

Geography, Christians and those with No Religion

The 2011 Population Census included “No Religion” as one of the options in answering the voluntary question on Religion, as it had in the 2001 Census. Overall the proportion of the population saying they were “Christian” fell from 72% in England and Wales in 2001 to 59% in 2011, and the percentage saying they had No Religion rose from 15% in 2001 to 25% in 2011.

County variations on these overall percentages are shown in the accompanying maps of England and Wales. The heartland of Christianity was north of a line stretching from the River Severn to the Wash in 2001, although much of the South East (outside the urban area of London), the South West and western Wales also had a strong Christian following. By 2011 that strength had disintegrated, the highest pockets of people saying they were Christian being in the Catholic counties of Cheshire and Merseyside, and the strongly Anglican rural counties of Cumbria and Durham. The areas where fewest people said they were Christian in 2011 were again in the urban areas of London and Bristol, but now also in South Wales and a broad swathe north of London in a north-south industrial belt, but also in rural counties like Cornwall and Hampshire.

The No Religion maps show that South Wales and East Sussex had the greatest number saying they had no religion in 2001, but by 2011 this had become the overwhelming majority in both England and Wales, with only the Catholic counties of Lancashire and Merseyside and Outer London being less intense.

In both sets of maps, the total number of counties coloured in each of the four colours is roughly equal, and the fact that two colours largely dominate in the 2001 maps (Christian and No Religion) and two in the 2011 maps indicates just how sweeping the changes have been, and how great the challenge facing the church in reaching people for the Kingdom.

SOURCES: Detailed county figures from the Office of National Statistics website for the 2011 Census of Population; the maps are taken from illustrations in *UK Church Statistics No. 2 2010-2020*, ADPC Publishers, Tonbridge, 2014, Page 14, 14.

MILLENNIALS AND TECHNOLOGY

Research is ongoing about how best to reach those who “prefer watching to reading, screens to paper, interacting to writing, dialoguing to listening to lectures, and group activities to individual activities,” a quote by Tom Steffen of the Orality Movement. Research by the Barna Group in California looking at the ongoing trends from Millennials (those in their twenties) and their “digital lens” showed that a third of American adults of this age group, 36%, stop whatever they are doing to check their device when they get a new text or message. However, the same proportion, 35%, also realise that these devices can separate them from people they are with.

- Half, 53%, find that smart phones and tablets can become a distraction
- Half, 55%, wish they had accomplished more the previous day (having been hindered in the process by using social media)

In other words, some American Millennials, while agreeing life is fast and furious, are reporting they are getting less done than they would wish. Three-fifths, 62%, reckon they know more about technology than other adults, but at the same time are looking for substance, not flashing lights. Seven out of eight, 87%, of Millennials say they want to live a meaningful life. Despite high rates of cohabitation and delayed marriage, four-fifths of Millennials, 82%, want to get married. Born-again Millennials, notable for social activism, are also the generation practising evangelism most.

While technology is a pervasive part of life for Millennials, they are beginning to realise that it can burn them out. Few ever log off, half (46%) never ever reckon on relaxing. As a consequence, less than half (42%) of these Americans are satisfied with their work/life balance, their level of stress (28%) or their practice of rest (39%). Only a fifth spend between 8 and 12 hours a day being truly productive, and, as given above, half (55%) wish they had accomplished more the day before.

This suggests that technology does not satisfy, and constant people interaction does not do so either. Innovative ways of reaching Millennials for Jesus Christ, with or apart from technology, are an urgent need for the church.

Another recent American report shows three strong factors for attracting young adults (18 to 34): they are more likely to go to churches experiencing rapid growth or decline (more than 10% have changed churches during the last decade); more are likely to stay at those churches with multiple full-time leaders; and men are more likely to remain in those churches where a quarter or fewer leaders are women.

SOURCES: Article “Tracking the Orality Movement” by Tom Steffen in the *Lausanne Global Analysis*, Vol 3, No 2, March 2014; www.barna.org/barna-update/culture/657-three-digits, accessed March 2014; *Christianity Today*, Jan 2014, reported in *Great Commission News Spring 2014*, Page 7.

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Figure 1: Percentage of Christians in population, 2001

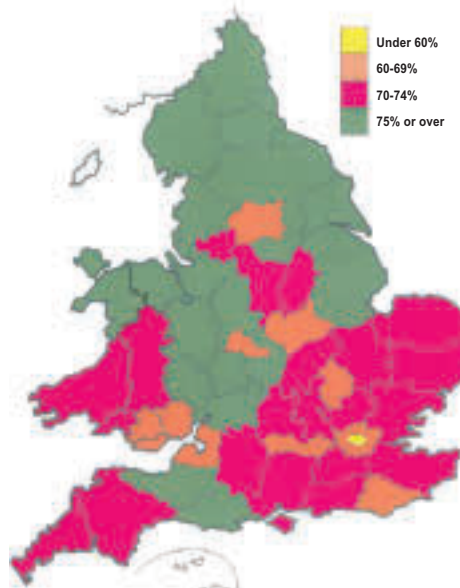


Figure 2: Percentage of Christians in population, 2011

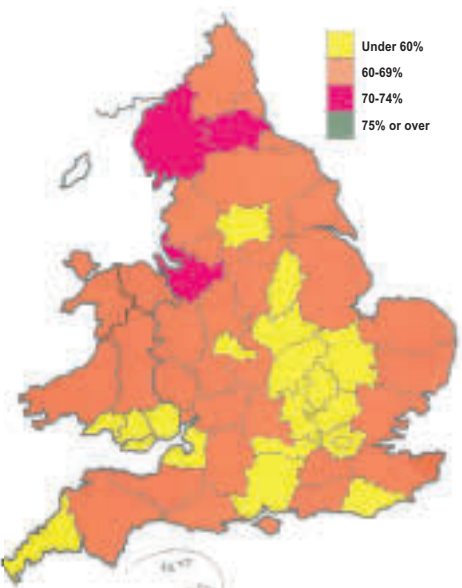


Figure 3: Percentage of those with No Religion in population 2001

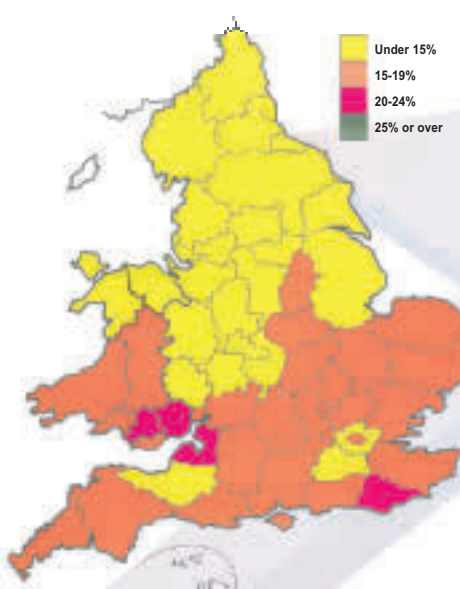
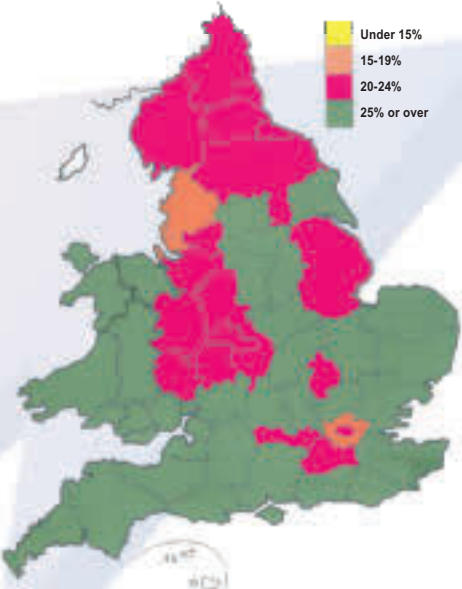


Figure 4: Percentage of those with No Religion in population, 2011

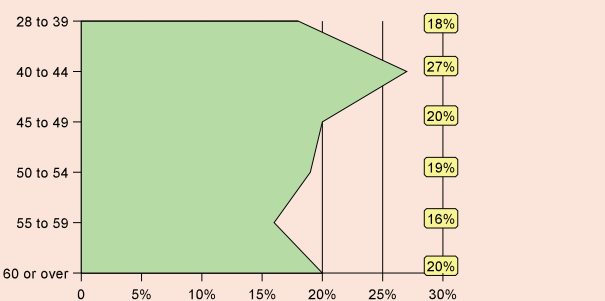


ANGLICAN RESIGNATIONS

The Church of England is the only denomination that regularly publishes the age of its clergy. Two-thirds, 68%, of parochial clergy (that is, congregational ministers) are over 50, which may lead to significant replacement problems in 10 or 15 years' time. Two pieces of research looking specifically at age in relation to growth and resignations illustrate the current situation.

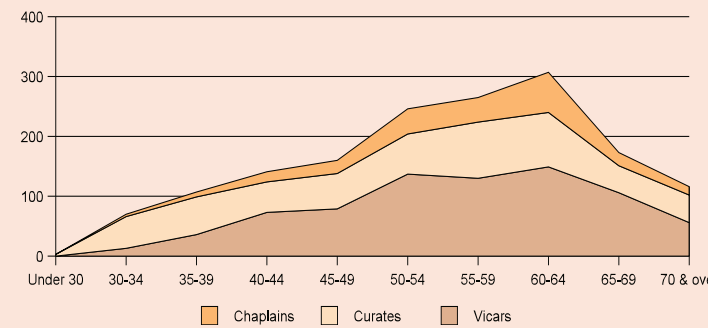
One is from a study initially undertaken on church growth in the 1990s, which analysed the proportion of growing churches by age of minister. The graph clearly shows that growth is more likely to occur when Anglican ministers are in their 40s or 60s, but not their 50s. The analysis was repeated with the data from the 2005 English Church Census which found likewise that growth was most likely to occur for ministers of all denominations (so not just Anglicans) in their 40s, but only for Anglicans in their 60s.

Growth in Anglican churches by age of incumbent



The second comes from *UK Church Statistics No 2* which shows the age at which clergy have resigned between 2000 and 2013. It may be seen that there is a distinct rise in numbers of resignations of clergy in their 50s compared with their 40s. That maybe because of health, but it might be that offers of other employment become more attractive then because the satisfaction of service may have diminished (churches not growing). They may prefer to resign rather than remain unhappily in the job. Curates and Chaplains also seem more likely to resign in their 50s.

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An unpublished report from 2007, *From Frustration to Fulfilment*, found that a small number of clerics lose their sense of vocation, and in some cases, their faith in God. Sometimes the loss of vocation came because a preferment to a more senior position was promised but went unfulfilled. Sometimes the problem came because, with fewer clergy, hours worked became longer, 70 or 80 hours a week, “routinely putting their ministry ahead of their family or their own health,” as a Bishop reported. A 2003 survey found that a third of Archdeacons worked in excess of 70 hours a week, and that the Bishops were similar. Some clergy find frustration because of a “feeling of increasing irrelevance in a largely secularised society.”

Clearly the problems clergy in their 50s can face come from a variety of sources. They are not just felt by Anglican ministers. The solutions are neither single nor simple, but sympathy and support are likely to be essential ingredients of any answer.

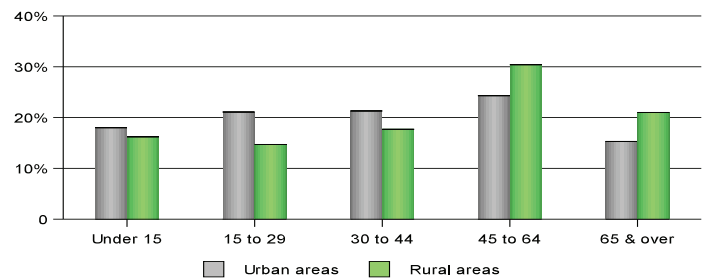
One minister known to the author was appointed to a key position when he was 48. His comment was, “I’m very glad to have been appointed, but I don’t want to continue in it till I retire at 65. I’m afraid of undoing in my last 5 years all that I do in my first 10 or 12.” He took voluntary retirement when he was 60 – and has continued actively in alternative employment ever since! Awareness of the needs of the Kingdom need to be finely balanced with the needs of the individual and his/her family.

SOURCES: *Church Growth in the 1990s*, A statistical Report, Christian Research with Springboard, 2000; *UK Church Statistics No 2 2010-2020*, ADPC Publishers, Tonbridge, 2014, Figure 2.7.1, articles in *Church Times*, 2nd Feb and 29th June, 2007.

Age by Environment

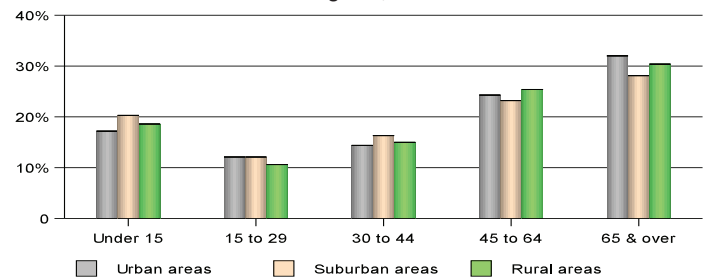
A recent report on “Rural England 2014” contrasts the age of those living in the country with those living in urban situations. As the first bar chart shows, older people are more likely to be living in rural areas and younger people in urban areas. More than 50% of those living in rural areas are 45 and over compared with just 40% of urbanites, the figures coming from the 2011 Population Census.

Age of people living in rural and urban areas in England, 2011



Similar information is available for churchgoers from the 2005 English Church Census, with additional information available for suburban areas (including towns), and this is shown in the second bar chart.

Age of churchgoers living in rural, suburban and urban areas in England, 2005



The pattern, however, is not the same. There is a greater proportion of children in rural areas than in urban areas, although less than in suburban areas where many middle-income families live, which will include many churchgoers.

The rural popularity is partly time related – in the years 1998 to 2003 many young families “green shifted”, that is, moved from urban or suburban areas deliberately to the countryside, and this included churchgoing families also. Consequently some very rural parts of the country, like Ryedale in North Yorkshire, rural but with easy access to York for employment, saw an increase in the number of churchgoers, many of whom had young families, and hence an increase in the number of children at church. This green shifting movement now seems to have abated and a 2015 Census, for example, might well show a different pattern.

Churchgoers follow a similar pattern to the general population in having many elderly people going to church living in rural areas (percentage of the total being 56%), but not as many as those in urban areas. This is because a large percentage of churchgoers in the Inner City areas (36% of all in such areas) are 65 and over, older people unable to move elsewhere for financial, health or family reasons, going to church for fellowship and out of loyalty, especially if they are Anglican, Catholic or Black Pentecostal.

SOURCES: *Statistical Digest of Rural England*, 2014, Dept for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Government Statistical Service, March 2014, Page 10, and *Religious Trends*, No 6, 2006/2007, Christian Research, Eltham, London, 2006, Table 5.18.1.

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Life and Death

The Maranatha Community, an international interdenominational movement based in Manchester, has produced a summary of a series of private consultations of Christian leaders, which it has called “Life or Death – The Struggle for the Soul of our Nation”, in which they highlight a number of concerns especially relating to children and young people in the UK today.

They see “the corrosive influences of Secular Humanism and the growth of Islam” and call for “the urgent need for the Christian Gospel to be lived and spelt out in terms that our society can understand.” They cite the escalating numbers of children and young people suffering mental problems, broken homes, and being “NEETS”, those Not in Education, Employment or Training. In particular they quote:

- The 9,500 web pages which included child sexual abuse, 81% of such abuse involving children under 11 (Internet Watch Federation 2012 report)

- The cost of family breakdown which has risen from £30bn in 2000 to £46bn in 2013 (Marriage Foundation 2013)

- 40% of NEETS feel they are “not part of society” and 37% rarely leave their house, 33% have suffered depression (NEETS survey, UCU/Comres, 2013)

- 15,000 children contacted Childline in the year ending 2013 about suicide, up from 12,000 the year before (ChildLine, 2014)

- There were 44,000 registered sex offenders being monitored (1 in every 1,200 people in the country) in 2013 (Ministry of Justice Statistics Bulletin 2013)

- The average household debt in the UK was £8,000 in 2013, excluding mortgages (Centre for Social Justice, 2013)

- Half, 48%, of all children born in 2014 will experience the breakdown of their parents’ relationship (Centre for Social Justice, 2012)

- One million fathers do not now live with their children (Hansard 2013)

- In 2012, 70,000 women were raped and 400,000 were sexually assaulted (Home Office 2014)

- Three-fifths, 62%, of 12 to 15s have a Facebook profile, 24% are on Twitter and text an average 260 texts per week (OFCOM, 2013)

Such statistics could be multiplied many times over. The report calls for a “new kind of moral leadership”, as normal morality is being abandoned. It recognises that the Judaeo-Christian values are being changed and as a consequence the nation is becoming de-Christianised (in spite of David Cameron’s affirmations to the contrary).

The Report recognises that banishing God from the national conscience means we are left as a nation without purpose, and says that the Christian task today is “to bring hope”. A society without values robs human beings of dignity, and that “immense damage has been done by the promotion of violence, promiscuity and pornography,” with the young “robbed of their innocence”. There is the dismissal of God, the rejection of absolutes and a growing alienation between politicians and people.

Many Christians would agree with the broad tenets of this report, which follows a similar report 10 years ago, and other like reports published in America. So what is the solution suggested? That there is an outpouring of prayer in the power of the Holy Spirit, and that the values and riches of the Christian vision be expressed more clearly in order that Christian people can bring “Hope and Life at this time of deep crisis.”

SOURCE: *A Matter of Life and Death*, The Maranatha Community, 2nd edition, May 2014, www.maranathacomunity.org.uk

SNOWFLAKES

–Bible Use. A survey found that 88% of American households own a Bible, and on average 4.7 Bibles! 37% say they read it at least once a week, but half, 47%, of owners say they never have enough time to do so. The use of tablets or smartphones for Bible search rose from 18% in 2011 to 35% in 2014, but 84% still prefer to read it in print. Why read it? “It brings me closer to God,” say half, 56% (down from 64% in 2011), while others, a third (32%), say, “It brings me comfort or helps solve my problems,” (up from 26% in 2011).

SOURCE: Barna-update, www.barna.org, 21st April 2014.

Hearing Loss can be permanent if high noise levels are endured for a long time. Anything above 75 decibels (dB) can be dangerous. Normal conversation is about 60 dB, but 2 hours on a ride-on lawn mower (91 dB) is as much as we can safely stand, or 1 hour of a personal stereo at maximum volume (94 dB). One minute of a pneumatic hammer at 110 db is the normal limit, and as for jets taking off if just 25 metres away at 130 dB ... well! Some churches use high amplification for their worship and an hour of that may be too much for some people and literally damage their congregations’ hearing.

SOURCE: *Community Ear and Hearing Health*, Volume 10, Issue 13, 2013, Page 11.

“Minster” churches. Some discussion has been held as to whether larger churches should be “Minister” churches, that is, supporting local churches with people, finance, or other help. In the London Borough of Southwark a number of Anglican church “plants” have occurred, some of which have been from existing churches to strengthen another nearby congregation. Some 13 of these have been noted, and it has been found that, overall, membership has grown from 521 to 1,862, a three-fold increase, and an average of 140 people each church. On the other hand, at the same time some completely new plants have started with no prior membership, and these have an average membership of 220. Conclusion: church planting works, however it’s done!

SOURCE: Email from Rev Paul Perkin, April 2014.

Continued from page 1

Well-being. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) regularly measures well-being on David Cameron’s instructions. The latest, 2013, study found that 77% of British adults rated their life between 7 and 10 out of 10, marginally higher than the 76% a year before. Teenagers and those over 65 scored highest; those aged 45 to 54 lowest. Women were higher than men. The American Gallup organisation went one stage further in a similar survey bringing churchgoing into the equation and finding that churchgoers had more positive emotions of well-being than non-churchgoers. Perhaps ONS should factor in religion in their next survey!

God and Jesus scored better than church across all age-groups, though there were a number of comments about the problem of suffering. Jesus scored the best of all, though the comments showed that this was not due to views of divine status, but due to His significance as a moral teacher, or even for challenging the status quo.

There was some good news. The graded statements highlighted some recognised positive characteristics, in that “present-day Christianity” is regarded as having good principles, being a friendly and a respected faith. However, those were outweighed by a significant perception of judgmentalism (68%), being anti-homosexual (78%), hypocritical (63%), old-fashioned (70%), and out of touch (63%), these percentages combining those for Affiliates and Others. The same negative statements scored highly across all groups – including Regulars.

The findings were consistent with similar research done in the USA by Kinnaman and Kimball. Moreover, as with the key concepts, the younger age ranges were found to be more likely to have a strongly negative view. It is deeply troubling that a message of grace appears to be masked by a perception of judgmentalism, anti-homosexuality, hypocrisy and being old-fashioned. It seems we have much to do to change perceptions and present the one unique selling point that no-one else has to offer – the grace and love of God.

Same Sex Acceptable. Two surveys in America 10 years apart show how the moral acceptance of same-sex sexual relationships has changed.

Acceptance by Group	2003 %	2013 %
Practising Protestants	12	15
Practising Catholics	19	37
Those of other faiths	41	50
Those with no faith	55	71
Evangelicals	5	2

Those with no faith have increased their acceptance, but equally so have those with a religious faith, except for evangelicals who have gone in the opposite direction.

SOURCE: Barna Group surveys, June 2003 and 2013, and article in *Answers magazine*, Oct-Dec 2013, Page 10.



REFLECTIONS

In his vision on the Island of Patmos towards the end of the first century, John saw the glorified Christ and described Him in terms of the One with (a) the seven Spirits, (b) as the faithful witness, (c) the seven golden lamps, (d) the long robe and golden sash, (e) the head white as wool or snow, (f) the eyes a flame of fire, (g) the feet like burnished bronze, (h) the voice sounding of many waters, (i) the right hand holding seven stars, (j) the mouth with its two-edged sword, (k) the face like the sun, (l) being the First and the Last, and (m) having the keys to Death and Hades.

That's just the first chapter of Revelation! In the next two chapters are letters to seven churches in Asia which give comments and instructions for each church. Each repeats some of the imagery in the first chapter. Thus in the letter to Ephesus come (c) and (i), to Smyrna (l), to Pergamum (j), to Thyatira (f) and (g), to Sardis (a), to Philadelphia (m), and to Laodicea (b). Each church gets as it were part of the overall vision personalised for them but not the whole vision.

The church, in its different denominations, as well as individual Christians, may "personalise" revealed truth in the sense of emphasising a particular aspect of the Christian faith. The Orthodox especially focus on the Resurrection, the Roman Catholics on Mary, Evangelicals on the Cross, and so on. In reality, none of us can claim the whole truth, "for we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part" (1 Cor 13:9), or as Paul puts it three verses later, we see in "a glass, darkly".

A number of recent books have described what people saw when they had a spiritual experience of heaven, the most well-known currently being probably that of Todd Burpo's son in *Heaven is for Real*. He met Jesus, so he describes, and his dead grandfather and his sister originally born in a miscarriage. Frank Peretti in a less well known book describes a vision of heaven with aborted children playing in a field with Jesus. Amazing as such experiences were for the recipients, at best they are only partial glimpses of the wonders of eternity.

When C S Lewis in his *The Last Battle* finally describes the children experiencing what we would call Heaven he uses the phrase, "Come farther up, come farther in," suggesting there is always more to discover, more to know, more to marvel and wonder at. Heaven is totally beyond our finite, flawed understanding – no wonder we will need eternity to try to glimpse and enjoy it all!

Likewise, as individual Christians, we each know some of the truth, portray some of the likeness of Christ, but never the whole in this life. What can we learn from this person, how understand the grace of God in that person, what are the positives in this awkward person, the beauty in this disfigured person, the wonder in this Downs person, the teaching in this gifted person, the joy in this suffering person? So often, we are driven and dominated by our own agenda that the reality of eternity and the challenges of the life of the risen Christ in others pass us by. May the experience of the Emmaus road, "Jesus Himself drew near and went with them," be ours constantly.

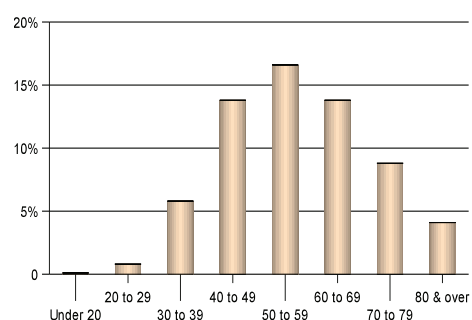
Living Arrangements

The majority, 98%, of the UK population live in households, the remaining 2% being in communal establishments. The proportion of the population who are married has dropped from 51% in 2001 to under half, 47%, in 2011. Marriage in this context includes the small proportion, 0.2%, who are in civil partnerships. Separated people are counted as legally still married, but divorced are not.

The fall in the percentage who are married is because those who are "single" have increased from 30% to 35% in the same period. The Office for National Statistics uses "single" in the legal sense of those never married, but the category includes those who are cohabiting and single parents as well as those living alone. With 12% of households being cohabiting couples, the percentage of people living as a couple, married or cohabiting, is 59% (47% + 12%), still down from the 61% (51% + 10%) seen in 2001.

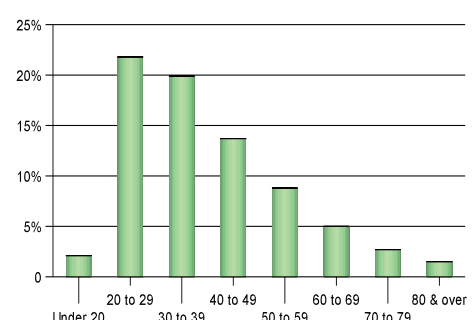
Some of the single will be those who have been married but are now divorced or widowed. The number and percentage of those widowed has dropped, from 8% to 7%, largely because of the increase in life expectancy. One person in 11, 9%, of the population was divorced in 2011, and the first chart shows how this varied with age. The highest proportion was those in their 50s when 1 person in 6 was divorced, but the percentage of those in their 40s or 60s was also high, 14% or 1 adult in every seven.

Percentage of people divorced in England and Wales by age, 2011



The proportion cohabiting has increased from 10% in 2001 to 12% in 2011 partly as a result of the ageing population. More of those 40 and over are now cohabiting (8% of households in 2011 against 5% in 2001), partly because those who divorce prefer to cohabit rather than re-marry and partly because cohabitation has become more socially acceptable.

Percentage of people cohabiting in England and Wales by age, 2011



While the age group with the highest proportion of people cohabiting is those aged 20 to 29, the proportion of cohabiting people in this age group fell from 22% in 2001 to 19% in 2011 because of the increase in older cohabiters. The second bar

chart gives the age of those cohabiting. Two-thirds (69%) of cohabiting people were previously single, and a fifth (21%) divorced. The remaining 10% were either widowed (3%) or legally married but separated and now living with someone else (7%).

SOURCE: How have Living Arrangements and Marital Status in England and Wales changed since 2001?, Office for National Statistics, March 2014.

Sunday Assemblies

Started by two atheist stand-up comedians, Sanderson Jones and Pippa Evans, Sunday Assemblies aim to provide "the best bits of church, with no religion, and awesome pop songs." The first was held on 6th January 2013, the second week they had 300 attending and now they regularly have 600 people.

What is their attraction? According to their website, "simple values, clear message and excellent mission." They have certainly proliferated. In June 2014 they had 38 meetings in 13 countries and aim for 100 meetings in 15 countries by the end of the year.

There are 10 in England, one each in Scotland, N Ireland, the Irish Republic, 6 in Australia, 12 in the United States, 3 in Asia and one each in Germany, France, Canada and Brazil. They plan to conduct rites of passage like weddings and funerals, and have already started a book club and discussion group.

Sunday Assemblies promote atheism, but argue that such can have emotional and experiential appeal and not just be a cerebral exercise. Although there are few registered atheists in Britain, with a quarter of the UK's population saying they have No Religion there would appear to be much room for Sunday Assemblies to expand.

Almost surely, this would seem to indicate a spiritual vacuum in this country and elsewhere which the church is failing to fulfil. Can a better image, greater commitment, increasing community involvement, innovative approaches help the church stem the tide of this pseudo-religion? Undoubtedly, these may all have a part to play but above all, we need to pray passionately and urgently for an outpouring of God's Holy Spirit on dry and thirsty ground, both within the church and without.



SOURCES: Sunday Assembly website, www.sundayassembly.com; article in Religion Watch, Vol 29, No 1, November 2013, Page 11.

EUROPEAN STUDENT CHALLENGE

Within the European Union (EU-27) there are about 4,000 university-type institutions with almost 20 million students in total in 2010, three-fifths (63%) of all those aged 20 to 24. A third, 34%, of these were studying social sciences, business or law (three-fifths women), 15% engineering or manufacturing (mostly men), 14% health and welfare (mostly women), 12% humanities and arts (mostly women), and just 10% science, mathematics or computing (equally men and women).

The number of international students in the UK, France and Germany collectively is a quarter (23%) of all the international students in the world, and is a number which has increased substantially over the previous 10 years. A great opportunity! However, a study by Wim Rietkerk of L'Abri suggests many students fear being trapped by religion – "they say they want the kingdom, but they don't want God in it."

Wim would argue that five Europeans have created today's environment of suspicion:

- Darwin No need for God to explain life
- Marx Authority can't be trusted
- Freud Morality and conscience don't come from God
- Nietzsche Piety is always the weapon of the loser
- Kant We can never reach truth or reality

As a consequence, the centre of gravity of the worldwide church has moved away from Europe, which has wasted its Judaeo-Christian heritage, and Europe is now full of "new unreached tribes alienated from the Gospel," according to Jeff Fountain of the Schuman Centre for European Studies who postulates five types of Europeans:

- 1) **Post-Christian** who reject the Christian world view and values as old-fashioned and irrelevant. Modernity has marginalised faith in many European minds.
- 2) **Post-Communist** who have rejected science and the state as saviours of the human race. Communism's collapse left a great spiritual and ideological vacuum.
- 3) **Post-Modern** who reject the scientific Modern worldview and rational attempts to create a better future, giving space to hopelessness and cynicism.

- 4) **Post-Migrant** who are the children mainly of Muslim immigrants without Christian heritage who make up a significant proportion of Europe's urban population, which they will greatly influence in the future for better or worse.

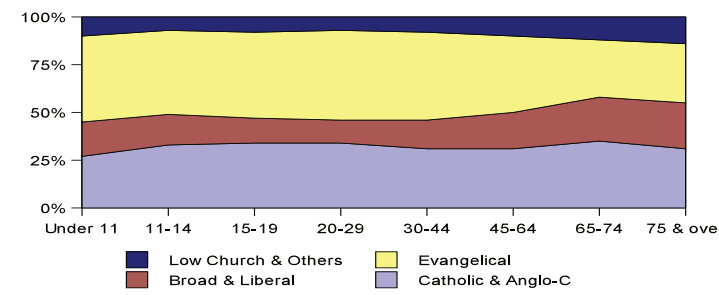
- 5) **Post-Secular**, the New Age type person, the Madonna "do-it-yourself-spirituality" without any ethical demands.

Students today are part of the Millennial generation which "is forging a distinctive path into adulthood. Ranging from 18 to 33, they are relatively unattached to organised politics and religion, linked by social media, burdened by debt, distrustful of people, in no rush to marry – and optimistic about the future." This comment comes from the Pew Research Centre which undertook a survey across Europe showing that 50% of Millennials considered themselves

Age by Churchmanship

Looking at the age of churchgoers by churchmanship may not be undertaken very frequently, but it does contribute to the overall picture of churchgoing in this century. The chart shows that evangelicals are almost half the churchgoers for those under 45, but thereafter the pattern changes and the Catholics and Anglo-Catholics form a third of the total. Those who are Broad or Liberal are much stronger over 45 than under.

Age of English churchgoers, by churchmanship, 2005



These variations are reflected in the average age for each of these four groups. Evangelicals are the youngest with an average age of 41, then come the Catholics and Anglo-Catholics at 46, followed by Low Church and Others at 48 with those who are Broad or Liberal averaging 49. The overall average for all churchgoers in England in 2005 was 45.

SOURCE: Religious Trends No 6, 2006/2007, Christian Research, Eltham, London, 2006, Table 5.7.2.

SCIENCE AND FAITH

Science and Faith are in conflict in the belief of over half of American adults, 55%, according to a Pew Survey. Over a quarter, 29%, of Christian Millennials say that "churches are out of step with the scientific world we live in." The main cause for this is not just that many academics have no faith but that many leading scientists accept evolution, with 90% rejecting the idea that evolution is directed towards an "ultimate purpose". Very few youth leaders address the topic of science, and only a third, 35%, of clergy say they mention it at least once a year. Although such figures for the UK are not available, the situation is likely to be similar.

SOURCE: Article by Dr John West at the Centre for Science and Culture, website, 2014.

This may be helpful Report received

The Designer's Guide to Presenting Numbers, Figures and Charts, Sally Bigwood and Melissa Spore, Allworth Press, New York, 2013. £15. A useful introduction.

HUMOUR

Allegedly taken from actual medical records dictated by doctors:

On the second day, the knee was better and on the third day it had completely disappeared.

The patient has been depressed ever since she began seeing me in 1983.

Discharge status: Alive but without permission.

She slipped on the ice in early December and her legs went in separate directions.

The patient was released to the outpatient department without dressing.

She is numb from the toes down.

SOURCE: Grove Jokes of the month.



Providing Facts for Forward Planning

SNIPPETS

1) An American survey of TV watching found that Christians tend to watch slightly more than non-Christians, 3.3 hours per day against 3.2 hours. 5% of Americans don't watch it at all.

2) 32% of those in the UK aged 15 to 24 registered an interest in newly-branded Alpha in 2013, compared with 20% in 2001, and 34% of those aged 25 to 34 (compared with 13%).

3) The 10 countries with the worst record for persecuting Christians in 2014 are (in order): North Korea, Somalia, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Maldives, Pakistan, Iran and Yemen.

4) Half, 51%, of the population say the birth of Jesus is irrelevant to Christmas.

5) Half, 45%, of teenagers aged 13 to 15 no longer live with both of their birth parents.

6) The Biblical film which has brought in the most money is one screened nearly 60 years ago in 1956, *The Ten Commandments*, which in 2013 prices grossed more than £640 million in the US alone. The second is *Ben Hur*, released 1959, and accruing nearly £500 million in box office receipts. *Noah*, released April 2014, grossed £150 million in its first week.

7) Emus and kangaroos cannot walk backwards, and are on the Australian coat of arms for that reason.

SOURCES: 1) Barna survey, May 2014, www.barna.org/barna-update/media-watch; 2) Alpha Life Journal, No 1, May 2014, Page 21; 3) Annual persecution report by Open Doors, 2014, quoted in *New Europe Vision*, Spring 2014, Page 2; 4) Christmas starts with Christ leal, June 2014; 5) Marriage Foundation Newsletter, May 2014, Page 3; 6) Article in *The Economist*, 19th April, 2014; 7) Plain Truth, Spring 2012, Page 23.

PERCEPTIONS OF THOSE OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

by Will Bissett, Senior Business Manager and Minister in Guildford Diocese

In recent weeks, the question of whether the UK is a Christian country has been raised again, and debated publicly and politically. Is the proposition that the UK is a Christian country perception, actuality, or the desire for a social and communal unity which we wish existed? Some find crumbs of comfort in the assertion, along with the 2011 Census results, indicating that 59% of the UK population have some kind of Christian allegiance. However, that is a drop of 13% compared to the 2001 census.

Moreover, if church attendance is an indication of faith practice, then with around 6% of the UK attending weekly, or around 15% attending once a month, only a relatively small proportion of the population seems to be active in the practice of its Christian faith. Does this mean that there is a desertion to atheism or secular humanism? Well, no, not exactly. Studies indicate that there remains a healthy interest in spirituality, but that such is not necessarily connected with the Christian faith (or other religions).

In this culture of competing voices clamouring for attention, why don't more view the church as an option for their spiritual search? Isn't the incredible message of God's grace and love something attractive? Or is that not seen, or even communicated effectively? The situation begs the question, "What is the perception of the Christian faith?"

Understanding how others view Christianity may help us appreciate why so few see our faith as a viable option, rather than us concocting or imposing our reasons for their disinterest. It may also help us relate better and communicate more effectively and appropriately into the reality of life in 21st century Britain.

It was with these and other thoughts in mind that research was undertaken, in support of an MA dissertation, in the Spring of 2013. A survey was distributed electronically using an opportunity sample, and responses were received from 228 people across the UK, of which 148 did not attend church regularly ("Affiliates"), or at all ("Others"), the remaining 80 participating in church or Christian activities at least once a month ("Regulars").

The survey asked participants to rate their reaction to five key faith concepts, and give reasons for their ratings, as well as grading 22 statements (evenly balanced between positive and negative statements) about faith. Scores ranged from 1 (very positive/favourable) to 9 (very negative/ unfavourable), so the lower the score the better.

Average scores for the different groups as how they perceived the five concepts

Concepts	Affiliates	Others	Regulars
Christians	3.8	4.7	2.5
Christianity	3.5	5.6	1.9
Church	4.5	5.7	3.0
God	3.0	5.6	1.3
Jesus	2.9	4.9	1.1
Base	70	78	80

The scores from those outside the regular attending community were much lower than the Regulars, indicating a significantly different perception. While it may seem obvious that Regulars would rate God, Jesus, Christians, Christianity and Church

more highly than the Affiliates or Others, what should make us sit up is that even Regular churchgoers didn't rate church as highly as the other concepts.

While not all the scores were low, church consistently scored the lowest. There is a weight of evidence consistent with other findings such as the research by Spencer, which points to a significant negative perception of church. Moreover, while the scores are numbers, which in aggregate score church around the middle of the scale 1 to 9, the free text comments were much harsher – even the comments by Regulars.

What is even more alarming is an age divide. While the wonders of modern medicine may be helping us to live longer, the commission of the church is to make disciples across the age spectrum, and the future of the church lies in the transmission of the Gospel message to an increasingly unchurched generation. The research results indicated that amongst those who are not Regulars, the 18-30 age range are more likely to score Christians, Christianity and Church negatively, with the 31-50 age range not far behind.

Percentage of scores in three ranges by age-group for each concept

Concept	Score	18 to 30 %	31 to 50 %	Over 50 %
Christians	1-4	45	50	30
	5	25	26	37
	6-9	30	24	9
Christianity	1-4	45	47	54
	5	18	23	30
	6-9	37	30	16
Church	1-4	20	39	35
	5	30	29	37
	6-9	50	32	28
God	1-4	45	45	41
	5	30	29	39
	6-9	25	26	20
Jesus	1-4	45	55	61
	5	37	24	30
	6-9	18	21	9

To put it more starkly:

• Only 1 in 11 of the 50 and overs had a negative view of "Christians", whereas that was true for 1 in 4 of the 31-50s, and 1 in 3 of the 18-30s.

• For "Church", the 18-30s are 2.5 times more likely to have a negative than a positive view, with the other age ranges marginally more likely to be positive than negative.

To find that the 18-30s are more likely to hold negative views than the 30s-50s and over-50s should be a significant concern. We cannot afford to take the naïve view that they will grow up and come back to church one day; many have never been to church and hold no allegiance.

A "Back to Church" Sunday approach for this age-group is wholeheartedly inappropriate and unlikely to be effective. In the light of the above findings it seems to be a waste of time,

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