

## Gender of Churchgoers

Although it is often accepted, correctly, that there are more women in the church than men, the margin is not as great as some suppose. In the 2005 English Church Census, out of every 7 people in church, 4 were women and 3 were men. This is in a context of a UK population where, up to 45 years of age, there are more men than women.

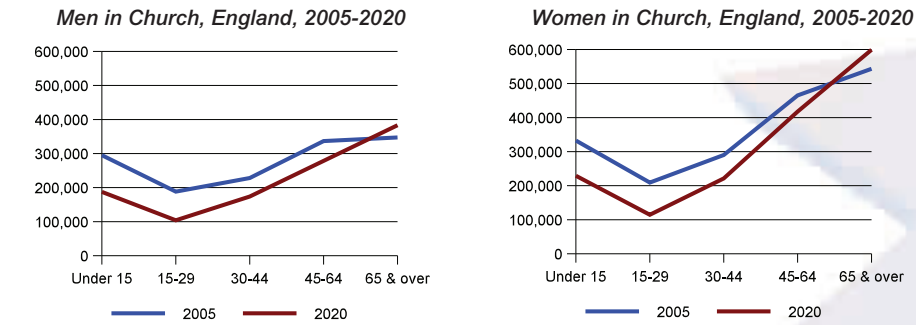
For reasons that seem to be unknown, around the world (it is not just a Western phenomenon) for every 100 girls that are born there are 105 boys. In some societies girls are not wanted and the “one child” policy in China, for example, has led to an extreme gender imbalance of something like 115 or 120 boys for every 100 girls.

The girls begin to catch up in numbers since in most countries more boys die in their teens than girls, and by the time people get to about 45 there are roughly equal numbers of both sexes. But these days (it hasn’t always been true historically) women mostly live longer than men, so by the time people are 65 women are in the majority, certainly in the UK and most Western countries.

This of course is as true of churchgoers as of the population as a whole, except that whereas across the general population the gender balance works out as a ratio of 49:51 male : female, the paucity of young people in the church means the ratio overall is less balanced – 43:57. This is easily verified by looking especially at the gender of people attending rural churches, who are mostly older – many more women than men. This is just the outcome of simple mortality statistics on the one hand and fewer young people on the other.

In an interesting book *Why are Women more Religious than Men?* sociologists Marta Trzebiatowska and Steve Bruce explore this in more detail, and show that it is not just in the church where women outnumber men, but also in most other religions (in the UK), and perhaps especially among the many new religions which sprang up in the 1980s. They investigate a lot of the social research on gender and conclude that the gender gap is not primarily the results of biology (or mortality) but rather social differences overlapping and re-inforcing each other – they would suggest the responsibility of managing birth, child-rearing, death and attitudes to the body, illness and health all play a part and find expression in the broad cultural world of contemporary male/female spirituality.

The two graphs below show the numbers of churchgoers in England for the years 2005 and the estimated situation in 2020. They show that there are likely to be fewer people in church in 2020 than in 2005, except for those 65 and over. These graphs have not been drawn before.



In age-terms the consequence is that the 65-and-overs are becoming an increasingly large proportion of total churchgoers, which has obvious implications in several ways. In terms of gender, the proportions for this age-group change very little; about 39% are male.

Probably the most interesting gender-proportion change taking place is among those aged 15 to 29, where there are two contrasting movements– older teenagers (15 to 19) who are involved in church are more likely to be male than female, while for those in their twenties there are some indications it may be the other way round. Of the male churchgoers in London in 2012, 6% were aged 15 to 19, but only 5% of the females, and in Inner London the differences for this age-group were even more marked.

Between 2005 and 2012 the number of people going to church in London increased by 100,000. Five-sixths (83%, a huge percentage) of that increase was female! The reason is not obvious – the book mentioned above looks at the female issue from other viewpoints (though not leadership) but comes to no other firm conclusions than the social differences already detailed within a generalised secular framework.

In response to the book, if being religious is equated with churchgoing, it might well be asked whether women are, in fact, more religious than men, or just that they feel more comfortable with expressing it and more under the necessity to express it, particularly in terms of churchgoing.

The American Barna Group have also researched women and the church, and have found that women in 2015 were less likely to attend church regularly than men, a reverse of the situation 10 years earlier. They sought to ascertain why this was so, and found the following reasons:

- 1) Women are putting churchgoing at a *lower priority* than before, with family and work coming first very often (but not a commitment to furthering their career).
- 2) They were just busy, really, *really busy*. 72% of women felt stressed out, 58% felt tired, and 48% said they were overcommitted.
- 3) *Lack of emotional engagement and support* from those at church. 17% said they felt “very” supported at church, 23% “somewhat” and 43% “not at all”.
- 4) *Changing family structures*. Women are getting married later now, starting families later, preferring to become financially stable before embarking on marriage.
- 5) Women are not only failing to identify with the church, but also increasingly not *identifying as a Christian*, with churchgoing thus becoming irrelevant.

If these factors are true, or become true, of British female churchgoers, then a larger question looms: “Why should I go to church?” or “What do I go to church for?” Churchgoing for both women and men has become more of a flexible option than a regular commitment.

**SOURCES:** *Why are Women more Religious than Men?*, Marta Trzebiatowska and Steve Bruce, OUP 2014; *Religious Trends* No 6, 2006/2007, Table 5.8.4; UK Church Statistics No 2, 2010-2020, Table 16.8.1; *Five Factors Changing Women's Relationship with Churches*, Barna-update, 30th June 2015.

## Beating Your Wife and Churchgoing!

In a fascinating paper at the Kuala Lumpur Lausanne Researchers’ Conference, Philip Hughes, Director of the Australian Christian Research Centre, gave the results from two questions asked in the 2012 World Values’ Survey. One of the questions in this survey was whether the beating of one’s wife was sometimes or always justifiable – an extraordinary question to ask at the best of times. It also asked its more usual question on whether the respondent attended religious services and, if so, how often.

Although the survey is called the *World Values’ Survey*, answers to these questions were only available from 49 or around a quarter (23%) of the countries in the world, although they did cover every continent, and the countries included accounted for half (49%) of the world’s population. Even so the answers are interesting.

Across the world apparently 15% of men feel that beating their wife is sometimes or always justifiable. This percentage does not vary according to whether or not they attend church, except in Africa where the percentage is 19% for those who don’t attend and 22% for those who do, and in South America where the percentages are respectively 5% and 7%! In North America it’s the other way round – 10% if the men don’t attend church and 7% of those who do. In Oceania (3%), Europe (11%) and Asia (16%) churchgoing makes no difference. The Asian contribution is high because of its large population – without them the rest of the world averages 12%.

In a few countries, going to church appeared to make things worse! In Germany, for instance, 8% who didn’t go to church felt wife beating was acceptable, but it was 16% for those who did! Likewise in Lebanon and Algeria the churchgoers were more in favour of beating their wives than non-goers. In some “Christian” countries there was a high level of acceptance of wife beating, for example, Rwanda (38%) and the Philippines (33%)!

I worry about the accuracy of our results. After all, how many other men who consider wife-beating acceptable would have moral qualms about lying to our researchers?



The same survey also asked if respondents were actively involved in a humanitarian or charitable organisation, and this was analysed in relation to church going. A similar weighted analysis by population of each country was undertaken, with the results shown in the Table; again, if Asia was excluded the overall figures would be 4% and 11% respectively. Nevertheless the overall figures seem extremely low.

More than 2 million children under 18 worldwide live in group homes or “institutions”, 0.1% of the world’s children, and the question is often asked “Does institution-based caregiving negatively affect child development?” A detailed 3-year study between 2006 and 2008 was undertaken across a representative sample of 1,400 institutionally orphaned and separated children (OSC) and 1,400 family-dwelling OSC aged 6 to 12 across 5 Southern World countries. This was funded (at considerable expense) by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, one of the National Institutes of Health which is part of the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

The evaluation of the two groups contrasted a range of measures – physical health and growth, emotional well-being, learning ability and memory, and consisted of measuring the differences between the two groups of OSC and also the differences in each group over the 3-year period.

In comparing the two types of OSC the study found that (a) Child health and (b) Children’s memory were significantly better for institution-based OSC than family-based. (c) Physical growth, (d) Body Mass Index, (e) Learning ability and (f) Emotional difficulties were the same wherever the OSC were based. They also found that (g) Recent illness (such as diarrhoea, fever or a cough in the last 2 weeks) was more prevalent in family-based OSC than institution-based. Similar findings were evident when comparing the differences over the 3-year period of the study.

This particular study is a rare example of such an extended evaluation, and while the researchers naturally found a wide range of answers in their various measurements, the status of institution-based children improved on “most well-being measures over time, [and] while the family-based children improved [faster] over time, [they] could be catching up to the well-being status of the institution-based children.” They concluded that, “This overall trend in improvement ... is an encouraging finding.”

However, the researchers also found that the differences between one country and another

Involvement in Humanitarian and Charitable Organisations		
Continent	Never attend church	Attend monthly or more often
Africa	1%	5%
Asia	0%	2%
America, South	5%	7%
Europe	2%	10%
America, North	8%	20%
Oceania	13%	29%
<b>WORLD</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>5%</b>

Philip introduced his talk by saying that critiques of Christians were becoming more persistent, partly from the activities of fundamental atheists like Richard Dawkins. The International Social Survey Programme, across 44 countries, showed that 61% of people agreed that those with strong religious belief are often intolerant of others. Some 57% of this global sample thought religion contributed to violence. There was also fairly low confidence in religious organisations – 32% had great confidence, 34% some confidence and 34% little or no confidence.

**SOURCES:** Talk at Researchers’ Conference; The Impact of Faith on Society. Painters, Vol 25, No 2, June 2015, Pages 8,9.

# ORPHANAGES

were usually much greater than the differences between institution- and family-based OSC. They found some OSC did well in either setting and some did poorly, showing the need to decipher the quality of care within each setting.

The findings complement the recent work of other researchers examining the well-being of children in group homes. “Taken as a whole, the study findings do not support the hypothesis that institution-based living universally and significantly affects child well-being.” This is an important statement taken from the paper.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most rapidly and widely ratified international human rights treaty in history, has shifted the focus of the debate on institutionalization from technical and systems management issues and their effect on children, to a policy and strategic outlook of generating opportunities for humane development to all. Children are now frequently placed in institutional care throughout the world.



As a practical example, the Kisumu Children Ministries are responsible for a 48-bed orphanage in Kisumu, Kenya. Those in their Children’s Home are regularly fed and clothed, given relevant health treatment when necessary, enabled to attend school and given appropriate training for ultimate employment. They invariably sleep better because they are sleeping on mattresses with mosquito nets, neither of which many poor homes have in Kenya, and are therefore able to concentrate better at school.

Many come initially in a very malnourished state but with regular food and care blossom. They also see other children ahead of them at school and know that, all being well, they will be able to go to school for as long as necessary – something that many poor children may not have the advantage of. They can also interact with a large number of other young people who become like brothers and sisters to them, not just during their school days but for life. They know, too, that the Home will seek to ascertain their gifts, abilities and interests and provide opportunities to develop such with training and/or further education.

No comparable study has as yet been undertaken to estimate how such children might have fared if they had been fostered or adopted or cared for by distant relatives (presuming such alternatives were available in general poverty-stricken situations). Nevertheless, the development of these children into secure, mature adulthood suggests that an alternative upbringing would not have been more successful or satisfactory.

While very much aware of the current “expert” opinion with regard to such Homes, in reality there are always children who have no extended family to care for them, and if there is such, they may be unwilling, too overcrowded or too poor to take on another child. Where possible the Home children are encouraged to stay with relatives where available during the school holidays to maintain cultural and family roots. Local Kenyan opinion is very much in favour of this kind of Home, and tribal and local authorities are keen to recommend needy orphaned youngsters for immediate and waiting list places.

**SOURCES:** *Change in the Well-being of OSC*, PLOS One, Vol 9, Issue 8, August 2014; Carter, 2005; *Hand in Hand*, The Kisumu Children Trust, The first 20 years, ADBC Publishers, Tonbridge, 2015.

## Malaysian Conference

Every three or four years a Lausanne International Researchers’ Conference is held. The first was in Holland in 1986, the seventh in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia, in May 2015. This is the city where the Petronas Towers are located, the tallest buildings in the world between 1998 and 2004, and still the tallest Twin Towers, 1,480 feet tall with 88 floors.



Malaysia’s history is a colourful one, having been conquered firstly by the Portuguese in 1511, then by the Dutch in 1640, and then the English in 1786. That gave a certain amount of religious freedom and the Catholic church spread until 1805 when the Anglican church became dominant and other denominations were closed.

In 1824 Malaya (as it was then called) was part of Singapore and Sarawak, and in 1909 the Chaplaincy churches began, making mission to the local populace a priority. The Bible Society of Malaysia (BSM) was inaugurated in 1948 in the aftermath of World War II. The country became independent from Britain in 1957, when many expatriates left, creating a huge vacuum and many struggling churches with buildings but few people.

In 1963, Malaya united with North Borneo, Sarawak and Singapore, with *si* being added to give the new country the name Malaysia. Less than two years later in 1965, Singapore was expelled from the federation. There were racial riots in 1969. Many people returned in the 1970s, creating new denominations in the process. In 1985, the Christian Federation of Malaysia was formed, which is an ecumenical umbrella body comprising the Council of Churches of Malaysia (mainline Protestants and Oriental Orthodox), the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (Evangelicals) and the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Malaysia (Roman Catholic). The population of Malaysia in 2015 is 30 million, half the size of the UK, and Christians are 9% of the population (against a nominal 59% in the UK).

While the official religion of Malaysia is Islam, non-Islamic religions are allowed. “Arabism” or Islamisation is increasing, however, with the confiscation of over 300 Bibles from the BSM in January 2014 because the word “Allah” was used in the translation for “God”. They were officially returned the following November. It was, though, a call to the churches on how prepared they needed to be for the challenge of extremists.

The Malaysian churches face the same generational problems as other countries, as well as an unclear belief system. While probably 60% of the population are unreachable (because Muslim), at least 15% could be reached (about 5 million people), according to the Bishop of West Malaysia, Ng Moon Hing, who addressed the Researchers’ Conference. The current key needs, he said, were leadership evaluation, working with other faiths, and deepening discipleship. Modern missions are still possible in Malaysia, working under local leadership, particularly in secular and professional roles.

# SNOWFLAKES

**Implicit Religion.** Rev Prof Edward Bailey was the mainspring behind the rise of interest in, and study of, implicit religion in the UK and increasingly worldwide. Listening to the conversations of pub customers in the 1960s formed the basis of his doctoral thesis of what he argued was an “implicit religion”. He followed this through in his ministry at Winterbourne, near Bristol, holding annual Conferences (at Denton, near Ilkley), founding the Journal of Implicit Religion and starting the Centre for the Study of Implicit Religion at Middlesex University. Sadly, he died on 23rd April 2015, but two of his key books *Implicit Religion in Contemporary Society* (1997, Peeters, Leuven) and *Implicit Religion: An Introduction* (1998, Middlesex University Press) are still in print.



**Meeting Your Partner.** In 2010, 21% of heterosexual American couples met their romantic partner online (but 70% of same-sex couples did so). A quarter, 28%, met their spouse through friends, 24% in a bar or restaurant, 10% at work, 8% at College, 7% through their family, and 2% in church. In the year 2000, these percentages were 3% online, 34% friends, 18% restaurant, 18% at work, 10% College, 11% through family and 6% at church. All mechanisms are declining except restaurants and online!

**SOURCE:** Article in *Time* magazine, 22nd June 2015, Page 40.

### Continued from page 1

5) When villagers have problems, such as ill health or demon-possession, they often turn to their Christian neighbours to help them. When the prayers of these Protestants are answered, their neighbours are deeply impressed and want to become Protestants. Specifically, prayer for healing has been a major cause of growth. Again and again, this was given to us as the major reason for the growth of the congregations. Considerable growth of the church in China among rural people has also been attributed to answered prayer for healing.<sup>4</sup>

6) Persecution of Protestants continues in some parts of the country. This may come either from other villagers or from the authorities. Lao people value unity and frequently regard those who have become Protestants as

Province	1986 Protestants	% change per annum	2011 Protestants	% change per annum	2014 Protestants	Latest population	2014 % of population
Bokeo	0	n/a	2,295	+52%	8,100	145,919	5.6%
Vientiane Prefecture	3,321 <sup>a</sup>	+6%	1,770	0.31	4,000E	695,473	0.6%
Vientiane Province			11,000	+13%	15,700	386,558	4.1%
Bolikhamxai			3,910	+21%	7,000	225,167	3.1%
Savannakhet	5,754	+4%	15,202	+8%	19,225	824,662	2.3%
Luang Phabang	3,499	+2%	6,038	+9%	7,886	405,949	1.9%
Oudomsai	0	n/a	2,629	+24%	5,036	264,830	1.9%
Xiang Khouang	330	+9%	2,925	+7%	3,594	228,882	1.6%
Sainyabouli	108	+11%	1,377E	+55%	5,090	338,044	1.5%
Attapeu	236	+4%	583	+39%	1,581	112,171	1.4%
Luang Namtha	0	n/a	841	+27%	1,719	145,231	1.2%
Champassak	1,245	+4%	3,415	+6%	4,118	603,880	0.7%
Salavan	240	+8%	1,682	+8%	2,124	324,470	0.6%
Houa Phun	0	n/a	227E	+69%	1,103	280,780	0.4%
Khammouane	43	+8%	311	+22%	563	336,935	0.2%
Phongsavan	0	n/a	120E	+36%	300	167,181	0.2%
Sekong	0	n/a	198E	+45%	605	85,316	0.1%
Sai Somboun	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	3,755	1,198,279	0.02%
Non LEC Christians	n/a	n/a	5,000	-26%	2,000		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>14,922</b>	<b>+6%</b>	<b>59,523</b>	<b>+16%</b>	<b>93,499</b>	<b>6,769,727</b>	<b>1.4%</b>

**Christian Bookshops** in the UK rely increasingly on volunteers for their viability. *Together* conducted a small survey among them early in 2015, and received 106 responses. From the replies it emerged that over 80% of shops use volunteers, with 70% regarding them as “absolutely vital.” 60% of shops are staffed “mostly by volunteers” and more than 60% of shops feel it is harder to recruit volunteers now. Without volunteers, half, 50%, of shops would be unable to continue, and the decline in Christian bookshops would be dangerously accelerated.

**SOURCE:** *Together* magazine, Issue 14, July/August 2015, Page 36.

**Hillary Clinton.** An article in *The Tablet* asked what qualities the world wanted in an American President. Suggested answers: wisdom, maturity, taking decisions with a measured view, putting other people first, power being an opportunity to serve, someone with a long view of history, good judgement and experience. The author argued these are the precise gifts most grandmothers have – and Hillary is now a grandmother. If she should become President next year, how will these “grandmotherly-gifts” become “Presidential-attributes”?

**SOURCE:** Article by Joanna Moorhead, *The Tablet*, 20th June 2015, Page 15.

**London growth** continues, its population in 2015 reaching its maximum-ever population of 8.6 million which it had in 1939, just before the outbreak of WWII. 14% of the UK’s population lives in London, including 18% of those aged 20 to 29. London generates 19% of the country’s jobs and 22% of the total UK income. A fifth, 20%, of the people going to church in the UK go to a church in London. While more and more people are

increasingly moving out (due partly to the shortage and price of housing) – many moving to Birmingham – international migration and a high birth rate make up the numbers.

**SOURCES:** Article in *The Week*, 11th July 2015, Page 13; *Capital Growth*, ADBC Publishers, 2013.

**Same-sex decision.** On 26th June 2015, the US Supreme Court issued a landmark ruling granting same-sex couples a constitutional right to marry. Although widely regarded as inevitable by three-fifths (62%) of the population, and supported by about half (49%), it was not welcomed by all. Practising Christians were less likely to support it (28%), and evangelicals far less so (2%). Age is significant – those under 40 are twice as likely to support the decision than those over, but only a fifth (21%) of Americans feel that religious institutions should be forced to perform same-sex marriages against their beliefs. There are now 20 countries in the world which allow same-sex marriage, including 7 in Europe.

**SOURCE:** Press Release by Pew Research Centre, 26th June 2015; *Legalization of Same-Sex Marriage*, www.barna.org/barna-update, 2nd July 2015.



**The International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies** based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia is 7 years old, and produces a quarterly journal (*Islam and Civilisational Renewal*) and a bi-monthly bulletin. Its founding CEO is Professor Mohammad Hashim Kamali (pictured). It is currently especially concerned with issues of the family, the stigma of being a single parent, family challenges to the Islamic faith, the inequality of divorce, and how fairness and justice is practised in a family context.

**SOURCE:** Personal visit, 27th May 2015.

“stepping out of line” and breaking the unity of the community. Protestants may be ostracised, forbidden to send their children to the village school, deprived of using the village supply of water, or evicted from the village, with consequent loss of their land and livelihood.

In the past, there have been campaigns when the police have tried to persuade the Protestants to sign forms stating that they were leaving the Christian faith. Some Protestants have been arrested and put in prison for joining in worship in a village other than their own or for similar reasons that would seem unreasonable in western nations. However, persecution seems to put Protestants on their mettle. It challenges their faith, deepens their prayer-life and stimulates their witness. There are few “nominal” Protestants when persecution is rife. One pastor told me, “Please ask your Christian friends to pray for us – but not that persecution will cease. It is the persecution that makes us stay close to the Lord and remain strong in faith.”

There is much to give thanks for in the growth of the Lao church and there are lessons for us in the West. Learning from the Protestants in the Lao Peoples’ Democratic Republic and in other countries who live in such hard conditions can be a source of inspiration to a largely stagnant church in the West.

### NOTES

- 1 In the village of Ban Vang Mon in Oudomsai province.
- 2 The Bible Society *Prayer in Action* for March-June 2015 quotes a figure of 200,000 Christians in Laos (week of 17 to 23 May) but this includes Roman Catholics.
- 3 See *The Gospel in the Land of a Million Elephants*, Silvain Dupertuis, published by the Federation Romande d’eglises evangeliques, St-Prex, Switzerland, 2013, Pages 35f and *Chosen for a Special Joy*, Jean L. Andrianoff, Wing Spread Publishers, Camp Hill, PA, USA, 2012.
- 4 A recently published PhD dissertation on the Protestant Church in China (*Mobilized Merchants-Patriotic Martyrs* by Timothy Conking) states healings in response to prayer are particularly common among rural populations, accounting for up to 90% of all conversions to Christianity in rural areas. The author goes on to explain that the animistic, superstitious, world-view of a typical rural farmer coincided with charismatic Christianity in its shared emphasis on the goal of religious practice to bring blessing, help and healing in this present life.





# REFLECTIONS

*"Is it nothing to you all you that pass by?"*

This haunting question from Lamentations 1:12 has echoed down through two and a half millennia and still challenges us today. Consider, for example:

- 1) The 44 million abortions per year carried out globally; a billion in total between 1973 and 2013.
- 2) The diseases of HIV/AIDS, Ebola, malaria, and preventable childhood diseases.
- 3) A world afflicted by poverty and hunger, compounded by greed, indifference and power seeking in the developed world.
- 4) A world of mothers grieving over the death of children and husbands in the wake of rockets and suicide bombs in Israel or reprisal shelling in Gaza as well as horrendous terrorist atrocities in other parts of the world.
- 5) A world of insane and endemic tribal and ethnic slaughter in South Sudan, D R Congo, Iraq, Syria, parts of Europe and Eurasia.
- 6) A world of accelerating creational damage and climate change that threatens the poorest and weakest most.
- 7) A world in which 2014 was deemed by several agencies to be the worst year ever for children – abused, abducted, raped, mutilated, enslaved, forced into child armies, murdered and traumatized in mass shootings in schools from the United States to Nigeria to Pakistan, and driven by war or hunger from their homes in their thousands to wretched refugee camps.
- 8) A world in which divorce is common, single parenthood accepted and part of the norm, "marriage" changed of meaning, homelessness even in richer societies, sex slavery, and the plight of thousands and thousands of migrants and others who are displaced.
- 9) 21 Egyptian martyrs saying "Jesus Christ is Lord" as they were beheaded and thousands and thousands of others being killed, imprisoned or tortured because they are Christians (with 90,000 Christian martyrs per year)

"Lamentations not only gives us the language for lament in such a world. Surely it also demands that we use it. For lament appeals beyond the world and its tragic fallenness to the One about whom even Lamentations can say:

You, O Lord, reign forever, Your throne endures from generation to generation. (5:19)

"Lament is missional because it keeps the world before God, and it draws God into the world – with the longing that God should act, and the faith that He ultimately will.

"Therefore I have hope (Lam 3:21). We may have sung 'Great Is Thy Faithfulness' without any awareness of the surrounding darkness and desolation of the Lamentations text from which it is drawn. But knowing that context, there is no reason not to go on singing it! For its truth is also a truth embedded in Lamentations. There is hope in this book with its redemptive heart and glorious climax [and] because the book is saturated with prayer. Even when it is angry, pain-soaked, protesting, grieving, questioning prayer, it is still prayer. And it is prayer addressed to the Lord – the God whose faithfulness, love, and compassion are eternal, and whose anger, though real and terrible, will not last forever.

"And in that God, the Poet places his hope while still in the midst of his pain, and calls us to do the same." (Chris Wright).

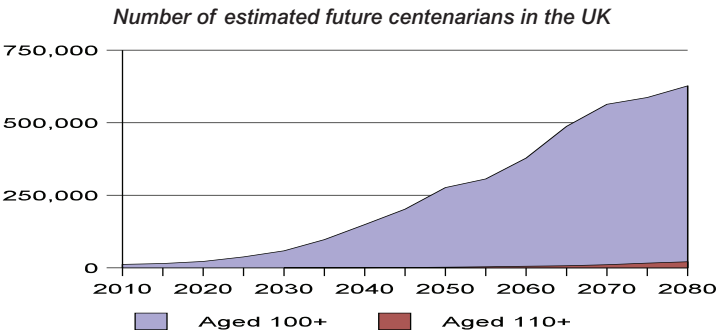
**SOURCES:** *Lamentations:* A Book for Today, Christopher J H Wright, in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol 39, No 2, April 2015, Pages 59-64; and No 1, January 2015, Page 29; *New Horizons*, May/June 2015 Vol 19 No 3, Page 7, Church of God Outreach Ministries.

## Older People

The Department for Work and Pensions have published an interesting Table estimating how many people might become centenarians. If you are now somewhere between 5 and 20 years old, incredibly over a quarter, 27%, are expected still to be here in 80 to 95 years' time. If you are currently between 20 and 55 then a sixth, 18%, are expected to reach 100, and if between 55 and 70 now then one in eight, 12%, will reach three digits. For those at present in their 70s, or over, 9% could reach this "magic" figure.

The main reason is essentially improved health provision and consequently people are living much longer. Previous actuarial estimates on the length of life of churchgoers have found that, on average, they tend to live perhaps 4 years longer than the general population (as they mostly smoke and drink less).

The growth in numbers is illustrated in the graph, with a particular surge in the 2050s, that is, for those in their 30s or 40s now.



The average age of a Protestant minister in the UK is about 54 (Catholic priests are older), and supposing the current retirement age of 70 (in many denominations) continues to hold, then by the time many present serving ministers retire, say in 15 years' time, in 2030, there will be not a few church-attached centenarians, although nothing like as many as in 2050, when ministers now in 30s will be thinking of retiring.

The future number of centenarians will certainly keep the Queen busy (or her successors if they continue the tradition of signing a card for everyone reaching 100). But the impact of older people, say those 65 and over, not just the centenarians, on the church will be profound. Two-fifths (42%) of church people are expected to be 65 or over in 2025 and that percentage will rise rapidly in succeeding years.

Some churches are already appointing a Minister for Older People. Are ministers in training being prepared to serve congregations largely of older people? Not all older people enjoy modern, especially loud, worship. Their physical ability is usually less, often finding stairs difficult (for example). While remaining strongly committed to their congregation, financial support from them may not be what it once was. One Christian newspaper, *Evangelicals Now*, is focussing on older people in a survey this summer. It will be interesting to know what they discover!

**SOURCES:** *Number of Future Centenarians*, Dept for Work and Pensions, Dec 2010; *UK Church Statistics*, No 2, Table 16.8.2, ADBC Publishers; *Evangelicals Now*, Thornton Heath, Surrey, 2015.

## AUSTRALIAN CULTURE

Ruth Powell, the Director of the National Church Life Survey in Australia (a major study conducted across 23 denominations every 5 years), gave an interesting talk on multicultural Australia at the 2015 Lausanne Researchers' Conference. A quarter (28%) of the population of Australia was born outside the country (in the UK it is 13%). The oldest group of these are the British, making up 5% of the overall population and whose average age is 54.

Why do immigrants come to Australia? According to the government, they come to work and thus support the labour market, thereby helping to build the economy. They come to reunite with a family member or members already in the country, and they help to shape Australian society. Their multiculturalism emerges out of their immigration, and the breadth of their immigration brings a diverse religious society, one of the most diverse in the world.

So many immigrants helps give focus to the church's mission efforts. A third, 35%, of Australian churches work with migrants, with 15% highly involved. At the same time, the church needs to be built and trained to do such mission work. As well as immigrants, the church has to engage with a post-Christian society and,

as in the UK, the (Western) churches struggle to find relevant models. As in the UK, the non-Western churches are generally growing, illustrating "reverse mission".

"Cross-culture" work thus takes on different meanings from "East v West". Old and young pose quite different cultural models, for example. Churches are using the following strategies to do this:

- They help make positive contacts between the different groups
- They engage in intentional cross-cultural church planting
- They release younger people into mission
- They support mono-cultural church communities while they transition

Part of that reaching out is sharing their church property with other groups; 21% of Australian churches do this, exactly the same percentage as London's churches which let another congregation use their premises.

However, the migrant mix in Australia is quite different from the British. Australia has many from India, whereas the UK has many from Africa and the Caribbean and, increasingly, many from other European countries.

## Obtaining Church Statistics

In Britain we are fortunate in that the Church of England has a Research and Statistics Department which regularly, usually annually, publishes huge numbers of statistics about the Church of England. Similar information is available from other denominations even if it doesn't generate the same headlines in the religious press. *UK Church Statistics* seeks to collect data across all denominations.

Similar information is also available in Australia with its 5 year cycle of National Censuses and the well-established National Church Life Survey resulting in about a quarter of a million responses each time. Likewise in the United States there are a number of publications listing denominational data, as well as the Pew Forum, Barna Group, Gallup and other research agencies actively working in the church and religious world.

But in other countries? At the recent Lausanne Researchers' Conference Larry Kraft reported on a survey he had undertaken to find out what religious information was publicly available in other countries. He found some countries have lists of churches, a few had a religious research organisation, but in the main there was really very little church data publicly available, and if there was, it was frequently organised by expats living in the country seeking to get such information. Out of 30 countries which responded to his survey, 14 had such lists, and a further 10 had a partnership involved with collecting such data. In 4 countries it was related to sending of mission personnel, and in 2 countries the focus was on church growth factors.

In the 1990s, lists of the various denominations (with data for each) within each country were published for 10 countries in Europe (France, Spain, French-speaking Switzerland, Norway, Finland, UK and Irish Republic, Austria, the Netherlands and Denmark) in the *European Churches' Handbooks* Volumes 1 and 2, but these have not been replicated since nor updated.

These factors, apart from global surveys like the World Values' Study and others, and one-off sample surveys within a particular country, make the acquiring of accurate information difficult. A Christian Directory was once published in Thailand in the 1980s, but not repeated, and doubtless in other countries on an ad hoc basis from time to time also. The Lutheran Research Institute in Finland produced some fascinating research in the 1990s. There are more city directories available, but not national directories.

All this shows how important was the widespread gathering of such data by Ed Dayton in the 1970s and David Barrett for the first *World Christian Encyclopaedia* of 1980, now maintained by Todd Johnson in the World Christian Database. Earlier attempts in the *World Christian Handbooks* in the 1950s and 1960s were worthy publications seeking to give a comprehensive picture.

What is the value of such collections of data? Primarily to give indications for strategic actions for service, providing a place for academic research, the noting of key movements, an enhanced overview nationally, the opportunity for discerning long-term trends, and ascertaining how churches may need to change in order to evangelise more effectively.

**SOURCES:** Talk by Larry Kraft, and the publications mentioned.

## Self Confidence

Self-confidence makes a bigger difference to a person's likelihood of success in Britain than in almost any other country, apart from New Zealand, an international study of 500,000 pupils aged 15 in over 60 countries by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has found. Teenagers with a strong belief in their own ability scored more highly in science and maths tests than those who doubted themselves. In these subjects, boys outperformed girls by an average of 13 points in the study's testing mechanism scores, although overall girls were less likely to underachieve than boys.

Caroline Jordan, Headmistress of Headington School, Oxford, said, "Girls are often very good at making abstract links, so what is it particularly about science that makes them feel less confident?"

Boys play more video games than girls (75% to 44%), but girls spend more time reading for pleasure and doing their homework than boys; could this have any relation? Boys are better problem solvers (even in one-player games), perhaps giving them more self-confidence in maths.

A CBI study found that a third, 33%, of Primary and Junior schools are not teaching the required minimum of two hours science a day, partly because teachers say they lack confidence in teaching the subject. Consequently many pupils already lack significant grounding in science subjects by the time they reach secondary school. The church itself also seems to lack confidence in teaching the relationship between science and faith, particularly in the impressionable teenage years.

The annual Prince's Trust survey asks about young people's happiness and their self-confidence. Over the last 6 years, self-confidence has fallen (from a measure of 74 in 2009 to 71 in 2015). A quarter, 23%, of those in the survey had been physically bullied, the main impact of which was on their confidence (76% said it suffered) and motivation (43%).

Those lacking confidence are often anxious, which means, according to the Trust survey, a lack of confidence in meeting new people (54%), talking on the phone (41%), or making eye contact with people (31%). What helps them to get over this? Primarily, the Trust found that having someone to talk to (71%) was a vital key, something that church youth groups can perhaps specially offer.

In a totally different study in the context of tough neighbourhoods, a Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust survey found that "building personal and community confidence builds community resilience" to difficult situations.

Confidence and faith are Biblically linked. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," declared Paul, and many an uncertain teenager has been changed as they have allowed the power of Christ to transform them. Is this partly why the black churches are growing – they have more confidence in their faith? One group of churches in a Buckinghamshire town was asked, "What inhibits you most from seeing your church grow?" The majority answer was, "A lack of confidence in explaining the faith."

A small, demure 13-year old girl from a very impoverished background was asked what she liked best about the orphanage where she had been living the past 2 years. "Standing up front before my peers reciting verses I've learned from the Bible," she said, as it gave her confidence in affirming herself and finding that she could do it.

**SOURCES:** Articles in the *Daily Telegraph* 6th March, 2015; *Youth Index* 2015, The Prince's Trust Macquarie; *International Journal of Market Research*, Vol 57 Issue 2, Page 168; *Philippians* 4:13; *Vision Building Day* in High Wycombe, 2006.

### Britain's Last Religious Revival?

Quantifying Belonging, Behaving and Believing in the Long 1950s, Clive D Field

ISBN 978-1-1375-1252-9; 144 pages; £45 hardback; Published 25/2/15

This book is the result of many hours of careful, detailed work poring through hundreds of different references – some 350 are listed in the Bibliography and some nearly 500 notes in its 140 pages! Its focus is on giving the breadth of sample survey data on key religious topics starting from the 1950s when the relatively new science of market research began to blossom.

It looks at the key issues of affiliation and membership by denomination in one chapter and then primarily on church attendance in the next. Frequency of attendance and rites of passage are looked at briefly also. The final substantive chapter is on belief, followed by a useful and comprehensive conclusion.

Did the British religious scene substantially change in the 1950s? Field would argue the 1950s saw a progressive secularisation which started before then and has continued since. For those wanting source material for this key period, however, the book is unparalleled, and perhaps worth its high cost.

**SOURCES:** Talk by Larry Kraft, and the publications mentioned.



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## Providing Facts for Forward Planning

## SNIPPETS

1) 6.7 million adults in the UK were using health and fitness wearable devices and smart phone apps in October 2014 (11% of the population).

2) 6,000 of the 32,000 polling places for the general election in May 2015 were located in churches, almost a fifth of the total. In London 25% of the churches were used; in Scotland just 12%.

3) In 1995, 86% of teenage suicides in the UK were from fatherless families; in America in 2002 the percentage was 63%. No more recent figures seem available.

4) 9% of all species of bee are threatened with extinction in Europe (out of a total of 1,965 different species).

5) More than 28 million hours of voluntary work are being undertaken by churches and faith groups across the UK per year, benefiting 3.5 million people.

6) Two-thirds, 67%, of students read their e-textbooks on the screen, but they only read 8 pages at a time on average, and spend no more than 13 minutes in doing so. 5% of students print out their e-textbooks and read them from paper.

7) What helped you do your job well? (a) Being shown how to do it by others (63%), (b) Reflecting on my own performance (61%), (c) Watching/listening to others (56%), (d) Training courses (55%).

**SOURCES:** 1) *IMPACT*, Market Research Society, No 9, April 2015, Page 18; 2) National Churches Trust, given in *The Tablet*, 2nd May 2015, Page 34; 3) US DHHS Bureau of the Census, quoted on www.coefic.demon.co.uk/stats.htm; 4) *Environment for Europeans*, Directorate-General for the Environment EC, April 2015, No 56, Page 3; 5) *Cinnamon Faith Action* Audit, Matt Bird, May 2015; 6) *The Bookseller*, 13th November, 2009, Page 24; 7) *UKDA News*, March 2009, No 7, Page 3.

## LAOS CHURCH GROWTH

Ian D Bowley, former OMF International missionary

In recent years, there has been considerable growth of the Protestant Church in Laos. Some provinces have seen the number of Protestants double in a little over three years. How has this come about and to what can this growth be attributed ?



Laos is a south-east Asian country, about the size of England and Wales, that is situated south of China, with Burma and Thailand to the west, Vietnam to the east and Cambodia to the south. In the north and down its eastern border it is mountainous, with wide areas over 4,000 feet above sea level, the highest mountain being some 9,250 feet high, resulting in a population of just 6.8 million. This number is made up of about 60% Lao people, plus ethnic groups speaking various Sino-Tibetan languages (Hmong, Akha, Mien, Phu Noi, Lantaen and Lahu) and groups speaking various Mon-Khmer languages (Khmu, Katang, Ta Oi, Mangkong, Bru, So and many others).

Thai Protestants, brought to Christ through American Presbyterian work, were the first to cross into Laos with the Christian message in the 1870s and one Church of Khmu Christians remains from their work.<sup>1</sup> The first foreign workers to live in the country were Swiss Brethren who came in 1902. The Christian and Missionary Alliance followed in 1926 and OMF International in 1957.

In 1975, the Royal government was overthrown and the Lao Peoples' Democratic Republic was established. Under this Marxist regime, Christians suffered and some leaders were sent for re-education in Labour Camps. During the 1990s, conditions eased somewhat, though persecution continues in a number of areas. A survey of the churches was conducted in 1986 which found a total of 14,922 Protestants in 136 local congregations. At that time, there were no known Protestants in the five most northern provinces.

Another survey was carried out in 2011 which found that there were in excess of 62,000 Protestants from 34 different language groups. By then, there were Protestants in all of the (then) 17 provinces. A further survey was carried out at the end of 2014 which found that there were some 94,000 Protestants from 39 language groups in about 400 congregations.<sup>2</sup> There are an estimated 45,000 Roman Catholics as well.

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The Table (on Page 4) shows growth in some of the Laos Provinces, with the percentage change worked out per annum as the time periods between the counts are different. The population figures are the latest available. The 2014 Vientiane Prefecture figure is estimated. It must be remembered that starting from such a small base, such as only several hundred Protestants, any increase in numbers can seem large.

Growth has not been consistent across the country. Some areas have seen considerable increases while in other areas the increase has been small. The provinces of Sainyabouli and Khammouane have similar sizes of population (338,000 and 336,000 respectively), yet Sainyabouli had some 5,090 Protestants in 2014 while Khammouane had only 563.

The province of Bokeo had no Protestants at all in 1986 but there are now some 8,100, with an average increase of 52% per annum from 2011 to 2014. Why is that? The Protestants in Khammouane province comprise 0.2% of the population, whereas 5.6% of the population of Bokeo province are Protestants. Why these vast differences? All foreign missionaries left the country in 1975, so it cannot be due to different strategies, numbers of mission personnel, or their denomination. It is mainly due to the different ethnic groups, some of whom are more open to the gospel than others.

The theological stance of the Lao Evangelical Church is Biblical and evangelical, with a small number of Charismatic congregations, mainly in the capital, Vientiane.

### The causes of such growth

1) The Lao people are predominantly Buddhist, though with an inherent fear of spirits. As is true of many such Buddhist groups, progress among them has been slow. It took three years for the Swiss Brethren to see their first convert baptised. Whereas the majority of the various ethnic minority groups are animists, there are very few followers of Buddhism among them. Consequently, they are more open to consider changing faith and leaving the worship of spirits or their ancestors. In the 1950s there was a "turning" of several thousands in the first two months of the Hmong people hearing the Gospel.<sup>3</sup>

2) Under the Communist regime, the various Christian denominations were forced into one national group, the Lao Evangelical Church. This has given a greater sense of unity, taking away any sense of competition between the Church groups and has given the Protestants a desire to spread their faith.

3) Christian Radio broadcasts from the Far Eastern Broadcasting Company in the Philippines can be heard in many of the more remote parts of the country. It is estimated that some 20,000 to 30,000 people have become Protestants through listening to broadcasts in the Khmu language over the past ten years.

4) The lives of Protestants stand out as different from their non-Christian fellow villagers. Alcohol abuse is a common problem in Laos – it has the highest per capita consumption of alcohol among South East Asian nations. By and large Protestants do not drink alcoholic drinks, get drunk and get into fights. Their lifestyle can be attractive to non-Protestants.

Continued on page 4