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## FACTS FOR FORWARD PLANNING

# FUTURE FIRST

## SNIPPETS

1) Christians have the oldest average age of all religious groups in England and Wales – 51 years, compared with 40 for the overall population, while Muslims have the youngest average age at 27.

2) “Baby boomers have raised the least religious generation ever, with current church attitudes ‘abhorrent to the young’ not improving matters,” Prof Abby Day, Goldsmiths, University of London.

3) 27% of Americans expressed an unfavourable view of evangelicals, compared with 10% who have a negative view of mainline Protestants or 18% who have a negative view of Catholics.

4) 2021 was the 45th consecutive year (since 1977) with global temperatures (at least nominally) above the 20th century average.

5) Of the 6.5 million stories on 32 top subjects published in 2022 in the UK, with 1 billion readers, the Ukraine war accounted for 28%, a similar percentage to Covid in 2021.

6) Kenya is expected to have the highest GDP growth in Africa (after Libya) in 2023, because of expansion of trade with other countries, and its use of better infrastructure.

7) The UK’s annual population growth in 2023 is expected to be just 0.8%, 135th in the world’s 195 countries.

**SOURCE:** 1) and 2) Office for National Statistics Census 2021: Religion, and Religion Media Centre, 31st January, 2023; 3) Pew Research Centre, 15th March, 2023; 4) *Impact*, Market Research Society, Issue 40, January 2023, Page 19; 5) *The Economist*, 24th December, 2022, Page 61; 6) *World Ahead 2023*, *The Economist*, Page 107; 7) Industry Leader, <http://www.populationpyramid.net/hup/population-growth/2015/1>.

## Religion in Britain in the 2020s

**While it is true that Christian adherents across the UK now number only 46% of the population, as shown by the results of the 2021 Population Census, it is still by far the most popular religion in the country. In all the 309 District Authorities in England and 22 in Wales Christian adherents were present in significant numbers.**

Outside Greater London, Leicester City has the lowest percentage of any local authority at 25%, but several other authorities have low percentages as well. Brighton & Hove has 30%, Birmingham 34%, Cambridge, Nottingham and Oadby & Wigston (in Leicestershire) all have 35%, Manchester is 36% and there are another 6 which are 38 or 39% (Hastings, Blackburn with Darwen, Oxford, Pendle, Portsmouth and Sheffield). Inner London is only 38% also.

At county level, the one with the lowest percentage is Leicestershire with 39.2%, closely followed by the old Avon with 39.4%, but there are 4 which have only 41% – East Sussex, Greater London, West Midlands and West Yorkshire.

At the other end of the scale is the county of Merseyside, the highest with 60%, because of its large Catholic population, followed by Cumbria with 57% and Cheshire with 55%. A further 13 out of 47 English counties have between 50 and 54%. With the overall average in England being 46%, it is not surprising that half the counties average between 45 and 49%.

The map on Page 2 showing Christian adherents reflects these various percentages, and illustrates that the largest proportions are in the north and west of England, north of a line joining the Severn and The Wash (excluding Leicestershire), though with Somerset and Surrey as outliers in the south. It is interesting that Birmingham (West Midlands) is shown completely surrounded by counties with a higher percentage of adherents, reflecting the fact that this part of the country is seeing many growing churches.

Wales has a lower percentage of Christian adherents than England – 44%. Of their 8 old counties, Clwyd and Gwynedd in the north had 50%, matching the percentage on the English side of its border. The lowest Welsh percentage was 38% in Mid-Glamorgan which includes Rhondda Cynon Taff (home of the Royal Mint) where only 36% were adherents. The central counties of Dyfed and Powsy were between 45 and 49%.

Some of London’s Boroughs have small percentages. Lowest of all is Tower Hamlets with 22%, but 7 out of Inner London’s 14 Boroughs and 8 of Outer London’s 18 Boroughs all have percentages between 30 and 39%. Highest is Kensington & Chelsea with 48% in Inner London, and Havering with 52% and Bexley with 50% in Outer London.

### Muslims

One key reason why some parts of England have low Christian percentages is simply because there are large numbers of those in other religions present, of which Islam is the largest. Three fifths, 61%, of all those in Other

Religions declared in the 2021 Census were Muslim. Of the 309 Authorities some Muslims are present in all but one (99.7%) – the Isles of Scilly. Muslims are also found in all the Welsh Authorities.

They are, however, mostly concentrated in the more urban areas in the central parts of England, as their map shows, although there are outliers like Cleveland, Lancashire and South Glamorgan. Note that because of lower percentages of Muslims, there is no percentage colour correlation between the Christian and Muslim maps. There are 39 Authorities (14%) excluding Greater London, where there is a total of over 4 million Muslims living (7% of population), the largest of which are Blackburn with Darwen (35% of population), Bradford (31%), Birmingham (30%), Slough (29%), Pendle (26%), Oldham (24%), Leicester (23%), Manchester (22%) and Bolton (20%). The other 30 have between 7 and 20% of the population in each.

London is different. While over the whole capital the average percentage of the population who are Muslim is 15%, it is greater than that in 12 of its 33 Boroughs – Tower Hamlets (40%), Newham (35%), Redbridge (31%), Barking and Dagenham (24%), Waltham Forest (22%), Brent (21%), City of Westminster (20%), Ealing and Enfield (both 19%), Hounslow (17%), Harrow and Camden (both 16%). These are significant proportions.

### Hindus

Four other religions were specifically named in the Census: Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and Jews. The largest of these with over a million people ticking the box were Hindu. Like the Muslims, some Hindus were present in every Authority in England and Wales except one, again the Isles of Scilly. Some Buddhists or adherents of other religions were present in every district, however, including the Scilly Isles.

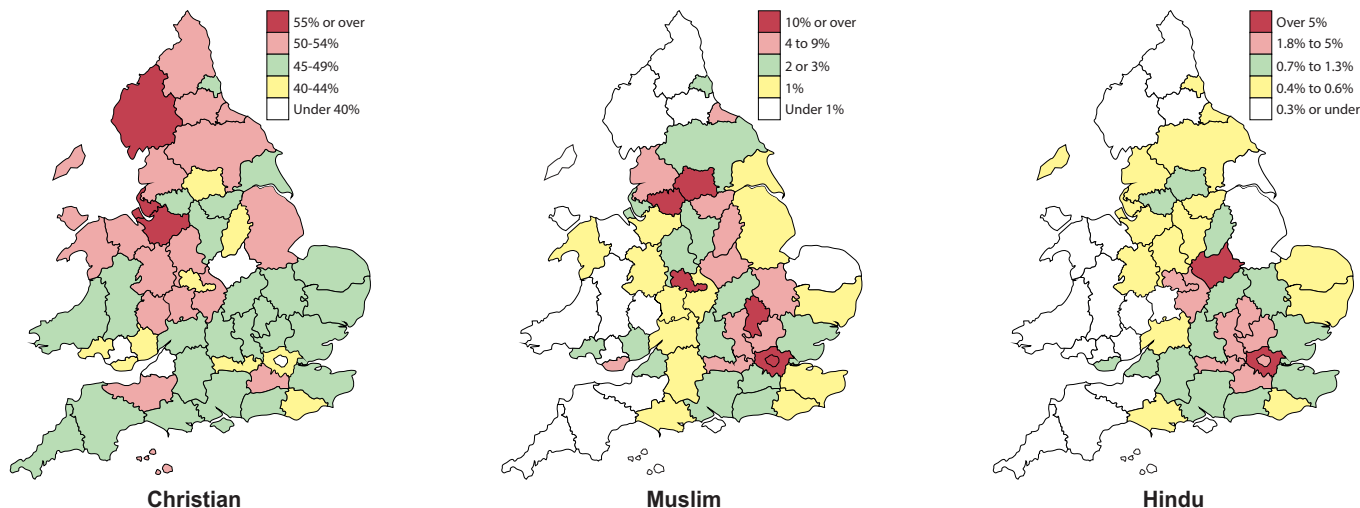
There are two counties with significant numbers of Hindus – 9% across Leicestershire as a whole, but 23% in Leicester City and 11% of the population in Oadby & Wigston. They are also 5% of Greater London’s population, made up of 2% in Inner and 7% in Outer London, being especially strong in Harrow Borough (26%), 16% in Brent and 11% in each of Hillingdon and Redbridge. Their map, with no colour correlation with either of the others, shows them spreading out from London, but with a strong Leicester to Birmingham bridge. There are many parts of the north, the south west and Wales where there are very few.

### Other Religions

The large majority of the other religions were present in small proportions in districts outside London. Mostly they were less than 1% of the population. The Buddhists, for example, were under 1% in 97% of districts, and were only relatively numerous, 5% of the population, in Rushmoor Borough Council, in Hampshire.

The Jews have been in England since 1066, but were banned from the country by Edward I in 1290, then re-admitted under Oliver Cromwell in 1656. Apart from London, they live in small numbers in 97% of local authority

## Percentage of Adherents of three largest Religions in England and Wales, by county, 2021 Census



areas, with the largest numbers in Hertsmere in Hertfordshire (17% of the population), Salford in Greater Manchester (4%) and Epping Forest in Essex (3%).

The first Sikh came to Britain in 1854, but they have now settled extensively in many areas, with proportions, outside London, of 1 or 2% of the population in 9% of authorities, 3 to 6% in other places in another 4%, and concentrating in both Sandwell and Wolverhampton in the West Midlands each with 12% of the population, 11% in Slough in Berkshire and 8% in both Oadby & Wigston in Leicestershire and in Gravesham in Kent.

The miscellaneous Other Religions are indeed in small numbers throughout the UK, only reaching 2% of the population in one district outside London, Broxbourne in Hertfordshire, and 1% in 7 others.

### What does this mean?

No part of England and Wales is without the presence of those with a religion other than Christianity.

Some of the growth of these other faiths has come from the many immigrants who have settled in our country, and their mosques, temples, synagogues, gurdwaras, etc are no longer a strange sight. RE lessons in schools must include a study of two religions, but few will cover all six explicitly mentioned in the Census.

As the largest religion, the Christian faith should occupy a critical place in the teaching of RE in schools. Sadly, though, recent generations have missed out on even the basic truths of our traditional faith and today's children are experiencing likewise. While an understanding of other beliefs is essential in our multicultural society, there is a vital opportunity for Christians to train as RE teachers and ensure that the tenets of the Christian faith are explored and passed on to this and subsequent generations of pupils in our schools.

**SOURCE:** 2021 Census statistics from the Office for National Statistics.

## These may be helpful

### Books/papers received

*Learning to Care*, Pastoral Work in the Local Church, by David Clarkson (on the staff of Tilsley College for many years) and Dr Stephen McQuoid (General Director of Gospel Literature Outreach). Published by Partnership, GLO and OPAL Trust, ISBN 978-1-9160130-8-7. It has 260 pages. How to nurture the resources of time and spiritual gifts across a congregation to improve pastoral care – an accessible leadership skill that grows churches.

*Caught in the Current*: British and Canadian Evangelicals in an Age of Self-Spirituality, by Prof Sam Reimer, McGill-Queen's University Press, London, ISBN (paper edition): 978-0-2280-1696-0, based on interviews with 125 clergy and laity. It has 236 pages. Evangelical Christianity is known for its defence of traditional Biblical teaching, but many do not realise how their faith is being reshaped by the modern zeitgeist. This book explains how and why these changes are happening, and helps our understanding of the changing religious landscape.

*A Great Multitude One Can Count*, A statistical study on the Spatio-Temporal Development of the Reformed Denominations in the Netherlands between 1892 and 2015, a dissertation by Dr Merijm Wijma, published by Buijten & Schipperheijn, ISBN 978-9-4636918-0-2, € 29.90, 466 pages. Eight different Reformed denominations are discussed in terms of membership statistics and spatial location. What causes growth? Why do churches shrink? Why does each denomination seem to have a similar numerical development of membership? What exactly is the Bible belt? etc.

## Humour

- 1) If money doesn't grow on trees why do banks have branches?
- 2) Never argue with cross-eyed people; you'll never see their point of view.
- 3) I'm close friends with 25 letters of the alphabet; I don't know Y.
- 4) A University graduate turned up for his first day at work, was given a broom and also asked by the Manager to tidy the office. "But I'm a graduate with a degree," said the lad. "Sorry!" said the Manager. "I should have thought. I'll call someone to show you how to do it."
- 5) In the jungle I met a monkey with a tin opener. "You don't need a tin opener for bananas," I said. "I know," the monkey replied, "this is for the custard."

**SOURCE:** *Escape into Humour*, The Rotary Club of Hoddesdon 2017.

*FutureFirst* is a bimonthly bulletin for those concerned with the future of the church. Editorial board: Rosemary Dowsett, Anne Coomes and Peter Brierley. The acceptance and publication of copy does not indicate editorial endorsement. Readers are welcome to quote items provided they give the source.

Established 2009. Subscriptions free via website [www.brierleyconsultancy.com](http://www.brierleyconsultancy.com). Published by Brierley Consultancy, 1B, Thorpe Avenue, Tonbridge, Kent, TN10 4PW, United Kingdom. Email: [peter@brierleyres.com](mailto:peter@brierleyres.com).

ISSN 2756-2093

## World Religions

The January edition each year of the *International Bulletin of Mission Research* always includes an article by the editors of the *World Christian Encyclopedia (WCE)* giving the latest estimates of adherents of each major religion world-wide. It was also included in 2023, and the following Table gives the percentages of each religion as a proportion of the total world population.

Percentage of global population of each major religion, 1970 to 2050E

Religion	1900	1970	2000	2023		2050E
	%	%	%	Millions	%	%
Christians	34.5	32.9	32.3	2,604	32.4	34.4
Muslims	12.4	15.5	21.3	2,007	25.0	29.0
Hindus	12.5	12.7	13.5	1,090	13.6	12.7
Buddhists	7.8	6.3	7.3	536	6.7	5.7
Sikhs	0.2	0.3	0.3	29	0.4	0.4
Jews	0.7	0.4	0.2	15	0.2	0.2
Others	31.7	12.7	12.2	867	10.5	8.7
No Religion	0.2	19.2	12.9	897	11.2	8.9
Global Population, millions (= 100%)	1,620	3,695	6,149	8,045	100.0	9,709

These percentages hide some of the massive political changes in the 20th century, from a largely Christianised Europe at its beginning to the massive Communist dominance in Russia and China by 1970. Hence the huge drop in proportion of Christians between 1900 and 1970 and the huge increase in No Religion. The Table reflects the increase forecast in the Christian faith between now and 2050 which is given in the article, which is largely based on the enormous growth of Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Islam has grown steadily throughout the 20th century and this growth is set to continue. Hinduism, largely based in India, drops between 2023 and 2050 as a percentage, again because of the population increases expected in Africa. The actual number of Hindus increases by over 100 million, but the African population is increasing faster still. Currently, Buddhism is failing to keep pace with population growth, and the Sikhs and Jews likewise.

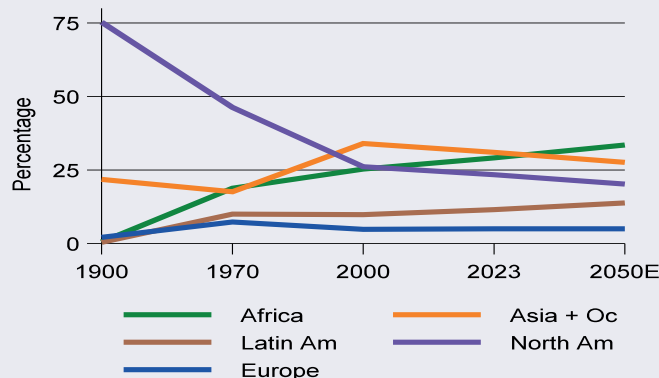
Those in the Other Religions are declining, the huge drop from 1900 to 1970 being largely the replacement of Confucianism with Communism in China. About half of "Others" are what the WCE calls "Chinese folk-religionists" showing that while Communism may be dominant, Confucianism has not entirely died out in China – perhaps still held by a fifth or more of its population.

Two additional tables and a chart are shown in the page circulated with this issue of *FutureFirst* for space reasons. The following comments are based on these.

Among the various Christian traditions or denominations, the Roman Catholics continue to be the largest globally. In 2023 they were 45% of the world's Christian adherents, which could slip to 42% by 2050. Protestants (Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians mostly) account for a fifth (in 1970) to around a quarter (24% now, 26% in 2050) of Christians. The Orthodox are slowly declining, from 21% in 1900 to 13% by 2000, to 11% today and perhaps just 9% in 2050. The Unaffiliated are about 5% of the total, although 9% in 1970.

It is the Independents worldwide which are growing, from just 2% of global adherents in 1900, to 7% by 1970, to 14% by 2000, and 16% in 2023 and over 18% by 2050. The article breaks this growth down by continent. The population in North America has quadrupled since 1900 (82 million to 370 million in 2020), and some of this growth filled the numbers in the big denominations in North America (Baptists, Anglicans, Methodists) and as these have grown, so the Independent sector has reduced, from 75% in 1900 to 46% by 1970, and now down to about a quarter (26% in 2000 and 23% in 2023). Europe's proportion is stable, about 5%. Latin America is growing marginally, from 10% in 2000, to 12% in 2023 and 14% by 2050. In Asia it remains about a third of the total (34% in 2000, 31% in 2023 and 27% in 2050). The growth is shown in the graph.

Growth of Independent Christians by Continent, 1900 to 2050E



The growth factor again is in the African Sub-Saharan continent where Independent Christians went from 19% of the world's total in 1970 to 25% by 2000, to 29% in 2023 and a likely 34% by 2050. This is a very substantial growth, from 10 million people in 1900 to 1.3 billion expected by 2050. Why the growth? The youthfulness of the population, the vibrant spirituality of many in the population (Africa has the highest percentage of Pentecostal Christians, 35% in 2020) and the high fertility rate (4.2 children per woman in 2023, while the world average is half that).

SOURCES: Article "World Christianity 2023" by Gina Zurlo, Todd Johnson and Peter Crossing, *International Bulletin of Mission Research*, Overseas Ministries Study Center, Vol 47, Issue 1, Jan 2023, Page 11; *World Christian Encyclopedia*, edited Gina Zurlo and Todd Johnson, Edinburgh University Press, 2020; wikipedia accessed March 2023.

## Counties are Useful Units!

The names of some of the English counties go back for centuries and are part of our national history, but with the advent of postcodes counties are now no longer needed as part of a mailing address, the focus being on the town or village designation instead (as well as the postcode which is essential for the Royal Mail).

On 1st April 1974 (to coincide with the financial year), at the conclusion of much work in trying to get better cohesion and accountability, a Local Government Act came into force which created several new counties (Avon, Cleveland, Humberside and Tyne & Wear) and lost a few, much to the chagrin of those then living in them (like Rutland). The end result was 46 official counties, each broken down into two or more Local Authority Districts (even the Isle of Wight was split into two), with a grand total for England of 369 new Local Authorities.

Subsequent revisions to our administrative network saw some Local Authorities merge together. After the 1st April 2009 Act some became Unitary Authorities and therefore not part of their County Council, some being termed "Non-Metropolitan Districts" and various other classifications.

In all of these changes the boundaries for the Local Authorities made in 1974 have been retained with a few exceptions, such as Beverley in what was Humberside being split into two when the East Riding came into being. But the number of Local Authorities (whatever their actual title) has reduced from the original 369 to 349 in 2009 (= 269 Local + 80 Unitary Authorities) and to 309 in 2021 (= 219 Local + 90 Unitary Authorities), reflecting the many Local Authority mergers in the last 12 years. More mergers may well still come.

In the background of these changes the 1974 Counties have largely remained

and retained their old names. In the 1974 Act the county of "Hereford and Worcestershire" was named, but the residents soon voted to split into their old counties of "Herefordshire" and "Worcestershire." Rutland is now a separate Unitary Authority (but not a County as such). To some people, counties are still highly relevant as a geographical location.

When depicting the variations around the country, maps are frequently drawn, and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has produced a brilliant mapping illustrative system of the many 2021 Census results showing the variations in very small areas. Variations over larger areas are usually confined to colouring the 309 Local Authorities, but a map of England split into 309 parts on an A4 page can be overwhelming.

Using just the 47 Counties enables the various densities shown on maps to be assessed more easily, and this is especially true when they are used to illustrate changes over time. Compiling the County data is not always easy, however, as, for instance, Leicester County numbers given by ONS will exclude Leicester City because the City is a Unitary Authority, whereas speaking of "Leicestershire" normally would mean including Leicester City!

The task of maps is to explain and illustrate, not befuddle, so in a separate article in this issue of *FutureFirst* we have used Counties, not Local Authorities, as the basic unit of explanation, with the sole exception for London which is split into Inner London and Outer London as these two are so different. It was also the basis used for the major publications of the various English Church Censuses (even though the data for Local Authorities was available).

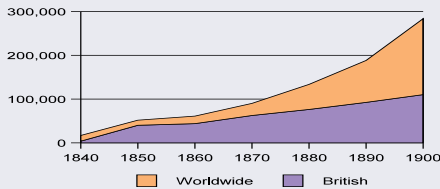
SOURCES: *Index of Local Authority districts, London Boroughs and new towns*, England and Wales, HMSO, 1974.

# Mormon Growth

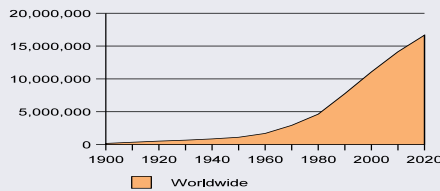
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), now often called “Mormons,” officially began in North America on 6th April 1830 with 6 members, but rapidly spread to other parts of the world. By the end of 1830 there were 280 members in America, and by 1840 the global total was 16,865, of which a fifth, 22%, 3,626, were in Great Britain.

As the first graph shows this dominance of the global movement by those in Great Britain continued until about 1870, when expansion elsewhere, but especially in America, caused the numbers to grow, until in 1890 there were more non-British members than British, a trend which has continued to expand ever since.

Global Mormon Membership  
1840 to 1900



1900 to 2020



Why the growth in Britain in the mid-19th century? Rodney Stark, long term professor of Sociology of Religion at the University of Washington, who died in July 2022 aged 88, explained: “The 1840s were very stressful times in Britain. The enclosure movement had driven millions from rural areas to lead lives of desperate poverty and misery in polluted industrial cities ... (people) lived in squalid, crowded tenements or were homeless on the streets.

“(Much) antagonism was directed towards the conventional churches; nearly all of them, including the ‘fundamentalist’ sects, ... charged pew rents that were well beyond the means of most citizens.” As a consequence a new religion, especially for many who subsequently migrated to the United States, was very welcoming and acceptable.

Since then, the church has grown from 175,000 worldwide in 1900 to 530,000 by 1920 (an average growth of +5.7% per year), to 860,000 by 1940 (+2.4% annually), to 1.69 million by 1960 (+3.4%), to 4.64 million in 1980 (+5.2%), to 11.1 million by the year 2000 (+4.4%) and to 16.7 million in 2020 (+2.1% average annual increase over previous 20 years). It can be seen there was an enormous increase in numbers in the second half of the 20th century, essentially because dedicated Mormon missionaries spread across the entire world.

# SNOWFLAKES

“Don’t give up.” “The older I get, the more I’m convinced Christians need to shake off society’s perceptions about their faith – that it is soft, gentle, like mild, green Fairy Liquid. It is challenging; if it isn’t upsetting someone, it isn’t being preached properly. It is not, however, political,” wrote journalist Tim Stanley after reading Christians were only 46% of the population.

SOURCE: Article in *The Telegraph*, January 2023.

**Grandparents are multiplying!** There are 1.5 billion grandparents in the world, three times the estimated number in 1960, and from being 17% of the global population they are now 20%. By 2050 there could be 2.1 billion, 22% of the population – that’s more than those aged under 15! Then some 30% of China’s population will be grandparents, 28% of Bulgaria’s and 24% of the United States – the highest three predicted countries.

Sources: Article in *The Economist*, 14th January, 2023, Page 57.

**Not sharing the good news.** A survey by Operation Mobilisation found that two fifths, 43%, of those describing themselves as “active Christians” did not know of the Great Commission “to go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). Another two-fifths, 38%, agreed that sharing the Christian faith with those who don’t know it was the primary purpose of church mission work.

SOURCE: Article in *Christianity*, February 2023, Page 15.

**Mission Workers.** Latin Link reports 117 mission workers in their mission agency working across Latin America in their latest Prayer Calendar for 2023 (against 147 in 2022): Peru (17), Bolivia and Brazil (9 each), Colombia and Guatemala (8 each), Argentina, Spain, Switzerland and International (6 each), the Netherlands (5), Costa Rica and Ecuador (4 each) and Mexico, Chile and Nicaragua (1 each) as well as 26 working in Britain and Ireland; 16 countries in total.

SOURCE: *Prayer Calendar* 2023, Latin Link.

**Opportunities ahead.** Lorna Tilbian, Chair of Dowgate Capital, in an article includes five opportunities she sees for the 5 to 10 years ahead: (1) Augmented and extended reality – the metaverse is up to 10 years away; (2) Accelerating artificial intelligence – with big implications for creative industries; (3) Autonomous vehicles, with China leading the way; (4) Quantum computing, with implications for drug discovery, weather forecasts, financial modelling, material discovery and cyber security; (5) Healthcare innovation, including continuous monitoring of heart rate variability.

SOURCE: *Impact*, Market Research Society, Issue 40, January 2023, Page 41.

**Online Worship.** The General Assembly 2022 report for the Church of Scotland indicated that during the Covid restrictions of 2021, some 57%

of its 1,264 congregations offered online worship, with many offering a hybrid form of worship. In a typical congregation of 176 members, 40 people were worshipping in the church and a further 32 worshipping online, so two-fifths, 41%, of members worshipping.

SOURCE: *Order of Proceedings*, Church of Scotland General Assembly Report, 2022, Pages 37 & 40.

**Ethnicity.** The 2021 Population Census has shown the changing broad ethnicities in England and Wales, all Non-White going up, with the White going down! The relevant percentages are shown in the Table (the 2001 figures are for England only):

Ethnic Group	2001%	2011%	2021%
White	91.3	86.0	81.7
Asian	4.8	7.5	9.3
Black	2.2	3.3	4.0
Mixed	1.3	2.2	2.9
Other group	0.4	1.0	2.1
<b>TOTAL (=100%)</b>	<b>52,041,916</b>	<b>56,075,912</b>	<b>59,597,542</b>

It is the small “other” group which is increasing fastest (+8.6% per annum 2001 to 2021), followed by the Mixed groups (+4.1%), then the Asians (+3.4%), then the Blacks (+3.0%). The Whites are declining at -0.6% per annum.

SOURCE: 2021 Census of Population, Office for National Statistics: Ethnicity.

**Identity.** The 2021 Census repeated the 2011 question on national identity, with an interesting change in answers between the two years, as shown below (both years for England and Wales). The total base numbers (=100%) are the same as in the table above.

National Identity	2011 %	2021%
British only	19.1	54.8
English only	57.7	14.9
English and British only	8.7	13.6
Non-UK identity only	8.0	9.7
Welsh only	3.6	3.2
UK identity and non-UK	0.8	2.0
Other combinations of UK	1.6	1.2
Welsh and British only	0.5	.6

In the last 10 years the proportion of the population saying they are “English” or “British” has swapped over. Perhaps the problems of Scottish identity have helped in this decision making. Of the “Non-UK” identities the largest in 2021 was “Polish” which was also the largest in 2011, about the same number each time (600,000, 1% of the population). The second largest in 2021 was “Romanian” whose numbers had increased from 73,000 in 2011 (0.1%) to 477,000 in 2021 (0.8%), which was the largest increase of any nationality. Other common non-UK identities were “Indian” (0.6% or 380,000), “Irish” (0.5%, 300,000) and “Italian” (0.5%, 287,000).

SOURCE: 2021 Census of Population, Office for National Statistics: National Identity.

Why the growth? The focus is simply on mission, especially door-to-door evangelism. Although not very effective in gaining new members, the experience enables missionaries to acquire greater confidence in the Mormon faith, often a spiritual growth, and they benefit from travelling abroad and acquiring deeper interpersonal skills. “The mission experience is a rite of passage for young Mormon men. The LDS church could not exist as we know it without its mission programme,” wrote Robert Lively author of a 2017 article about them.

It is a worldwide church in 161 countries in 2023 (81% of the global total of 198) with 17 million members, over half (56%) of whom are in North America and 25% in South America. Just 3% are in Europe, the only continent where numbers are declining. Sadly, such organisation and zeal is based on a non-Biblical “revelation” to its founder Joseph Smith and is therefore a sect which “sits in darkness.”

SOURCES: Articles in the *International Bulletin of Mission Research*, Vol 41, Issue 3, July 2017 and Vol 46, Issue 4, October 2002, Pages 546 and 580 and <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org.uk/facts-and-statistics>.

# Christians in South and Central Asia

The third volume in the 10 volume series “Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity” was published in 2019 entitled *Christianity in South and Central Asia*. The series looks in detail at each of the 22 UN Global Regions. The South Asia Region includes the countries of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The Central Asia Region includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. However, this article focusses on South Asia.



If you are looking for countries where Christianity is almost invisible, South Asia is one place to start! In four of these countries Christian adherents are less than 1% of the population! Roman Catholics, Independent Christians, Protestants are all just 1% of the population of the entire area, and the Orthodox Churches and Anglicans are each only 0.3% of the population.

Even these percentages are boosted because the Region contains India which had almost three-quarters (72%) of the entire population in 2020 and 88% of the Christian adherents. But though some numbers are desperately small (0.02% of the population in Afghanistan, 0.34% in the Maldives, 0.55% in Bangladesh and 0.73% in Iran in 2020) these small numbers are growing!

In the last 50 years, Christians in Bangladesh have grown particularly through the Assemblies of God, which is the largest Pentecostal group, at an average rate of +2.7% per year – faster than the enormous population of 65 million (+1.9%), and the same was true in the Maldives (+4.0% per year average for the Christians, +2.1% for the population). However, the same was not true in Iran (Christian growth +1.6%, population +2.2%), and numbers declined in Afghanistan, perhaps not surprisingly (-0.1% for Christians, but +2.5% for the population).

The other countries in the Region have higher percentages of Christian adherents: 2.3% in Bhutan, 2.5% in Pakistan, 4.3% in Nepal, 4.9% in India and, perhaps surprisingly, 9.1% in Sri Lanka. All these have seen growth as well. Bhutan's Christians grew at an average annual rate since 1970 of +6.2% against a population growth rate of +2.1% (a country of under a million people), Pakistan's figures were respectively +2.5% and +2.6% so not quite as fast as the population (208 million), Nepal was +10.9% for Christians, five times the population growth of +1.9% per year, while India also beat the population rate with +2.4% to +1.8%, and in Sri Lanka, Christian and population both grew at just +1.1% per year.

In the Region as a whole, Christians are 4% of the population of 1.9 billion, a quarter (25%) of the world's population. Christians in the Region are also 4% of the global Christian total, the lowest percentage of all 22 UN Regions. Prayer is much needed for the Christians in South Asia, all in largely hostile environments.

## Denominational growth

Which are the growing groups? The Volume 3 mentioned above only breaks the figures down into six groups. The Roman Catholics are 29% of the total, the Independents 28%, Protestants 27%, with Anglicans 8% and the Orthodox 7%. The unaffiliated are just 0.3%. Globally these figures are respectively 45%, 16%, 20%, 3%, 12% and 4%, so the regional distribution is therefore very different from the global pattern. There are many more Independents, Protestants and Anglicans, and far fewer Catholics, Orthodox and unaffiliated. It is also the Independents, Protestants and Anglicans which have grown the fastest since 1970, with

average annual growth rates of +3.7%, +2.3% and +3.5% respectively. Independents are expected to continue to grow at a fast rate, becoming a third (33%) of the Region's Christians by 2050, but the others more slowly.

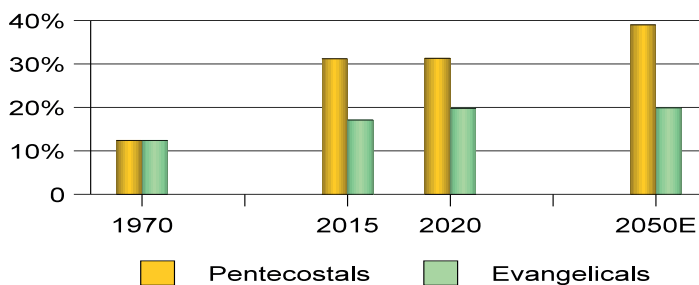
The **Roman Catholics** declined in Afghanistan and Iran, but have grown in Nepal and Pakistan. Catholic mission history has close cultural and civilisational ties with the Indian subcontinent, but their development has clashed with the missional efforts of others. “Caste is a potent factor in the life of the Catholic Church in most parts of South Asia,” writes a contributor to the volume. Dalits are a considerable proportion of the Catholic population, but under-represented in the leadership.

The **Protestants** (who include German Lutherans, Korean Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians) are very active in Bangladesh and Pakistan and to a smaller extent in Nepal where faith was “allowed only from the 1950s.” They are 1% of the population in India and Sri Lanka. These churches tend to be either ethnic minority churches, or regional churches strong in some rural areas, or national churches when they are confessional like the Anglicans and Methodists. There are two Anglican Provinces in India (North and South) and another for the Indian Ocean (not included here). The Church of Ceylon is also Anglican.

The **Independents** are especially strong in Nepal (77% of all Christians in the country in 2020) and Iran (59%), but also in the sub-continent of Bangladesh (34%), India (28%) and Pakistan (14%). In India this is basically due to the dramatic conversions of Sadhu Sundar Singh who died in 1929 when 40 and Pandita Ramabai who died in 1922, both powerful independent evangelists. In 1954 the United Mission to Nepal was permitted to begin medical work, and many female Nepali Christians penetrated the country with the gospel. South Asian “Independent churches tend to be ‘grassroots’ expressions of a popular Christianity of ‘little tradition’.”

Within all the denominations except Orthodoxy are the **Pentecostals**, which have grown from 3 million across the Region in 1970 to 24 million in 2020. They were a third (31%) of all Christians in the Region in 2020 with the highest rate of annual growth (+4.3%). They grew especially fast in Nepal and Pakistan (a rate of +12% annually!), but also quickly in Afghanistan (10%), Iran (9%), Bangladesh (8%), Bhutan and the Maldives (both 7%) and Sri Lanka (6%). By comparison in India they “only” grew at 4% per annum (which is why the overall percentage is so low). As in other parts of the world, this is where the energy and witness are seen, the results “of spontaneous Spirit-inspired revivals” according to an article in the book.

Percentage of the Christian population of two key groups in South Asia 1970-2050E



The **Evangelicals** are also growing, but not so fast as the Pentecostals, some of whom would be in the Pentecostal group as well. They are likewise growing fastest in Nepal and Pakistan, followed by Bhutan, but are not growing as fast in Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Iran. They grew +3% in India between 1970 and 2050, where especially large numbers of Dalits have come to Christ. There have also been large numbers of healings.

South Asian Christians may only be 4% of the total population but they are growing faster than the countries in which they live. Courage, tenacity, a vibrant and practical life-style are the ways in which they proclaim the living Christ especially among Hindus and Muslims who are 54% and 35% of the regional population.

# Biblical Worldview

The American researcher, Prof George Barna, now leads the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, where he especially focuses on researching the worldview held by Americans in general and Christians in particular, and how much of that is passed on to their children. Part of this broad research programme is a specific focus on a Biblical worldview.

What is a "Biblical worldview"? It is defined by the Center as follows:

- Believing God is omniscient, omnipotent, perfect, just and is the Creator and eternal ruler of the world.
- Realising that all humans are not basically good, everyone is a sinner.
- Knowing Jesus Christ is the only means to salvation, through confession of sin and reliance on His forgiveness.
- Believing the Bible to be true, relevant and reliable words of God that serve as a moral guide.
- Accepting the existence of absolute moral truth.
- Acknowledging a purpose in your life: knowing, loving and serving with all your heart, soul, strength and mind.
- Understanding genuine success in life: consistent obedience to God.

Based on a survey of 2,000 American adults in the general population (18 or over) in January 2023, the agreement results were, respectively, 50%, 27%, 35%, 46%, 25%, 36% and 23%. This makes (A) accepted by half of the sample, and (D) almost half. Two were just over a third – (C) and (F), while the remaining three were all about a quarter – (B), (E) and (G). Those are not very high percentages, and judging by the first (A) which was agreed by 69% of the sample in 1995, they are declining.

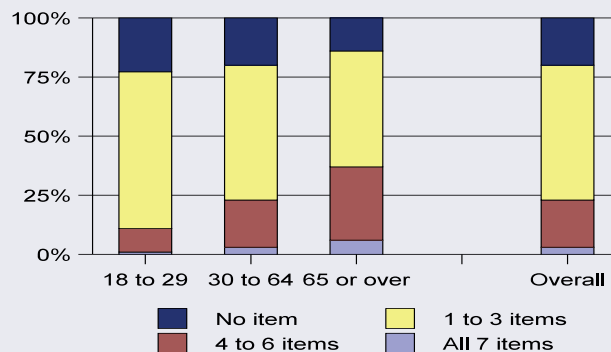
Most of these worldview elements have not been asked in the same way in British surveys. In 1981 a survey of almost 1,200 people asked if they believed in sin (B): two-thirds, 68%, did, but this had dropped to 57% by 2008 in a similar study. Many surveys have asked about belief in God but not in the nature of God as in (A). A fifth said belief in God was necessary to be moral, 25% in 2002, 20% in 2019 (D).

Gallup have asked about the divinity of Christ (not quite the same as (C)), getting the answer of "Son of God" from 60% in 1963 and 46% in 1993, and 27% in 2013 by YouGov. That those believing in Jesus can expect salvation was agreed by 47% (C) in an Independent Television Authority survey in 1968. Believing life is meaningful only because God exists (similar to G) was agreed by 19% in 1991 and 13% in 2018. But few British surveys have explored what belief might mean in practice, as some of the Barna questions do.

Clive Field cites 17 surveys between 1979 and 2017 asking respondents if they believed in a soul. Average across these years was 60%, although in the latest, for 2017, it was only 49%. Six surveys are cited asking about the authority of the Old and New Testaments between 1960 and 1993, with average positive answers of 12% and 15% respectively, much lower than (D) above. Whether the Bible was the inspired word of God is cited for 5 British surveys between 1987 and 2008, with the average agreeing just 8%.

This selection of a random series of surveys suggests that British belief is, on the whole, lower about Christian values than in the United States. The same series of questions were also asked in the US in 2020, the above 2023 answers being, on average, just 1% higher. The 2023 US study also noted how many respondents answered all, or some, of the questions, the answers being shown in the chart:

Percentage of respondents ticking positive answers to the 7 statements

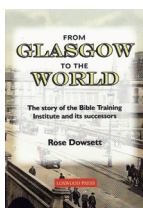


It is obvious from the chart that very few of those aged 18-29 accepted all 7 items, just 1%, with just 6% of those 65 or over. Most of the 18-29 age-group, two-thirds (67%), believed between 1 and 3 items. Older people, 65 or over, accepted more of them – a third (31%) between 4 and 6 items, and only 14% accepting none of them (against 23% of those 18-29). Those in the US sample who were parents accepted on average just 2.5 of these statements.

Barna rightly points out that in a Christian context this situation is serious, and concludes that people's worldviews change slowly, but perceptively, "especially in times of social instability and uncertainty, such as we have today."

**SOURCES:** *American Worldview Inventory 2023*, Arizona Christian University, 14th March, 2023; EVS research cited in *Counting Religion in Britain*, 1970-2020, Dr Clive Field, OUP, 2022, Table 108, Pew Global Attitudes, Table 105; Gallup and You Gov Table 106, Page 190; Page 189; British Social Attitudes, Table 106; Belief in a soul Table 109; Authority of the Bible Tables 85 and 86.

## Book Reviews



The Bible Training Institute (BTI) was one of the major British Bible Colleges in the 20th century. Starting from evangelistic endeavours at the end of the 19th century (such as by D L Moody), it became embedded in a major building in Bothwell Street where tens of thousands of mostly young people learned about the Scriptures.

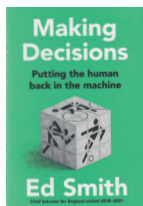
The two-year basic course comprised the Old Testament one year and the New the next, systematic theology and many practical skills to fit Christians for missionary endeavour, especially overseas, not least in the actual experience of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. Students took on visiting in neighbouring residential blocks of flats in Glasgow, such as Easterhouse, to help them learn better how to share the faith.

This is BTI's story, told in a lively, imaginative and fascinating way. Missiologist Rose Dowsett once taught global history at BTI, and this aspect of her knowledge enlivens the pages so that the contemporary position of past BTI students is put into context. She and her husband Dick served with OMF International from 1969, often seconded to a variety of ministries, especially among students, and, for Rose, service with global mission networks such as Lausanne and WEA's Mission Commission. This book is illustrated by stories of its students in every era of its life, and what they accomplished. Today its work is taken on by others, such as All Nations Christian College, Moorlands College and others.

One of the key lecturers in the 1960s was Geoff Grogan, the gentle giant, whose books have helped many understand the nuances of the God-breathed Word. He was Principal for 22 years 1969-1991, and saw the College move (because a motorway was being built), later becoming Glasgow Christian College. Later again, merging with Northumbria Bible College, it became International Bible College, until its closure under its last Principal, Richard Tiplady, in 2014 for economic reasons.

Here is a fascinating story of the pressures on leadership, based firmly on Biblical principles, coping with the external flows of society, but above all seeking to exalt the Lord Jesus and help Christians know and understand the Scriptures. The global impact of its ministry has been simply enormous. There is, however, no index, so if you were one of its students, you'll have to read the book to find out if you are mentioned!

*From Glasgow to the World*, by Rose Dowsett, Loxwood Press, 2022, ISBN 978-1-908113-66-5, 128 pages, £14 + £1.70 p & p via Amazon or Loxwood Press, 50 Loxwood Avenue, Worthing, West Sussex, BN14 7RA.



Ed Smith, the author of *Making Decisions*, is a renowned thinker on sport and leadership. He played cricket for Kent, Middlesex and England and was Chief Selector for England cricket from 2018 to 2021, a period of unprecedented success for England's men's teams.

In this book he focusses on the key elements needed in making successful decisions, whether this applies to cricket, or business, or charitable pursuits, or church work. His thinking about cricket applies widely, and he works through the process of making decisions piece by piece across 14 very readable and understandable chapters.

His priority is producing a successful *team*, and thus enabling a project (or cricket match) to be successful. His thinking readily translates across different disciplines. Part of his work as Selector was to keep an eye out for successful cricket players whether in county or other teams.

If someone should suggest that Player A might be chosen to play for England, and someone else suggested Player B, his questions would be not, "Who is the better player?" but "Who would fit better into the existing team?" His aim was to enable teams to perform well whether or not all the players were successful in a particular game. He was seeking quality teams.

This emphasis was followed through whether a team included a new, bright player or was one which had lost the previous time. He looked at the overall results and not so much at the individuals who significantly contributed to the result. His work therefore fits into the tensions of church leadership, exploring which way to go forwards, how to strive for "success" but equally how to build a robust team able to take the strain of the unexpected whether in a game, business, church, school or other network.

*Making Decisions*, sub-titled "Putting the human back into the machine", by Ed Smith, and published by Williams Collins, in 2022 @ £20. ISBN: 978-0-00-853014-3, 240 pages. Available on Amazon.