Ever since the publication of Callum Brown's *The Death of Christian Britain*, historians of religion have increasingly focused on the 1960s as a key decade of religious change. In spite of a growing consensus that something dramatic happened to Western Christendom in the long 1960s, there is less agreement about how to understand these changes with respect to what came before. In Brown’s account, the rapid secularization of the 1960s represented a sharp break from the persistent and pervasive “discursive Christianity” that continued and even strengthened through the 1950s. Other scholars, most notably the sociologists of religion Steve Bruce and David Voas, emphasize the long-term and gradual nature of religious decline, with the 1960s representing a culmination of trends that had been in place for decades. Understanding the strength and character of religion in the 1950s is, therefore, critical for characterizing the nature of religious change in what Hugh McLeod has called the “religious crisis of the 1960s.”

In this slim but data-rich book, Clive Field casts light on the state of religion in Britain in the “long 1950s” that, in Field’s account, stretched from 1945 to 1963. Drawing on contemporary academic studies, public opinion surveys, and data compiled by the churches themselves, Field assesses the social significance of religion in three realms: belonging, behaving, and believing. Field is the ideal author for a study of this sort. President of the Religious Archives Group and co-director of the invaluable British Religion in Numbers project (www.brin.ac.uk), Field is a steady and confident guide through the mountain of available evidence (the BRIN database contains over a hundred studies for this period). He takes us on a brisk tour of the quantitative evidence for Britons’ levels of religious affiliation, membership, church attendance, participation in Christian rites of passage, belief in God, and a host of other indices to evaluate Brown’s argument that the 1950s were a period of religious revival.

In Field’s estimation, that evidence is lacking. Though measures of affiliation and membership for the Church of England, Church of Scotland, and Roman Catholic Church remained fairly stable, the Free Churches experienced dramatic (and in some cases catastrophic) decline. Rates of church attendance, which had already been on a downward trajectory from the late nineteenth century, continued to diminish. Disbelief in God became more common. Field concludes that “the 1950s were not some pinnacle of religious revivalism” but should, instead, be “understood in the context of a progressive and protracted...
secularization of the role of religion in British life, a process which had already started before that decade and which continued long afterwards" (pp. 109, 110). Field's answer to the question posed in his title is, then, a definitive "No."

There is, to be sure, little in Field's data that would lend support to Brown's depiction of the long 1950s as a period of puritanism and Billy Graham-style revivalism. But Field's own data do suggest that there was a real, if small, increase in many measures of religiosity in the 1950s. Much of the data that Field examines is the product of one-off surveys, useful for analyzing variations across age, gender, and region but unable to tell us much about how things changed in the period under consideration. To best answer the question of how religious belonging, behaving, and believing changed in the 1950s, we need to focus on longitudinal data, however imperfect they are. These data, as often as not, suggest that the 1950s witnessed a limited religious revival. A 1946 Gallup poll, for instance, found that 83% of respondents identified with one of mainstream churches. In 1963, that proportion had increased to 90%. Surveys on churchgoing in this time period display considerable variation, but it is striking that, in contrast to the late 1940s, when almost half of respondents said they never attended church, a 1963 poll found that three-quarters claimed at least occasional attendance.

In contrast to Field's claim that "the trajectory [of decline] is unmistakable" (p. 110), then, there does seem to have been a modest increase in religious belonging and behavior (if not belief) in the 1950s. If we now see that increase as only a small blip in a trajectory of decline that stretches back to the nineteenth century, that perspective comes only with the benefit of hindsight and the knowledge that the pace of decline quickened in the 1960s. Focusing on the data from the 1950s, without knowing what was to come in the next decade, a mixed picture emerges, one that fits neither Brown's image of a sexually conservative and religiously oppressive society nor Field's of a waystation on the steady road to a secular society.

Rather than pointing to a clear story of decline, the evidence Field presents allows us to discern a shift towards what could be termed cultural Anglicanism. Field estimates that, between 1939 and 1963, the percentage of the adult population who identified as Anglicans increased from 55% to 61%. Rates of participation in Anglican rites of passage remained high, with the Church of England administering the lion's share of infant baptisms and religious weddings. These apparent successes were counterbalanced by a continuing decline in numbers on Anglican electoral rolls (the Church of England's formal mark of membership) and in frequency of church attendance. Field downplays the significance of "passive" participants as little more than "nominal Anglicans," but the fact that they continued to identify as such calls out for