

Let the people speak '

The results of an independent ecumenical investigation examining the reasons why church going is declining in Britain and Ireland and the solutions people offer to reverse this decline.

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FOREWORD BY LORD BROMLEY BETCHWORTH, SURREY, GREAT BRITAIN

This report is essential reading for those who are concerned about the decline of church going in Britain and Ireland. The results of *The Church Survey* ' compiled by the Ecumenical Research Committee will provide everyone (of whatever denomination) with ideas and suggestions "from the grassroots" on how to reverse this decline and draw people back into the pews.

When I returned to the UK after living in the United States for 12 years I was shocked at how moral values had changed in such a short time and how church attendance in mainstream denominations was in freefall. Four out of five churches were either declining or simply static. What was causing this erosion of values? Why were people turning away from the church? And more to the point what can be done about it?

The interdenominational Ecumenical Research Committee was established in 2002 under the chairmanship of an Anglican Priest the Rev. Jonathan Willans. The aim of this committee was simple. It was to investigate and examine exactly what it is that people are wanting from their church. Only when churches discover what the people want 'and provide for those desires will church attendance become appealing.

The Church Survey ' conducted between September 2003 and September 2004 provided individuals at the grassroots ' with a unique opportunity to speak for themselves and explain what they wanted without fear of discrimination or reproach.

This report is an indispensable summary and compilation of the main points raised by the 14,000 people who responded. It gives a fascinating insight into what they want churches to provide and what they say will make church attendance more attractive. It is an invaluable resource for congregations who wish to grow and it is packed with tips and recommendations, all having come from "the people in the pews". The Report is "the people 's voice" these are their views; these are the things they believe will make a difference. I congratulate the members of the committee for their research and above all for their willingness to listen to those in the pews.

It is also revealing that when given the opportunity to speak, those who did so generally spoke with "one voice". This is an alarming indication that there are multitudes of people across Britain and Ireland who feel that their views are not being heard or represented and who are frustrated that no one is speaking on their behalf. The underlying theme behind all but a few responses is that people are calling on churches to robustly defend moral values with conviction and courage and cease being "silent" and "lukewarm" in the face of moral and social collapse. They are appalled that moral values and treasured beliefs are being stood on their head and want churches to play a leading role in standing up for these things.

The Church Survey 'provided a vehicle through which people could be heard. It shows that the vast majority of the people in Britain and Ireland are still morally conservative. They want social stability and harmony for themselves and their families and they generally aspire to the virtues rooted in the 10 Commandments. They want churches to champion the moral values of the mainstream. If churches started defending these beleaguered values the effect would be profound, galvanising and encouraging millions of ordinary decent people. Yes, churches would be denounced by some sections of the population but millions of fair-minded bewildered people would support the church with an overwhelming sense of relief that at long last the *the voice of reason, morality and conviction* 'was being heard.

Church going is rapidly growing in most other parts of the world, but significantly these churches boldly defend moral values and traditional beliefs. They learned long ago that the only way to grow is to defend what is right. This is a lesson the churches in Britain and Ireland are learning the hard way.

Introduction

The Need for Research

This report contains the results of a £20,000 year long study into the reasons why church going is declining in Britain and Ireland. This study was conducted between September 2003 and September 2004. Christianity is growing in most other parts of the world and this investigation was initiated because no real answer had been found to explain the decline of Christianity in Britain and Ireland.

The idea that church attendance declines when scientific knowledge increases had already been invalidated by American church going statistics. The USA is the most advanced scientific nation on earth and yet in some States, almost 50% of the population attends church regularly. (Scientific and religious beliefs are often seen as compatible, hence the high number of scientists involved with NASA who are also churchgoers).

Again the suggestion that decline in church attendance is the inevitable result of growing wealth had also been shown to be untrue, with America being the richest nation in the world.

Finally, the notion that increasing awareness about world suffering was the reason why people were turning away from 'The Church' failed to explain why church going is often strongest in those parts of the world where suffering is a daily fact of life such as in South Africa.

Even more puzzling, surveys consistently revealed that about two thirds of the population in the UK and Ireland believe in God. Why did this strength of belief not translate into greater church attendance?

Until recently 'The Church' in Britain and Ireland was an integral part of the culture of both countries, and part of people's lives. Now it is just hanging on, with the mainstream denominations declining year by year. Why was this happening? Why was Christianity not spreading as in other countries? The growing interest in the New Age movement clearly demonstrates that people have not lost interest in 'spirituality' as such.

In the light of these facts and faced with declining congregations, an inter-denominational Ecumenical Research Committee (hereafter referred to as the ERC) was established in 2002 to discover the reasons why mainstream churches were declining.

(There are individual churches which are growing, but this cannot hide the fact that the general state of Christianity in Britain and Ireland is weak and getting weaker by the month).

The Ecumenical Research Committee

Composition

The ERC was composed of 15 individuals providing a range of skills in statistical analysis, market research, publicity and media management. To ensure the objective integrity of the Committee, individuals were drawn from a variety of different denominational backgrounds – Quaker, Methodist, Baptist, Church of Ireland, Church of England, Roman Catholic etc. The Committee was financially independent of any particular denomination. The Chairman was the Reverend Jonathan Willans an Anglican Priest living in Surrey who has had experience of serving in three different parts of the Anglican Communion and has contacts with the media and members of the House of Lords.

Methodology

The Committee operated on the premise that the only way to discover why individuals who used to regularly attend church and had become infrequent in attendance or who had actually given up completely, was to *let them speak for themselves*. The failure of many surveys is that they are often open to the charge of being worded in such a manner as to steer those responding towards a particular conclusion. With this in mind a questionnaire was composed with open ended questions avoiding the use of 'tick boxes'. Questions were worded loosely to encourage those groups or individuals responding to think for themselves. The aim was to facilitate rather than direct answers. This technique was to promote a higher order of thinking by freeing peoples' thoughts and giving them the flexibility to be utterly open and honest.

The title given to this survey was *Let the People Speak*

The Questionnaire:

1. If you attend church regularly, what are the main things which encourage you to attend? If your attendance is merely out of a 'sense of duty', what could be changed so as to make it more appealing?
2. If you used to be a churchgoer, but now only attend infrequently or not at all, what were the main things which led to this? What could be changed in order for you to attend again regularly?
3. If you have never been a churchgoer, what could be done to encourage you to begin?
4. The traditional custom of 'clergy visiting' has steadily declined in spite of the maxim 'a house going minister makes a church going people'. Do you think the demise of this customary visiting role is significant?

To ensure the statistical validity of responses The Questionnaire was widely distributed for one year across every strata of society in both Britain and Ireland. It went to churchgoers and non churchgoers of every denomination and theological persuasion as well as to people of different ethnic backgrounds, age groups and gender.

This was achieved by a variety of means. Many secular newspapers published The Questionnaire encouraging their readers to respond. Clergy of various denominations printed it in their church magazines. It was published in many Church of England Diocesan newspapers as well as several other religious publications. It was broadcast on Irish radio and 13 BBC regional radio stations also discussed the survey, during their Sunday morning 'religious slot'. *The Daily Mail* 'also printed an article about it. Full page advertisements appeared in *The Sign* 'and *Home Words* '.

Throughout the year the ERC analysed replies as they were received and transferred the information contained within each response, to an analysis table (see appendix). The data from this analysis table was then used by the ERC to compile this report. If particular information was missing, the relevant boxes would be left blank.

The Role of the Committee –terms of reference

The Committee saw its role as three fold;

1. To invite a wide variety of people from a cross section of society to explain for themselves why they attend a church, or have given up attending.
2. To analyse their replies impartially.
3. To present the results of this research to churches of various denominations, in order to assist them in the reversing of declining attendance levels.

The Committee saw itself as being a channel through which people could speak. The recording of the views people expressed would be no indication of the personal beliefs held by various Committee members.

The Responses

The People Speak

General Observations –

(1) Quality, length, quantity

Conducting a survey with 'open ended' questions required people to answer for themselves, however, it also called for a significant amount of time and effort. The ERC was surprised therefore to receive over 14,000 replies during the year. These came from every part of the UK and Ireland. (One reference to the survey in the Daily Mail in January 2004 resulted in more than 1,100 replies). The ERC was also astonished by the quality, length and nature of these replies. There were few 'one line' answers with most replies covering several pages and many issues. Letters up to 10 pages long of A4 sized paper were common.

The fact that so many people and groups took time to respond to The Questionnaire with such lengthy replies indicates the great concern many have regarding the state of the churches today. Between 680 –700 respondents commented that they had spent several days reflecting on their answers before replying.

(2) Background of those responding

Although people from every age range responded, 70% were over 40 years of age. This is what the ERC had expected as church statistics show it tends to be older people who are interested in church matters and have a greater concern for its future.

The overwhelming majority of those who replied had a background of church going to some extent. Some were still attending church, some attended infrequently and others had ceased going altogether. (Of those who indicated, 75% attended church at least once a month, of these 31% attended weekly. 20% stated that they had stopped attending church altogether). Individuals from most denominations existing in the UK and Ireland responded and the Committee observed different theological perspectives emphasised by these various churches. This can be seen for example in the section headed 'Visionary and Prophetic' churches. The replies from Charismatics and Pentecostals were largely responsible for this *visionary and prophetic* perspective which may reflect a reaction to the Iraq War and general world tension. It was intriguing for the ERC to read about their teaching regarding 'the future', which they cited as one of the main reasons for their denominational growth.

Of those who indicated, 67% were members of the Anglican Communion (i.e. Church of Ireland, Church of England, Scottish Episcopal or Church in Wales), 9% Baptist, 8% Presbyterian (Scottish, Irish, English or Welsh), 7% Roman Catholic and 9% others (e.g. Methodists, Pentecostals, Charismatics, Vineyard Churches etc.)

Of those individuals who wrote 51% were female 49% male and 18% were joint replies coming from families, house groups or congregations. Of those who commented on the subject of denominations 14% claimed they had switched denominations recently.

(3) Indications of frustration, anger and fear

Responses displayed a widespread sense of frustration and anger at what was happening to the churches in Britain and Ireland.

Around 900 letters began *"Thank you so much for the opportunity to express our views"* or *"Why hasn't a survey like this been done before, so we can speak?"* or *"At last someone is listening, thank you so much."*

A student from London Bible College commented:

"It is brilliant to have open ended questions so as to give people an opportunity to say what they really think." Of these at least 100 letters went even further by saying: *"Thank you for the chance to express our beliefs without fear."* Whilst many replies demonstrated frustration that no one appeared to be listening to their views,

some felt too nervous to express their views openly and were so concerned about their name being revealed that they wrote anonymously.

Anxiety was also felt by several 'traditionalist' Anglican clerics who stated that they had to *"keep their own views to themselves in case their bishop, who held opposing beliefs, would remove them from their diocese."*

The ERC was saddened to receive replies from two Anglican priests complaining about the dangers of empowering people to speak for themselves and adding that conducting this type of research *"would only cause trouble."*

(4) Common Theme of the Responses

It was thought that there would be a wide diversity of opinions regarding the reasons why church going was on the decline. The reality however, was an unexpected uniformity of views with 91% of the responses expressing the same opinions.

This simplified the categorizing of replies because generally *'what the people are saying'* can be placed under five broad headings. This uniformity revealed however, that what many people want from their church and what they are actually receiving are frequently two different things.

Until these differences are reconciled, congregations will continue to dwindle.

Reading through the following comments individuals may find some ideas with which they disagree, nevertheless this does not alter the fact that:

"When the people were asked, this is what the people said and this is what the people think":

Why is church going declining in Britain and Ireland? And what can be done to reverse the decline? What exactly are people asking for from their churches?

The people speak' - the following is a compilation and summary of what they said... .

Chapter One

The Need for Apologetics

People want churches to emphasise the many reasons why believing in God and Christianity makes sense and to challenge a doubting society.

People will be attracted to the Christian faith if they understand that it makes sense to believe. Today's generation wants to know the reasons for belief, hear the evidence and examine the facts.

Respondents pointed out that whilst churches in other countries give priority to this particular type of ministry, called 'apologetics', many churches in Britain and Ireland ignore it almost altogether. This has resulted in a growing number of people, being left with the false impression that there are *"no strong reasons for Christian belief."* Ultimately they abandon church going and are mystified that Christianity continues to grow elsewhere in the world.

An Irish correspondent summarised the views of hundreds of letters from regular churchgoers when he wrote:

"The Bible never speaks about any need to have a blind faith, but rather a reasoned and logical faith which is built upon a firm foundation of facts and information. For a church to be vibrant and healthy this body of evidence needs to be regularly presented and explained, so that congregations can learn and see for themselves why believing makes sense. Sadly this is a particular form of ministry which is so often neglected."

This subject emerged as a fundamental reason why people were not being attracted to the church, being mentioned implicitly or explicitly in 73% of the letters received. The following selection of quotations encapsulates what was being said.

A lady from Northants spoke for literally thousands when she lamented:

"We are now living in a secular age and yet rarely do you hear churches point out with any vehemence that there are sound reasons as to why we believe what we believe."

A man from Wales wrote:

"Often Clergy do little to try and convince us that God exists, let alone outline the logical reasons behind our belief in the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection."

A woman who is a regular churchgoer from Monmouth added:

"One day I asked my Vicar why his sermons were so bland and never gave any clear explanation about the events recorded in the Bible. He replied that if he did he would lose the few members that he had left. If he only but knew it, this is the complete reversal of the truth, because what they are wanting from him is encouragement for their faith."

Another letter added quite simply and bluntly:

“The church needs to give a more robust defence of the reasons for believing.”

The thoughts expressed in many thousands of replies revealed that increasing disbelief is a significant reason why church attendance is declining, and yet churches here are failing to address this issue. Replies revealed frustration that unlike churches in other parts of the world, ministers in the British Isles often failed to confront scepticism with any meaningful challenge.

People requested regular teaching via sermons to encourage and build up Christian faith. They want the church to robustly defend belief by regularly explaining the proof for the existence of a Creator and pointing out the various evidences which reveal the truth of Christianity.

“It’s done elsewhere. Why can’t it be done here?” was the heartfelt message of many replies.

If this teaching had not been ignored by so many churches the ERC would have received fewer of the following responses.

An elderly man from Yorkshire was one of several hundred who wrote along similar lines bluntly stating:

“After 50 years of going to church I gradually realised that it was all nonsense.”

And from the South of England came the comment:

“All the changes ministers introduce tend to be merely cosmetic changes and miss the heart of the matter. What we need are sermons which build up our faith rather than trying to tear it down.”

A churchgoer from the Outer Hebrides further added:

“This Sunday on Lewis, I listened to a 45 minute sermon concerning Paul’s meeting with Festus as outlined in the Book of Acts. The preacher looked at the encounter from every possible angle and highlighted every possible point. I came away with an excellent knowledge of a meeting which took place 2000 years ago – but no better equipped in how to help and encourage the unbelieving members of my family to find faith.”

A most profound comment on this issue came from a churchgoer in the Midlands, who wrote thoughtfully:

“It is a myth to say that the people of this country have rejected Christianity, they simply haven’t been told enough about it to either accept or reject it.”

In the Republic of Ireland several radio stations broadcast ‘phone in’ interviews regarding The Questionnaire. At that time there were more revelations about paedophile priests in the Roman Catholic Church. Nevertheless, the feeling expressed by callers was that although these scandals further eroded the moral high ground of the church, the church had lost the intellectual high ground much earlier.

Several of these callers from Ireland described a sequence of events which often takes place. Young couples would approach their priest to get married or have their child baptised. During their interview, they would ask questions about belief in general. The priest *“often advanced in years”* would fail to give any in depth teaching on the many reasons for believing in a Creator or in Christianity. The reply invariably given to most questions would be; *“oh well, it is just a matter of faith”*.

The couple would proceed to get married or have the baptism but they would be left with unresolved questions. Being intellectually dissatisfied they would turn away from the church with the distinct impression that the clergy appeared to have 'no answers'.

Callers wanted priests to state the reasons for their faith and to explain how after considering matters in their own mind, they themselves had been led to a firm belief.

Quite independently a group of university students from Wales, who had seen The Questionnaire in 'The Big Issue', confirmed that their own experience of ministers in Britain was similarly lacking.

House groups likewise urged ministers to recognise the need for clear teaching in the form of apologetics. Replies indicated that house groups now form the backbone of many Irish and UK churches. Hundreds of groups revealed that the main reason for their popularity was not so much 'fellowship' as the teaching they provided.

Churchgoers who were also house group members displayed a stronger faith than those who only attended church. This was because they had obtained a greater understanding of the reasons why they believed, rather than just relying on church sermons.

One young churchgoer from Surrey summed up the feelings of many when she said:

"If it hadn't been for the teaching I received from my house group friends I would have given up on Christianity. . . . they told me that the coming of Jesus fulfilled 300 prophecies in the Old Testament and that these prophecies had been written centuries before their fulfilment. To me this was evidence for the inspiration of the Bible and has provided an anchor for my faith."

A woman from Cheshire added in a similar manner:

"But for my house fellowship I would have abandoned my faith long ago. . . . it was here that I heard for the first time the evidence for the existence of God . . . and that Jesus' life fulfilled ancient prophecy. To help me my fellowship examined archaeological discoveries which showed the truth of the Biblical narrative. . . . when new people join our group they are often shocked and ask "Why have we never been shown these facts before in church?"

Another churchgoer commented:

"I used to have doubts about God's existence after a desperate search I joined a study group. It was here that I discovered the simplicity of the choice before me. Either, I believed this universe was the result of a vast number of the most unlikely random coincidences and accidents, or I believed it was the result of deliberate planning and design by a great intelligence... The nucleus of each cell in the body contains as much data as that found in a thirty volume set of The Encyclopaedia Britannica- mere commonsense tells me this can't have happened by chance."

In a similar vein a member of the Baptist Church wrote:

"My church group pointed out to me that either Jesus was exactly who he said he was – the Son of God, in which case I should take him seriously, or he was the greatest deceiver the world has ever known, in which case I should walk away from everything connected to the church I regularly go to church but I had never heard it so simply put before."

Replies revealed that apologetics are often taught in house groups. Churchgoers want this teaching *"from the pulpit"*:

One church attender from London commented:

“I was amazed when I read in my parish magazine that: moments after Neil Armstrong’s walk on the moon in 1969, Buzz Aldrin received Holy Communion on their spacecraft to celebrate this momentous event. To think that the first bread consumed on the moon and the first wine drunk there were the elements of Holy Communion reminds us of how religious and scientific belief go together... so why can’t we hear more of these interesting facts in sermons?”

A vast quantity of information was sent in from house groups, on the issue of apologetics, including books, audio tapes, videos and a wide variety of literature. The majority of the material however, came from various evidence based websites the most frequently mentioned being;

www.anchorstone.com
www.errantskeptics.org

www.christiananswers.net
www.answersingenesis.org

www.answers.org

The ministry of apologetics provided by the Rev James Elmer was also referred to. He is the Director of Evidence Ministries (25 Priory Road, Keynsham, Bristol. BS31 2BX. jim@valian.fsnet.co.uk) and is an international speaker on archaeological evidence and discoveries. Frequently on radio he also gives talks to packed congregations across the country providing the latest evidence for Christianity. (His seminars about the recent discovery of the Red Sea crossing by the Israelites as related in the book of Exodus and his talks on the large boat-shaped vessel found near Mount Ararat were often alluded to).

The people have spoken ’

They have asked for churches to give greater publicity to this kind of information by publishing it in church magazines and reminding people of it in sermons. They want priority given to the ministry of apologetics so that those who have become faithless can be restored, and those who have questions can receive answers and be firmly rooted in their faith. Churches in other countries make the teaching of apologetics a priority and grow. Respondents urgently called for churches in Britain and Ireland to emulate them.

Chapter Two

The Desire for Holiness

People want churches to give clear teaching on the nature of God's holiness and the implications this has for individuals and our two nations.

Surveys have consistently shown that around two thirds of the population actually believe in God. This begged the question – why did this belief not translate into greater church attendance? Or why do so many believe in God but remain disinterested in church and unchanged in moral character?

The answer to this question has been revealed by approximately 75% of those responding i.e. 10400 replies. They pointed out that while many believe in God, they regard him as undemanding and not requiring obedience or any particular standard of conduct. They believe in a God who can be ignored and simply called upon in an emergency. The kind of God believed in determines personal behaviour. Therefore many people have no inclination to attend church and see no advantage or attraction in ever doing so. They see no reason why following God or attending church should be a priority in their lives.

Many letters complained about this portrayal of God's character, regarding it as an issue of fundamental importance.

One churchgoer from Surrey summarised the feeling of thousands when he wrote:

“The Holiness of God is the forgotten doctrine of many 21st century churches. If the message presented in church is merely that God is love ’without this being balanced by the fact that He is also infinitely Holy and requires us to change, then He will be ignored... People will not make any effort to attend church to learn about Him, let alone personally repent and change their lives, if they believe such actions are unnecessary and irrelevant.”

Many churchgoers lamented that while they attended regularly, their children regarded following God and attending church as being irrelevant. Hundreds of parents from 'church families' described the attitude of the young generation as being:

“Yeah, God exists, but so what? It's of no importance to me.”

These parents want churches to explain that it is relevant, because God is not just loving but also infinitely holy. They want churches to point out that God is not mocked but that he requires standards of moral conduct and calls on individuals to personally repent. Another added:

“Unless the importance of obeying God is properly explained, people will never give God, let alone church attendance, priority over the other things in their life, like entertainment, materialism or Sunday shopping.”

The false concept of God's character as being *“loving and nothing more”* has developed over decades by churches emphasising this one sided image and rarely referring to his holiness.

In Victorian times churches mainly emphasised God's holiness (often to the exclusion of his love), but many complained that now all people ever hear is that *“God loves you no matter what you do”*, to the exclusion of his holiness.

Passions were so strong regarding this matter that together with thousands of letters, several petitions were also received. Both letters and petitions pleaded for the church to resume its divine calling, of being the moral conscience of the two nations and a proclaimer of the true character of God.

Responses from house groups were particularly thought provoking, many having been influenced by Mel Gibson's film 'The Passion of The Christ'.

A house group leader from Ireland echoed the voice of many when he wrote on the nature of God:

*“It is clear that the central message of the cross is that God is not just loving, but also Holy, so Holy, that His nature required sin to be punished in some way and yet so loving that He bore this punishment Himself. If God’s character was simply one of Holiness, there would have been no cross (and no forgiveness). Likewise if God’s character was simply one of love, there still wouldn’t have been a cross, because He would simply have forgiven us without any suffering or pain on His part... .
The agony experienced by Christ on the cross clearly teaches us that sin is no trivial matter. Yet churches rarely point this out.”*

A churchgoer from the West Country further added:

“Missing is the fear of a Holy God and grateful thanks that He has paid the penalty for us. The suffering experienced by Jesus on the cross is now rarely emphasised. Instead, the message of His sufferings appears to have been diminished for the sake of soft Western ears, giving the impression that sin is not as shocking as it really is.”

A woman from Skipton who had given up attending church wrote:

“I no longer go to church now because it has stopped teaching the importance of obeying God’s Commandments. I was talking to a boy (who had recently been confirmed into the Church of England) about something in the news, when I mentioned the Ten Commandments. I was shocked when the boy said, ‘what are those?’ .. God called them ‘the Ten Commandments and not the ten suggestions’. Can you blame me for thinking churches are failing dismally in explaining the serious nature of sin and the concept of obedience?”

Again summarising the views of thousands, a head teacher and his wife from Somerset wrote:

“How many now, within the church understand the real demands and sacrifices that are required in Christian living? Christ never diminished His teachings on sin and morality to accommodate anyone. Christian living means that in everything, we must put God first. Unless it is explained to people that this is what a Holy God requires, they will see no advantage or attraction to following the Christian way.”

This attitude was confirmed by a respondent living on the South Coast of England who wrote:

“Many of us don’t go to church anymore simply out of apathy and I can’t be bothered to write anymore.”

This was the shortest letter received by the ERC, but it aptly made the point. Many who used to attend church are now filled with apathy. They no longer see any point in attending, because the message they have been given is that *“God loves me anyway”*, regardless of whether or not they attend church or change their lives, so why bother?’

Around 2,000 lengthy replies added that it was this lack of teaching in church, regarding God’s holiness, which has directly resulted in a morally corrupt society. Society has been left bereft of any moral guidance and rules, with premarital sex, cohabitation, illegitimacy, abortion, divorce and depression being rife.

The following is a summary of these replies and the information they contained.

Summary

Many people are asking *“What has gone wrong with Britain?”* The moral state of the nation appears to be in free fall, with crime and teenage pregnancies soaring, family values collapsing, teachers reprimanded for disciplining pupils, road rage, and criminals inadequately punished.

Politicians often cite poverty, unemployment and bad housing as the cause of these problems. People, however have always had poverty and the like to contend with to a greater or lesser degree, so clearly something else must be the real reason.

Statistics relating to the past 150 years of British Society reveal two related U curves. The first, an inverted U curve shows church and Sunday school attendance rising in the last half of the 19th century and peaking around 1905 before going into steady decline. The second U curve, this time the right way up also begins in the late Victorian era and shows crime, drunkenness and illegitimacy falling to a low at the turn of the century and then steadily rising.

The marked fall in crime as church attendance and moral standards rose, was remarked upon by commentators of the day – one wrote:

“Football crowds are as orderly as a church meeting.”

Another stated:

“There has never been a time in which life and property has been so secure.”

It was not people’s fear of arrest which kept them from breaking the law, but their inner morality and fear of God. They had been made acutely aware of their standing as sinners before an all-holy God. The message they received from churches at that time was that they must have self control, because God is holy, to be feared and they would be accountable to him for their actions.

Since then this teaching has been neglected to such a degree, that often people feel they can do whatever they like without restraint or shame, wrongly thinking that there will be no personal accountability for their behaviour.

From Rochdale a churchgoer worded it like this:

“When did we last hear a clarion call from ministers to take up our sword and fight for our Christian values? How often does one hear an unequivocal statement of faith, or a reminder of the Ten Commandments? How long is it, since a truly inspirational address was delivered on national television, reminding people that profound consequences follow immoral behaviour, both in this life and the next? Too often clergy are portrayed as figures of fun and thus dismissed without the realisation that they have a most serious and profound message.”

From Cumbria a woman added:

“The teaching provided by churches has been watered down, particularly in the abandonment of the concept of sin. The result is that there is nothing to raise people’s outlook on life or to awaken a spiritual awareness beyond the aim of self-gratification.”

Similar sentiments were expressed by 35 members of the House of Lords, who responded. Their comment was that *‘if churches persist in just telling society of God’s grace, without also being forthright in condemning immorality, then is it any wonder that people today are lost and confused?’*

A regular churchgoer from the Scottish Borders pointed out:

“Today churches are behaving in quite a bizarre manner. Jesus never once tolerated sin – instead He continually challenged people to turn away from it and to follow Him. Yet this is not the general impression churches are giving. Instead the churches’ view of sin appears to change direction, depending on whichever pressure group is strongest at any particular time . . . any concept of the fear of God and the serious nature of sin has now evaporated lest certain individuals are upset.”

Hundreds of replies from house groups also quoted portions of the New Testament on the theme of God’s holiness, how he was to be feared and the need for personal repentance.

From Dublin a woman summarised the views of many when she wrote:

“There is a general lack of reverence for God displayed by some churches. My house group has recently studied the book of Hebrews and we have learned how God ought to be feared, with such injunctions as ‘how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation’ (Hebrews 2:3) and ‘it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God’ (Hebrews 10:31)...

I am ashamed to confess it, but statements such as these and Paul’s words ‘knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men to repent’ (2Cor 5:11) are all quite new to me. I am all the more startled because although I spent my formative years going to church, I cannot remember this subject ever being mentioned.”

During this Survey the issue regarding the ordination of ‘practising’ homosexuals was constantly in the news, and this was reflected in many responses. Out of 10,400 responses approximately 85% of those who referred to the morality of God and the implications this had for us, specifically mentioned this issue.

Although 205 letters argued that the ordination of ‘practising’ homosexuals would make church going more appealing, all the rest were vehemently against such an idea. The argument was that if homosexuals wanted to follow that lifestyle, then they should not insist on being church ministers. Thousands quoted 1Corinthians 6:9-10 (‘do not be deceived the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Neither fornicators ... adulterers nor homosexuals...’) as well as Romans 1: 26-28.

Feelings against the ordination of ‘practising’ homosexuals were so strong that over a hundred individuals actually responded to the survey in order to announce their resignation from the Church of England.

A woman from Carlisle expressed the feelings of many when she added:

“We won’t be intimidated by those who aren’t willing to obey the laws of God and remain celibate. We fear God more than them... Calling us ‘homophobic’ in the media is only a diversionary tactic to draw attention away from the real heart of the matter, namely the question as to whether or not we are to obey the commands in the Bible.”

From East Anglia another churchgoer put it this way:

“It displays great ignorance on the part of the media to call people like me homophobic . . . it only goes to show how little the media understand the matter, since everyone knows that the real issue at stake here is whether or not we should accept God’s commands.”

From Glasgow a church going couple wrote to say:

“Homosexual practice is forbidden in the Koran just as much as in the Bible. We find it strange that it hasn’t yet occurred to the media that if they describe people who obey the commands of the Bible ‘homophobic’; they are in fact saying the same thing about every Muslim in the British Isles who obeys the Koran.”

An eighteen year old girl from Merseyside, who had now stopped going to her local Church of England church over the issue of homosexual practice, had this to say:

“Whoever wants to belong to an organization whose ministers are so weak that they won’t stand up for the very principles the church was built on, but rather look for compromise. It’s no wonder people of my age have little respect for the church.”

From another angle, a member of the General Synod of the Church of England said in his response:

“To believe that moral commandments of this nature were merely culturally determined by the writers of the New Testament is to believe that God hasn't given us any moral absolutes at all. If this really is the case, then why doesn't Scripture itself make this plain?”

Seventeen responses were received from 'celibate' homosexuals who expressed a point rarely considered. One of these letters from the West Country echoed the feelings of them all:

“I have been a Christian for 24 years and with the help of the power of Christ I control the urges that sometimes besiege me. For sections of the church to suddenly say that my struggle over the years was for nothing and that it would have been OK to have given in, would be to deny my personal cross for Christ and mock the faithfulness I have shown Him. I know in my heart that I followed the path Christ wanted me to follow and He has never deserted me, but the church has.”

People pleaded for churches to give clear teaching about God's moral nature and the implications this has for personal behaviour. They argued that only by so doing will people see 'the church' as being relevant and make it a priority in their lives. Many of these letters were filled with great feeling and passion of the utmost intensity, the following being just one of numerous examples.

An elderly couple wrote from the West Country explaining that they had been loyal churchgoers for years in both the Methodist and Church of England denominations. They felt that the churches were so lukewarm in resisting immorality that they had now ceased attending out of principle. They stated however, that they still took Holy Communion every Sunday. They met together around the kitchen table with bread and wine before them, recited a prayer of consecration and then received Communion.

Responses revealed that many people were unable to tolerate serious departures from the fundamental basis of their Christian Faith and felt that the time had come to make a stand.

Chapter Three

Worship

The Need for High Quality Church Services

People want churches to give priority to the ministry of worship, satisfying all the various aspects worship involves.

83% of those responding to The Questionnaire commented about church services and the needs they should satisfy.

Comments regarding this subject fell into four distinct categories:

- 1) The manner in which church services are conducted.
- 2) The form of liturgy used.
- 3) The sermons / addresses delivered.
- 4) The sense of fellowship experienced.

Responses made it clear that for worship to be appealing to non churchgoers as well as helpful to regular attenders these four needs had to be properly fulfilled.

1) **The manner in which services are conducted**

Today people expect certain standards from the organisations they encounter. From the products they buy to the advice they receive from their bank, expectations are higher today than ever. This rule applies to their dealings with church services just as much as anything else.

Thousands of comments were made about the casual manner in which some ministers conducted services. Complaints were made of services being *“speed read”* or *“inaudible”* and often it came across that the minister or reader lacked any *“real conviction or sincerity”*.

One churchgoer described a common experience for many. He wrote:

“Whilst on holiday in Scotland I decided to attend early morning Communion at an Episcopal church. The service was conducted so poorly that a member of the Select Vestry approached me afterwards to apologise for their Rector. The service had been inaudible, and what little there was that could be heard, was read so fast it couldn't be followed. This Vestry person further added that for three years the congregation had been telling the priest he was going too fast and couldn't be heard. This had made no difference whatsoever.”

Letters complained about *“shoddy services”*, *“ministers going through the motions”*, *“inaudible prayers”* and *“prayers not being said from the heart”*. It was commented that services conducted in this manner gave the impression that God was undeserving of our very best and that anything will suffice.

Another churchgoer from Wales put it in this manner:

“Far removed is the notion, that in an act of worship, we are approaching a majestic and awesome God... a God so Holy and Righteous that no human can behold Him and live... when I hear the words we do not presume to come to this thy table ?.. I often think to myself that this is precisely what we are doing – we are presuming to approach our Creator in a casual and irreverent manner.”

Over 3,500 people stated that they attended services merely *“out of a sense of duty”* rather than for any *“sense of fulfilment.”*

A middle aged couple spoke for thousands when they wrote:

“We used to go to church expecting very little and came away with nothing. This has now changed to expecting nothing and coming away with even less... what we want are services taken with a conviction and a passion for Christ.”

2) The form of liturgy used

2,000 individuals said that the way to attract older generations back to church was to provide them with *the traditional liturgy*; they knew and loved. The theme of these replies was an understanding that traditional liturgies had been abandoned in the hope that younger generations would be attracted to the Christian Faith. They pointed out that generally this had not worked. Instead new liturgies had alienated older generations and had failed to appeal to younger generations.

One ex-churchgoer from Wales summarised this when she said of the Anglican Church:

“If the 1662 liturgy had remained, then at the very least the older generation would have continued to attend.”

Over 450 people explained that *“traditional liturgy”* was so dear to them that they drove vast distances on a Sunday to find such a service. (The furthest distance documented was a 40 mile round trip). The demand was not for traditional liturgies to be restored to every service with modern liturgies being abandoned, but rather that modern and traditional liturgies should be treated equally, each having their own place.

One correspondent put it succinctly:

“Every church should provide a liturgy appropriate to the needs of a particular congregation... arrange traditional worship for the older members and modern for the young ... to provide one without the other only causes discontentment.”

Churches which provided both traditional and modern liturgies were appreciated by old and young alike, because every need was catered for and every age group felt valued. Where contemporary worship took place however, it still needed to be conducted in a dignified and reverent manner.

This demand for traditional and modern liturgy to be equally valued also extended to attitudes about traditional hymns and modern choruses. People commented that *“the balance”* was not always achieved. Whilst hundreds wrote that they rarely got the opportunity to sing traditional hymns. Others, especially Scottish churchgoers, complained that they rarely had the chance to sing contemporary songs.

One person made a theological comment when he wrote:

“Are we really saying, that the only time the Holy Spirit inspired hymns to be written was in the 17th –19th centuries? We believe that God is as active today as much as yesterday, when it comes to inspiring people to compose songs for His praise.”

One musical couple, from a large Church of Scotland congregation in Ayrshire stated:

“Our congregation, though large, is a rapidly aging one, with virtually no one below the age of 30. We urgently need to provide a much more diverse range of music and songs to suit all ages and tastes. The older members of the congregation are ignoring the needs of the younger members by not allowing contemporary worship songs to be introduced. The minister would gladly have the songs if only he were permitted to do so by the aging hierarchy.”

People are calling for 'traditional' hymns and 'modern' choruses to be treated equally, without either having preference.

When commenting on church services, there was also widespread criticism of 'Family' or 'All Age' services. 1500 letters stated that an opportunity for outreach was often lost, because these services sometimes *"bordered on entertainment rather than worship"*.

From Guildford, a woman worded it this way:

"It is great to have an informal service every month, but there is no reason why, within this relaxed context, a serious message cannot be communicated ... at these Family Services I never hear the cross being mentioned."

A former churchgoer from Shropshire added:

"I've seen balloons rising from pulpits, fake moustaches and all manner of audience appeal ... but with no real message behind it."

A regular church attender from London stated:

"No matter how a service is packaged, an important message can be delivered to fringe members and yet this opportunity is often missed ... If they don't hear it at a Family Service where else will they hear it?"

One individual summarised the thoughts of many when she wrote:

"Using gimmicks to make Family Services fun only goes skin deep. These services are a vital part of mission, so they need to remain meaningful and dignified. There is a thin yet distinct line between what is worship and what comes across as mere entertainment... gimmicks without a serious point being made, sends people away empty."

3) The sermons / addresses delivered

Thousands of letters specifically referred to *the sermon* 'as being crucial for teaching and outreach. It was regarded as *"the meat in the sandwich"*, which either made or spoiled a service. *The sermon* either encouraged attendance by being interesting and thought provoking, or discouraged attendance by being boring and irrelevant.

Hundreds of pages were written on this subject, (many extremely detailed) which showed that *the sermon* ' and its contents were of fundamental importance to churchgoers. These replies shared a common theme and what follows is a brief synopsis of this material.

Summary

The sermon is crucial because unless churchgoers are also involved in a house group, this may be the only time when they receive Christian teaching. There is a spiritual hunger amongst congregations for a greater understanding of a wide range of relevant Biblical topics.

Sermons on these topics encourage regular attendance making services more meaningful. Frequently however, preachers ignore these deeper issues by delivering sermons on lectionary readings with the result that the subject matter is often irrelevant and boring *"to all but the most hardy"*.

From Wales a man commented:

"On Sunday I listened to a sermon on the subject of Elijah being fed by the ravens. The sermon was good in explaining what happened, but failed to point out why this should be significant to me in my everyday walk with Jesus."

Repeatedly people wrote to say:

“We want sermons on Biblical topics which help us to live as faithful Christians in the 21st century.” Ignoring these topics often results in individuals drifting away from the church. Others will seek the information they desire from alternative sources, such as Bible reading notes, house groups, teaching websites, devotional TV programmes on satellite, (the God Channel Sky 671/2 often being mentioned), or by attending a Christian basics course e.g. Alpha.

As one woman wrote:

“People will vote with their feet and go where they are being fed with the spiritual knowledge they so dearly seek.”

A churchgoer from Farnham expressed it this way:

“In my experience ministers tend to preach on some minor point and seldom provide the Biblical food we so badly need... what people are crying out for are sermons which enable spiritual growth... if I hear another sermon on racism or immigration I ll scream.”

Thousands of comments were made that sermons on relevant Biblical topics attract, while *“political and social sermons leave people dissatisfied “*.

“I don’t want to hear platitudes,” wrote one disgruntled churchgoer *“I need help to grow in my faith and help to become the person Christ wants me to be.”*

The following extract of a letter written by a couple living in Warwickshire is one example of how strongly people felt:

“For 14 Years I was treasurer of my church. My wife and I tootled along to a service perhaps once a month just to support the minister. We always came away from the services and said ‘what spiritual benefit have we gained?’ The answer was nil. The 10 minute sermon was a string of platitudes. We were agreeing with our grown up children that the whole thing was a boring hour on a Sunday morning... and we were questioning our faith. So we took the plunge and joined another church which we had heard others speak about. What a difference! Here we can listen to a well researched sermon on the Bible and never look at one’s watch. Here the faith is so strong. What worries me is that some ministers think it is ‘OK’ to preach about matters of little spiritual significance. It certainly isn’t. The Christian message is so strong we should not be ashamed to shout it out loud.”

Repeatedly regular churchgoers wrote that it was the Biblical theme of sermons which drew them to a particular church. A member of the Church of Scotland from Rothes spoke for many when she said:

“I like to go home with something to think about... having listened to parts of the Bible being explained.”

From the West Country another churchgoer stated:

“Tinkering around with service times or liturgy won’t work if the message isn’t there. The heart of the matter is that congregations want to hear what the Bible says in a relevant way, with conviction and passion.”

Responses revealed that people wanted sermons covering a variety of particular topics. Outlined below is a summary of the topics people requested, which fell into several distinct categories:

a) Help on how to live the Christian life

How to develop a personal relationship with Christ, Christ being our Best Friend, how to resist temptation, the role of the Holy Spirit as Helper, personal holiness and self discipline, the 10 Commandments, developing thankfulness and appreciation for the sufferings of Christ and God’s love.

b) Salvation

The need for personal repentance, how to obtain God’s forgiveness, preparing for death and the Judgment, punishments and rewards in the after-life, God’s role as Saviour and Judge, fearing God, the consequences of immorality for the nation, society and the individual.

c) Doctrine

Biblical teaching on the uniqueness of Christ, the Deity of Christ, the moral and doctrinal teaching of the New Testament, the second coming of Christ and the differences between Christianity and Islam.

d) Guidance on how to witness to others.

How to lead others to Christ, how to evangelise people distracted by materialism.

e) Apologetics

(See Chapter One)

f) Bible Prophecy and a vision of the future

(See Chapter Four)

g) Biblical teaching re human suffering

The consequences of living in a ‘fallen world’ where the laws of nature fail to work as God intended resulting in the occurrence of natural disasters (Rom. 8:20-22. Isaiah 11:6-9), the need for humans to have genuine freewill in order to be a real creation (1 John 3:1-3) and God’s promise of recompense in eternity for those who suffer unfairly (Luke 14:14, 16:25). See appendix 2 for a further example of material sent on this issue.

From Belfast a member of the Church of Ireland commented:

“There is general confusion amongst congregations as to what the Bible teaches on everyday issues. When will the penny drop that one of the main reasons for the success of Alpha is because it attempts to answer the questions people are interested in?... the best way to attract people back into church is to deal with these matters directly from the pulpit with courage and conviction.”

Hundreds of references highlighted the crucial role now performed by house groups in covering topics often neglected in sermons. The constant theme was:

“But for my house group I wouldn’t know what the Bible teaches...”

From Roxburghshire one individual spoke for many when he wrote:

“It was in sheer despair that I joined a house group. I needed to hear what Christ himself was teaching not the latest opinion of the church.”

Correspondence from house groups showed that much of the teaching material they used was coming from Christian websites. The following were the most frequently mentioned;

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| www.gospelcom.net/rbc | www.billygraham.org | www.arkwebs.com |
| www.online-churches.net | www.thebiblecenter.com | www.gospeldirect.com |
| www.digitalwalk.net | www.internetforchristians.org | www.god.tv |
| www.newlifepublishing.co.uk | www.truthmedia.com | www.alphacourse.com |
| www.prayerbook.org.uk | www.christianherald.org.uk | www.plain-truth.org.uk |

4) The sense of fellowship experienced

The pleasure of being a member of a Christian fellowship was frequently referred to, with over 700 individuals stating that they had particularly chosen their church because of its friendly atmosphere. They said that they derived pleasure from worshipping with others, it gave a sense of belonging, a sense of comradeship and a sense of being part of a *“spiritual family”*. Membership of this *“family”* was all the more important in the light of disintegrating marriages and broken relationships. Church friends were regarded as individuals to turn to in times of trouble, whereas in the past many would have automatically turned to a *‘blood relation’*.

Although Christian fellowship was regarded as vital, over 300 people expressed concern about *the giving of The Peace* ; feeling that it was *“forced bonhomie”*. The message of these letters was – *“we enjoy having fellowship over a cup of coffee after the service, but we find the giving of The Peace ’embarrassing and contrived”*. Around a 100 individuals felt so embarrassed they actually avoided church services where The Peace ’took place.

One churchgoer from Sanderstead spoke for these individuals when he said:

“I am writing as a heart broken member of the Church of England, who would love to attend church every Sunday. I do not go regularly because of the dreaded and embarrassing sign of The Peace ? This is a display of “Hi buddy”chumminess which is incompatible with my private devotion. Congregations feel obliged to participate but many of us are inwardly cringing with embarrassment.”

A welcoming congregation attracts people, but an unfriendly one drives people away. 120 letters were received from individuals who had either found themselves ignored as newcomers, or who had actually experienced an unfriendly reception. They subsequently stopped attending church altogether. One incident documented was that of a newcomer who was asked in front of everyone to move pews because they were in somebody’s place - *“and you can’t have their seat”*.

Another experience related by 55 individuals was that as newcomers, they found themselves standing alone during refreshments after the service.

An individual from Northumberland illustrated this when he wrote:

“Everyone drew into cliques and my wife and I were left alone sipping our tea.”

Responses revealed that the damage caused by unwelcoming and thoughtless behaviour can have a devastating effect on newcomers who experience it. In some cases it has permanently put them off attending church.

The worst incident documented came from an ex-churchgoer living in the West Country. He explained that after moving to a new area *“as was his custom”* he started attending one of the local churches. Having attended for several weeks a member of the congregation came up to him after a service, put his hand on his shoulder and said:

“I think you are in the wrong church – don’t you live on the other side of town? The parish boundary is the river; you belong to a different parish.”

He never returned to that church and said that he now avoided any Church *“for fear of a similar experience”*.

Chapter Four

The Attraction of 'Visionary and Prophetic' Churches / Teaching

Many respondents want churches to respond to the needs of this frightened generation by adopting a *visionary and prophetic role* :

Set against the background of 9/11, the Iraq war and escalating violence in Israel, 23% of those replying included references to the state of the world and their opinions on what the teaching of churches should be to frightened people.

Thousands of references were made on this issue covering hundreds of pages. The contents of these letters revealed that the majority who referred to this subject were members of the Free Churches – Baptist, Pentecostal, Charismatic, Assemblies of God, Vineyard Fellowships and Community Churches.

Between 370 and 400 replies were from lay preachers, pastors, evangelists or home group leaders. They attributed the growth of their particular church to *visionary and prophetic* 'teaching which they said addressed people's needs and attracted large congregations.

In their opinion churches with this teaching satisfied the needs of a frightened generation in 3 particular ways. They stated:

- 1) *Visionary and prophetic* 'teaching provided reassurance and comfort for the faithful by explaining the purpose of the second coming of Christ.
- 2) *Visionary and prophetic* 'churches challenged the immorality of society and taught the necessity of repentance.
- 3) *Visionary and prophetic* 'churches highlighted Biblical prophecies to be fulfilled before Christ's return.

1) *Visionary and prophetic* 'teaching provided reassurance and comfort for the faithful by explaining the purpose of the second coming of Christ

Hundreds of replies revealed how frightened people were by world events. Many avoided watching the news or reading newspapers in order to escape the reality of today's troubled times. *Visionary and prophetic* 'churches responded to these anxieties by explaining the nature and purpose of the second coming of Christ.

A young mother from West Sussex summarised the fears of many when she wrote:

"I have found this constant talk of war, weapons of mass destruction, terror attacks, Bible Codes and the end of the world very frightening. It seems every time you open a newspaper or switch on the news there is more bad news. It had totally taken over my otherwise rational thinking to the point where I avoided buying a newspaper and left the room when the news comes on. I had lain awake at night unable to sleep because of the thought whizzing around in my head... we're all going to die... I then started attending a small church nearby... (one Sunday) a talk was delivered on Matt 24:22-23 explaining that while it was prophesied that there will be a world conflict centring around the Middle East, such as the world had never seen before, the Lord was going to shorten this trouble by his return, otherwise no flesh would have survived. It was explained to the congregation that the whole reason for Jesus' return is to stop the human race from destroying itself. I wish I had known this before... it was such a relief to hear these words from Scripture. I got a copy of the pastor's sermon and anytime I get frightened I read it over and over again. I really do feel as if a black cloud has been lifted and replaced by a ray of sunshine."

From Ashbourne a woman expressed it this way:

“I am ashamed to say that I was placed in the category of those predicted in Luke 21:26 where it describes men’s hearts fainting from fear’ concerning the troubles befalling the planet. Now that the pastors I sit under have explained the purpose of the Second Coming of Jesus, I am now like those in v 28 where it describes the devout as being excited, looking forward to and spiritually preparing for His glorious return.”

From Lincoln a churchgoer wrote from a slightly different angle:

“I have always felt that among all these horrors we can remain confident. When my mother was a small child (born 1902) an elderly man explained to her that he had studied Bible prophecy for many years. He said that Scripture predicted that some day the Jews would return to Israel and re-establish their nation, and that many different countries would gather at a place called Armageddon for war. At this point Christ would dramatically return in His glory and set up His Kingdom on earth, which is why we say in the Lord’s own prayer Thy kingdom come.’ World events as such have never worried me because I know the world is in His hands and He will not allow us to be annihilated.”

Hundreds of individuals were grateful for their churches’ explanation of the second coming and the reassurance it brought them. Many others who had not received this kind of teaching expressed their need for such reassurance.

From London a woman echoed the thoughts of many when she wrote:

“As an Anglican I eventually converted to Catholicism. I have quite a lot of friends who are Pentecostal. Pentecostal churches stress strongly the return of Jesus, something I feel my church is not so forthcoming on speaking out about. I don’t understand why this should be so because His return is stated in the Creed we confess each week and in the Anglican Church the old prayer of consecration stated that Communion is only ‘until He comes again.’ The New Testament teaches that the whole Christian Church of whatever denomination, is but a church in waiting – waiting for the return of its Lord’, yet this hope is rarely mentioned except in the liturgy.”

Correspondence showed that the study of the second coming of Christ was a favourite subject in house groups and cell churches. Much of the material received by the ERC on this issue came from various internet websites such as

www.believers.com
www.banner.org.uk

www.100prophecies.org

www.prophecytoday.co.uk

www.pwmi.org

The large number of references to this topic showed that prophecy has attracted people’s interest and some respondents even admitted to re-evaluating their previous thinking. From County Down one man admitted:

“I had looked upon much of the Bible as being a collection of myths... but as we look around and see its prophecies being fulfilled, I am having doubts about this view ... the thought keeps coming to my mind – what if I’m wrong and the Bible is true after all?...I have to honestly admit to myself that this is a serious possibility.”

2) ‘Visionary and prophetic’ churches challenged the immorality of society and taught the necessity of repentance

Replies which made reference to ‘Visionary and Prophetic’ churches stated that to fulfil this role it was necessary to courageously condemn immorality and corruption.

The message was virtually unanimous – people wanted churches to speak out with **“boldness”** and **“conviction”** against immoral behaviour. They wanted **“boldness not silence”**. The word **“silence”** was repeatedly used when describing the response of some churches towards immorality, and people said they were encouraged when ministers and churches were forthright and bold.

From Wrexham a lay preacher summarised these replies when she wrote:

“With society in its present state church ministers should be playing a leading role in guiding people towards the straight and narrow path which leads to eternity, yet every time a major issue arises, from pornography on TV, to the morning after pill, all we hear is silence ... it is little wonder the faithful are losing heart and losing respect for some churches.”

A member of the Anglican Deanery Synod from Whitby commented:

“It is obvious moral values have deteriorated over the past 50 years, but some churches seem to do little or nothing about it and remain silent. Church ministers must not become tolerant of such things but condemn the sin, whilst at the same time love the sinner... ministers who do this would find their congregations swelling...”

A churchgoer from Wiltshire added:

“You cannot have a religion which is watered down to please everyone because in the end you please no one. Christianity has a vital role to play in our country today ... because people are searching for spiritual answers to the emptiness in their lives. Those ministers and pastors who fail to speak out are gradually emptying their churches.”

A summary of the information contained in these letters is as follows:

Summary

Society is in a mess. Whether it is to do with the NHS, the decline of the monarchy, race and age discrimination, the break up of the UK, the demise of traditional family life or whatever, it appears that just about everything we value is facing difficulty or trouble.

Economic, political and social reasons are often blamed for these troubles. In reality they are being caused by spiritual problems. Until these spiritual problems are addressed, trouble and distress will not only remain but also increase with time.

History shows that no nation or society has ever been able to achieve peace or harmony without moral and spiritual righteousness. Repeatedly, it is demonstrated that *“reaping what a nation sows”* is an inescapable law, with peace and harmony following moral righteousness, and distress and trouble following immorality.

There are no lasting economic, political or social solutions to the problems we face because the issue is a spiritual one. Our problems are symptoms of a morally bankrupt and confused society. If people obeyed the Ten Commandments society would be dramatically transformed.

Church ministers of all denominations and nationalities whether Irish, Welsh, Scottish or English have a vital role to play in reminding people of God’s wrath against individual sin, and warning, that a corrupt society will not have God’s blessing or protection from evil.

Hundreds of letters quoted Bible verses which people believed described today’s situation,

‘Righteousness will exalt a nation, but wickedness will destroy a people.’
(Proverbs 14:34) and *‘A fruitful country will become impoverished because of the wickedness of those who dwell in it.’* (Psalm 107:34)

The most frequently quoted reference was:

“because of all the evil they have done I will forsake them and hide my face from them and many evils and troubles will befall them, so that in that day they will say have not these evils come upon us because God is no longer protecting us?” (Deuteronomy 31:17-18)

The ERC repeatedly read of people's firm belief that Britain cannot go on *"behaving the way it is without eventually leaving itself completely unprotected by God and wide open for the occurrence of some kind of national catastrophe"*.

One pastor spoke for hundreds when he wrote:

"Very few people realise the greatness of God's long suffering towards this generation... but unless we repent as a nation He cannot protect us indefinitely."

An Elder from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland added:

"It doesn't take an exceptionally religious mind to sense that if the people of Great Britain and Ireland continue to ignore the lessons of history and the law of Scripture we will all find ourselves engulfed in trouble that will be on an apocalyptic scale... I am only glad that I know that as bad as things may get, Christ is returning and He will personally put things right again."

In 375 letters people expressed the belief that this trouble could be averted by having repentance on *"a national scale"*. The phrases *"National Repentance"* and *"National Days of Prayer"* were used interchangeably, often with Biblical references promising forgiveness and deliverance if repentance is taken seriously by a nation.

In these letters the most frequently quoted verse was:

"If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin, deliver them from their enemies and heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14)

Several pastors stated that during the bleakest days of the Second World War, when hope was all but lost, churches nationwide had taken the implications of this verse to heart and organised 26 days and two whole weeks of National Prayer pleading for Divine Deliverance. Hundreds of thousands of people who hitherto had neglected God, instinctively turned to the only one able to deliver. They realised that the nation had reached a point where only Divine intervention would make a difference.

A pastor from Belfast stated:

"When the nation took God seriously and repented of its sins the result each time was Divine intervention in human affairs altering a sequence of events which would otherwise have naturally occurred... The miracle of Dunkirk was just that – a miracle. Churchill had been advised that only 20 - 30,000 men would be evacuated... the situation was so perilous that King George 6th called for a National Day of Prayer on 26th May, to plead for deliverance. Hundreds of thousands of people across the British Isles flocked into churches. The result was a calm on the waters of the English Channel the like of which had not been experienced for some 30 years, which allowed an armada of boats to rescue 335,000 men... Similar Providential interference was experienced during the Battle of Britain and during the Normandy landings."

A member of the Church of Scotland further commented:

*"Churchill himself was so convinced that God answered the prayers of the nation that he delivered a speech at the end of 1942 declaring his reflective observations:
I sometimes have a feeling of interference, I want to stress that. I have a feeling sometimes that some Guiding Hand has interfered. I have a feeling that we have a Guardian and we shall have this Guardian so long as we serve his cause faithfully."*

The unanimous view held by these pastors, evangelists, and lay preachers etc, was that the time had come for deep national repentance and only by doing so would there be Divine Intervention to deliver the nation from evil.

Visionary and prophetic churches teach this **“need for repentance”** to their congregations and directly challenge the immorality of the nation. Replies showed that this message is increasingly popular with those who feel that society must not be allowed to continue unchecked on its downward spiral.

3) *Visionary and prophetic* churches highlighted Biblical prophecies to be fulfilled before Christ’s return

Together with sermons on the second coming and the need for national repentance, *visionary and prophetic* churches teach about events predicted in Bible prophecy which they say will take place prior to Christ’s return. Along with hundreds of Biblical references the following material was received; press cuttings, audio tapes of talks and house group meetings, religious literature, books, ‘Prophecy Today’ magazines, photocopies of material from the internet and in depth articles. There was a marked similarity among the hundreds of replies on this particular issue. A brief summary of the main points made is as follows:

Summary

Pastors, Elders, lay preachers and evangelists of *prophetic and visionary* churches believed that they could use examples of fulfilled Bible prophecy in their ministry so as to make the Christian message interesting and relevant to modern times.

They taught their congregations that the Bible was prophetic in nature having over 1,800 references to the second coming of Christ in the Old Testament and on average 1 in every 30 verses referring to it in the New Testament.

They teach that Christ’s return will prevent world destruction and force nations to live in harmony with one another. His return is something for Christians to eagerly anticipate and prepare for. Although a time of personal judgment, it will also be the time when:

“Nations will beat their weapons into ploughs and no longer learn the art of war” (Isaiah 2:4) and **Christ will rule the world with a rod of iron for a millennium** (Revelation 12: 5 and Revelation 20: 2-5).

Adolf Hitler based his idea of a 1000 year Reich (kingdom) in mockery of this predicted 1000 year rule of Christ.

The most commonly cited examples of fulfilled prophecy were:

a) The return of the Jewish people to the Middle East to re-establish their nation after having been scattered across the world for 1900 years (Ezekiel 37: 21). Many replies pointed out that no nation in history has ever regained nationhood after a worldwide dispersal, let alone a dispersal lasting almost 2000 years.

b) The rise of Russia from a peasant nation to a super power (according to their interpretation of Ezekiel 38&39 Russia will unexpectedly invade the Middle East as a solution to its economic problems).

c) The development and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction which would threaten human existence but for Christ’s personal intervention (Mark 13:19-20).

d) The end of the Cold War as a fulfilment of a predicted false world peace.
(1 Thessalonians 5:3).

e) The general increase in world unrest in the form of conflicts, famines, earthquakes and diseases (Matt 24:6-7). Disasters caused by sea and wave. (Luke 21:25-26). (According to their interpretation of Zechariah 14:12 and Ezekiel 39 there is also to be a limited use of nuclear weapons in the Middle East around Jerusalem).

f) The fulfilment on 9/11 of a symbolic vision recorded in Revelation 18:3 -19, which predicted that the focal point for world trade would be destroyed by fire in one hour.

A huge number of responses referred specifically to this tragedy as being a defining moment in world affairs. Extracts from secular newspapers showed that similarities between 9/11 and Revelation 18 had been widely observed by the media in Canada and America at the time. However, the religious press has had the greatest influence upon *prophetic and visionary* 'congregations, regarding their interpretation of this event.

Two prophetic magazines were frequently quoted by respondents. One was *The Last Trumpet Newsletter* ' produced by Last Trumpet Ministries. In their **August 2001** issue, clergyman and writer the Rev David Meyers described a strange event which happened when he and members of his congregation visited New York, in the July **prior** to the destruction of the World Trade Centre:

"We were sailing across New York harbour on the ferry bound for Manhattan. There in the distance were the twin towers of the World Trade Centre. Suddenly I saw massive flames of fire rising into the sky from the towers, as the entire area became engulfed in fire. I could hear horrifying screams of multitudes of people in the distance. The vision ended as quickly as it had begun. Then I heard a voice that seemed to come from inside my head say 'describe what you have seen in your August newsletter that people may realise the significance of the events which are shortly to take place.' "

The other prophetic magazine frequently mentioned was the *Pulpit Series* ' produced by the Times Square Church (www.timessquarechurch.org). This church had been awaiting a disaster and was ready to establish relief tents at 'ground zero 'to comfort survivors and rescue workers. In this magazine the pastor of the church David Wilkerson explained the reason for their readiness. He wrote that six weeks **before** the disaster, he and every member of his pastoral team were struck by a deep conviction that a tragedy was shortly to occur and that God wanted them to prepare for it. As a result of this, (as documented in their magazine) they cancelled all major church events in the weeks prior to 9/11 and replaced them with four prayer meetings every week. At these meetings they sensed God prompting them to pray that the effects of this coming disaster would be lessened from what otherwise might have been the case.

Visionary and prophetic 'churches claim that the reason for their growing congregations is largely due to their prophetic Bible teaching in all its various forms. With deteriorating world conditions, many more seem to be turning to prophecy to receive the comfort and reassurance that no matter what, God is still ultimately in control of human destiny.

Chapter Five

Requests for more Home Visiting and Greater Pastoral Care

People want clergy to give greater priority to home visiting and pastoral care, in order to reflect God's love and concern for the individual.

The ERC found that the decline of home visiting and reduced pastoral care was regarded as a significant factor in reducing church attendance by 80% of those who referred to this subject. Many suggestions were documented on how to reinstate home visiting in the light of clergy shortages and multiple parishes.

Responses revealed that the request for clergy to reinstate their traditional role of home visiting came mainly from members of the Anglican church. In total, reference was made to this subject in approximately 76% of letters received, many of which stated:

“A house going minister does indeed make a church going people.” and argued that *“one of the best ways to get the church back on its feet, was to get the clergy back on theirs”*.

Clergy visiting or the *“ministry of presence”* as some described it, was regarded as an integral part of being a priest or pastor. One house group leader from Wales quoted from the Old Testament to give this view a Biblical basis when she wrote:

“I can never understand why the clergy in my area give visiting and pastoral care such a low profile... the words of God recorded in Ezekiel chapter 34 could be said of many shepherds today – you do not feed the flock, the weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who are sick, nor bound up the broken, nor sought after those who were lost. My sheep wandered all over the place and no one was seeking or searching for them. Woe to those shepherds who only feed themselves because I will require my flock at their hand... 'God clearly expects his priests to have a visiting ministry because people need a point of contact. When such a ministry is neglected, those who are weak in faith often fall away and think that the church does not care.”

From Oxfordshire a hospital Chaplain expressed it in this manner:

“As a Chaplain who listens to the experiences of a wide cross section of both churchgoers and non churchgoers I would say that the decline in clergy visiting is of the utmost significance as a determinant of people's relationship with the church. It is particularly significant given our ageing population and the fact that many people are isolated at home. I frequently hear the disappointment or anger of people who are infirm or unwell and have not been visited by anyone from the church. This can leave them feeling forgotten or, at worst, abandoned especially if they had previously had contact with the church. My experience is that many people, including non churchgoers, have a strong perception that this pastoral work should be at the heart of the church's ministry and are disappointed when this is not the case. I have known a significant number of people who have stopped going to church because no one visited them when they became unwell or unable to attend.”

From the diocese of Truro a Priest-in-Charge added:

“I have based my entire ministry since 1987 on pastoral visiting. I have indeed found it to be the most clearly identifiable factor in church growth. In their own homes people feel valued, they ask for prayers, ask questions and get things off their chests. They feel that the church is taking a personal interest in them. Our present church has gone up from 88 to over 200 in 8 years and is still rising – particularly in the middle-aged bracket. It is sad to hear fellow clergy speak at Deanery Chapter about how there isn't time for visiting and that everybody's out working. There are always plenty of people in when I call. In today's society many are either retired or on shift work, so if no one is in at the first house you call at, you won't have to knock on too many doors before you do get someone in.”

Repeatedly grave concern was expressed regarding the pastoral care provided by churches. One clergy wife living in Kings Lynn stated succinctly:

“It is a very uncaring world now and the church should not be emulating this, but rather standing out against it and being seen as a caring community.”

Frequently the ERC came across such phrases as:

“I couldn't go to church, but nobody seemed to miss me, nobody called to see if I was alright.” and *“When I was ill the Vicar didn't even telephone to see if I was OK.”*

Making the situation even worse many individuals further commented:

“The clergy or church officers always find time to call when there is a need for money.”

From Desborough one man summarised a common experience when he declared:

“It must be 15 years since anyone from the church made a visit to our home, except to obtain my signature on a covenant to improve the effectiveness of the regular donations I still make.”

Many respondents regarded home visiting as being *“the most effective and successful tool for evangelism and outreach ever invented”*.

A churchgoer from Worcester stated:

“Even from the purely human point of view, the church as an organisation will never grow unless it makes contact with potential customers and increase its customer base. Like any other organisation it has to get out there where the people are and market itself... the church must contact people in their homes if it is to turn the corner and grow.”

Thousands of references to home visiting and pastoral care reflected a common theme. The following is a summary of these replies and the information they contained:

Summary

People find the thought of going to church for the first time and being amongst strangers a daunting prospect. As a result of this fear, *“people won't go to the church, unless the Vicar first makes the effort to go to them, and break down this psychological barrier”*.

Diocesan committees especially in the Anglican Church have experimented with different *mechanisms* by which to draw people to church, such as the use of *mission teams* and *area teams* etc. However, the most effective and cheapest way to reach the un-churched is the simplest way of all – *“for clergy to show the love and concern of God for the individual, by visiting people in their own homes”*. As important as attending Synods, committees and church social events, may be, they are no substitute for home visiting with its personal touch.

Only by meeting people in their own homes can a priest get the opportunity to engage with individuals on a one to one basis. If they are churchgoers to perhaps deal with questions of faith they might have, or if they are not churchgoers to establish a rapport with them, which in the long run frequently *“bears fruit”*.

Many comments were made about this latter kind of home visiting stating that given the missionary situation many churches find themselves in, this type of visiting was *“absolutely vital.”*

“Visit the sick by all means” wrote one churchgoer *“but don't neglect the non-churched, because when attention is paid to them the church ultimately draws in new members, and begins to expand.”*

Another commented:

“Visiting those who have never attended a church before helps to remove prejudices and misconceptions as to what the church is all about... they begin to see the church in a new light. An occasional, but non pushy visit from a friendly vicar to say hello and ask how are you keeping? is a powerful weapon against false notions and ultimately tears down barriers which hinder belief.”

From Dublin a churchgoer added:

“The ministry and care of the church is also for non attenders. God loves them too and is seeking to establish a relationship with them... On many occasions the priest will find such people unburdening themselves and asking heartfelt questions which they have never had the chance to ask before like What are we here for? ; Where are we going? ; Is there a God who cares? ; If the priest never visits these people, they will never ask their questions and never find the answers. Did not our Lord say He did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance yet those outside the church are often the last to be visited by the priest if at all... ”

Regarding who should conduct these visits the statement was repeatedly made *“It should be the minister, the priest, the one who has been ordained”*. Generally the role of visiting was seen as so serious and needing such diplomacy that *“only the trained person with the collar will do”*. This was clearly a major issue with a wide range of individuals. The sentiment *“we want the vicar not Mrs X from the congregation,”* was a frequent cry.

From Norfolk one individual spoke for hundreds when she said:

“Although many churches have conscientious lay visitors, a visit from the minister or clergy means so much more to people. They can unburden themselves to a minister in a way they cannot do so with a lay person and they can discuss the deepest of spiritual matters with someone who has undergone years of theological and pastoral training and who has fully devoted their whole lives to the service of God.”

Many replies offered helpful suggestions as to how the role of a *“visiting vicar”* could be re-established. Most writers were aware of the difficult situation that confronts modern day clergy, with perhaps having multiple parishes.

As one churchgoer from Somerset added:

“Our local priest has to run a crisis ministry because she deals with 6 churches in a large rural area. The way things are structured at the moment she doesn't have time to visit and is wrapped up in maintaining the buildings and meeting the quota.”

Two strategies were particularly advocated *“to free up the vicar”*:

- 1) Give lay people the responsibility of running the physical and organisational side of parish life, so that the vicar is free to concentrate on the spiritual side.**

Individuals stated that *“this model”* is different from the strategy presently being adopted in many Anglican parishes, where current thinking is to make clergy *“mini managers”* over a team of lay visitors. The result is that parishioners only receive a visit from the vicar when there is a major crisis.

The model being suggested from the grassroots is different; give the laity the responsibility of the daily *“physical running”* of parishes, so as to enable the vicar to concentrate on the *“spiritual running”* regarding home visiting and pastoral care.

From Wiltshire a churchgoer summarised the thoughts of many when he wrote:

“There is no necessity for the vicar to attend every PCC or every fundraising committee... there is no need for clergy to have to spend hours on the church magazine or other administrative tasks like printing off endless

new service sheets each week. It is not good stewardship of time when the vicar constantly wants to keep a finger in every pie when so many others can be entrusted with these tasks. The vicar should be the 'worker at the coal face' the 'cutting edge' out there meeting people and making a difference. How delighted our PCC would be if our vicar said those remarkable words: 'I won't be with you tonight because I am going knocking on doors.'"

2) Establish lay visiting teams which focus on the long term sick and needy so as to allow the vicar to visit the non-churched and "*seek out new contacts*".

Letters frequently suggested that lay visiting teams could be used for "*targeted visiting*"; in order to enable clergy to do the more sensitive and difficult visiting of non churchgoers.

It was acknowledged that clergy could spend all their time visiting the sick and housebound and never have the opportunity to visit those outside "*the fold*", where there are potential new members. This is where lay visiting teams were seen to be vital. Such teams were not to be used to replace clergy visiting but supplement it. If these teams focused on the sick and the housebound, then clergy could concentrate on the task of meeting new people and building up new contacts.

Pastoral care was a dominant theme in thousands of replies. With clergy often being spread thinly across multiple parishes, many respondents called for the adoption of new strategies so that once again home visiting and pastoral care could become a priest's priority.

Chapter Six

Other Related Subjects

The vast majority of references and comments received could easily be placed under 5 general headings, as documented in the previous chapters. However, several issues were raised which did not necessarily fit within these chapters. The following subjects are recorded in order to provide an accurate reflection of these other issues.

1) The desire to have a *listening church* ’

Thousands of respondents asked for churches to listen to those who held *“traditional beliefs and traditional moral values”* and accept them *“as being valued members of the Body of Christ”*. Of these, around 900 individuals further stated that they had been sidelined and ignored because they held *“traditional beliefs and values”*. These kind of *“traditionalists”* stated that they had been *“marginalised”* because of their beliefs and their moral standards and were being *“condemned for their conscience”*.

The majority of these comments came from members of the Church of England. These ranged from churchwardens both serving and retired, members and former members of PCC s, past and present members of various Deanery Synods, and a wide spectrum of other church workers including *‘prayer intercessors’* and *‘flower arrangers’*.

These people described a similar experience; that when they voiced their belief in Scripture as *“traditionally accepted and understood for the past two thousand years”* they found themselves gradually ignored and *“put out to pasture”*.

From Salisbury Diocese a churchwarden stated:

“The people have been speaking for years. The problem is ‘trendy clergy’ simply don’t listen and if you’re not part of the ‘in crowd’ then you’re out.”

A churchgoer from Cheltenham spoke for many when she said:

“A rector should serve the needs of all the members of the parish but often there is no one so illiberal as a liberal.”

From Liverpool another churchgoer added:

“For too long many ‘traditionalists’ have felt ignored. What is destroying some parishes are priests with closed minds... minds that are closed to the fact that we ‘traditionalists’ have as legitimate a right to our beliefs and moral standards, as they have to theirs. We have a legitimate right to be heard without fear of being ‘old-shouldered’.”

The tone of these replies ranged from *“a cry from the heart”* to be heard, through to individuals *“seething with anger”* at being ignored. Letters stated that in order to keep *“traditionalists”* attending church their beliefs and feelings needed to be listened to, *“recognised as being legitimate”* and taken into account. They called for a *“listening church”* which valued them. They wanted an end to the growing attitude that anyone who followed Jesus’ teaching was an extremist when they were merely upholding conventional orthodox Christianity.

From Sheffield a churchgoer commented for many when she wrote:

“You can respect a priest’s theological view point without having to agree with it, however all too often respect ‘seems to come from only one direction.’”

In comparison with the 900 replies from *“traditionalists”* who complained of being sidelined, only 20 – 25 individuals wrote to say that they had had a similar experience for holding *“liberal”* views,

2) The continual demand for money

This issue was referred to in hundreds of letters. These individuals felt that their church (particularly members of the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England) was constantly making demands for money.

The call for money was rarely mentioned by Baptists or Pentecostals who regarded *“tithing”* as a natural part of their Christian commitment. However, other denominational members stated that they were finding their church a constant financial drain on their resources.

One churchgoer described the experience of many when she wrote:

“Every time I go to church, they ask me for more money so that they can pay the quota.” (An annual Diocesan levy for Church of England parishes)

Another added:

“They seem more interested in the money I donate than in my needs as a person.”

The constant struggle to pay *“the quota”* was a huge burden for members of small congregations and many wrote to say that they were unsure how much longer they could *“afford to attend”* their particular church.

3) Women & ministry

580-600 respondents complained about the ordination of women as priests. These letters came almost exclusively from Anglicans, particularly members of the Church of England. It was often unclear however, how many saw this issue as being so serious as to prevent them from attending church.

References regarding the ordination of women were often listed amongst other issues especially complaints against the ordination of non-celibate homosexuals.

The ordination of women was regarded as a form of *“church government”* they could not support on grounds of conscience. However, letters stated that the ordination of practising homosexuals was a fundamental moral issue and as such *“was in a league of its own”*. Respondents stated this was *“a line which must not be crossed”*.

4) Sunday shopping / Sunday sport

Hundreds of respondents regarded trading and sport on a Sunday as a temptation which drew people away from attending church. However, most felt that *“this was a symptom of a deeper spiritual problem”*. They stated that if people really understood the character of God *“as revealed in the Bible and the demands He makes upon us, they would make attending church a priority”*.

“Open shops do not force people to use them.” They stated that *“If God was their first priority churches would be full and the shops empty, open or not”*. They saw the fundamental problem as being a lack of Christian understanding and education.

5) The lack of Christian teaching in schools / demise of Christian assemblies

References were made to this topic in approximately 2,400 replies. The view expressed was that proper Christian teaching and regular Christian assemblies at school encouraged young people to understand Christianity and subsequently encourage church attendance in adult life.

Many respondents stated that the hostility some young people have towards 'The Church' is often due to their misunderstanding of Christianity. This is because the Christian faith has been inadequately explained to them at school and they have been denied the chance to investigate its claims and its relevance for their lives.

Church Survey UK & Ireland (Appendix 1)

Serial No			
Denomination	Church of England	Catholic	Baptist
Methodist	Pentecostal	Unitarian	Presbyterian
Irish Catholic	Church of Scotland	Church of Ireland	Community / Vineyard
Other – please specify			
Recently changed denomination ?	Y / N please specify		
Age		Gender	M / F / ? / Family / Joint reply
Post code			
Frequency of church attendance	> once per week	once per week	once per month (regular)
infrequently	special occasions ~ festive, weddings	used to attend	never
Any church courses attended ?	Yes / No	Which ones ?	
Participation in church life	Yes / No	What role ?	
Reasons for not attending church	(Further comments to be listed over leaf)		
Reasons for attending church	(Further comments to be listed over leaf)		
Member of Clergy ?	Yes / No		
Any comment re: church services	(Further comments to be listed over leaf)		
Any comment re: church services	(Further comments to be listed over leaf)		
What 's gone wrong ?	(Further comments to be listed over leaf)		
How did they hear about the survey ?			
Attitude towards visiting and / or pastoral care			

Appendix 2

The Long Silence

At the end of time, billions of people were scattered on a vast plain before God's throne. Some groups talked heatedly. 'How can God judge us?' 'What does he know about suffering?' snapped a young woman. She jerked back a sleeve to reveal a tattooed number from a Nazi concentration camp. A black man lowered his collar. 'What about this?' he demanded, showing an ugly rope burn. Lynched for no crime but being black. We have suffocated in slave ships, been wrenched from loved ones and toiled till only death gave release.'

Many other people recounted stories of suffering. Each had a complaint against God for the evil and suffering he permitted in his world. How lucky he was to live in heaven where all was sweetness and light; where there was no weeping, no fear, no hunger and no hatred. All agreed that God seemed to lead a pretty sheltered life.

So each group sent out a representative. There was a Jew, a black woman, an untouchable from India, an illegitimate child, a victim from Hiroshima, a sweatshop worker and a prisoner from a labour camp. In the centre of the plain they consulted.

At last they were ready to present their case. It was very daring. Before God could qualify to be their judge, he must endure what they had endured. So the decision was made: God should be sentenced to live on earth – as a man! But, because he was God, they set certain safeguards to be sure he could not use his divine powers to help himself:

Let him be born a Jew.

Let the legitimacy of his birth be doubted, so that none will know who his father really is.

Let him champion a cause so just, but so radical, that it brings down upon him the hatred and condemnation of the establishment.

Let him try to describe what no man has ever seen, tasted, heard or smelled... . Let him try to communicate God to men.

Let him be betrayed by his dearest friends.

Let him be indicted on false charges, tried before a prejudiced jury, and convicted by a cowardly judge.

Let him be terribly alone and abandoned.

Let him be tortured.

Then let him die a humiliating death alongside common criminals.

As each leader announced a portion of the sentence, there were shouts of approval from the people. But after the final statement, there was a long silence. No one uttered another word. No one moved.

For suddenly all knew... .. God had already served his sentence.

(Author unknown)

Listening to the ‘View from the pew’ has been enlightening and thought provoking. This investigation is essential reading and a brilliant resource for those who want to encourage church growth. ’

The Rev JMA Willans BD.Dip Theol. (Chairperson and Spokesperson of the Ecumenical Research Committee).

Report Availability

This report is available to download free from : www.churchsurvey.co.uk

Alternatively, in booklet form the report may be purchased at £3.50 ROI €7.30 per copy including postage and packing.

Order online or send a cheque payable to the Ecumenical Research Committee 'at the following address

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