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FUTURE FIRST

FACTS FOR FORWARD PLANNING

Churches in Eastern Asia

SNIPPETS

1) In a survey of 1,000 Christians in the UK, 94% said the national media does not understand faith and does not represent Christians well.

2) In Japan, South Korea and Taiwan less than 5% of births are outside wedlock. This is considered by some to result in a plummeting fertility rate. South Korea is at 0.78, the global lowest.

3) 27% of abortions were cancelled in the Republic of Ireland after women were made to delay the decision mandatorily by three days according to Irish law.

4) More state school students in the UK were entered for sociology A level last year than for physics, music, French and German combined.

5) A recent essay claims that Inner London church attendance in 2020 was around 65% Black, even though only 14% of the population was Black. Most congregations have national identities.

6) It is estimated that 14.7 million Muslims die every year, assuming national death rates apply equally across whole populations, an increase from 12.2 million between 2010 and 2015.

7) Between 2010 and 2019, the Church of England had 180,000 confirmations but an attendance decline of 210,000 (from 1.06 million to 850,000).

SOURCES: 1) Quoted in a letter from Premier Chief Executive, Peter Kerridge, July 2023, Page 2; 2) Article in *The Economist*, 8th July, 2023, Page 12; 3) *The Tablet*, 8th July 2023, Page 29; 4) *The Week*, 19th August 2023, Page 21; 5) "Every Christian Migrant a Potential Missionary" by Dr Harvey Kwiyani, *International Bulletin of Mission Research*, OMSC, Vol 47, Issue 2, April 2023, Page 208; 6) Justin Long, *Act Beyond*, Texas organisation based on figures from Dr Todd Johnson (editor of *World Christian Encyclopedia*) and Pew Research Centre for earlier estimate; 7) Relevant issues of *Statistics for Mission* by Dept of Research and Statistics, Archbishops' Council.

Of the 22 Regions into which the United Nations divides the globe, Eastern Asia is the second largest in population terms as it includes the huge country of China (1,420 million people in 2020). The Region includes 7 other countries: Hong Kong, Japan, Macao, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea and Taiwan, the largest of which in population is Japan with 130 million people (twice the number in the UK). All these countries have increased in population and grown larger over the previous 50 years at a collective average annual rate of +1.0%.

The two countries with the smallest populations in this Region have grown fastest – Macao (650,000) at +2.0% on average and Mongolia (which used to be known as Inner Mongolia, Outer Mongolia now being part of Russia) with 3.2 million people at +1.9%.

Macao and Hong Kong are included here as separate countries although they are now legally Special Administration Regions of the People's Republic of China. Macao was a former Portuguese colony which became part of China in 1999, and Hong Kong a British colony until 1997.

The churches in all 7 countries have seen growth which is expected to continue certainly for the next 30 years. In 1970 Christians were just 1.2% of the then Regional population of just under a billion people; in 2020 they had become 7.7% of 1.7 billion and are expected to almost double that to 14% in 2050. The church is therefore growing faster than the general population, a source of great tension and persecution in all these countries except South Korea and Taiwan.



Chinese Churches

The number of Christians in churches in China has been increasing at an average annual rate of +10.1% since 1970 – that's over 10% per year for 50 years! That growth has come through an incredible number of arrests, tortures, killings, high pressure and tension, especially under Mao

Zedong in the 1960s and 1970s, but also in all succeeding decades. The growth is especially seen among the Independent and Protestant groups, the Independents being over 4% of the entire population in 2020.

There have been four broad groups of Christians in China: (1) The House Church networks, which grew by 26% per annum between 1970 and 2000 but have seen less growth since; (2) The official Three-Self Patriotic Movement working with the Chinese Government, and which saw annual growth between 1970 and 2000 – about 16% – but slowing and about +4.3% in the 21st century; (3) The many other Protestant Christians, who collectively grew at +10% per annum; and (4) The Roman Catholics who grew yearly at +12%. Approximate numbers in each group are difficult to estimate but are given, respectively, in the *World Christian Encyclopaedia* as 55 million in 2020, 30 million, 11 million and 10 million, a total of 106 million. The first three are all expected to grow in the years ahead, but the Catholics have declined from 2000 (-1.9% per annum) though are expected to increase over the next decades.

Being a Portuguese colony has meant that most (two-thirds, 70%) of Macao's Christians are Catholic (31,000 adherents in just 10 parishes), followed by the Protestants (10,000 or 23%, which include a handful of 200 Anglicans), but only about half of all these actively attend church services. Christians are 7% of the population, with the large majority (three-fifths, 59%) following the dominant Chinese religion of ancestor worship. There are some Baptists and the Church of Christ in China, but the conservative evangelical Christian Shuen Tao Church of Macau, which started in 1950, has established 11 congregations with a total membership of 6,550, three-fifths, 63%, of the Protestants. This growth has come through household visitation, a clear 10-year plan, campus evangelisation and stable leadership (the founder, Rev Yam-man Lam, passed it to his son, Rev Chung-kong Lam).

As Hong Kong was British there are many (29,000) Anglicans in Hong Kong, 3% of all the Christians, but the dominant group are the Roman Catholics, 44%, of the total. Other Protestants form a third, 36%, of Hong Kong's 2020 adherents. In a Hong Kong Church Census in 2014 there were 1,287 churches – across 71 different denominations! The largest are those who have been present the longest, especially Baptists (American), Anglicans (British), Methodists (American) and Lutherans (German). The Hong Kong Christian Council sees much unity. Growth has been helped by the establishment of theological education and Christian publishers, but schools and medical services are key also, although these are now being forced to follow the Chinese authoritarian regime.

Mongolia in north China has a population of 3 million of whom 2% are Christian adherents. They are dominated by the Independent groups (38% of the total) and Protestant groups (55%). Christianity only really started and spread

in the 20th century, helped by the country being largely mono-lingual. The Independent churches are Mongolian led, but the Protestants were mostly started by missionaries, especially from South Korea. There are 600 Protestant churches, half in the capital and the rest spread across all 21 provinces. Their 55% comprises Presbyterian (35%), Pentecostal (6%), Baptist (6%), Methodist (4%), Charismatic (2%) and Lutheran (2%). A church survey of 2015 showed 44% of leaders were women. The Catholics have 1,300 believers and a cathedral.



North and South Korea

North Korea in 2020 had a population of 26 million and perhaps 99,000 Christian adherents (0.4%). When liberated from Japanese rule in 1945 there were thought to be 3,000 churches

and 300,000 Christians, including some 200,000 Protestants and 53,000 Catholics. Today these number 6,000 and 3,000 respectively. The largest group in 2020 was the Independents, 91% of the total. In 1988 the government built two churches – Bongsu for the Protestants (some 300 members in 2020) and Changchung Cathedral for the Catholics. Most Christians, however, worship in house churches. Visitors from South Korea help strengthen these as they are able, but worship is hindered by serious persecution, Christians sometimes meeting just to share Biblical texts they have memorised and to pray.

The situation in South Korea is radically different. A third, 34%, of the population claim to be Christian, but true numbers are uncertain as totalling all those stating adherence in different denominations comes to 160% of the total population! The largest groups are the Independents (35%), the Protestants (30%) and the Catholics (32%). Two-thirds, 68%, of the Protestants are Presbyterian. All three groups have seen mega-growth since 1970, although in 2020 “the number of Christians is stagnating or decreasing.” In 2015 Korean government statistics gave a figure of 44% religious people (48% women, 39% men), but the percentage is thought to be smaller in 2020. Two-thirds, 65%, of those in their 20s say they have No Religion. The largest Christian congregation in the world, Yoido Full Gospel Church, had 830,000 members in 2007, but has “only” 480,000 in 2020. There has been a severe leadership lack

in financial transparency, and other churches have seen sex scandals and corruption.

Taiwan

Of the Taiwan population of 24 million in 2020, some 6% claimed to be Christian adherents. Eastern Asia is not Orthodox or Anglican country (both very few at 0.1% each across the Region), so the main groups in Taiwan are as elsewhere – Independents (35%), Protestants (31%) and Catholics (16%) with 18% unaffiliated, including some aboriginal Christians called Han. The Catholics are declining, the others are growing. The Protestants include many Presbyterians whose early missionaries started many schools. During WWII many of these faced problems working with the Japanese. After the War came Lutherans, Methodists, Baptists and Anglicans – but also, in the 1990s, Charismatics and others from South Korea, which over time and increasing nationalistic pressures, are causing tensions within the Taiwanese Christian community.

Christianity in Eastern Asia is expected to continue to grow despite and perhaps because of enormous difficulties in some countries. The perseverance, vibrancy and expectancy of God’s people in Eastern Asia is both a challenge and a wake-up call to a decadent church in the West. Growth is dominant!

SOURCES: *Christianity in East and Southeast Asia*, edited by Kenneth R Ross, Francis D Alvarez SJ and Todd M Johnson, Edinburgh University Press, 2022 for Anglican figures, all others come from *World Christian Encyclopaedia*, edited by Todd Johnson and Gina Zurlo, Edinburgh University Press, 2020; article in *FutureFirst* August 2020, Page 2; various websites accessed July 2023.

Passports by Religion

One of the questions in the 2021 England and Wales Population Census was the nationality in which a person had their passport, if any. These answers could be broken down by religion and of course the appropriate country. One person in seven, 13.5%, living in England and Wales did not have a passport at all, nearly all of whom were Christian, mostly elderly people whose desire or ability to visit overseas is less relevant to them.

Of the other 86.5% who did hold one, the large majority, 89%, had a British passport as might be expected. A further 8% held a European passport, most of these an EU passport. Just 0.6% of those living in England and Wales had an African passport, 1.8% an Asian one, 0.5% an American one, and just 0.1% one from Australia, New Zealand or other Oceanian country.

All the passports held by North Africans and those with a Central or West African passport were equally split between Christian and Muslim. Those with East or South Africa passports were of every religion. Asian countries were equally varied – many passport holders from Southern Asia were Muslim, but also included Sikhs, Hindus, and Buddhists and those with other (minority) religions. In fact the highest percentage of those holding passports in Other Religions who were non-British or outside the EU were those from Southern Asia.

Those with North American passports again ranged across all the religions, Jews being the largest percentage. For those from Central or South America again it was those in the Other Religions which were the largest for this group. An eighth of those who said they were Other Religion actually had no passport at all, many of whom were men over the age of 65.

The Jews were interesting. The quarter million (270,000) living in England and Wales, has the highest proportion of any religion with a UK passport (86%). In addition 4% of the Jews in this country have an EU passport, another 4% have no passport, 2% have a Middle East passport (which will include Israel), 2% hold one from North America, and the remaining 2% other countries.

Only the Sikhs are like the Jews, those living in England and Wales tending to have passports from relatively few parts of the world. Of the Sikhs, 79% have a British passport, but 13% have one from Southern Asia, 4% from the EU and the remaining 4% no passport at all.

Those with No Religion are predominately British (79% have a UK passport) or no passport (16%), 3% have one from the EU and the remaining 2% from other parts of the world.

All this shows that we have many from overseas who are now part of this country, many now with UK passports, but reflecting all four corners of the globe for us to meet, share our faith, and welcome into our communities.

SOURCE: Office for National Statistics, 2021 Population Census, England and Wales, 2022, Passport held by Religion.

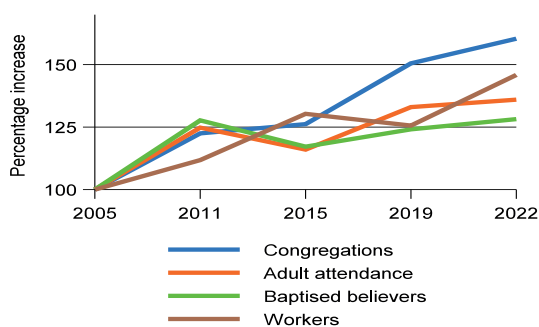
Global Christian Brethren

Every four years an international conference of the Christian Brethren is held, prior to which an extensive research exercise is undertaken seeking details of the work in each country. The Christian Open Brethren began as a movement in the 1830s but now, nearly two centuries later, are a global Christian force, working in more than 140 countries around the world, and maybe more. These countries, with a total population of 6.9 billion in 2022, represent 86% of the world's 8 billion (which was reached on 15th November 2022).

In 2022 their total global attendance was some 3.6 million people across over 40,000 churches or gatherings (technically called "preaching points"—gatherings which are not yet seen as local churches), 1.4% of the world's 2.6 billion Christian adherents and 1.0% of the 4.2 million congregations. These churches had an average attendance of 57 adults plus, incredibly, an average of 32 children. That number of children is 3 times the UK average, and is largely due to their extensive work in Africa where many of their churches actually have **more** children than adults attending – for example in Chad, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

The graph shows their growth since 2005 in the main numerical factors their survey collects, using 2005 as the baseline (= 100). Child attendance was only collected in 2022 for the first time.

Growth of the Christian Brethren worldwide since 2005



This first graph shows that their church planting is active, indicating the priority of their evangelism, though significant growth is apparent in each aspect of church life. Their average adult congregation was 67 in 2005 but was 57 in 2022. While numbers dipped temporarily ten years ago, they have been growing globally in the last 7 years.

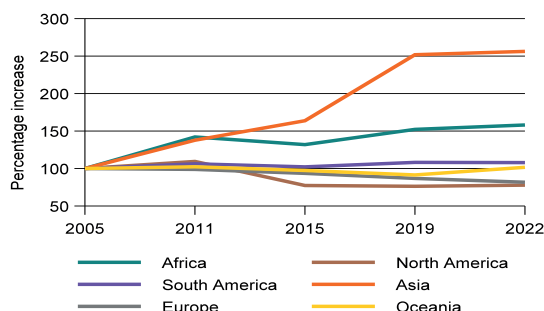
Attendance

Of all those attending Brethren churches, three-fifths, 61%, are from Africa, followed by 13% in Asia, 10% in South America, 9% in North America, 6% in Europe and 1% in Oceania. These percentages are very different from where Christians live worldwide, which are, respectively, 28%, 16%, 23%, 10%, 22% and 1%. The Brethren are especially low in South America (their 10% to 23%) and Europe (6% to 22%), even if the latter is where they started. However, despite their locational differences, they mimic the church generally in where they are growing (Africa and Asia), as the second graph shows.

The Christian Brethren started in Europe but Christian identity in Europe

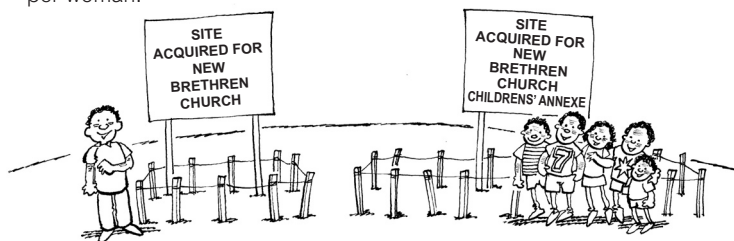
is, of course, dominated by the strength of Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and historic Protestantism, and, apart from in Italy, Christian Brethren evangelism in Continental Europe did not really get under way until the 20th century.

Adult attendance by the Brethren by continent, 2005 to 2022



This second graph shows that the Brethren are indeed growing fast in Asia, especially due to their rapid expansion over the last 20 years in India, doubling their 2015 attendance of 155,000 to 300,000 by 2022. Much growth is also seen in Singapore and Myanmar.

In Africa, Angola is important as over a quarter of Africa's Brethren attend there, 29%, and so are Nigeria (17%), DR of Congo (15%) and Zambia (12%). But, as mentioned above, it is the children who are hugely important in Africa, where the average fertility rate is 4.2 children per woman.



Leadership

The Brethren do not have "ministers" as such but call their leaders "workers," about four-fifths of whom are full-time. The last three years have seen these numbers increase from 14,200 in 2019 to 16,500 in 2022, an average annual increase of 5% per year. Three-quarters of them serve in either Africa or Asia, 77%, which may be a contributing factor in these continents' attendance growth.

The survey details attendance for every country in which the Brethren work. With three-quarters, 76%, of all their children going to their churches in Africa, it is important to note the key countries where they attend. These are Angola, DR Congo, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Zambia. It would be worth researching these countries to unlock some of the secrets of their success with children. The rest of the church world, and not least the UK, would be happy to share in such a blessing!

SOURCES: Christian Brethren survey co-ordinated by Dr Neil Summerton, CB, 2022, to be published in the autumn of 2023.

Quotations

Rishi Sunak visited the "Ram Katha," a recital of the story of Lord Rama, led by the Indian spiritual leader Morari Bapu at Jesus College, Cambridge on 15th August 2023. He said he was present not as a prime minister, but as a Hindu, and spoke of his upbringing in a Hindu family and taking his place serving the local community at the temple. He said: "For me, faith is very personal. It guides me in every aspect of my life. Being prime minister is a great honour, but it is not an easy job. There are difficult decisions to make, hard choices to confront and our faith gives me courage, strength, and resilience to do the best that I can for our

country." He also revealed that a golden Ganesha, a symbol of Lord Ganesha of happiness and prosperity, "sits gleefully" on his desk at 10 Downing Street.

Said Andrew Brown in the *Church Times* the following week: "Imagine the horror if a British Prime Minister had announced in *The Daily Telegraph* that his Christian faith guided him in every aspect of his life, and gave him the courage, strength and resilience to do the best that he could for the country, and topped it by saying he kept a crucifix on his desk and was proud to do so."

SOURCES: Religion Media Centre report 16th August 2023; *Church Times*, 25th August, Page 19.

Readers write ...

Baptist Growth

Following the article in the last issue of *FutureFirst* about "Growth in Scotland" a reader says that this is also true of the Baptist Union in Scotland which last year (2022) saw an increase of 2% on its numbers of members and people attending church. Why? Baptist churches have a 10-year vision programme on planting new churches and training church-planters, but the proof will be seen if 2023 numbers increase over those for 2022! It is likely some folk will join the BU because of the problems over same-sex issues in the Church of Scotland, and the influx of Nigerian Christian immigrants are also providing a challenge (and not just to the Baptists!).

SOURCES: Baptist Union of Scotland annual report; personal emails.

What is the church for?

Beacon Light is a monthly prayer letter email publication which helps those at work especially with daily texts and ministry to encourage the reading, study and learning of the Scriptures, and witnessing to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is compiled by Dr Paul Adams, a retired doctor and church pastor, and Executive Chair of the Beacon Light Trust..

In the August email he asks the question, "What is the church for?" but says that "this is not a major public question in the UK these days but when it arises, the answers vary from interesting to concerning.

"Community benefit" is a key phrase – the church is to serve the needs of the community and to provide the space and facilities for what people want to do, irrespective of whether or not these are God's priorities. 'Social conscience' is another – the church is to be the voice of compassion in society and act as a political spur to government.

"Spiritual affirmation" – the concept that if the church blesses something then God positively approves, even if it contravenes God's Word and the people do not normally even want God's commendation. 'Emotional reassurance' – at times of distress or loss the church says that God cares.

"There is some truth in each of these answers, but a recent AI search is more encouraging:

"... the church is the community of people who believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, and who follow His teachings and commands. The church has a three-fold purpose: to edify its members, to evangelize the world, and to glorify God."

Not bad for a computer! Paul then goes on to ask, "But how are churches going to do this?" and indicates that leaders have three key responsibilities – proclaiming the truth, protecting the church from error and equipping Christian people to be functional witnesses.

SOURCE: *Beacon Light*, Prayer Newsletter, August 2023. Used with permission.

SNOWFLAKES

Fewer French Priests. Catholic "Religious" priests belong to one of the Orders (like the Jesuits), while "Diocesan" (or Secular) priests belong to a particular Diocese. In 2021, 130 new priests in France were ordained, 122 in 2022 and just 88 in 2023. In 2021 three-fifths (62%) of these were Diocesan priests, and in 2023 it was a similar proportion (58%), whereas the proportion dropped to two-fifths (43%) in 2022. The proportion of Diocesan priests in England and Wales seems to have been last published in 2004 when it was 71%, which, if continued, is slightly higher than in France.

SOURCES: French figures in *The Tablet*, 1st July 2023, Page 23; English figures *UK Church Statistics*, Vol 2 2010-2020, Table 4.3.3.

American psychologists found that "religious leaders hold on to their influence because they are seen as highly credible. Robots may be able to write and deliver sermons, but people don't see them as credible." It is very unlikely that sermons by "soulless" AI robots (like one called Mindar) will be delivered in religious buildings.

SOURCE: Report by Tom Whipple, Science Editor, *The Times*, given by Religious Media Centre, 27th July, 2023.

Mormon movements. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) had 5.4 million members in the US in 2007, but only 4.1 million in 2022, an average annual decline of -1.2%. Globally, however, it grew from 13.2 million to 17.0 million in those years, an average increase of +1.7% per annum. In the UK there were 181,756 members in 2007, and 186,933 members in 2022, an average annual growth of +0.2%.

SOURCES: *The Week*, 15th July, 2023, Page 15; website; personal email.

Abortions. Just 14% of UK residents feel abortions should be illegal against 27% across 3.4 billion people in 24 key countries (but excluding China), 43% of the world population. In Poland 36% are against it, and 24% in Spain, but only 4% in Sweden and 11% in France. It was 17% across Europe, but 36% in the US, 89% in Kenya and 92% in Nigeria.

SOURCE: "Support for legal abortion," Pew Research Centre survey, 20th June 2023.

Same-sex marriages. Likewise, in a similar survey, 13% of UK residents said they opposed same-sex marriages, against 23% in Europe. It was 19% in the US but 82% in Kenya and 92% in Nigeria. Globally across the same 24 countries it was 46%, weighted not only by the African countries but also by Indonesia with 88%.

SOURCE: "Views of same-sex marriage," Pew Research Centre survey, 13th June 2023.



Growth in Australian Pentecostalism. A new book by Associate Prof Jon K Newton called *Holy Spirit Breakout* attributes 5 reasons for the rapid growth of Pentecostals in the 1970s in Australia: (a) the foundations laid by the initial institutions; (b) the influence of the New Zealand "Latter Rain" movement [also in the UK]; (c) the emergence of neo-Pentecostal movements, forms of worship, schools and youth movements; (d) the release of women's ministry particularly; and (e) the emergence of mega churches. In 1976 there were 38,400 who ticked Pentecostal on their Census form, 195,000 in 2001, 261,000 in 2016, but 256,000 in 2021. The Australian growth has become less over the last 20 years and is perhaps beginning to decline in the 2020s.

SOURCES: Article in *Pointers*, Australian Christian Research Association, Vol 33, No 2, June 2023, Page 18; email from Rev Dr Philip Hughes.

Migrant religion. A 2018 survey of 520 Polish migrants coming to the Irish Republic found that (a) where 17% were regular attenders at Mass in Poland, only 8% were in Ireland; (b) where 11% used to pray daily, 10% did so now; (c) where 50% said they lived a religious life in Poland only 12% claimed to do so in Ireland; and (d) when needing pastoral help 23% might have sought it in Poland, but only 12% did so in Ireland.

SOURCE: Article "Social Activity of Polish Migrants" by Wojciech Salon, in *Review of Religious Research*, Vol 64, No 4, December 2022, Page 916.

Megachurches. There are reckoned to be 1,750 mega churches in America, all Protestant and mostly evangelical, all with 2,000 or more attendees. Between 2015 and 2020 their attendance grew by a third, thereby turning younger and more multi-racial, according to the think-tank Hartford Institute for Religion Research. One of the largest is Welcome to Life Church with 80,000 Sunday attenders in 170 services across 44 sites (that's averaging 470 per service!), which includes watching a pre-recorded sermon by Senior Pastor Craig Groeschel. Mega churches are growing, even if churchgoing generally is declining, mostly by people transferring to them. Converts are few. It is said such churches seek to answer Peter Drucker's management question, "What does the customer consider value?" Mega churches are 0.5% of America's churches, but 7% of attendance and are essentially transdenominational – only two-fifths belong to a specific denomination.

SOURCE: Report in *The Economist*, 26th August, 2023, Page 34.

These may be helpful - Books/papers received

By Law and Love, When God builds a new society, by Rev David Harley, ex-General Director of the Overseas Missionary Fellowship. This book explores the world of Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, bringing each book into the 21st century with a Christological viewpoint, section by section (usually several chapters at a time) through these Old Testament books, found difficult by many. Published by Amazon Publishing Agency, 2022, ISBN 978-1-915662-99-6, 186 pages.

Twenty Years On: The Spiritual Revolution Thesis and the Fate of Practices, by Prof Paul Heelas. An excellent academic paper looking at church attendance and the "holistic milieu" and how they've changed since the turn of the century. Gives some very helpful conclusions for seeing the generality of spiritual life in the UK. Private paper available by email (can be given if requested).

Global Christianity: A Guide to the World's Largest Religion, by Gina Zurlo, editor of *World Christian Encyclopaedia*. Published by Zondervan Academic, Michigan, 2022. 352 pages. From Afghanistan to Zimbabwe.

"How the Pandemic Reshaped Christian Beliefs and Behaviours", the latest *American Worldview Inventory* for 2023, Dr George Barna, Director of Research, Cultural Research Centre, Arizona Christian University, released 13th June, 2023.

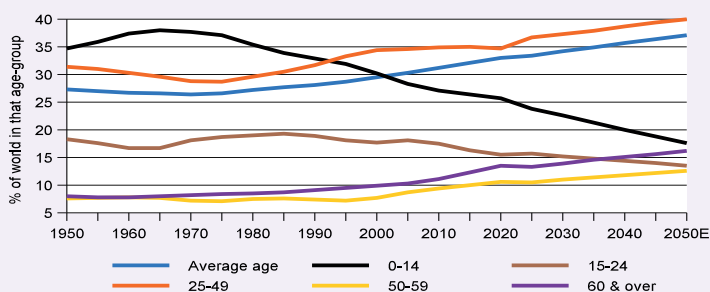
Grand- and Great-grandparents

There may be now more grandparents alive today than at any previous time in the history of the world! And perhaps, although people are starting families later and having fewer children now, at the moment there is probably the largest number of grandparents ever! And that means great-grandparents also, and great-great-grandparents ... etc, except possibly in the earliest days of creation when the initial chapters of Genesis indicate people living a very long time!

The US Census Bureau estimates that the world's population will reach 8 billion in October 2023. It reached just 2 billion in 1927, almost 100 years ago, and 33 years later in 1960 it was 3 billion, 14 years later in 1974 it was 4 billion, 13 years later in 1987 it was 5 billion, 12 years later in 1999 it was 6 billion, 12 years later again in 2011 it was 7 billion, and now, after yet another 12 year period, it is 8 billion. Demographers reckon, however, that the rate of increase is slowing down. It will take 14 years, they estimate, to reach 9 billion in 2037 and a further 21 years after that, in 2058, before it reaches 10 billion.

Part of the reason for the longer times, and therefore slightly slower growth rates, is that people are living longer, so the world is, as it were, filling up with older people, while those of child-bearing age are now often able to limit/choose the size and timing of their families. In this huge process the average age of the global population is increasing. As the graph shows, the proportion of the global population under 15 is shrinking and the percentage of those 25 to 49 and 60 and over increasing quite rapidly.

Percentage of the global population by age-group, 1950 to 2050E



It may be seen that the average age (the blue line) actually went down slightly between 1950 and 1970, largely because of the huge numbers of children born after the ending of WWII. The Americans had a "baby boom" in the 1950s, and the UK did in the 1960s, and many other countries did as well (UK had 670,000 births in 2022, but over a million in 1964). The large number of surviving new-borns pushed the average down.

Changes since 1975

The average age has climbed steeply since 1975. That year 5.6% of the world's population was 65 or over, some 230 million people; in the year 2000 of the global population 6.9% was 65 or over or 420 million, and now in 2023 there are 800 million in that age-bracket (10.0%). One US survey of grandparents found the youngest was 38 years old and the oldest was 100 when they became a grandparent. If that range is typical then for 800 million people over 65 in the world that gives scope for literally hundreds of millions of grandparents. It also suggests a large number of great-grandparents. The exact number does not seem to have been estimated, as the average size of families is unknown.

The number of grandparents is also set to decline. Data shared by the Office

for National Statistics (ONS) in 2022 showed that half of women in England and Wales were childless by their 30th birthday, a record high since data collection began in the 1930s. Even so, in the UK, 2.1% of households (600,000) were multi-generational in 2018 (that is, with at least two generations of adults), up from 1.8% in 2011. Professor Athina Vlachantoni, a Centre for Research on Ageing researcher, comments: "The role of grandparents has significantly increased over the last decade."

While dangerous to judge from just one detailed study, a comprehensive survey of families across 7 English churches in 2012 suggested 4% were living in a family with three adults and at least one child – higher than in society at large but reflecting the Christian motive of caring for your family.

What are grandparents called? The most common names are "Granny/Granddad/Grandpa," the first of which is often abbreviated to "Nan/Nanna." The more formal titles of "Grandfather" and "Grandmother" are perhaps used by the more traditional families, while "Grams/Gramps" are "unfailingly honest." "Pops" is American, and "Grandmamma/Grandpappa" is definitely highbrow. The name could be worse, however, as some children make up the relevant name, resulting in "Nanny Gin" for one lady! Where a child has more than one set of grandparents, personal names are often attached such as "Granddad John" and "Nanna Mary."

Christian grandparents

What does this all mean for an ageing church? Obviously, the likelihood of having yet more grandparents in the congregation! The number of people in England and Wales over 80 increased from 2.2% in 2011 to 5% in 2021, but among churchgoers from 11.6% in 2010 to 14.3% in 2020!

One (Methodist) church with increasing numbers of elderly some years ago asked all those in their church the names and birthdays of all their grandchildren, grand-nieces, great-grandchildren, etc, and compiled a list in calendar order. They then repeated the first names of those children whose birthday was in the week ahead and prayed each week for them, and found, after some months of this, that the church began to welcome children in their services, and gradually was able to re-start a Sunday School.

Building relationships are always important in a church. Why not hold a "Grandparents' Day" or a "Grandparents' Sunday" when Biblical examples of grandparents could be thought about, practical grandparenting could be explored, and the importance of praying for our grandchildren emphasised, perhaps by praying in groups?

A 2002 survey of teenagers found that three-fifths, 60%, went regularly to church if one or both their grandparents did, and a further 17% occasionally. Grandchildren often appreciate the values of their grandparents even if they disagree with them, but grandparents often become trusted people of influence and a source of stability in insecure lives.

There is a fascinating series in 5 of the kings of Judah: Ahaz, a bad king (2 Kings 16:2) was succeeded by his son Hezekiah, a good king (18:3). In his turn, Hezekiah was succeeded by his son Manasseh, a bad king until very late in life (21:2; 2 Chr 33:19), who was succeeded by his short-reigned son Amon, a bad king (21:22), and then by his grandson, Josiah, a good king (22:2). Apparent failure with one generation still gives an opportunity for the next-but-one generation!

SOURCES: Dept of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, United Nations: World Population Prospects 2022; website on age of first-time grandparents accessed August 2023; ONS on families; *Living the Christian Life* survey for Langham International Partnership, 2012; article in the *Daily Telegraph*, 11th August 2023; *Reaching and Keeping Teenagers*, Christian Research, 2002; *Grandparents*, Christian Research, 2007; *Changing Population* Newsletter July-Dec 2022.; *UK Church Statistics* No 4, 2021 Edition, Table 13.5.1.

Growth in Thailand

A new church association in Thailand is seeing some incredible growth results. Reach a Village was founded in 2012 by a Canadian, Rev Robert Craft, who has spent a life-time in South-East Asia as a pastor, mission worker and evangelical missions leader. It is now a network of organisations working in China, and 19 other Asian countries. Its primary focus is on villages because Craft researched and found some 1.7 million villages were remaining untouched by mission efforts, even though the Bible and other resources were available to help in evangelism. In total these neglected villages represented more than 2 billion people, just over a quarter (26%) of the world's population.

In Thailand, the movement is called the Free in Jesus Christ Church Association (FJCCA) and is based in the north of Thailand. Thailand is a country of 76 provinces and 85,000 villages, of which 94% have no church, whose unreached village population is some 65 million people, about the size of the UK.

The FJCCA is leading one of Thailand's fastest growing movements of people coming to Christ in the nation's history. In December 2016, it had less than 20 churches. Now, there are more than 700. It has had strong leadership by Pastor Somsak, who leads a large church in Chon Daen (a town of some 86,000 people in the Cho Daen District of the Phetchabun Province). He started the first FJCCA church.



On September 6, 2020, a record-breaking baptism took place in Thailand when more than 1,400 people from 200 villages in 5 different provinces came together at Chon Daen to declare their faith in Jesus Christ and be baptised. Many of them had heard about Jesus for the first time in 2020 through the ministry of FJCCA teams. They were all baptised within 2 hours by just 20 FJCCA leaders. Previously in 2019 some 1,200 were also baptised (in two events).

How does this growth happen? The FJCCA teams go into unreached villages, start Bible Studies and then begin house churches. The important element here is Thai nationals reaching out to fellow Thai nationals in nearby villages. While some white people are involved in leadership, this is primarily a Thai movement doing things in a Thai manner. The importance of their ministry can be seen as they are:

- Contextualising the gospel in Thai, speaking much more of PraJesu (or Jesus) rather than PraChao (God).
- Only slowly introducing the doctrine of the Trinity, which is often a confusing concept to Thai believers (who tend to accuse Christians of having 3 gods).
- Not praying immediately that new believers be filled with the Holy Spirit since this language suggests to the Thai that one is being possessed by a spirit in the way a spirit medium is possessed. The role of the Holy Spirit in a Christian's life is taught later in the discipleship process.

Dwight Martin was born in Thailand where his parents were missionaries with the Christian and Missionary Alliance. After 30 years in American IT work he returned to Thailand as a mission worker.

He researched the number of churches in Thailand and found that in 2015 there were 5,200 churches, roughly half being part of the Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand (EFT) and a third, 33%, the Church of Christ in Thailand.

The number of Thai churches has grown since then, however, to 8,300 in 2022 and 8,500 in April 2023! This rapid growth (+6.4% per annum on average since 2015), now includes the FJCCA as well as the EFT, both being dominant groups, each at just over a third of the total. Local believers are following the simple command of Jesus in Mark 1:38, "Let us go somewhere else — to the nearby villages — so I can preach there also. That is why I have come."

SOURCES: Free in Jesus Christ Church Association website; other websites including: thaichurches.org/directory and estarwv, all accessed July 2023; *FutureFirst* article June 2022, Page 5; personal emails; wikipedia.

Changing Affiliation

A "Religious Landscape Survey" was carried out by the American Pew Research Centre in 2007 followed up by re-interviewing a selected sample of the respondents the following year in a "Conversion Recontact Survey." These surveys provided huge amounts of interesting data, and a sample of 1,900 adult forms from the second survey were subsequently analysed in more depth by a lecturer in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

The aim was to try and ascertain the proportions of people who changed their religious affiliation, either by moving to another Protestant denomination, switching from Protestantism to Catholicism or the reverse, or becoming disaffiliated with any religious group. Table 1 shows the percentages at three broad life stages (each line and column totals 100%):

Table 1: Religious affiliation at three different periods of life

Affiliation	Childhood %	Teenager %	Adult %
Very religious	37	29	34
Moderately religious	42	34	24
Not religious	21	37	42

The Table suggests that almost two-fifths, 37%, growing up in a "very religious" context retain that commitment into adulthood, even if there was some temporary alternatives during their teenage years. However those who had a "moderately religious" childhood dropped away even from such religiosity as they had. Those growing up in a "non-religious" home retained that into adulthood, and were joined by those leaving the religiousness of their childhood years.

These are American figures and rooted in one period of time (15 years ago), although they are a randomly selected sample by a professional agency. But, as the Director of another American Research Centre wrote, "Many people who disaffiliate do not cite a single precipitating factor. It's more of a fading away from religion rather than a dramatic break."

How far are these figures replicated in the UK? As far as is known, similar research going to the same respondents two successive times has not been undertaken yet in the UK. But questions on (a) the religion of one's childhood and (b) current religion have been asked by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) in their British Social Attitudes Survey on a number of occasions, and these questions have also been included in some Scottish Censuses.

The latest of these NatCen studies (for 2010) said that 44% of those asked who grew up in a Christian household were still Christian today, a similar roughly two-fifths religious percentage noted above. The studies also found that those who grew up with no religion are likely to profess the same today. In other words, converts are few (although not zero). British surveys undertaken by Eddie Gibbs in the 1990s in the UK would also support the middle line of Table 1.

However, this Table does not give any reasons why people changed, and a further Table shows the main changes in this American sample:

Table 2: Changes between Catholicism and Protestantism, USA, 2008

Affiliation	Current Affiliation percentage			TOTAL
	Catholic	Protestant	Unaffiliated	
Raised Catholic	6	13	12	31
Raised Protestant	5	47	17	69

Relatively few Catholics remained Catholic in adulthood (6%) in this sample but nevertheless retained their religiosity by, if necessary, converting to Protestantism. 12% out of 31% who were raised Catholic had dropped away (=39%). Among the Protestants in this sample were a very large number (47%, half) who retained their Protestant affiliation but this hides those who remained Protestant but changed their denomination. Rather fewer had become unaffiliated (17% out of 69% or a quarter, 25%).

Why had some 5% raised Protestant become Catholic? The author suggests it was probably because of marriage. Why had some 13% raised Catholics become Protestant? Perhaps also because of marriage but more likely for other socio-demographic reasons – they wished to continue to belong to a church community. Both Catholics and Protestants who had started religious but were now unaffiliated gave similar reasons – the religion of their spouse again featured, but also especially their local community where they lived. Age and gender were not measured as such in this analysis, but the UK NatCen surveys found men more like to disaffiliate than women (49% to 40%), and Anglican women more likely to stay in an Anglican church than men (32% to 26%).

At the turn of the century, three strategic reviews were carried out in Deaneries in the Anglican Diocese of Rochester. Collectively (2,700 people), the surveys showed 14% had been coming to their present church all their lives; another 45% had moved from another Anglican church to their present one. 2% had previously been in a Catholic church and 11% in a Protestant church before coming to their current Anglican church, while 28% had never been to a church before coming to their present one.

What do these various surveys show in broad terms?

- Many churchgoers change church in their lifetimes, probably at least 50+%, half.
- While there is much loyalty to the denomination people first experience, there is also much movement between them, perhaps of the order of a fifth, 20%, plus the more specific change between Catholic and Protestant, or vice versa, perhaps about a tenth, 10%.
- More people join the church than is sometimes realised, moving from a secular perspective to a religious one, often over a period of several years, perhaps as many as the other fifth, 20%.

These surveys might suggest that it is more important for both seekers and committed to find a spiritual home rather than denominational one and that focus should be on birthing and building up people in their faith through the Scriptures rather than adherence to denominational definitions and definitions.

SOURCES: Article "Motivations and Types of Religious Change ..." by Nadia Belder in *Review of Religious Research*, Vol 6, No 4, December 2022, Pages 933-959; British Social Attitudes for 2010 cited in *FutureFirst*, October 2017, Page 5; *Religious Trends 7* Christian Research, 2008, Table 2.3.1; *Winning Them Back*, Eddie Gibbs, Christian Research, 1995; Deanery Strategic Reviews for Erith, Orpington and Sidcup, Christian Research, 2000 to 2002, Chapter 2; Daniel Cox, *Washington Post*, 21st August in the *Church Times*, 25th August, 2013 Page 13.