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# FUTURE FIRST



## FACTS FOR FORWARD PLANNING

### SNIPPETS

1) Three-fifths, 60%, of American employment in 2018 was in job titles that didn't exist in 1940.

2) In 2011 in the UK 48% of all transactions were not paid by cash; by 2016 that had become 76% and by 2021 it was 91%.

3) In a survey of 16 to 18-year olds, half, 53%, thought it was "likely" the world would end in their lifetime because of climate change.

4) In a year they described as "tough," Youth for Christ reached 145,000 young people indirectly through their 60 local centres, and 225 young offenders directly reached.

5) In Canada there are 1.8 million Indigenous people, one-twentieth, 5%, of their 36 million population. Half of these, 47%, identify as Christian.

6) Of the 78 Partners working with Interserve UK, almost three-fifths (58%) or 45, are serving in Great Britain and Ireland and 33 are serving overseas.

7) Over the past 2 years (2021 and 2022) over 880,000 people have left the German Roman Catholic Church, some 4% of their total of 21 million, while under 3,000 have joined (0.01%).

**SOURCES:** 1) *The Week*, 20th May 2023, Page 15; 2) *The Economist*, 20th May, Special Report Page 4; 3) Civitas survey, quoted in *The Week*, 27th May, 2023, Page 6; 4) *Annual Report for 2021/22*, Youth for Christ, June 2023, Pages 7, 14; 5) Item in *The Tablet*, 27th May, 2023, Page 26; 6) *Impact Report*, Interserve, June 2022, Page 9; 7) Religion Media Centre report, 29th June 2023.

## Religion by the Age of Male Adherents

Perhaps 50 years or so ago, it was sometimes said, "Church is a woman's thing." Whether that ever was true is debatable, but the results from the 2021 Census of people's religion in England broken down by their age and gender show that it is certainly not universally true, even if true for four of the six religions on the census form!

Globally more boys are born than girls (in a ratio of about 106 to 100), a ratio which gradually reduces as people reach their mid-20s as there is a greater mortality rate for males earlier in life. Thereafter there are more women than men in the population. This is not true in countries like China where its now abandoned "one child policy" produced very distinct distortions (as many families wanting a boy aborted the foetus if it was a girl). Across the English population as a whole in 2021 49% were men and 51% were women. This is shown by the red (population) line in the graph.

Neither is the male/female ratio true of all religions. Christian men in England, for example, are below the population line throughout (dark blue in the graph), with a particular absence of men between 30 and 60. This is seen in many churches today, and amongst leaders as well as those in the congregation. If leadership was statistically balanced according to this graph, then for every 20 leaders between 30 and 60, 11 would be women and 9 would be men. This is not true of any denomination, except perhaps the Salvation Army.

The paucity of men was especially noticed in the 1984 Scottish Church Census and a very small survey was carried out to try to ascertain why. The response that came back then was that women were expected to go to church

on behalf of their family, as the token person to represent the whole!

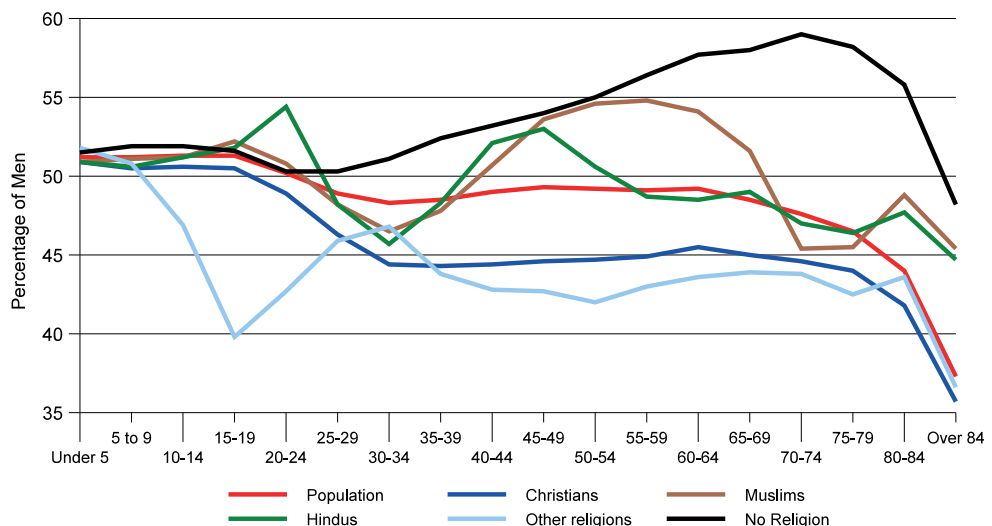
The graph also shows the percentage of men by age-group for three other religions and No Religion. The Muslims, shown in brown, have an especially large proportion of men between 40 and 70 and in the middle of these years (50 to 60) 5% more males than in the population that age.

Hindus, shown in green, are interesting as they have an especially large number of men aged 20 to 24 and again between 40 and 50. Almost certainly, as Hindus are nearly all Indians, this is because of the huge number of Indians coming to the UK to study and being allowed at present to bring in their families, including their parents 20 or so years older. The University of East London enrolment has increased by 60% since 2017 largely because of Indian students. In 2021 over 6,000 students, a quarter of their total, were from India.

Indian students starting new courses have increased from a UK total of 10,000 in 2017 to over 80,000 in 2021. Many are postgraduate students studying engineering or tech courses. In 2021 some 40,000 dependants joined the total of 140,000 Indian students then in Britain. The 2021 Census showed there are 1.8 million Indians in England and Wales altogether, coming here in part because they are "people whose view of the world has been at least partly shaped by an education in the West."

Not shown in this graph are the Buddhists whose male proportion comes well below the population level, that is, there is a large majority of female Buddhists, 56% overall. The Jews and Sikhs follow the population proportions

Percentage of men by age-group of some religious groups in England, 2021



reasonably closely, as do those who didn't answer the religion question in the Census. Those who belong to "other religions," outside the six given on the census form, the minority groups, like the Buddhists, have a strong majority of women, also 56%.

Those who have No Religion, shown in black in the graph, have a huge and increasing percentage of men from about 50% in their late 20s to almost 60% in their late 60s and 70s. It is said that so many young people have No Religion these days, but there are many more older men without a religion. One of the Theos Think-tank surveys may indicate why: many of these once had a formal or informal linkage as an Anglican or Catholic adherent, but as they have got older that veneer has dropped away, and in the Census they recorded No Religion. In other words, the over-65s are rejecting religion and faster than any other age-group.

But perhaps the overall challenge of these figures is not so much in the current variations by age and gender in different religions but in how inadequately our Christian faith is represented by men in the general population, well below that of Islam.

**SOURCES:** Official for National Statistics, Religion by Gender by Age (18 categories) for England and Wales, released February 2023 and accessed in June; article in *The Economist*, 17th June, Page 57 and 24th June, 2023, Pages 25, 26; *Daily Telegraph*, 4th April 2023, Page 9.

## Growth in Scotland

Each year for its General Assembly in May the Church of Scotland releases its "Blue Book." The numbers in it for 2022 show a continuing downward trend – from 413,500 **members** in 2012 to 270,300 in 2022 ten years later, an average annual rate of decline of -4.2%. Having fewer people will mean it becomes even more difficult to run and maintain its 1,260 **churches**.

In 2022 there were 60,000 **attenders** worshipping in person, while in 2019 pre-pandemic there were 88,000. The major problem with these is that 48% of these are between the ages 65 and 84, a very high percentage almost three times the 18% in the general population. The Blue Book also says, "45,000 people now worship online" in 2022, about two-fifths, 43%, of the overall total. How many of these were previously worshipping in person is unknown. However, spreading these across so many churches, the church will be "forced to make hard choices on closures," said Assembly reporter, Rachel Farmer.

### Scottish Episcopal Church

One of the smaller denominations is the Scottish Episcopal Church (SEC). It produces a report for its Annual Conference, also held in May. It has about 3% of total Scottish churchgoers, but 8% of congregations, meaning its churches are smaller. It is spread across 7 Dioceses covering the whole of Scotland. Membership and attendance are measured each year for each Diocese, but attendance was not measured in 2020 because of the pandemic.

Total attendance in 2019 was 11,782, declining over the previous four years at an average rate of -2.3%. The attendance in 2021, the year when Covid-19 restrictions were less was 7,644, a drop of -35%, but in 2022 it grew to 8,532, a +12% increase. This excludes on-line worshippers. The growth was not seen across all Dioceses, but attendance numbers **increased** in the Dioceses of Argyll and the Isles, in Edinburgh (massively by +6%) and in Moray, Ross and Caithness in the very north of Scotland (+2%).

### Other denominations

Is the other major denomination in Scotland faring like the Church of Scotland? It would seem not. The Roman Catholic Church in Scotland had, for instance, 158,500 attending in 2012 and 127,000 in 2022, a rate of decline of -2.2%, only half the rate for the Church of Scotland. The Roman Catholics and the Church of Scotland form about three-quarters, 72%, of churchgoers in Scotland; the other quarter being spread across all the other denominations (including the SEC). Between 2012 and 2022 attendance in these other denominations was estimated, respectively, at 124,500 and 110,100, a rate of decline of -1.2% per annum. This much smaller figure is because it includes a number of growing churches.

Where are these growing churches and in what denominations? A study by a Ghanaian, Sheila Akomiah-Conteh, working for a research company in Edinburgh, found some 110 churches had been started in Glasgow between 2000 and 2016, an average of 7 per year, but with 14 starting in 2016. She found that almost two-thirds, 65%, of these were Black and Minority Ethnic churches, and half of such, 51%, were African. Thus the boom in church planting in Glasgow was primarily because of the immigration increase in the general population. This is not just true of Glasgow. "(Most) urban religious landscapes have now changed dramatically over recent decades because of rapid BME expansion," writes Sheila.

### So what?

The overall picture is one of declining numbers, especially after the impact of Covid-19. But new churches are being and have been started, and some denominations, like the SEC, are seeing growth in both urban and rural areas. Maybe this suggests a different story will be told in, say, 2030!

**SOURCES:** *Order of Proceedings*, Church of Scotland General Assembly, 2022 and 2023; Gordon Hudson MClOF, <http://link.hudson.nu/GxgJLD>; article "Possessing the Nations" by Sheila Akomiah-Conteh in *International Bulletin of Mission Research*, Vol 47, Issue 2, April 2023, Page 191; *Church Times* article 26th May 2023, Page 9; Annual Reports of the Scottish Episcopal Church, 37th to 42nd usually about Page 68 in each.

## These may be helpful - Books/papers received

*The Authenticity of the Book of Daniel*, by Bill Cooper (1947 to 2021) who demonstrates very clearly from many ancient sources the accurate observations and writings of this Biblical book, which he firmly dates as written in the 6th century BC. Brilliantly researched but written in a somewhat abrasive manner. Published by the Creation Science Movement in 2012, ISBN 978-0-9502090-9-8.

*Inspiration from Creation*, How engineers are copying God's designs.. A brilliant book showing how a dragonfly inspired a very tiny air vehicle with its double crank-rocket mechanism, a fish jaw aiding design of a robotic hand, and much else. Well worth reading! By Prof Stuart Burgess and Dominic Tatham, Creation Book Publishers, 2018. ISBN 978-1-942773-55-9.

*For Christ and for Wales: A Collection of Essays in Honour of the Life and Ministry of John Griffiths (1875-1947)*, edited by Paul Beasley-Murray. Over 100 pages about the remarkable young man from Rhos who left school at 12, became a miner for 10 years, then a Baptist minister looking after a church of 5,000. Additional essays by Denzil Morgan, John Weaver and Rob James. Privately published, but available for £5 including postage from paulbeasleymurray@gmail.com.

# Population Changes

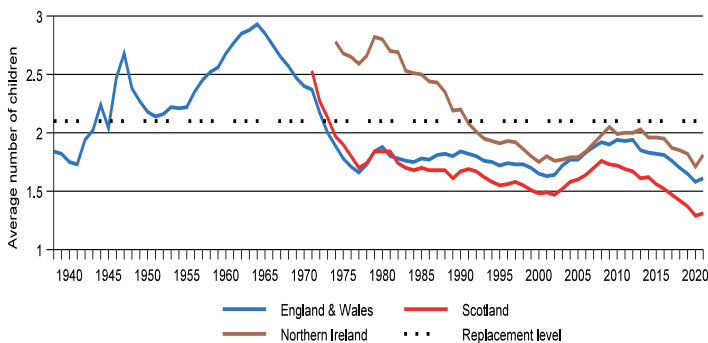
The UK population is increasing partly by immigration over emigration and partly by births over deaths. This article looks at births. The first year in which the number was counted in all parts of the UK (the existing area of Northern Ireland being back-tracked) was in 1887 when there were over 1 million births. Now, 134 years later, in 2021 (the latest data) there were only 695,000 births, just two-thirds, 67%, as many.

The decline is seen mostly in Scotland where the 2021 births were less than two-fifths, 38%, of the number in 1887 (48,000 to 124,000). In 1887, England contributed 85% of the babies, Scotland 12% and N Ireland 3%. Today the proportions are 90%, 7% and 3% respectively. Boys made up 51% of the total in 1887, and they are the same percentage today – the ratio of boys to girls doesn't vary across the UK's countries nor across the centuries!

While the general trend in birth numbers is obviously downwards, it does not descend smoothly. There are high peaks of births immediately after the ends of the World Wars in 1920 (jumping from 830,000 in 1919 to 1,130,000 in 1920, +36%) and in 1946 (going from 800,000 in 1945 to 1,030,000 in 1947, +29%). There was also the "birth boom" of unusually high numbers of births between 1955 and 1965, which led to subsequent minor booms as these babies married around 30 years later between 1985 and 1995, and a further similar boom in 2010, although this started earlier, augmented by many births from immigrants.

## Fertility rate

Fertility Rate of Women in the UK, 1950 to 2021



The fertility rate is the average number of children born per woman in a country, and reached a high of 2.8 in 1963 in the first "boom," as

the graph shows. In general the fertility rate in Scotland is below that in England and Wales, and the gap is increasing. In 2021 it was 1.3 in Scotland, well below the 2.1 level for maintaining a population. Whether the usually greater fertility rate among immigrants in Scotland will stabilise or reverse the present Scottish trend remains to be seen.

In Northern Ireland, however, the opposite is the case, with a much higher rate than in England and Wales, and a smaller, but also increasing, gap with England and Wales, as the graph shows (which illustrates the only published figures). It means N Ireland will have more children born than in other parts of the UK, though still too few to maintain the standard population 2.1 replacement level.

## Born outside marriage

The number of babies born outside marriage has been measured in England since 1838, 1887 in N Ireland, but later in Scotland. In 1974 9% of UK babies were born outside marriage, but by 2021 the percentage has risen to 51% in the UK, the first time the figure has been over 50% for both England and Wales as well as the UK, although it first reached 50% in Scotland in 2008.

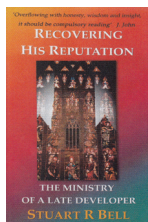
The trend is slowly upwards, first reaching 10% in the UK in 1978, 20% in 1986, 30% in 1992, 40% in 2002, and now 50%. Relatively few of the births to immigrants are outside marriage but the increasingly large numbers entering the country over the last 20 years has lessened the impact of unmarried parents reaching the 50% figure before now.

While co-habiting couples and single mothers or fathers are socially just as acceptable as married couples these days, the church has rather lagged behind in appreciating the implications of these new family situations. A lack of permanent commitment, or the absence of a father or mother figure, may decrease a child's sense of security. Alternating between one parent and another can be emotionally confusing. Couples family relationships such as different surnames, various half and step siblings, sometimes multiple, may undermine a child's sense of belonging anywhere.

So in addition to the church teaching and encouraging God-ordained marriage, those working with children and young people might provide a listening and understanding ear to affected children as well as helping them to find love, acceptance and security in a Heavenly Father and a friend and saviour in the Lord Jesus Christ.

**SOURCES:** Office for National Statistics, Summary of key birth statistics, England and Wales; National Records of Scotland, Birth Time Series; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, Births.

# Book Review



Stuart Bell was born in Devon but was called to serve the Lord in Wales. On "retirement" at 67 he had been the Team Rector of St Michael's, Aberystwyth, for 25 years. St Michael's had both the largest church of any Church in Wales congregation (over 500), and was one of the very few evangelical churches in the (Anglican) Church in Wales. This book tells the story of answers to prayer, desperate moments in ministry, woeful mistakes and how to correct them, in an open, masterful, pastoral manner which will make you want to keep on reading while chuckling at the same time.

Canon Bell's desire was to uphold the Lord Jesus Christ and help Him to be supreme in the church, in the parish and in the congregation's ways of life. He therefore sought to recover the reputation of one who was frequently not so regarded. He looks at the problems honestly, and gives his solutions and his reasons for solving them that way, then, at the end of each chapter, asks you questions to see how you would fare in your own church or circumstances. It is an inspiring story not just of his time in Aberystwyth but of 50 years at the spiritual heart of

leadership, which has culminated in his being consecrated in March 2023 as the Assistant Bishop in the Anglican Convocation in Europe (ACE) with primary responsibility for Wales. ACE is a group of historic orthodox Biblical confessional Anglican churches of which the Anglican Mission in England is also a part.

There is huge amount of challenge in every chapter, not least trying to answer the question in every situation, "How can we do this better?" For the many summer visitors who came to the town came the "Evangelistic Ice Cream" initiative of selling ice cream and giving service invitations at the same time. "Nightlight" was another initiative encouraged by Stuart to those on the streets after 11.00 pm Fridays and Saturdays. There was the Aberystwyth Academy of Christian Discipleship to train people to work in Wales. How do you overcome "the tyranny of the volunteer" (folk who do what they can when they can but restrict you by their availability)? These and a hundred other issues are looked at in this book, given truthful answers, even if the solutions didn't always succeed! The story is not to be missed!

*Recovering His Reputation*, The Ministry of a Late Developer, was self-published in 2022, and printed by Amazon (and available from). Its ISBN is 979-8-4443940-1-4.



## A New Vision for Mission

By Rev Dr Paul Beasley-Murray

**The churches of the UK are in freefall. For years membership, however that has been defined, has been in decline. Church attendance has also been in massive decline. In many church communities it is terminal decline. Covid certainly didn't help. Most churches are now much smaller. Many people seem to have given up on church. As we know, Christians today are in a minority – less than 50% of people in the UK perceive themselves to be Christian.**

It is in this context that the Church of England developed a model for mission. At the heart of the "circle" was a church that was "Christ centred and Jesus shaped." A renewed church, with a deepening prayer life and a new delight in worship, yet at the same time outward looking and overflowing in loving service for the world.

From this "hub" emerged three spokes within the wheel, pointing to three strategic mission priorities: to be a church of missionary disciples; to be a younger and more diverse church; and to be a church where mixed ecology is the norm. The first two priorities speak for themselves. However, the term mixed ecology needs unpacking: it refers to a church prepared to experiment in new forms of church.

The vision underlying this mission is a church that is bolder, simpler and humbler. The hope is that within 10 years the number of children and young active disciples will be doubled, and that the church will be fully representative of the communities it seeks to serve. It is a bold vision, involving a simpler church in the sense that it does away with activities which are peripheral to mission and instead focusses on the basic tasks of transforming lives of those whom it seeks to serve. Inevitably this kind of church is also humbler, a church where God is allowed to work.

How precisely this mission is expressed will vary from place to place. Pope Francis put it this way: "The church is a people with many faces, and expresses (its) truth in countless different ways, according to each culture." He went on: "That is why I like to think that evangelisation must always be in the dialect of each place, with the same words and sounds of the grandmother who uses it to sing lullabies to her grandchildren."

As a Baptist minister of many years standing, understanding of mission appeals to me. It is not a "top-down" model imposed by a hierarchical leadership. Rather it is for each church to discern what is appropriate for them. What's more it asks each church to think through their priorities in such a way that the needs of the whole community are met – the need to appeal to young people is clearly vital, but older people must not be forgotten either. What's more, there is the recognition that this one style of service is a limiting factor to effective mission.

Unlike Anglicans, who tend to operate with a parish system where the focus is on the community as a whole, Baptists make much of the fact that they are a "gathered church." The downside of the Baptist concept of the gathered church is that the needs of the wider world can be forgotten. However, unlike a typical Anglican church where mission tends to be limited to those within the parish, a Baptist church need not limit its mission to a local parish, but rather can appeal to a wider grouping of people.

Whatever the denominational allegiance, if the tide is to be turned and communities are to be transformed by the Gospel of Christ, then appropriate strategies need to be put in place for Christ's new creation (2 Cor 5.17) to be realised.

SOURCE: Email from Paul Beasley-Murray, April 2023.

## SNOWFLAKES

**Rural Churches.** Some church leaders talk of "the fragile rural church." An article in *Rural Theology* described six features which contributed to making a church "fragile." They were:

- 1) Financial pressure and congregational anxiety about dwindling finances.
- 2) An actual or feared inability to replace church leaders or other officers or volunteers.
- 3) The relentless nature of having to keep going which saps energy and thwarts initiatives.
- 4) A lack of a critical mass of children and volunteers to work with them.
- 5) Congregations of fewer than a dozen people, combined with an increasing age profile.
- 6) The demands of maintaining historic buildings.

The last is especially true of Church of England churches, no less than four-fifths, 78%, of which are listed, including many of their 9,000 rural churches!

SOURCE: Article in *Rural Theology* by Rev Anne Lawson, Vol 21, No 1, 2023, Page 50.

**Religious affiliation** in the United States fell -11% between its 2010 and 2020 Censuses (in the UK the drop was -13%). As many Christians vote Republic there is a possibility that increasing secularisation may give Democrats a greater chance of winning swing states like Michigan, Pennsylvania or Wisconsin. However, religion has apparently "surged" in Florida and Texas, owing to the influx of Hispanic immigrants, which may cause these states to have a majority Republican vote. So religion could help decide future elections.

SOURCE: Ryan Burge, from Politico, quoted in *The Week*, 27th May, 2023, Page 15.

**The Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD)** membership fell 3% in 2022, bringing its numbers to 19 million, a fifth, 22%, of the population. It has 42,500 churches, 80% listed, of which 1,200 have already been boarded up, facing either demolition or conversion into residential or cultural centres. This is despite church mergers and reorganised parishes. The Roman Catholics, with 11,000 churches, have similar problems, and the research suggests that some 40,000 churches, three-quarters, of the churches of these two denominations, will be abandoned by 2060 if trends continue. Clearly very similar problems apply to the Anglican churches and Roman Catholics in the UK. If that percentage applied just to the Church of England, nearly 12,000 churches would be closed!

SOURCE: Report by Adalbert Schmidt and Karl Schmiemann, church legal experts, quoted in the *Church Times*, 26th May, 2023, Page 12.

**"Numbers are not everything.** I believe we are seeing a shift from a church comprised of many people with limited motivation to one made up of fewer but more motivated members," wrote evangelist Canon J John. "I hear stories of a new openness to exploring the Christian faith among people from a wide range of backgrounds," said Rev Richard England, Regional Director, London West, New Wine.

SOURCE: Both in articles in the *Church of England Newspaper*, 9th June, 2023, Page 10.

### **Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG).**

There were 10 million members worldwide in 2022, half in Nigeria and half outside. These were in 47,000 churches, 32,000 in Nigeria (average membership 150) and 15,000 elsewhere. In the UK there were over 900 churches (which they call "parishes"), and in the United States 921. Globally the RCCG churches are divided into 13 regions and across 89 zones. The church began in Nigeria in 1952, and by 1981 had 42 parishes and a few thousand Yoruba-speaking members in southwest Nigeria when Pastor "Daddy" G O Enoch Adeboye became leader, and it has grown under the then 39-year old's very humble leadership.

SOURCE: Article "Every Christian Migrant a Potential Missionary: Reflections on the Missiology of the Redeemed Christian Church of God" by Harvey Kwiyani, CEO, Global Connections, *UK in International Bulletin of Mission Research*, Volume 47, Issue 2, April 2023, Page 209.

**Impact of marriage.** Research has shown that having married parents is likely to help their children achieve higher grades. The probability of NOT achieving English and Maths at GCSE is 26% for children of married parents, but 32% for those not married. Two-fifths, 40%, of children born into a low income family will have married parents, while three-quarters, 75%, of the children born into a high income family will have married parents. The impact of being married or not is not just on the couple living together but on any children they have also.

SOURCE: Harry Benson, Marriage Foundation, articles in the *Mail on Sunday* on 6th February, and *Sunday Telegraph* on 13th May, sent by email 26th June, 2023.

**The White factor.** For every £1 of white British wealth, a survey found that UK Indian households have 90p, Pakistani 50p, Black Caribbean 20p, Black African 10p and Bangladeshi households 10p also. The percentage of workers paid below the minimum wage was 18% of Bangladeshis, 11% of Pakistanis, 11% also of Chinese, 5% of Black Africans, 5% of Indians also and White workers just 3%.

SOURCE: *The Colour of Money* in the 2020 report by the Runnymede Trust reproduced in *Christianity*, June 2023, Page 22.

## Humour

"The way science changes is epitomized by a delightful cartoon in the *New Scientist*. It showed a school room science (class) in which a young lady was addressing her teacher, 'Is that the answer?' she asked, 'Yes,' replied the teacher. 'But, Mr Flutesnoot, you told us the opposite yesterday.' For a moment the teacher appeared nonplussed, and then his face lit up and he exclaimed, 'Jennifer, that was yesterday – we must remember science is making tremendous strides!' "

SOURCE: Quoted from *The Relevance of Christianity in a Scientific Age*, by Prof V Wright, MD, FRCP, Creation Science Association of India, October, 2022, Page 9.

## Churches in Central Asia

The United Nations divides the world into 22 Regions, one of which is Central Asia. This consists of five countries – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – which might be called the “-stan bloc” although it excludes Afghanistan and Pakistan in South Asia Region. For most of the 20th century these five “-stan bloc” countries were ruled by Russia with “not only political and ideological dislocation, but also social-cultural and religious disturbances.” The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 destabilised the region, and the five newly formed countries in Central Asia still remain “politically volatile, economically fragile and religiously unstable.”

The third of a 10-part project, encompassing descriptions of Christians in every country, are given in the *Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity* (ECCG), but the figures used here come from the *World Christian Encyclopaedia* (WCE), because the ECCG figures for 1970 are so very different from those in 2015 in the new countries. The descriptions are taken from ECCG, however.



Central Asia covers a vast area of 1.5 million square miles, of which Kazakhstan is two-thirds, 68%, with its huge grassy steppes, and is the 9th largest country in the world. Three-fifths of the

entire Region is desert. The population, was 69 million in 2015, rising to 74 million by 2020, a relatively fast rate of growth of +1.4% per year, because they have a high fertility rate (2.8 children per woman, so lots of youngsters). It is very thinly spread, as therefore is church life – the Region is 16 times the area of the UK, but with virtually the same sized population! “Central Asia is home to untapped natural gas and oil reserves, supplies of copper and uranium, and 6,500 miles of border with Russia and China, both of whom take an interest in it,” says an article in *The Economist*, but such may not be of much help to a struggling church.

Christians were 8% of the total population in 2020, and are dominated by the Russian Orthodox Church which was 90% of them. Just 4% were Independent in 2020, 2% Roman Catholic, 2% Protestants and 2% others. There are now no Anglicans in this part of the world, although the Church Mission Society (CMS) and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) once had missionaries in this area.

Seven-eighths, 87%, of Central Asian Christians live in Kazakhstan, where they form a quarter, 26%, of the population. One twentieth, 5%, of Central Asian Christians are in Kyrgyzstan (where they are 4% of the population, 6% in Uzbekistan (1% of population) and 1% each in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, also being 1% (or less) of the population in each. Christians are growing but more slowly than the population in Kazakhstan (+1.0% per year between 2015 and 2020), and Uzbekistan (+1.2%), but are declining in the other three countries – -4% per year in Tajikistan, -3% per year in Kyrgyzstan, and -1% in Turkmenistan.

The decline is almost entirely among the Orthodox community, with the few Independent churches

mostly increasing. Much of this growth is seen in both the Pentecostal and Evangelical groups (both increasing in all 5 countries, with some overlap between the two). Across Central Asia the Independents grew at +2.0% between 2015 and 2020, while the Protestants grew at +0.9% and the Roman Catholics at +0.3%.

### So what of the future?

All this reads of a fairly desperate situation in a part of the world hardly ever talked about by Christians. But there is flourishing spiritual life there, and agencies like People International have people working in each country. The WCE claims there are over 1,600 Christian congregations in Central Asia, the majority (770) in Kazakhstan, but 550 in Uzbekistan, 180 in Kyrgyzstan, 75 in Tajikistan and 40 in Turkmenistan. The Korean churches have much work in the Region, with Korean Baptist, Methodist (particularly), Presbyterian and Pentecostal churches present, especially in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. A quarter of the total congregations are Orthodox (24% or 390), and the non-Trinitarian Jehovah Witnesses (not counted in these numbers) claim 380 congregations, some in each country.

So there is Christian witness, there are a small number of churches, and the number of Christians, especially among the Evangelical, Pentecostal and Independent sectors, is growing. The numbers are certainly small – across the Region just 8% are Christian, 89% Muslim with 3% others. We need to pray for the leaders and the churches in this part of the globe, and broadcasting ministries such as that by David Hathaway.

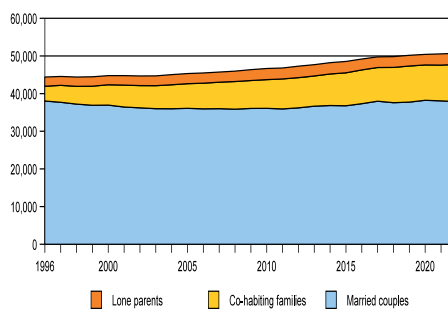
**SOURCES:** *Christianity in South and Central Asia*, Kenneth R Ross, Daniel Jeyaraj and Todd M Johnson, Edinburgh University Press, 2019; *World Christian Encyclopaedia*, edited by Todd Johnson and Gina Zurlo, Edinburgh University Press, 2020; article in *The Economist*, 27th May, 2023, Page 69.

## UK Families

The Labour Force Survey is an annual Government-run household survey across the whole of the UK. It counts the number of people living within each household, and their marital status, and the age of any children living in that household. In its 2022 survey of the UK’s population of 67.8 million people they found some 55.3 million or four-fifths, 81%, were living in families, including lone parents. Those living alone, 13%, would include some who had been married, such as the separated, divorced or widowed, as well as the single. The remaining 6% were people living in households where the residents are either multi-family, or unrelated adults like “friends or students sharing or sometimes two siblings.”

A family is defined as “a married [68%], civil partnered [1%] or cohabiting couple [18%], with or without children, or a lone parent [13%] with at least one child. Children may be dependent or non-dependent.” The cohabiting are broken down between opposite- and same-sex (17½% and ½% respectively). Figures have been collected since 1996, and are shown in the graph. As would be expected, household numbers have increased in line with the population.

Number of families in the UK, 1996-2022, by type of family, in thousands



The graph shows that the number of married couples has remained fairly constant over this period: 38,000 in 1996 and 37,900 in 2022, the 2022 figure including 300 civil partnerships. What has clearly increased is the number of cohabiting families: 3,900 to 9,900 in 2022 (a +154% increase), the 2022 figures including 300 same-sex families. The number of lone parents has also gone up: 6,300 1996 to 7,600 in 2022 (a +21% increase). By comparison, the overall population has increased by +16% in this period. How far do these reflect church families?

### Cohabiting couples

The difference with church families is the

percentage who are cohabiting. This will be much smaller than in the UK population as a whole, although the percentage will almost certainly have increased from the 1% from a survey in 2012 (to perhaps 2 or 3% in 2023). The proportion of churchgoing civil partnerships will be negligible.

In the population, cohabiting couples may be either opposite-sex (the majority at 97% in 2022) or same-sex (the remaining 3%). Numbers in both categories are increasing – at +3.1% on average annually since 1996 for opposite-sex and +6.1% for same-sex. Despite the increasing numbers of same-sex, as an overall proportion they remain small, and if a cohabiting couple go to church, they are less likely to be same-sex.

Though exact figures are unavailable, cohabiting couples may be more frequent in Black Majority Churches (BMCs). In one BMC church, for example, the pastor urged cohabiting couples to get married and a number in his congregation did so. After a few years, however, they came back to the pastor asking to be divorced! One father explained, “I don’t intend to leave my wife; I love her. But being married makes me feel I have to love her, while I prefer the freedom of just wanting to love her!” In the growing global church, especially in Africa, many of the family couples are in reality cohabiting couples, who often cannot afford a traditional wedding.

### Lone parents

Lone parent families by definition have only one parent looking after one or more children. In 2022, in the UK, 33% were responsible for one child, 38% for two children and 29% for three or more dependent children, the overall average being 1.8. Some partners will have died, but many more will be lone parents because of separation or divorce. The large majority, 85%, of lone-parent families have the mother as the adult, a percentage which has not significantly changed since 1996 (when it was 87%).

In 1991, a well-known church in Inner London

undertook a survey of its locality and discovered an unusually high proportion of single parents in their neighbourhood, almost none of whom went to church. The leadership undertook a further survey asking them, "What can our church best do to help you?" The overwhelming reply was, "Please provide baby-sitters." So the church asked for volunteer baby-sitters, which proved a great success, as some of the lone mothers began attending the church with their child(ren).

The number of Black Caribbean single-parented children is relatively large at 63%, and one reader of *FutureFirst* said the problems of single parenting need to be heard loudly and clearly as

they require urgent help from Black Church leaders.

The problem is very serious as many families are involved. The high figure needs some "brave unpacking" ascertaining the factors that make the men presumably unwilling to take responsibility, or the women unwilling to live with the fathers of their children. This is especially so when this segment of the population are members of churches and they are not forming stable marriages.

**SOURCES:** *Families and Households*, Office for National Statistics, released 18th May, 2023; personal emails; survey for St Mark's, Kennington, MARC Europe, 1991.

## Global Surveys of Beliefs and Values

**Two large global surveys on religious beliefs and values have been published in the last few months. By far the largest of these, the World Values Survey (WVS), is one of the most extensive and widely used social surveys in the world. It began in 1981, and its sixth round was between 2010 and 2014 covering 60 countries. In the seventh round 2017 to 2022 it was combined with the European Values Study (EVS), thus covering 90 countries in total, and the results were published a few months ago. As its name suggests it studies people's values and beliefs and how they change over time.**

Many research units in different countries are utilised. One of these was the Policy Institute of King's College, London (KCL), which was asked to study belief in the UK. Do you believe in God? In heaven? In hell? In life after death? etc. Some 3,060 adults in the UK were approached. In 1981 some 75% said they believed in God, in 2022 it was 49%, down by a third. In fact only 5 countries had a lower result – Norway (46%), South Korea (41%), Japan (39%), Sweden (35%) and China (17%). While younger people were less religious than older people (27% to 46%), they were more likely to believe in life after death (52%) than those 65+ (37%).

A third, 32%, of Gen Z and Millennials said they believed in hell, but only 18% of the older baby boomers and the pre-war generation. The average of these two figures is consistent with the 26% of the EVS surveys since 1981 believing in hell and the 24% from Gallup's surveys since 1968. Worldwide, according to the WVS, 62% of people believe in hell.

Belief in heaven, on the other hand, respectively averaging, 47% and 53% in the EVS and Gallup surveys, fell from 57% in the last WVS study to 41% this time. While "our cultural attachment to organised religion has continued to decline in the UK, ... our belief that there is something beyond this life is holding strong, including the youngest generations," commented Professor of Public Policy at KCL, Bobby Duffy.

Another aspect of the WVS report which was analysed was people's religion and whether they reported being in good or very good health. The results by the different countries' majority religions are shown in the Table.

The question was asked across the 51 WVS countries in the world, which cover two-thirds, 68%, of the global population. Half, 52%, of the respondents said they were in good or very good health. Where Buddhism was dominant (such as in Singapore and Thailand) nearly

three-quarters, 72%, of the population reckoned they were in good or very good health.

Health was deemed poorest in the countries where Orthodox Christianity is dominant with only a quarter, 27%, saying it was good or very good. Those having no religious affiliation were exactly half, 50%. Even if religion and health are correlatable, it does not follow that the one is caused by the other. There are many factors which facilitate or prevent good health, and a much deeper analysis would be needed to prove any kind of association.

### Percentage reporting good or very good health, by religion, WVS, 2022

Religion	No of countries	Population, m	Good/very good health	
			Millions	% of pop
Buddhism	2	75	54	72
Islam	13	707	421	60
Hinduism	1	1,383	810	59
None	9	1,064	1,026	50
Catholicism	12	722	318	44
Protestantism	7	135	58	43
Orthodoxy	7	224	61	27
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>5,311</b>	<b>2,748</b>	<b>52</b>

The other recent global survey was across 26 countries seeking interviews with nearly 24,900 teenagers (aged 13 to 17) and undertaken by the US-based Barna Group, together with Alpha, Biblical and World Vision. Globally, a fifth, 22%, said they were committed Christians, but only 8% engaged with the Bible (that is, believed it was the Word of God and read it several times a week) – an obvious weakness in values orientation. The survey included interviewing 1,000 UK young people. They showed a similar disbursement between commitment and discipleship. David Kinnaman, the Barna CEO, said this was seen in "British teens' lack of confidence in their ability to make an impact."

**SOURCES:** World Values website accessed June 2023; articles in the *Church Times*, 19th May, Page 5, and 9th June, 2023, Page 8; *Daily Telegraph*, 19th May, 2023, Page 5; *Counting Religion in Britain 1970-2020*, Dr Clive Field, OUP 2022, Pages 411-13; articles in the *Review of Religious Research*, Vol 64, No 4, December 2022, Pages 777, 792 & 793.