Introduction

In Scotland, as in much of Northern Europe, the subject of growing secularism has been the lifeblood and fodder of social and religious commentators since the beginning of the twenty-first century. A 'haemorrhaging of support' for organised religion has been identified by sociologists Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, on the basis that fewer people are choosing to identify as religiously affiliated (Heelas & Woodhead, 2004: 9). In the 2011 Census, 54% of the Scottish population identified as Christian (National Records of Scotland, 2011), indicating a decrease of eleven percentage points since the 2001 census (Scottish Executive, 2005). Further, 37% of Scottish respondents stated they had no religion, an increase of nine percentage points (National Records of Scotland, 2011). As Philosopher Charles Taylor surmises: 'We no longer live in societies in which the widespread sense can be maintained that faith in God is central to the ordered life we…enjoy' (Taylor, 2007: 531). Yet secularism is by no means a neatly construed or linear process. Heelas and Woodhead suggest that the erosion of the church in Britain has not left behind a fully secular society, but rather one in which those who leave religious institutions find themselves in a kind of post-church vacuum, 'adrift' and 'searching for new forms of meaning and purpose' (Heelas, 2006: 46). Rather than setting the church on a direct path to extinction, secularism has in fact created a space for varied new expressions of spirituality and community

  It is within this vacuum that one particular instantiation of secular community has emerged in recent years. The Sunday Assembly, created by comedians Sanderson Jones and Pippa Evans, was labelled a 'godless church' in the first instance. Jones and Evans admired the collective inspiration and congregational structure of British churches, and desired a space in which to encounter these elements without the inclusion of religion or dogma. The Assembly's inaugural event was held in January 2013, in a deconsecrated church in North London. In 2017, the organisation estimates a presence in more than 70 cities worldwide. While the Sunday Assembly might claim to constitute a non-religious expression of community, *Guardian* journalist Esther Addley suggests that 'a church goer who stumbled through the wrong door would find much they recognised' (Addley, 2013). Assembly

meetings typically include communal singing, readings, reflections, and financial offerings. Gatherings fit a recognisably church-like format; hymns are replaced with popular music, sermons with TED-style presentations, and prayers with silent reflection. One member of the London Assembly described this to me in his own words, saying: 'Anyone who has ever been to church would certainly relate to the feeling of being at Sunday Assembly.'

   The metamorphosis of the Sunday Assembly from small local organisation to burgeoning global movement can be located within a much wider conversation about the relationship secularity and religion, both in Britain and in the rest of the Western hemisphere. While numerical data appears to support a trajectory of religious decline, 'vestiges' of religious life are still discernable within the rhetoric and behaviours of those who locate themselves within the sphere of secularity. In brief, this refers to the secular retention of identities and aspects associated with the Christian church; a further, more descriptive definition will be offered in due course. In what follows, I will explore this phenomenon with reference to my own research at the Sunday Assembly congregation in Edinburgh. In examining what precisely these aforementioned 'vestiges' constitute, and where they are apparent within the life and activities of the organisation, three key themes emerge; that of continuing Christian identity in practise, the shape of community, and the perceived need for pastoral care. Exploration of these themes both sociologically and theologically significant. Each reveals the on-going impact of aspects of the Christian church in an increasingly secular society

'Vestiges' in context: Temperate atheism and deconversion narratives

In order to understand the rise of the Sunday Assembly, and what exactly is meant by the term 'vestiges of religious life,' it is important to appreciate two matters. The broader landscape of scholariship on non-religion, and its development in recent years, together with the occurrence of religious 'deconversion' (which typically relates to a loss of faith and/or ideological shift towards atheism or agnosticism), provide insight into the post-church 'gap' identified in Heelas and Woodhead's work. While New Atheist philosophy dominated the post-faith phenomenon at the turn of the twenty-first century, a slow but significant

diversification has taken place within the field of non-religion in more recent years. In his work *After the New Atheist Debate*, Phil Ryan suggests that the eponymous conversation has reached a point of stagnation. He posits that atheists cannot claim intimate theological knowledge of the religions that they set out to attack, while, correspondingly, theological 'defenders' have failed to grasp the worldview against which they are arguing (Ryan, 2014: 63). Within the boundaries of this static exchange, Theodore Beale criticises New Atheist writings for being both 'fraudulent' and 'error-filled' (Beale, 2008: 2), while theologian David Bentley Hart exposes Richard Dawkins, the chieftain of this particular bastion of thought, for his 'embarrassing incapacity for philosophical reasoning' (Hart, 2009: 4). Arguably, New Atheism is a spent force. What began as a series of 'provocative and lively attacks on religion' (Ryan, 2014: 4) has been marred by both barriers to understanding, and controversy. Dawkins has attracted criticism for his comments about women, the disabled, and other religious groups. His *Dear Muslima* letter condemned the views of atheist feminist Rebecca Watson, who excoriated the New Atheist movement for its ubiquitous misogyny. Dawkins attracted criticism for belittling the sexual harassment of Western women on the grounds that sexism in Islamic theocracies is comparably worse. As a whole, the New Atheist movement has been chastised for its lack of intersectionality, and its failure to include women and those from ethnic minority backgrounds. In sum, these factors have resulted in a decline in prominence for the campaign and its thinkers.

 Militant, 'Dawkinsian' thinkers of the New Atheist tradition continue their castigation of religion. However, they now do so in the presence of a less antagonistic form of unbelief. Thinkers such as Kitcher and Alain De Botton retain that there is no God, yet are set apart from their atheist contemporaries by their scholarly syntheses of the sacred and the secular. 'Temperate' atheists such as these are intent on preserving what they identify as valuable human and social aspects of religion for secular use. In his seminal work, *Religion for Atheists*, De Botton disagrees with the 'hard tone' of thinkers such as Dawkins, and adds that he is 'deeply respectful' of religion, despite being unable to accept its supernatural aspects. This position allows De Botton to 'examine aspects of religious life which contain concepts

that could fruitfully be applied to the problems of secular society' (De Botton, 2012: 19). He explains that religions merit secular attention 'for their sheer conceptual ambition,' and for the historical and cultural impact they have had upon the realms of 'education, fashion, politics, travel, initiating ceremonies, publishing, art and architecture.' (2012: 18) De Botton outlines several ways in which secular communities might use aspects of religion on a practical basis. In one particularly vivid example, which will be referred to and further developed in due course, De Botton suggests that shared communal meals, based on Christian configurations of gathering in community, should constitute a fundamental aspect of the secular life. Like De Botton, American philosopher Philip Kitcher identifies a need for orientation within the sphere of post-religious experience. While he believes that the voice of New Atheism is both compelling and eloquent, Kitcher suggests that it amounts only to 'mere denial' of the existence of a divine being, and does not elaborate on the positive aspects of a secular life. Because of this, Kitcher proposes that 'the rejection of religious commitment leaves a vacuum demanding to be filled' (Kitcher, 2014: 1).

 Two narratives extracted from recent media coverage appear to support Kitcher's statement. Both explore the manifestation of religious 'deconversion,' and the simultaneous retention of some aspects of the Christian experience; the eponymous 'vestiges' of Christian identity, ritual, and memory. The first is of Bart Campolo, son of famed American evangelical preacher, Tony Campolo. The younger Campolo was previously a Christian pastor, before undergoing a 'deconversion experience,' which led him to identify as a secular humanist. The trigger for Campolo's transition was a bike accident that caused him to suffer from memory loss, and led to a crisis of faith. He later left the church to focus on finding 'good without God,' and in doing so, faced the initial tension of questioning his vocation. In an interview with Campolo for *The New York Times Magazine*, Mark Oppenheimer explains that his subject 'loved talking to people, caring for them, helping them.' He adds that Campolo ultimately: 'loved everything about Christian ministry, except the Christianity' (Oppenheimer, 2016). As such, Campolo has since chosen to continue his ministry. Describing himself as a 'community builder, counsellor [and] conveyer of hope'

(Oppenheimer, 2016), Campolo preaches secular humanism instead of the gospel, using evangelical communication techniques acquired in his previous line of work. Like Jones and Evans, the creators of the Sunday Assembly, he has capitalised on the aforementioned ideological shift towards temperate atheism, which he perceive to be a more welcoming form of non-belief, focused primarily on the joy and potential of human life as opposed to challenging the convictions of religious thinkers.

  In a similar vein, Gretta Vosper, a former minister in the United Church of Canada (UCC), openly identifies as a non-theist. Her works, *With or Without God* (2008) and *Amen* (2012) chronicle her journey towards atheism within the framework of her life and work in the UCC. Vosper explains that she does not believe in a theistic, supernatural deity, but rather understands God to be a metaphor for goodness, justice and compassion. At West Hill, Vosper's church in Toronto, references to God and Jesus were replaced by rhetoric of love and compassion, and prayer was substituted with 'community sharing time.' In September 2016, after conducting a review of Vosper's effectiveness as a minister based on her atheistic beliefs, the UCC found her unfit to continue her ministry within its theological boundaries. Vosper now is now a part of the Oasis Network, described as a movement aimed at 'building a sense of community outside of religious affiliation.' The network, based in Toronto, operates on core values concerned with human empowerment, intellectual exploration, and humanitarian services. Vosper continues to make use of 'non-exclusive' materials such as liturgical and musical resources, for use with both Christians and those who identify as non-believers.

  The stories of Campolo and Vosper reveal an interesting aspect of the deconversion experience which has not yet been excavated in any great detail, either by theologians or by social theorists. Both have set aside their Christian faith and embraced a non-religious conceptualisation of the world, and yet both retain; at least in part; the roles they forged within their religious communities, utilising the skills and methods of communication they acquired in their former occupations. Similarly, de Botton, Kitcher, and other 'temperate atheist' thinkers acknowledge the social and cultural impact of Christianity, in particular

advocating its emphasis on community and caring in the face of increasingly individualised societies. It is the perspectives of temperate atheists, as well as the deconversion narratives of Campolo and Vosper, which expose the presence of what I proposed should be termed 'vestiges' of the Christian religion. In the context of this particular conversation, the term refers centrally to aspects of Christianity, whether ritualistic, identity-driven, or otherwise, which are carried over, unconsciously retained, or actively incorporated into a secular perspective, even where faith in a divine being is not. I turn now to examine this phenomenon further, not on a global scale, but in Scotland, looking in particular to the Edinburgh congregation of the Sunday Assembly. In identifying the presence of such 'vestiges' amongst attendees, evident in observations, interviews, and my own participation in the activities and rituals of the group, I will examine continuing Christian practises evident within this context.

Sunday Assembly Edinburgh and research methodology

Forged within the post-church climate, the Sunday Assembly initially faced overwhelming demand for its particular format of secular community. As a result, the organisation made a commitment to replicate its brand of 'godless church' in cities and towns across the globe. In 2013, three initial sites for congregations were identified in Scotland, in three major cities, Glasgow, Aberdeen, and Edinburgh. As part of the Assembly's first wave of global expansion in September 2013, satellite congregations commenced operation in both Glasgow and Edinburgh. As of March 2015, the Glasgow branch had fallen silent on social media, and on the official Assembly website. At present, no discernible plans are in place to resurrect the congregation. The Assembly's outpost Edinburgh remains active, with numbers steady at between thirty to fifty at monthly meetings. As part of my PhD research, I made a number of field visits to the Edinburgh congregation. Using qualitative methodology, I conducted an ethnographic study, undertaking a combination of semi-structured interviews, observation, and participatory activities to find out more about the Sunday Assembly and its purpose.

 Initially, the decision to include the Edinburgh Assembly in my research was a methodological one. While undertaking research at the flagship congregation in London, it

became increasingly apparent that the London Assembly is somewhat 'set apart' from smaller satellite congregations. The presence of the Assembly's founders there gives the London Assembly a 'privileged position,' according to David, one of my research participants. London acts as global headquarters for the movement. As such, those who attend the Assembly's flagship congregation are automatically situated at the organisations' global epicentre, with both paid members of staff, and new concepts, ideas, and events being trialled first in London. The city also has a large population to draw from. This results in high attendance levels on a regular basis, even where turnover is perceptible. Moreover, in its infancy, the London Assembly attracted a great deal of media attention and commentary, inflating its numbers further. It also runs fortnightly, as opposed to monthly; which is the case for many satellite Assemblies; and well-established social groups and meetings take place between Sunday services. These factors set the experience of the average London Assembler apart from attendees of satellite congregations. Conscious of the importance of reflexivity in qualitative research, and concerned that the aforementioned factors might distort my portrayal of the Sunday Assembly experience, I sought to conduct further research at my local congregation, in order to better represent the environment and activities of the organisation's satellite congregations. The Assembly's proposal to launch a presence in Aberdeen was never realised, and the Glasgow branch had, by early 2015, fallen silent after an irregular pattern of meetings. Edinburgh thus became, by default, my local Sunday Assembly, and the organisations' only remaining presence in Scotland.

 In Edinburgh, I conducted eight semi-structured interviews, lasting between forty-five minutes and one hour, with members who described themselves as 'regular' attendees (i.e. attending most months). In addition to this, I made connections with four people who were there for the first time. The following extracts are taken from a data set, which in sum comprises eight interviews and four sets of email correspondence, with a total of twelve attendees of the Edinburgh Assembly. Themes emerging from this data are particularly prevalent in the conversation surrounding vestiges of Christian religious life and thought in the secular context.

i. Christian community structures in a secular congregation

In line with social trends in much of Northern Europe, Scotland is becoming an increasingly secular country. Nonetheless, in the context of this particular study, remnants of <u>a desire for rituals and practises from their prior Christian background</u> were discernible in responses given by members of the Edinburgh Assembly to my opening interview question: 'Why did you first start going to the Sunday Assembly?' Attendees gravitated towards answers which either incorporated a sense of former or continuing religious identity. Information regarding previous church affiliation was offered readily. Nine of the twelve Edinburgh Assembly-goers I spoke to mentioned religion or church attendance as part of their answer to this question. By comparison, fewer respondents from the London congregation offered such insights voluntarily; that is, without being directly questioned. Of the twenty-two interviewed in connection with the flagship Assembly, four made reference to religion by way of response to this particular question. This amounts to 75% in Edinburgh and 22% in London, in relative terms.

 Laura was an Edinburgh attendee, who answered the preceding question with a narrative that included church. She attended church as a teenager, and was involved in what she described as 'a more evangelical' movement. Laura explained that her past religious identity was part of what drew her to the Sunday Assembly:

> I went along because...there were maybe elements of church that I...not exactly missed, but still saw the value in, and just thought it was a really good idea to have that without the religious element.

Laura described her time as church as 'positive' and 'happy,' and suggested that the Assembly's 'imitation of religion' might allow former churchgoers to feel more comfortable at gatherings. She admitted that church-like format of meetings was 'attractive to her.' Later, Laura told a story about her first experience of Sunday Assembly at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. In her description, Laura touched on her feelings of elation at being part of a congregation again:

> I remember the first one I went to, that one in the Fringe…The first thing
> they did was get everyone standing up and start singing. And it just…It really
> felt like church to me. A sort of flashback, almost- 'Oh, yeah, this is what it
> used to feel like!' Singing enthusiastically. I don't even remember the song,
> but it was...really kind of happy, uplifting… It just made me feel like I used
> to feel when I was at church.

Laura's particular experience here highlights the way in which the Sunday Assembly can function as pseudo-church for some, whose look to retain some habitual Christian practises. Indeed, it was Laura's previous contact with church that informed her decision to go along to, and be involved in, the Sunday Assembly.

The secular use of Christian congregational structures to create community is, as referenced earlier, explored within De Botton's work, *Religion For Atheists*. For De Botton, structures borrowed from Christian churches can be used to encourage greater human connection and interaction. He remarks that 'One of the losses modern society feels most keenly is that of community' (2012:23). De Botton argues that Europe and the United States in particular have undergone an erosion of community-based activities, to the extent that loneliness in the public space has become a twenty-first century epidemic. In a BBC Radio 4 documentary entitled 'Swapping Psalms for Pop Songs,' Sanderson Jones asserted that the Sunday Assembly is acutely aware of the impact of social isolation. He referred to the organisation as 'an important social and public health intervention'. The Assembly now works with housing associations, the NHS, and local councils, in an effort to expand its social reach and create communities to tackle loneliness.

 How might secular society draw on Christian wisdom regarding the creation and sustenance of communities? De Botton poses several suggestions. Principally, he proposes that secular communities should adopt the practices of communal eating, exemplified in part by the Jewish Passover Seder, and equally by the Christian tradition of the Eucharist. In doing so, De Botton suggests that they might read from 'guide books' reminiscent of the Jewish Haggadah or the 'Catholic missal' (2012: 44). Such practises are intended to reinforce feelings of community, shifting participants away from egocentrism, and towards an understanding of the needs of others. De Botton interprets the Catholic Mass as being replete with elements

which strengthen the social bonds of those who participate in it. The Mass makes use of a complex liturgical missal, which compels congregants to partake in physical rituals of standing, sitting, kneeling, praying, drinking and eating at certain points. De Botton suggests that such rituals speak to 'an essential aspect of human nature which benefits from being guided in how to behave with others' (2012:37). Within de Botton's frame of reference, this applies to human beings regardless of religious affiliation and belief, or lack thereof.

A number of research participants from Edinburgh expressed such a longing for community, which they hoped to find at the Sunday Assembly. Maggie, who was involved in presenting and comparing Assembly meetings, remarked that:

> I had been raised a Catholic, but I stopped practising...and it just...there was something about [Sunday Assembly] that appealed to me in, the fact that it was a community thing, and that it was like a church service.

Like Laura, Maggie drew comfort from the familiar structure and recognisably church-like format of Assembly meetings, but she also emphasised the importance of finding an 'open, friendly group of people' to interact with. When I inquired of Maggie, 'What is it that draws you to a community that is similar to church?' she answered: 'It's hard to say, but I think it's the community spirit.' In particular, Maggie spoke of the varied demographics of the Assembly, and the opportunities to socialise and make friends.

 In a similar vein, Robert emphasised the importance of being part of a 'gathered community.' Formerly a minister, he began attending Humanist meetings after an abrupt and life-changing deconversion experience, not unlike that of Bart Campolo. However, Robert felt that these meetings were 'too cerebral,' and that they lacked the 'feel of a community, and of a congregation getting together.' Robert told the story of his first experience of Sunday Assembly in Edinburgh, which he described as a 'homecoming' of sorts. In this narrative, he emphasised the different kinds of people present at the Assembly; a community that wouldn't have come together otherwise:

> I'll never forget the first day I came along. There they were- a completely disparate, large group of people... The silver surfers were there, the middle -aged were there, the young people in their early twenties were there, young mums came in with their babies. I sat down, this old guy wandered in with twa dugs and I thought, 'Oh yes! I've come home!'

While Robert's words represent one perspective, the Sunday Assembly remains a group in its infancy. Linda, another attendee, suggested that it 'doesn't have that sense of community you'd expect from a village church.' She offered several suggestions for why this might be:

> It's only once a month, not weekly like church. And I suppose, because it's a relatively young thing and it was recently started up…and, you know, it's not a very local congregation. It's for anybody in Edinburgh. So it tends to be sort of different people each time.

While the Assembly is drawing on a recognisably church-like format, for Linda, it has been unable to reproduce the community feel of church. Bart Campolo has argued that this is due to the lack of shared values within the Assembly's target audience. While Jesus Christ is the lynchpin for church communities, Campolo suggests that the Sunday Assembly has no defining doctrine with which to untie its attendees. He adds that the frequency of meetings, held largely on a monthly basis, is not conducive to building community (Oppenheimer, 2016). The transient nature of the Assembly, which continually attracts new members, but often struggles to keep them, further contributes to this difficult, and ultimately, contradictory desire for both the structures and format of a church community, and the simultaneous disposal of religious elements.

ii. Continuing denominational tensions?

Another aspect of continuing religious identity in Scotland concerns cultural notions of Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. In findings produced by ScotCen for the 2014 Scottish Social Attitudes survey, 88% of Scottish people surveyed thought sectarianism was still a problem in Scotland (Hinchliffe et al, 2014:ii). In this particular framework, religious sectarianism relates primarily to bigotry and discrimination, primarily on the basis of Christian denominational background. While Historian Tom Gallagher suggests that sectarian tensions in Scotland have become less violent in recent years, having never become as corrosive as they were in Northern Ireland (Gallagher, 2013: 11), instances of religiously motivated violence are still perceptible. In Scotland, this ongoing climate of sectarian tension, coupled with declining rates of religious belief, creates an interesting as seemingly

contradictory state of affairs, which has not yet been afforded any significant scholarly attention. Could sectarian perspectives, historically bound to religious identity, fit the definition of 'vestiges' contained within this particular conversation? Frank, a member of the Edinburgh Assembly, spoke about his own Catholic religious memory, and the 'tribal' aspect of his denominational identification:

> I've come from a Catholic background. I don't practise, but it's something similar to the way Jewish people talk about it…Somebody can be a complete atheist, but see themselves as Jewish. It's probably less extreme but similar. Coming from a Catholic background, you feel you're part of that tribe…

Frank's answer points to the concept of 'cultural Catholicism,' in which Catholicism and its traditions are identified with, but not actively practised. While issues at play are too broad and multidimensional to expand on fully within this particular conversation, Donald Smith notes that modern-day Catholic cultural identity in secular Scotland could stem from the historic need of Irish immigrants in Scotland to 'keep their solidarity alive' when being targeted with sectarian abuse (Smith, 2013: 64). Along similar lines, Frank developed his thoughts on feeling 'part of a tribe' by explaining that he: 'used to think about Protestants as 'them' as opposed to 'us'…' He admitted that his feelings 'might tend towards sectarianism,' but added that the Sunday Assembly had been helpful in allowing him to 'disassociate' from such a perspective.

iii. Admiration of the person of Jesus Christ

Later, Frank added that he 'admires' the figure of Jesus Christ. He explained his position in this way:

> I actually admire the figure of Jesus, even though I'm not sure I would take it literally. There have been a lot of nods when I've said that- 'Me too, me too.' That's not such an uncommon point of view, actually. I noticed that…they do tend to get attracted to the figure of Jesus.

Frank's assertion that this view is not uncommon within the membership of the organisation was supported by a poetry reading, which coincided with my first field visit to the Edinburgh Assembly. The selected poem at the meeting in question was 'Three Rusty Nails,' by Roger

McGough (McGough, 2004). The poet narrates from the perspective of a young child, who meets Jesus on their doorstep. In return for the child's help, Jesus hands over three rusty nails. The text is replete with theological allusions, and hints towards soteriology. It was evident that the membership of the Assembly was not uncomfortable when Jesus was mentioned.

 Frank's perspective and the reading of McGough's poem can be located within phenomenon explored within the work of Tom Krattenmaker, who identifies an abiding need for meaning and inspiration in post-religious America. Despite being nonreligious, Krattenmaker draws on sociological research to suggest that secular people might find inspiration in the figure of Jesus. For him, Jesus is the embodiment of humility, wisdom, peace, generosity, and justice. 'From Jesus,' Krattenmaker writes, 'I have long drawn inspiration and a deep...sense of how to live and how to treat others' (Krattenmaker, 2016: 8). He adds that the term 'secular Jesus follower' is not yet in wide circulation, but contends that 'the idea enjoys great and growing, albeit unarticulated, resonance,' and that it could 'address a longing or need felt by many' (2016, 12). Krattenmaker's phraseology recalls the post-church societal 'vacuum' identified by Heelas and Woodhead, and Kitcher, in their respective works. The significance of this will become evident in due course. Further, Krattenmaker's 're-discovery' of Jesus as an ethical guru is another example of how vestiges of religious life and identity are evident in an increasingly secular world.

iv. Perceived need for pastoral care

In addition to vestiges of Christian practise, and the on-going adoption of a Christian congregational style of community, members of the Sunday Assembly in Edinburgh expressed their desire for a system of organised pastoral care. At present, the Sunday Assembly abides by a three-point motto: 'Live Better, Help Often, Wonder More.' While discussing the 'help' aspect of the motto and what it might entail, respondents tended towards answers which incorporated their want for organised support. Stephen outlined the current predicament:

> I remember when I went to church, they talked about suffering and the state of the world every single time you'd go along to a service. It's something the Assembly has dipped into a bit…I don't know if the word 'implied' comes into it, but we are having to think through…helping others in a time of need, social issues like homelessness or hunger or food banks, the kind of pastoral care type stuff. We just haven't gone into it in a massive amount of detail.

Stephen later added that pastoral care was something he hoped would be an aspect of the Assembly in future. He declared: 'It should be. We model ourselves on church, and churches have that care. Why shouldn't we?' For Stephen, if the congregational format of the Assembly, its communal singing, reflection time, and talks could be carried over from a church setting, pastoral care could be, too.

 In Edinburgh, the Assembly currently has no official, organised pastoral care. In part, this is due to the leadership. Leaders of the Sunday Assembly are not expected to take on pastoring duties. Moreover, unlike at the flagship congregation in London, which is led by the movement's co-founders Sanderson and Pippa, regional assemblies tend to be led by teams, or by different people each month. Because of this, Frank explained, there is 'no equivalent of a priest or a minister' at Sunday Assembly. He added, 'It isn't a case of having one individual you can approach with problems.' Jane echoed Linda's earlier comments regarding the lack of cohesion within Sunday Assembly communities, and touched on her own perceptions of what church-based pastoral care might involve:

> I've never been involved really meaningfully in a local church, but I have a vision of people who…are sad, out of sorts, ill, bereaved, hungry…the community comes together to help them. That sort of thing, of helping the community, is very difficult in Sunday Assembly, because we are…We're not a coherent body of people. There's a lot of new people every time, which you wouldn't get at church.

Jane explained that the Assembly's high turnover makes it difficult for pastoral care to take root within the community. The Edinburgh Assembly runs once per month, and often attracts people on a one-off basis; as such, the composition of the community tends to fluctuate.

 Despite this, Agnes was one member who continued to advocate church-style pastoral care. In expressing her desire for this, she outlined some practical considerations:

> I would like it if it [Sunday Assembly] did more in the way of supporting people as they need it. So probably a bit like the way that churches do. Say if someone

was ill, someone would visit them, take them a meal, be aware of them, make
sure they're being looked after.

It is important to note that pastoral care *is* evident outwith church settings. The British

Humanist Association provides pastoral support through Humanist Care, its non-religious

pastoral care support network. The Association has around 150 secular pastoral carers in its

network, who are stationed in schools, university campuses, and NHS hospitals (British

Humanist Association, 2017). Additionally, Humanist Chaplains are prevalent in similar

social institutions, and are trained to provide care based on rational, Humanist principles.

However, this is not the kind of care that Sunday Assembly participants describe or desire.

Within the extracts above, respondents clearly communicated their collective desire for

pastoral care based on that which occurs in church settings. In particular, they mentioned

looking after the sick, pastoral visits, and speaking with an appointed carer, such as a minister

or priest.

Conclusion

This paper has outlined several 'vestiges' or remnants of church life, present, identified, and

drawn out within the setting of a secular congregation in Scotland. In part, the church-like

structures and rituals of Sunday Assembly meetings represent the desires of members to

partake in a situation of 'church without God.' But what do these findings suggests about the

state of religion and the process of secularisation in Scotland? For sociologists Heelas and

Woodhead, dominant theories of secularisation, which emphasise the 'decline of religious

traditions in 'Western' settings,' are misguided (Heelas, 2006: 51). They argue that new

expressions of meaning and community have proliferated the spiritual gap between belief and

unbelief, thus complexifying a more linear perspective on the process of secularisation.

Though Heelas and Woodhead conducted their Kendal Project on religion and alternative

expressions of spirituality between the year 2000 and 2001, their claims about the untidiness

of secularisation patterns and the conception of 'New Age' spiritualities can now be

supported by the findings contained within this work. While sociologists have concentrated

on the presence of these expressions, this work has explored their theological facets. In speaking with members of the Sunday Assembly in Edinburgh, it is clear that religious identity has not been altogether abandoned. Instead, this secular group, which fits the profile of Heelas and Woodhead's 'new expressions' of spirituality, has chosen to incorporate various aspects of the religious life into its activities. This is notably true of the Sunday Assembly's only Scottish presence in Edinburgh.

  The broader findings of this study relate also to the Assembly's flagship congregation in London, where such 'vestiges' of religious identity, ritual, and memory, are not as readily apparent. Members there have distanced themselves from the label of 'atheist church,' which was initially utilised, according to co-founder Sanderson Jones, as a method of creating cognitive dissonance and thus attracting attention. This descriptor has since been abandoned for its use of the word 'church,' and the term 'secular congregation' adopted in its place. Additionally, members I spoke with in London were less forthright in identifying the components of church life and identity which have been subsumed by the organisation. Sarah, a member of the organising committee in London, explained that:

> In London, we're trying to move away from that 'church' idea...It was maybe useful in the beginning to attract people, but we're not a church, and we don't do the same kinds of things as churches do.

By contrast, members of the Edinburgh Assembly gave answers which touched on aspects of religious identity, ritual, and memory evident within the community. On a microcosmic level, this might suggest that there is a stronger sense of 'religious memory' amongst members of the Sunday Assembly in Scotland. Religion here appears to be present within the conscious of those attending, whether related to a cultural sense of identity, a need for the ritual and congregational style of church, or a desire for care and the alleviation for the twenty-first century epidemic of loneliness.

  This particular piece of work is not intended to argue that 'vestiges' of religion are more apparent within the Scottish context; but there is space and scope for such a comparative study to take place within the fields of theology or sociology at a later stage. Instead, it is intended to contribute to the conversation surrounding religion in Scotland in the present day,

by contributing new data collected within a secular organisation. Data collected at the Sunday Assembly opens out onto further conversations for the church, about how best to support those who move away from or leave the church. This study is not apologetic, in the sense that it does not seek to defend the church to atheists, or to those who have chosen to partake in secular forms of ritual. But it does seek to communicate and describe the presence of 'vestiges' of religion; aspects of identity, ritual, and memory; that present themselves within this particular non- religious setting. It is hoped that there will be further excavations of these new expressions of congregational activity, particularly given that the 'vestiges' of Christian life elucidated here hint at the presence of continuing Christian identity, even within an increasingly secular world.

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