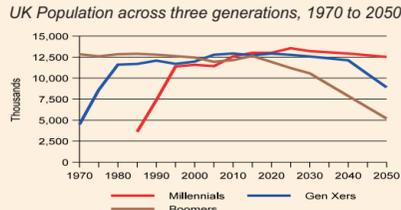


Millennials’ Moment

The five year period, 2015 to 2020, which we currently are in, is an interesting one in relation to Millennial demography. The graph shows the UK population by three age-groups – those called the Millennials (born, for the purposes of this graph, 1981 to 1995), Gen X (born 1966 to 1980) and the Boomers (born 1951 to 1965).



Most generations dominate the population at some stage in their life. It may be seen from the graph that the Millennials are now the largest of these three population groups which in 2015 constituted three-fifths (58%) of the entire population, and in 2020 will be 56%. It is from now that the Millennials are the dominant generation in our population until about 2040, when those coming after them, the so-called “Gen Z,” will eventually overtake them. For the next 20 or so years they are the largest single age-cohort, and both they and their ideas are therefore likely to penetrate every facet of British society.

That may include the church. The Millennials themselves are a fifth (19%) of the total population. In churchgoing terms, Millennials are 12% of total churchgoers, so, as is already known, there is a considerable lack of people in this age-group. In 2030 Millennials will still be 19% of the total population, but only 15% of churchgoers, their percentage rising because so many older churchgoers will have died. The increased percentage, however, indicates that they are likely to be a greater influence in church affairs, many of whom in that broad age-group (roughly 35 to 50 in 2030) will be in positions of lay leadership.

Those in the Millennial age-group are 13% of current Church of England stipendiary clergy, so the C of E has some way to go for similar proportions, but it is seeking to attract more in this age-group. However, exactly half (50%) of current Millennials in 2020 are male, and half are female, but of the Millennial-aged clergy only 28% were female in 2017.

In 2020, the Millennials span a wide age-group, which can be broken into three sub-groups – those aged 25 to 29, those aged 30 to 34 and those 35 and over. The youngest and oldest of these groups are in fact significantly different. Many in the youngest group will be cohabiting, many in the oldest married. Many of those in the middle group will be having their first child. Many will stay single. Many will live in rented accommodation, finding it very hard to save for a house deposit. Quite a few may fear being assaulted (especially women) or a victim of crime.

If the latest small-scale reports turn out to be representative many in the youngest group will not be watching pornography (as those in the oldest group did and perhaps still do), nor are they having casual sex as those in the oldest group did. All will be tech-savvy, and possibly those in the youngest group will have more advanced technology than those in the oldest group, but are less likely to be purchasing new models – their existing phone giving them access to all the information and functions they need. They will be in a position, however, to advise churches on the latest IT products and help churches produce their own apps and other devices.

Millennials expect to wear casual clothing to work, including jeans and sneakers, for meetings and day-to-day work. They are usually sociable, consultative, unassuming and optimistic, but they have a low loyalty to their (usually Gen X) manager or (Boomer) employer. They are happy to talk about anything, including their personal life, and will constantly communicate via Twitter, Facebook and so on, multi-tasking, wanting frequent rewards and recognition, and have an active focus on their professional development. They dislike having vague instructions and those who do not share their beliefs and priorities.

A Barna study asked why attending church was important for those Millennials who said it was. The main reason was that they “go to be closer to God” (44%), “to learn about God there” (27%), and that “the Bible says we should go” (22%). Church was deemed a place “to find answers if you want to live a meaningful life” (65%). However, the Millennials in this sample felt that Christianity’s image was primarily of pointing the finger (37%), or as a prorester (16%). A quarter (24%) saw it as a helping hand reaching out to a person in need.

The key reason why Millennials stay in church is that they form a close personal friendship with an adult in the church or parish (59%). They have also learned how Christians positively contribute to society (46%), and have seen their own gifts and passions as part of God’s vocational calling (45%). Regular prayer (60%) and reading the Bible (27%) are also key.

SOURCES: Graph based on similar graph for the US in *The World in 2019*, The Economist, 2018, Page 44. *Ministry Statistics 2017*, Research and Statistics Dept, Archbishops’ Council; *UK Church Statistics*, No 3, 2018 Edition, Table 13.2.1; article “The Trouble with X” by Laura Evans, *The Professional Manager*, Summer 2013, Page 58; *What Millennials want when they visit church*, March 2015, www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials.

• The mix of religion in London is exceptional (a “hotspot”) because the many immigrants bring their own religion with them. “The world is arriving in London on a daily basis.” But the explosion seen in London is also happening in New York, Lagos and Singapore.

• The denominational make-up of religion in London is important, especially the Roman Catholics, while Methodism is being “re-interpreted.” So are other religions (42 Hindu temples in London in 2003).

• London is no longer a European city – it is a global metropolis, a gateway city, shown in its ever-expanding religious market. The emphasis on personal transformation in London’s growth can hinder social impact.

• Religion in Britain is dominated by its cultural heritage, the old mode of public expression, the shift from *having* to attend to *wanting* to attend, the waves of arriving immigrants, and the secular alternatives.

• Patterns of religion in Britain and Europe are an exception in global terms – we are more secular, but we talk about religion much more than we used to. London’s religion is re-balancing these factors – is what is happening there exceptional or an indication of things to come?

RELIGION IN LONDON

A public seminar on “The Deseccularisation of the City” by Kings College London in January 2019 brought together some 80 people from a variety of backgrounds. Comments made by speakers and delegates included:

• The changing population of London over the last century was essentially due to the numbers of non-British immigrants.

• There were probably more churches in London in 2012 than the 4,800 indicated by the London Church Census that year, especially in the Boroughs of Newham and Southwark.

• Religion appears to be static or declining in the richer Boroughs while in the poorer Boroughs it is growing.

• The London Cathedrals are also doing an incredible job with growing congregations. “Nobody ever refuses an invitation to go to Westminster Abbey.”

• There is a gender issue in London church attendance – many more women than men attend. Is there a class issue also – rich young people wanting to get on? 18% of London’s population are in their 20s, against 11% of the population generally. Are we in danger of confusing frequency of attendance with social status?

• If the growth of religion in London is primarily due to immigration that growth will slow down, but it brings ethnicity into the centre of discussion.

• In 2011, 43% of London’s population was White British, 42% Non-White and 15% Other (non-British) White. Over the previous decade, 600,000 White British had left London, but 1.6 million people had moved in! The rise in “No Religion” in London is primarily due to its increase in the White British (from 15% to 28%), so the secularisation in London is primarily due to the White British.

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• Patterns of religion in Britain and Europe are an exception in global terms – we are more secular, but we talk about religion much more than we used to. London’s religion is re-balancing these factors – is what is happening there exceptional or an indication of things to come?

SOURCE: Personal attendance, January 25th 2019; based on the book *The Deseccularisation of the City*, edited by David Goodhew and Anthony Paul-Cooper, Routledge, 2019.

1 Kingston upon Thames
2 Hammersmith and Fulham
3 Kensington and Chelsea
4 Westminster

Decades of Social Change

The Social Research Association (SRA) began in 1978, so was 40 years old in 2018. A small committee, including this writer, headed by Sir Roger Jowell (he had not been knighted then though) planned a series of public lectures to pilot the idea, and when sufficient support was clearly forthcoming, the SRA was launched. It now has hundreds of members.

In the decades between then and now much has changed. We have had our first female prime minister, we have fought the Falklands War, the Berlin Wall was still standing in 1978, the term “New Labour” was 16 years away then, and the internet had not been invented (but by 2013 83% of UK households had access to it). Just over half, 56%, of British women went to work in 1978, but now 71% do. In 1984 37% of the public disagreed that “A man’s job is to earn money; a woman’s job is to look after the home and family”, but 72% disagreed in 2018. In 1980, 68,000 young people graduated from university (37% female); in 2011 351,000 did (56% female).

Churchwise, in 1980 10% of the population went to church on Sunday in England; by 2018 only 5% did so. Anglicans were 28% of the total attending then, but 25% today. Roman Catholics were 35% then, but are only 27% today; Pentecostals were 5% in 1980, and are 15% of the total today. In Scotland, 17% of the population attended then, but just 7% go to church now, and the Catholics have declined there also, from 40% to 34%, and the Church of Scotland from 44% to 35% in 2018. In 1980 26% of English churchgoers were under 15; in 2018 it was 16%. In 1980 18% of English churchgoers were 65 or over; in 2018 it was 34%.

What is the value of looking at such macro changes, both social and religious? They sometimes help us to pause, think, and consider what the future changes might be and how we should adapt our church opportunities to them. As elsewhere in this issue, the Millennials (35 to 50) are set to become the largest generation in the UK between 2020 and 2040. Sunday church attendance is likely to continue to decrease (4% of population by 2030) but greater numbers will attend midweek (but not making up the Sunday losses). Technology will continue to prompt mega changes – we now have 4G; 5G is coming. Will there be a 6G? Already an implanted “chip” culture is underway and likely to become more inclusive. There will be fewer children born pro rata, and fewer brought up with a conventional married couple. Half our children already are not living with their two natural parents when they take their GCSEs, a percentage likely to grow.

Church life will be more local community centred, with many more elderly people involved. The proportion of evangelicals is likely to grow (above half by 2030) but their overall numbers will lessen. Making a significant impact will be harder. More congregations will start but their number will be almost offset by closures, perhaps a net increase of just over 100 per annum by 2030. Churches will struggle to find able leaders.

Very few of the technological and social changes and their impact could have been foreseen in detail by the embryo SRA in 1978 and this may well be true of the 40-year old SRA in 2018. But perhaps the Church can benefit from its past analyses and future trends, resting in God’s sovereignty and seeking to implement His purposes.

SOURCE: *Research Matters*, SRA, December 2018; *UK Church Statistics*, No 3, 2018 Edition; various unpublished analyses.

5 City of London
6 Ilkington
7 Hackney
8 Waltham Forest

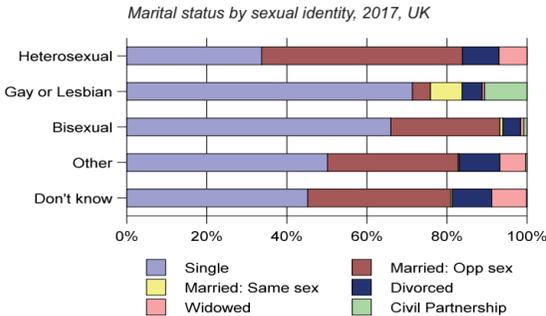
Sexual Identity

One of the questions in the annual Population Survey by the Office for National Statistics is on sexual identity. The most recent one (for 2017) indicates that 93% of the population regards itself as heterosexual or straight, 1% gay or lesbian (2% gay, 1% lesbian), 1% bisexual, 1% other with 4% who didn’t know or refused to answer the question. This is based on a random sample of 53,000 adults, just under 1% of the population.

Measured each year since 2012, the proportions have not varied over time significantly since then, when they were, respectively, 94%, 1%, ½%, ½% and 4%. Nor have they varied by gender; gays have consistently been twice as many as lesbians, and female bisexuals half as many again as male bisexuals.

They do vary somewhat by age, with the age-group 16 to 24 the most different. In 2017 those in this age-group were 90% heterosexual, 2% gay/lesbian, 2% bisexual, 1% other and 5% who didn’t know. This compares with those 65 and over who were, respectively, 95%, ½%, ½%, ½% and 3½%. Bisexual means “those attracted to both men and women” (Bing on web).

Nor do the figures vary much by marital status. Of those married to the opposite sex in 2017, 96% were heterosexual, 0% gay/lesbian, ½% bisexual, ½% other, and 3% didn’t know. Of those who were single the percentages were, respectively, 90%, 3%, 1%, 1%, and 5%. However, the marital status of those in the smaller groupings are different, as might be expected, as shown in the chart:



If one assumes that those who “don’t know” their sexuality are in fact distributed as the rest of the population (and they might not be), then overall, the UK population would be 97% heterosexual, 0.9% gay, 0.5% lesbian and 1.6% bisexual or other. Some of these will be churchgoers. A 2016 article estimated that the percentage of churchgoers who are non-heterosexual could be 1 or 2% of the total, that is, a slightly smaller percentage than in the population as a whole.

In the light of these figures, it does seem that the focus of recent years, firstly on homosexuality and recently on other forms of sexuality, is out of all proportion to their actual representation in the population. It could be argued, therefore, that the emphasis in the media, in our schools, etc, regardless of a secular or Scriptural viewpoint, is totally misplaced.

SOURCES: Legal Marital Status by Sexual Identity, Office for National Statistics, UK 2012-2017, November 2018, *Perspectives*, May, 2016.

Cremations and Midweek

An Anglican minister who is responsible for 7 rural parishes and subscribes to *FutureFirst* wrote after the previous issue with these comments:

Cremations. “I suspect that the largest decline in Christian services [in crematoria] is in towns where many funeral directors now say to families, ‘Do you want a religious service or a non-religious one?’ and make no reference to their local church. When I was responsible for occasional office fees across the Diocese this was a familiar story from clergy.

“Here in the rural parishes we have around 15 funerals a year, of which about a third are cremations, whether preceded or followed by a church service. Invariably the ashes return to the village to be interred in the churchyard.

Midweek attendance. “One of the growth points in one of my churches is a midweek BCP communion. Because we only have two services month in each church across the benefice there are those who will come midweek, either because of family commitments or because there was no service in their church on Sunday. Interestingly the folks come from several parishes. I suspect some are attracted by the fact that it is BCP!” [Book of Common Prayer]

Letters/emails from other readers on their own experience of these topics (or any other) are always very welcome.

SOURCE: Personal communication, February 2019.

CONTENTS

Am I Serving a Dying Church?	P1
The Most Popular Preaching Books	P2
American Christianity	P2
Retiring Baptists	P3
Snowflakes	P4
Millennials’ Moment	P5
Religion in London	P5
Decades of Social Change	P6
Sexual Identity	P6
Cremations and Midweek	P6



FUTURE FIRST

FACTS FOR FORWARD PLANNING

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AM I SERVING A DYING CHURCH?

Rev Alan Donaldson, General Director, Baptist Union of Scotland

Statistical analysis of the church in Scotland begs the question, “Am I serving a dying church?” To this central question I would want to add others, in the light of John 15: “Is God pruning the Scottish Church? Is God cutting out the Scottish Church? Are we farming poorly, or are we working poor quality soil? Is this some form of exilic punishment or, as Alan Roxburgh describes, “is it the gift that forces us to learn to ask God-centred questions...?”

The Scottish Churches’ Census, reported in Peter Brierley’s *Growth Amidst Decline*, suggests that there are good news stories in Scotland that we might learn from, particularly among African congregations, Messy Churches and some of the larger Pentecostal congregations. It has been the church’s default response for many decades to franchise the patterns of perceived success. Initially the work of denominations across the western world, the franchising pattern, has in the post-denominational era been taken up by some mega-churches.

I wish, however, to propose an alternative perspective in understanding and responding to these statistics. My approach, informed by the science of Complexity Theory, largely rejects the Newtonian cause and effect model of leadership widely adopted across churches today. Put simply, Complexity Theory recognises that the world is complex, not merely complicated; that order, beauty and growth can develop through emergence; and that emergence is rooted in self-organisation rather than command and control structures.

I would want to recognise that the church is a living body significantly impacted by its environment. As such, like all living things since the Fall, it has a predisposition to decay. The prolonged period of equilibrium known as Christendom has dulled the sense of the church to the significant environmental changes which have resulted in its current unravelling. The church is not alone in this: we live in a time of stunted generational progress, political parties and trade unions that fail to attract members and High Streets that are in decline, as are many sports clubs and community organisations.

And yet it is on the edge of this type of chaos where great opportunities are often found. It is in the cutting and pruning of the vine, in John 15, that fruitfulness flows. It is at the foot of the Cross and in the uncertainty of the next three days that Resurrection life is found. I want to argue that the route to growth, in the face of decline, is in choosing death rather than tweaking current models or imitating other, growing churches.

Complexity Theory describes living systems, such as churches, being impacted by ‘attractors’ that orientate them in particular directions. These attractors help churches negotiate their place in the surrounding environment. Three such attractors are key, as we reflect on the church census results.

Point attractors

These are useful when the environment is stable. You keep doing what you have been doing and you will get the same results. When you have “monopoly” conditions, there is no need to change anything if you are experiencing success. Traditional attractional models of church experienced monopoly conditions for hundreds of years and church growth required the planting of more of these churches doing the same things. Today, point attractor churches still grow. I would argue that these are churches that are already large and have an ability to make minor adaptations to their style and staffing in response to consumer demand. Their monopoly is no longer over society but over those who are already committed to going to church. I believe this partially explains the growth in Cathedral worship and the larger Pentecostal churches that we see and celebrate across the nation. It also has a bearing on mono-ethnic churches where there is a religious, cultural and language monopoly. For most Scottish congregations, there is no way to replicate the monopoly; and while lessons can be learned from these churches, there is little for a local church to imitate that would lead to growth.

Cycle attractor

As the name suggests, these are environmental factors that come and go, impacting the church for a period of time and then impacting it differently when the cycle moves on. For example, in Scotland the redeployment of military personnel impacted the churches, as did dramatic depopulation of certain islands. From a growth perspective, the decline in American oil workers in Aberdeen led to the increase of Nigerian oil workers, which subsequently created the potential for substantial church growth among the Nigerian community. Whilst particular patterns of worship, leadership, strategy and devotion have harvested this population migration, there remains little evidence that adopting these same values will lead other churches to grow.

Strange attractor

For most churches in Scotland which are experiencing decline, we need to escape the natural tendencies to either attempt to imitate success or resort to entrenchment. An alternative response is to develop what Complexity Theory calls “strange attractors”. A strange attractor consists of a unique blend of founding charisms, disciplines, and engagement with the environment. In Christian terms, these would include: a creative exploration of and participation in our church roots; practising the disciplines of “abiding in Christ” such as prayer, sharing faith, hospitality, reading Scripture; joining God who is already at work in our communities and networks. The result of such a process of discernment should be a variety of church expressions, of which some will discover health and growth.

While the church may still struggle with the concept of participating in the mission of God, prior to knowing what the church will look like, there are many early signs of fruitfulness in the Scottish churches consistent with a strange attractor approach such as: the growing recognition that the equilibrium must be disturbed; an increasing willingness to die to our traditional style; a serious embrace of the priesthood and witness of all believers; a re-evaluating of denominational structures around founding charisms; a new generation crying out for authenticity and fresh approaches to spiritual disciplines; and depth of church engagement with local communities.

Beyond the churches which are currently growing numerically, I also see “growth amidst decline”: shoots of new life orientated by a strange attractor, rooted in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Correction. In the February 2019 issue there was a short article on Leadership Training in which it was mentioned that Dr David Cormack became Chair of MAF International. This should have been Chair of MAF Europe. It also said his successor was Dr Bryn Jones; this should have been Dr Bryn Hughes. Apologies for these mistakes.

Humour

“I tried to sue the airline for losing my luggage. I lost my case.”

Station platform announcement: “The train arriving at Platform 3 is on time. We’d like to apologise to passengers for any confusion this may cause ...”

“In my nursery hung a plaque which stated, ‘Today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday.’” (Mrs Heather Prescott)

“That’s a new one – a minister resigning because he wants to spend more time with his lawyers.” (Alan Paterson)

SOURCE: Email from Rev George Fisher, 9/2/19; cartoon caption anon; Letters to The Times, 1995.

SNOWFLAKES

Global Mission Workers. In 2015 there were about 400,000 mission workers (those serving overseas for at least two years), 121,000 of which were American (half of whom were Mormons). 27,400 came from Africa, up from 20,800 in 2010, and 30,000 were from South Korea, up from 20,000. Dr Todd Johnson, GCD Director, estimates there could be a further 40,000 independent mission workers.

SOURCE: Global Christian Database (GCD) data given in *The Economist*, 12th January, 2019, Pages 55-56.

Fertility Rates. Although the worldwide average Total Fertility Rate in 2016 (the latest year for data) was 2.4, the country with the highest was three times that, Niger with a TFR of 7.2. Then came Somalia with 6.3, Mali with 6.1, Burundi and Angola, both with 5.7 and Uganda with 5.6. The top 18 countries are all in Sub-Saharan Africa, making that continent’s average, 4.8, the highest. At the other end of the scale of the number of children a woman is likely to have in her lifetime are four countries with a rate of 1.2 (N Korea, Hong Kong, Moldova and Singapore), 5 with a rate of 1.3 (Cyprus, Greece, Macao, Portugal and Spain), and 6 with a rate of 1.4 (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Italy, Malta, Mauritius, and Slovakia).

SOURCE: *Fertility Rates*, The World Bank website, accessed January 2019.

Life of Churches. A research project among 228 Southern Baptist Convention churches in Adams County in Pennsylvania in north-east America found that just over a fifth, 22%, of newly started churches had closed within 12 months. Three-fifths, 60%, closed within 10 years! Those closing tended to have small congregations and no pastor, or a pastor who had left within 2 years of appointment.

SOURCE: Article in *Review of Religious Research*, Vol 60, No 4, December 2018, Page 470.

Former Mormons. A study of 335 adults who completed an anonymous online survey among active or former Mormon adults (Latter-Day Saints) in 2016 found that those who had left that church were more likely to be male (49% to 37% female) assuming the sample was representative. This is similar to the experience of Trinitarian Christians in England (between 1980 and 2020 the average percentage of men leaving the church was -1.4% and of women -1.0%; similar percentages in Scotland). An analysis of belief and life-style showed that those who left were less likely to attend church again and pray frequently but more likely to read the Scriptures.

SOURCE: Article in *Review of Religious Research*, Vol 60, No 4, December 2018, Page 541; 7 *Reasons your Church needs More Men*, Annabel Clarke & Nathan Blackaby, Engage 2018, Page 57.

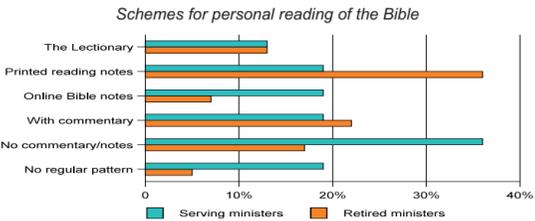
Lion Hudson. This Christian publisher went into administration in 2017, but was rescued in 2018. It sold just over £810,000 of books in 2018, inevitably down from its £1.1 million the previous year. More than half its sales are overseas, and its many books have been translated into over 200 languages.

SOURCES: *The Bookseller*, 18th January 2019, Page 7; <http://www.lionhudson.com> accessed February 2019.

advise ministers to prepare 5 or 10 years ahead for retirement, and make financial plans, developing hobbies. It was important to find a new church before a new home (advice not just relevant to ministers but all Christians who move home). Initially over half felt “relieved”, and two-fifths were joyful, but a fifth said they were lonely. Half said they especially missed not being a minister at Christmas and Easter.

Nine-tenths, 89%, had made a will, but only a quarter, 25%, a power of attorney. Nearly two-fifths, 38%, had chosen the hymns for their funeral!

Two-thirds, 68%, maintained their daily devotions, with a further quarter, 28%, having such “most days”. Retired ministers and practising ministers had different Bible reading habits:



A quarter of the retirees, 25%, were not accountable to anyone spiritually and the same percentage had a mentor. Over half, 57%, had continued some Biblical or theological study. Just over half were very happy (53%) or happy (19%) with their present church, and similar proportions said it was supportive, and they felt part of it. Two-thirds (64%) belonged to a house group. Most, 91%, had made some friends, with 72% having friends outside the church. A quarter had had a visit or letter from their Regional Minister, and a quarter had served as a Moderator of another church.

So, overall, what did retirement add up to for those Baptist ministers sampled? In a word, “Freedom” said 87%. Half said they were still passionate about the Gospel (47%). However, many (75%) felt they had been “abandoned”; they felt they were in a special category, as would be the perception of retired Anglican ministers. The calling experienced initially propelling them into ministry had not ceased with their retirement, and retired ministers often needed help to know how that calling might be continued – and honoured.



SOURCE: *Retirement Matters for Ministers*, Paul Beasley-Murray, College for Baptist Ministers, 2018; Article “How much do I need to retire?”, *Daily Telegraph* 3rd January 2018; “Ministers’ Reading Habits”, *Baptist Quarterly*, Paul Beasley-Murray, Vol 49 No 1, January 2018; *Reaching and Keeping Teenagers*, Peter Brierley, Christian Research, 1993; *Supporting the ministry of retired clergy*, Archbishops’ Council, 2014.

Retiring Baptists

A research report on how Baptist ministers experience retirement was published last year by the College of Baptist Ministers. It was undertaken by Rev Dr Paul Beasley-Murray, now retired from his pastorates at Chelmsford and Altrincham, his principalship of Spurgeons, time in Zaire (and much more as detailed in his 2018 autobiography *This is my Story*), so he speaks with some experience.

He interviewed 17 retired Baptist ministers and sent a questionnaire to a small random number of others, 36 of whom replied. These 53 replies are roughly 5% of the total, as there are just under 900 Baptist ministers in the Baptist pension scheme, and perhaps approximately 100 others not belonging to it. All but 3 respondents were male; a third, 36%, were 75 or over.

A third, 31%, had retired before they were 65, just over half at 65, 10% between 66-69, and 4% at 70. A quarter had taken up paid employment after retirement. While the average income when interviewed was £25,000, a third were under £20,000; most, however, said they had enough to live on and were comfortable. (Industry estimates a comfortable retirement requires an income of about £25,000). Three-quarters had been able to buy the house they lived in, the rest renting. However, some (but not all) had found the official Retired Baptist Ministers Housing Society very difficult. Seven in eight, 87%, had moved away from their church on retirement (the Church of England insists all its ministers do so).

Most said they and their spouse were in reasonable health – the main regular exercise including walks, short and long, and gardening. Did they have worries or concerns about the future? Half said YES, half said NO! “If I die first will my wife have enough to live on?”; “We will need to downsize sometime and that isn’t attractive”; “Would like to keep my mental facilities”; “Leaving children who are struggling” were some of their concerns.

On average they had been retired for 11 years, having been a minister on average for 32 years. Most (72%) said the experience was “rewarding but they were tough times.” Would they do it again? Only three-fifths said YES.

The main high points were seeing people come to faith, baptising new Christians, seeing their church grow, leading worship and presiding at the Lord’s Table. The low points included confronting racism and sexism, their wife’s illness, and safeguarding issues, but they mostly related to power struggles, conflict, manipulation, diaconal aggression, criticism and gossip. For some this was so bad they resigned, some were sacked, others suffered clinical depression.

Three-fifths, 62%, of spouses had a positive view of ministry, and a third, 34%, of their children likewise. However, some of their children did not and have left the church subsequently; some 10% said their children had been “badly burnt” by the times of extreme tension. Half, 49%, of their children, now adults, were involved with the church and a similar percentage of their grandchildren (53%), a percentage close to a study in the 1990s when 60% of grandchildren went to church if their grandparents did.

Had ministers received helpful advice prior to retirement? Over half (55%) were positive and a quarter had found the adjustment “very easy”. Others mentioned a sense of loss, of “being on the edge,” that it was difficult to become an ordinary church member, and have an empty diary. They would

Also the various estimates across the years do allow a basis for future estimation which also can be helpful. The ASARB divides its numbers into three broad groups – Evangelicals, Mainline and Others. These were, respectively, 28%, 28% and 44% of the total in 1980 but were 31%, 19% and 50% by 2010. Which groups within each category had changed and why? The numbers by themselves are of little value unless they help in understanding the changes that are taking place and enable identification of key areas of movement, which then can be considered and where necessary acted upon. Such a statement is true for all statistical evaluation.

In the case of the American numbers evaluated by ASARB, personal estimates based on them for the year 2020 would suggest that in that year the proportions will be 32%, 17% and 51%, respectively, showing that evangelicals would appear to be continuing to grow slightly while the mainline religious groups in America decline.

Another use of such estimates is that they can be compared with other external data sets compiled in different ways, especially the decadal population censuses which most countries undertake and into which a huge amount of careful planning, rigorous assessment, spending of large sums of money and professional evaluation takes place. No Census is 100% accurate but its results are much more likely to be robust and reasonably trustworthy than most other studies. Unfortunately many denominational counts lack a similar thoroughness, usually simply because of financial affordability.

The ASARB estimate puts total religious group adherents at 38% of the American population in 2010 and 36% in 2020. This indicates that the number of adherents in the United States is declining, while for the number of evangelicals the percentage is growing slightly (as shown by the American General Social Survey). In this respect the United States is similar to the UK, although our percentage of the population which is Christian is dropping more rapidly, and the total number of evangelicals is declining rather than growing, although our evangelical percentage is increasing. As in the US, in the UK it is the mainline groups which are declining most.

It will be appreciated that if the robustness of the numbers is dubious then the conclusions naturally have an air of uncertainty. Depending on the parameters from which the figures are taken, it is still possible to evaluate trends, even from viable approximations, and, as such, statistics can provide guidelines for future strategies.

SOURCE: Article “... Documenting American Religious Change” by Rachel Bacon, et al, in *Review of Religious Research*, Vol 60, No 3, Sept 2018, Page 419; *Evangelicals around the World*, Brian Stiller, Todd Johnson, et al, World Evangelical Alliance, 2015, Pages 38-41.

American Christianity

While a multiplicity of statistics are available in many areas, both secular and religious, one situation where it is extraordinarily difficult to gain accurate figures is the number of Christians in America. The resulting analysis and interpretation is extremely complex as this article attempts to show.

The Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB) undertakes a decennial census and publishes the resulting data set. It now gives adherent numbers in the different American denominations rather than membership numbers. But over the years there have been a number of problems associated with the resultant findings:

Not every denomination measures adherents (or members) in the same way, nor do they use the same definitions, nor “double-count” on the old and new definitions when they are changed.

A number of schisms and mergers have taken place between religious groups, and the effect of these has to be estimated (adding it is thought 7% to basic numbers).

Some count “adherents” rather than “members,” and at least one major denomination, the United Methodists, switched their counting from members to adherents without any estimate of the extra numbers thus included (adding 9% to basic numbers when adjusted).

A lot of data is missing and this has to be estimated (adding 1% to basic numbers).

Most data is counted by “county”, a number of which make up every American state. But administrative changes cause their boundaries to change, so that “Orange County” in one year may not be exactly the same area as “Orange County” another year, or it may have merged with another county, and the impact of these changes in church counts is not noted (adding an estimated 2% to basic numbers).

These variations mean that at the end in the overall estimated total about 17% has come by statistical estimating rather than actual counts, though it is clear that such estimating has been very carefully done by ASARB.

The overall total of evangelicals published for 2010 by the Association (some 37 million out of 119 million total adherents, or 31%) is very different from those given by the World Christian Database for that year (51 million) or *Operation World* (92 million), both these latter sources using different methods of estimating total numbers.

The World Christian Database (based at the Centre for the Study of Global Christianity) adds together (a) those denominations it regards as 100% evangelical, (b) estimates for the percentage of evangelicals in non-evangelical denominations, and (c) counts also those evangelicals who do not belong to any denomination (the latter presumably excluded by ASARB). *Operation World* includes all these but also includes (d) estimates for the numbers of individuals whom they reckon hold given theological descriptions of their beliefs, even if they do not call themselves evangelical, thus leading to a much larger number.

Readers might well wonder if all this work is worthwhile or even useful if the resulting numbers have such wide variation. The value in all such data sets, so long as the same principles are applied to all countries, is that the summed results give a continental evaluation and global evaluation which is useful for internal comparison. Why, for example, are African evangelicals expanding at the rate of +4.5% per annum when in the rest of the world they are only expanding at +1.7%?

The Most Popular Preaching Books

Which books in the Bible are the most popular for preachers? A website called CrossPreach has taken some 127,000 sermons recorded and available on mp3s from over 600 churches, and counted how many times from which book of the Bible the basic text was taken.

The participating churches were assessed by a researcher in the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC) and were judged to be “mostly evangelical.” The sermons were preached by a total of 9,500 different preachers, so this is a very fair sample of sermons, with an average of 13 sermons per preacher. However, one feature was immediately noticeable – over two-fifths of sermons, 43%, had no specific text which was being explained, so were presumably talks on particular topics rather than expositions. It would have been very interesting to have had an analysis of the 55,000 topics preached upon, but the website doesn’t give this. However, that still leaves 72,000 sermons taken at random which is a good sample.

It would also be interesting to have had an analysis of how many preachers work through a book (as did Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones), and therefore preach more on a passage than a single text, but again this was not given on the website.

Of these 72,000, 50,000 were based on a NT text (69%) and the other 22,000 on an OT one (31%). Given that the NT is one-third the length of the OT (249 pages in my Bible to 815, 23% to 77%), this means that two-thirds of text-based sermons are based on only a quarter of the available material or Scriptures.

Which book was preached the most? In the NT that honour goes to Luke, 13% of the total, followed by John and Matthew, both at 12%. With Mark and Acts both at 7%, that means half of NT sermons come from the Gospels and Acts. One third, 33%, of NT sermons are from one of Paul’s letters (Romans being the most, followed by Ephesians, both at 6%), and of the remaining 16%, Hebrews takes 4%, Revelation and 1 Peter 3% each, and the remaining books the rest. In summary therefore that makes half from the Gospels/Acts, a third from Paul and a sixth from the rest.

In the Old Testament, the top book for preaching purposes is the Psalms, one fifth or 19%, followed by Genesis 13%, Isaiah 9% and Exodus at 8%. So four books account for half the OT texts! Including Isaiah, the prophets are 27% of the total (major 16%, minor 11%). The Pentateuch, including Genesis and Exodus, was 26% of the total, a quarter. The historical books (taken as Joshua to Esther) were 22%, and the remaining books, Job to Song of Songs, were 25%. This divides the OT into four more or less equally represented groups in this sample of sermons preached: The Beginnings (the Pentateuch), History, Poetry (or Writings) and Prophets.

It would be interesting to take a note of the sermons one actually hears in the course of a year and then fit the proportions into the groupings given above to see how average is the teaching we individually actually get! We could then read/study for ourselves those books which were missing from our diet.

Crossway (not the same group as far as is known) conducted a similar survey on which sections of the Bible were most read, and which readers found the hardest to understand. The percentages given have been grossed up to 100% and are shown in the Table, along with the figures given above.

Bible Reading frequency, comprehension, and teaching						
Passage	Pentateuch	Historical books	Writings	Prophets	Gospels & Acts	Rest of the NT
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Read most often	3	2	8	2	34	51
Hardest to understand	13	10	14	53	1	9
Preached	8	7	8	8	35	34

This Table shows that only for the Gospels are the figures balanced – read and preached most often and most readily understood. The Prophets show the greatest differentiation in their figures – read least, hardest to understand and explained only 8% of the time. The Pentateuch and Historical books are also read least, but are understood more readily, though even here more preaching/help would probably be appreciated. What is not given in this Table is any idea of “self-help” – how much daily notes are used, study Bibles, or commentaries and like material, or what kind of percentages a similar survey of Bible Study groups would engender.

There is another line which ideally should also be added – what should be the amount of attention we give to each part of the Scriptures? Is the NT three times more important for our daily living than the OT, for example? Balance this with the fact that Jesus and the NT writers frequently quoted and applied the OT Scriptures, even those we tend to overlook, and perhaps our emphasis calls for some re-adjustment!

SOURCES: <http://fiec.org.uk/what-we-do/strand/C2> article by Oil Tucker; www.crosspreach.com, accessed February 2019; article in *Answers* Nov-Dec 2018, Vol 13, No 6, Page 13.