



Report

Religious London Faith in a global city

Paul Bickley and Nathan Mladin



Theos is the UK's leading religion and society think tank. It has a broad Christian basis and exists to enrich the conversation about the role of faith in society through research, events, and media commentary.



Published by Theos in 2020

© Theos

ISBN 978-1-9996680-2-0

Some rights reserved. See copyright licence for details. For further information and subscription details please contact:

Theos Licence Department
77 Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2EZ

Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

+44 (0) 20 7828 7777
hello@theosthinktank.co.uk
theosthinktank.co.uk



Report

Religious London

Faith in a global city

Paul Bickley and Nathan Mladin

*I journeyed to London, to the timekept City,
Where the River flows, with foreign flotations.
There I was told: we have too many churches,
And too few chop-houses. There I was told:
Let the vicars retire. Men do not need the Church
In the place where they work, but where they spend their Sundays.
In the City, we need no bells:
Let them waken the suburbs.*

T.S. Eliot, *Choruses* from "The Rock"

A large, light yellow, stylized number '6' is positioned on the left side of the page, partially overlapping the title.

Acknowledgements

We would like to offer thanks to individuals and organisations that have encouraged, supported or assisted on this project.

The generous support of The Mercers' Company enabled this research. Conversations with a number of individuals – Ben Judah, Professor Tony Travers, Professor Grace Davie (who had already broken some of this ground in a previous Theos report), the Rev Dr David Goodhew, and Dr Andrew Rogers – inspired us to explore our theme in greater depth.

As always, a number of Theos colleagues, past and present, have contributed substantially to the project at various stages. Nick Spencer, Amy Plender, Hannah Eves, Madeleine Pennington, Lizzie Stanley, Abbie Allison, Emily Downe and Anna Wheeler deserve particular mention. We would also like to thank colleagues at Savanta ComRes for their assistance with the data which lies at the heart of this report.

Finally, we are grateful to those leaders in religious and public institutions who agreed to be interviewed during the project. We hope that we have presented their views well.

NB. This report was completed in February 2020 before the London Mayoral election was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic and we have left the text in original form for clarity.



Contents

Foreword	7
Executive summary	10
Introduction	15
Chapter 1: London's Religious Geography	22
Chapter 2: Religious London's Values	34
Chapter 3: Governing Religious London	60
Conclusions	82
Appendix	94



Foreword

It has long been part of Theos' mission to understand and show how a simplistic version of the 'secularisation thesis' is, at best, Eurocentric. The world remains very religious, and it is likely to become more so in the future. Countries like the UK may be losing faith, but they must find a place in a world that, in Peter Berger's term, is "as furiously religious" as it has ever been.

London is, wonderfully, a global city and can justifiably claim to be one of the most diverse in the world. We shouldn't be surprised, then, by the findings of the Religious London project (though I suspect many will be). We think of London not only as a cultural, political and economic hub, but also as England's liberal heartland. In such a diverse city, however, no single story is the whole story.

The truth is that London is complicated: it is at once the home of non-religious congregations like Sunday Assembly, but at the same time more religious, and more intensely religious, than the rest of the country. It is liberal in terms of many social values overall, but also has substantial and intense pockets of traditionalism which mean that, on many so-called "moral" questions, London is more conservative than other parts of the country.

This research comes in the run-up to the London mayoral and assembly elections in 2020. It's the time when the city will be looking ahead and thinking again about its place in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world. It's also the right time to be exploring the many and diverse ways that public institutions relate (and do not relate) well to religious institutions.

Theos' research focuses on three themes – living together, doing good, being human. Religious London sits squarely in this first category. The question standing behind this report is:

how do we build a healthy common life in a city characterised by such deep difference? It is encouraging that religious Londoners are engaged in civic life, volunteering and serving in their communities, and I appreciate the hopeful tone with which the report concludes.

Of course, London's religious diversity poses some challenges, and both religious and public institutions need to work harder to ensure these challenges are met. But London's diversity should be seen primarily as an opportunity. London is a place where the religious and non-religious alike can learn to love their neighbours better.

Elizabeth Oldfield

Director, Theos

A large, light yellow, stylized number '6' is positioned on the left side of the page, partially overlapping the title.

Executive summary

London's Religious Geography

- *London is the most religious region in Britain – 62% of Londoners identify as religious, compared to 53% in GB, excluding London.*
- *London is the least Anglican place in Britain - 33% of Londoners identify as Anglicans compared to 55% in GB excluding London.*
- *London is the most intensively religious place in Britain*
 - **30%** of Christian Londoners attend services and pray regularly, compared to **13%** in Britain.
 - **38%** of Christians in London attend a service at least once a month, compared to **17%** in Britain, excluding London.

Religious London's Values

- Londoners are more conservative than the rest of Britain on moral questions such as sex before marriage, same-sex relationships, and assisted suicide. For example, Londoners are more than twice as likely as British adults (excluding London) to say that sex before marriage is always or mostly wrong (**17%** vs. **7%** respectively).
- **63%** of Londoners (and **76%** of Christian Londoners) think political correctness has gone too far.
- Christians are less welfarist than both non-Christian religious respondents and 'nones' – **69%** agree with the statement 'People shouldn't rely on the welfare state', compared to **55%** of respondents with no religion.
- Frequently practicing (FP) Christians are more welfarist than other Christians when it comes to tax increases, benefit cuts and a generous welfare system being a top priority for ensuring a healthy society.

- Frequently practicing religious Londoners are more civically engaged than non-religious Londoners. For example, **63%** of regular attenders at a religious service (across all religions) said that they were likely or very likely to volunteer, compared to **37%** of people who say they never attend a religious service.
- There is a significant sense of religious discrimination and civic discomfort in the capital:
 - **26%** of Londoners feel marginalised or threatened because of their religious background, beliefs or identity (**23%** of Christians; 45% of those belonging to other religions, non-Christian)
 - **27%** of Londoners (**28%** of Christians; **36%** of non-Christian religious) feel that governments have passed legislation which makes life more difficult for people with their beliefs.

Governing Religious London

- Faith communities deliver a wide range of public services that foster cohesion and belonging at the local level.
- Where there are positive examples of engagement between public institutions and faith groups, this tends to be based on personal relationships between faith leaders and civic and political leaders rather than ecumenical or civic structures.
- In general, *the approach of public authorities towards faith groups is reactive: crisis-driven and needs-based*
Interviewees believed faith groups are seen as levers to be pulled in an emergency (e.g. austerity cuts;

terrorist attack) rather than partners and community assets.

- One of the key pressure points in the relationship between faith groups and public authorities is the provision of worshipping space, particularly for newer, black majority, diaspora churches.
- There are some tensions between secular values and religious values in public services. The most cited example was around education, and specifically the intersection between education and *human sexuality*.
- *Intermediary institutions* are crucial for building relationship and engagement between faith groups themselves, and with public authorities.
- *Poor religious literacy* is a significant obstacle in the way of more constructive engagement between faith communities and public bodies.

Recommendations

For religious communities: curate ‘religious infrastructure’

- Create and encourage participation in structures and networks that enable intra- and inter-religious cooperation and engagement in public life, particularly for emerging religious communities.

For public bodies: sustain ‘social infrastructure’

- Create conditions and structures that enable faith communities to participate fully as partners in community life and service.
- Consider adopting the APPG on Faith and Society ‘Faith Covenant’ as a framework for engagement and collaboration.
- Increase the level of religious literacy through training, and intentional dialogue with religious

leaders, but also through seconding or embedding officers within key faith institutions.

- London boroughs should include faith community space in their local plan.
- The next London Plan should give proper attention to the space needs of London's religious communities.

For the next mayor/Assembly: champion 'religious London'

- Acknowledge the city's vibrant religious communities.
- Embrace religious groups as friends rather than foes - the high level of civic engagement amongst religious Londoners, and the opportunities that flow from it, should be recognised.
- Encourage 'practical multiculturalism'. Faith is often the energy that brings different communities together around common social endeavour.

A detailed list of recommendations can be found at the end of this report.



Introduction

On 7 May 2020 London will elect – or re-elect – its mayor and assembly. How would you describe the city they will seek to lead and shape? Expensive, unequal, crowded, lonely, dangerous? Or modern, multicultural, open, tolerant, diverse and young, full of the energy that comes from being a “global gateway city”? London’s detractors and defenders, choose your weapons.

How about “spiritual”? London exceptionalism is peaking, but it is telling that neither the city’s critics nor its supporters have shown much interest in one of the ways in which the city is unique: London is the most religious place in England and, for that matter, much more religious than Scotland and Wales. Of course, London *is* economically dynamic, culturally vibrant and socially diverse. London does sit on the political left and it is socially liberal. But London is *not* a secular city.

This is not to say that Londoners are not capable of a collective act of blindness. Informed commentators know well enough that four in ten Londoners were not even born in the UK, never mind in the city!¹ Yet many of those same commentators are slow to reckon with the implications of this fact. As Janan Ganesh, writing on London, put it, “Europeans have to negotiate a world in which we are the odd ones out. I know almost no one who prays. Some globalist.”² Even this confessional was subtitled “Hubs such as London are generally atheist.” Yet London is not generally atheist. Not even close.

This research project has sought to explore not only London’s religious demography, but its religious practice, and to begin to consider some of the public and civic implications thereof. We are conscious that it’s just a scratch on the surface of a set of themes and questions that have already been explored by various thinkers and from different perspectives.

We fervently hope they will continue to be explored in the future.

Why? Certainly not because London's ongoing religiosity represents a win for the "religious team", but because London is an important case study of how different lives and different communities can hold together. Cities are not just spaces in which many people cohabit – they must be about relationships of trust, collaboration and creativity. As commentator Charles Leadbeater has argued, a growing London will need both systems and empathy: "New homes, offices, power lines and train tunnels. But as London rushes to get bigger, taller and faster, we need to make a special effort to protect the city's capacity to be slow, social and convivial ... London should realise its strengths lie in being friendly and hospitable."³

London's religious communities receive London's hospitality, but they must also play a part in offering it. This report focuses not just on London's religious demography, trends and values but also on the way in which relationships do or do not form between religious institutions and civic and political institutions, with a view to the welfare of the city.

Methodology and approach

In this project, we have sought to explore the following questions:

- What is London's religious demography? Is London more religious? If so, how much more religious?
- Do London's religious citizens have different social and political values? If so, what is the effect of this on London's social and political values?
- In what ways do civic institutions – particularly those of local governance – relate to faith institutions?

Is there a discernible philosophy of engagement?
What things prevent the formation of productive
relationships?

The project essentially comprised two elements.

The first was the collection of new data to inform our understanding of London's religious profile. There are, of course, many sources for religious statistics – most of which tell the same story, but all with different strengths and limitations. For instance, Census data is extremely robust but it is now nine years old. Annual Population Survey data (which we cite in chapter 1) is a household survey, so although it is very extensive, respondents report on behalf of others. We were not merely interested in demographic questions, but also in social and political values. NatCen's British Social Attitudes survey and the European Social Survey data are excellent sources on some of the themes we were interested in addressing, as they are on demographic questions.⁴

We commissioned Savanta ComRes to survey online 2,023 British adults (aged 18+) between 17 and 20 January 2020, and 1,005 London adults (aged 18+) between 17 and 23 January 2020.⁵ We looked to explore London's religious demography compared to the rest of the UK, but also its political, social and moral views. In particular, we tested a series of statements on economic questions, the size and role of the state and positions on welfare questions. Additionally, we tested statements on traditional "moral" issues such as sex before marriage, the use of pornography, and the legitimacy of abortion in a variety of circumstances.

We also wanted to explore whether the religious were playing a full part in their local communities, and so asked questions around civic engagement (e.g., likelihood to

vote, volunteer, donate to charity and so on) and a series of questions around what could be called “civic comfort”. Did respondents feel that people with their religious background were properly represented in public life? Were the lives of the religious being made more difficult by government legislation? Did they experience a sense of being socially marginalised?⁶

Additionally, we conducted 35 interviews in four case study areas. These were focused in four boroughs, and included confidential semi-structured interviews with representatives of public authorities such as local government, police, education and health organisations, as well as with religious leaders, whether those leading individual congregations or others with a more “episcopal”/overseeing role. While our initial ambition was to map faith institutions and relationships, it quickly became apparent that it would be impossible to do so. Indeed, perhaps one of the main findings of this qualitative element is that a large number of religious start-ups exist off-grid. Many formal structures and relationships exist, not least through mediating institutions, though we will go on to observe that these can be patchy.

Structure of the report

Chapters 1 and 2 of the report set out some of the findings available from the new data. The first looks primarily at the demographic picture, while the second considers the social, political and moral values questions alongside the civil engagement and civic comfort questions.

Chapter 3 reports on the qualitative research. It asks what kinds of relationships between public authorities and faith institutions exist. London is known to be a richly religious city. Is it recognised as such by civic leaders? Is London governed differently because of it? What forces were at work in the

formation and dissolution of relationships, and can things be done better?

In the final section of the report we discuss some of the implications of both the statistical picture and our qualitative data, and make recommendations for faith groups, boroughs and London-wide institutions. As Grace Davie puts it in her recent Theos report:

One point ... is clear: the scope and diversity of the data demand a willingness to discover new ways of imagining the city. Traditional readings of secularisation led us to assume a necessary incompatibility between religion and the urban environment. Manifestly this is not the case and we need to understand why, both in London and elsewhere. This means looking at the abundance of new material with fresh eyes, allowing this to stimulate not only new ideas but new ways of speaking about the city.

The authors agree with this sentiment, and add: more than just new ways of speaking about the city, we need new ways of understanding how Londoners can flourish together.

-
- 1 www.trustforlondon.org.uk/data/populations/migrants. Site accessed: 28 February 2020.
 - 2 www.ft.com/content/e651e0f8-d5bb-11e7-a303-9060cb1e5f44. Site accessed: 28 February 2020.
 - 3 www.standard.co.uk/comment/comment/charles-leadbeater-it-s-small-things-that-make-our-big-city-what-it-is-9301446.html. Site accessed: 28 February 2020.
 - 4 See the useful discussion by David Voas and Steve Bruce: www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/39293/1_bsa36_religion.pdf. Site accessed: 28 February 2020.
 - 5 GB data are weighted to be representative of all British adults by key demographic categories including age, gender, region and social grade. London data are weighted to be representative of all London adults by key demographic factors including age, gender and social grade. For the purpose of the analysis, London responses (n=284) were excluded from the GB sample in order to enable a clearer understanding of the key similarities and differences between the views of British adults who live outside London (n=1,739) and London adults (n=1,005). Data are weighted to be representative of all British adults outside London by age, gender and region.
 - 6 Many of these statements are similar to questions posed in the British Social Attitudes survey or European Social Survey, while we have introduced others – particularly those around “civic comfort”.



1 London's Religious Geography

The common perception is that London diverges from the rest of England on virtually every measure. This is more the case than people realise, though not necessarily in the ways that they think.

In this chapter, we show how London is significantly more religious than the rest of England, Wales and Scotland. This is not just a matter of identification but also of practice. Londoners are not only more religious; they also take their religion more seriously by praying and worshipping more regularly than their counterparts in the rest of Great Britain.

More religious

There is various data which can be used to map UK religious trends. Alongside the ten-yearly national census, the Office of National Statistics conducts an Annual Population Survey (as part of the household-based Labour Force Survey). This is large enough to allow the generation of statistics in small geographical areas, e.g., local authority areas. The British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey, conducted annually by NatCen, is an important source of longitudinal data.

These data sets give a picture of rapidly declining religious identification across the UK. Since the BSA survey first ran in 1983, the proportion of people who identify with Christianity has declined overall, while there has been an increase in the proportion of people saying they identify with no religious faith, as well as a steady increase in those belonging to non-Christian faiths. To put it another way, in 1983, 64.4% identified as belonging to a religion; in 2018 the comparable figure was 47.5%. In the latter part of the last decade, the BSA saw the numbers of religious “nones” begin to exceed the number of Christians.¹ The European Social Survey (beginning in 2002)

gives an impression of a more stable picture, but nonetheless where overall levels of religiosity are declining.²

However, a number of commentators observed different kinds of trends in London. Eric Kaufmann, Professor of Politics

at Birkbeck College, University of London, has argued that London should be seen as a gateway city like New York City and Amsterdam, a “rising island of religion in a secular sea”, and even suggested that some parts of London were undergoing

a process of reverse secularisation.³ While this may be to overstate matters, London certainly has a different religious geography from the rest of England. It seems likely that this is driven by immigration and diaspora communities, but it is nonetheless real and deserves greater attention than it is often given. If there is such a thing as London exceptionalism, it ought to give mind to London’s religious difference.

We commissioned Savanta ComRes to collect new data through two separate surveys. They interviewed 2,023 British adults (aged 18+) online between 17 and 20 January 2020, and 1,005 London adults (aged 18+) online between 17 and 23 January 2020.⁴ We looked to explore London’s religious demography compared to the rest of Britain, but also political, social and moral views. In particular, we tested a series of statements on economic questions, the size and role of the state and positions on welfare questions. Additionally, we tested statements on traditional “moral” issues and, finally, views around civil engagement and social trust. Many of these statements are similar to questions posed in the BSA survey – while the survey methodologies differ and results cannot be

“

London is the most religious place in Britain.

directly compared, the BSA and other sources offer a horizon on which to plot our findings.

Firstly, London is the most religious place in Great Britain, in the sense that a larger part of London's population say they have a religion, compared to the rest of Great Britain (GB) – 62% against 53% in GB (excluding London). Conversely, London has far fewer people who identify as having no religion (45% GB excl. London vs. 33% London). Indeed, London is the least non-religious place in the Britain.

Figure 1:1 Religious groups – GB (excluding London) and London

		GB excl. London	London
Religion	Christian	46%	40%
	Member of non-Christian religious group	7%	22%
	Not religious	45%	33%
	Prefer not to say	2%	5%
Christian denomination	Church of England	55%	33%
	Roman Catholic	15%	35%
	Church of Scotland	6%	1%
	Methodist	5%	2%
	Baptist	3%	3%
	Orthodox	1%	6%
	Pentecostal	1%	7%
	Independent	1%	2%
	New churches / charismatic / non-denominational	1%	2%
	United Reformed Church / Congregational	1%	0%
	Other	3%	4%
	None	7%	4%

Religious London Survey by Savanta ComRes

Base: All GB respondents excl. London (n=1,739); All London respondents (n=1,005); Base: All Christian GB respondents excl. London (n=818); All Christian London respondents (n=410)

Secondly, the Christian population in London is made up of a different mix of denominations. The two main denominations are Anglican (33%) and Catholic (35%), but whereas in our GB (excluding London) sample Anglicanism is the largest denomination by some distance, in London it is only the second largest denomination. Catholics make up the largest group among London Christians. Pentecostal (7% London vs. 1% GB excluding London) and Orthodox Christians (6% London vs. 1% GB excl. London) also have a more significant presence in London than elsewhere in Britain. Peter Brierley has argued that, taken as a single tradition, Pentecostal/charismatic



One fifth of London's population, compared to 7% in GB (excluding London), identify with a non-Christian religion

Christianity is the largest religious tradition in London.⁵ While we could not draw that conclusion from our data, taking it together with longitudinal data offered by the likes of the BSA, it's obviously the case that "mainline" denominations have struggled in London, while growth has occurred in other parts of the Christian church.

Thirdly, there is a more substantial non-Christian religious presence in London. One fifth of London's population, compared to 7% in GB (excluding London), identify with a non-Christian religion. The largest non-Christian religious group, in London and across the UK, is Muslim. According to our data, roughly one in ten Londoners identify as Muslim, compared to less than 2% in GB (excluding London).⁶ All non-Christian religious groups have population concentrations in London, confirming its status as a gateway city. Data from the Labour Force Survey shows, of course, significant concentrations of different religious populations in various parts of London

– boroughs like Barking and Dagenham, Brent, Harrow, Redbridge, and Newham are both religiously diverse and have the lowest rates of non-religious identification in the Britain.⁷

While, to repeat, London is the least non-religious part of the country overall (45% GB excluding London vs. 33% London), the religious “nones” (that is, non-religious adults) are still the second largest group (after Christian) and continue to grow rapidly, as we will discuss below.

Nones also tend to be concentrated in particular boroughs – Islington, Southwark, Bromley, Lewisham and Lambeth are those that the Labour Force Survey data show as being most non-religious.

“

Religious “nones” are still the second largest group (after Christian)

More religiously engaged

Beneath these headlines, religious belief in London is also more intense, or at least more observant, than in the rest of Britain.

For example, London's Christians say they are more likely to pray – and pray regularly – than Christians in the GB population as a whole: 56% of London's Christians state that they pray regularly compared to 32% of GB excluding London Christians as a whole. In the two largest denominations (Church of England and Roman Catholic), 31% and 66% pray regularly, compared to 27% and 35% nationally.

There is a similar, though less marked, difference amongst other non-Christian religious groups. In London, 64% state that they pray regularly compared to the 51% that claim to pray regularly in our GB (excluding London) sample.

Londoners are also more likely to say they attend religious services. Regardless of religious affiliation, 64% of GB adults (excluding London) say they never attend a religious service (apart from weddings, funerals etc.). In London, only 43% of adults say they never attend a religious service. In GB (excluding London), 50% of Anglicans and 41% of Catholics state they never attend a religious service. By comparison, in London, 45% of Anglicans and only 15% of Catholics report that they never attend a religious service.

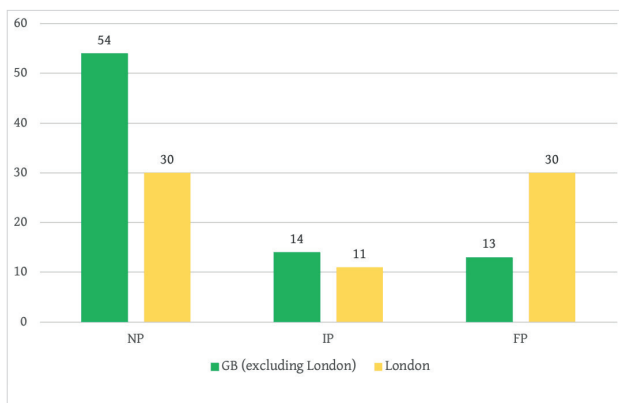


Londoners are more likely to say they attend religious services

While patterns and norms of religious practice vary enormously in different religious traditions, a similar phenomenon can be seen in non-Christian religious groups. For example, outside of London, 40% of respondents in this group say that they never attend a religious service, while the comparable figure in London is 15%.

It is possible to segment the Christian population into categories that reflect this higher intensity in religious practice. In GB (excluding London), only around one in ten (13%) Christians are attending religious services and praying regularly, and a further 14% are attending and praying irregularly. The majority (54%) of GB Christians (excluding London) never pray or attend a religious service. The picture in London is very different: 30% of Christians attend and pray regularly, with 11% doing so irregularly, and only 30% having no religious practice, in spite of identifying as a Christian. For the sake of clarity, we have omitted respondents who do not clearly appear in any of those categories from this analysis. We call these groups NPs (never practising), IPs (infrequently practising) and FPs (frequently practising).

Figure 1:2 Never, Infrequent, Frequently Practising Christians in GB (excluding London) and London



Religious London Survey by Savanta ComRes

Base: All Christian respondents in GB excluding London (n=818); All Christian respondents in London (n=410).

Although base sizes are small, some demographic differences can be observed between the three groups, and indeed between these groups and others. FPs in London are far more likely to be non-white than IPs or NPs (49% vs. 21% and 13% respectively). FPs are also younger than their counterparts in the IP and NP categories. Approaching half (45%) of London's 18-24-year-olds and almost two in five 25-34 and 34-44 year-olds (37%) are FPs in London. In comparison, just around one in five of their older counterparts belong to this group (20% 45-54, 18% 55-64 and 23% 65+). In turn, the majority of older Christian adults in London belong to the NP group. FPs are marginally younger than the London average – and younger than the religious nones (the youngest group is the non-Christian religious group). FPs are gender balanced, whereas IPs are disproportionately female and NPs disproportionately male.

The whole Christians group in London is broadly proportionate in terms of social grade.



London's religion is younger and more diverse

The purpose of segmenting the group in this way is not to imply that there is a hierarchy or sliding scale of Christian from real to “in name only”. Rather, it shows that there is a different religious temperature in the capital, and allows us to open up the discussion to some of the demographic correlations at play. To this end, London is not just more religious overall. Its (larger) religious population is more intensely and observantly religious than religious populations elsewhere in the UK; London's religion is younger and more diverse than it is elsewhere in the country; and, on average, it is also younger and more diverse than London as a whole.

It is worth asking whether this intensity is reflected amongst London's “nones”. Do they feel or practice their non-religious identity more intensely than elsewhere in the UK? Our data cannot assist us here. However, BSA survey data seems to suggest that non-religion in London is “softer” than it is in other regions: in 2018, 26.7% of Londoners said they felt



Even the non-religious in London are warmer towards religion

very or extremely non-religious – a significant figure. However, 42% in the North East of England identified as very or extremely non-religious.⁸ Londoners were also more likely to say that they were “somewhat” non-religious, rather than very or extremely non-religious. In other words, even the non-religious in London are warmer towards religion. As we will see in the next section, London's religious and non-religious

diverge significantly on social, political and moral questions. It is therefore encouraging that London's non-religious are, nonetheless, less fervently anti-religious than their counterparts in the rest of the country.

A religious future?

We have seen that London is simultaneously the most religious place in the Britain and the least Anglican. There is a much greater presence of non-Christian religious communities, and the Christian community is itself far more pluralistic and diverse, reflecting patterns of migration and confirming London's status as a gateway and global city. We have also shown that, perhaps contrary to general expectations, London's religious population is not only ethnically diverse but also young.

However, this demographic data represents a snapshot in time, and should be put in the context of broader religious trends in the capital and beyond. London's population has been growing quickly and is anticipated to continue to do so in the future. In 1991, London had a population of 6.4 million. In 2016, after decades of growth, it passed its 1939 population peak of 8.6 million. In 2021, it is anticipated that 9.3 million people will be resident in the city.⁹

While the overall number of Christians has declined only slightly over the last couple of decades, it has declined substantially as a proportion of London's population. London's Muslim population has grown from just over 700,000 in 2004 to over 1.2 million in 2018. Hindu and Jewish populations have also grown, though these are much smaller in their total size.¹⁰

Without a doubt, however, the fastest growing group in London is the religious nones. In the last decade, this has increased by almost a million. London does have a different religious temperature to the rest of the country, but it is not immunised from rapid religious change. We can only speculate at the factors which make for this paradoxical picture of a city which is both highly religious and increasingly non-religious. The city's religious future will depend on factors as diverse as immigration policy, higher birth rates amongst religious populations, and whether more intensely observant religious populations are better at transmitting their faith to subsequent generations, non-religious neighbours, or beyond diaspora ethnic boundaries (as the “reverse mission” phenomena seeks to do). The London of the future will likely be less religious than it is now (religious disaffiliation is known to be a cohort effect i.e., younger generations are less religious overall, and remain so across their lives). Will the process of Anglican disaffiliation (the BSA shows that the proportion of the population identifying as Anglican has fallen from 40% in 1983 to just 12% in 2018) slow or halt? What will the effect of Britain's departure from the EU have on London's vibrant Catholic community?

“

London is not currently a secular city, or if it is, its secularism is not popular but elite

What we can say with confidence is London is not currently a secular city, or if it is, its secularism is not popular but elite. On that basis, we will now turn to consider religious London's economic, political and moral values.

- 1 www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/39293/1_bsa36_religion.pdf. Site accessed: 28 February 2020.
- 2 In an analysis of European Social Survey data on religion between 2002 and 2014, Ben Clements observed “stability in terms of affiliation and attendance, with some decline in self-assessed levels of religiosity; and a rise in the proportion who do not pray.” www.brin.ac.uk/the-european-social-survey-and-religion-in-britain. Site accessed: 28 February 2020.
- 3 www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/eric-kaufmann/london-a-rising-island-of-religion_b_2336699.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAIcNjCypdx4qjNbjUehkK8er8GkcmjhU2Qmh7Ce3Py-nCXnzsG75AfP7zZ0mXFM2Jjub8OHxZNbpJ59jxkd-wqsfETVO00ZHCueAlcEgLZ4n05ip3z5UNn6uGv2pARGePj1ZEOa1PLrmfkjWAPsl59_gulS7aqUqDnrZgJ7HSqA2. Site accessed: 28 February 2020.
- 4 GB data are weighted to be representative of all British adults by key demographic categories including age, gender, region and social grade. London data are weighted to be representative of all London adults by key demographic factors including age, gender and social grade. For the purpose of the analysis, London responses (n=284) were excluded from the GB sample in order to enable a clearer understanding of the key similarities and differences between the views of British adults who live outside London (n=1,739) and London adults (n=1,005). Data are weighted to be representative of all British adults outside London by age, gender and region.
- 5 Peter Brierley, “The 2012 London Church Census” in David Goodhew and Anthony-Paul Cooper (eds.), *The Desecularisation of the City: London's Churches, 1980 to the Present* (London, UK: Routledge, 2019), p. 69.
- 6 This seems to be an under-reporting of Muslim population, which the Office of National Statistics/Labour Force Survey places at 5% nationally in 2018, and around 14% in London. This may be explained by the fact that the Labour Force Survey is a household rather than single adult survey. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/transparencyandgovernance/freedomofinformationfoi/muslimpopulationintheuk/>
- 7 See <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/percentage-population-religion-borough>
- 8 Theos analysis of British Social Attitudes survey data
- 9 See <https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/data/londons-population-over-time/>
- 10 Theos analysis of Annual Population Survey data at <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/percentage-population-religion-borough>. A full discussion is not possible here, but differential birth rates are likely to be one factor, as is an increased willingness for Muslims to identify as such in surveys, official and otherwise.



2 Religious London's Values

In a NatCen report for Trust for London, Allison Dunatchik and Neil Smith observe that Londoners tend to be more politically engaged, further to the left and more liberal than other regions. They did, however, identify that there were some counterintuitive findings on questions like sex before marriage and same-sex relationships: Londoners were significantly less likely to say that these were rarely or never wrong. After controlling for income, race, age, education and gender, these differences remained statistically significant, indicating religion is indeed the key factor.¹

Having established that London is more religious – and more intensely religious – than England, Scotland or Wales, we wanted to explore whether religious views on key social, political and moral questions differed greatly from London's views as a whole and whether this is changing the complexion of views in London as a whole.

In our polling, we tested three sets of value statements: economic questions, welfare questions and libertarian versus authoritarian attitudes. These statements are broadly similar to those used in values surveys like the BSA survey.

We also asked if respondents considered whether certain behaviours, including sex before marriage, pornography use, abortion in various circumstances, and gender transitioning to be wrong/not wrong. As above, these matters are traditionally those on which religious groups hold non-typical views compared to the rest of the population.

Finally, we tested a series of questions around citizenship and engagement and a series of statements that could be described as relating to civic comfort. Did respondents feel like they had been marginalised because of their religious identity?

Previous studies have indicated that religious populations have slightly more “progressive” social attitudes.² In our polling, however, the Christian population overall leans more to the right on economic and welfare questions (though, importantly, they are still substantially to the left overall). Non-Christian religious groups differ depending on the issue in question, sometimes leaning to the right and sometimes to the left of the population as a whole. It seems that on some questions, practising and non-practising religious people diverge significantly in their views. All religious groups are

“

On “moral questions”, the more conservative views of religious populations mean that London as a whole is more conservative than would be anticipated

more authoritarian than their non-religious counterparts, though it would be hard to describe any group – non-religious or otherwise – as significantly liberal. On “moral questions”, the more conservative views of religious populations mean that London as a whole is more conservative than would be anticipated, compared to other parts of GB. Finally, although

religious Londoners make good neighbours and good citizens, they experience significant levels of what we would call civic discomfort; a significant minority feel that governments make their life harder and that they are socially marginalised because of their faith.

Economic position

We tested five statements in relation to economic positions:

- Big business generally benefits owners at the expense of workers.

- Government should redistribute income from the better off to those who are less well off.
- Utilities like water, gas and rail would be better off in public ownership.
- The best way to tackle poverty is by generating wealth through strong businesses and private enterprises.
- Businesses are currently restricted with too much regulation.

In London and in GB (excluding London) as a whole, somewhat surprisingly considering the results of the recent general election, responses tended to lean towards the economic left. For instance, in GB (excluding London), 56% said that government should redistribute income from the better off to the less well off, while only 29% disagreed. In London respondents split 62%/26% on this same statement.

In general, the UK population seems suspicious of big business, supportive of redistribution, and does not support deregulation for business. There was less certainty around the statement on public utilities, though the majority in GB (excluding London) and London still supported public ownership – 53% and 56% respectively. However, half of respondents in both areas (51% GB excluding London and 53% London) also agreed with the statement, “The best way to tackle poverty is by generating wealth through strong businesses and private enterprise”, indicating that redistributive policies and a strong private sector are not seen as mutually exclusive.

In terms of party support in general elections, London clearly leans towards the left (Labour holds 49 of the 73 London constituencies, the Conservative Party 21, and the Liberal Democrats three). However, in our data, while London's views

on underlying economic questions do sit slightly to the left of those in the rest of GB, this effect is not nearly as strong as would have been expected. In terms of supporting these statements, GB (excluding London) and London only diverged by an average of 3.6%.

In our London sample, however, religious – in this case, Christian – attitudes diverge on some of these questions. Namely, both in GB (excluding London) and London, these tend to sit to the right of average positions, and more markedly to the right of religious “nones”.

*Figure 2:1 To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?
(NET: % agree)*

	Total London	Christian	Other religious	Non-religious
Big business generally benefits owners at the expense of workers	77	73	75	82
Government should redistribute income from the better off to those who are less well off	62	58	61	66
Utilities like water, gas and rail would be better off in public ownership	56	51	54	62
The best way to tackle poverty is by generating wealth through strong businesses and private enterprises	53	61	59	40
Businesses are currently restricted with too much regulation	33	39	41	19

Religious London Survey by Savanta ComRes

Base: All London respondents (n=1005); All Christian respondents in London (n=410); All other religious, non-Christian respondents in London (n=208); All non-religious respondents in London (n=346)

The biggest difference here is between the two largest religious categories: Christian and nones. London nones are highly suspicious of big business, Christians less so; nones are pro-redistribution, Christians – while in favour overall – are less likely to support this; there is an 11 percentage point difference between the two categories on public ownership of utilities; and Christians are more likely to see wealth generation through business as the best way to relieve poverty. On whether “businesses are currently restricted with too much regulation”, nones and religious groups of all kinds diverge to a very significant margin, around 20%. In other words, religious nones seem very pessimistic about the role of business in society.



London “nones” are highly suspicious of big business, Christians less so

However, responses vary when taking religious practice into account (though sample sizes for the Christian sub-groups of NPs, IPs and FPs are small and the variations are not consistent).

Figure 2:2 To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

(NET: % agree)

	Total London	Christian	*NP	*IP	*FP	None
Big business generally benefits owners at the expense of workers	77	73	72	72	74	82
Government should redistribute income from the better off to those who are less well off	62	58	57	66	61	66
Utilities like water, gas and rail would be better off in public ownership	56	51	47	48	59	62
The best way to tackle poverty is by generating wealth through strong businesses and private enterprises	53	61	60	66	62	40
Businesses are currently restricted with too much regulation	33	39	47	24	39	19

Religious London Survey by Savanta ComRes

Base: All London respondents (n=1005); All Christian respondents (n=410); Never practicing Christians in London (NP) (n=128); Infrequently practicing Christians in London (IP) (n=45*); Frequently practicing Christians in London (FP) (n=116*); Non-religious respondents in London (n=346)

*small base - indicative only

Religious nones and all Christian sub-groups still have significantly diverging views on these questions, with some exceptions. FP Christians are nearly as likely as nones to support the public ownership of utilities, and IP and FP Christians are slightly more likely to support redistribution. Again, however, Christians seem significantly more supportive of business and private enterprise than non-religious respondents.

Welfare position

We tested six statements in relation to welfare positions:

- The creation of the NHS is one of Britain's proudest achievements.
- People shouldn't rely on the welfare state.
- Many people on benefits are exploiting the system.
- Cutting welfare benefits has damaged too many people's lives.
- A generous welfare system is a top priority for ensuring a healthy society.
- The government should provide for all vulnerable people by increasing taxes.

As before, our populations in London and GB (excluding London) do diverge on many statements, with London skewing in a welfarist direction. Overall, London and GB populations tend towards the left, although the statements “people shouldn't rely on the welfare state” and “many people on benefits are exploiting the system” attract agreement. Broader provision supported by tax increases is supported less strongly and opposed by over a third of respondents in GB and London (again, slightly more supportive), though for this statement large numbers of respondents were unsure.

Figure 2:3 Welfare attitudes in GB (excluding London) and London

	GB adults (ex. London)			London adults		
	NET: Agree	NET: Disagree	Don't know	NET: Agree	NET: Disagree	Don't know
The creation of the NHS is one of Britain's proudest achievements	93%	3%	4%	89%	6%	5%
People shouldn't rely on the welfare state	65%	26%	9%	61%	30%	9%
Many people on benefits are exploiting the system	60%	30%	10%	54%	34%	12%
Cutting welfare benefits has damaged too many people's lives	60%	25%	15%	66%	20%	15%
A generous welfare system is a top priority for ensuring a healthy society	52%	33%	15%	62%	25%	13%
The government should provide for all vulnerable people by increasing taxes	44%	37%	20%	48%	35%	17%

Religious London Survey by Savanta ComRes

Base: All GB respondents excluding London (n=1,739); Base: All London respondents (n=1,005)

The general public are supportive of a good welfare settlement (support for the statement that the NHS is one of Britain's proudest achievements is very high across age, region, social grade and religious group). This general support is combined with a strong sentiment that the system might be being abused.

Again, however, religious groups diverge in significant ways.

Figure 2:4 To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

(NET: % agree)

	All	Christian	Other	None
People shouldn't rely on the welfare state	61	69	61	55
The government should provide for all vulnerable people by increasing taxes	48	46	39	57
Many people on benefits are exploiting the system	54	64	59	41
Cutting welfare benefits has damaged too many people's lives	66	60	64	72
A generous welfare system is a top priority for ensuring a healthy society	62	59	63	66
The creation of the NHS is one of Britain's proudest achievements	89	90	85	91

Religious London Survey by Savanta ComRes

Base: All London respondents (n=1,005); All Christian respondents in London (n=410); All other religious, non-Christian respondents in London (n=208); All none-religious respondents in London (n=346)

We see that Christians here are less welfarist than both non-Christian religious respondents and religious nones (who are the most welfarist group). Christian are more likely to say that “many people on benefits are exploiting the system”, and less likely to say that “cutting welfare benefits had damaged too many people’s lives”. Non-Christian religious respondents were the group least likely to favour increased provision through higher taxes.

As we will see in other questions, Christians are more likely to trust and help their neighbours – that Christians are less welfarist implies that they see compassionate action manifested through civil society and personal action.

“

Christians are less welfarist than both non-Christian religious respondents and religious nones

Figure 2:5 To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

(NET: % agree)

	All	Christian	*NP	*IP	*FP	None
People shouldn't rely on the welfare state	61	69	76	67	71	55
The government should provide for all vulnerable people by increasing taxes	48	46	41	39	53	57
Many people on benefits are exploiting the system	54	64	64	66	65	41
Cutting welfare benefits has damaged too many people's lives	66	60	56	50	68	72
A generous welfare system is a top priority for ensuring a healthy society	62	59	54	53	67	66
The creation of the NHS is one of Britain's proudest achievements	89	90	91	90	83	91

Religious London Survey by Savanta ComRes

Base: All London respondents (n=1,005); All Christian respondents (n=410); Never practicing Christians in London (NP) (n=128); Infrequently practicing Christians in London (IP) (n=47*); Frequently practicing Christians in London (FP) (n=116*); Non-religious respondents in London (n=346).

*small base - indicative only

Turning to the Christian sub-groups, the signals here are mixed. There is an ongoing difference between all Christian sub-groups and religious nones, who are the most welfarist on most statements. Christians in all groups are far more likely to agree that many people on benefits are exploiting the system. However, FP Christians are more welfarist on questions when it comes to tax increases, benefit cuts and a generous welfare system being a top priority for ensuring a healthy society (on the latter statement, being the group most likely to agree).

Libertarian/authoritarian views

We tested six statements to understand libertarian/authoritarian perspectives:

- No crime deserves the death penalty.
- Schools should teach children to obey authority.
- Censorship of explicit content (e.g., films, magazines or websites involving nudity, violence etc.) is necessary to uphold moral standards.
- The traditional roles of men as the main earner and women as the primary carer for children should be upheld.
- Governments should make environmentally harmful habits more expensive for citizens.
- Political correctness has gone too far.

Again, many of these statements are similar to those used in other social surveys. Here, however, we added statements to test views on environmental issues and general freedom of expression (with the intentionally provocative “political correctness has gone too far”).

All these statements see a greater degree of divergence between London and GB (excluding London) than the economic and welfare questions – an average of 6.5% difference.

Figure 2:6 Libertarian/-authoritarian positions in GB (excluding London) and London

	GB excl. London			London adults		
	NET: Agree	NET: Disagree	Don't know	NET: Agree	NET: Disagree	Don't know
Schools should teach children to obey authority	75%	15%	10%	70%	19%	10%
Political correctness has gone too far	73%	16%	11%	63%	24%	13%
Governments should make environmentally harmful habits more expensive for citizens	69%	16%	15%	73%	14%	14%
Censorship of explicit content (e.g., films, magazines or websites involving nudity, violence etc.) is necessary to uphold moral standards	59%	28%	13%	56%	32%	12%
No crime deserves the death penalty	35%	55%	10%	47%	42%	11%
The traditional roles of men as the main earner and women as the primary carer for children should be upheld	23%	68%	9%	28%	64%	9%

Base: All GB respondents excluding London (n=1,739)

Base: All London respondents (n=1,005)

On four statements, London adults were more libertarian than GB (excluding London) adults. However, on whether the government should financially penalise environmentally harmful habits, Londoners were more likely to agree. This is

indicative of a slightly higher awareness of environmental issues in the capital (though 69% of GB adults also supported this). At the same time, on the question of traditional gender roles, Londoners are more likely to agree that traditional gender roles should be upheld.

In addition to political distinctions between London and the rest of the country, this hints at a “religion effect”, and indeed on these issues religious Londoners think very differently than London religious nones.

*Figure 2:7 To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?
(NET: % agree)*

	Total – London	Christian	Other religion	No religion
No crime deserves the death penalty	47	42	37	58
Schools should teach children to obey authority	70	81	76	56
Censorship of explicit content is necessary to uphold moral standards	56	65	61	42
The traditional roles of men and women should be upheld	28	34	34	14
Governments should make environmentally harmful habits more expensive for citizens	73	72	66	78
Political correctness has gone too far	63	76	60	52

Religious London Survey by Savanta ComRes

Base: All London respondents (n=1,005); All Christian respondents in London (n=410); All other religious, non-Christian respondents in London (n=208); All none-religious respondents in London (n=346)

There are some predictable forces at work in the data. Younger groups in London are significantly more libertarian on some statements – for instance, “schools should teach children to obey authority” (45% in the 18-24 category vs. 83%

in the 65+ category). Women are significantly more in favour of censorship than men (64% vs. 48%). There was a consistent difference, however, between Christians and religious nones when looking at level of agreement with most statements, with the exception of the statement of government penalising environmentally harmful activity (72% Christians and 78% nones agree). When it comes to other questions, it looks as if there are two Londons. All we could say is that these issues, with the exception of freedom of speech, are happily not politicised. If they were, they would be deeply divisive.



Frequently practising Christians (FPs) are less likely to support the death penalty than non-practising Christians (NPs).

Do practising and non-practising Christians differ in their attitudes to these issues? FPs are less likely to support the death penalty (50% vs. 35% NPs), but more likely to support censorship (76% vs. 52% NPs) and traditional gender roles (45% vs. 28% NPs). The group most likely to think political correctness has gone too far is the NP group, where nine

in ten (88%) agree with the statement, compared to five in ten nones. Again, sample sizes for the Christian sub-groups are small so findings should only be taken as indicative.

Figure 2:8 To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

(NET: % agree)

	Total London	Christian	*NP	*IP	*FP	None
No crime deserves the death penalty	47	42	35	48	50	58
Schools should teach children to obey authority	70	81	88	78	84	56
Censorship of explicit content is necessary to uphold moral standards	56	65	63	52	76	42
The traditional roles of men and women should be upheld	28	34	28	31	45	14
Governments should make environmentally harmful habits more expensive for citizens	73	72	71	78	77	78
Political correctness has gone too far	63	76	88	76	69	52

Religious London Survey by Savanta ComRes

Base: All London respondents (n=1,005); All Christian respondents (n=410);
Never practicing Christians in London (NP) (n=128); Infrequently practicing
Christians in London (IP) (n=47*); Frequently practicing Christians in London
(FP) (n=116*); Non-religious respondents in London (n=346)

*small base – indicative only

On economic questions, welfare values and libertarian vs. authoritarian views, we can see that London and the rest of Great Britain have divergent views. Then, within London, there are very different sensibilities at play amongst religious and non-religious citizens. Then, within London's biggest religious groups, there is evidence to suggest that there are, at least on some issues, divergent views depending on the level of religious engagement.

The next effect is paradoxical. As we have said, London is more religious than the rest of the country – the city is an outlier. But that very fact pegs back London's political difference.

In other words, London's religiosity means that it resembles the rest of the country more than it would do otherwise on economic, welfare and libertarian/authoritarian questions.

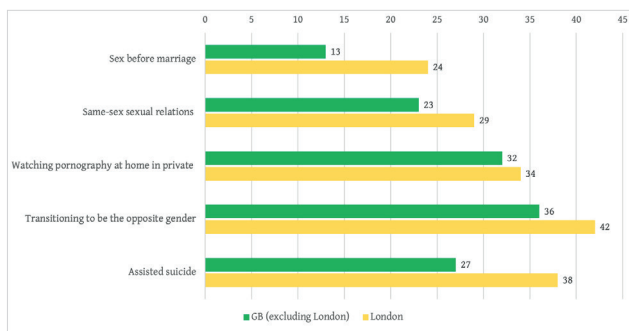
“

On moral questions London is surprisingly conservative

Moral questions

London is perceived to be a socially liberal city overall – and indeed it is, consistently so. But it is consistently *less* liberal than GB (excluding London). In other words, on moral questions London is surprisingly conservative.

Figure 2:9 Percentage of respondents saying the following are at least sometimes wrong: GB (excluding London) and London



Religious London Survey by Savanta ComRes

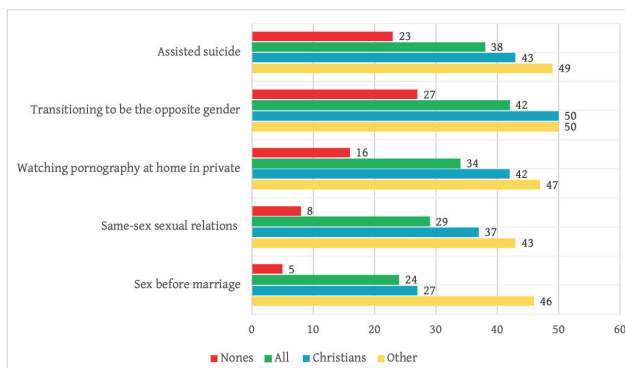
Base: All GB respondents excl. London (n=1,739); All London respondents (n=1,005)

This is not to suggest that London is socially conservative overall, but rather that it is more socially conservative than one would expect, sometimes startlingly so. For example, Londoners are more than twice as likely as British adults (excluding London) to say that sex before marriage is always/mostly wrong (17% vs. 7% respectively). In contrast, three in five (60%)

London adults say that sex before marriage is not wrong at all; in comparison, seven in ten (73%) British adults say the same.

This is undoubtedly a religious effect. Christians and respondents from other religions are far more likely to say that the various actions were sometimes, mostly or always wrong. The divergence of views is dramatic. Thus, while only 8% of religious nones agreed that same-sex relationships are at least sometimes wrong, 43% of non-Christian religious respondents (and 69% of Muslims) said the same. No religious nones said sex before marriage was always wrong, while 10% of Christians and 21% of non-Christian religious respondents (and 38% of Muslims) said the same.

Figure 2:10 Percentage of respondents saying the following are at least sometimes wrong: London respondents by religious group



Religious London Survey by Savanta ComRes

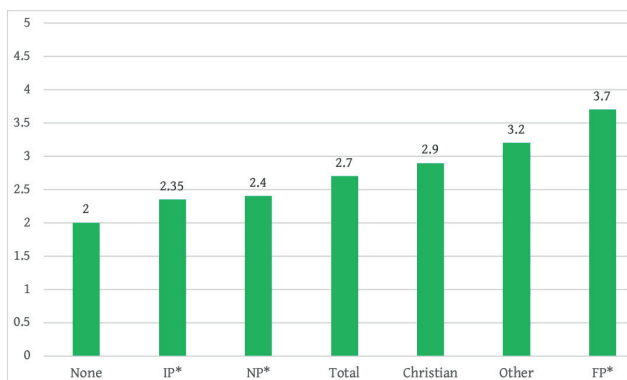
Base: All London respondents (n=1,005); All Christian respondents in London (n=410); All other religious, non-Christian respondents in London (n=208); All none-religious respondents in London (n=346)

As an aside, while one might suppose that factors like age would be significant, we do not always see diverging responses: 23% of 18-24s and over 65s thought that sex before marriage

was at least sometimes wrong, compared to only 16% of 55-64-year-olds (figures indicative as base sizes are small).

We can further illustrate these differences by calculating a mean score on the scale where “always wrong” is given a numerical value of 5 and “never wrong” is given a numerical value of 1. Nones inevitably score as the most socially liberal group, with non-Christian religious groups and FP (frequently practising) Christians as the least socially liberal. On these kinds of questions, NP (never practising) Christians fall closest to religious nones.

Figure 2:11 Overall score: moral questions



Religious London Survey by Savanta ComRes

Base: All London respondents (n=1,005); All Christian respondents (n=410); All other religious, non-Christian respondents in London (n=208); Never practicing Christians in London (NP) (n=128); Infrequently practicing Christians in London (IP) (n=47*); Frequently practicing Christians in London (FP) (n=116*); Non-religious respondents in London (n=346)

It is worth noting that the GB (excluding London) score was 2.4, compared to a London average of 2.7. Arguably, this is a marginal difference but it is a marginal difference in a completely counter-intuitive direction. Most would

assume that London is significantly more socially liberal than the nation at large. Rather, it is somewhat more socially conservative.

Other questions might produce different results. However, a series of statements around the issue of abortion indicated that, again, London appears slightly more socially conservative than other parts of Great Britain.

Civic engagement and civic comfort

Finally, we sought to explore how engaged respondents were in their neighbourhood and civic life, and – with a mind on religious respondents – whether they were experiencing any degree of social discomfort because of their religious beliefs.

With regard to civic engagement, we asked how likely respondents were to:

- help a neighbour with a simple task (e.g., putting their bins out, accepting parcel deliveries, lending sugar);
- vote in an election in their area;
- make a financial donation to support a charitable cause;
- volunteer regularly for a local charitable initiative;
- join a political party.

In this case, differences between London and GB (excluding London) adults were not particularly marked. Around nine in ten respondents in all parts of the country said they were either fairly likely or very likely to help a neighbour with a simple task (91% GB ex. London and 88% London) or vote in an election in their area (89% GB ex. London and 88% London). Over seven in ten respondents across the country

said that they were likely to make a charitable donation. London adults did seem more civically engaged when it came to volunteering regularly (47% London vs. 38% GB ex. London said that they were fairly or very likely to do so) and joining a political party (19% of Londoners said that they were fairly or very likely to do so vs. 15% in GB excluding London).



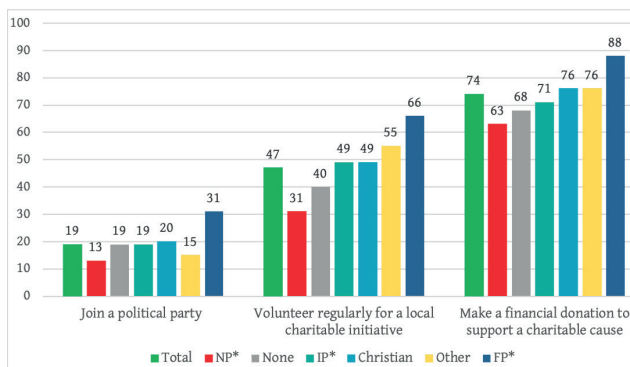
Religious people may be helping to make London a more neighbourly place

Religious people may be helping to make London a more neighbourly place. For instance, Christian Londoners are significantly more likely than non-religious Londoners and other religious, non-Christian Londoners to say that they are

likely to help a neighbour with a simple task (92% vs. 86% and 83% respectively). Christian Londoners are also more likely than non-religious Londoners to say they are likely to make a financial donation to support a charitable cause (76% vs. 68%). Moreover, half of Christian (49%) and other religious, non-Christian (53%) adults say they are likely to volunteer regularly for a local charitable initiative. In comparison, just two in five non-religious Londoners say the same (40%).

On these statements, frequency of religious practice did correlate with pro-social behaviours. For instance, in London, 63% of regular attenders at a religious service said that they were likely or very likely to volunteer, compared to 37% of people who say they never attend a religious service. This plays out in our NP, IP and FP categories. In short, the more religious you are, the better a neighbour you seem to be.

Figure 2:12 Percentage likely to join a political party, volunteer for a local charity or make a charitable donation



Religious London Survey by Savanta ComRes

Base: All London respondents (n=1,005); All Christian respondents (n=410); All other religious, non-Christian respondents in London (n=208); Never practicing Christians in London (NP) (n=128); Infrequently practicing Christians in London (IP) (n=47*); Frequently practicing Christians in London (FP) (n=116*); Non-religious respondents in London (n=346).

Finally, with regard to civic dis/comfort, we asked to what extent people could agree with the following statements:

- In general, people in my neighbourhood can be trusted.
- People of my religious background are generally welcomed and respected in my local community.
- People of my religious background are well represented in civic and political life.
- Governments have passed legislation that makes life more difficult for people with beliefs like mine.
- I have experienced feeling marginalised or threatened because of my religious background, beliefs or identity.

The first of these statements is often used to test general levels of social trust, while the subsequent four are intended to explore feelings of religious marginalisation.



There is a more than significant sense of religious discrimination in the capital

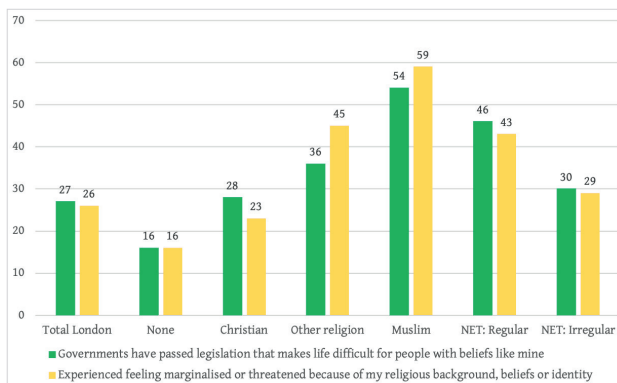
It comes as no surprise that respondents in London report as less trusting overall than respondents in GB (excluding London). The statements which sought to test whether people of a religious background felt welcomed and respected in their area and well

represented in public life produced no significantly different responses. However, respondents in London were more likely to say that they felt marginalised because of their religious background (26% vs. 12%) and that governments had passed legislation which made life more difficult for people with their religious background (27% vs. 16%). There is a more than significant sense of religious discrimination in the capital.

Christians and non-Christian religious respondents feel this sense of marginalisation, the latter much more strongly. Approaching half (45%) of other religious Londoners say that they have experienced feeling marginalised or threatened because of their religious background, beliefs or identity. Around a quarter (23%) of Christian Londoners agree that they have experienced feeling marginalised or threatened, while only 16% of non-religious Londoners say the same.

Similarly, Christian and non-Christian religious Londoners are significantly more likely than non-religious Londoners to say that governments have passed legislation that makes life more difficult for people with beliefs like theirs (28% and 36% vs. 16% respectively).

Figure 2:13 Percentage that agree with the following statements



Religious London Survey by Savanta ComRes

Base: All London respondents (n=1,005); All Christian respondents in London (n=410); All other religious, non-Christian respondents in London (n=208); All non-religious respondents in London (n=346); All Christians in London who regularly attend religious services (n=197); All Christians in London who irregularly attend religious services (n=310); All Muslim respondents in London (n=93)

*small base – indicative only

As with all indicators in this chapter, there is a significant difference between NPs and FPs, illustrated above by including a score for those from the whole sample who attend a religious service but do so infrequently and those who attend regularly. The more observant you are, the more likely you are to feel marginalised or feel that governments enacted legislation which makes your life more difficult. Additionally, we have included a score for Muslims in this table. The sample size is too small to draw hard conclusions, but this indicates they are the single religious group who, on both these questions at least, feel most marginalised. Other religious groups (Jews and Hindus) are more likely to express a general sense of social marginalisation than they are to agree to the statement on legislation.



London's leaders, present and future, should ask what they can do to make the city more hospitable to people of faith

Something of a paradox is therefore at play. Religious Londoners are civically engaged – they're joiners, volunteers, donors and good neighbours. They are about as trusting as non-religious Londoners, and in some cases more so (68% of Christian Londoners agree that in general people in their neighbourhood can be trusted, compared to 60% of non-religious Londoners). However, a significant proportion of them feel a sense of civic discomfort. London's leaders, present and future, should ask what they can do to make the city more hospitable to people of faith.

Conclusion

There is a different religious temperature in London. If London's political, civil and religious leaders know this they may not have appreciated how large is the variance. This data should shape the discussion about London's relationship with the rest of the United Kingdom and London's relationship with itself – or should we say, the relationships between the diverse communities that share the city.

In the next chapter, we explore how different actors in the religious city relate to each other. Do public authorities and political leaders understand the city they lead and serve? And how do religious institutions perceive their own role, vis-à-vis those public institutions and, indeed, their non-religious neighbours?

- 1 Allison Dunatchik and Neil Smith, "What Britain thinks: Comparing views across London and other regions", www.trustforlondon.org.uk/publications/what-britain-thinks-comparing-views-across-london-and-other-regions. Site accessed 28 February 2020.
- 2 Jonathan Birdwell Mark Littler, "Faithful Citizens: Why Those Who Do Good Do God" (London, UK: Demos, 2012).



3 Governing Religious London

The previous two chapters have shown that London is more religious, and more intensely religious, than the rest of the UK. We have also seen how London's religiosity means that the city is less left-wing, welfarist, and more authoritarian than it would otherwise be. It is also more socially conservative than the rest of the country on many moral issues. We also set out how religious Londoners tend to be more civically engaged than their non-religious counterparts, but there is nevertheless a sense of what we call "civic discomfort". A substantial minority feel marginalised and even discriminated against by governing institutions.

Even without the factors set out above, governing London presents a unique set of challenges. However, London's more intense religiosity amplifies and sharpens a range of questions in fields as diverse as education, welfare and public services, policing and security, and even planning.

If religious Londoners are more likely to volunteer, donate or help neighbours, then religious London may present opportunities not available in other parts of the country. Religious groups already have a strong role in shaping a common life in this city. Could they be enabled even further?

In the qualitative phase of the research, we conducted a series of 35 interviews across a number of boroughs which reflect the diversity of religious identity and intensity of religious practice in London. We interviewed representatives of public bodies, including local council, police and health services. We also interviewed representatives of the faith communities, including religious leaders and those with a governing role in various intermediary structures.

We hoped to gauge the nature and intensity of engagement between various public authorities and faith communities, to ascertain both opportunities and challenges in relating to each other. We did not seek to offer an exhaustive picture of any particular borough when it comes to the interface between religion, state and civil society, but rather to identify common features, opportunities and difficulties arising across a number of contrasting London boroughs.

Looking around: what did we find?

Relationships and faith-based community service

We came across many positive examples of faith communities delivering a wide variety of public services that foster cohesion and belonging at the local level – including

frontline poverty relief projects, youth programmes to tackle knife crime, various wellbeing interventions, debt advice, lunches for the elderly, night shelters for the homeless, refugee resettlement initiatives and much more. This elucidates the key findings of the survey discussed in the first two chapters, which revealed higher

rates of volunteering among the religious population of London compared to the non-religious. We found ample evidence of a renewed visibility, reach and confidence of faith expressions in London.

“

Faith communities deliver a wide variety of public services that foster cohesion and belonging at the local level

Public authorities, including local councils, have taken notice and in many cases are developing fruitful relationships with faith groups. We discovered positive examples of councils relating to faith communities in a spirit of partnership, borne

out of a recognition of the value of religious volunteering and their provision of local and neighbourhood services. They showed a willingness to reciprocate and meet, as far as possible, the needs of the sector, particularly when it came to places of worship and planning of future developments. For example, a borough which has experienced significant growth in its religious population in the last 20 years commissioned an independent study to inform its strategy for addressing the accommodation needs of faith communities, recognising their vital contribution to the wellbeing and cohesiveness of the borough.¹

Where we discovered positive cases of collaboration and support between faith communities and public authorities, this was generally on account of good personal relationships between particular representatives of the council, who were either religious themselves or understood the value of faith, and faith communities.

During several interviews we heard public officials describe faith leaders as important access points into the broader community, who could be called upon to provide knowledge of grassroots initiatives and to disseminate information into the wider community. One representative of a local authority noted:

From our end we know that the faith leaders in those communities are critical to us for ensuring a good settlement in a community. Particularly in times of crisis, when something goes wrong, they are called on; we often go directly to them to

“

We discovered positive examples of councils relating to faith communities in a spirit of partnership

try to help us deal with whatever the crisis is or to help us get a message out.

Public authority representative, Interviewee #17

Intentional relationship building, particularly from the public authorities' side, was deemed crucial but presents its own vulnerability. The lack of institutional memory and clear protocols for faith engagement in the council can mean that when the individuals who build relationships and establish partnerships between public institutions and faith communities move on, a rift ensues. As one religious leader put it:

The good things that are happening are because of personal relationships between faith leaders and public servants, but at the same time there isn't a framework. It can be whimsical and we can have bad experiences because the people who were maybe once pro-faith are gone. There isn't an official policy or framework to guide future engagement with faith communities. The next person might be prejudiced against faith.

Religious leader, Interviewee #9

“

Authorities are aware of and interact with fewer religious groups than exist in a particular area

While public institutions generally engage faith communities, our research did reveal that often, local authorities are aware of and interact with fewer religious groups than exist in a particular area, especially in places with high diversity of religious expression.

This is partly a capacity issue. For example, only one of our case study boroughs appointed somebody with faith engagement in their brief. Community engagement officers,

who generally relate to faith communities as part of their broader work, are often overstretched. It is also the case that, particularly among the black majority, Pentecostal grouping, new churches spring up with high frequency. This makes it difficult for local authorities to have up-to-date knowledge of all new worshipping communities in their area.

As a result, a gap in communication is created between the faith sector and public authorities. Besides capacity limitations and high churn, some interviewees suggested that this gap may be due to a failure to see religious communities as assets and partners in fostering resilience and community service. Some councils were thought to be inward-looking and corporate in their approach, rather than relational and outward focused. One religious leader noted:

The local authority is very corporate – “this is our strategy, our plan, what we need to achieve.” They’ve got their corporate plan and everything has to fit around that. The local authority needs to turn the manifesto into a working document.

Religious leader, Interviewee #12

Lack of relationship is clearly a problem for faith groups and public authorities alike. Faith groups are deprived of vital information on what is available to them, while the latter struggle to meet their responsibilities towards them with regards to, among other things, public safety and security.

Lack of relationship between public authorities and faith groups can also be explained, some interviewees suggested, in terms of the concerns about proselytism, namely the worry that religious groups might use public funds to proselytise. As we demonstrated in a report from 2015,² however, there is little evidence to suggest religious charities proselytise as part

of their community action. In fact, several interviewees noted specific measures they took to prevent such fears even forming in the minds of public authorities. But because this fear still appears, as some interviewees noted, councils will commission fewer services from faith-based groups than these would be willing to provide. In this context, interfaith approaches and cross-community partnerships for civic engagement were mentioned as means to address this particular concern.

Intermediary structures

One of the practical ways in which public authorities will relate to faith groups is through intermediary structures.



One of the practical ways in which public authorities relate to faith groups is through intermediary structures

These include government-initiated faith forums at borough level, faith networks at city level, multifaith chaplaincies, Ecumenical Borough Deans groups, leaders' networks for those belonging to the same faith tradition, and other similar structures. Many of our interviewees highlighted the importance of these in aggregating interests,

creating stability in the community, brokering relationship and facilitating communication between their constituents and public authorities or other relevant civil or commercial entities. In some cases, intermediary structures also enable common action at local level, including running environmental projects, combating knife crime, addressing polarisation and hate, and encouraging participation in local politics.

Our interviews showed that members of historic denominations, like the Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Methodists and Quakers, are generally more inclined towards

interfaith collaboration. The least engaged were members of diaspora, Pentecostal and charismatic traditions. Whatever theological reason may lie beneath this, there is also a practical one: older, historic denominations have better structures and often designated representatives for this type of engagement, whereas churches in the Pentecostal and charismatic traditions have a devolved governing structure or are completely independent.

Our research revealed that energy in the interfaith space lies with shared action rather than face-to-face theological dialogue. In this regard, we picked up a number of shared concerns with faith forums, one of the established means for interfaith work in the city. Some interviewees perceived them to be mere talking shops, and therefore ineffective in addressing real issues in the community. Some faith leaders, particularly those with responsibility over larger religious institutions, prefer to establish direct communication with local authorities on an ad hoc basis, rather than go through intermediate structures like faith forums. In other cases, besides a theologically grounded reluctance towards interfaith work in general, some interviewees mentioned a suspicion that, as a government initiative, faith forums carry a hidden agenda, although none were able to identify that specifically.

“

Energy in the interfaith space lies with shared action rather than face-to-face theological dialogue

Looking underneath: why is it like this?

While our research evidenced that in general faith groups are a vibrant presence in their local communities and important in creating a sense of belonging and cohesiveness

through their service, the relationship between them and public authorities, most notably council, is uneven. There are many factors to account for this, some of which we outlined above. In what follows, we seek to, on the one hand, delineate some underlying causes, and identify areas of tension that came up in our research.

A crisis-driven approach

One of the principal findings of the qualitative phase of the research was that public institutions lacked a coherent

framework for engaging faith communities. Their approach was perceived to be piecemeal, crisis-driven and needs-based, rather than borne out of a positive appreciation of faith groups and an understanding of their specific needs and concerns.

In the context of successive funding cuts to local council budgets, authorities have gradually come to appreciate the contributions and capabilities of faith communities

and faith-based organisations in delivering public services, particularly through their ability to mobilise and deploy volunteers. As one interviewee noted:

We know that faith organisations offer an enormous scope when it comes to volunteering opportunities so that relationship with faith organisations is really important. They add to what we can do in the borough rather than being detracting. We view it as an asset-based relationship, as in they have a lot they can offer for our residents.

Public authority representative, Interviewee #6



Public institutions lacked a coherent framework for engaging faith communities. Their approach was perceived to be piecemeal, crisis-driven and needs-based

During times of crises, like the Lee Rigby murder (2013), the Grenfell fire (2017) or the London Bridge attacks (2017, 2019), public authorities reach out to faith communities to gain or communicate relevant information, mobilise for a particular action or, as often is the case, to avail of their practical support. In a similar vein, one interviewee praised faith communities in East London for standing up to far-right forces in the previous decade, and acting as a glue to keep the borough united. As they put it:

Faith communities themselves were the glue to hold that together throughout that period. Through that there were renewed relationships with the authorities ... [Faith] outreach is greater now. There's more agility within the council in terms of faith. We're also seeing more confident faith-based interventions.

Public authority representative, Interviewee #2

This is a particularly positive local story, but other interviews revealed there is little engagement outside of moments of crisis or special events. As a result, faith communities can have a sense of being instrumentalised, especially on account of their capacity and appetite for volunteering, but ignored the rest of the time. As one interviewee noted:

What I would like to see is public institutions acknowledging that we are partners in this business [of community service], not only when they need us. Because until this is acknowledged, they will see us in terms of us versus them.

Religious leader, Interviewee #9

Poor religious literacy

A significant obstacle to greater partnership between faith communities and public authorities is the lack of

religious literacy. In particular, a poor understanding of the variety of religious expression was deemed by many of our interviewees from the faith communities as being one of

“

A significant obstacle to greater partnership between faith communities and public authorities is the lack of religious literacy

the fundamental problems. This manifests itself in misinformed assumptions about “people of faith”, sometimes unhelpfully lumped together, to setting up frameworks for engagement which unwittingly constrict faith groups and therefore dissuade them from engaging. Religious illiteracy is at the root of many of the difficulties

of negotiating a common life with religious communities in contemporary London and the UK more broadly.

Specifically, poor religious literacy was seen in suggestions of sharing of worship space between religious groups belonging to different faith traditions. This was perceived to illustrate the failure to appreciate the significant differences in worship practices, which make such suggestions at best impractical and at worst insensitive. Poor religious literacy was also evident in catering for, or rather failing to cater to, the specific dietary needs of Jewish and Muslim faith representatives attending events with public authorities. In general, our research indicates that active religious discrimination may be absent or rarely encountered, but a general lack of awareness was noted as discouraging faith groups from being more engaged.

Divergent cultures and values

Deeper and more organic forms of engagement between faith groups and public institutions may also be lacking on account of divergent styles of working: faith communities tend to work in organic and relational ways, whereas public

institutions such as local council are perceived to be more bureaucratic, strategy-led and targets-orientated. These divergent approaches can be the source of tensions particularly around governance and observance of policies, which councils will rightly want to emphasise, but which in some cases may be a weakness for faith institutions. When local authorities are perceived as enforcers of policy rather than partners in and facilitators of public service, fear and distrust can creep in.

In some cases, public authorities were perceived to be making onerous demands of faith providers, with regards to catering licensing for community events, for example, and other forms of regulation. Of course, maintaining high standards of public health and safety is a priority for public authorities. However, some interviewees reported feeling as if they had many hoops to jump through, which made it feel like their contribution was not valued. As one interviewee put it:

“

Deeper and more organic forms of engagement between faith groups and public institutions may also be lacking on account of divergent styles of working

There has to be balance in the way we regulate voluntary organisations, particularly when the government isn't funding them. If you were funding, then he who pays the piper dictates the tune. But in this case, you are not paying the piper but you dictate the tune. So many people are suffering and there are organisations ready to assist them, but if you put all these hoops for them to pass through, they will simply withdraw and cease their service.

Religious leader, Interviewee #9

Moreover, chapter 2 highlighted important divergences in moral values between the religious and non-religious population of London. A practical area in which the tensions



A practical area in which the tensions between secular values and religious values are worked out is education

between secular values and religious values are worked out is education. Indeed, the provision of education uniquely crystalises the challenge of nurturing a common life given divergent social and political values at work in contemporary, thickly plural London.

In some cases, education is a significant source of friction at the interface between religion and state, particularly for very socially conservative religious groups. The practical issues which highlight the problem are the teaching of creationism, prevalent in certain religious groups, and more topically, relationships & sex education (RSE). The latter is a particularly neuralgic area in the light of the widely reported parents' protests in Birmingham over teaching children about LGBT relationships.³

Several interviewees complained specifically about Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills), describing it as "not [being] fit for purpose" or "heavy-handed", with some interviewees going as far as to suggest it "undermines religious belief and practice" and even that it acts as "a Trojan horse for individuals acting without a democratic mandate" (Religious leader, Interviewee #21).

Pointing to potential ways forward in negotiating difference, an interviewee from a central governmental authority noted:

Anything to do with Ofsted is a challenge, particularly for the more conservative groups. Same with sexual education. The Catholic Church has been a front runner here. They have held to their beliefs and will teach them, but they have been able to do this in a way that other faith groups can learn from. So it's about how do you get these relationships and bridges built so that they can learn from each other, and the ways that you can teach your beliefs but do it in a way in which you can also have mutual respect and understanding.

Public authority representative, Interviewee #26

Another interviewee stressed the need to keep communication channels between stakeholders open and facilitate dialogue and consultations with parents:

If we can have an open dialogue about that then there aren't as many issues as people assume. Often dialogue breaks down and that's usually what has happened where there are protests: bad consultations with parents and faith groups.

Public authority representative, Interviewee #20

Beyond education, human sexuality is an area of broader concern for socially conservative religious groups, particularly as this relates to free speech. Some churches, for example, feel “under siege” because of their conservative, theologically grounded views on human sexuality. As one interviewee noted in this regard:

“

Human sexuality is an area of broader concern for socially conservative religious groups, particularly as this relates to free speech

[These churches] feel completely disempowered because they cannot engage in public discourse unless they are affirmative. Otherwise you are immediately labelled homophobic.

Religious leader, Interviewee #1

As with education, several interviewees noted the need to create space for genuine dialogue across differences in social and moral values. The same interviewee as above said:

If you don't allow for conversations where people can actually tell you how they feel, the sense of repressiveness will continue to grow as the validity of others to take part in conversation is annulled.

Religious leader, Interviewee #1

Looking ahead: how could things be better?

This study has shown that faith groups are present and active in communities all across London. Often, they are able to reach and serve groups to which governmental agencies do not have access. Their tangible contribution to community life is increasingly recognised by local authorities, particularly in

the context of funding cuts to local government or in times of crisis.

Engagement of faith communities is in some cases healthy and consistent, based on relationships initiated by proactive individuals embedded in public bodies. More often, however, it is sporadic, uneven and crisis-driven.

“

Faith communities generally provide public services as an organic expression of their faith

While faith communities generally provide public services as an organic expression of their faith, some of our

interviewees expressed, on the one hand, frustration at not having enough support from local government, particularly around training and coordinating volunteers, and on the other, a feeling of being taken for granted. As one interviewee put it:

Government needs to put some value on the contribution of faith communities ... Just because we can access volunteers, that shouldn't mean that we do everything for free.

Religious leader, Interviewee #9

The same interviewee went on to note that funding is necessary for training and organising those volunteers, and ensuring professional support for those involved in providing services as diverse as English classes for immigrants, youth clubs, lunchtime groups for the elderly, refugees resettlement programmes etc. The general sentiment from the religious leaders we interviewed was the desire to be seen as gifts to, and assets in the community, rather than as problems to be managed or mere levers to be pulled in an emergency.

“

The general sentiment from the religious leaders we interviewed was a desire to be seen as gifts to, and assets in the community

To help foster better relationship between faith communities and public authorities, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Faith and Society, chaired by Rt Hon. Stephen Timms MP has drafted a “faith covenant” that sets out the principles and ground rules for engagement. The aims of the covenant are to combat the misunderstanding and mistrust that can creep in and to create the conditions in which faith groups can play an active role as providers and advocates for the communities in which they serve. To date, 13 local councils have adopted the covenant.⁴ However, uptake in

London has been very low, with only two out of 32 boroughs adopting it. The covenant should be considered as a useful basis for developing a productive engagement between faith groups and local authorities.

Plugging in to intermediary institutions

Earlier in this chapter, we highlighted the importance of intermediary institutions in creating relationship, cohesion

and partnership in community service. However, our research revealed concerns about the degree of representation of these structures in relation to their constituencies, particularly in richly diverse areas. In some contexts, leaders of these mediating institutions struggle to represent highly decentralised religious groups, which may lack the structures, time and the desire to connect, some of which may be operating completely under the radar of public authorities.

Questions were also raised about the level of representation of faith forums or other interfaith networks. These tend to attract those with an ecumenical outlook, who are not necessarily those with clear connections to the grassroots, thus making downward information flow and wider mobilisation difficult to achieve. As one interviewee noted:

The relationship between the faith leaders who come to the [faith] forum and the council members who go is really excellent, but that's a small percentage of the whole ... I would say that there are well over 100 faith leaders in the borough and out of



Public authorities and religious and relevant civic bodies need to help new or emerging religious groups plug into relevant intermediate structures and support networks

that the numbers at the meeting would be 15-16, and that might include two people from one faith group.

Public authority representative, Interviewee #11

All this suggests a need for both public authorities and religious and relevant civic bodies to help new or emerging religious groups plug into relevant intermediate structures and support networks. This is to facilitate shared community projects, avoid replication, exchange best practice and generally encourage relationships of trust and partnership, and where appropriate, of accountability, across different groups and communities.

Places of worship, planning and community spaces

As previous studies have shown, the provision of space for worshipping communities has been a real pressure point in the relationship between faith groups and public authorities, especially in the context of significant growth of new and black majority churches in places like Southwark, or the Muslim population in places like Barking and Dagenham.⁵ Added to that, parking, noise levels, disposal of waste and other practical features of community life are some of the areas of tension at the interface between worshipping communities and their non-religious neighbours.

“

The provision of space for worshipping communities has been a real pressure point in the relationship between faith groups and public authorities

The demand for religious meeting places has grown considerably as a result of the said significant demographic changes,⁶ and the increased community activities that have

often resulted. Previous studies have indicated, however, that both supply and current planning policy are inadequate.

The London Plan 2016 acknowledges that “voluntary and community groups often find it difficult to find

“

Local faith premises policies should be developed following high quality consultations with representatives of faith communities

premises suitable for their needs,” recommending that “unused or underused facilities should be brought into use as much as possible to help address their accommodation needs.”⁷⁷ It then goes on to single out places of worship as having potential to be given additional use or be reused by other traditions, faiths and wider community. What is lacking, however, is an approach

to the question of premises that is undertaken at both regional, borough and local level, to ensure sufficient level of detail and granularity of both needs and opportunities is produced. Local faith premises policies should be developed in the future following high quality consultations with representatives of faith communities.

Our research reveals that local authorities are not always sympathetic to faith groups when it comes to the provision of adequate worshipping space or requests for changing the use of buildings they are currently occupying. As a result, certain faith groups, including Christian diaspora communities, worship in inappropriately licensed premises – commercial spaces and light industrial units, for example.

At the same time, we also came across religious institutions using what premises they had available as community spaces for their public service delivery, and also

for enabling local authorities and MPs to interface with the community. This is a particularly valuable contribution of faith groups in a context where community halls or other similar spaces have been systematically disbanded and/or sold to property developers.

As another study has shown, while there is broad support for shared community spaces, there is less so for multifaith sharing of worship spaces.⁸ Several interviewees stressed the need for opening up multipurpose community spaces/hubs which faith communities can access and share. They emphasised the need for local authorities to think more creatively about community space, and the contribution and needs of faith groups, both in established areas and in new developments. As one interviewee remarked:

I think we need to think more about how we can get dynamic spaces that can serve ethnic communities and the wider community ... I want to see faith spaces as more meaningful – health clinics in mosques, for example. There is an opportunity there because mosques are mostly used on Fridays and at the weekend. Throughout the week it's quite empty. We've got to be more creative and the local authority needs to bring that to the table.

Religious leader, Interviewee #30

The Church of England and the future of establishment

The Church of England, although taking only the second largest slice of the religious population of London and experiencing marked numerical decline across the UK, still enjoys benefits and advantages associated with its position as the established church. This includes strategically located church buildings and community halls, clear structures and

pathways to public authorities, access to historic endowments, in some cases, and a guaranteed place at the table.

In a multifaith, richly diverse London, what is the future of the Church of England as the established church? What role should it play, in relation to the state, to other faith traditions and to other expressions of Christianity? Should (and can) it take the role of host? If so, can faith groups, which are continuing to grow and are firmly embedded in the life of London, be considered mere guests? Can it perhaps exercise a role of gathering and convening? If so, who risks being left out? Can the Church of England be a guardian of the spiritual

life of the nation in a multifaith context? Or should it be one faith actor among others? Is it to continue exercising its responsibility towards communities through the parish system?⁹


These are all broad and complex questions requiring further reflection, which is beyond the remit of this study. For now, it is

perhaps worth saying that the established church has a unique opportunity to act as a bridging institution for newer religious communities, actively seeking them out and encouraging their participation in mediating institutions. Church of England leaders could use their implicit knowledge of public engagement and residual cultural capital to encourage, train and build other religious communities.

“

The established church has a unique opportunity to act as a bridging institution for newer religious communities

- 1 *Faith groups and meeting places: Evidence base study. Final report to London Borough of Barking & Dagenham Council*, CAG Consultants, November 2017, www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/places_of_worship_report_2008.pdf. Site accessed: 26 February 2020.
- 2 Paul Bickley, *The Problem of Proselytism* (London, UK: Theos, 2015).
- 3 “Birmingham LGBT teaching row: How did it unfold?”, BBC News, 22 May 2019, www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-48351401. Site accessed: 26 February 2020.
- 4 www.faithandsociety.org/covenant. Site accessed 18 February 2020.
- 5 Andrew Rogers, *Being Built Together: A Story of New Black Majority Churches in the London Borough of Southwark* (University of Roehampton, Southwark for Jesus, Churches Together South London, 2013). See also *Faith Groups and meeting places: Evidence base study*, CAG Consultants (2017)
- 6 Peter Brierley, “The 2012 London Church Census” in David Goodhew and Anthony-Paul Cooper (eds.), *The Desecularisation of the City: London’s Churches, 1980 to the Present* (London, UK: Routledge, 2019), p. 69.
- 7 Mayor of London, *The London Plan: The Spatial Development Strategy for London Consolidated with Alterations since 2011* (London, UK: Greater London Authority, 2016), section 3.91, p. 131.
- 8 *Faith groups and meeting places: Evidence base study. Final report to London Borough of Barking & Dagenham Council*, CAG Consultants, November 2017, www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/places_of_worship_report_2008.pdf. Site accessed: 28 February 2020.
- 9 Amy Plender, *After Grenfell: The Faith Groups’ Response* (London, UK: Theos, 2018).



Conclusions

This study has shown that London is more religious than the rest of the country in terms of figures for self-identification. It is also more intensely religious, in the sense that those who identify as belonging to a particular faith are more likely than their counterparts across England, Wales and Scotland to be doing something about it.

London's religious citizens have different social and political values to secular Londoners. They are slightly further to the right on economic questions, sometimes significantly less welfarist, and definitely less libertarian. There is some evidence to suggest that this gap is widest amongst the “never practising” group of Christians, and that infrequently and frequently practising Christians are more like their secular neighbours. On moral questions, however, religious Londoners hold significantly more socially conservative positions, and the more observant they are the greater that effect.

This in itself may not come as a surprise, but the result of London being more religious than the rest of the country is that, taken as a whole, it is significantly more socially conservative than might be expected – and indeed, more so than other parts of the country. At the same time, paradoxically, the religious effect on economic, welfare and libertarian/authoritarian questions tethers London closer to the rest of the country.

This has implications for how London is governed, and we have also looked at how public authorities relate to worshipping communities and faith-based organisations. We have argued that London's systems and cultures of governance do not reflect the religious intensity and diversity of the city. For all the ways in which faith communities have seen greater

permission and greater partnership with public institutions, engagement is too often piecemeal and crisis-driven. Many leaders in faith communities think that they are seen as a problem to be managed or a lever to be pulled, rather than assets to their boroughs or the city at large.

Our data also shows that religious Londoners tend to be good neighbours and express higher levels of trust in their neighbourhoods. In other words, although they tend to be further to the economic right than religious nones, they are also less individualistic and more communitarian.

Faith communities have the potential to be reservoirs of neighbourliness and civic action – a fact with which we are now familiar – but they too have work to do, enfolding emerging religious communities into the networks and mediating institutions which enable fuller engagement. Too many emerging religious congregations are denizen, that is, resident, rather than citizen, communities. More established religious communities are best placed to make connections and offer invitations.

Implications

We have hinted at various points that it sometimes seems as if there are two cities in London: one sacred, one secular. Certainly, there is considerable value divergence, and although religious people may be neighbourly, they themselves do not necessarily feel comfortable. A significant minority experience a sense of marginalisation because of their faith.

Some may react to these findings with concern around social integration – and this is at least partly justified.¹ But it would be foolish to assume that faith is a problem to be overcome rather than part of the solution. In themselves,

faith communities are among the places where people can most readily find themselves mixing with people of different ethnicities, ages and social classes.²

There could also be a temptation simply to try to “fix” religious communities who are perceived to be holding the wrong social or political views – and again, a substantial minority in our survey said they felt governments had passed legislation which made their lives more difficult. A number of our interviewees also worried about an overtly secular agenda in some public authorities. Even these, however, tended to express a desire not for uncritical acceptance of their positions, but for respectful engagement and candid dialogue. We would argue that this is by far the more preferable course.

Another response may be to attempt to capitalise on religious cleavages, particularly around elections. Some might worry that encouraging religious organisations to participate more fully in public life could seed sectarian conflict between or even within religious traditions. Might there even be a possibility that aspiring political leaders could instrumentalise some of the issues about which religious groups feel differently? Again, such fears would not be unfounded. However, the answer is surely not to secularise London’s governance further, but to promote greater engagement across diverse communities – especially those that are currently more marginal.

There are difficult lines to walk and extremes to be avoided. If a flourishing city is indeed a place where one can encounter and learn from difference, then the access to the public square cannot be governed by what one previous Theos report called the “progressive test” (that is, commitment to progressive values) any more than it can be governed

by a confessional test. The same report called instead for a “relational test”, whereby the only criteria for engagement is willingness to work with others across ideological divides.³ At present, there will be those from both ends of the spectrum – social liberals and religious conservatives – who feel that there can be no cooperation with anyone who doesn’t pass their test. Yet London can find space for both these groups, and liberal and religious exclusivists can learn the habits of cooperation for the common good. The city will not flourish if liberal or religious exclusivism dominate public institutions. It is also true that the forums of common life – educational institutions and the like – can’t be a free for all. The public square needs to be bounded by a spirit of genuine pluralism and commitment to the common good.

Recommendations

With this in mind, we make a limited set of recommendations to religious communities, public bodies, and future mayors and assemblies.

For religious communities

Curate “religious infrastructure”

- In a radically diverse environment, there needs to be clear structures and pathways for religious engagement in public life. Many denominations collaborate in ecumenical networks, and at the local level many congregations will participate in activities like broad-based community organising. This could be called “religious infrastructure”. There is a shift away from formal ecumenical networks into informal relational and action-oriented networks. While these networks are extremely valuable, they are often highly

organic, unpredictable and – at worst – patchy. In such a fertile religious environment, there will be many who will decline to participate. There are others who would benefit from representation, but are missed.

There will be some religious communities that work with advantages of buildings, networks, public standing and reputation. They are recognised, and therefore they are more likely to work with, through and benefit from a “religious infrastructure”.

- Ecumenical networks should be generous and open, not just seeking the benefit of established voices but finding a place at the table for emerging religious communities. The recommendations from the 2014 report *Being Built Together* could be applied to many boroughs in London. Summarised, this report asks for an emphasis on engaging new black majority churches. The leadership of ecumenical groups or mediating institutions should favour emerging, diaspora, minority ethnic communities.
- Inter-religious networks have an important role to play too, creating a platform for cooperative action between faith communities. Historically, these have been perceived as reducing potential conflict between religious groups or providing forums for theological dialogue. Inter-religious networks should be accepted as having a wider brief, not least improving religious literacy.

For public bodies

Sustain “social infrastructure”

- Just as religious groups should curate religious infrastructure, local authorities in particular should

ask how they can sustain a “social infrastructure” for religious communities. By this, we don’t mean just buildings, although seeking to accommodate the needs for worshipping space of religious communities should be a priority. Rather, we mean the ways in which they can structure opportunities for faith-based public action and engagement.

- Public authorities, especially councils, should see faith communities as assets and partners rather than problems to manage or levers to pull.
- They should take a relational rather than a red-tape, bureaucratic, corporate approach.
- Their overall task should be to shift towards a mode of engagement which is driven by opportunity rather than crisis.
- Adopting the APPG on Faith and Society Faith Covenant, for example, can establish the ground on which collaboration and engagement can take place.

Improve religious literacy

Improving religious literacy is paramount. In the course of our research we discovered that even some (not all) who had a special responsibility to engage with faith communities displayed only a limited awareness of the particularities, and indeed the opportunities of working with them. This is the effect of viewing religious communities solely through the lens of a diversity category, rather than through the lens of institutions which can contribute to the common good.

Public authorities could be more creative than, for example, engaging in diversity training, or seconding or embedding officers within key faith institutions.

Plan with religion in mind

- Turning to the issue of buildings, we recommend that London boroughs include faith community spaces in their local plan.
- With a growing population, we are only aware of a few boroughs that have sought to scope future need. A conversation about the role of local authorities in facilitating the findings of worshipping space will have the additional benefit of promoting deeper relationships with faith groups as they canvas knowledge about existing and future needs.
- Faith communities don't necessarily observe, or operate according to, borough boundaries. As a result, there is a need for a regional steer. However, as we have noted, the London Plan makes only a vague allusion to the issue of faith community space, and makes no concrete plan or commitment. The next iteration of the London Plan should give proper attention to this matter.
- It should not be, however, the sole responsibility of public authorities to provide worshipping spaces. Established faith communities already play a role in lending and sharing space with itinerant worshipping communities, and there are further opportunities to be taken in sharing community halls and other facilities.

For the next mayor/London Assembly: champion 'religious London'

London's representative institutions – the mayoralty and assembly – have a significant role in setting the tone of public conversation around faith in the capital. How should they

respond to the findings of this report, not least in the run up to the election in May 2020?

Acknowledge the city's religious life

- Firstly, they have a key role in recognising and celebrating London's diverse communities, but ironically there is only muted acknowledgement of London's rich religious life.
- The best response to divisive and misleading rhetoric is not to ignore the city's religious life, but to encourage it. Religious Londoners are not the exception; they are the norm.
- The high level of civic engagement amongst religious Londoners, and the opportunities that flow from it, should be duly recognised.

Embrace religious groups as friends not foes

Secondly, the current mayor has articulated a “hands on” approach to integration. This is to be applauded, but vague talk of “asserting ... progressive values” risks unnecessarily alienating many Londoners and unwittingly contributing to the sense of social marginalisation that some feel. In place of a nebulous affirmation of “progressive values”, London and London's mayor should follow the example of other gateway cities. Bill de Blasio, Mayor of New York City – though himself having no religious affiliation – has acknowledged that religious outreach is inseparable from his work to create a more inclusive and equitable New York City: “If you are going to understand the community and the city, you have to understand how deeply faithful people are, and how central it is to people in their lives.” He has been described as “a more inclusive kind of liberal, one who is willing to embrace religious groups rather than treat them as adversaries.”⁴ The issues raised by de Blasio are relevant far beyond the confines

of New York City – and indeed, far beyond the London mayoral election.

Encourage “practical multiculturalism”

- Thirdly, in line with previous Theos reports, we advocate a “practical multiculturalism”.⁵ Models for this approach, such as the Near Neighbours programme, already operate in London (although funded by central government).⁶ In this programme, faith isn’t treated as an identity which divides, but as the energy bringing different communities together around common social endeavour.


In sociologist Peter Berger’s term, London – a global gateway city – is “as furiously religious as it ever was”.⁷ It may not be religious in the sense that it once was, but all its citizens need to be able to understand, navigate and take advantage of the opportunities of rich religious difference.

Sociologist and expert on cities, Richard Sennett – no great friend of religion – argues that “a city is a place where people can learn to live with strangers, to enter into the experiences and interests of unfamiliar lives. Sameness stultifies the mind; diversity stimulates and expands it.”⁸ While recognising the complexities of managing such plurality of sensibilities, we should see it as a wonderful opportunity. A city like London should be a school where religious and secular alike can learn to love their neighbour, where their neighbour is someone radically different from them. In today’s Britain, is there a greater or better challenge than this?

*Can you keep the City that the LORD keeps not with you?
A thousand policemen directing the traffic
Cannot tell you why you come or where you go.
A colony of covies or a horde of active marmots
Build better than they that build without the LORD.
Shall we lift up our feet among perpetual ruins?
I have loved the beauty of Thy House, the peace of Thy sanctuary
I have swept the floors and garnished the altars.
Where there is no temple there shall be no homes,
Though you have shelters and institutions,
Precarious lodgings while the rent is paid,
Subsiding basements where the rat breeds
Or sanitary dwellings with numbered doors
Or a house a little better than your neighbour's;
When the Stranger says: "What is the meaning of this city?
Do you huddle close together because you love each other?"
What will you answer? "We all dwell together
To make money from each other?" Or "This is a community"?*

T.S. Eliot, Choruses from "The Rock"

-
- 1 *British Integration Survey* (London, UK: The Challenge, 2016). See p. 14: “Whilst London has by far the most ethnically diverse population, Londoners are not making the most of this, with only 44% of potential interactions being taken up, although it should be noted that Londoners have the ‘highest bar’ to cross in terms of integration given the capital is the most diverse region. In particular, white respondents reported a strikingly low level of integration in London (27%), compared to the rest of the country (44%).” <https://the-challenge.org/cms/uploads/the-challenge-british-integration-study.pdf>. Site accessed: 5 March 2020.
 - 2 John Bingham, “Churches are best melting pots in Britain” in *The Telegraph* (7 December 2014), www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/11276878/Churches-are-best-social-melting-pots-in-modern-Britain.html. Site accessed: 5 March 2020.
 - 3 David Barclay, *Making multiculturalism work, enabling practical action across deep difference* (London, UK: Theos, 2013) www.theosthinktank.co.uk/cmsfiles/archive/files/Reports/Making%20Multiculturalism%20Work%20combined.pdf, pp. 27–30. Site accessed: 5 March 2020.
 - 4 “Mayor de Blasio Emerges as an Unexpected Champion of Religion” in *The New York Times* (18 March 2015) www.nytimes.com/2015/03/19/nyregion/mayor-de-blasio-emerges-as-an-unexpected-champion-of-religion.html Site accessed: 5 March 2020.
 - 5 David Barclay, *Making multiculturalism work: enabling practical action across deep difference* (London, UK: Theos, 2013).
 - 6 Paul Bickley, *Good Neighbours: How Churches Help Communities Flourish* (London, UK: Theos, 2014).
 - 7 Peter L. Berger, *The Desecularization of the World: The Resurgence of Religion in World Politics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 2.
 - 8 Richard Sennett, “The New Statesman Essay – Cities without care or connection” in *The New Statesman* (5 June 2000), www.newstatesman.com/node/151415. Site accessed: 28 February 2020.



Appendix

Recent relevant studies

This work has been prompted by a number of thinkers who have considered the unique religious context developing in London:

- 1 David Goodhew and Anthony-Paul Cooper (eds.), *The Desecularisation of the City: London's Churches, 1980 to the Present* (London, UK: Routledge, 2019). This book provides the first academic survey of churches in London over recent decades, linking them to similar developments in other major cities across the West. Produced by a large team of scholars from a range of disciplines, it offers a striking portrait of congregational life in London since 1980. Seventeen chapters explore the diverse localities, ethnicities and denominations that make up the church in contemporary London. The vitality of London's churches in the last four decades shows that secularisation is far from inevitable in the cities of the future.
- 2 Grace Davie, *Religion in Public Life: Levelling the Ground* (London, UK: Theos, 2017). This Theos report draws on Davie's 2016 Edward Cadbury Lectures to explore the "return" to, or rather renewed visibility of, religion in public life, analysing the phenomenon at the local, metropolitan, national and global level. Chapter 2, titled "Rethinking the metropolis: the unexpected can and does happen," focuses on London. Drawing on empirical data, it dispels the supposedly negative associations between religion and urban life, and shows London as having a vibrant religious market serving an ever more diverse city.
- 3 Heather Buckingham and Andrew Davies, *Megachurches and Social Engagement in London: Policy Options and*

Opportunities (Birmingham, UK: Edward Cadbury Centre for the Public Understanding of Religion, 2016). This is a briefing paper produced as part of a larger Arts and Humanities Research Council funded research project at the University of Birmingham, which investigated the social engagement of megachurches in London. The paper presents a series of insights and recommendations for policy-makers and social innovators based on empirical data showing the comprehensive contribution of the Christian megachurch to London's social and spiritual wellbeing. The detailed findings of the project are published in: Mark J. Cartledge, Sarah Dunlop, Heather Buckingham and Sophie Bremner, ***Megachurches and Social Engagement: Public Theology in Practice*** (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2019).

- 4 Daniel Nilsson DeHanas, ***London Youth, Religion, and Politics: Engagement and Activism from Brixton to Brick Lane*** (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016). This book offers an in-depth study of how religion shapes ethnic minority youth political participation in London. Based on extensive ethnographic research and interviews, the book presents a comparison of the lives of Christian and Muslim young people in Brixton, South London, and Tower Hamlets, East London. It focuses particularly on questions of civic engagement and political participation.
- 5 Andrew Rogers, ***Being Built Together: A Story of New Black Majority Churches in the London Borough of Southwark*** (London, UK: University of Roehampton, Southwark for Jesus, Churches Together South London, 2013). This report is the culmination of a two-year project investigating the demographics, ecclesiology, ecumenical life and community engagement of new black majority

churches in Southwark. The report devotes particular attention to questions around planning and premises, given a shortage of suitable places of worship for this group of churches which has experienced considerable growth in recent decades.



Theos – enriching conversations

Theos exists to enrich the conversation about the role of faith in society.

Religion and faith have become key public issues in this century, nationally and globally. As our society grows more religiously diverse, we must grapple with religion as a significant force in public life. All too often, though, opinions in this area are reactionary or ill informed.

We exist to change this

We want to help people move beyond common misconceptions about faith and religion, behind the headlines and beneath the surface. Our rigorous approach gives us the ability to express informed views with confidence and clarity.

As the UK's leading religion and society think tank, we reach millions of people with our ideas. Through our reports, events and media commentary, we influence today's influencers and decision makers. According to *The Economist*, we're "an organisation that demands attention". We believe Christianity can contribute to the common good and that faith, given space in the public square, will help the UK to flourish.



Will you partner with us?

Theos receives no government, corporate or denominational funding. We rely on donations from individuals and organisations to continue our vital work. Please consider signing up as a Theos Friend or Associate or making a one off donation today.

Theos Friends and Students

- Stay up to date with our monthly newsletter
- Receive (free) printed copies of our reports
- Get free tickets to all our events

£7/month
for Friends

£4/month
for Students

Theos Associates

- Stay up to date with our monthly newsletter
- Receive (free) printed copies of our reports
- Get free tickets to all our events
- Get invites to private events with the Theos team and other Theos Associates

£32/month



Sign up on our website:

www.theosthinktank.co.uk/about/support-us

Recent Theos publications include:

**Faith and Belief on Campus:
Division and Cohesion
Exploring student faith
and belief societies**

Simon Perfect, Ben Ryan
and Kristin Aune

**After Grenfell: the Faith
Groups' Response**

Amy Plender

**"Science and Religion":
the perils of
misperception**

Nick Spencer

**Religion in Public Life:
Levelling the Ground**

Grace Davie

**Forgive Us Our Debts:
lending and borrowing as
if relationships matter**

Nathan Mladin and
Barbara Ridpath

**Dignity at the End of
Life: What's Beneath the
Assisted Dying Debate?**

Andrew Grey

**People, Place, and
Purpose: Churches and
Neighbourhood Resilience
in the North East**

Paul Bickley

**Doing Good: A Future
for Christianity in
the 21st Century**

Nick Spencer

London is a global city – an economic, political and cultural hub. It is also seen as one of the UK's liberal heartlands. But in such a diverse city, no one story is the whole story. London's status as a gateway city means that it is a religious city as well – in fact, more religious, and more intensely religious than almost any other part of the United Kingdom.

This difference has surprising and significant public implications, not least that the capital is more traditionalist than other parts of the country when it comes to moral questions. *Religious London: Faith in a global city* argues that the religious diversity of London, though it raises many challenges, makes it a unique place where religious and non-religious alike can learn to love their neighbours better.

“

Paul Bickley is Research Fellow at Theos. His background is in Parliament and public affairs, and he holds an MLitt from the University of St Andrews' School of Divinity. Paul is the author of Theos reports on themes as diverse as the social contribution of churches and faith-based organisations, to the role of the Bishops in the House of Lords and the intersection of faith and sport. He also leads a church in South East London.

Nathan Mladin is a Researcher at Theos. He holds a PhD in Systematic Theology from Queen's University Belfast, and is the author of several Theos publications, including *'Forgive Us Our Debts: lending and borrowing as if relationships matter'*, a report on the ethics of debt.

Cover photograph: Clem Onojeghuo, Unsplash

ISBN: 978-1-9996680-2-0

‘THEOS’

