

We draw this chapter to a close with an argument which we think sets a research agenda for the future. Although the subjective turn is unquestionably a major feature of the cultural landscape in which we dwell, a great deal supports the contention that another major feature has emerged in the form of 'new' versions of life-as regulation and control with forceful life-as capacities. One can think of the technologies of surveillance (which force one to drive *us* a good motorist, for example) or the auditing, monitoring, inspecting, the performance-related pay and the public performance tables, which impose themselves within the modern workplace, and require one to work as the institution demands if one is to be successful. Without going into any more details, it is perfectly clear that we spend a great deal of time in a world of 'meet them or else...' targets, the process of targeting meaning that we have to channel our efforts in highly regulated ways – thereby serving to instil a very effective, because apparently self-chosen, life-as dimension to significant parts of many peoples' lives.

Our culture is experiencing a fundamental clash of values: on the one hand those associated with the cultivation of unique subjectivities, on the other those associated with the iron cage of having to live *the targeted-life*. In some spheres, like public-sector teaching or nursing, the clash may be acute. In others it may be better 'managed'. But given the prevalence of this clash, and given the preference on the part of increasing numbers of people for finding the freedom, the opportunity to be and become themselves, it is likely that many will use their 'free' time to seek liberation from their standard/ized, in effect *regimented*, work lives. If they engage with associational forms of the sacred, they are therefore much more likely to be involved with freedom-loving spiritualities of life than with role-enforcing life-as religion. Seeking to escape from externally imposed targets elsewhere in their lives, they will not want more of the same in the sphere of the sacred.

Chapter Five

Looking to the Future

... it will be those people who can keep alive and cultivate into a fuller perfection the art of life itself, who will be able to enjoy the abundance when it comes. (John Maynard Keynes, 'Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren', 1931, p. 368)

[England] is littered with people who used to go to church but no longer do. We could well bleed to death. The tide is running out. At the present rate of change we are one generation from extinction. (Peter Brierley, 2000, p. 236)

Does the future belong to the holistic milieu? And is there any reason why the congregational domain should not decline to the 3 or 4 per cent regular attendance level it has reached in, for example, Sweden? In this chapter we consider whether the trajectories of growth and decline we have found in Britain will be sustained in the future. Or whether it is likely that the growth of the holistic milieu will 'top off' and even turn into decline, whilst the decline of the congregational domain will 'bottom out', and perhaps turn into growth.

We argue that the future of associational forms of the sacred in Britain depends on the future of 'the massive subjective turn of modern culture', and the ways in which religions and spiritualities relate to it. Since we have explained developments to date by reference to this cultural turn, it makes sense to treat it as the key to unlocking the future. So we begin by looking at some of the reasons we think that the long-standing, deeply embedded subjective turn is going to persist, if not intensify – thereby providing a basis for prediction. We then go on to look in greater detail at what could well happen to the holistic milieu and the congregational domain in the future. Finally, we pull things together to reflect on whether the holistic milieu will become larger than the congregational domain – thereby bringing about a spiritual revolution.

The Cultural Momentum Factor

From an empirical point of view, the force of the subjective turn is clearly seen in the fact that institution after institution has shifted from emphasizing life-as formations as the primary source of significance to catering for subjective-life. Examples have already been provided: the development of child-centred education, managerial-centred soft capitalism, patient-centred health care – of subjective wellbeing culture in all its many forms. Indeed, it is difficult to think of institutions which have not moved some way towards paying more attention to how people experience their own personal lives, and it is virtually impossible to think of an institution which has gone against the grain to become more focused on life-as – the institutional shift to subjective-life being clearly linked with a shift in self-understanding.

From a more explanatory point of view, the momentum of this cultural current is bound up with that of other major developments which, like subjectivization itself, have had a central role in shaping the world in which we now live. We might think of the process of pluralization. With more and more forms of life coming to co-exist, any particular form loses the credibility it had when it existed alone. The authority which a religion has when it is presented as ‘the truth’, for example, is undermined when other religious ‘truths’ enter the picture; and so people turn to their subjective-lives for a ‘deeper truth’. Or we might think of the ‘democratic revolution’ and the closely allied development of the ethic of humanity. By emphasizing the value of equality, and the importance of respecting the freedom of others to decide how to live out their own lives, these developments generate reactions against life-as systems – or meta-narratives – which violate equality and which do not respect the unique subjective-life. Or we can recall the process of autonomization, whereby people come to think of themselves as sovereign agents, and aim to enrich the quality of their subjective-lives by going out into the world in order to feel powerful or successful (for example). Then again, we might think of the process whereby people who perceive themselves to be locked into anonymous ‘iron cages’ of procedures, rules and regulations turn to their private, personal lives to find meaning, satisfaction and significance.¹

‘Suppose that a hundred years hence’, John Maynard Keynes (1931) wrote some 70 years ago, ‘we are all of us, on average, eight times better

off in the economic sense than we are today’ (p. 365). ‘Thus’, he continues, ‘for the first time since his creation man will be faced with his real, his permanent problem – how to use his freedom from pressing economic cares, how to occupy the leisure, which science and compound interest will have won him, to live wisely and agreeably and well’ (p. 367). For a large proportion of the population of the West, Keynes’s predictions about increased affluence and ‘the art of life itself’ coming into prominence have come true. Greater prosperity has provided the resources required for the cultivation of subjective wellbeing (patient-centred nursing is not cheap, neither is child-centred education). It has meant an increase in the number of people who feel that there must be more to life than wealth-creation. And it has allowed growing numbers of ‘post-materialists’ to devote more time and energy to concerns which go beyond material wellbeing. Thus in Kendal, a considerable number of spiritual practitioners have downsized to devote more of their lives to the pursuit of quality of life; in Britain, Hamilton (2003) reports an estimated 1.7 million downshifting in 1997, 2.6 million in 2002 (p. 11); on an international scale, Inglehart’s (1997) World Values surveys provide detailed evidence of the connection between economic development and the attention paid to subjective wellbeing.²

This brief foray into some of the dynamics of modern times enables us to conclude that the massive subjective turn is integral to the world in which we currently live. Short of radical change – such as would be brought about by a long lasting collapse of the standard of living, for example – it is highly unlikely that the quest for ‘quality of life’ will not remain firmly on the agenda for the foreseeable future.

What are the implications for the future of life-as religion and subjective-life spirituality? In Chapter Four we argued that since life-as religion (necessarily) performs life-as functions and appeals to those who have life-as requirements, the subjective turn undermines the significance of what life-as religion has to offer. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that life-as religion cannot authorize the cultivation of unique, personal subjectivities. And the result is the decline of the congregational domain to date. Given that the subjective turn is not going to go away, we see absolutely no reason why this undermining process should not continue in the future. Hence the basis of our prediction that the congregational domain in Britain is likely to continue to decline, even though, as we shall argue later in this chapter, decline may ‘bottom out’.

In Chapter Four we also argued that since subjective-life spirituality performs subjective-life jobs, the subjective turn means that holistic activities

can benefit from the increasing number of people who are dwelling on the never-ending task of improving the quality of their own subjective-lives. Looking to the future, so long as value continues to be attached to the development, cultivation and exploration of subjective-life, and so long as subjectivized culture extols the virtues of wellbeing, there is every reason to suppose that the future of subjective-life spiritualities is secure. What has happened to date is likely to continue to happen in the future; there is no reason to suppose that activities (such as yoga) which are currently experienced as 'working' will not be experienced as 'doing the job' in the future. Hence the basis of our prediction that the holistic milieu of Britain is here to stay, even though, as we shall argue, growth is likely to slow down somewhat.

Holistic Milieu Scenarios

Having discussed what underpins our predictions, we now look in some detail at how the holistic milieu of Britain could fare in the future. We look first at two storms that appear to be brewing and which could result in the milieu going into decline.³

The 'last gasp of the sixties' scenario

The first possible storm concerns the age profile of those involved in the holistic milieu. Kendal Project research shows that 48 per cent of the spiritual practitioners operating at the time of our study were aged between 45 and 54, 23 per cent were older, 30 per cent younger. Of this younger cohort, 17 per cent were aged between 40 and 44, 11 per cent were in their thirties, and just 1.3 per cent were under 30. It is not as though group members and one-to-one clients are much younger, with almost three-quarters of those active in the holistic milieu being over 45 years old. Given that much the same age profile applies to the holistic milieu of the UK, it looks as though few of those currently active in the milieu will still be with us 40 to 50 years from now.

Looking more closely at this scenario, there is another consideration to take into account. It goes without saying that the existence of the milieu depends upon people serving as spiritual practitioners. Many practitioners came of age during the 'sixties', that is, during the period between the

mid-1960s and the mid-1970s when subjective-life spirituality became relatively widespread among younger college or university people. Many would thus appear to owe a great deal to their first-hand experiences of 'sixties values'. (As Ken Wilber says, 'the new age is a product of the baby-boom phenomenon, the "60s" generation' (cited by Rose, 1998, p. 9).) With so much apparently depending on this particular cohort, which is moving into old age, the 'last gasp of the sixties' scenario could be pretty bleak. True, 30 per cent of spiritual practitioners in Kendal are under 45, but only 12 per cent of these are under 40. So it may be that replenishment is not taking place at a rate which will compensate for the loss of the sixties practitioners.⁴

The declining sacred capital scenario

To make matters worse, there may be another storm on the horizon. According to a questionnaire finding from our study of Kendal's holistic milieu, 58 per cent of the largely middle-aged people active in the milieu report that they have been 'brought up with a religious faith' at home, 54 per cent at school, and 57 per cent at church. (There is no reason to suppose much the same does not apply to the holistic milieu of the UK as a whole.) So it seems possible that the growth of the milieu has owed a considerable amount to the fact that it caters for many who were already in possession of 'sacred capital': people who became disillusioned with Christianity earlier in their lives, but who have retained faith that the sacred might have something to offer. (Although 57 per cent of those active in the Kendal holistic milieu report that they used to attend church regularly, 80 per cent of this number say that they had stopped attending by the age of 24.) However, younger people today have been brought up in a society where regular church attendance is much lower, where there are considerably fewer Sunday Schools, and where there is much less transmission of Christianity by way of family or school. So if the declining sacred capital scenario is correct, the holistic milieu is going to run into difficulties. Its momentum will suffer when there are fewer 'believers' around who are seeking an alternative to the Christian religion of their younger days.

The cultural transmission scenario

Can it be argued, though, that 'fair weather' is more likely to lie ahead? To take the 'last gasp' scenario first, there are good reasons for thinking that

the future does not depend, at least so critically, on those who came of age during the sixties. For younger people – too young to have directly experienced the sixties – are nevertheless growing up in a world where holistic spirituality has become mainstream. So the sixties are no longer needed: younger people are quite likely to encounter holistic themes by way of all those culturally acceptable, plausible, sometimes positively engaging, provisions which we have discussed in the last two chapters of this volume. Whether it be by way of education-culture, media-culture, purchasing-culture, health-culture, production-culture, wellbeing-culture or some combination of these, younger people can readily become familiar with subjective-life mind-body-spiritualities, learn something about what is on offer and perhaps become ‘primed’ to become actively engaged with them when the time is right.

It is true that in Kendal and environs just 1.3 per cent of all those active in the milieu were under 30 years of age, with only 27 percent of the number of all those active being younger than 45 and 17 per cent younger than 40. But there is evidence elsewhere of younger people showing interest in holistic spiritualities of life. As suggested in Chapter Four (p. 110), it may simply be that their priorities – relationships, student life, family life, making their way in the world and so on – mean they do not have the time (or the resources) for much associational participation, and that those wellbeing or ‘life-issues’ which are catered for by holistic activities have yet to become of concern. So our expectation is that the holistic milieu will attract more participants, including those who will become practitioners, as they enter their mid-lives and have reason to dwell on improving the quality of their subjective-lives. And after all, 27 per cent of all those involved in the holistic milieu of Kendal and environs are younger than 45, which is not an inconsiderable figure.⁵

As for the declining religious capital scenario, although *religious* instruction and education might have become less significant (see Chapter Three), this is not to say that Britain has become a society of atheists. Far from it: the Soul of Britain survey reports that just 8 per cent identify as ‘a convinced atheist’ (Heald, 2000). The decline of religious capital, then, has not resulted in a world of atheists – a world which would make life very difficult for holistic spiritual practitioners. Instead, the development of cultural renderings of holistic themes has no doubt encouraged, and been encouraged by, beliefs of a ‘life-force’ or ‘spiritual’ variety, and has generated a ‘spiritual capital’ which will increasingly take over the role once played by having been brought up in the Christian faith.

Prediction: holistic milieu

We therefore predict that the storms will not develop, and that the holistic milieu of the UK will continue to grow. But at what rate?

‘New Age’ or ‘alternative spiritualities’, it is often claimed, are ‘individualistic’ or ‘relativistic’, with ‘diffuse’ beliefs. With little consensus among participants, beliefs are not sustained or reinforced by way of shared ‘plausibility structures’. Beliefs are ‘precarious’, and transmission to others (children, friends, etc.) is ‘weak’ (see, for example, Bruce, 2002). Accordingly, growth is likely to slow down, if not turn into decline. In response to this argument, our short answer is that the holistic milieu of Kendal, as elsewhere, has not only persisted over the years but has grown – a point which makes it extremely difficult to claim that transmission is weak. Of course, we cannot rule out the possibility that the holistic milieu would have grown faster if transmission had somehow been more effective, or that the future would be more promising if transmission were somehow to be improved. But this is speculation. What we do know is that growth has taken place, and that the milieu is no more likely to be adversely affected by transmission factors in the future than it has been in the past.

Furthermore, a considerable amount of evidence shows that the holistic milieu is far from being as diffuse, individualistic, superficial (or shallowly ‘consumerist’) as is often claimed. A recurrent theme of this volume is that the holistic milieu is characterized by relationality; by the expression and cultivation of unique, and thus autonomous, subjective-lives *within* associational settings. With so much sharing going on – especially in the highly intimate, disclosing encounters of one-to-one activities, activities which also take place between practitioners – it is not surprising to find that key holistic themes like ‘subtle energy’ (for example) are found among the great majority of participants of Kendal and environs (see Chapter One). Indeed, although 45 per cent do not experience their current activity as being of spiritual significance, 90 per cent believe in spirituality. And far from being superficially involved, we found many of those active in the milieu, especially practitioners, to be deeply embedded in the activities of subjective-life spirituality. In Kendal and environs, 30 per cent of acts of weekly participation are by people who are currently practising more than one activity (see Chapter Two, p. 40). In addition, on average all those currently active in the milieu have been involved with six of the activities comprising the milieu today (see Appendix 3) during the past (that is, prior

to the one, sometimes two or three, but rarely more, activities they had been attending during the week when the holistic milieu questionnaire was distributed).⁶ What is more, many more also meditate or practise yoga (for example) at home, with the questionnaire showing that 55 per cent meditate at home, 46 per cent practise yoga, and many also read relevant literature (60 per cent reading 'spiritual or religious (not specifically Christian) books or magazines'). It comes as no surprise, then, to find that 32 per cent of the participants in the Kendal holistic milieu who have children report that their offspring share their own interest in holistic milieu activities – not an especially high figure, but high enough to indicate that parental transmission (alone) is not without importance.⁷

Even if it is still argued that there are transmission problems, the fact remains that there is no reason to think they are going to make any more difference to the future than they have to the past. It is unlikely, however, that the holistic milieu will continue to grow at the rate it did in Kendal in the later 1980s and the 1990s (a rate which is probably typical for Britain as a whole). For during this period the milieu had a golden 'market opportunity'. With the expansion of subjective wellbeing culture during the last decade or two, spiritual practitioners have been able to cater for an increase in the number of people interested in associational, holistic, quality of life provisions. Recalling Kendal findings, however, 80 per cent of those active in the milieu are women, 83 per cent of all those active are older than 40, 45 per cent of all participants are women aged between 40 and 60, over half of all participants have attended university or college, and many work (or have worked) in people-centred wellbeing professions. Those attracted, in other words, represent a relatively small sector of the population. Drawing on 2001 census data concerning occupation and educational attainment in England and Wales, there are likely to be around 1000 women in Kendal and environs in their forties and fifties with the kind of cultural capital that makes the holistic milieu an attractive option. So the 45 per cent of those active in the milieu during any given week who are women in their forties and fifties (numbering 270 individuals) represent around 30 per cent of this number. The milieu, in other words, seems to have attracted a considerable proportion of its primary 'market niche' already.⁸

We might well conclude that this means that there will be very little growth in the future, if any at all. In actual fact, we think that slowish growth will be the order of the day. For the market niche is likely to expand gradually. After all, this is *not* a counter-cultural niche, and the

subjective turn will continue to support rather than threaten it. Holistic wellbeing culture is surely not going to stop developing and growing in influence. College and university educational courses are devoting ever more resources to preparing students for person-centred careers in the caring and human resource development professions, for example, which will surely continue to proliferate. It is true that unless the milieu broadens its appeal by gender, age, educational background or occupation it might not continue to expand at the same rate as it has during the recent past. But grow it will. There is too much in the culture, and too many beliefs of the 'some sort of spirit or life force' variety, for it to do otherwise.

During the last 30 years, the holistic milieu of Britain has grown to involve 1.6 per cent of the population during a given week. With growth continuing, but possibly slowing down somewhat, our prediction is that weekly participation in the milieu will double in size over the next 40 or 50 years to take in a little more than 3 per cent of the population of the nation.⁹

Another possibility

Even as we write this chapter, however, we keep coming across new evidence – from Britain and more widely – that suggests our prediction for the holistic milieu may be too cautious. Let us mention just a few examples, which suggest that the market niche is in fact already expanding.

In the USA, the circulation of the *Yoga Journal* has increased from 90,000 in 1998 to 300,000 in 2002. And it would appear that much of this increase is due to the increasing popularity of yoga among younger people: 25.2 per cent of the 15 million adults practising yoga (an increase of 28.5 per cent on the previous year) are aged between 25 and 34, only slightly less than the 26.9 per cent aged between 45 and 54 (15.7 per cent being between 35 and 44) (Harris Interactive Service Bureau 2003 survey of 4,000 respondents, statistically representative of the USA adult population). (The survey also finds that that 25.5 million are very or extremely interested in yoga, and that 35.3 million intend to take up yoga during the next 12 months – numbers which presumably include many younger people.) Then there is Franz Hollinger and Timothy Smith's (2002) cross-cultural survey, which finds that 'most students have some experiences with such practices' (including 'spiritual techniques' and 'alternative medicine and healing'): although, it should be added, 'only a relatively small proportion practises one or more methods regularly' (p. 246). (See also Houtman

and Mascini, 2002, p. 464 for the picture regarding younger people and the Netherlands.)¹⁰ In addition, there is also some evidence of yoga attracting more men – ‘real men’ doing ‘athletic yoga’ according to John Capouya (2003). Likewise, new men’s magazines like *Best Life* (in the USA) suggest there is a new market amongst men for subjectivized well-being culture – which could mean that the ‘niche’ on which the holistic milieu can draw is set to expand considerably.

Evidence of this sort – and more could be provided – cannot be ignored when considering the possibility that the market niche will also expand in Britain. Aside from anecdotal evidence of yoga (tai chi, etc.) becoming popular among young adults in cities like London, we have to take into account the fact that GPs are increasingly making referrals to CAM practitioners (see Chapter Three, p. 72). There are also clear signs that in addition to more ‘orthodox’ activities (such as osteopathy), GPs are increasingly encouraging patients – by no means just mid-life, well-educated women – to turn to activities like yoga, tai chi or combinations of the two. Furthermore, we can note the proliferation of holistic activities within the educational system (in particular colleges with health, fitness or beauty courses, for example), where younger people predominate. Then there are the (preventative) health projects, such as government ‘local health forums’, that are being established in inner cities, in particular, where holistic activities are in evidence. (See al Yafai, 2003 on ‘healthy living centres’, where reflexology, massage and shiatsu, for example, can be found.) And in addition, there is no doubting the fact that more and more ‘soft capitalism’ companies are providing healthcare or wellbeing advice and provisions – many of which can readily lead into the body, mind, *spirituality* dimension (see Roberts and Kelleher, 2004). We have even come across Hindu temples/community centres/societies offering mind-body-spirituality, with the Gujarat Hindu Society and temple in Preston, one of the largest in Britain, currently offering popular courses in ‘Holistic Living’, including reiki (specifically aimed at youth) and aromatherapy.

The upshot is that our prediction that the growth of the holistic milieu in Britain will be slower than during the 1990s could be wrong. The developments highlighted here mean that growth may continue at a high rate – high enough to bring about a spiritual revolution. Currently, though, the milieu caters largely to the relatively small market niche we have described. Since evidence of expansion beyond this niche is not yet extensive, we remain content for now with the prediction above.

Congregational Domain Scenarios

Though the continuing momentum of the subjective turn bodes well for the holistic milieu, it bodes ill for the congregational domain. Insofar as the latter remains predominantly in the business of supporting and secularizing life-as roles, its future is precarious – but *how* precarious? There are three main scenarios to be considered.

The continuing decline scenario

Strong support for the scenario of continuing decline comes from the existing trend data for Christianity in Britain. Decline has now been sustained for over a century with no significant reversals, save a short period of growth between 1945 and 1965. According to the most reliable sources, congregational membership shrank from 33 per cent of the population in 1900 to 29 per cent in 1930 to 24 per cent in 1960, followed by swifter decline from 24 per cent in 1960 to 12 per cent in 2000. Figures for typical Sunday attendance show the same pattern: from 19 per cent of the population in 1903 to 15 per cent in 1951 to 12 per cent in 1979 to 10 per cent in 1989 and 8 per cent in 2000.¹¹ If we step even further back in time to 1851 when Mann carried out his famous census of *Religious Worship in England and Wales* (1854), the percentage of the population attending church on census Sunday was around 39 per cent, although this may fall to about 24 per cent if those who attended two or more times are only counted once (Gill, 1993). Overall the picture is one of gradual decline in both membership and attendance between 1851 and 1960, with a short ‘blip’ of growth in the 1950s, followed by accelerated decline from the 1960s to the present.

With the rate of decline of the last few decades in mind, Bruce (2003) forecasts that, ‘three decades from now, Christianity in Britain will have largely disappeared... In 2031... British Methodism will die and other denominations will be close behind’ (p. 61). But there is an even worse scenario for the churches. Brierley’s surveys show that the decline of the congregational domain in England speeded up in the 1990s. In the first 10-year period covered by his surveys (1979-1989) church attendance dropped 1.8 per cent. In the second nine-year period (1989-1998) it dropped 2.4 per cent, that is, 0.6 per cent more. If this rate of decline were

to continue, then in the next nine-year period (to 2007) the drop could be by a further 3 per cent, and in the following nine years (to 2016) by 3.6 per cent. By that time only 0.9 per cent of the English population would still be attending church (Brierley, 2000, p. 28).

Even though it would be statistically unsound to make such a forecast on the basis of a single nine-year period, there are some good reasons for thinking that this scenario of accelerated decline – perhaps to near zero – may be likely. The most important reasons concern the demographic profile of the congregational domain, and transmission issues. Brierley (2000) notes that in the last two decades of the twentieth century the age profile of congregations has changed, with the average age climbing and the proportion of young people declining. The average age of a churchgoer is now higher than the average age in the population, and the number of young people, under age 19, attending church has halved in the last 20 years to 25 per cent of all churchgoers (p. 95). In Kendal our headcount revealed that 17 per cent of congregational attenders were under 18 (25 per cent of the UK population as a whole is under 19) (Brierley, 2001, p. 4.3). And of these, 12 per cent were babies and children and 5 per cent adolescents. This would suggest that a significant and growing proportion of the children of churchgoers cease to attend as soon as they are able to do so, and that this haemorrhage is a major and accelerating cause of congregational decline. When the current (older) generations of churchgoers die out, there will be very few people to take their place. Of course this need not be fatal if, like the holistic milieu, the congregational domain can be sustained by people joining it in later life, but there is no evidence that this is happening on anything approaching a significant scale. Nor should this be surprising, for unless the general culture can ‘prime’ people to enter an associational heartland – as in the case of the holistic milieu – the only real entry route is by way of socialization within that heartland (which is most likely when parents bring children to church). The fact that the numbers who are being successfully socialized in this way is shrinking so fast, and that the general culture does little to reinforce Christian beliefs, adds weight to the scenario of accelerating decline.

It can also be argued that congregational decline begets decline. Belief may seem less plausible when there are fewer who share it. A shrinking group worshipping in a building designed for many more cannot generate the ‘collective effervescence’ experienced in a larger assembly. The experience can readily be of the ‘empty crowd’ (to paraphrase Gill, 2003). The quality of the worship may fall, as anyone who has tried to sing

unaccompanied hymns to tape-recorded organ music will testify. The ‘cost’ of attending will become higher as the jobs necessary to maintain a congregation fall on fewer shoulders, and as finances become stretched. An older congregation may have less energy or enthusiasm for evangelism. And young people are unlikely to be attracted to congregations where the average age is far higher than their own.

For all these reasons, the scenario of the continued decline of the congregational domain as a whole must be taken seriously. Attendance in Great Britain continues to plummet, and in countries like Sweden where attendance has already fallen to a considerably lower level, there is no evidence of overall bottoming out.¹²

The bottoming-out scenario

Even though the congregational domain as a whole is declining, we have noted in earlier chapters that some forms of congregation have been able to buck the general trend, even in Britain. Could it be that some forms of congregation will exhibit sufficient vitality in the years ahead to hold their own, or even to grow? And if they do, will this prevent the congregational domain as a whole from declining to zero and lead instead to a bottoming out in overall attendance levels? There are three main ways in which this could happen: by retaining and attracting people who are attracted to the security of life-as religion; by attracting those with an orientation towards subjective-life or by retaining and attracting individuals who value the authoritative approach of life-as religion, but also seek some subjective enhancement.

Retaining and attracting those who value life-as

Given their predominantly life-as profile, it is most likely that contemporary congregations will be able to strengthen their attendance figures by retaining or attracting individuals who seek externally authorized frameworks of meaning and value. They will succeed if they are able to stabilize, dignify and sacralize forms of life which significant numbers find attractive, and which may be felt to be unsupported or under threat in the culture more widely. There are a number of areas in which such life-as provision may be made.

First, congregations may continue to play a role in upholding ‘social’ roles, duties and obligations, such as the role of ‘good citizen’ and ‘good

neighbour' at local, civic, national and international level. Churches may provide the spaces where people can gather for civic or national celebrations or after disasters, and serve as the point at which 'society' can hold up an ideal image of itself, affirm core values and reinforce its identity (thus 72 per cent of the population identified as 'Christian' in the UK census of 2001, even though few attend church regularly). Congregations may serve as the place in society where people still think of and act on behalf of the 'distant other', including those in need in developing countries. They can also serve as rallying points for the local community, perhaps as providers of welfare and 'social capital' – visiting the elderly, looking after the bereaved, caring for the socially marginal and so on.

Second, congregations may continue to support a particular vision of the ideal family, and the domestic and sexual roles which are seen as essential to its continued health and wellbeing. There may be increasing demand for this provision if a significant portion of society continues to feel that 'family values' based around the preservation of heterosexual marriage, the nuclear family and differentiated gender roles are being undermined by social and cultural developments such as a climbing divorce rate, co-habitation, growing support for homosexual unions and increased tolerance of new forms of sexual relationship and identity. Those who wish to uphold more clearly defined roles for men and women, husbands and wives, parents and children, may turn to congregations for support. Many churches, both Protestant and Catholic, currently appear to be catering for such demand by upholding traditional gender roles as God-given, condemning homosexual activity, campaigning on behalf of the nuclear family and offering a wide array of family-orientated provisions.

Third, congregations may continue to supply a range of more strictly religio-cultural goods. By way of teaching, worship, example and institutional reinforcement they may continue to support and reinforce religious roles, bring people into meaningful contact with a transcendent God, preserve connection with a 2,000 year old tradition of life and thought, and bring externally defined meaning, structure and purpose to individual lives in the process.

Which of these functions are likely to be the most important in the future, and which forms of congregation will be best equipped to meet demand for them? Given their established humanitarian emphasis, congregations of humanity are best placed to uphold social and civic functions. However, these are the very functions for which demand seems to be declining (Putnam, 2000). In any case, congregations can continue to

carry out their social and civic functions without necessarily attracting any more regular attenders – as we see in the Church of Sweden, for example, or in English villages, where many want the church to remain as a focus of community, but few have the time to support it. (Similarly, even if demand for 'occasional offices' like baptism and marriage remains, this does not help raise regular attendance levels.)

By contrast, there is less evidence of a slowdown in demand for the other two areas of life-as provision, namely support for family values and provision of strictly religio-cultural goods. The congregations best placed to benefit are congregations of difference and experiential difference, which offer the most prescriptive and detailed teachings on how Christians should comport themselves in relation to one another (particularly with regard to sexuality) and in relation to God. Of course it could be argued that the subjective turn will undermine demand in these areas, but it can equally be argued that it will benefit congregations that function as safe havens and counter-cultural refuges for those who prefer to be guided by authoritative tradition rather than rely on their own subjective resources. What is more, in upholding family values and supplying religio-cultural goods, the only real competition such congregations currently face is from other forms of life-as religion such as orthodox Judaism and Islam, and there are often cultural barriers to entering such religions. Consequently, if congregations of difference and experiential difference do benefit from continuing demand for the supply of these life-as services, this could help bring about a bottoming out of overall congregational decline.

Attracting those who value unique subjective-life

Since the subjective turn has very considerable momentum, an alternative way in which attendance could be boosted would be if congregations were able to attract those who wish to cultivate their subjective-lives.

Given that they are the most likely of all types of congregation to encourage and resource unique subjectivities, and to authorize and facilitate encounter with the sacred in the depths of personal experience, congregations of experiential humanity have the greatest potential in this regard. However, there are two serious stumbling blocks in the way. First, many such congregations retain a high moral tone centred around selfless support of humanitarian values, which is likely to be off-putting for those who feel that value commitments should be freely chosen rather than externally imposed. The emphasis placed by many Unitarians and Quakers on the importance of

'community' and, even more importantly, of humanitarian ('justice and peace') causes of universal applicability, may alienate those who are seeking to explore their personal and spiritual depths in their own unique ways. Second, subjectivized Christian congregations face serious competition from the holistic milieu. Unless congregations of experiential humanity can offer something uniquely appealing to subjective-life orientated selves seeking spiritual depth, the latter are more likely to follow the more direct route from subjective wellbeing culture into the holistic milieu. Even if congregations of experiential humanity can succeed in diverting some who seek to develop inner life into their activities, they currently constitute such a small proportion of the total congregational domain (around 5 per cent in Kendal) that this would be unlikely to be able to bring about a bottoming out of attendance in the congregational domain as a whole.

Given the lack of attention they currently pay to the cultivation of unique subjective-lives, congregations of humanity seem much less likely to be able to attract those who wish to encounter the sacred 'in my own way'. However, our research in Kendal revealed that a few subjective-life orientated souls *are* 'clinging on' in such congregations. This may be indicative of the fact that these congregations have at least the *potential* to appeal to those who seek personally meaningful forms of spirituality. For one thing, the relative lack of didacticism in such congregations compared to congregations of difference and experiential difference gives participants a measure of freedom to think their own thoughts and pursue their own personal spiritual paths – even if it means 'letting the service wash over' and 'ignoring a lot of what goes on' (as one Anglican in Kendal put it). For another thing, these congregations have the strongest liturgical and ritual traditions, which can be compatible with subjective-life spirituality insofar as ritual and symbol are open-textured and non-dogmatic enough to provide a point of focus for individual meditation and spiritual growth. (It is highly likely that the rapid growth of Eastern Orthodoxy in Britain is due to its attracting 'cultured' inner-directed selves; strong attendance levels at many cathedrals seems to witness to the same phenomenon.) Finally, congregations of humanity have the potential to appeal to those who value subjective-life because they contain within their own historic traditions the traces and legacies of subjectivized forms of Christianity, most notably in ascetic and mystical traditions which hold out the ideal of union with God through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Woodhead, 2004). However, apart from a few limited spheres (spiritual retreats, spiritual literature, conferences and workshops on Christian meditation) there is, as yet, no

evidence of congregations of humanity attracting a constituency of subjective-life orientated selves in anything like the numbers that would be necessary to halt their own decline, never mind that of the congregational domain as a whole. (A very speculative scenario about how this might change would be that current controversies in 'broad' churches like the Anglican communion might lead eventually to schism that might leave a 'liberal' wing of the church free to develop in a more subjectivized direction by reclaiming a heritage of experiential Christian spirituality for its followers, and making it central to its life and organization.)

What of congregations of difference and experiential difference? Might they be able to attract or retain those seeking to cultivate inner life? To date we have found little evidence that such congregations are able to appeal those who prefer to rely on their own subjective resources than on external guidance. Both types of congregation continue to insist that the individual is 'saved' only through surrender (of mind, body and spirit) to the transcendent God who is made known above all in Christ and in scripture, and both types of congregation are united in opposition to 'secular modernity', including subjective and humanist values (Marsden, 1991). Where congregations of experiential difference go further than congregations of difference is in teaching that the sacred can be encountered not only from 'without', but from 'within', by way of direct experience of God as Holy Spirit. This lends congregations of experiential difference much greater potential to attract those who seek subjective satisfaction and who wish to encounter the sacred in the depths of personal experience. At present, however, such congregations insist that inner experience of the sacred must be checked and validated by the 'higher' external authority of scripture and of authorized interpreters of scripture (pastors and elders). To a greater extent than congregations of humanity and experiential humanity they preach strict codes of morality and duty, based on biblical norms. Unless this changes, even congregations of experiential difference are unlikely to attract those of a subjectivized disposition, unless the latter are in the process of becoming disillusioned with subjective-life values and looking for stronger normative frameworks. A 'conversion' would be needed.¹³

Retaining and attracting those who seek subjective enhancement in a framework of life-as roles

The conclusion to which we are drawn is that whilst the congregational domain is more likely to attract those who retain a commitment to life-as

than to subjective-life, congregations of experiential difference have an advantage over other forms of congregation in that they may be able to attract not only those who seek the sacred in external obligation, but those who also wish to encounter the sacred in the depths of inner experience. They seem to have secured a competitive edge by virtue of the fact that they both resist the subjective turn by offering clear normative guidance *and* cater to it by offering intense personal experience of the sacred. As such, experiential congregations of difference can appeal to those who seek a clear framework of roles, obligations and duties, but *also* want their subjective lives to be healed, stimulated, enhanced, and transformed through contact with the Holy Spirit. What this means, in more concrete terms, is that they are likely to attract 'respectable' individuals and families – from tradespeople to administrators to solicitors to businesspeople – who long for a more stable, ordered, hierarchical, respectful, family-based, 'wholesome' society, but who want their religion to make a difference to the quality of their subjective-lives. They want to 'feel' the presence of God, to 'taste and see' how good the Lord is, to experience 'his blessings' in every aspect of their lives. Given the 'joy' they have themselves experienced through being 'born again', they are likely to be active in trying to convert others so that they too may experience the richness of a life lived 'in the Lord' and in everyday, moment-to-moment, deeply subjective relationship with him.

As regards the future, the key question is whether there will be enough such people around in the future to allow congregations of experiential difference to stabilize or grow, and in doing so slow down the decline of the congregational domain as a whole. This depends, in part, on whether the children of those who currently attend will be effectively socialized into the faith of the parents. The danger is that they will be attracted by the more thoroughly subjectivized forms of life on offer in the culture than by the regulated subjective satisfactions available in congregations of experiential difference. Another danger is that charismatic enthusiasm wanes as intense experience cannot be sustained, and so leads to congregational decline. In Kendal and in England as a whole there is evidence of a slow-down in growth rates of the more 'charismatic' forms of evangelical congregation since the 1990s (Percy, 2003; Brierley, 2000, p. 54).

On the other hand, it is likely that those who seek clear moral and religious validation of traditional family values (amongst other things) will continue to be attracted to what Christianity has to offer. And given that the subjective turn is likely to prime even those who believe that the truth is 'out there' to think that it should also be experienced within, and

harnessed to the healing and enhancement of subjective-life, we would predict that congregations of experiential difference are likely to grow at the expense of 'drier', less experiential and subjectively focused forms of congregation (both congregations of humanity and of difference). In support, there is clear evidence that the successful 'new paradigm churches' in the USA have grown (see Chapter 3 pp. 63-4), and they have done so by attracting people away from congregations of difference and congregations of humanity (Perrin, Kennedy and Miller, 1997). We also note that congregations of experiential difference are often extremely active in evangelical endeavour (for example the Alpha Course), and that they are often more successful than other forms of congregation in offering strong educational provision at the congregational level – which may help socialize and retain young people.

We therefore think it likely that congregations of experiential difference will be able to sustain their current levels of attendance. In support, Greater London, Berkshire and Surrey – affluent 'home counties' where many congregations of experiential difference are located – are the only counties in England that experienced static rather than declining attendance levels between 1989 and 1998 (Brierley, 2001, p. 2.15). At worst, such congregations will probably suffer only very gradual decline (in England, evangelicalism as a whole declined by 3 per cent between 1989 and 1998 (Brierley, 2000, p. 51)). In either case, the relative vitality of congregations of experiential difference means that they may well be able to prevent overall congregational 'decline to zero', and make the bottoming-out scenario more likely – for such congregations constitute a sizeable proportion of the congregational domain as a whole. (Currently, evangelicalism makes up 37 per cent of the congregational domain in England (Brierley, 2000, p. 67); in Kendal, congregations of experiential difference make up 21 per cent of the congregational domain, whilst congregations of difference make up 18 per cent.)

The revival scenario

The final scenario holds that both the continuing decline and the bottoming-out scenarios are too pessimistic about the future of congregational Christianity and that Christianity will stage a revival, just as it has in the past. This seems unlikely, since previous revivals, like that stimulated by Methodism in the eighteenth century, took place in populations where

Christian capital was still high. Some suggest that the 'secular' West will be reconverted by missionaries from overseas. However, it is hard to believe that missionaries would have any success in converting the denizens of a widely subjectivized culture which has actively rejected associational forms of Christianity. Still others argue that people will grow sick of the shallow and illusory rewards of an 'individualistic' and 'materialist' culture and return to the churches to fill the spiritual gap in their lives. The evidence (Chapter Four), however, suggests that 'post-materialists', with their quality-of-life values, are much more likely to be attracted to the holistic milieu than the congregational domain.

Prediction: congregational domain

Drawing our discussion of congregational scenarios to a close, we find no strong evidence to support the more optimistic scenarios, some evidence to support the most pessimistic scenario of a decline to (near) zero, but the greater weight of evidence supporting the bottoming-out scenario – with the domain being supported by the relative vitality of the life-as spirituality of experiential congregations of difference. More precisely, we would expect overall congregational decline to continue for the next 25 to 30 years as attendance at congregations of humanity shrinks to around 1 per cent of the population or below, but we would expect attendance at congregations of experiential difference to remain fairly steady, thus leading to a levelling out of the congregational domain at around 3 per cent of the population by 2030. This prediction is based on religions of humanity continuing to decline at the same rate (around 50 per cent) as over the last two decades, and on attendance at congregations of experiential difference remaining fairly steady, or declining very gently, over the next three decades.¹⁴

The Spiritual Revolution: Past, Present and Future

Some hundred years ago, Durkheim drew a distinction between 'a religion handed down by tradition' and 'a free, private, optional religion, fashioned according to one's own needs and understanding' (cited in Pickering, 1975, p. 96). Writing at much the same time, William James, Simmel, Troeltsch and others drew similar distinctions. They too thought that spiritualities of life were a growing force, so they would not be surprised by the

extent to which the spiritual revolution has developed since their time, nor about our predictions. Arguing that the sacred gravitates towards ultimate value to affirm, enhance, validate and express that value, they all reflected on the significance that was coming to be placed on subjective-life. As Simmel (1997) put it so vividly, 'This emotional reality – which we can only call life – makes itself increasingly felt in its formless strength ... claiming inalienable rights as the true meaning or value of our existence' (p. 24). And as it progresses, the turn to subjective life draws the sacred within.

Following the lead of these giants of the past, we have argued in this volume that a major cultural development – 'the massive subjective turn of modern culture' – has served to fuel the growth of subjective-life spirituality and to undermine life-as religion. To summarize our findings concerning the situation in Great Britain today, around 4,600,000 are active in the congregational domain on a typical Sunday, and around 900,000 in the holistic milieu during a typical week. This means that the claim that a spiritual revolution has taken place is exaggerated. Nevertheless, we have demonstrated that a major shift has occurred in the sacred landscape since the fifties and sixties, and is still continuing. Even though it cannot be described as a full-blown revolution, we have noted a few 'mini-revolutions' that have already occurred. When the spiritual revolution claim is taken to include what is happening within the 'cultural canopy', including the cultures of education, healthcare and wellbeing, its validity is considerably enhanced. Had it been possible to quantify the growth of subjective-life spirituality within and on the fringes of congregational activity, particularly in small groups, we might have found additional evidence to support the claim.

Looking to the future, much suggests that the cultivation of subjective-life is going to remain of central importance and attain increasing cultural significance. Having considered the most likely scenarios for associational forms of the sacred in this chapter, we have concluded that the holistic milieu will continue to grow, albeit at a slower rate than in recent years, to perhaps double its size during the next 40 or 50 years. We have also concluded that although the congregational domain will decline to around a third of its current size by 2030, decline is likely to be stemmed by the relative vitality of experiential religions of difference. Pulling these two conclusions together, we predict that in 40 or so years time the congregational domain and holistic milieu of Britain will have become much the same size. Between 3 and 4 per cent of the population will be active in each during a typical week. As to whether a spiritual revolution will take place after that – well, predicting the future has its limits.

In any case, this volume does not stand or fall with the accuracy of its prediction. Predictions are fun. More importantly, they serve to focus the mind on current trends and their longer term significance. It may be, for instance, that the spiritual revolution will take place in the next 40 or 50 years – as will happen if the holistic milieu widens its appeal, if experiential religions of difference fail to halt overall congregational decline, or if both processes operate. The main purpose of the volume has not been to foretell the future, but to study the tectonic shifts currently underway in the sacred landscape. We have demonstrated that we are living through a period of unique change, and we have tried to characterize and explain the nature of this change. As we learn more about the values, beliefs, experiences, activities and general outlook of the generation that is currently coming to maturity, we will learn more about what may happen next. So far as the fate of religion and spirituality are concerned, the future is very much in their hands.

Appendices

Appendix 1: The Kendal Project: Summary of Research Strategies (1 October 2000–30 June 2002)

Why Kendal?

Once we had decided to undertake a locality study, we had to select a town. It need not have been Kendal but, for the following reasons, it was.

Practicality. The chosen locality was within easy reach of our homes and workplace, and we had some prior knowledge of the town and useful contacts within it.

Size. With its population of just under 28,000 Kendal was the right size to research with the resources at our disposal. Our feasibility study showed it had enough churches, chapels and ‘alternative’ forms of spiritual practice to make it possible to test the spiritual revolution claim.

Boundedness. Kendal is a fairly self-contained town. With the nearest other towns being 10-25 miles away (Windermere, Penrith, Lancaster), the majority of people could be expected to conduct much of their religious or spiritual lives within or near the town rather than travelling elsewhere.

Homogeneity. Kendal has no significant ethnic communities. Whilst it would have been interesting in its own right to study a more multi-cultural town, it would also have made things considerably more complex. Since we were treading new ground as it was, and since we had limited time and resources, we were happy to have one less complicating factor.