



## REFLECTIONS

Even the radiographer, doing a routine X-ray in his local hospital, agreed. "We are truly and wonderfully made," said the patient, and the radiographer simply added, "I agree," as they looked at the complexities of the bone formations they were gazing at, and the distortions in one of them which was causing all the pain.

The detail of our bodies is incredible. Our thumb, to take just one minor example, is at right angles to the rest of our fingers and able to touch them all. Without that manoeuvre-ability it would be difficult or impossible to pick things up. In the height of the Cold War, when anything about religion was forbidden, a Russian biology teacher, suddenly realising the value of his thumbs, simply said, "I worship the thumb-maker."

Moses discovered the same reality. He had seen God do miraculous signs beyond his human experience, from creating clouds of gnats to turning water into blood and the incredible mind-blowing actuality of watching an entire sea part while hundreds of thousands walked through. So in his final speeches to the Israelites, now ready to advance into the Promised Land, what does he say? In the light of God's awesome power and holiness, he passes on God's instructions for the Israelites' relationship with their sovereign Creator.

The Israelites had in their 40 years of wanderings been transformed from a community of subservient slaves (when someone else took the decisions, held the vision, and told them what to do) into a community of citizens who now had the authority to decide how to live their lives, what their goals would be, and how much collaboration would be needed to make it happen.

So Moses gives them a huge range of minutely detailed God-given requirements for holy living. What to eat and what not to eat, how to help your neighbour if his donkey falls over, how and when (and when not) to fall in love and who to, family relations and what to do if they fall apart, strict warnings against idolatry, what is (and isn't) permissible in worship, rules for when accidents happen (such as an accidental killing), male/female inheritance, rules for a holy war, and so on across a myriad subjects. Deuteronomy is the first Charter Book of Citizenry, which was summarised by Jesus as "Love God and Love your Neighbour."

It is the detail which makes it so unique. Hammurabi's code didn't have half as many regulations in it! And then you have the book of Leviticus giving all the minute detail of worship, orderliness, conduct of the priests, and so on. Joshua has the same with the settlement of the land. God is a God of wide vision certainly, but also of the most fantastic detail. Scientists find fish alive 3,500' under the Antarctic which live only in darkness! Or use your microscope to blow up perfectly formed creatures nine-millionths smaller than a centimetre! Or just watch a few atoms, and the neutrons that make them up, and the quarks which make up the neutrons.

The God who originates and then controls such detail is also the God who organises the mega-sweep as well as the minutiae of everyday time. Can we understand the march of history, the horrors being perpetuated daily, the earthquakes and floods which wipe out thousands? No, but we are called to trust the God of the minute as well as the God of the minutes. May the thumb-prints of God lead us to daily holiness in our lives, uncompromising obedience to his Word, passionate intercession for His world and unfaltering witness to our world of family, friends, neighbours, colleagues and contacts.

## Being a British Muslim

The number of Muslims in the UK is often inaccurately perceived. In one recent UK poll, when asked what percentage of the British population was Muslim, the average answer was 21%, whereas the correct answer should have been 5%. The same kind of wide difference was found across most of the countries in Europe – public perception of the number of Muslims is considerably over-estimated, almost certainly because of the enormous amount of publicity Muslims get in the press from the immigration issues and Middle East conflicts. A four-fold error is about the norm.

The Muslim Council of Britain estimated that the spending power of British Muslims in 2013 was £21 billion, of the order of £7,300 each. Recent research has investigated the identity of Young British Muslims (YBMs), as "90% say that their faith affects their consumption". Apart from food, YBMs did not see themselves as being influenced by their religion, although female YBMs all spoke of the need for modesty in their clothing.

The research sought to break the YBM identity or sense of belonging to a global community into four discrete areas: Ethnicity, Nationality, Language and Region. Region was important as those interviewed tended to be located in certain urban areas, such as Greater Manchester where there are many of Indian or Pakistani origin. Four-fifths (78%) of the Muslims in England are either Pakistani or Bangladeshi.

Although there are more than twice as many Pakistanis (1,120,000) as Bangladeshis (450,000) in England, they tend to be concentrated in specific areas. A third, 32%, of those living in Tower Hamlets are Bangladeshi, for example, one-sixth (18%) of all the Bangladeshis in the country! They are also strong in Newham (12% of the population), but are less than 0.1% of the population of Scotland.

Pakistanis are similarly concentrated in Bradford (20% of the population), Slough (18%), Pendle, Lancashire (17%), Birmingham (14%, 13% of all in the country), Luton (14%), Blackburn (12%), and the London Borough of Redbridge (11%). They are less than 1% of the population of Scotland.

Young Muslims said that their parents always described themselves in terms of ethnicity, whereas their own first response to a question on identity is to say they were "Muslim". As one young person expressed it, "Religion is a lifestyle," thus affecting every aspect of their personality and behaviour.

The impact of ethnicity is diminishing with the generations, in the sense that the younger generations are making more close friends outside their particular ethnicity – one of the good consequences of immigration when many ethnicities tend to mix together rather than segregate in ethnic groups. Multi-cultural churches find something similar, a mixing of cultures and ethnicities as people fellowship together. Data from the Office for National Statistics found that while 24% of Bangladeshis had friends of another ethnicity, this was true of 58% of their children. Similar figures for Pakistanis were 31% and 50% respectively.

These figures suggest integrated schools rather than specifically Muslim schools lead to more positive relationships between ethnicities. Bangladeshis also do better in attaining 5 or more A\* - C GCSEs, including Maths and English – 62% getting such in 2014, compared with 57% of whites and 52% of Pakistanis.

In terms of Christianity, 1.5% of both Pakistanis and Bangladeshis said they were Christian in the 2011 Census, such a low figure presenting its own challenge to believers in this country. The latest Pew Research study shows that Muslims are growing faster than Christians worldwide, and could be almost as many by 2050.

**SOURCES:** Articles in *The Economist*, 17th January, 21st February, 2015; article by Hannah Wright of *Illumines in the International Journal of Market Research*, Vol 57, Issue 1, 2015, Page 15; Office for National Statistics; Pew Research Centre, April 2015.

## Evangelical Free Church of America

The Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA) is a denomination of just over 1,300 churches, probably very similar in essence to the UK's Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC), although about 3 times the size (which means a much smaller proportion of American churches than the FIEC). In 2014 it carried out a "Metrics Survey", and obtained a response rate (with reminders) of 50%.

In total, EFCA is a denomination of 350,000 attenders and 190,000 members. Some of the EFCA churches have large congregations: 5% have 1,000 or more on a Sunday, with a further 9% with between 500 and 999. While average attendance is 265, taking what is called the median figure gives a better idea of size – half the churches have up to 150 in their congregation and the other half have more. Two-fifths, 39%, of the churches have under 100 on a Sunday.

Average membership is only just over half of average attendance, as is the case with many British churches, and 3% of their churches actually had zero membership! Actual attendance numbers had increased nearly 1% over 2013, despite two-fifths, 43%, of the churches reporting growth – a phenomenon not unique to American churches. The 2002 Scottish Church Census showed exactly the same. Perception and reality do not always coincide.

A third, 32%, of the EFCA churches had plans to plant a new congregation, a percentage much greater than UK churches, and two-thirds, 65%, were supporting another congregation in some way. The 32% did not vary significantly by size of church which is interesting; in the UK it is the medium sized churches which are the most likely to be planning a new congregation.

The EFCA churches were also more multiethnic than British churches. One in six, 18%, of their churches said that at least a fifth of their congregation were of a different ethnicity to the majority, something true of only 11% of English churches in 2005.

Some of their figures point to key problems. Total attendance between 2013 and 2014 grew by about 2,500 people, but in that period they had over 5,500 baptisms, and 8,000 conversions. If their congregations grew so much less, did they have a high number of deaths, or are people being converted but not staying in that congregation, or are they losing people for other reasons? Their survey does not answer this question, but it perhaps suggests a problem common with English churches – how to retain the congregation one already has!

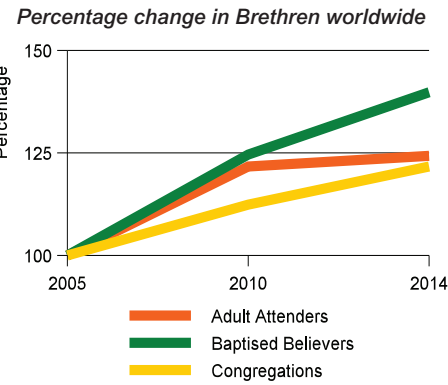
**SOURCE:** Metrics Report, EFCA, web: ???, accessed 25th March, 2015; *Pulling out of the Nosedive*, Christian Research, Eltham, London, 2006.

## Christian Brethren

Every four years, the International Brethren Conference on Mission for its quadrennial conference collects summary information, including figures, on the work of the worldwide (Christian or Open) Brethren movement. In 2014 their total globally was over 31,000 congregations with an adult attendance in excess of 2 million, up by just 2% in 4 years, after a much faster growth in the five years previously. Whereas previous growth (2005 to 2010) had centred largely on Africa and Asia, this time it focussed much more only on Asia, as the Table shows, where "no growth" means growth between 2010 and 2014:

Christian Brethren Worldwide, 2014					
Continent	Congregations		Adult attendance		Per cont.
	Number	% growth	Number	% growth	
Africa	12,200	+14	1.05 mn	+1	85
America, South	3,800	+8	0.26 mn	-3	70
Asia	4,300	+12	0.26 mn	+19	60
America, North	5,800	+3	0.30 mn	0	50
Europe	3,700	-2	0.20 mn	0	55
Oceania	1,000	-2	0.04 mn	-4	45
<b>WORLD</b>	<b>30,800</b>	<b>+8</b>	<b>2.12 mn</b>	<b>+2</b>	<b>70</b>

Congregations are getting smaller (the 2010 average was 80), but enthusiasm to start new churches, especially in the developing world, continues unabated. However, getting more people to come is proving more difficult, while baptised believers increased by +12%, general adult members of the congregations increased by only +2%. This is not a problem confined to the Christian Brethren, but what their figures show is that smaller numbers of new people are no longer the case just in the Western world. The change in the percentage change among adult attenders is readily seen in the graph.



There is one full-time worker for every 3 congregations on average, and a further worker (like an itinerant Bible teacher) for every 3 full-time workers. As a consequence, most of the growth is lay led and local, consistent with the ecclesiology of the movement.

The top three lines in the Table reflect Christianity in the "Southern" or "developing world", and are three-quarters (74%) of global Brethren, but only two-thirds (66%) of total congregations. For every 6 congregations there is an extra preaching point which is included here as a congregation.

**SOURCE:** The Brethren Movement Worldwide: Key Information, edited by Ken and Jeanette Newton, IBCM and OPAL Trust (forthcoming), via Dr Neil Summerton. The source data is provided by national contacts in response to a questionnaire and it is difficult to be sure of accuracy and consistency.

## Humour

Paraprocdokians:

Knowledge is knowing tomato is a fruit; wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad.

I'm supposed to respect my elders, but it's getter harder and harder for me to find one now.

**SOURCE:** Various emails.

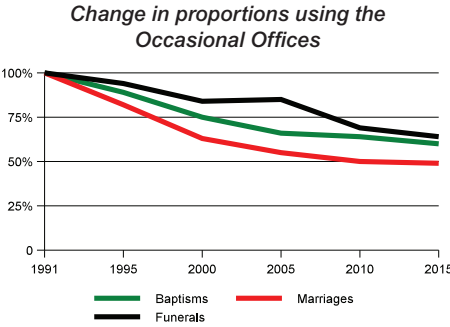
## Occasional Offices

Occasional Offices is the Church of England name given for the three church services of "hatching, matching and dispatching" or Baptisms, Marriages and Funerals to give their more correct title. The Church of England has counted the number of babies it has baptised literally for centuries, but funerals its ministers have taken (in church or crematoria) only since the year 2000. Religious Marriages are and have been counted by the Office for National Statistics and its forebears since the first year it was compulsory to register such, in 1837.

Not all denominations christen or baptise babies, some feeling it inappropriate theologically. Of those that do, the Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Presbyterians and Methodists are the main groups, but not all publish such figures regularly. Only the Catholics and Methodists (and they only since 2008) also provide figures for deaths or funerals taken. Consequently figures are culled from different sources (and are therefore not always comparable), and have to be estimated for some years.

Nevertheless, the numbers are interesting. In 1991, it is estimated there were 440,000 babies baptised in the UK, some 55% of all those born. There were 150,000 religious marriages, 49% of all the marriages in England and Wales that year. Also in 1991 there were perhaps 330,000 Anglican church funerals, some 52% of all deaths. It is interesting that the "take-up" percentage for all three Occasional Offices was so similar. By contrast in 2015 the estimated percentages are perhaps 34% of all babies will be baptised, 27% of all marriages will be in a church, and perhaps 42% of all funerals will be taken by a major denomination, having fallen, respectively, by 60%, 49% and 64% of their earlier 1991 estimates in terms of actual numbers.

The graph shows how the numbers since 1991 have declined over the intervening years, even though their sources, coverage and denominations involved are not homogeneous:



It may be seen that baptisms declined quite steeply in the first few years of the current century but have remained fairly stable since 2007. Religious marriages have dropped fastest and most, almost certainly because of permission being given in 1995 for "approved premises" to be used for registering marriages other than a Registry Office or Church/Religious building. Funerals have only slightly changed (and the decline shown up to 2010 largely reflects the smaller number of deaths rather than fewer church funerals), but in the last 5 years, church funerals have dropped quite sharply.



Churches rightly use the opportunity for Occasional Offices to help in their pastoral care of those in the community. When a survey was undertaken of the most effective services that a church undertook ("services" in this context including the myriad of various organisations meeting during the week, and "success" assessed as the number subsequently joining the church), bereavement classes came top of the list (and Mums and Toddlers' Groups, the most common, were at the bottom).

Occasional Offices may be less popular than they used to be, and less used, but they remain a hugely important part of, and opportunity for, a church's involvement with the parish or community within which it is sited.

**SOURCE:** Figures taken from *UK Church Statistics*, ADCB Publishers, Tonbridge, Kent, 2014, Pages 16.6, 156.7 and 2.87 respectively, and like figures in previous volumes of *Religious Trends*.

## SNOWFLAKES

**Dynamics of Community.**

In a big world, the small church can remain intimate.

In a fast world, the small church can remain steady. In a smart world, the small church can remain plain. In a complex world, the small church can remain simple.

In a noisy world, the small church can be a place for listening.

In an anonymous world, the small church can call us by name.

**SOURCE:** Report in *Time* magazine, December 8th, 2014, Page 45.

**Women Bishops.** The first three women bishops to be appointed (Libby Lane to Stockport, Alison White to Hull and Rachel Treweek to Gloucester) all have clergy husbands. Why? Prof Linda Woodhead comments, "The most amusing suggestion I've heard is that the Church is looking for women bishops with experience of managing male clergy."

**SOURCE:** *The Tablet*, 4th April 2015, Page 11.

**Household Expenditure.** Average UK household expenditure in 2013 was £520 per week, or £27,000 per annum. Housing was the main cost (14%), of which half was mortgage payments and the other half fuel and power. The next highest item was transport (also 14%, but a decreasing proportion), followed by recreation and culture (12%, an increasing percentage), and then food and non-alcoholic drinks (11%). The other half, 51%, was spent on everything else! In some Third World countries, like rural Kenya, food itself would be over 50%!

**SOURCE:** *Family Spending*, Office for National Statistics, 2nd Dec 2014, Pages 1.2.

**Supercells** are giant rotating storms than can cover 1,000 square miles and can spawn multiple tornadoes and throw huge hailstones for miles. While confined mostly to "Tornado Alley" in the United States, they can occur anywhere. On May 25th, 2009 in Belgium, for example, a supercell storm gave over 30,000 recorded lightning flashes – an average of 4 strikes per second – over a two hour period! The wonders (and fears) of creation are awe-inspiring.

Source: *AnswersMagazine*, April-June, 2015, Page 27.



**AIDS in the States.** Some 1.1 million people in the United States have AIDS (about 0.4% of the population), but only 37% take the appropriate medication regularly. Three-quarters (76%) of these AIDS sufferers are men (mostly [53%] passed on through gay sex), almost half (44%) are among black people, a third (33%) white and most (19%) of the remainder among Hispanics. A quarter, 27%, of infections came through heterosexual sex, the majority of the rest through drugs.

**Female violence in Kenya.** A small research study among a random sample of 80 women in Nyalenda, a town in the county of Kisumu, Kenya, showed that almost half (45%) had been victimised in some way. Of the 36 women affected, 18 had suffered wife beating, 7 had been specifically harassed, 6 girls had had their education stopped, 3 had been raped and 2 had been killed in "honour killings". Many of these would have been churchgoers, just the tip of the anti-women/Christian violence iceberg worldwide.

**SOURCE:** Report *Effects of gender based violence* by Keven Juma Ndede, Oct 2015, African Institute of Research.

**Children being looked after.** The number of children being looked after by English Local Authorities has increased by a fifth, 20%, in the last 5 years, from 25,000 in 2010 to 30,000 in 2014. As the Table shows, a third (34%) of these returned home to live with their parents or relatives and a sixth (17%) were adopted, the latter up from 13% in 2010.

Reason	2010	2012	2014	2014 as % of total	Change 2010-2014
Returned home	9,870	10,200	10,300	<b>34</b>	<b>+4%</b>
Adopted	3,200	3,470	5,050	<b>17</b>	<b>+58%</b>
Independent living	3,360	3,740	3,680	<b>12</b>	<b>+10%</b>
Special Guardianship Order	1,290	2,150	3,330	<b>11</b>	<b>+158%</b>
Residence order granted	1,010	1,310	1,690	<b>6</b>	<b>+67%</b>
S/A/C	970	1,070	1,360	<b>4</b>	<b>+40%</b>
Other reasons	5,630	5,560	5,020	<b>16</b>	<b>-11%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>25,330</b>	<b>27,500</b>	<b>30,430</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>+20%</b>

S/A/C = Sentenced to custody/Adult residential care/Care taken by another Local Authority

The 2014 total represents 1 child in every 400 is being looked after by a Local Authority.

**SOURCE:** Table SFR 36/2014 Office for National Statistics.

## Looking for Love

**Finding a possible partner via the web today is very popular. Some American websites estimate that 28-35% of marriages today are made through an initial contact via a dating service, but a Pew Survey in 2005 found the percentage to be only 5%. A more balanced view puts the percentage as between 10 and 15% in 2015, still a significant proportion.**

One such service, called Lovestruck, undertook an interesting analysis of those on its data base, which at that time included 54,000 men looking for a suitable woman, and 70,000 women looking for a suitable man – a large enough sample.

Lovestruck analysed the age of the partner being sought by the age of the seeker. While those in the youngest age-group (22 years of age), for both men and women, looked on average for someone older, those who were older (32 or above) tended to look, on balance, usually for someone younger. The actual age ranges are shown in the Table:

**No longer green shifting**

Twelve to fifteen years ago, many people moved out of cities to live in the commuter rural parts of Britain, some of which saw church attendance grow as a consequence. That trend is no longer taking place, for while those in their 30s continue to move out of London they are especially moving to other cities. So while a net 18,000 people in this age-group moved out in 2010, 22,000 did so in 2013, a record number, according to the Office for National Statistics. Where did they go? Mostly to Birmingham, Manchester, Bristol and Oxford. Selfridges opened a posh new branch in Birmingham in 2012 to help meet their shopping requirements.

**SOURCES:** Report in *The Economist*, 6th Dec 2009; Wikipedia accessed 30th April 2015.



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**SOURCE:** Table SFR 36/2014 Office for National Statistics.

Men seeking women		Women seeking men	
Age	Desired range	Age	Desired range
22	19 to 29	22	21 to 31
32	23 to 37	32	29 to 40
42	29 to 44	42	36 to 49
52	37 to 53	52	44 to 57
62	48 to 63	62	52 to 65

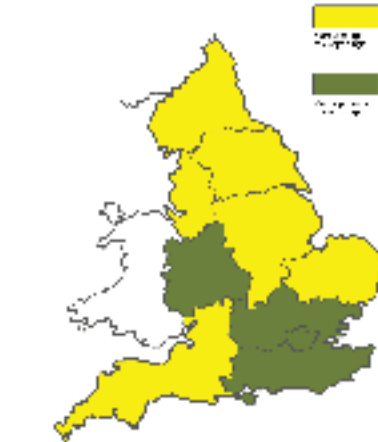
The widest range for men is 16 years (when they are aged 52), and for women is 13 years (when they are aged 42, 52 or 62). Men who are 32 are not willing to look for a woman more than 5 years older than they are, and older men are only prepared to look for someone 1 year older (when 52 or 62). Women, on the other hand, are willing to look for someone up to 8 years older (when 32), a figure which drops to 3 years for those aged 62. It would be interesting to know if being a Christian made any difference to these findings.

**SOURCE:** *The Information Capital*, Particular Books (Penguin), James Cheshire and Oliver Uberti, 2014, Page 227; [www.blogs.wsj.com/news/how-many-marriages-started-online-764](http://www.blogs.wsj.com/news/how-many-marriages-started-online-764).



OPENINGS AND CLOSURES

As the map indicates there have been more openings of churches than closures in the 30 years since 1989 in the West Midlands and the South East of England, and the reverse elsewhere.



There have been almost 2,900 new churches started between 2010 and 2015 in England, or about 600 a year, three new churches every two days! It is also true that churches close. Over the last 5 years, 1,400 churches have closed altogether, or four every three days, leaving a net growth of some 1,500 churches in the 5 years to 2015.

Where are these extra newly-started churches? The number varies by region, but there are some in every part of the country:

- 170 in the North
- 170 in East Anglia
- 200 in the Yorkshire
- 250 in the East Midlands
- 270 in the North West
- 320 in the South West
- 330 in South East South
- 370 in South East North
- 370 in the West Midlands
- 410 in Greater London

These new churches are mostly one of three kinds:

- New congregations started by some of the New Church streams (such as Vineyard, Newfrontiers, Ground Level or Salt and Light).
- Fresh Expressions of churches, which are often Church of England (which has 900 across England) or Methodist (which has 800), but might also be Baptist or Salvation Army.
- Black Majority Churches, especially if they are in London where some 400 such churches started between 2005 and 2012. Catholic chaplaincy churches are also important in the capital.

Invariably these fresh congregations have good community links, which is where much of their support comes from. All three groups given above are beginning new church “plants”, not trying to revive small or declining churches, or particularly trying to grow existing congregations. Nearly all are lay-led initially (although half of Fresh Expressions are led by an ordained person). Theological conviction is the main motivation for starting these churches; most of these new churches are evangelical. Different ethnicities are also involved.

Questions: Are the established forms of churches now becoming outmoded? Should scarce resources be mainly allocated to these new models?

SOURCE: UK Church Statistics, No 2, 2010-2020, ADCB Publishers, Tonbridge, Kent, 2014.

Families and their Households

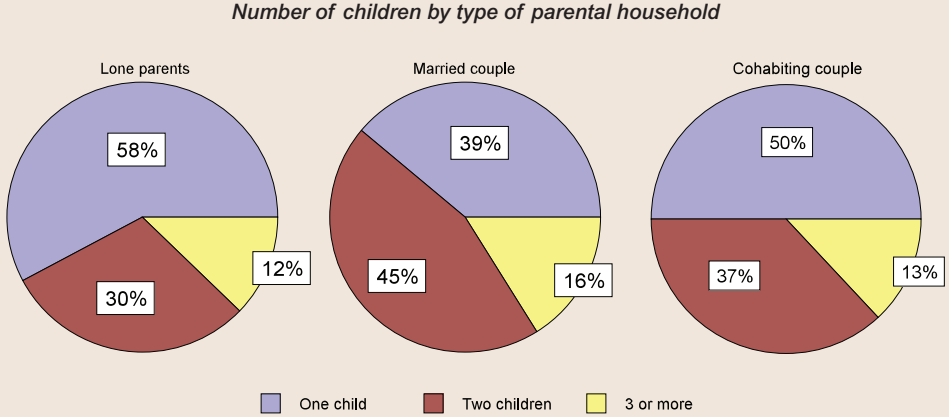
The UK population of 63 million is split into 27 million households making an average of 2.4 people in each. A “household” is taken as an independent financial unit and therefore includes families of all sizes from single people to the largest, currently one with 17 children (Mrs Sue Radford, 39, of Morecambe). People in nursing and care homes are not included in this count.

As the population increases, so does the number of households and the need for more houses. On average the UK needs 175,000 new houses every year just to keep the balance. Just over 1% of households, 313,000 in 2014, contained more than one family, and they are a fast growing group of households, increasing by 11,000 a year. The fastest growing group, however, are of cohabiting households, a fifth, 22%, or 5.9 million as a total number, but increasing by 140,000 every year.

Single people, some 7 million in total, account for 29% of all households, just over a quarter. Of those living alone, almost half, 46%, are 65 or over (of whom 45% are male), while the other half are 64 or under (of whom 58% are male). Numbers living alone aged 65 to 74 are increasing slowly, while those aged 45 to 64 have increased substantially, by 25%, over the past decade. The number of single people aged 25 to 44 has dropped quite significantly since 2004, however.

A third of households, 35%, consist of two people – a married couple with no dependent children, a cohabiting couple, or a single parent with one child. A sixth, 16%, have three people in their household, and a fifth, 20% have 4 or more. There were 2 million single parent households in the UK in 2014, 90% of them being a single mother.

The number of children per type of parent is shown in the chart, averaging 1.5 for lone parents, 1.7 for married couples, and 1.6 for cohabiting couples, showing that while married couples may still have the largest families, this is becoming much less the case than it used to be.



This begs the question, “What is a family?” When teenagers were asked this some years ago, 59% replied, “those who love you and care about you deeply”, and only 38% said, “those who are biologically related.” Today, a modern reply would be along the lines, “I have learned that to be with those I like is enough,” even though this was first said by Walt Whitman, a 19th century American humanist.

There are two other key features of present day households. Sometime after they reach 18 years of age, many children will leave home, and are often expected to. Today, however, partly because of lack of housing or other financial reasons, a quarter, 26%, of those aged between 20 and 34 are living with their parents, some 3.3 million young people, a number which is increasing by 90,000 every year.

The other feature is that the above numbers assume that a married couple, for example, have always been the same man and woman (or are a man and a woman). Many couples divorce and remarry, or subsequently cohabit. A 2005 survey found that only two-thirds of church children actually lived with both their biological parents. Church services where an assumption is made that many of those present will be from a traditional form of household may therefore become increasingly anachronistic.

SOURCE: Society Now, ESRC, Spring 2015, Issue 21, Pages 20,21; Mail on Line, accessed 31st March 2015.

Continued from page 1

important. That said, however, the lifestyles of churchled and unchurchled were not that different. The unchurchled might swear more or drink more, while the churchled will likely fellowship more and talk more about their faith. In terms of newspapers read, television watched, websites visited, social media used, there was little difference.

A particular group of the unchurchled are what Barna calls the “Skeptics”, who are increasingly likely to be under 30 (34% in 2013 against 18% in 1993), female (43% to 16%), and college graduates (50% to 33%). How may such be reached? Only really through personal one-to-one relationships built around non-faith topics or actions. Being seen to help the needy, perhaps holding a seminar on a relevant topic (one UK church put on a series of films on parenting) or

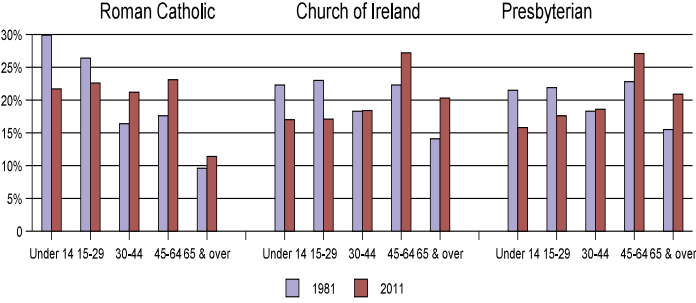
a concert hosted by the church might attract some. Barna emphasises the importance of just listening to them, however.

How reach the churchless? Invitations from trusted friends, the opportunity to talk privately with a minister or church member, an appealing event, serving the poor, especially helping young adults were features that scored positively, while mailings, advertisements, websites or special celebrity speakers did not. Churches are likely to have many volunteers, be a place for peace, seeking to promote good morals and cultural discernment, as well as witnessing to Christ, which are all positive elements often greatly appreciated. Christians can also pray, a powerful but neglected way to reach the unchurchled.

SOURCE: Churchless, George Barna and David Cinnamon, Barna, Tyndale Momentum, 2014, ISBN 978-1-4143-8709-3.

Religion in N Ireland

Analyses of religion in N Ireland have always been rather different from elsewhere in the UK, if only because many more people attend church and a greater percentage affirm their allegiance to a particular denomination. Whereas in England only 59% said they were Christian in 2011, 58% in Wales and 54% in Scotland, a massive 82% ticked “Christian” in N Ireland. In 2001 their percentage of Christians was 86% and in 1991 (when the question was not asked elsewhere) it was 96% in the population Census.



The chart shows a breakdown of the figures by denomination and age in 1981 and 2011, giving the proportion of the total in each age-group in these two

years. The Church of Ireland and the Presbyterians are very similar – in the 30 years between the percentages, both have lost about 5% of those under 30, a similar loss to the Catholics, but, as the latter had a higher percentage in 1981, the loss hasn’t impacted them so noticeably.

To compensate, both the Church of Ireland and the Presbyterians have seen the proportions of those 45 and over increase. Their experience, however, is quite unlike the Roman Catholics who have seen the percentage of those saying they are Catholics between 30 and 44 increase by 5%. Why, in the 1981 Census were there fewer Catholics than in the 2011 Census prepared to identify themselves as Catholics? Those in this age range are most likely to have families whose children are young, and, through pressures of work and family, may have lapsed as practising Catholics. The 1980s were in the middle of “the troubles” and many were afraid to state their religion, especially Catholics, which perhaps explains the relatively low percentage ticking “Catholic” in 1981.

Nearly a fifth, 19%, of the entire country did not answer this (voluntary) question in 1981, and many almost certainly were in the age-group 30 to 44 and refrained because of worries for the safety of their children. It says something for increased security and stability that 30 years later, the percentage of “not stated” is only a third as many, 7%, and on a par now with the percentages in the other UK countries.

Source: Numbers taken from tables in UK Church Statistics, ADCB Publishers, Tonbridge, Kent, 2014, which initially came from N Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

Worship Space for Millennials

The Barna Group undertook an interesting survey in 2014 – if a church was being built for those in their 20s, what kind of design would be most appreciated? Nearly half the respondents, 44%, said they would like a conventional looking church but not too big and not too small. Very big churches were felt by some to appear as “really a big business”, and while they would like a church big enough to give some anonymity as a visitor, they also wanted a church small enough to feel part of a community. Only a fifth, 20%, wanted a permanent lectern at the front, and almost the same proportion, 18%, did not want either to look at a pleasing picture at the front, or (another 18%) to have rank upon rank of long pews.



What did respondents want to look at or felt should be at the front? Something fairly simple and distinctively Christian, such as a wooden crucifix. Unsurprisingly, Protestants preferred a crucifix without Jesus on it, while the Catholics preferred a crucifix with Jesus. More than two-thirds of those in their 20s gave this preference for a wooden cross. A fifth, 19%, were in favour of a fixed table (altar) at the front, while the remaining 11% preferred something with more design. The basic preference was for a straightforward, overtly Christian style of imagery.

If the church was to have an openly natural element, what should that look like? The overwhelming preference by over three-fifths, 62%, was for some kind of garden, perhaps with a small path, rather than just shrubs or bushes or a pattern of flowers. Many churches in the UK build such little gardens on a window ledge, shelf or plank to illustrate the Easter or Christmas story, and these are often especially appreciated.

What kinds of windows were preferred? There was no agreement here – the response was split between a third, 35%, liking a plain window with no ornamentation of any kind, while another third, 35%, liked a fully stained ornate glass window, with the remaining third, 30%, split between different types of ornateness (a fifth, 21%, wanting much, and 9% wanting something modern but little). Ornate windows seemed to appeal more to Catholics than others.

In summary then, what would the ideal church building be like? Something that was clearly Christian, serving the community, with a sense of quietness, but also a touch of classic design (the cross), modern but casual. It was clear that the respondents were not wanting something slick and overly fashionable, but something that represented depth and involvement with others. Mass production was not required but something individual, with appropriate visual clues, offering a sense of peace or respite, and comfortable. The ideal church would evoke a sense of the sacred and connect with Christian history and tradition.

Some UK churches make space for worship by having specially creative mid-weekly sessions for those in their 20s. St Mark’s, Milton Keynes calls these “life groups”, St Francis in Salisbury “Awakenings,” while St George’s, Leeds have services specially aimed at this age-group.

SOURCE: Designing Worship Spaces, Barna Group, November 2014, www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials/ Idea, Sept/Oct 2014, Page 36.

Leaving the Church

There has been much British research into why people stop going to church. Philip Richter and Leslie Francis have written two books and many papers on the topic while others have added to this research. One of these was Michael Fanstone, then minister of Gravesend Baptist Church, who in 1993 published the results of interviewing 500 former churchgoers in a book called The Sheep that Got Away.

Sometimes it’s worth re-capitulating past findings as they can still have present day relevance. He found three-fifths (62%) left because church was “no longer relevant” to them, and when asked what that meant in practice he was told five things – firstly, buildings which contained artefacts of yesterday’s religious culture, and secondly, the content and style of worship services (affecting men more than women and those aged 25 to 34 most).

This latter merged with the third factor – basic boredom, also affecting men more than women and those aged 25 to 34. “Boredom” meant their reaction to a lack of spiritual vitality on the part of those leading the worship, a lack of spiritual responsiveness by the congregation, and a lack of creative imagination in the planning of services.

On Palm Sunday this year Worcester Cathedral as in some other churches hosted a live donkey! A minister in a rural Essex church just after Easter asked two men to carry a large black box (about the size of a coffin) down the centre of the church and then asked the congregation what they thought it might contain. Someone talking to children about football in a suburban church in Hertfordshire showed a group of Kenyan children playing in bare feet.

The other two factors related to the youth culture and the teaching programme. Several ex-churchgoers said that basic doctrinal truths of the Christian faith were hardly ever taught, nor how one could progress in personal discipleship. One reason why many of the larger Anglican churches in London are growing is precisely because of their emphasis on comprehensive and understandable teaching of the faith.

On a score from 1 to 10 on “relevance”, what would your church score? Without resorting to such measures as gimmicks and entertainment, what could be done to increase that score?

SOURCE: Emmanuel Baptist Church research report, Christian Research, August 1992.

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Providing Facts for Forward Planning

SNIPPETS

1) 85% of young people say they want a parental or grandparental figure in their ideal youth worker.

2) During its 25 years in space, the Hubble telescope has orbited the earth almost 140,000 times – on average about 15 times a day!

3) US children make up just 3% of the global child population, but American families buy 40% of the toys.

4) The Pew Forum’s latest global survey suggests that, over the next 30 years, the number of Christian people not affiliated to any denomination is expected to decline because those who are affiliated will be having more children.

5) 60% of women believe in life after death as against just 35% of men. 71% of Evangelicals said they did, 33% of Roman Catholics and just 16% of other mainline Christian denominations.

6) A 2014 YouGov poll by The Co-operative Group, fighting back to regain its commercial competitiveness, had an unprecedented participation – over 180,000 people – essentially supporting a focus by the Group majoring on helping local communities.

7) Which is most important to Britain out of the Commonwealth, Europe and America? A 2003 poll said, respectively, 16%, 42% and 34%, which became in 2014, respectively, 25%, 48% and 20%.

SOURCES: 1) and 2) Christianity, April 2015, Pages 45 and 4 respectively; 3) Time magazine 23rd March 2015, Page 35; 4) Global Religious Futures report from Pew Forum, 2nd April 2015; 5) Social Research Council survey of 9,000 people, The Mysteries of Religion and the Lifecourse, www.cis.ioe.ac.uk; 6) Report published by You Gov, Have your Say, December 2014; 7) Ipsos Mori poll of 1,002 people, published October, 2014, as per The Tablet, 29th Nov, Page 12.

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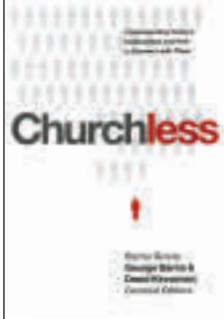
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CHURCHLESS

Churchless is the name of a new book by George Barna and David Cinnamon, known as expert researchers in the United States. Over the last 6 years (2008 to 2014) they have interviewed over 20,000 adults, 6,300 of whom did not go to church, while the rest did, and asked them similar questions. While the answers naturally relate to Americans, some of their findings are relevant to the British and European situation as well.

The “churchless” include those who never go to church as well as those who used to attend but no longer do so. A much greater percentage of Americans go to church than elsewhere in the West – almost half, 49%, of the population in 2014 – defined as attending at least once a month. In Britain the equivalent percentage is probably about 7%. This is made up of the 6% of those in England and Wales who attend every week, a greater percentage who attend in Scotland and N Ireland, and an estimated few who attend at least monthly.

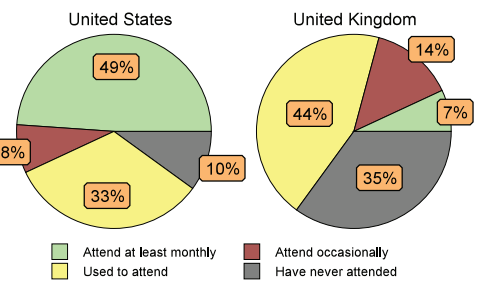


Some of those who don’t attend even once a month will still attend occasionally, especially at Christmas – perhaps as many as an extra 14% in the UK. In America this percentage is given as 8%.

The greatest proportion of Americans who are churchless, however, is those who used to attend but no longer do so, given as 33% out of the 51% labelled “churchless”, or virtually two-thirds.

It will also be true in Britain that a substantial proportion of people who call themselves Christian (59% in the 2011 Population Census) but who never now come to church – the “invisible church” as the Church of Scotland calls them – used to attend. In America, this proportion (the 33%) is growing, as it almost certainly is also in the UK and Europe. The differing proportions are shown in the pie-charts.

Churchled and Unchurchled adults, percentage of population, USA and UK, 2014



Who are the people who are thus “de-churching”? In the USA they tend to be younger (under 50), male and single/cohabiting (characteristics which are linked). They are too busy to go to church and in any case prefer to spend the time in contact with their many friends, via social media. There is not, however, a smooth cut-off between “churchled” and “de-churchled”, but rather a continuum with interest and

engagement at one end and resistance and rejection at the other, with doubt and indifference somewhere in between.

Barna’s research found that the unchurchled felt the church made little positive contribution to society, although agreeing they often served the poor. The unchurchled were less likely now to go to church if invited by a friend (47% in 2011, 65% in 1993). Casual religiosity (such as praying) was declining (87% in 2008, 72% in 2013), but a third, 34%, described themselves as “deeply spiritual”, three-fifths, 62%, consider themselves Christian, and half, 51%, said they were actively seeking something spiritual “better than they [had] experienced to date.”

The answer to “What could the churches do to contribute to the community’s common good?” was focussed on service – feeding the needy, housing the homeless, keeping kids off the streets, and so on. Few of the unchurchled would consider returning to church, and even if the church had good programmes for their children, they were not inclined to do so – an important finding relevant to UK churches and youth work. They saw church essentially as “boring”.

A third of the churchless said they had an “active relationship with God”, and while 16% described this as “shallow”, well over half, 57%, said it was “intimate”, with 90% saying it was “satisfying”. One in seven, 15%, say they’ll go to heaven as they’ve accepted Christ as Saviour, two-thirds, 68%, believe in God, and a third, 35%, consider the Bible to be inerrant. However, three-fifths, 60%, have an unorthodox view of God, three-quarters, 76%, think Jesus may have sinned, and six in every seven, 86%, consider the Holy Spirit as a symbolic being. If all the “born-again” sub-group (of 15%) were to come back to church in the UK they would add an average of 80 people to every congregation (50 people each in the US!)

What starts the churchless sequence? According to Barna, one of the chief reasons is having no-one to whom one can turn with questions and doubts. Hence the importance of mentoring, which some of the more successful congregations in the UK ministering to those in their 20s are especially promoting. The potential churchless need a thoughtful response to their probing, looking for genuine answers to involvement with the world, wanting to understand the apparent conflict with science, disliking the church’s seeming rigidity on sexuality, and are unhappy with Christianity’s claim to exclusiveness.

One of the challenges facing unchurchled parents is setting standards and guidelines for teaching their children right from wrong. The redefinition of “family” which is currently taking place also has an impact on what is “normal”, which is why churches can find it difficult to connect with them. Many of the children in churchless families will have little knowledge of God and the Bible.

Only one third of unchurchled Americans thought their moral views should influence their community or their personal views on watching television or abortion, for example, whereas half of the churchled people felt morality was

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