

BELIEVING AND BELONGING IN NEWHAM

Greg Smith's presentation
to the Marchant Seminar
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The title believing and belonging is a phrase used by Grace Davie, who teaches sociology of Religion at Exeter University and has recently published a book.... In this book she typifies the "mood" of religion in Great Britain, most obviously in middle England as one where the majority of the population "believe without belonging". This captures the fact that repeatedly in surveys some 75% or more say quite firmly that they believe in God, yet no more than 10% of the population can be found at worship each weekend. True the believing is often vague, although the majority continue to happily accept the label church of England, and especially to use its services for christenings, marriages and almost universally for funerals, the belief is "in an ordinary kind of God" who doesn't interfere or have any serious impact on everyday life. On the fringes of course are minority groups, Catholics, Evangelicals, New Agers, sects and cults and the faiths of ethnic minority communities, relatively recently arrived. But it does seem that Davie's phrase has captured the mood of mainstream Britain quite succinctly.

Newham of course is not middle England and what I want to suggest today is that both believing and belonging are important features of social life in the 1990's, that we can expect them to grow rather than diminish in significance and that any social policy for the Council, the government, the Health service or the voluntary sector which ignores the religious dimensions of community life does so at its peril.

The evidence I shall present is drawn from various pieces of research work in which I have had a hand over the past ten years, and most specifically from three recent projects. The 2nd edition of this religious directory of Newham (thanks especially to Debbie Byrne), the survey of interfaith attitudes undertaken by Newham Association of Faiths and Conflict & Change. (thanks to Doris Sadeghi and colleagues), and the West Ham Parish Survey, thanks to Rev. Julian Scharf and parish members, plus a follow up survey of community support networks in that locality carried out by a team of Medical Students from LH & ST Barts Medical college. I would also want to acknowledge the work of Colin Marchant himself, whose PhD thesis remains the master work on the history of religion in West Ham and whose continued inspiration, advice and friendship has been so important to the development of my own thinking and practice.

BRIEF HISTORY

We need to begin by setting the historical context...The history until about 1960 at least is a predominantly Christian one. The development of Hindu, Sikh, Muslim and other faith communities is of course of tremendous significance today and I hope that when we come to them later, we will do them justice.

Local Christian church history is well documented especially in the writing of Colin Marchant (1974, 1986) and in historical studies such as Sainsbury (1986). Before 1850 there were the three ancient parish churches of Little Ilford, West Ham and East Ham, a congregational chapel and not much else. With rapid urbanisation, and the moral panic that the working class masses of the growing industrial cities were unsaved, unchurched, desperately poor and potentially revolutionary, the second half of the 19th Century saw the establishment of over forty Church of England Parishes, five large Roman Catholic parishes, and a very strong Free church presence with 97 Methodist, Baptist and independent churches... as well as numerous settlements and mission halls. There was also a significant Jewish presence with several synagogues and cemeteries. The only national religious census for England in 1851 showed in West Ham, a 40% church attendance rate (65% of it Anglican). Since urbanisation had hardly begun in the area in 1851 this can hardly be used as a base line for later comparisons. However in London in 1903 the Daily News survey of religious life indicated that the attendance rates in inner and especially East London were low (Marchant 1986). In West Ham church attendance was put at 20% (55,649 people in 137 churches and chapels). Non-Conformists now accounted for 65% of the churchgoers, 32% were Church of England and the Roman Catholics had grown to 12%. There was also one synagogue with 68 worshippers. The church authorities were most concerned over even lower attendances in the Southern working class neighbourhoods of the borough.

Marchant's (1974) doctoral work suggested the pattern continued right up to the 1970's and he summarised the historical situation by saying that in East London the decline in national church attendance was reflected locally but rates were consistently half to a third of the national average. The post 1945 exodus and decline in local population on top of a general decline in church going habits, and the loss of a number of church buildings in the blitz, led to rationalisation and closures on the part of the denominations, the Church of England merging parishes and the Free Churches selling off buildings. There were by the mid 1970's only eighteen Anglican buildings and twenty Free Churches.

All this added to the familiar hypothesis that urban people are less religious, that city life brings only church decline, and indeed that the city is a dark and evil place. When I came to east London in 1975 I was told that if current trends continued and that if Christians continued to migrate to the sea like lemmings there would be no churches left in Newham by the year 2000. (Hill 1975). As late as 1985 the Faith in City report (ACUPA 1985) was bemoaning the continuing decline of urban congregation; in urban priority areas Anglican attendance averaged 0.85% or half the national average. In none of these statistics was there any attempt to control for population decline, the age profile of urban areas, or to analyse in any depth the effect of social class or ethnic composition of communities and congregations.

However by the mid 1980s Colin Marchant, had noticed a wave of church planting (Marchant 1985). Working closely with him David Driscoll (a local Anglican vicar) and I, in a report submitted to the Archbishop's Commission on UPAs, documented some of the new church planting and the renewal of congregational life in some parts of the mainline churches (Driscoll & Smith 1986). When Colin Marchant (1985) and I (Smith 1988) began to suggest that a new wave of urban church planting was beginning to transform the Christian scene in Newham, and other parts of London our observations were hard for many people to accept. By 1988 my own research was suggesting that in

Forest Gate church attendance rates (at 7% of the population) were not far behind the national average, and really quite high in a community where around half the population was from Muslim, Hindu and Sikh communities (Smith 1988).

The most recent Church censuses with any claim to comprehensive national coverage were those of 1985 & 1989 conducted by MARC Europe based on a head count on a specified Sunday in each year. (Brierley 1991; 1993 personal communication) They showed a 10% increase over four years in adult attenders in Newham from 6800 to 7500 and a growth in membership of 16% from 13,300 to 15,400. But this attendance level still only represented some 5% of the adult population. There are many problems about the reliability and coverage of this data, but it does not seem implausible to those with local knowledge of the churches, and it is matched by similar trends in other parts of inner London especially the Inner South East and Inner North East sectors. (Brierley 1991). The 1989 MARC census put church attendance rates for England as a whole at 9% and follow up work suggests they are still declining. (Brierley & Hiscock 1993)

Several factors have contributed to what one may call the stemming of the tide of secularisation in Newham. The first of the "Black Pentecostal" churches were founded in the area before 1970 by immigrants from the Caribbean. INCOMERS: By about 1975 a new awareness of East London as a mission field was emerging in the mainline churches spurred on by David Sheppard's (1975) book "Built as a City" and the creation of groups such as the Newham Community Renewal Programme and In Contact. A wave of educated Christian incomers (including the present author) moved into the area, full of zeal to do evangelism and/or community work, and many of them have now stayed nearly 20 years. They have been joined more recently by several groups of "religious" from the Roman Catholic orders. From 1975 to the present several new independent congregations have emerged in the "white led" evangelical charismatic sector of the church. Many mainline denominational churches which were on the verge of closure in the mid 1970's have found new congregational life. These include both charismatic / evangelical congregations and (more recently) broad and Anglo Catholic congregations. Caribbean-led majority black Pentecostal churches continue to be formed, although there is some evidence that their growth had peaked by the mid 1980s. In the last ten years the most significant growth point has been among African Christians (Ashdown 1992). Many mainline denominational churches have doubled in numbers because of the involvement of African Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists and Pentecostals, while a thriving independent African led sector has mushroomed. These newer churches are mainly from Pentecostal / Holiness or the Aladura / African indigenous traditions and serve Ghanaians, Nigerians, Ugandans, Zaireans, Zimbabweans usually in their national and ethnic groupings (Booth 1985).

But even the predominantly white communities of Docklands are affected. A recent local study by Oliver (1992) has looked at adult Christian learning and church attendance in Canning Town and Custom House, an area of council estates, which is well researched and documented in earlier urban mission literature (Marchant 1970; Sheppard 1975 ; Smith & Driscoll 1984). Oliver estimated 2.86% of the local population were churchgoers (230 of them attending 7 local churches). Nearly three quarters of them were female and just under a quarter were black. Oliver characterises church-going as "deviant" behaviour in the local (white) working class Cockney culture, especially for men. Yet significantly he reports growth in attendance; a doubling of estimated numbers from 150 (in 8 buildings) in the early 1980's to 300 (in 7 buildings) in 1991/2. Only a small part of the growth can be put down to active Christian incomers including black people. There has been some significant "conversion" growth, of which Oliver documents a number of individual cases. Note : There is a (spurious?) correlation between the take off of this growth and the fact that the present author ceased to be a pastor in the area in 1984.!

RELIGION IN NEWHAM; 1994-5 Some statistics

FINDINGS OF RESEARCH

There isn't time to present all the data from the research, let alone to make all the qualifications and explanations that would be needed in an academic presentation. But you can read most of it if you buy the directory, or if you want a more academic presentation and greater discussion either in a forthcoming UEL book on the East End or I can let you have a copy of my Lincoln Paper to the sociology of religion conference.

a) Organisations

The Newham Directory of Religious Groups 2nd Edition 1994 lists 275 groups. Statistics for all faith communities (based on a survey with a response rate of 78% of all congregations, and 96.5% for the mainline Christian churches) show :

In Newham in 1994 there were

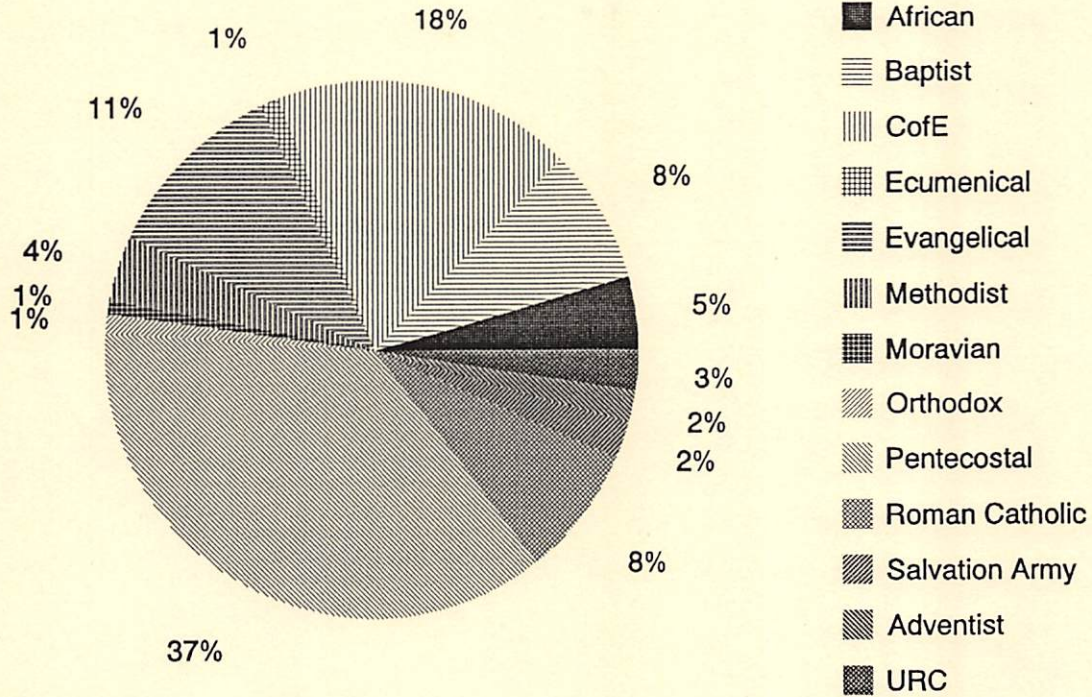
198 "congregations"

117 of whom owned their own meeting places

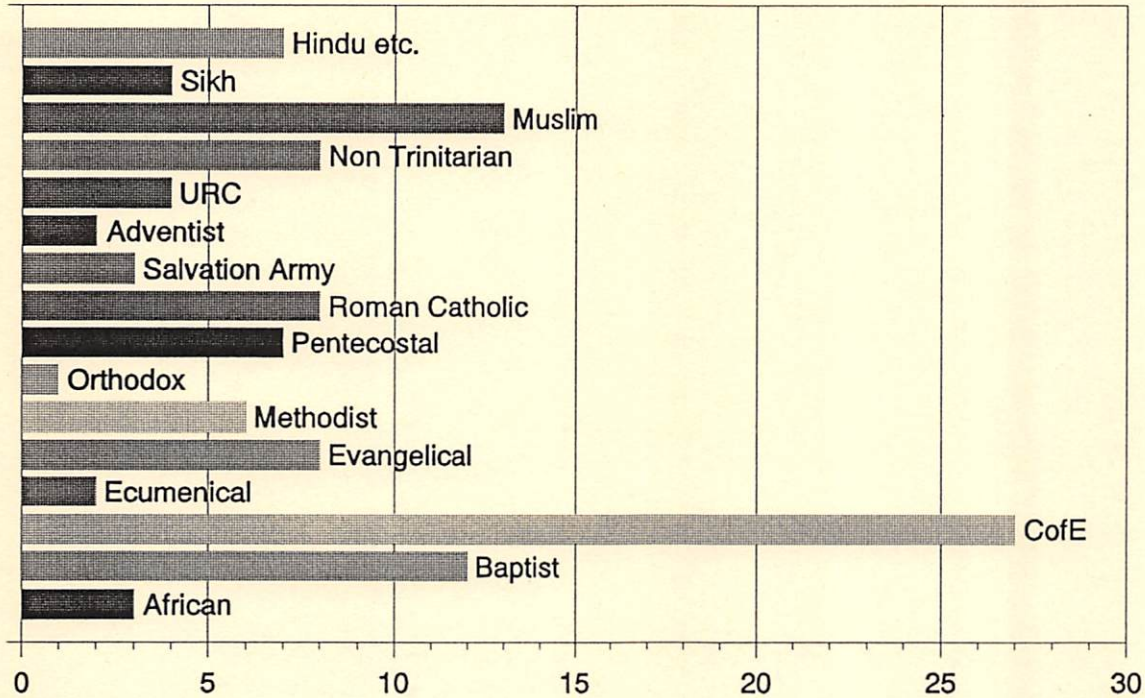
163 of these congregations were in the broadest sense of the term "Christian"

77 religious organisations, centres, agencies, orders, networks etc.

CHRISTIAN CONGREGATIONS



BUILDINGS OWNED BY CONGREGATIONS



A breakdown by denomination shows that Pentecostal congregations are by far the most numerous category, followed by Anglicans (CofE), independent evangelicals and Muslims. But when it comes to owning their own buildings the Anglicans are in a league of their own, although almost all Muslim, Baptist, Methodist, Salvation Army and URC groups do own their buildings. Many of the newer Pentecostals and Independent Evangelicals and some of the Roman Catholic groups are meeting in rented church halls and community centres. There are also a handful of examples where two or more congregations of different denominations have a formal agreement to share a church building such as the ecumenical St. Marks Centre in Beckton.

b) BELONGING: Members /attenders

The 1994 Newham Directory of Religious Groups gives estimates of attenders at congregations in the Christian tradition which are at least one and a half times as high as the 1989 Census figures. Between 15,000 and 18,000 people are likely to attend services in the borough. This is around 8% of the whole population and 10% of the non-Asian population (See Table 2).

TABLE 2 ESTIMATES OF CHURCH ATTENDANCE. NEWHAM 1994

	++	High Est	Lower Est
Total estimated Church attendance		17,929	15,388
as % of Newham's population		8.26	7.09
as % of Non Asian population		10.99	9.44
	Members	Attenders	
Counted *	22,650	13,515	

* These figures represent the grand totals of members and attenders claimed by those Christian churches who returned completed questionnaires.

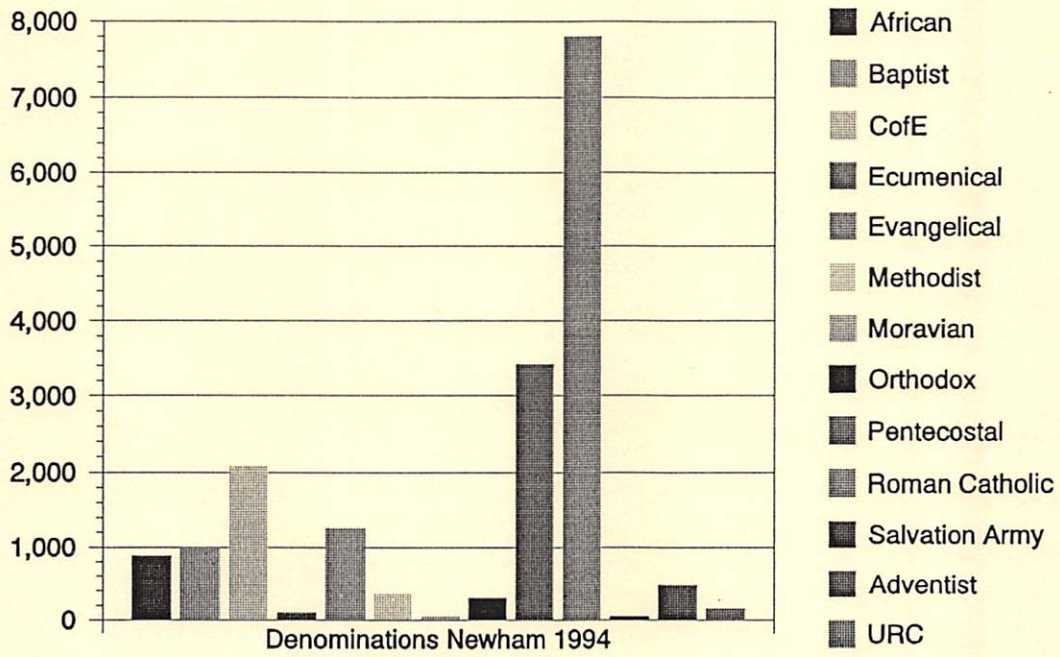
++ Estimates are based on the following assumptions in order to allow for the cases where the information had not been received.

The high estimate.. assumes that churches with missing information have numbers equivalent to the mean average of the churches in their denomination for which we have figures.

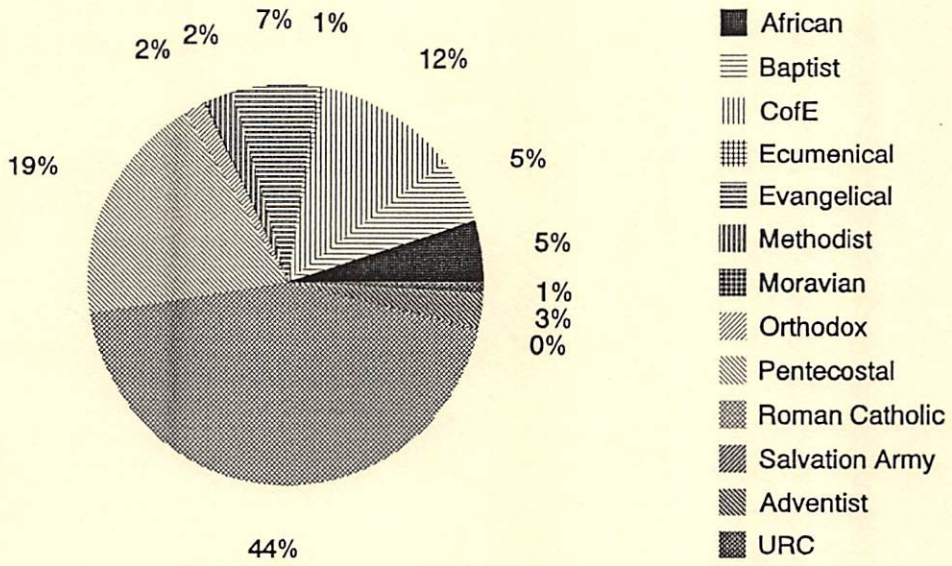
The low estimate.. allows for the possibility that smaller less established congregations are over-represented among the missing data and also incorporates some "local knowledge" about the likely size of particular congregations.

Figure 2 shows the breakdown of attendance by denomination. Nearly half the reported attenders are Roman Catholics, with Pentecostals and Anglicans in next place. Roman Catholic churches claim an average attendance of over 600. African independent churches were next largest with an average of 120 attenders. Baptists, Anglicans, Evangelicals, and Methodists averaged about 60 to 80 attenders. URC and Moravians were smaller with about 40 attenders each and the Salvation Army smallest at under 30. The Pentecostal churches for whom we have data averaged just over 60 attenders.

Number of Attenders



Number of Attenders



CHRISTIANS IN NEWHAM 1994

WORLD FAITH COMMUNITIES

Data here is more limited, reflecting our difficulty as white English monolingual researchers, working from an organisation identified in some way as Christian, without the time or resources to engage in the necessary networking and relationship building to get a clear overall detailed picture.

The following estimates for the main religious communities are based on 1991 Census data.

MUSLIMS: between 25,000 and 30,000 people.

Hindus approx 20,700

Sikhs approx 4,150

ATTENDANCE PATTERNS

The data collected for the directory does not allow us to measure attendance rates at Non-Christian worship. Indeed cultural differences around the patterns and meaning of attendance at worship in the various faith communities make it hard to use as a comparable measure of belonging. However a survey by the Newham Association of Faiths (1994) did produce some relevant results.

Of 75 adult Muslims questioned 33 (41%) said they attended their mosque at least weekly of whom 16 (21%) said they went daily. But 23 (31%) never attended. However among the 37 men over 75% attended at least weekly and only one man never went, while among women less than 10% were weekly or daily attenders and 58% never went.

Of 47 Hindus 20 (42%) attended worship at least weekly and 7 (15%) never. Slightly more men (47%) than women (40%) were weekly or daily attenders.

Of 27 Sikhs 10 (37%) attended worship at least weekly but 6 (22%) never attended. This was 50% of the men and 22% of the women.

Clearly this gender difference, which is most marked among Muslims and Sikhs, indicates a cultural pattern rather than a lower level of faith among Asian women.

WHO BELIEVES / BELONGS

While attendance at worship may be the most appropriate measure of belonging to a religious community, measures of believing (to use Davie's terms) are more commonly based on responses to attitudinal questions in survey research (Davie 1994). As a base line for local comparisons the British Social Attitudes Survey discovered that 69% of the population believed in God, 27% claimed to pray at least weekly and 16% to attend a service at least two or three times a month. (Greely 1992)

West Ham Parish Survey

Between August 1992 and January 1993 185 residents of the inner city parish of All Saints West Ham were interviewed

Local levels of belief and practice may well be higher than the national average.

It is no surprise that in a neighbourhood with very few Asian residents that 73% called themselves "Christian" or in view of national findings that 73% "definitely" believed in God. It is however remarkable that 30% claimed to go to church or other religious centres, and that 18% said they had attended within the last week. This compares with figures from the same survey of 28% visiting pubs, 39% entertainment venues such as theatres/ cinema / concerts, 32% car boot sales, 81% going to shopping centres or markets, 19% to sporting events, 23% taking part in sport and 11% going to adult education classes. Private religious practice defined as prayers, scripture reading, worship at home etc. produced a considerably higher figure of 43% participation in the previous week.

Breaking the findings down by denominational affiliation and race gives some interesting insights. Nominality, (Davies Believing without belonging) which is defined here as no public practice in the last year, is widespread. It reached about 60% among respondents who identified themselves as "CofE" and 42% among Roman Catholics. However, while 18% of whites claimed to have been to public worship in the previous month the figure among black respondents rose to nearly half. Yet even among whites in West Ham there is no evidence here to suggest that religious activism is below the national rates.

Firstly white respondents were far less likely than others to be religiously active. Secondly older respondents were more likely to be religiously active than younger ones. Finally women who were mothers of small children were more likely than other people to be religiously active. Variables based on denominational and faith affiliation, social class or its proxies (such as housing tenure and education) or length of residence or residence close to the church were found to play no significant part in explaining rates of religious activism when the three main factors were held constant.

It is interesting to speculate as to why young mothers are more likely to attend the church. Is it that anyone who has been involved in child bearing and child care is inevitably more "spiritual". Or are they more concerned to ensure that their children are given some early exposure to the Church and its values, and therefore bring them to Sunday school? Perhaps they have a more practical motivation of seeking support networks, and direct social help from the parish and its organisations, including quite significantly in this parish the Church Primary School.

Newham Association of Faiths survey

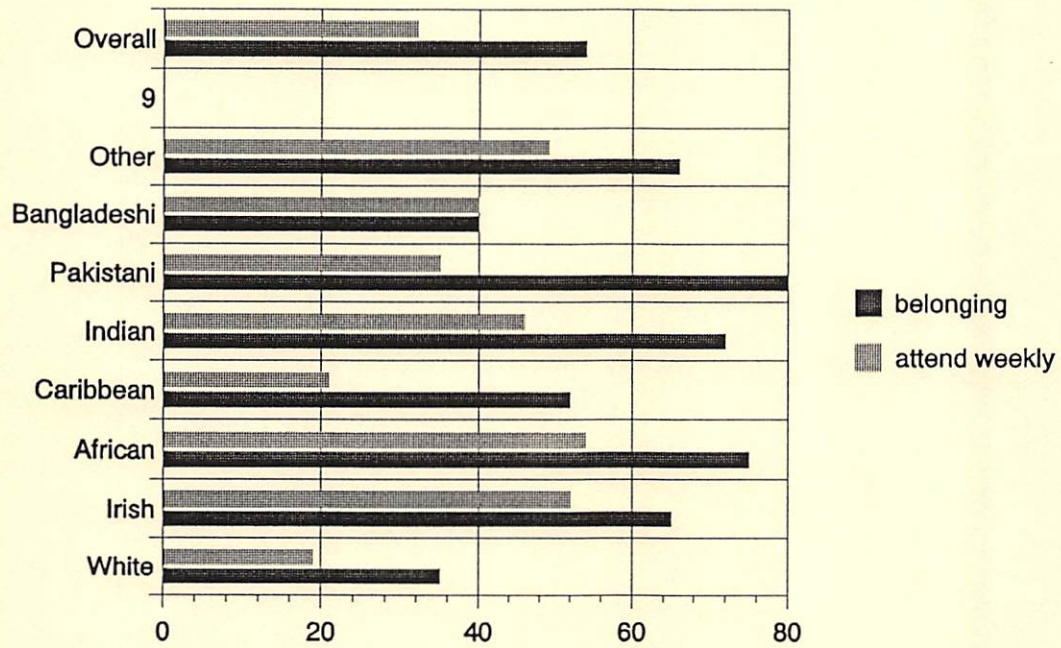
The findings of the West Ham parish survey were confirmed by another local survey of 513 Newham residents, which was carried out by the Newham Association of Faiths in 1993. In this research 32% of the respondents claimed that they usually attended a public gathering for worship / prayer etc at least weekly, and 54% claimed to belong to a local religious body (a church, mosque, temple or other group). The ethnic patterns were replicated, and it was possible to see more clearly the pattern in the Asian communities, as Table 5 makes clear.

TABLE 5 ATTENDANCE AT RELIGIOUS GROUPS BY ETHNICITY

DATA FROM NEWHAM ASSOCIATION OF FAITHS

Ethnic Group	N	% attending weekly or belonging	% attending at least
White (U.K.)	190	35	19
Irish	23	65	52
African	35	75	54
Caribbean	44	52	21
Indian	108	72	46
Pakistani	40	80	35
Bangladeshi	10	40	40
Other	35	66	49
Overall	511	54	32

RELIGIOUS ATTENDANCE BY ETHNICITY



OHP SLIDE

The decline of community

I want to move on to consider now the notion of community, and its expression in day to day life in Newham. Local folk wisdom (in the indigenous Cockney culture) is that "Fings aint wot they used to be" that its no longer safe to leave your front door open, or possible to trust your neighbours.

Although the classic community studies of the are (wilmott & Young) provide support for this account we need to note that it relies largely on the notion of a "mythical golden age". Many writers on urbanism seem to have a wistful nostalgia for rural or at least small town community life, and it can be argued that such values are deeply rooted in the cultural values of the English speaking world. There has been a vigorous critique of the ideological role of this value system, (most notably from Castells 1977). The Secularisation story as popularly understood also posits "the good old days" usually set in pre-reformation Europe, when the church was dominant, and all the people were found among the faithful. At the level of ideas secularisation, or perhaps more accurately secularism seems to run in parallel with the project of modernity, as rationality, science and autonomous humanism were perceived as challenging and ultimately overcoming the traditional and supernatural. Both strands could be challenged as to the truth of the golden age scenario, that is not my purpose today..

But I do want to present some data that supports if not the community lost, the community absent hypothesis among some people in Newham.

* This report is based on a survey of 67 Newham residents which was carried out by six medical students in November 1993 as the Community Module part of their second year course.

* The students used a questionnaire which aimed to gather information about community involvement, personal informal networks, and sources of help and support.

* The sample of respondents was recruited by a networking process starting from contacts suggested by voluntary sector and church workers in the area. The snowball sampling procedure showed that for many people the number and strength of their local network ties was extremely limited.

* While the sampling method means that the survey results cannot be generalised to the whole population of Newham, they suggest some important trends in community life, especially for older white people and mothers of small children.

* The respondents in the survey fell into two contrasting groups, on the one hand older long term residents, mostly white working class people and on the other a younger group, from a wider range of class, geographical and ethnic backgrounds, mostly living in family / households with children.

* Nearly 70% liked living in the neighbourhood, but only 11% saw it as a strong friendly community and only a third belonged to more than one community group. However almost all the respondents with children reported their children had been involved in some local community activity.

* Respondents reported they were in touch with an average of 3.6 kin (outside their own household), 3.3 friends, and 2.9 neighbours. Older respondents had considerably more kin and neighbours, but less friends than younger respondents.

* Only a third of the relatives mentioned were living in Newham, compared with

70% of the friends. Only 37% of the relatives were seen at least weekly.

* Friends were likely to be of the same gender, and age group as the respondent. Inter ethnic friendship was rare and almost unheard of among the older respondents.

* Neighbours seemed relatively insignificant to most people and only 10% of the ones mentioned ever came inside the respondent's home.

* Only about one in ten of the respondents were receiving regular help from professional sources, although over a quarter of them had received nursing type care from friends or relatives.

* Over half the respondents felt they could turn to relatives and/or friends for routine help or support of more than one type, compared with only 20% who could turn to neighbours. Even for the proverbial "borrowing a cup of sugar" less than one in five had recently been helped by a neighbour and only another one in five thought they could approach a neighbour.

* While relatives were the most frequent source of help for "nursing" type care friends were turned to for the widest range of help and support, and particularly for talking through problems or companionship for an outing.

* Most people expressed high levels of contentment / happiness satisfaction with their lives, despite living in a deprived urban area. The highest scores came from older long term residents, and from those who had lots of friends.

CONCLUSIONS

1) Religion and community building

In Newham, and similar urban contexts, where neighbourly concern seems to be rare and declining, there is a growing role for community development work which recreates "local community" and challenges the culture of privatised individualism, at the grass roots in neighbourhoods, as a strategy for preventative social work. This is distinct from the usual bureaucratic process of setting up well managed, legally constituted voluntary bodies. It clearly has some close links with the notion of communitarianism which has been publicised recently by Etzioni, taken on by the Demos think tank, slightly recast as "mutuality" by Bob Holman and which is threatening to pervade the manifestos of all our political parties. The notion, especially in its detailed application is far from problematic but it does need to be explored and worked on.

There is a key contrast to explore between the growing vitality of religion, the strength and increasing importance of the community and support networks it represents, and the situation of so many people who experience and express isolation and low levels of personal contact, neighbourliness and friendship. It is quite possible for some of the 20,000 or so people of Newham who live alone to live and die without any other human being knowing of them, as occasional tragic stories in the local press make clear.

Surely the faith communities of Newham have a responsibility here. Increasingly the notion of community is linked to religion, indeed defined by it. There is no way the urban church or the other faith communities can ignore or neglect the task of building, managing and living community, even if it wanted to. Nor can secular policy makers safely ignore the religious dimension in dealing with "community" issues. However, this should not be surprising if one recognises the importance of religion for the shaping of shared values, and building friendship and support networks. Elective communities can be the building blocks from which a more integrated society can be constructed. Religion (etymologically from a Latin term meaning "to bind") is by its nature an integrating force. In traditional *Gemeinschaft* society, analysed by Durkheim and his followers the function of religion was seen to be legitimation for traditional social norms and the basis of mechanical solidarity. In post-modern plural societies religion for some people is the vestigial glue of a traditional society which has broken down or been transferred and re-established in a new country, while for others it is a matter of choice in the supermarket of value systems. But in both cases it offers the possibility of believing and belonging, of finding personal meaning and social identity, in a group which in an urban setting may be diverse in terms of social class, ethnicity, skills and interests, and for Christians and Muslims at least avowedly ecumenical or universalist in ideology. (Davie 1994)

It would seem at first glance unlikely that the diverse and conflicting religious systems and groups in current urban settings can find enough in common to integrate the community as a whole. But there are many common values that can be found in many different faith communities, and in most there is a commitment to social welfare of others, even if it is often limited to others who belong to the community itself. In some ways religious groups can become a quasi extended family network (even the practice of calling fellow members "brother" or "sister" is far from dead), and take over functions of care and support which were once located in neighbourhood communities. This "quiet care" offered by most congregations (Harris 1995) can become an important strand in community care policy.

Social Services and Health Care Policies are as we all know moving into "the community". Clearly they need to work with the grain of the existing informal social networks of their clients and patients, but without loading unrealistic expectations and burdens on relatives, friends and neighbours, where such relationships exist. The commitment of many religious groups to community work in its many manifestations mean they are especially well placed as stakeholders in the community development process which is now at work in health and social services. They certainly cannot be ignored in the debates and practice around care in the community and are an obvious if often neglected resource. Arguably churches, mosques and temples should be encouraged, supported and even funded to deliver social services, despite difficult questions about equal opportunities, proselytisation, and the exploitation of volunteers (again usually women) as cheap labour.

2) The political and social significance of religion

The borough is the second most ethnically diverse in the whole of Britain, religious pluralism is unparalleled and recognised by the local authority in the provision of school holidays at Eid, Diwali, Guru Nanak's Birthday, Christmas and Easter. Local politics increasingly reflects religious interests; recent arguments in Newham Council and Labour Party have focussed on the following issues

- the sale of land to provide car parking for a mosque as opposed to a building site for housing

- the inappropriateness of scheduling a race equality sub committee on the eve of Eid

- whether Muslim representation on the SACRE should be increased,

- selection contests in the Labour Party for council candidates involving Muslim, Hindu and Sikh candidates, sometimes with accusations of dubious membership recruitment practices

- the nomination of two Christian Independent candidates for the May 1994 Council elections

- conflicts over the funding of community centres; the Council substantially funds what in practice is a Hindu Centre, but is uneasy about the prospect of backing a Muslim women's centre (rather than an Asian women's centre), while at least one Christian centre has ceased to be funded by the Council following an acrimonious debate over religious / moral values around equal opportunities for gay and lesbian people ...

In the first place whatever Newham is in the 1990's it is not a godless or unchurched community. Although religion is by no means a majority interest and attendance at worship is far below Irish or American levels, faith persists and if anything is growing in numbers, influence and significance. New churches, mosques, temples and organisations are being formed to cater for unmet religious and community need. And religion in Newham clearly is taking on political dimensions which have not been seen since the rout at the hands of the Labour Party of Church supported candidates opposed to Sunday opening of cinemas in the 1920s.

Here is a fundamental challenge to the approach to religion, quite widely held in mainstream white British culture in the twentieth century is that faith is a purely personal matter between the individual and God. In this view, derived in large part from the Protestant view of individual conscience, the role of the church is merely to be available as a solace in time of need. One can certainly be a good Christian without attending church, and the congregation as community, or the church as a political force is not on the agenda. Undoubtedly there are many people in Newham, particularly among older white nominal Christians who subscribe to this view of believing in an ordinary God, as opposed to a supernatural interventionist one, without belonging to any church. (Davie 1994). However, most churches in Newham, of all denominations, are increasingly operating on the model of the congregation as the gathered community of God's people, distinct from the Non-Christian world, but committed to being involved in that wider world according to the Biblical metaphors of salt and light, in service and evangelism. This trend has theological roots, but also resonates with an important social need. As neighbourhood community and kinship networks have fragmented, perhaps more rapidly in East London than elsewhere, many people recognise a deep personal need for belonging, for solidarity, for social support, for communion. At the local level it is churches and other religious groups that are best placed to meet such needs. Incidentally it may be the case that believing at least in the sense of assent to orthodox credal statements and strict communally held moral standards will be less important, as the pick and mix global culture of the postmodern world makes highly individualised world views and value packages more available and normal.

In a deprived urban area such as Newham a crucial question must be the relationship of poverty and religion. (Griffiths / LBN 1994; Forrest & Gordon 1993). Religion was criticised by Marxists as "opium of the people" and with some justification as an ideological tool of the ruling classes. There is a long Christian tradition of concern for and involvement alongside the poor, of voluntary poverty for the sake of the Gospel, and of struggling to see the Kingdom of God established as social and economic reality on earth. That tradition continues in Newham as Church and other groups play a major, and growing role in community development work, anti-poverty programmes and the provision of social services. Internationally there is a vigorous theological debate both in Catholic and evangelical circles about social justice and the gospel, in which Christians in the Two Thirds World and in British inner cities often make common cause on "the option for the poor" and the need to root the gospel in local realities. (Smith 1990). Some Muslims too are exploring their traditions in the light of longings for equality and liberation. As the social and economic statistics about Newham show that it is consistently the African, Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups that are bottom of all the deprivation leagues, and it is these very groups that are most religiously active, then we can expect struggles for racial and social justice to take on a religious form.

3) The ethnic question

Is the revival of religion purely a result of ethnic diversity? This is a compelling suggestion in as far as the tendency for religious organisations to be ethnically homogeneous. Indeed there is a case that in many plural urban settings around the world the prime focus for belonging, identity, community, "gemeinschaft" is located in some notion of ethno - religious - linguistic identity. However there may be some counter evidence especially if the growth of churches, mosques and other religious communities which cut across some of the ethnic, national and tribal identities can be sustained. Yet even in Christian congregations which have attracted roughly equal numbers of black and white worshippers there are often observable social divides, cliques with ethnic boundaries, and an imbalance in

patterns of participation and power that can be seen as racist exclusion. The same may be true in some of the other faith communities that cross ethnic lines.

More generally will religion diminish in significance as immigrant communities mature and become established in Britain? There are inevitably many pressures towards secularisation including economic forces, the professed value neutrality of the state and its education system (which is now being questioned), the mass media and the McDonaldisation of global culture. But all of these forces encounter some resistance at the level of human communities, and a feature of post modern culture is that there is some recognition and space in which sub-cultural forms can flourish. In North America it is significant that ethnicity has undergone a strong revival in recent decades, and that for many ethnic groups it is their churches which maintain ancestral traditions, values, cultural forms and "roots" long after other markers of ethnic community identity have gone. The same forces could be at work in Britain. In addition there is the dimension of racism. As minority groups, most of them "black" in the political sense of the word, continue to meet hostility, discrimination and social exclusion their religious identities and organisations will prove to be a powerful resource in their struggles. Already we are seeing a mobilisation of Islamic (rather than Asian or Pakistani) identity around such issues as the publication of the Satanic Verses, and the Muslim Parliament (Samad 1992; Knott & Khoker 1993). In this setting it is hard to believe that an irresistible force of secularisation will sweep away the religious aspects of minority cultures.

The future shape of Christianity in Newham will depend on whether a long term measurable revival in religious activity among the deprived white communities in Newham can be sustained. At this moment there are only hopes and hints to counter long established trends. Will Church attendance or "getting religion" continue to be deviant behaviour in the Cockney culture? Will young white people start to attend church, or will older congregations simply die out? If numerical growth is established among both white and black communities, and the church can overcome its own racism, then religious community identity might become a significant factor in its own right. Specifically it could emerge as the polar opposition to the sense of Islamic identity found among some young local Muslims. For Christians at least the dream of evangelical unity which rests on the vision of "people of every language tribe and nation worshipping before the throne of the Lamb" (Rev.7) could just be realised in Newham as it is in heaven.

This brings us to our final question as to whether religious and ethnic divisions will sharpen and lead to conflict, segregation, and the brutality of competing fundamentalisms. In short will Newham become like Belfast or Beirut? Clearly there are such dangers, especially if the discourse of nationalism, racism and tribal loyalties are superimposed on deeply held religious, social and "moral" values in a context of conflict over diminishing economic and social resources. A recent murder in Newham has been reported as having some such dimensions of religious conflict. However, such fragmentation might be mitigated by the inability to avoid contact with a common mass culture, the complexity of ethnic interaction in Newham (compared say with the bipolar conflict in Belfast) and by deliberate policies in education, housing and community relations work.

Will the majority of Muslims in Newham follow a line that can be described as "fundamentalist"? Will Hindus and Sikhs develop radical versions of their own religions? Will Christians be pushed towards a fundamentalism of their own, or will the liberal tolerance of broad church Anglicanism and the Free Churches survive and grow? Interestingly enough the material from the Newham Association of Faiths survey does not suggest that the majority of people are willing to go to war over religion, but rather see religion potentially as a force for harmony.

Although 75% of respondents agreed that "there are always going to be conflicts between religions" only 10% agreed with the statement "I think of other faiths as the enemy of my own". In contrast 69% agreed that "all religions have a lot in common" and an overwhelming majority of 92% agreed that "different religions should work together to help people in need". There is in these findings a potentially more hopeful scenario in which religion in all its diversity becomes the building blocks out of which a new wider sense of community can be constructed.

HANDOUT 1

TABLE 1

Denominations within Christian Tradition

	Congregations	Organisations	Congregations owning building	Estimated Attendance
African	7	0	4	882
Baptist	12	1	12	972
CofE	28	10	27	2072
Ecumenical	2	17	2	100
Independent Evang.	17	5	8	1268
Methodist	6	2	6	372
Moravian	1	0	0	40
Orthodox	2	0	1	300
Pentecostal	56	4	7	3416
Quaker	0	1	0	0
Roman Catholic	12	15	8	7812
Salvation Army	3	0	3	51
Seventh Day Advent.	3	1	2	480
United Reformed	4	2	4	164
			Total	17929
Non Trinitarian	11	0	8	
none	0	5	0	
Other Faith Communities				
Bahai	1	0	0	
Buddhist	2	0	1	
Hindu	8	4	5	
Ravidassi	1	0	1	
Universal	2	0	0	
Jewish	1	0	1	
Inter Faith	0	4	0	
Muslim	14	5	13	
Pagan	1	0	0	
Sikh	5	0	4	
total	198	77	117	

Note

Estimates for attendance are based on the replies of church leaders to the question "How many people usually attend the largest meeting /service you regularly hold (e.g. for Christians this would be the main Sunday Service, for Muslims Friday prayers)." The "high" estimate is given here which assumes non responding churches to have the mean attendance for their denomination.

HANDOUT 2

Table 3 Religious Practice by Denomination

(ALL includes those claiming no religious affiliation and Non Christian Faiths)

Data from West Parish Survey 1992

GOING TO CHURCH	COFE	%	RC	%	FREE	%	ALL
ALREADY	18	24	12	48	13	59	56
INTERESTED	4	5	3	12	6	27	22
NOT INTERESTED	53	71	10	40	3	14	107
	75	100	25	100	22	100	185
PUBLIC PRACTICE	COFE	%	RC	%	FREE	%	ALL
LAST WEEK	8	10	8	31	9	36	32
LAST MONTH	9	11	3	12	1	4	19
LAST YEAR	15	19	4	15	4	16	28
OVER A YEAR AGO	41	51	11	42	11	44	75
NEVER	8	10	0	0	0	0	22
	81	100	26	100	25	100	176
private practice	COFE	%	RC	%	FREE	%	ALL
LAST WEEK	31	39	10	42	16	76	72
LAST MONTH	7	9	3	13	2	10	15
LAST YEAR	6	8	1	4	0	0	9
OVER A YEAR AGO	9	11	6	25	2	10	21
NEVER	26	33	4	17	1	5	50
	79	100	24	100	21	100	167
BELIEVE IN GOD	COFE	%	RC	%	FREE	%	ALL
DEFINITELY	56	69	22	85	22	88	130
SOME SORT OF	11	14	2	8	2	8	19
NOT SURE	6	7	2	8	1	4	15
DEF. NOT	8	10	0	0	0	0	14
	81	100	26	100	25	100	178
SPIRITUAL IMPORTANT	COFE		RC		FREE	%	ALL
very important	20	25	11	41	16	64	64
important	37	46	13	48	6	24	69
not important	23	29	3	11	3	12	45
	80	100	27	100	25	100	173

HANDOUT 3

Table 4 Religious Practice by RACE

Data from West Parish Survey 1992

GOING TO CHURCH	WHITE	%	BLACK	%	ASIAN	OTHER
ALREADY	21	19	20	47	4	11
INTERESTED	8	7	11	26	1	2
NOT INTERESTED	80	73	12	28	2	2
	109	100	43	100	7	15
PUBLIC PRACTICE	WHITE		BLACK		ASIAN	OTHER
LAST WEEK	9	8	14	34	3	6
LAST MONTH	12	10	6	15	1	0
LAST YEAR	20	17	5	12	2	1
OVER A YEAR AGO	59	50	13	32	1	2
NEVER	17	15	3	7	0	2
	117	100	41	100	7	11
private practice	WHITE		BLACK		ASIAN	OTHER
LAST WEEK	34	30	27	69	5	6
LAST MONTH	12	11	3	8	0	0
LAST YEAR	7	6	2	5	0	0
OVER A YEAR AGO	16	14	4	10	0	1
NEVER	43	38	3	8	1	3
	112	100	39	100	6	10
BELIEVE IN GOD	WHITE		BLACK		ASIAN	OTHER
DEFINITELY	76	64	37	88	6	11
SOME SORT OF	15	13	4	10	0	0
NOT SURE	14	12	1	2	0	0
DEF. NOT	14	12	0	0	0	0
	119	100	42	100	6	11
SPIRITUAL IMPORTANT	WHITE		BLACK		ASIAN	OTHER
very important	24	21	27	63	6	7
important	52	45	12	28	1	4
not important	40	34	4	9	0	1
	116	100	43	100	7	12

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