

CHRISTIANITY ON THE SHELF?

The American researcher, George Barna, in 2006 said 61% of those in their 20s put “Christianity on the shelf” following spiritually active teen years. An Australian book, *The Spirit of Generation Y*, says 46% of youth have traditional views of religion, 28% secular, 17% New Age and 9% “other”, but the key issue was not just the high percentages of secular and New Age but “the growing ranks of Christians from various backgrounds joining the secular camp”. Research in Britain at the start of the 21st century identified a similar problem – not just reaching young people but keeping young people.

There are a number of different factors which contribute to this problem:

Many churchgoing families with children of secondary school age find the pressure of regular attendance on Sunday too great, and opt to go fortnightly or monthly instead.

Government figures show that 57% of families with children have both parents out at work; that inhibits the opportunity for times of family worship in many cases.

Despite increasing numbers taking Religious Studies at GCSE or A Level, actual knowledge of the Scriptures is scanty.



Many churches struggle to find enough volunteers to help teach in their Sunday School or lead their young people’s work.

Only 27% of churches have mid-week youth activities, and 59% of churches have no one attending aged 15 to 19.

On the other hand, there are many success stories. Church-Based Children’s Outreach Projects were attended by over 20,000 children from unchurched homes in 2007; Soul Survivor had many thousands of children at its August weeks last summer;

one church in five now employs a youth or children’s worker; some churches are involving young people in leading their worship with spectacular success; the Metro Sunday School operated by a number of churches reaches thousands also. So it is not true to say that children aren’t being reached, not true that summer camps and other evangelistic efforts are ineffective, not true that organisations like Youth for Christ are not seeing young people come to faith among the 300,000 they work with each month.

What then are the problems? Part of the problem is the “world-view” that many in Generation Y have (those aged from about 15 to 30), which some say is one of low commitment – to anything, not just Christianity. The greater awareness of other faiths, leads some to move from one to another. Data from the British Social Attitudes studies showed that of 46% who grew up in Anglican homes only 30% still had a faith when adult; of 14% with a Catholic home only 10% were Christian years later; and of 20% in other Christian homes only 12% stayed with the faith.

One part of a Canadian study which researched young people and the church asked those who had left why they had done so. There were three main answers: “Feeling I could no longer accept the exclusive claims of Christianity”, hypocrisy among Christians, and disagreement with various ethical beliefs in the church (such as abortion, euthanasia and homosexuality). These are all serious issues.

Are there solutions? A secular study of young people in management showed that those given responsibility were more likely to stay with the same employer. 90% said they would “work for an organisation that does something I believe in” and 56% would “only work for organisations with strong values”. Perhaps churches are not articulating their values and the beliefs of Christianity sufficiently clearly, or relating these to the concerns young people have, as expressed in the Canadian study.

Maybe we need to learn how to stop treating young people as children; recognise the importance of reaching them in groups not as singles; help them especially at secondary school to see the relevance and depth of their faith; and to encourage them to learn values from their grandparents (whom most will respect) – factors all found in British research.

SOURCES: Article “Understanding Generation Y” in *Professional Manager*, Vol 17 Issue 4, July 2008, Page 25; *Reaching and Keeping Teenagers*, Peter Brierley, Christian Research, 2002; feature article in *Church of England Newspaper* by Mark Griffiths, 15th August 2008, Page 19; *Religion Watch*, November 2008, Page 10; *Barna Report*, 12th September 2006; *Keep the Faith* Christmas 2008 issue; *Religious Trends* No 7, Christian Research, 2008, Table 2.3.1; *Growing Up Christian*, John Bowen, Wycliffe College, Toronto, June 2008.

TIME PRIORITY

We are all familiar with financial or income poverty and know what it means. Research by the London School of Economics (LSE) introduced another kind of poverty – time poverty, defined as a key constraint on what people can achieve. Financial poverty might be remedied by helping people gain employment, but this might be hindered because basic obligations still have to be met, such as ensuring that children are looked after.

The following Table gives the proportions of children in income-poor households and households in which at least one adult is time-poor:

Household:	Children in income and/or time-poor households	
	At least one adult time - poor %	No adult time - poor %
Not income poor	21	44
Income poor	7	28
All	28	72

Just over a quarter, 28%, of households with children had at least one adult who was time-poor. If the above findings were true of churchgoing households, this may help explain the reluctance of people with families to volunteer to help with church activities. A higher proportion of households with children, 35%, were income-poor, but only a small percentage, 7%, were both income-poor and time-poor.

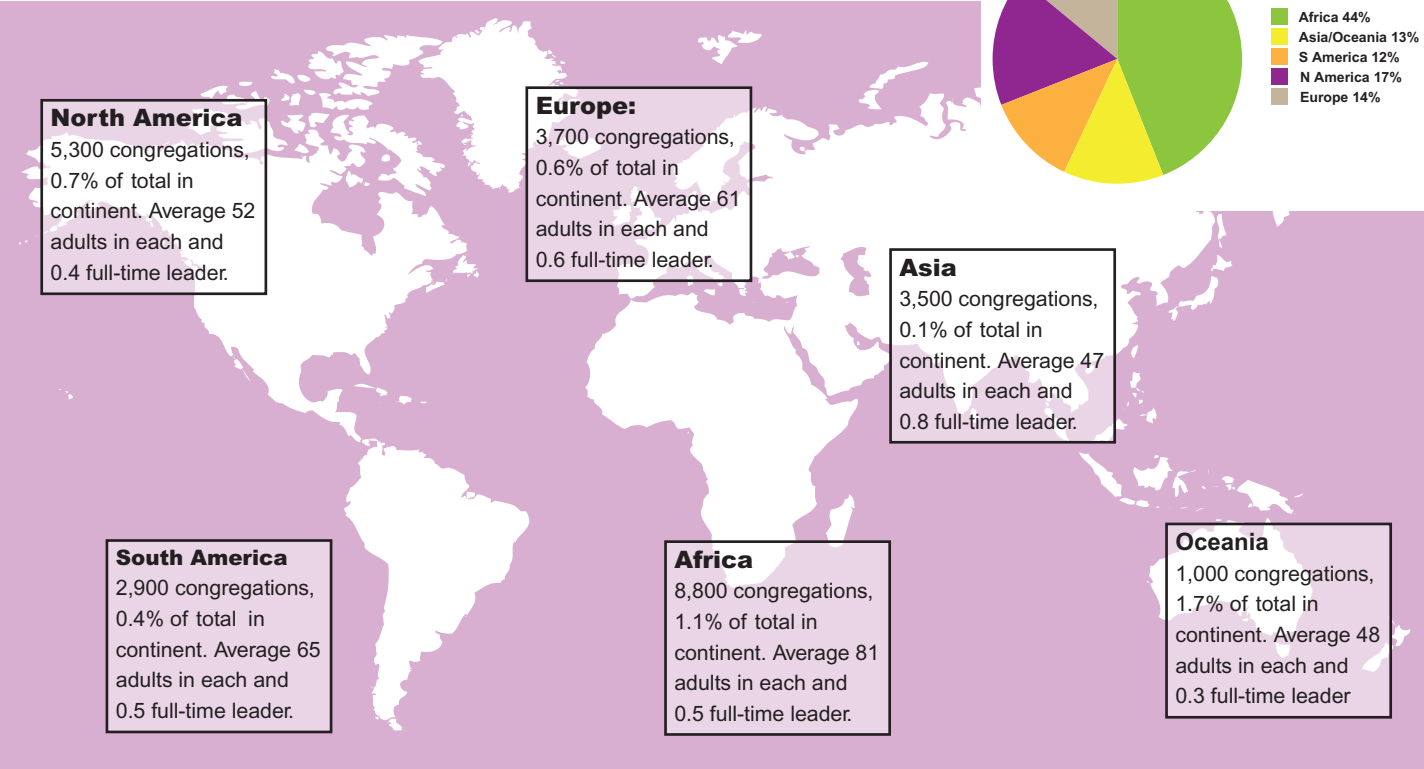
What creates time-poor pressures? Looking after children or ensuring that they are looked after, caring for older or disabled relatives, or the fulfilment of “duties to sustain entitlements”, personal care, and so on.

Those especially at risk of being time- and income-poor are single women aged 16 to 44, especially if they have few educational qualifications. Home responsibilities are not shared equally, making women more likely to be time-poor than husband or partner. There is an obvious implication for Christian men!

SOURCE: Research paper “Time and income poverty” by Tarnia Burchardt, LSE, published by Joseph Rowntree Foundation, November 2008, based on an analysis of the UK Time Use Survey run by the Office for National Statistics in 2000.

Christian Brethren Worldwide

The Christian Brethren originated in Britain almost 180 years ago. Since then they have grown and now straddle the world. The Open or Christian Brethren is the largest group and may be found in 121 countries. With 25,200 congregations in 2008, they represent one congregation in every 190, or 0.5% worldwide, but this varies by continent.



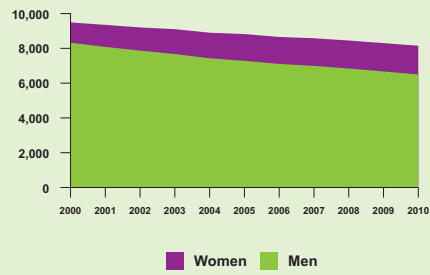
SOURCES: *The Brethren Movement Worldwide*, edited by Harold Rowdon, Partnership, 2007, and the *World Christian Encyclopaedia*, edited by David Barrett, OUP, 2001.

MORE ORDINATIONS

Good news from the Church of England was announced at the end of last year – another high number of people had been recommended for training for ordination. There were 595 people in 2007, the highest number for 10 years, and 575 in 2008.

However, the number of stipendiary clergy in diocesan ministry continues to decline, despite more women being ordained. As the diagram shows this is principally because of clergy losses, as the

Number of stipendiary clergy in the Church of England, by gender, 2000-2010



number of new people coming in fails to offset those who are leaving. However, the number who are retiring is slowly reducing, suggesting that the average age of clergy (55 in 2008) might reduce a little.

The number of ordinands under 40 was 243 in 2007, up from 188 in 2004.

Official projections by the Church of England of numbers into the future indicate quite clearly that the proportion of women is increasing, from 12% in 2000 to an estimated 20% by 2010.

What is not shown in the chart is the number of unpaid clergy (non-stipendiary) in the Church of England which is increasing rapidly and is likely to equal the number of stipendiary clergy by 2010.

SOURCES: www.cofe.org.uk/anglican.org/info/statistics/churchstats, Pages 37 and 39 etc and *Religious Trends* Nos 6 and 7, Christian Research, 2006 and 2008.

SNOWFLAKES

Year of the Child

2009 is the 30th Anniversary of UNESCO’s first Year of the Child.

Childhood over by 11

A Random House survey of interviews with 1,170 parents with children under 18 found that 55% reckoned childhood had ended when their children went to Secondary School. In addition:

- 71% said their children had little regard for authority;
- 71% allowed their 18-year olds to drink alcohol at home;
- 67% were worried about the company their children kept;
- 53% let 16-year olds (or younger) stay out after 11.00pm;
- 45% let their 16-year olds stay the night at a boy- or girl-friend’s house; and
- 35% allowed those under 12 to have their ears pierced.

Lack of discipline, much greater freedom, unwillingness to take responsibility seem to characterise much parenting today. Is this true of church families too?

SOURCE: *Church Times* article, 7th March 2008.

The Five Marks of Mission

The book, *Mission in the 21st Century*, edited by Cathy Ross and Andrew Walls, has some excellent articles exploring the five marks of mission, which are taken as:

- 1) To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- 2) To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- 3) To respond to human need by loving service
- 4) To seek to transform unjust structures of society and
- 5) To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

Most of the articles are by non-Westerners and give a flavour of the breadth of thinking taking place about these important issues at this time.

Never stop till you get there!

Michael Phelps had already won 7 gold medals in the 2008 Beijing Olympics, and in his race for the eighth was in seventh position half-way through the 100 metre butterfly. Making a furious comeback, the Serbian Milord Cavic seemed too far ahead. Then Cavic, thinking he’d won, made the mistake of gliding toward the finish, while Phelps put in an extra half-stroke and touched the wall 0.01 seconds ahead, equivalent to just 2 centimetres, 0.02% of the distance.

SOURCE: *Time* magazine, 22nd December 2008.



Drug concern

Around 300,000 children in the UK are growing up in households where one or both parents are addicted to drugs.

SOURCE: *The Guardian*, *The Week*, 8th November 2008, Page 23.

Voted top slogan

Barack Obama’s slogan for his successful campaign to become America’s 44th President, “Yes We Can”, was voted the top slogan by *Time* magazine in its 22nd December 2008 issue. Barack Obama never said on the campaign trail, “Yes I Can”.

Top books

The top three 2008 paperback bestsellers, in both volume and value, were Linwood Barclay’s *No Time for Goodbye*, with 640,000 sold (£3.4mn), Kate Morton’s *The Forgotten Garden* with 400,000 sold (£2.1mn) and Ian McEwan’s *On Chesil Beach* with 390,000 sold (£2.0mn). William Young’s controversial religious novel *The Shack* was 88th in the top 100, selling 135,000 copies (£740,000).

SOURCE: *The Bookseller*, 16th January 2009, Pages 26,27.

Wales is growing!

There were more births than deaths in Wales in 2006 (the latest year for figures), the first time in 10 years. As a consequence the population has increased from 2.9 million in 1997 to 3.0 million in 2006, and this growth was seen in every part of Wales except Merthyr Tydfil. The growth was helped by 15,000 people migrating into Wales, against 10,000 emigrants. The population is forecast to reach 3.3 million by 2031, with children then 17% of the population and pensioners 24%, the highest percentage for pensioners across the four countries in the UK. Unfortunately, Welsh church membership continues to decline, from 286,000 in 2000 to 239,000 in 2006 and a projected 211,000 by 2010 (7% of the population).

SOURCES: *Wales’s Population*, A demographic review, Welsh Assembly, Pages iv, v and 5; *Religious Trends*, No 7, Christian Research, 2008, Table 2.21.1.

Joining an American SDA Church

What influenced current members of American Seventh Day Adventist to join? The top five factors were:

- 59% Brought up in an Adventist home
- 58% A friend or relative
- 49% Reading or literature
- 36% Public evangelistic meetings
- 34% Bible studies in the home.

SOURCE: Article “The power of relationships in evangelism” by S Joseph Kidder in *Ministry*, July 2008, Page 11.

THE VOICE OF GOD

Continued from page 1

Members of this community reported how they had to learn to hear God’s voice and distinguish it from other voices. They reported a process of testing the Spirit whereby they would differentiate God’s voice from their own bodily feelings or from more malevolent voices such as the Devil. Experienced voice hearers were able to distinguish God’s voice from these malevolent influences although at times it necessitated a process of discussion with other members of the community and the Pastor. One test as to whether or not it was God’s voice was whether the content agreed with Scripture. God would never tell someone to hurt another person. Ultimately, if the voice was genuinely from God, the person would change significantly in some way ie the authenticity of a religious experience is to be judged by its fruits.

Of particular interest was how hearing God’s voice was different from the voices heard in psychotic illness such as schizophrenia. Hearing voices is common in schizophrenia and the voices are often quite intrusive and controlling. In schizophrenia, there is a loss of agency, sufferers generally feel compelled to obey the voices. Although informants who heard God’s voice were not able to initiate the process and they claimed clearly that God’s voice was separate from their thoughts they retained a sense of agency, in other words they were able to decide whether to act or not act in response to God’s voice. They retained a degree of personal control. One member of the community had had a psychotic illness and reported that the voices when he was ill were very different from God’s tranquil voice.

Our study highlights the importance of further studies looking at the experience of hearing God’s voice in diverse communities. We have recently carried out a study looking at experiencing God during prayer among Sunni Muslims and among Pentecostal Christians and New Age Spiritual Seekers. Hearing God’s voice was only common among Pentecostal Christians. Future research will look at the differences and similarities between Christian religious experience and experiences which have been traditionally defined as mental illness.

REFERENCE: Dein S (2004) Working with patients with religious beliefs *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment* 10: 287-294.

A NEW BULLETIN!

Welcome to *FutureFirst!* This is the first edition of a new bulletin aiming to provide facts and stimulation for those interested in the future of the church and wanting to think ahead or to plan forward for their local (or wider) strategy.

It comes from Brierley Consultancy, an organisation set up by the former director of Christian Research, Dr Peter Brierley, but aided by others in the team. We hope you enjoy this issue!

If you would like to receive it on a regular basis, then please complete the form below.

As a special incentive, we are offering those subscribing this first year a subscription for £15 instead of the regular £18, and to those taking out a subscription we will send, if you wish, a FREE 1,100 word extract entitled *Living in Injury Time* from a forthcoming book on church life, *God's Questions*, to be published later in 2009.

If you would find 7 copies of each issue more useful than just one copy, or you live outside the UK, then the subscription is £20. We will of course send you the FREE extract when we hear from you.

YES! Please send me the next five issues of *FutureFirst*.

- ☐ I/We enclose a cheque made out to "Peter Brierley" for £15
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- ☐ Please send me a copy of the extract *Living in Injury Time*

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Where are we going?

Virtually every current affairs commentator remarks that 2009 is going to be a difficult year economically and as a consequence probably socially as well. We look at three views from 3 different countries as they relate to the church.

In the United States, attention is focussed on newly elected President Barack Obama and his deal to help the world's biggest economy recover some of its power. It remains to be seen whether that will happen. Some foresee that the church in the States will continue to decline, both Protestant and Catholic. Nor does it seem that the growing evangelical churches will keep pace with the growing population. One group likely to grow faster is the megachurches (having Sunday congregations of 2,000 or more), but most of their growth will come from those switching from smaller churches. New churches will, however, continue to be started, even with some difficulty. The key challenge is said to be "too little vision".

In the UK, Dr Clifford Hill in a recent Moggerhanger Paper indicates he feels our value system needs to change. He writes, "With no moral absolutes and only a system of ethical relativism to direct the affairs of the nation it is impossible to achieve stability." While not against adjusting economic policy, he says such will not solve our problems as our moral failures involve greed and "an insatiable drive to increase profits and personal bonuses". He also puts the problems

which peaked in 2008 as stemming over the legal, social and educational changes seen in the Western nations, not just the UK, over the past 40 years or so.

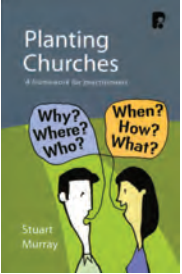
From Switzerland come the thoughts of Professor Prabhu Gupta, the Executive Director of Organisation Development at Wolfsburg. He believes that major tensions and internal repression will come "because no one in authority seems to wish to do anything to recognise the real roots of the crisis which is speculation, and specifically speculation with money that one does not have!" He says that the economic and political future will depend largely on how the US responds.

In Britain, forecasts of church life suggest that attendance will continue to decline, with the UK following the US in people moving from smaller churches to larger ones. In particular the proportion in church of those who are in their 20s will continue to shrink, and, with family life under pressure, more churchgoers in their 30s and 40s will attend less frequently.

These are very challenging times and Christian people need to pray for God's intervention, and for our national leaders to have God-given insight and a willingness to act radically in ways of justice and righteousness.

SOURCE: Websites www.theamericanchurch.org/fut; www.candmministries.org.uk; Email prabhu.guptara@ubs.com and based on data in *Religious Trends* No 7.

BOOK REVIEW



PLANTING CHURCHES: A framework for practitioners by Stuart Murray, Paternoster, Milton Keynes, 2008 240 pages, ISBN 0787-1-84227-611-2

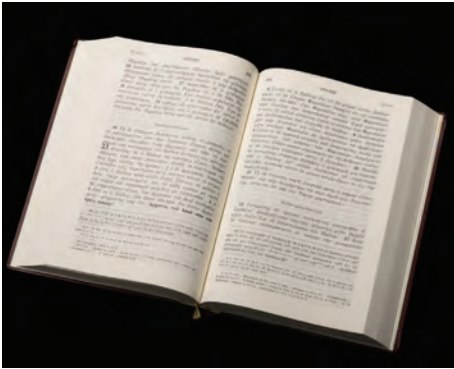
This, the sixth book written by Stuart Murray on the broad topic of church planting, is a book designed to help leaders think through the issues of starting another church. He argues that in an era of Fresh Expressions and Emerging Churches, church planting is still a vital need "if we are to incarnate the gospel in a changing culture".

It is a *practical* book. It gives guidance across the whole of the church planting adventure for those wondering whether to take the step and commit faith to action. It seeks to answer questions such as who should be involved in church planting, where churches should be planted, what kind of church should be planted, how it might be done and what some of the pitfalls are in practice.

It is an *encouraging* book. Stuart Murray believes in planting churches, and comes to that conclusion from his close involvement with church life in the UK over the past 30 years. He looks at the current UK context, is conscious of the huge amount of literature on allied topics as well as church planting and, in the light of that knowledge, basically says, "Go for it!"

It is a *timely* book. Fresh Expressions is about to undergo new leadership with Bishop Graham Cray, the numbers attending church are declining, but there continues to be a huge interest, if only vaguely, in "spirituality", so that if the church is to change in the next 10 years, as many hope and pray it will, here is a textbook to help start part of that process.

This is a highly commended and very useful volume, which has the advantage of an easy-reading style, with plenty of headings in the text and clear diagrams. But it is a *challenging* book also, and may leave you feeling less than comfortable!



REFLECTIONS

On His way through the streets of Jerusalem, presumably moonlit, after the Last Supper, when Judas had left to go to the religious leaders, Jesus is talking with His disciples. They are walking towards Gethsemane. The conversation is familiar to us, for it's that place where Peter declares that while everyone else may desert Jesus, he never will, and Jesus tells him that before the cock crows that night, Peter will deny Him three times.

Jesus knew he was walking towards Gethsemane, where anguish, betrayal, arrest, false trial, scourging, mocking, condemnation, crucifixion and resurrection all awaited him, and all, except the last, in the next 12 hours. In that conversation with His companions, however, Jesus also says, "After I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee".

There were 40 days between the resurrection of Jesus and His ascension into heaven. Exactly when they all met up for breakfast one morning on the shores of Lake Galilee, where Jesus and Peter had another intimate conversation, we don't know. Suppose it was roughly half way through those 40 days. Then, in effect, what Jesus said to the apostles en route for Gethsemane was, "Boys, I'll see you by the Lake in three weeks time." That is strategic thinking. Jesus was already sharing how He would use those precious final 40 days on earth in order to fulfil His objective of building a church which would resist the gates of hell. After the resurrection, the angel, too, re-inforced Jesus' promise, "He has been raised ... He is going ahead of you to Galilee."

Jesus maintained "emotional objectivity whilst in the midst of an emotional system that [was] in turmoil – and at the same time actively relate[d] to the key people in the system." Jesus calls us to follow Him to see through the chaos of the moment and to focus ahead.

REFERENCE: Quote from *The Differentiated Self: Essential to Leadership*, Murray Bowen.

Larger Churches

An American survey of 395 "megachurches" in 2008, each with an average weekend attendance of 2,000 people or more showed that there were as many with attendances between 2,000 and 3,000 as those with attendances above 3,000. The actual proportions of attendance were:

- 36% between 2,000 and 2,500
- 26% between 2,501 and 3,500
- 19% between 3,501 and 5,000
- 10% between 5,001 and 7,500
- 4% between 7,501 and 10,000
- 3% between 10,001 and 15,000, and
- 2% with above 15,000 people.

Two-fifths, 41%, had been founded since 1970. A third, 32%, were Independent churches and a sixth, 18%, were Southern Baptist. The rest were scattered across many denominations. These megachurches had an average ministerial staff of 22 people, of whom 3 would be women.

While there were a few who failed to support any long-term mission workers overseas, and a few which supported more than 100 such, the average was 34 per church, with an average support of £10,000 each. With an average income of £3.2 million, this support equated to 11% of the total. More than half these churches said their income had seen a large increase over the previous 5 years, as had their congregation. However, it was also noticeable that the number of mission workers going for short-term

THESE MAY BE HELPFUL

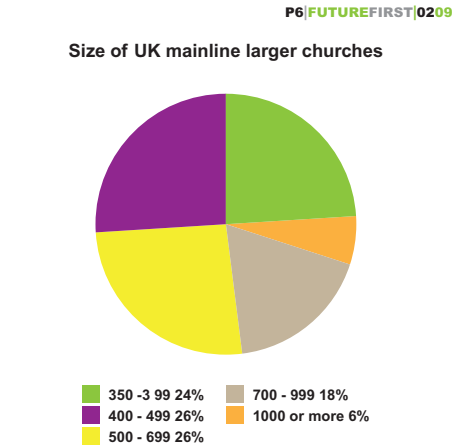
We have received the following:

The Bible and Tomorrow's World, by Rt Rev Dr Tom Wright, Bishop of Durham, Crowther Centre Monograph No 4, CMS Oxford, September 2008.

Global Pentecostalism, The New Face of Christian Social Engagement, Donald Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, University of California Press, London, 2007, including a DVD. ISBN: 978-0-520-25194-6.

A Mission-shaped Church for Older People? Practical Suggestions for Local Churches, by Michael Collier, Claire Dalpra, Alison Johnson and James Woodward, Church Army and the Leveson Centre, 2008.

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mission trips (under 2 weeks) had also increased considerably. In addition, these larger churches were each supporting on average 20 national Christian workers in other countries, at a cost of about £4,000 per person per year. India received most support from these churches, more than double the next country, Kenya.

Professor Scott Thuma who conducted the research, author of *Beyond Megachurch Myths*, said that attendance at America's megachurches continues to grow at fast rates. The same is true of the UK's larger churches, defined though as those with a Sunday attendance of 350 or more. About 1% of the Church of England's 16,000 churches have congregations exceeding 350 people, and the latest figures show that between 2005 and 2008 their attendance increased by an average of 10%. The breakdown of size of these UK churches is shown in the pie-chart.

These British churches have an average ministerial staff of 3, and in 1% of these larger churches one of these is a woman.

SOURCES: Presentation by Robert Priest on Scott Thumma's work at OMSC Mission Seminar, April 2008; report in *Christian Today* 14th September 2008, and survey on the Significance of Larger Churches.

DISORDER IN THE AMERICAN COURTS

Taken from *Futures*, Autumn 2008, with permission, quotations of things people actually said in court, word for word, taken originally from the book *Disorder in the American Courts*, where **A** = Attorney and **W** = Witness.

A: All your responses MUST be oral, OK? What school did you go to?

W: Oral
A: What is your date of birth?
W: July 18th
A: What year?
W: Every year

A: How was your first marriage terminated?
W: By death
A: And by whose death was it terminated?



Providing Facts for Forward Planning

SNIPPETS

1) Number of searches via Google in 2006 was 2.7 billion per month; in 2008 it was 31 billion.

2) 1 out of 8 couples married in the USA in 2007 met online.

3) In Malawi, 25% of schools have no protected water supply and on average 150 pupils use one latrine.

4) Number of 100th birthday messages sent by the Queen in 2001: 3,600 of which 13% were to men. In 2006 it was 4,300 of which 15% were to men.

5) Best board games of all time? First – Monopoly, second – Scrabble, third – Trivial Pursuit.

6) 80% of the population in Scotland live in 2% of the land; thus 20% of the population look after the other 98%, making a very rural environment.

7) 1 in 4 people have been with their current employer less than a year; one in two less than 5 years.

SOURCES: (1), (2) and (7) from a Sony video "Did you know?", June 2008, www.release.theplatform.com; (3) Human Development Report, 2006; (4) *Population Trends* No 132, Summer 2008, Page 15; (5) *Daily Telegraph*, 19th December 2008; (6) Martin Robb in *Briefings* No 14, Faith in Europe, December 2008, Page 10.

The Voice of God

Dr Simon Dein, Senior Lecturer in Anthropology and Medicine, Department of Mental Health Sciences, University College London

Until recently psychologists and psychiatrists have had little interest in the religious experience of their patients. Regrettably some religious experiences such as hearing God's voice audibly were misdiagnosed as a form of mental illness, and those who claimed to have had this experience were labelled as experiencing auditory hallucinations as part of a psychotic illness (Dein 2004). There is little information available about how widespread the experience of hearing God's voice audibly is among Christians.

The experience of hearing God's voice occurs both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. For instance, in Exodus 19:9 the Lord speaks to Moses "and the Lord said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee forever. And Moses told the words of the people unto the Lord." In Matthew 3:17 Jesus heard God's voice following his baptism: "And lo a voice from heaven saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." There has been little study of hearing God's voice amongst contemporary religious groups.



In 2006 we set out to investigate how Pentecostal Christians in London heard God's voice. The study was carried out in collaboration with Professor Roland Littlewood at University College, London. Specifically we were interested to find out how a Pentecostal group in London heard God's voice, what the qualities of God's voice were, and how they felt when hearing God's voice. Forty members of a Pentecostal group (age 18-80) in London were interviewed in depth about their prayer experiences, what they asked God for and how God responded. Twenty five out of forty claimed to have heard God's voice at some time in their lives. Fifteen out of twenty five had heard God's voice aloud. Almost unanimously individuals reported God's voice to be quiet, calm and reassuring. Most reported that God's voice was clearly distinguishable from a human voice although it had all the qualities of a human voice. One informant reported that God's voice had an accent. Like a human voice, those hearing knew when it started and stopped. Some members of the community even had a dialogue with the voice. For instance, one lady who had not paid a tithe reported how she heard God's voice castigating her.

Although some informants reported they heard God's voice from outside their heads for the others God's voice was internal and at times it was difficult to differentiate this from a thought. Those who had heard God's voice aloud did so only very occasionally. Sometimes God interrupted a train of thought and 'inserted' a thought into a person's head. For instance, one woman who had not seen her brother for over twenty years suddenly thought that she must phone him. She spoke to him and found out that he had been very ill and she was able to visit him. She attributed this train of events to God. For many, hearing the voice of God occurred at a time of a personal crisis. One woman reported how she heard God's voice when she was feeling very low and suicidal. The voice told her to visit a local church and speak to the pastor. Another man reported how he heard God's voice when he was undecided whether or not to have a child. The voice told him that he would have a child and a few months later his wife gave birth to a child. God's voice was characteristically quite calming and commonly alleviated their distress.

continued on page 4