her place by his bedside. So she wasn't there when he died later that night and her last words to him remained unspoken.

Towards the end of the book Margaret says how some lines of poetry from the last verse of a poem by Blake kept coming back to her: *Broken Love.*

> *And throughout all Eternity*
> *I forgive you, you forgive me*. (p. 197)

Do they complete the sentence and frame the question of her memoir? – *Home Is Where*. Do they resolve her sense of loss and longing? Remembering the couplet, she sits for a moment in silence, her father 'vivid to her as on that last walk in his beloved hills' (p. 197).

Alastair Hulbert
Alastair Hulbert worked in mission and ecumenism in Europe
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Steve Bruce, *British Gods: Religion in Modern Britain* (Oxford: OUP, 2020), pp. xvi + 282, ISBN 978-0198854111. £25.00

Steve Bruce, a sociologist based at the University of Aberdeen, has written extensively on religion and spirituality. His primary purpose in writing *British Gods* is to defend the hypothesis that the British people are becoming increasingly secular. He has collected and compiled a large amount of data and evidence covering many years and demonstrates his point well. This work will likely be of value to those interested in the trend towards secularisation of society. However, in this review I intend to examine the book with respect to the value it holds for committed Christians. From this perspective, the book will interest those looking for an outsider's view of religion in Britain.

It is helpful to allow Bruce's own words speak for how his book is structured:

> This book has two overlapping structures: a series of places and a series of themes. Most chapters start by documenting the changes

> in the religious culture of some locale and then segue into a general topic […]. As written texts must necessarily be linear, and repetition and omission are undesirable, some of the locale-theme links are a little clunky, but that structure does allow me to illustrate national and international trends with considerable local detail. (p. viii)

This is a good summary of his general approach as well as a good assessment of the problems inherent with the approach. However, the benefits are worth it.

Bruce begins in Chapter 1 with a discussion of the "Elite Patronage of Religion". He then discusses the effects of community cohesion (Chapter 2); the changing social roles of clergy (Chapter 3); the merging of churches in decline and more recent dividing issues (such as sexuality, Chapter 4); the charismatic movement (Chapter 5); migrant Christians and Pentecostalism in London (Chapter 6); 'Worktown' and Muslims (Chapter 7); folk religion and superstition (Chapter 8); spiritualism, spirituality and its relationship to social class (Chapter 9); and religion and politics (Chapter 10). He finishes with a chapter discussing the potential for the decline in religiosity being reversed.

Bruce's thesis is that in pre-industrial Britain, Christianity was a feature of society and culture rather than being an individual preference. With industrialisation came changes to society. 'Advances in science and technology sidelined religious solutions to practical problems with more effective alternatives' (p. 269). Social changes led to an increased individualism, and, with it becoming more acceptable to choose your religion, more and more people gave up any attachments they had maintained. He shows that the increase in numbers in Pentecostal churches have largely been driven by people moving from the more traditional denominations, and he describes this as a step for many on the path to no religion. In addition, he demonstrates that a large proportion of the Muslim population is also moving towards secularisation, and no other new religions are stepping into the gap in significant enough numbers to be able to describe British people as 'religious'. According to Bruce, the current situation is such that reversal of the secular trend is highly unlikely.

Through his collection and presentation of data he makes a very compelling case. However, we must keep in mind that often the statistical data he employs are measuring public religion rather than those who truly

believe. As it has become more socially acceptable to not believe, fewer people attend for cultural reasons alone. Thus the data do not measure the size of the true church, but attempts to measure what could be considered the visible church. Furthermore, in measuring the visible church, the figures include those who are only nominal members. This is particularly the case for earlier periods where the main source of data is membership rolls, a fact that Bruce points out in saying that these figures are not considered as accurate as church attendance figures (p. 28). In addition, as he points out, the Church of England long considered taking Easter communion to be 'the minimum qualification for good standing' in the church (p. 55). Earlier figures may be unduly inflated due to cultural pressure to appear Christian, masking a smaller percentage who could be legitimately considered the visible church, which again masks a smaller percentage that could be considered the true church. Therefore, when we read this book we need to be aware that it deals with Christianity as a socio-cultural phenomenon. While there has been a massive reduction in the size of the visible church, one may wonder how much that simply represents the cultural climate and whether the percentage of those who truly have a saving relationship with God (a figure that is impossible for us to measure directly) has reduced in the country.

This work can help us to see and more fully understand the lack of religious knowledge in the culture. Theological disagreements important to us may appear very strange to those with little to no basic understanding of our faith. Bruce's work helps to demonstrate the amount of work that may be required to educate people in the faith who are new to it. We cannot assume those we want to reach out to will have any understanding of the faith. In fact, as Bruce points out, the religious capital has decayed such that

> The *London Evening Standard* mangled a number of important distinctions in a space-filler prelude to the wedding of Prince Harry and Megan Markle. It announced that Ms Markle would have to be baptized before the wedding because she was a Protestant […]. It further described the putative baptism with text cut and pasted from a Catholic website [such that] Markle becoming Protestant would actually involve her taking the Roman 'mass'. (p. 77)

In addition, this decay also places greater societal pressures on people who attend church. The culture we all live and breathe teaches us that there is no God. We must be thinking of how we actively combat that view in the way we structure churches and educate congregants.

At some points Bruce uses metaphors and ways of describing faith which are a bit on-the-nose. One example of this is when he compares people moving from more conservative to charismatic denominations as moving from a high-security prison to an open prison and then writes, 'But people who are at liberty will not be volunteering to enter a relaxed open prison just because it is not as oppressive as Alcatraz or a bleak fortress on Dartmoor' (p. 225). This metaphor lacks subtlety and fails to appreciate that people do choose to move from what he claims to be liberty to what he claims to be a high-security prison, and what is more they often describe it as liberating as they find freedom in Christ.

This book is well-researched and makes its point well. Although Bruce's approach (self-admittedly) leads to a somewhat clunky presentation at times, pressing on with reading is worth the pay-off. Taking into account the few issues mentioned above, I would heartily recommend this book for considering the state of the culture and its trajectory in relation to religion in general.

Philip D. Foster
Associate Editor for the *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*
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