

Idols of Today

TECHNOLOGY

One often hears people saying things like: “If we can develop the right renewable energy, we can save the world from global warming”; or, “If we can only improve the productivity of farming, we can solve the world’s hunger problems”; or, “With the right medical treatments we can eliminate disease”. Although each of these represents a fine aspiration, each also shows how technology can become an idol.



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Technology as an idol is the belief that having and using the right technology will provide us the “good life” and will solve the world’s problems regarding health, safety, crime, climate change and other global issues.

Some look to technology to provide them with all their essential social connections so they feel accepted. Others look to technology to give meaning or excitement to life, having a sense of importance because of the technology they use. If only they have the latest iGadget, then they feel significant. Others think that using technology proficiently will help them feel good about themselves, giving them a sense of worth and competence.

Technology can even provide alternate realities in which people think they become the person they really wanted to be. Or technology may help people engage in sinful activities vicariously.

Generally, technology becomes an idol when people rely on it as their god, substituting man’s brilliant achievements in place of the true God, failing to acknowledge that no technological advance will ever resolve every major issue. The use of technology may help improve certain situations, but the lasting resolution of global issues will only come through the Cross and Reign of Christ.

Technology is very seductive because it can provide people with a false sense of control or power. It makes people almost feel as if they may become god-like and totally powerful and in control of their lives and in the world.

Even churches have fallen prey to this idol, believing that the right web page or Facebook page will be the key to effective evangelism. Churches can sacrifice thousands of pounds to the god Technology, forgetting that all church growth comes from Jesus who builds His Church, though not denying that, in its right place, God may use technology to advance His Kingdom.

God gave people the ability to create technology for the benefit of humanity and the betterment of our lives. People may enjoy and use technology in its place, even as a means of giving glory to Jesus Christ.

Dr Rod Woods, The City Temple

THE MOTHERS' UNION

The Mothers' Union (MU) is an impressive worldwide organisation working in 81 countries. An international Christian charity, it aims to provide a network “where God’s love is shown through loving, respectful and flourishing relationships” as its website declares. Not all its members are women (!), and not all the female members are mothers, or even married women. Singles and married women without children are also very welcome.

The Mothers' Union was started by Mary Sumner in 1876, and, because she was Anglican, had spread by the early 20th century throughout the world via the Anglican Communion. Today in 2011 it is represented in almost two-fifths of the total countries of the world, although these countries represent more than two-fifths of the world’s population. It has about 4 million members worldwide, and if all were women, and if women were exactly half the population of the countries the MU is in, then in its 81 countries 1 woman in every 380 women is a MU member.

The MU works with the United Nations especially on its Commission for the Status of Women. In May 2011 its Chief Executive, Reg Bailey, made the headlines when the recommendations of his review *Let Children Be Children* were agreed by the Prime Minister, David Cameron. The report focussed especially on the commercialisation and sexualisation of children in the UK.

In 2011 the MU’s prayer diary *Families Worldwide* listed every country in which it works and (mostly) its number of members. By continent, these are as follows, where the column “C” means number of countries in that continent in which MU members may be found:

Continent	C	Population of C	C members	% of pop
Africa	28	789,327,069	1,906,372	0.242%
South America	6	273,455,260	7,019	0.003%
Asia	9	1,485,786,127	1,921,144	0.129%
Europe	16	65,579,376	97,424	0.149%
North America	16	352,931,183	9,527	0.003%
Oceania	6	33,070,784	45,621	0.138%
WORLD	81	3,000,149,799	3,987,107	0.133%

The Mothers' Union is strongest in Africa, and because of its 1.9 million members in India, strong also in Asia. The MU is very strong in East Africa, with 715,000 members in Tanzania, 450,000 in Kenya and over 200,000 in Uganda – in these countries 1 in every 40 women belongs to the MU. The first 3 lines of the Table represent the Global South, totalling 96% of worldwide membership. The Democratic Republic of the Congo also has 300,000 members.

The bottom 3 lines represent the Global North. Europe’s strength comes from its English membership of 76,000 people, and, in Oceania, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands membership accounts for nearly 35,000 people representing more than three-quarters (76%) of that continent’s membership. It is obvious that the MU is poorly represented in both North and South America – only one woman in 19,000 is a MU member in these continents.

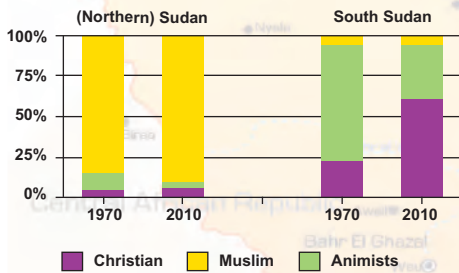
This means that the MU is very strong in India, 4 countries in Africa and 3 countries in the Global North – these 8 countries accounting for 92% of all its members. The other 8% of its members are found across 73 different countries in the world. This represents both a big strength and a huge strategic weakness.

SOUTHERN SUDAN

Sudan is/was the largest country in Africa, about the size of Europe. After a referendum in January 2011 in which 98.8% voted in favour of secession, the new country of Southern Sudan was formed on Saturday, July 9th 2011. The town of Abyei was occupied by the Sudanese Army on 22nd May claiming it as part of the northern territory, and the President of Sudan has said he would not recognise the new country if it claimed Abyei as part of its territory. It is in this town that the oil refineries and pipe lines to the (northern) coast are to be found.

There were few Christians in Arabic-speaking (Northern) Sudan at the beginning of the 20th century, but the number slowly increased to about 5% of the total population in 2010, with about three-fifths (61%) being Roman Catholic, and half that number (30%) being Anglican.

Religious proportions in (Northern) and South Sudan, 1970 and 2000



SEPARATION

Virtually half (48%) of children born in the UK in 2010 will have seen their parents split by the time they are 16. This was the finding of a 2010 survey by the Bristol Community Family Trust, and shows a considerable increase over the 40% a decade ago in 2000. Young people from broken homes are more likely to turn to drugs, alcohol and crime.

“Split” and “broken homes” are often used to describe the results of divorce. However, with fewer divorces (and fewer marriages) the actual separating of parents is less the result of married partners divorcing as rather unmarried parents going different ways. In other words, unmarried couples splitting up contribute more to the 48% of separations than married couples divorcing.

The just-reported Millennium Cohort Study of nearly 19,000 births into families between 2000 and 2002 showed that these births took place when 57% of the parents were married; 24% were cohabiting couples and 19% were lone

parents. By the time the child was 3 years old, only 17% of the parents were cohabiting couples. In that period, 5% had got married and 2% had become lone parents. By the time the child was 5, 1% of lone parents had found another partner so that cohabiting couples were then 18% of the total.

While some separations are driven by economic problems, the major need is to help people in their relationships. A school in Tonbridge, Kent, gives its sixth-formers lessons in parenting. A church in Bromley a few years ago showed films on “home relationships” – and drew dozens of people every week the course was on. Perhaps our huge and deep involvement with technology, whether computer games, ipads or Facebook, gives us less opportunity for real face-to-face interaction with other human beings.

AUSTRALIAN FAMILY LIFE

At the Sixth Lausanne International Researchers' Conference in Brazil in April 2011, Stephen Reid, Researcher with the Australian Christian Research Association explained some of the trends in Australian family life. When Australians were asked which issue was most critical for today’s society, almost half (46%) said “family life” (next was “social justice” at 36%, followed by “the environment” at 31%).

Over the 10 years 1996 to 2006 in Australia, the percentage of:

- Couples without children has increased (up almost +2% to 26% in 2006)

- One-parent families has increased (up +1% to 11%)

- The population living in a de facto relationship has increased +3% to 9%, but marriage is still seen as the goal. One-sixth (17%) of Australians believe that marriage is an out-dated institution (against 12% of Americans but 28% of the Swiss).

Gender roles are now changing, however:

- Australians now have a female Prime Minister (with a partner not husband) and a female MasterChef.

- Only one-sixth (17%) of the population believed in 2009 that the husband’s job was to earn money and the wife’s job was looking after the family – although churchgoers believed this twice as much as non-churchgoers (27% to 14%).

- There is now a multiplicity of combinations – mums, dads, aunts, uncles, ex-parents, step-dads, step-children, etc. and pets! All this leads to a lack of stability.

The ideal of a strong family is not matched by reality. Just over a quarter (28%) of those

married between 1985 and 1987 will likely experience divorce, but a third (33%) of those married between 2005 and 2007 are likely to do so. Domestic violence is greatly under reported (there were 28,000 cases in 2005 by one’s partner) and the same year 340,000 cases of child abuse were reported.

Many people are lonely: a quarter (26%) of those aged 15 to 24 live alone, increasing to 37% for those aged 25 to 44, but decreasing to a third (32%) of those aged 45 to 64, and a quarter (27%) of those 65 or over.

Churchgoers have differing views from non-churchgoers, although there are wide differences between the various denominations. For instance,

- One tenth of the population (10%) say that sex before marriage is always or almost always wrong – but this is 53% for churchgoers and 6% for non-goers.

- Just over half the population (55%) feel that homosexuality is always or almost always wrong – but this is 74% for churchgoers and only 32% for non-goers.

Many churches are family-friendly with suitable focussed child-oriented ministries. Many see marriage as a sacrament, and attenders experience lower rates of divorce than the general population.



However, fewer weddings are being conducted in the church, the rites of passage are being broken more, and there are fewer children in Sunday School. Often churchgoers who separate or divorce leave the church.

Researchers Evans and Kelley attributed three key factors for divorce – whether the wife worked full-time (divorce more likely if she did); a couple’s ethnicity (divorce was lower among those coming from Mediterranean countries) and church attendance (the more frequently people attended, the lower their divorce rate).

Another researcher, Philip Wilson, found that often single people active in church life had been hurt by “church-pain”, that is activity or teaching which is insensitive to the needs of single people.

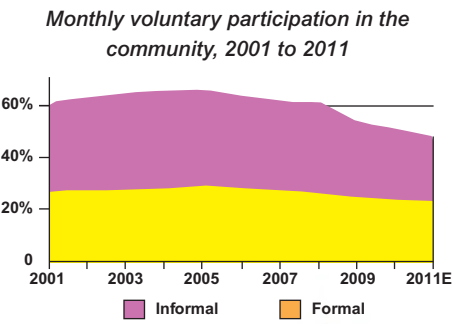
Much of the above is similar to trends in the UK, with church attenders having similar characteristics. The problem is not married people already in church life, but how to encourage people, married or not, to begin attending and finding out how friendly churches can be.

SNOWFLAKES

Angels popular. A plethora of books about angels in the 1990s, secular and Christian, proved that angels were a popular topic then. They still are! A 2011 survey found that 31% of British people agree they exist, and 29% believe a guardian angel watches over them. Women are twice as likely to believe as men, and 37% of those aged 45-54 believe compared to 27% of those aged 18 to 24.

SOURCE: Survey on British beliefs by Bible Society and Christian Research reported in theonpaper; Issue No 19, May 2011.

Decline in volunteering. People are not volunteering quite as much as they were, and the latest survey on citizenship confirms the trend. The chart shows the decline, both for “formal” volunteering (working regularly with an organisation) or “informal” volunteering (helping people face-to-face, taking time and possibly giving economic help). The latter has particularly dropped (from 37% in 2005 to 25% in 2011), the graph showing it specially declined when the financial crisis began. However, another study, specifically about evangelicals, estimated in 2010 that 81% did some kind of voluntary work once a month.



SOURCES: Citizenship Survey, Communities and Local Government, Cohesion Research, Statistical Release No 14, Suzanne Cooper, January 2011, Figs 5 and 6; Idea magazine, February 2011.

Dunfermline attendance. It is now the third year running that Dunfermline Presbytery has undertaken a census of all the people attending worship on a given Sunday. The overall total in 2011 was a drop of 2% on 2010, but it would seem this is at least partly applicable to very

What some people say

A bus station is where a bus stops. A train station is where a train stops. On my desk, I have a workstation.

If I agreed with you, we’d both be wrong.

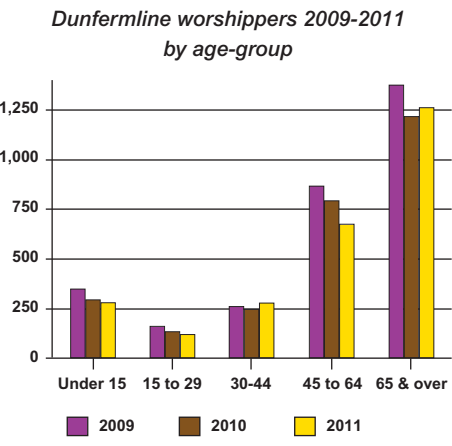
The early bird might get the worm, but the second mouse always gets the cheese.

Whenever I fill out an application, in the part that says, “In an emergency, notify”, I always put, “DOCTOR.”

You do not need a parachute to skydive. You definitely do need a parachute to skydive twice.

SOURCE: Email of Parasproskokians from Kim Tainio, ReachAcross, June 2011.

poor weather. The figures are collected by age, and the bar chart shows the changes by age since 2009.



SOURCE: Article in the Daily Telegraph, 13th July 2010, Page 7.

The chart shows that the main reason for the total drop in numbers between 2010 and 2011 was the decline in those aged 45 to 64. Other age-groups were virtually the same in numbers as for 2010 or slightly better, despite the weather. Those who are 45 to 64 are often parents of teenage children, but their youngsters seemed to attend even if they didn’t! The chart also shows that this is the age-group which has dropped most since 2009.

SOURCE: Dunfermline Presbytery Census 2011, Allan Vint, April 2011.

Population change. The US Census Bureau has released figures for the projected world population in 2050. It estimates that the populations of China and Russia will decrease (by -9% and -21% respectively), while India’s population will continue to grow, and exceed that of China by 2025. Nigeria’s population is expected to double, but the US will still be the third largest country in terms of population.

SOURCE: The e magazine, 11th July 2011, Page 9.

Evangelical voting preferences for the next US President differed greatly from non-Christians. While the overall issue was health care in the sample surveyed (64%), for evangelicals it was taxes (76% to 39%), followed by attitudes to terrorism (71% to 28%), abortion (71% to 20%), gay marriage (63% to 20%) and immigration (67% to 30%). One wonders how far British evangelicals would agree!

SOURCE: Survey by the Barna Group, 15th May, 2011, www.barna.org/transformation-articles/482.

Deaths from AIDS. It was 30 years ago, 5th June 1981, when a “cluster of unusual infections in Los Angeles” was first reported, which became the first recognised cases of HIV. There were an estimated 2.1 million deaths from AIDS worldwide in 2004, a number which remained steady in 2005 and 2006, and has now decreased to an estimated 1.8 million in 2009. However, while expenditure on anti-retroviral drugs has doubled to £11 billion in the same period, the AIDS death rate is set to stay at the same level for next year.

SOURCE: The Economist magazine, 4th June, 2011, Page 97.

Triggers for corruption. A German study looking at the reasons for corruption in mission work found that greed was the top reason (7.9%), followed closely by habit (7.8%) and the influence of a corrupt government (7.7%). A person’s religion was the least likely cause (3.1%).

SOURCE: Evangelikale Missionologie, 4th quarter, 2010, Page 205.

Can’t recall the number! A survey by an identity protection company, CPP, found that 70% of adults could not recall their partner’s phone number, and 51% could not recall that of their parents. Psychologist Dr Glenn Wilson said, “reliance on technology can lead to the decline of memory and mental agility in later life.”

SOURCE: Article in the Daily Telegraph, 13th July 2010, Page 7.

Muslims in Africa. The countries in North Africa and the Sahara have long had majority Muslim populations, while countries in sub-Saharan Africa are majority Christians. Christians in Africa have grown from 25% of the population in 1950 to 57% by 2010, according to the World Religion Database, while the Muslim percentage has increased from 22% to 29%. The most eastern country in the “horn” of Africa, Somalia, is the most dangerous place in the world for a Christian to convert to Islam.

SOURCES: Article in the Church Times, 7th May 2010; pull-out supplement to Bamabas Aid, Nov/Dec 2010, Page iii.

Congregations worldwide. In 2010 there were 4.7 million churches or congregations across the world. The largest group were the Independents with more than half of this number, which are especially strong in China. The Orthodox have the largest number of adherents per congregation (2,300), the Independents fewest (150).

Denomination	No of churches	% of total
Independents	2,496,000	53
Protestants	1,405,000	30
Catholics	568,000	12
Orthodox	120,000	3
Anglicans	103,000	2
World total	4,692,000	100%

SOURCE: Atlas of Global Christianity, edited by Todd Johnson and Kenneth Ross, Edinburgh University Press, 2009, ISBN 978-0-7486-3267-1.

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REFLECTIONS

The last of the Judges, Samuel, was called to play a critical role in the life of the emerging nation. His mother, Hannah, had poured her heart out to the Lord one festival day begging Him for a child. The Lord answered her fervent prayer, Samuel was born, and given back to the Lord's service for the whole of his life. It was a dedicated life of selfless ministry and prayer – "far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you" (1 Sam 12:23).

Samuel longed for people to trust and follow the Lord wholeheartedly, but he found people preferred the visible to the invisible. "Give us a king to lead us," they said (8:6). "We want to be like the other nations around us." Samuel advised the Israelites of the consequences of their choice, but they disregarded it. How do you react when you fail to dissuade someone from following a course of action you perceive to be wrong or at least ill advised? Maybe it's morally wrong, against sensible economic advice, rejection of the follow-on problems, or compromise of future potential.

Firstly, Samuel gave them time to re-consider. "Everyone is to go back to his town," he said (8:22). Then, secondly, Samuel talked over the problem with the Lord. He wanted to know what the Lord, who sees both present and future, thought about the matter – He could read the hearts and motives of those involved. God told Samuel not to be disappointed that the people hadn't listened to what he had said because His purposes were all-encompassing.

But the problem remained, though the consequences of the people's choice had been clearly presented. No leader can force people to obey in spiritual matters. In spite of his godly life and example, neither the Israelites nor his own children followed Samuel's spiritual leadership.

Thirdly, having heard what the Lord said, Samuel accepted His solution and implemented it, anointing the person of God's choice as the first King over the nation. In the event, Saul failed as King because he chose to disobey both Samuel and God Himself.

Is your ministry hedged by apparent failure? Perhaps you've encountered rejection of the fundamental principles you stand for or have wayward children who've abandoned the faith. Maybe the project failed, the church declined after you'd left, your successor turned out to have totally different objectives. Was the time worthless? No, never! From Genesis to Revelation, God's servants, including Samuel, and supremely the Lord Jesus Himself, have faced disappointment, rejection, seeming failure and even, outwardly, ultimate defeat.

Samuel and other "heroes of the faith" were called to be faithful, not necessarily successful. How do you measure your ministry – by faithfulness or success? Samuel's faithful ministry paved the way for the Kingship of David, the coming of the Messiah and the ultimate fulfilment of God's awesome purposes.

7,000,000,000+

The United Nations' Population Bureau forecasts that the population of Planet Earth will reach 7 billion by the end of 2011. These 7 billion live in four very different economic groups, as the Table shows. "Low" are mostly those people living in Africa, "Lower Middle" those in India and China, "Upper Middle" those in Latin America, South Africa and the Middle East, and "High" those living in Europe and the United States.

Item \ Type	Low	Lower Middle	Upper Middle	High
Annual Income	Under £700	£700 to £2,799	£2,800 to £8,500	Over £8,500
Population, billions	1	4	1	1
Life Expectancy	59	68	72	80
Deaths under 5	12%	6%	2.4%	0.7%
Access to toilets	35%	50%	84%	99%
Deaths by infectious disease	36%	14%	11%	7%
Years of education	8	10	14	15
Literacy Rate	66%	80%	93%	98%
Fertility rate	4	3	2	2
Annual rate of population increase	+2.3%	+1.3%	+1.0%	+0.4%
Net migration	-0.06% out	-0.04% out	-0.06% out	+0.26% in
Urban population	27%	41%	74%	78%
Cell phones per 100 people	22	47	92	106
Landline phones per 100	1	14	22	46
Internet Users	2%	14%	30%	68%
Personal Computers	1%	4%	12%	60%
Cars	0.6%	2%	13%	44%
CO ₂ emissions, metric tons per capita	1	3	5	13

There are some huge differences here highlighting justice, faith and fairness issues, not just economic concerns. In 2011, 2% of the global population owned 50% of the world's wealth.

SOURCES: National Geographic magazine supplement, March 2011.

PEOPLE GROUPS

The concept of reaching people in relevant "groups" (such as a tribe or those speaking the same language) was brought into special focus by Dr Ed Dayton at the first Lausanne Congress in 1974, an idea which was quickly taken up by many others. "Unreached People Groups" [UPGs] were listed in a series of directories issued by MARC in Los Angeles in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and were subsequently a key focus for strategising world evangelism by the AD2000 Movement in the 1990s (under the name of the Joshua Project or JP).

Those responsible for manufacturing and distributing the Jesus Film through Campus Crusade for Christ in California have also used UPGs for determining the most vital languages into which the film commentary should be translated. Part of the work in compiling the *World Christian Encyclopedia* in the 1990s was also producing a list of UPGs; these have now been copied and updated with the formation of the World Christian Database [WCD] based at Gordon-Conwell University in the early 2000s. At the third Lausanne Congress in South Africa, Paul Eschermann, Vice-President of the Jesus Film, produced a list of Unregistered UPGs. Others also, like IMB and Database Choice [DC], have produced lists.

Unfortunately, for any particular area, the number of UPGs vary according to which list one uses. It is recognised that those on one particular list but not on another may still be a valid UPG, and thus the problem is not choosing which list to use, but how to reconcile the various listings, conscious that the full listing, if ever possible, will always be greater than any one list.

An illustration of this confusion was given at the Lausanne Researchers' Conference in April 2011, looking at the number of UPGs in Europe's 55 countries. The WCD lists 524 UPGs, IMB 1,029, JP 620 and DC 658. Taking out the overlap and estimating what the actual total for Europe might be gave the following suggestions: WCD 2,100; JP 2,100; DC 2,200 and IMB 1,100! Take your choice – but meanwhile don't stop reaching unreached people!

SOURCE: Paul Dzinkowski, speaker at the Sixth International Researchers Conference, Brazil, April 2011.

Global Evangelical Leadership

The gathering of over 4,000 evangelical leaders from across the world at the Lausanne Cape Town Congress in October 2010 formed a wonderful opportunity to research their views on a variety of matters. This opportunity was carried through by the Pew Forum, which bore the entire costs of the project, and the results were released at the Lausanne Biennial Leadership Meeting in Boston, USA, in June 2011. There were responses from 2,196 delegates, though how representative they were either of Congress delegates or global Christians is not known.

Over two-thirds (71%) of these were male, half (51%) were ordained, five-sixths (85%) had a university degree and 5% were under 30. Almost three-fifths (57%) came from the Global South.

Global South leaders are more confident of their faith and its influence than those in the Global North. When answering the question, "In five years, the state of evangelical Christianity in your country will be ...", 71% from the Global South said it would be better than now, but only 44% of those from the Global North, with 12% and 33% respectively saying it would be worse.

"Do you think evangelical Christians are having an increasing or decreasing influence on life in your country?" "Increasing," said 58% of Global South's leaders, and "Decreasing," said 66% of Global North leadership. What are the threats to Evangelical Christianity? The influence of secularism (71%), too much emphasis on consumerism (67%) and sex and violence in pop culture (59%) were the top 3 answers.

Evangelicals ...

- 98% Believe the Bible is the Word of God
- 97% Follow the teachings of Christ in personal and family life
- 96% Say abortion is usually or always wrong
- 94% Work to lead others to Christ
- 84% Think society should discourage homosexuality
- 79% Say that men have a duty to serve as leaders in marriage and family
- 73% Work to help the poor and needy

However, evangelicals are less certain about drinking alcohol (52% against), believe "humans have existed in their present form since the beginning of time" (52%), and think Jesus will probably or definitely return in their lifetime (also 52%). Three-quarters (76%) have experienced or witnessed divine healing, and believe God's covenant with Jewish people continues today (73%), but a large majority (90%) are against the "Prosperity Gospel". Three-quarters (75%) believe women should be allowed to serve as pastors (men 72%, women 88%).

At what age had the respondent a born-again experience? The chart shows, the average being 17 years of age.



Virtually all (93%) attended a weekly religious activity and three-quarters (77%) a prayer or Bible study group. Far fewer listened to or watched religious media (39%). In terms of witness, "it is more effective to empower local missionaries" (88%) than to "send missionaries to other countries" (12%). While a third (33%) felt Christians and Muslims shared a common scriptural tradition, only a few (8%) thought they worshipped the same God. Christianity should focus on changing individual hearts (83%), not reforming social institutions (17%).

Evangelicals had been treated unfairly by their government when the country had a Hindu majority (77%), Muslim majority (66%), Buddhist majority (51%) and Christian majority (25%). This was usually seen in applying for a job, government services, applying for a school or finding housing (in that order).

SOURCE: Global Survey of Evangelical Protestant Leaders, Pew Research Centre, Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, June 2011, Luis Lugo, Director, www.pewforum.org.

These may be helpful Books and reports received

The Rise and Fall of Fuzzy Fidelity in Europe, Prof David Voas, *European Sociological Review*, Vol 25, No 2, 2009.

The Influence of Family and Friends on Young People's Drinking, Arun Sindhi and Claire Turner, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, January 2011, from www.jrf.org.uk

Faith-based Organisations and Social Exclusion in European Cities, a research programme funded by the European Commission, edited by Danielle Dierckx et al, University of Antwerp, Seventh Framework Programme, May 2009.

The National Churches Trust Survey, Andrew Edwards, Chief Executive, National Churches Trust, London, April 2011.

NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) *Statistics*, quarterly from the Department of Education, latest February 2011.

Correction

In the "Snowflakes" item "Women Priests" in the April 2011 issue of *FutureFirst*, we added together the number of Church of England churches which had voted for resolution A, B or C as if they were all independent of each other. However, many churches will vote for more than one of these resolutions, so the total is not the sum of the parts. Apologies!

Foreigners in the UK

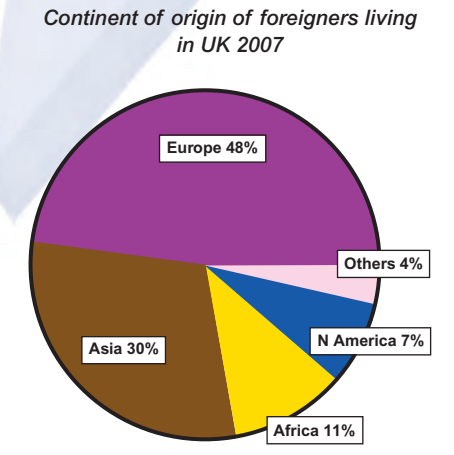
The 2010/11 winter edition of the Government publication *Population Trends* showed how many foreigners were living in the UK in 2007. Just over 10% of our 62 million residents were foreign-born. A quarter (24%) of this 10% came from just five countries, and a third (32%) came from another 35 countries, with the remainder made up of small groups from many places.

The top five countries were:

- 530,000 from Poland
- 330,000 from the Republic of Ireland
- 300,000 from India
- 190,000 from Pakistan, and
- 140,000 from the United States.

Many of those from Poland and the Irish Republic would be Roman Catholic, used to attending Mass fairly regularly, so helping to boost the Catholic numbers especially in England where the large majority of foreigners settle. While 4% of those coming from India and Pakistan were nominally, at least, Christian, almost two-fifths (37%) of these were Muslim and a further half (51%) were Hindu or Sikh. Many from the US would profess to be Christian but may not regularly attend church.

The overall breakdown by continent is shown in the pie-chart. The surprise that so few were African is simply because many Africans had already settled in the UK and if second and third generations were counted as well, their proportion would be much higher.



Countries experiencing political unrest had relatively high numbers of residents in the UK (Zimbabwe has 76,000, Somalia 59,000 and Iran 36,000, for example), and comparison of numbers with earlier years suggests that some are not quick to return home when circumstances are easier.

Many of these folk from overseas would be students, living in the UK for probably 3 years. Much has been said and written about the "mission field on our doorstep" and sterling work is being done among foreign students and others by various independent organisations. But it could be argued that relatively little is being done by the Church as a whole, or by many individual churches. Could you introduce and/or encourage this aspect in your church?

SOURCE: Article "The UK population: how does it compare?" by Jill Matheson, National Statistician, *Population Trends*, Office for National Statistics, No 142, Winter 2010, Page 21.



Providing Facts for Forward Planning

SNIPPETS

1) Only one person in five (20%) in the general population said they celebrated Harvest Festival in 2010 and of these 6% did so by taking tinned food gifts to a church and 4% to a school. Of these tinned foods, over half (54%) were tins of baked beans.

2) More than half the world's building cranes are located in China, and many of these are in Shanghai.

3) The number of births to women over 35 years of age jumped up nearly two-thirds (64%) between 1990 and 2008 in the United States, a similar trend to the UK. The number born to unmarried mothers went in the States up twice as much (122%).

4) By the time he or she is 18, a young Brit will have spent 12,000 hours in school – and will have watched 14,000 hours of TV.

5) 80% of men and 35% of women access pornography regularly on the internet in the UK, men for 2 hours a week on average and women for 15 minutes.

6) The Irish are religious people. One study says that 61% were "involved" with an evangelical church in 2009, 41% of whom exited from Roman Catholic churches.

7) In the first 40 years after they became legal in England and Wales there were 6.5 million abortions (1968-2007).

SOURCES: 1) Survey by YouGov on behalf of Defra 2010; 2) Zadok Perspectives, from Australia, No 110, Autumn 2011, Page 5; 3) National Geographic magazine, January 2011; 4) Grove's Quotes of the Month, March 2011; 5) Research undertaken by BBC Radio 1 Newsbeat programme, reported in Christianity magazine, June 2011, Page 13; 6) Review of Ireland's New Religious Movements in Religion Watch, March/April 2011, Page 10; 7) Office for National Statistics, given in Fact File UK, published by The Guardian, 24th April 2010, Page 7.

The Exciting Opportunities of Baptism

Rev Steve Rankin, Vicar of St Mary Magdalene, Ashton-upon-Mersey, Cheshire

When we renewed our Baptism strategy a couple of years ago we had two main aims: We wanted to safeguard the integrity of Baptism as a sacrament and we also wanted to hold onto more families whose first contact with our church came through Baptism. We are now seeing both things happen; families pursue a Baptism as an informed choice and for many of them Baptism becomes a catalyst for integrating into church life.

All parents who enquire about Baptism are, first of all, invited to a Baptism Open Evening. We organise these evenings once a month. During these meetings we discuss in detail the significance of Baptism and how it will impact family life long term. We watch a DVD, 'First Steps' produced by CPAS, which explains the basics of the Christian gospel and shows how Baptism fits in. All this helps parents to understand that Baptism is not just a one-off event; rather it is the start of a life-long journey of faith. The role of parents is essential on this journey – without their active help and guidance children cannot be expected to know or follow God's way.

This may sound daunting to some parents but we also highlight how the church can help and support them: Our Junior Church groups cover all ages and we also offer parenting courses, toddler/parent activities, small groups for parents with young children, the Alpha course, etc. With this kind of support most parents feel confident that they are able to stay one step ahead of their children in guiding them to a relationship with God.

Parents who feel after the Open Evening that they are NOT ready for a Baptism can choose a Thanksgiving service instead. The liturgy of this service contains prayers of blessing and thanksgiving, but does not ask parents to make vows they feel unable to keep. By offering the two alternatives we remain inclusive and give all parents an opportunity to express gratefulness to God for a new life.

Parents who opt for a Baptism can book a date after the Open Evening, on the understanding that they also sign up for four preparation events. Previously the preparation took place during an evening but we often had only one parent able to come due to child-minding or work commitments. Now all preparation takes place on Sunday Mornings, during our regular 9.30am service. This enables entire families to attend together and to get into a routine of attending church on Sundays. During this period the family photos of all baptism families are displayed on the church centre photo board so that the church family can welcome and include them in their prayers before, during and after baptism.

Each new cycle of Baptism preparation starts with two 'Baptism Buddies'. These are church members who act as welcomers, friends and guides to the church. The Buddies greet families at the door when they first arrive, answer questions, introduce them to other church members and inform parents of activities that are on offer outside Sunday

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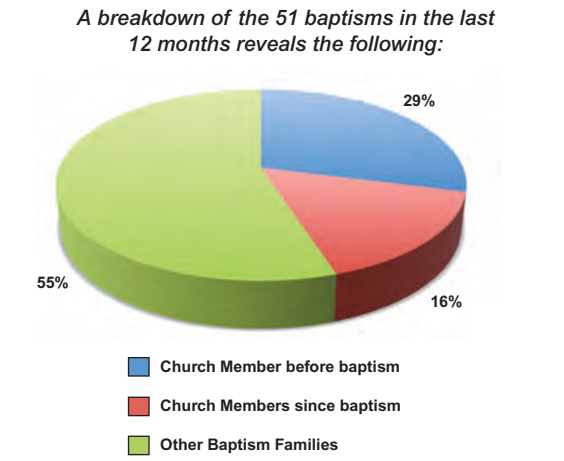
CONTENTS

The Exciting Opportunities of Baptism	P1
Idols of Today: Technology	P2
The Mothers' Union	P2
Southern Sudan	P2
Separation	P3
Australian Family Life	P3
7,000,000,000+	P5
People Groups	P5
Global Evangelical Leadership	P6
Foreigners in the UK	P6

services. The benefits of doing Baptism preparation on Sunday mornings are numerous: Creche and Junior Church groups are in operation so all children can be looked after without the need of baby sitter, clergy are on hand to answer specific questions, parents get a realistic flavour of life at St Mary's and friendships start over coffee that follows services. Baptism Buddies find their role satisfying and since each pair does only one cycle a year the level of commitment is not very high.

Each preparation cycle consists of four mornings: an initial meeting for all families who have chosen the same Baptism date, a viewing of a Baptism service the month before their own service, and two regular services. We reserve places for the baptism buddies and the families sit together in church. By the time the day of Baptism arrives we hope that families will feel they 'belong' at St Mary's, that they will be into a routine of Sunday morning church, that older siblings will feel at home in Junior Church, and (most importantly!) that there is a growing spiritual hunger.

We sometimes encourage parents who have completed a Baptism cycle to become Buddies for others: This can be an easy and yet significant step to church life and ministry. By doing Baptism Preparation this way we feel that we uphold the integrity of Baptism, we remain all-inclusive and we make it easy for new families to get to grips with faith and church life. These are exciting opportunities not to be missed!



• 13 (25%) were adult baptisms marking a public step of faith

• 10 (19%) were from unmarried couples
Of those 10, there are 3 (30%) now involved in some way with the church

• 36 of the 51 baptisms (71%) had no prior connection to the church
Of those 36, there are 8 (22%) now involved in some way with the church