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Catholic Research Forum Reports 1

# Contemporary Catholicism in England and Wales:

A statistical report based on recent  
British Social Attitudes survey data

Stephen Bullivant

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# Eleven Key Findings

## Religion in England and Wales

**1. 48.5% of the English and Welsh adult population identifies as 'no religion':** more than twice as many as claim to be Anglicans (19.8%). Catholics (8.3%) make up a greater share of the population than do members of all non-Christian religions combined (7.7%).

[See Figure 1.1, p.5]

**2. There are striking regional differences.**

In terms of affiliation, Inner and Outer London are the most religious regions; Wales and the North East are the least. Inner London and the North West are the most Catholic areas. The proportion of members of non-Christian religions ranges from as low as 1 in 100 in the South West to over 1 in 5 in London.

[See Figure 1.2, p.5]

**3. The religious make-up of England and Wales has changed dramatically in the past three decades.**

Anglicans have suffered the biggest declines: from 44.5% in 1983 to 19.0% in 2014. The Catholic population, however, has remained relatively steady throughout this period. [See Figure 1.3, p.5]

## Catholic Demographics

**4. An estimated 3.8 million English and Welsh adults identify as Catholic.** Meanwhile, an estimated 6.2 million say that they were brought up Catholic.

[See Figure 2.1, p.7]

**5. The age profile of Catholics is notably younger than that for Christians as a whole.** 44.4% of those who identify as Catholic are aged 18 to 44, compared to just 32.6% of Christians in general.

[See Figure 2.2, p.7]

**6. Catholics, like Christians in general, exhibit distinctive patterns of racial and ethnic diversity.**

Blacks are over-represented, and Asians of either Pakistani/Indian/Bangladeshi or Chinese origin are under-represented, among both groups. Those identifying as 'Asian (other origin)' – a category including Filipinos and Vietnamese – are particularly prevalent among Catholics. [See Figures 2.4, 2.5, p.8]

## Retention and Conversion

**7. Among the main Christian denominations, Catholics have the strongest retention rate:**

55.8% of cradle Catholics still identify as Catholic in adulthood. But Catholics also have the weakest conversion rate: only 7.7% of current Catholics were not brought up Catholic. [See Figures 3.4 (p.10), 3.6, (p.11)]

**8 The vast majority of all converts to Christian denominations have already been brought up in a different Christian tradition.**

The Churches convert very few people raised with either no religion, or in a non-Christian religion. [See Figure 3.6, p.11]

**9. For every one Catholic convert there are 10 cradle Catholics who no longer regard themselves to be Catholic.**

For every one Anglican convert there are 12 cradle Anglicans who no longer regard themselves to be Anglican. [See Figure 3.7, p.11]

## Church Attendance

**10. Of those who currently identify as Catholic, 27.5% say they attend church services at least once a week.** 39.2%, however, say they attend never or practically never. Furthermore, 59.6% of all cradle Catholics say they never or practically never attend church.

**11. There are clear positive correlations between regular church attendance and being female, older, and/or non-White.** Two-thirds of all weekly-or-more Mass goers are women. Almost a quarter of all weekly-or-more Mass goers are women over 65.

[See Figures 4.6 (p.13), 4.7 (p.14)]

## About the Author

Dr Stephen Bullivant is Senior Lecturer in Theology and Ethics, and Director of the Benedict XVI Centre for Religion and Society, at St Mary's University, Twickenham. Within the social-scientific study of (non)religion, his published works include *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism* (co-edited with Michael Ruse; OUP, 2013), *Secularity and Non-Religion* (co-edited with E. Arweck and L. Lee; Routledge, 2013), and articles in journals including *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, *Approaching Religion*, *Implicit Religion*, and *Catholic Social Science Review*. In 2013, he was commissioned by the National Catholic Safeguarding Commission to undertake an independent review of its statistics on abuse allegations. His research has received funding from, among others, the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the British Academy, the Higher Education Academy, and the John Templeton Foundation.

From April to September 2016, Dr Bullivant is a Visiting Research Fellow at the Institute of Advanced Studies, University College London. Among other projects, he is currently writing a monograph on Catholic disaffiliation in Britain and the USA, co-authoring *The Oxford Dictionary of Atheism* (with L. Lee), and co-editing a book on *Humanae Vitae* and its continuing significance.

In the media, Dr Bullivant has written for publications including *New Scientist*, *The Guardian*, *America*, and *The Tablet*. Since 2015, he has been a regular columnist and Consulting Editor for *The Catholic Herald*. Broadcast credits include EWTN, BBC Radio 4, and Vatican Radio. He tweets at @SSBullivant.

## Acknowledgments

I am grateful to a number of friends and colleagues for reading over drafts of this report, and for offering encouragements and criticisms in equal measure. In strictly alphabetical order, these are Prof Philip Booth, Dr Ben Clements, Prof Clive Field, Dr Alana Harris, Dr John Lydon, Revd Dr Stephen Morgan, Káren North, and Dr Damian Thompson. I remain ever grateful to Dr Siobhan McAndrew and Dr Sarah King-Hele for enabling the production of this study in the quantitative sociology of religion (and many others like it).

Above all, thanks are due to Mgr Richard Madders, without whom this project would not have been possible. Over the past year, it has been a great pleasure and privilege in bringing the Catholic Research Forum to fruition. Needless to say, I hope this short report will be the first of many.

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# Introduction

The purpose of this report is very simple: it aims to provide a set of reliable, up-to-date statistics on the overall state of Catholicism in England and Wales. This report is the first to be published as part of the **Catholic Research Forum (CRF)**, a stream of initiatives based within the new **Benedict XVI Centre for Religion and Society** at St Mary's University, Twickenham.<sup>1</sup> The overall aim of the CRF is to put research and strategic thinking that is both academically rigorous and pastorally useful at the service of the Catholic Church.

If this report works as we hope it will, then the following pages should largely speak for themselves. Each of the four chapters covers a key area:

- The place of Catholicism within the religious make-up of England and Wales as a whole.
- The demographic profile (age, sex, race/ethnicity) of the Catholic subpopulation.
- Levels of retention, disaffiliation, and conversion.
- Levels of church attendance.

While the natural focus of each chapter is on Catholics, where useful and appropriate, comparisons will sometimes be drawn to the general population, 'Christians in general', and/or selected other denominations. This is most obviously the case in chapter one, which presents data on English and Welsh religion as a whole.

This report is published to meet an often expressed need: that, with few exceptions,<sup>2</sup> basic statistical data on Catholics in England and Wales is very hard to come by (at least, beyond counts of overall numbers of baptisms, confirmations, ordinations, etc, in each diocese). One would struggle to find a reliable estimate of, say, the proportion of the general population who were either brought up Catholic, or who now consider themselves to be Catholic; or whether men or women, and of what ages, are more likely to attend Mass on a regular basis. These are fundamental questions concerning Catholic life – and ones to which solid answers are indeed available, through the careful use of nationally representative, weighted survey data.

Accordingly, the original analyses in this report are all based upon publicly available data collected as part of the highly respected British Social Attitudes survey (BSA), administered by NatCen Social Research. Most of the charts and tables presented here are based on the BSA's most recently released waves (2012-14 inclusive), although earlier years are sometimes used for the purposes of historical comparison. (Further details on the dataset and methodology may be found in the 'Technical Note' towards the end of this report. In the interests of readability, discussions of various technical and methodological issues, while significant in themselves, are primarily confined to the Endnotes.)

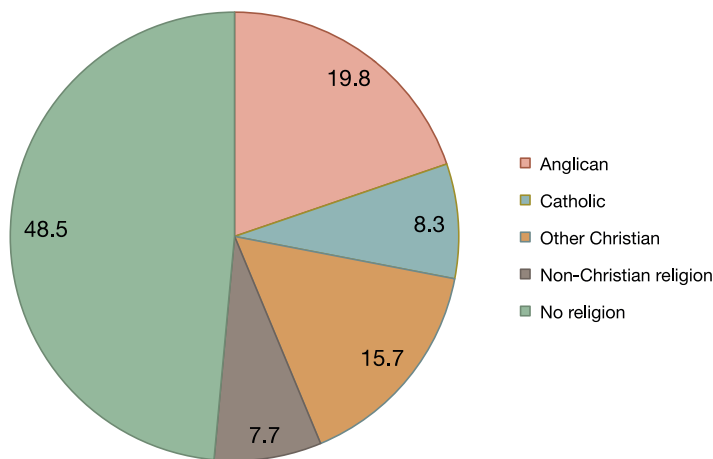
Needless to say, quantitative statistics of this nature have their limits: the dynamic realities and complexities of religious belief, practice, and identity go much deeper than surveys are able fully to explore. Nevertheless, they are indispensable in giving a genuine sense of the 'big picture' within which millions of concrete, individual lives are lived out. We hope, moreover, that the kind of basic statistical picture offered here helps to resource and inspire other initiatives, both pastoral and academic, which build upon some of the major findings highlighted herein.

Finally, when publishing empirical research on Catholicism in England and Wales, it is traditional to lament how, despite its undoubted urgency and importance, there has hitherto been a great dearth of this kind of thing. (And we have, above, already added our own comment to this effect.) Here though, we wish to take this opportunity to record our debt to, and esteem for, the work of several scholars – most especially Anthony Spencer, Michael Hornsby-Smith, Alana Harris, and Ben Clements – who, in different ways, have made and/or are still making a very serious contribution to the empirical study of Catholicism in England and Wales (and indeed, far beyond).

# 1. Religion in England and Wales

The Catholic population of England and Wales cannot, of course, be understood within a vacuum. Hence the purpose of this opening chapter is to present the general contours of English and Welsh religion as a whole. The focus here will be on religious affiliation: its current make-up, nationally and regionally (figs 1.1 and 1.2); how this has changed over the past several decades (fig. 1.3); and the extent to which people's current religious identity differs from the one in which they were brought up (figs. 1.4 and 1.5). It is only against – and within – this wider background that the state of Catholicism may properly be comprehended. Accordingly, the report's subsequent, more 'Catholic-specific' chapters will occasionally draw attention to statistics from other Christian denominations by way of comparison and context.

Fig. 1.1: Current religious affiliation of population of England and Wales



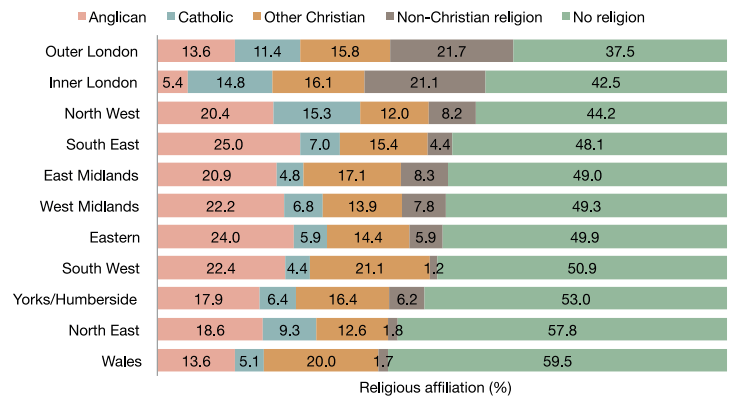
Data source: BSA 2012-14. Weighted data, based on 8501 valid cases. Question asked: 'Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion?'. Percentages shown may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

As fig. 1.1 shows, the largest single category belongs to those who identify as having 'No religion'. These 'nones', as they are sometimes called, account for almost one half of the total population of England and Wales.

Among those who *do* claim a religious affiliation, the majority (c. 44% of the total population) regard themselves as some form of Christian.<sup>3</sup> One in every five people identifies as Anglican: the most popular of the Christian denominations. Meanwhile, one in every thirteen people in England and Wales identifies as Catholic. This is a slightly higher proportion than those who identify with a non-Christian religion, over half of whom are Muslim (who make up 4.4% of the total population), with much smaller proportions of Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jews, and others.

The 'Other Christian' category, naturally, also includes a great deal of diversity. The largest subgroup – accounting for 12.0% of the English and Welsh population as a whole – being those who specify their religion simply as 'Christian', with no denominational qualifier.<sup>4</sup>

Fig. 1.2: Current religious affiliation by region



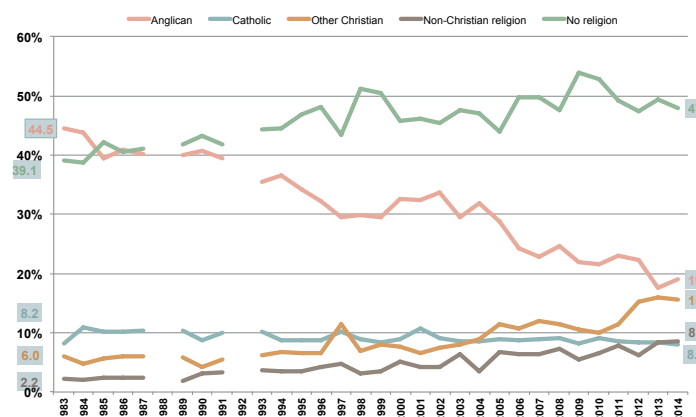
Data source: BSA 2012-14. Weighted data, based on 8504 valid cases. Question asked: 'Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion?'. Percentages shown may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Within England and Wales, there is a notable degree of geographic variation.<sup>5</sup> The various administrative regions are here sorted according to the proportion of people who claim a religious affiliation in each. Outer London, Inner London, and the North West are the most religiously affiliating areas; Wales, the North East, and Yorkshire and Humberside are the least.

Arguably the most striking differences occur in the proportions of members of non-Christian religions. For example, these account for one in five of the population in both London areas. In the South West, meanwhile, it is just one in a hundred.

The Catholic population also shows considerable variation. Catholics make up more than one in ten of the populations of the North West, Inner London, and Outer London. In Inner London, in fact, Catholics (at 14.8%) make up the single largest religious grouping, with Muslims second (13.5%). Compare this to the East Midlands and the South West, however, where the Catholic community accounts for fewer than one in twenty of each region's inhabitants.

Fig. 1.3: The changing religious make-up of England and Wales, 1983-2014



Data source: BSA 1983-2014. Weighted data. Number of valid cases in each year ranges between 1464 (1984) and 4071 (2008). BSA not undertaken in 1988 or 1992. Percentages shown may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

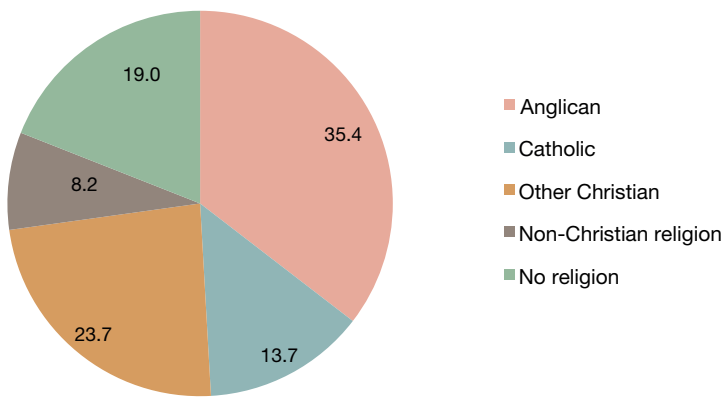
Fig. 1.3 shows, in summary form, the significant changes that religious affiliation in England and Wales has undergone over the past thirty or so years (that is, since the BSA began in 1983).

During this time, the most noticeable change is in the numbers of people affirming Anglicanism: from almost one in two in 1983, to one in five in 2014 – a decline, in terms of overall population share, of over half. Within the same period the ‘No religion’ option has grown in popularity from two in five, to one in two.

The ‘Other Christian’ category has more than doubled, with particular gains over the last five years.<sup>6</sup> Adherents of non-Christian religious traditions have also increased more than fourfold.

Against this ever-changing religious backdrop, the Catholic share of the English and Welsh population has remained generally steady, albeit with minor fluctuations.<sup>7</sup>

Fig. 1.4: Religion of upbringing of population of England and Wales

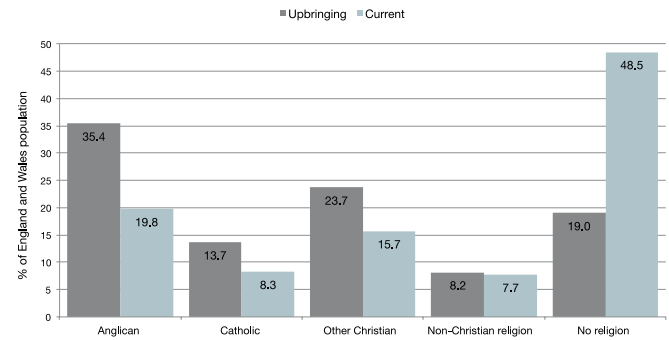


Data source: BSA 2012-14. Weighted data, based on 8488 valid cases. Question asked: ‘In what religion, if any, were you brought up?’ Percentages shown may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

In addition to asking about current affiliation, the BSA asks respondents in what religion, if any, they were brought up. Accordingly, fig. 1.4 depicts the (non)religious upbringings of the population of England and Wales.<sup>8</sup>

Around four out of every five people report having been brought up within a religion; seven in every ten are ‘cradle Christians’ of one sort or another. Over a third of the English and Welsh population were raised as Anglicans – the largest single category. By contrast, around one in seven people in England and Wales – 13.7% – are cradle Catholics.

Fig. 1.5: Comparison of religious upbringing and current religious affiliation within population of England and Wales



Data source: BSA 2012-14. Weighted data, based on 8488 (upbringing) and 8501 (current) valid cases. Percentages shown may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Fig. 1.5 brings together the two sets of data presented in figs 1.1 and 1.4. It allows an easy comparison between the proportion of the English and Welsh population who a) were raised in a specific religious or non-religious setting (i.e., dark column), and b) who now identify with that background (i.e., light column).

Perhaps the most striking finding here is the disparity between ‘cradle nones’, who make up just a fifth of the population, with those currently claiming no religion, who account for almost half. Every other category, meanwhile, has a greater share of upbringing than it does of current affiliation (although in the case of ‘Non-Christian religion’, the difference is small, and likely well within the margin of error).

The difference is largest for the Anglicans: over a third of the population were brought up as such, while only a fifth now identify in this way. The second largest difference in percentage terms, however, belongs to Catholicism; cradle Catholics outstrip current Catholics in the population by a ratio of three to two. (This is a topic which will be considered in more detail in chapter 3.)



## 2. The Catholic Population

This chapter begins our more specific focus on the Catholic (sub) population of England and Wales. Here we shall estimate the overall numbers of Catholic adults within the English and Welsh population (fig. 2.1), before mapping their main contours in terms of the key demographic indicators of age (fig. 2.2), sex (fig. 2.3), and race/ethnicity (figs 2.4 and 2.5). This background will prepare the way for deeper explorations of selected topics in the following chapters.

Fig. 2.1: Estimated size of the Catholic population of England and Wales

	2014 estimate (millions)
Total adult (i.e., 18+) population*	45.2
Current Catholics^	3.8
Cradle Catholics^	6.2

NB: All figures rounded to nearest 100 000.

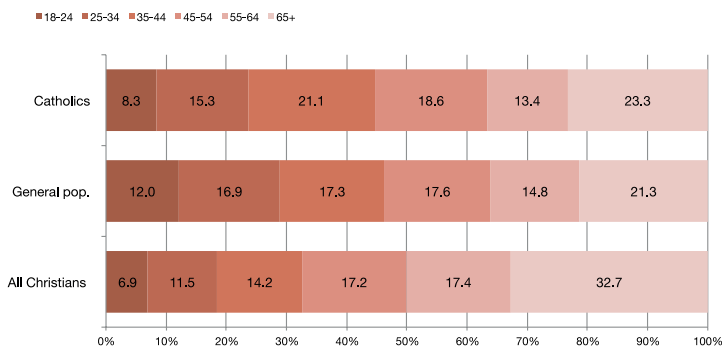
\*Office for National Statistics, mid-2014 estimate.

^ Based on percentages of overall adult population – 13.7% (cradle) and 8.3% (current) – derived from BSA 2012-14.

The above table presents estimates of the numbers of both 'current Catholics' (i.e., all those who now identify as Catholic) and 'cradle Catholics' (i.e., all those who say that they were brought up as Catholic) within the *adult* population of England and Wales, based on the same percentages given in the previous chapter.

These estimates of concrete numbers are primarily offered in order to help 'make real' some of the percentages given throughout this report as a whole. While Catholics comprising just over 8% of the population might not seem very significant, when applied across the whole of England and Wales, this accounts for several million individuals.

Fig. 2.2: Comparison of age profiles of Catholics, all Christians (including Catholics), and the general adult population of England and Wales



Data source: BSA 2012-14, Weighted data, based on 8530 valid cases, Percentages shown may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

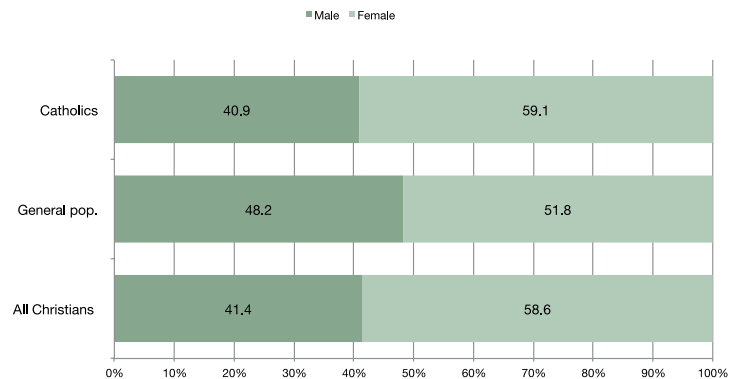
Fig. 2.2 shows the overall age profile of Catholics, and compares this to the age profiles of both the general English and Welsh population, and all those who identify as a Christian of one sort or another (a group which, of course, *includes* all Catholics too).

Roughly speaking, around a quarter of adult Catholics are between the ages of 18 to 35; around half between the ages of 35 to 64; and around a quarter aged 65 or over.

Viewed next to the population as a whole, the Catholic numbers for the youngest two age categories are comparatively low. That said, 35 to 44 year olds are overrepresented within the Catholic community. From the age of 45 upwards, the Catholic percentages broadly mirror those of the general population.

Catholics are, however, notably younger than Christians-in-general. Half of all English and Welsh Christians are over 55. Yet among Catholics (as with the general population) the over-55s account for just over a third. Whereas less than a third of all Christians come under the three youngest age brackets (ranging from 18 to 44), over two-fifths of Catholics do.

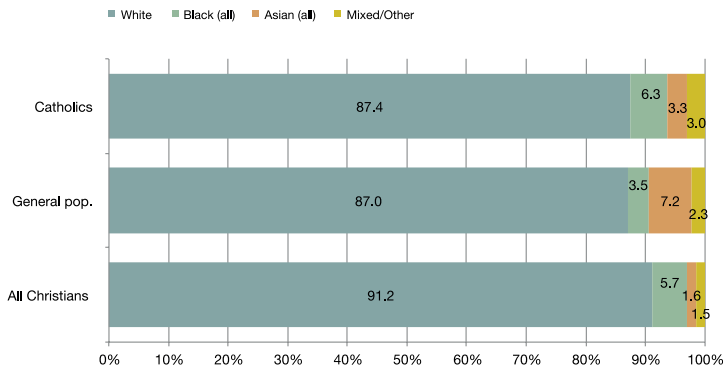
Fig. 2.3: Gender breakdown of Catholics, all Christians (including Catholics), and general adult population of England and Wales



Data source: BSA 2012-14, Weighted data, based on 8501 valid cases, Percentages shown may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

As fig. 2.3 makes plain, there are three Catholic women for every two Catholic men in England and Wales. This disparity is mirrored within the Christian population as a whole. The contrast to the general population, where the breakdown is roughly half and half, is clear.

Fig. 2.4: Race/ethnicity profiles of Catholics, all Christians (including Catholics), and general adult population of England and Wales



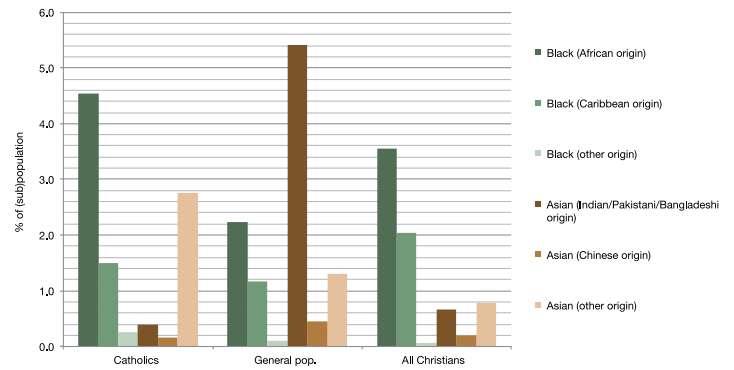
Data source: BSA 2012-14. Weighted data, based on 8488 valid cases. Percentages shown may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Fig. 2.4 presents data relating to race and/or ethnicity. The BSA dataset includes only a single 'White' category; no further breakdowns by ethnic or national background are possible. The BSA does, however, offer a small range of both 'Black' and 'Asian' categories. Here, these are grouped together into simply 'Black' and 'Asian'; fig. 2.5 gives a more detailed breakdown.

The Catholic population is predominantly White, closely in line with the general population as a whole. That said, it is likely that the BSA's non-variegated category masks significant diversity – quite possibly to a greater degree than in the general population – of national and ethnic background *within* the White Catholic population: Irish, Polish, Italian, Spanish, Lithuanian, etc. (Indeed, evidence from other national surveys confirms this supposition.)<sup>11</sup>

Blacks account for a greater proportion of both the Catholic, and general Christian, populations than they do of the English and Welsh population as a whole. The situation is, however, reversed among Asians. One in fourteen of the general population defines himself or herself as Asian. Among Catholics, the proportion is one in thirty; among all Christians, it is over one in sixty.

Fig. 2.5: Relative proportions of ethnic minorities among Catholics, all Christians (including Catholics), and general adult population of England and Wales



Data source: BSA 2012-14. Weighted data, based on 8488 valid cases.

The above graph takes the collated 'Black (all)' and 'Asian (all)' categories of fig. 2.4, and shows the full breakdown of the respective options. This demonstrates more clearly how the racial and ethnic profile of the Catholic community differs from the wider population of England and Wales, and indeed of the Christian population as a whole. (Though note the relatively small percentages being dealt with here.)

Most obvious, and unsurprising, is the much greater proportion of Asians of Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi origin within the general population (i.e., over 5%), when compared to both Catholics and Christians-in-general (less than 1% in both cases).

Blacks of African origin account for a disproportionate share of the Catholic community, as most strikingly do 'Asians (other)' - a category that would include those of Filipino and Vietnamese origin, among others.

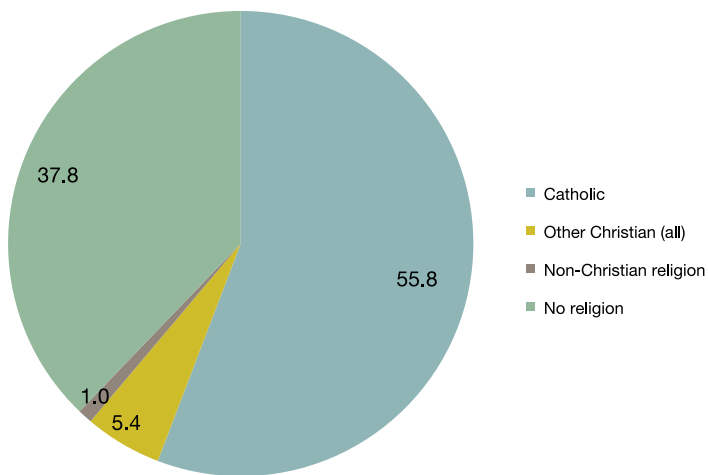
# 3. Retention and Conversion

In previous chapters, distinctions have sometimes been drawn between **current Catholics** (i.e., all those who now identify as Catholic, whether or not they were brought up as such; these are the primary subject of this report) and **cradle Catholics** (i.e., all those who say that they were brought up Catholic, whether or not they still identify as such). Both groups are, of course, of pastoral interest and concern to the Catholic community as a whole.

By combining BSA data on *both* religious upbringing *and* current affiliation, it is possible to identify what proportion of cradle Catholics still consider themselves to be Catholic (and, therefore, what proportion now consider themselves to be something else). Likewise, it is possible to identify what proportion of current Catholics were or were not brought up as Catholics (i.e., one can see what percentage of them are converts). The same things can also, of course, be discovered for other religious groups.

Accordingly, this chapter focuses on questions of *retention* (figs 3.1-4) and *conversion* (figs 3.5-7).<sup>14</sup> While, as ever, our primary focus here is on the Catholic data, comparisons with other denominations will be offered when useful or illuminating.

Fig. 3.1: Current religious affiliation of cradle Catholics in England and Wales



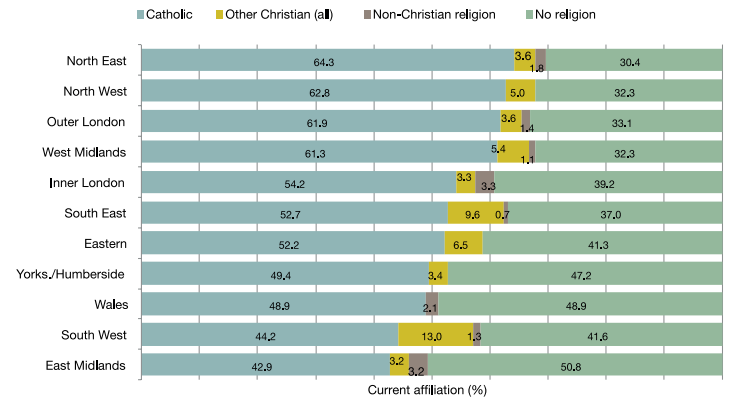
Data source: BSA 2012-14. Weighted data, based on 1160 valid cases. Questions asked: 'In what religion, if any, were you brought up?' and 'Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion?'. Percentages shown may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Fig. 3.1 shows that a little over half of those who were brought up Catholic in England and Wales still regard themselves as being Catholic. Or to put it another way, the Church has 'retained' some 56% of cradle Catholics into adulthood. Slightly over two in five English and Welsh cradle Catholics, meanwhile, are 'disaffiliates': i.e., they now identify as something other than Catholic.

A large majority of those who no longer identify as Catholic – and well over a third of all cradle Catholics – now claim to have 'no religion'. Among those who have adopted a different religious affiliation, most now have adopted a different Christian label. (NB: unlike in chapter 1, the 'Other Christian' category here includes Anglicans.)

The next three charts will a) present a regional breakdown of the above data (fig. 3.2); b) demonstrate how levels of Catholic retention have shifted over time (fig. 3.3); and c) compare current Catholic levels with those of several other major Christian groups (fig 3.4).

Fig. 3.2: Current religious affiliation of cradle Catholics by region

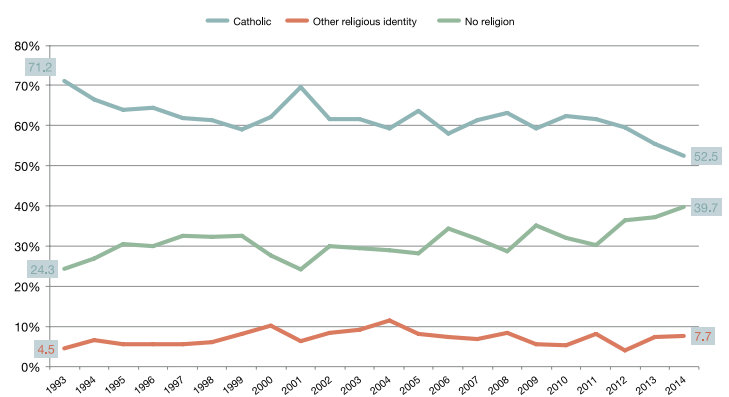


Data source: BSA 2012-14. Weighted data, Regional N ranges 47 (North East) and 239 (South West). Percentages shown may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

As with religious affiliation in general (see fig. 1.2), Catholic retention exhibits a notable degree of regional variation. For instance, while in the North East almost two-thirds of cradle Catholics still identify as such, in the East Midlands the proportion is closer to two out of every five.

In the North East, North West, Outer London, and the West Midlands, roughly three in every ten born-and-raised Catholics now regard themselves as having no religion. In the East Midlands, Wales, and Yorkshire and Humberside, it is around half.

Fig. 3.3: The changing religious affiliation of English and Welsh cradle Catholics over time, 1993-2014



Data source: BSA 1993-2014. Weighted data, Number of valid cases in each year ranges between 358(1993) and 547 (2006). Percentages shown may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

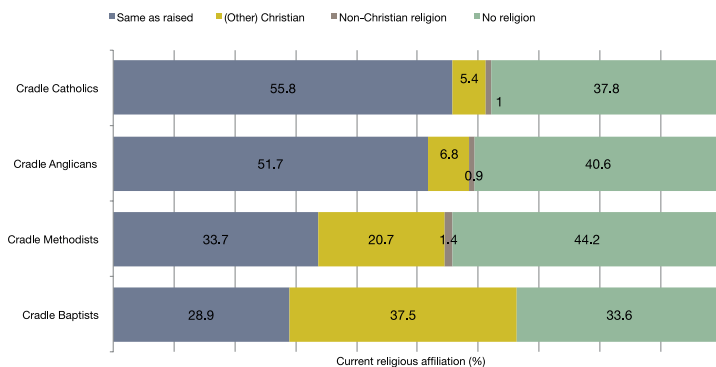
Fig. 3.3 shows the annual proportions of English and Welsh cradle Catholics who identify as a) Catholic, b) a non-Catholic religious affiliation (including all other Christian categories as well as non-Christian religions), or c) no religion.<sup>15</sup>

In 1993, seven out of every ten born-and-raised Catholics still identified as Catholics in adulthood. In 2014, the proportion was five in ten (i.e., a total fall of around 20 percentage points).

Conversely, in 1993, one in four cradle Catholics claimed no religious affiliation. In 2014, the proportion was two out of five (i.e., a total rise of around 15 percentage points).

Over the same period, the proportion of cradle Catholics who have come to affirm a different religious affiliation (in most cases, a Christian one) has also increased, albeit less dramatically: from 4.5% in 1993 to 7.7% in 2014.

Fig. 3.4: Current religious affiliation of those born-and-raised in selected Christian denominations in England and Wales



Data source: BSA 2012-2014. Weighted data. Number of valid cases in each group ranges between 113 (Cradle Baptists) and 3008 (Cradle Anglicans). Percentages shown may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Fig. 3.4 presents the Catholic retention figures (as shown in fig. 3.1) alongside those of three other major Christian denominations in England and Wales: Anglicans, Methodists, and Baptists.<sup>16</sup>

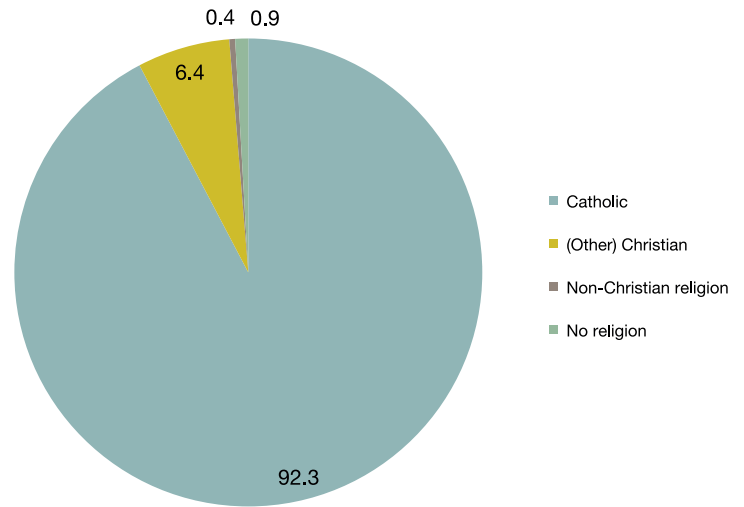
As before, the data are arranged to show the percentages of those brought up in a given group who a) have retained that identity into adulthood ('Same as raised'); b) now identify with a different Christian affiliation ('(Other) Christian'); c) now identify with a non-Christian religion ('Non-Christian religion'); and d) now identify as having no religion ('No religion'). Categories b), c), and d) therefore represent those who have *disaffiliated* away from their denomination of upbringing.

The chart shows notable variability across the denominations. Retention is slightly stronger among Catholics than Anglicans, although the differences are not large (equating to a difference of roughly one person in every twenty). Similar proportions of cradle Catholics and cradle Anglicans also now identify as other kinds of Christian, members of non-Christian religions, and as having no religion.

Retention levels among cradle Baptists and cradle Methodists are much lower, at around one in three. Importantly, however, both denominations produce much larger numbers of adult affiliates of other Christian denominations: one in five cradle Methodists, and almost two in five cradle Baptists (compared to a rate of just one in twenty among cradle Catholics or cradle Anglicans).

The cradle Baptist subsample is especially interesting, in fact. Cradle Baptists have the lowest retention rate out of our four groups (i.e., the lowest proportion of those born-and-raised in a denomination who identify as belonging to that denomination in adulthood). Nevertheless, they also have the largest proportion of adult Christians (whether Baptist or another kind), and the lowest proportion of adult nones.

Fig. 3.5: Religious upbringing of current Catholics in England and Wales



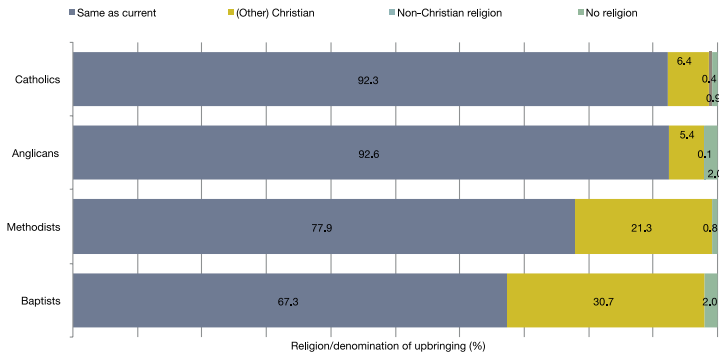
Data source: BSA 2012-14. Weighted data, based on 701 valid cases. Questions asked: 'In what religion, if any, were you brought up?' and 'Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion?'. Percentages shown may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Whereas figs 3.1-4, in various ways, break down upbringing in terms of current affiliation, fig. 3.5 does just the opposite: it shows us what those who currently identify as being Catholic were brought up as. Most significantly, this allows us to see what proportion of English and Welsh Catholics are converts.

The great majority – 92.3% – of current Catholics were raised Catholic. Conversely, somewhat fewer than one in ten current Catholics are converts (i.e., now consider themselves to be Catholic, despite not having been brought up as Catholic). Of these, the majority were brought up as some other kind of Christian. (In fact, around 4% of current Catholics are cradle Anglicans).

One out of every hundred English and Welsh Catholics say that they were brought up with no religion. One in every two hundred say that they were brought up within a non-Christian religion.

Fig. 3.6: Upbringings of current affiliates of selected Christian denominations in England and Wales



Data source: BSA 2012-2014. Weighted data. Number of valid cases in each group ranges between 49 (Baptists) and 1681 (Anglicans). Percentages shown may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Like fig. 3.4, fig. 3.6 presents Catholic data that has already been given (in this case, in fig. 3.5) alongside analogous data from three other Christian denominations in England and Wales: Anglicans, Methodists, and Baptists.<sup>17</sup>

The chart therefore shows what proportion of current affiliates for each denomination were brought up in a) the same denomination with which they now identify; b) a different Christian denomination; c) a non-Christian religion; and d) no religion. Evidently, those in categories b), c), and d) count are **converts**, of one sort or another, to their current denomination.

As with retention (see fig. 3.4), the relative Catholic and Anglican breakdowns are broadly similar. Like Catholics, over one in ten Anglicans were raised as such. Of those who weren't, most are converts from a different Christian group. (Incidentally, about 1% of current Anglicans were raised as Catholics.) Also in common with Catholics, there are comparatively few Anglicans from a nonreligious background, and even fewer from a non-Christian religious one. These categories respectively account for just one in fifty, and one in a thousand, current Anglicans.<sup>18</sup>

The Baptist and Methodist communities, meanwhile, are made up of significantly greater proportions of converts. Roughly one in five current Methodists, and one in three current Baptists, were not raised as such. This difference is, however, wholly made up from attracting larger proportions of those brought up within different Christian denominations. Our BSA 2012-14 dataset includes no Baptists or Methodists who were brought up in non-Christian religions.<sup>19</sup> Around one in fifty Baptists, and one in a hundred Methodists, was brought up with no religion - the same proportions as for Anglicans and Catholics respectively.

Fig. 3.7: Ratio of disaffiliates to converts in selected Christian denominations in England and Wales

Disaffiliates per convert	
Catholics	10
Anglicans	12
Methodists	7
Baptists	4

Data: BSA 2012-14. Weighted data. Number of valid cases in each group range from 49 (Baptists) to 1681 (Anglicans).

As was clear from fig. 1.5, a greater proportion of the English and Welsh population were brought up Catholic than now identify as Catholic. The same is true of Anglicans, Methodists, and Baptists (and indeed, of almost all Christian denominations). Figs 3.4 and 3.6, respectively, showed the proportions of those brought up in a given denomination who now identify with that denomination (or not), and the proportions of those who currently identify with a given denomination who were brought up as such (or not).

Fig. 3.7 now shows the ratio of **disaffiliates** (i.e., those brought up as X who no longer identify as X) to **converts** (i.e., those who now identify as X, who were brought up as something other than X).

Thus, for every one Catholic convert in England and Wales, ten cradle Catholics no longer identify as Catholics. For every one convert to Anglicanism, twelve cradle Anglicans now no longer identify as Anglicans.

The Baptist and Methodist ratios are somewhat better: four and seven disaffiliates for every one convert, respectively.

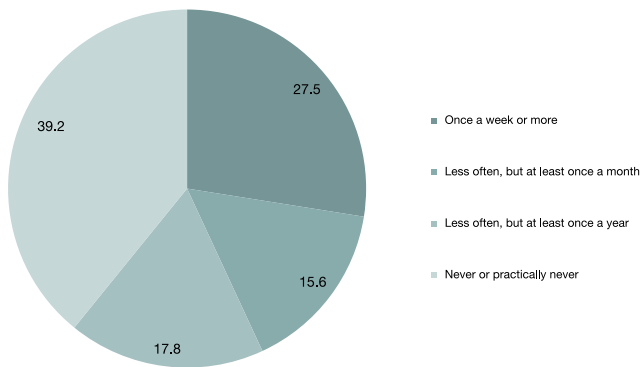
We have already seen that a large proportion of cradle Christians end up with no religion (see fig. 3.4), but very few 'cradle nones' end up with a Christian affiliation (fig. 3.6). Unsurprisingly, therefore, these two facts go a long way towards explaining the growth of 'no religion' as a share of the English and Welsh population over the past several decades (see fig. 1.3).

# 4. Church Attendance

The final chapter of this report focuses on (self-reported)<sup>20</sup> church attendance. Helpfully on this score, the BSA asks its respondents: 'Apart from such special occasions as weddings, funerals and baptisms, how often nowadays do you attend services or meetings connected with your religion?'

As throughout this report, our primary interest here is with Catholics. This will principally concern those who currently identify as Catholics: in terms of overall attendance rates (fig. 4.1); and breakdowns according to sex and age (figs 4.4-6), and ethnicity (fig. 4.7.) We will also, however, look at the current church attendance of all cradle Catholics (fig. 4.2), as well as compare the attendance rates of current Catholics with members of selected other denominations (fig. 4.3).

Fig. 4.1: Frequency of church attendance by Catholics in England and Wales



Data source: BSA 2012-14. Weighted data, based on 701 valid cases. Question asked: 'Apart from such special occasions as weddings, funerals and baptisms, how often nowadays do you attend services or meetings connected with your religion?'. Percentages shown may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

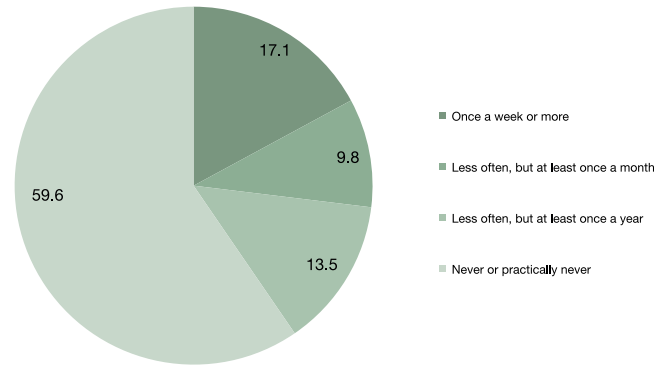
The above pie chart divides the (self-reported) church attendance of the Catholic population of England and Wales into four categories.<sup>21</sup> This fourfold division will form the basis of all the charts presented in this chapter.

Around a quarter of English and Welsh Catholics say that they attend church on a weekly (or more) basis. This may be taken as a reasonable proxy for fulfilment of the Catholic obligation to attend Mass on a Sunday (cf. *Catechism* 2180).

Slightly over one in six says that they attend less often, but at least monthly (NB: this category includes those in the original dataset who specify that they attend fortnightly). A roughly similar proportion say that they attend less often than monthly, but at least once a year.

Two in every five Catholics in England and Wales say that they attend rarely or never (NB: this includes those in the original dataset who say that they attend less than annually).

Fig. 4.2: Frequency of church attendance by cradle Catholics in England and Wales



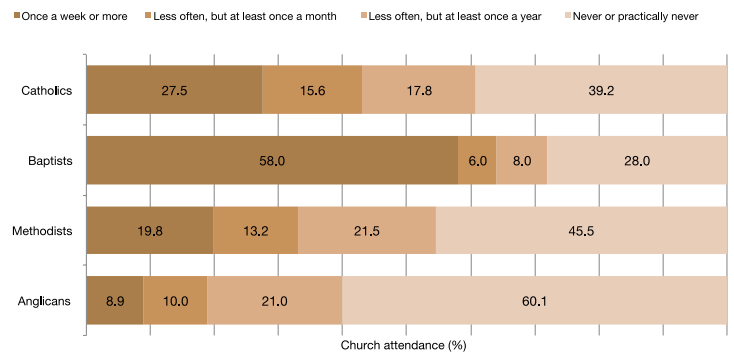
Data source: BSA 2012-14. Weighted data, based on 1140 valid cases. Question asked: 'Apart from such special occasions as weddings, funerals and baptisms, how often nowadays do you attend services or meetings connected with your religion?'. Percentages shown may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Fig. 4.2 shows the current attendance of all those who were brought up as Catholics. It is important to note that these figures include a significant number of those who now affirm no religion (who make up fully 37.8% of all cradle Catholics in England and Wales, as noted in fig. 3.1): presumably, these would have interpreted the question's mention of 'services or meetings connected with your religion' as referring to their religion of upbringing (i.e., to Catholic Mass). The chart also, however, includes the attendance of cradle Catholics who now identify with a different religious affiliation (accounting for 6.4% of all cradle Catholics, as also noted in fig. 3.1): these would have answered the question according to their new affiliation. That is to say, the church attendance statistics presented in fig. 4.2 include a small minority attending non-Catholic religious services.

The most obvious feature of the pie chart is this: three out of every five cradle Catholics now never or practically never attend religious services. Meanwhile, somewhat under two in five attends religious services once a week or more. (For the reasons mentioned above, most but by no means all of these will be attending Catholic services.)<sup>22</sup> These are the two largest categories.

One in ten cradle Catholics attends, not weekly, but at least once a month; roughly one in seven attends less-than-monthly but at least annually.

Fig. 4.3: Frequency of church attendance within selected Christian denominations in England and Wales



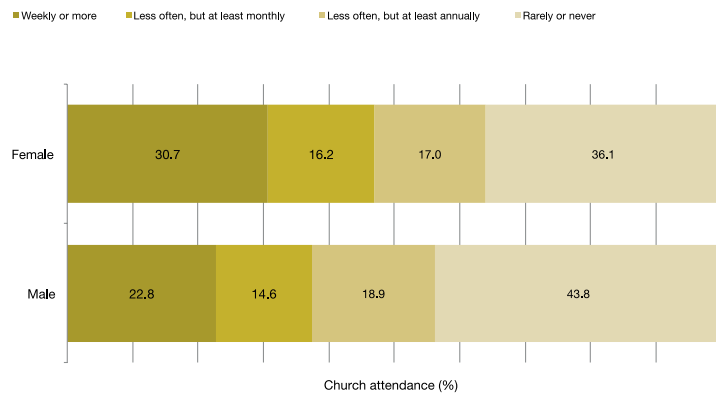
Data source: BSA 2012-14. Weighted data. Number of valid cases in each group ranges between 50 (Baptists) and 1667 (Anglicans). Question asked: 'Apart from such special occasions as weddings, funerals and baptisms, how often nowadays do you attend services or meetings connected with your religion?'. Percentages shown may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

As with previous comparisons (figs 3.4, 3.6), the above chart displays the Catholic levels of church attendance alongside those from selected other Christian denominations. As before, there are notable degrees of variation.

Most striking here is the high level of practice among self-ascribing Baptists, three in five of whom say that they attend religious services at least once a week. This rate is double the proportion of Catholic, three times the proportion of Methodist, and over six times the proportion of Anglican, weekly-or-more attenders.

Three in five Anglicans rarely (i.e., less than annually) or never attend religious services, outside of special occasions. That said, non-attenders are the largest, or modal, category within both the Catholic and Methodist categories too. Only the Baptists have a greater proportion of weekly practisers than they do non-practisers.

Fig. 4.4: Gender breakdown of Catholic church attendance within England and Wales



Data source: BSA 2012-14, Weighted data, based on 688 valid cases, Percentages shown may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

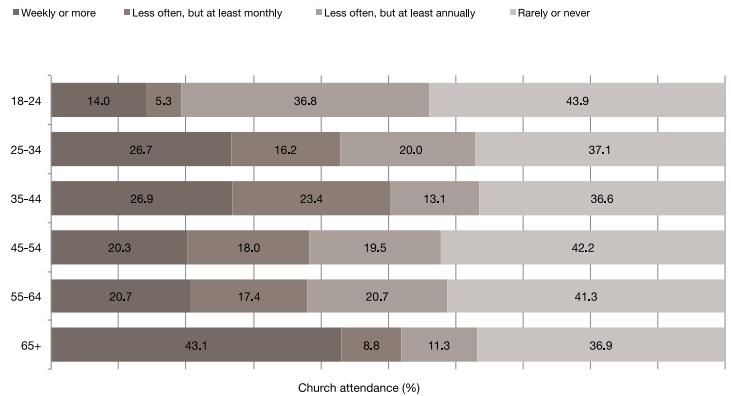
Fig. 4.4 shows frequency of church attendance among English and Welsh Catholics according to sex. We have already seen (i.e., fig. 2.4) that women account for a greater proportion of current Catholics than do men – and the same is true among Christians generally. Here we see also that Catholic women are more likely to practise, and to practise more frequently, than are Catholic men.

Two fifths of Catholic men rarely or never attend Mass, outside of special occasions. Among Catholic women the proportion is closer to one third.

The same holds true at the opposite end of the spectrum. Three in ten Catholic women say that they attend at least weekly. This compares to two in ten Catholic men.

Our two intermediate categories – i.e., those attending ‘less than weekly, but at least monthly’, and ‘less than monthly, but at least annually’ respectively – account for almost exactly the same proportions of both women and men. A third of each gender comes under these categories.

Fig. 4.5: Age breakdown of Catholic church attendance within England and Wales



In fig. 2.2 we saw the age breakdown of the Catholic population of England and Wales. Here we see this age profile further broken down in terms of church attendance.

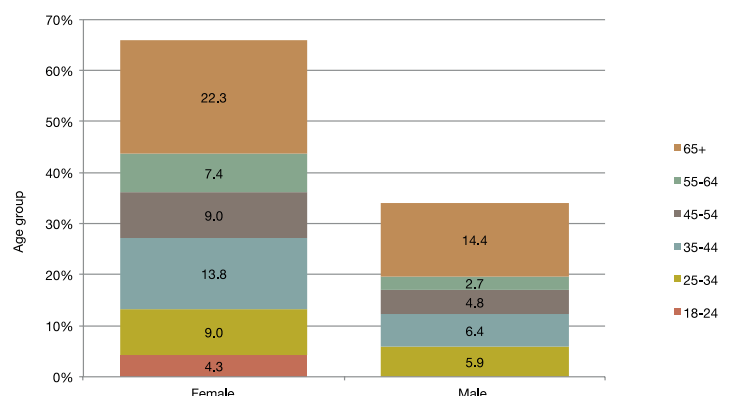
Across each of our six age categories, the proportion of those attending rarely or never is broadly consistent: there is only 7 percentage points difference between the highest (18-24, with 43.9%) and lowest (over 65s, with 36.9%). Elsewhere, however, variability between the age groups is rather more marked.

The over 65s are, by far, the most practising age group: two in every five say that they attend church weekly or more; over half practise at least monthly. Conversely, 18 to 24 year-olds are, by far, the least practising: one in seven attends at least weekly; one in every five goes to church at least monthly.

Religious practice does not, however, increase steadily by age cohort. A quarter of both 25-34s (all ‘youth’ according to the common Catholic definition<sup>23</sup>) and 35-44s say that they attend weekly or more. Furthermore, two in five of the former, and half of the latter, attend at least monthly.

Both age groupings are thus markedly more practising than the next two older groups. One in five of both 45-54s and 55-64s attend church weekly or more – a proportion that increases to just under two in five when one includes all those attending less often, but at least monthly.

Fig. 4.6: Catholics who attend church ‘once a week or more’ in England and Wales, by age and sex



Data source: BSA 2012-14, Weighted data, based on 188 valid cases, Percentages shown may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

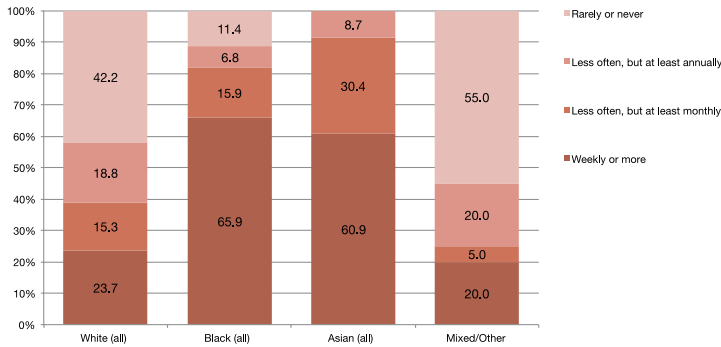
Fig. 4.5 shows the age and sex profile of Catholics in England and Wales who say that they attend church once a week or more.<sup>24</sup> That is to say, it combines the ‘weekly or more’ data presented in figs 4.4 and 4.5.

The graph is revealing in several ways. For a start, it shows that women account for two-thirds, and therefore men only a third, of all weekly-or-more Mass-goers. Moreover, women outnumber men in every single age category.

Women aged 65+ alone make up almost a quarter of all weekly-or-more church attenders among English and Welsh Catholics. Overall, the over-65s (male and female combined) make up just under half – i.e. 46.7% – of all such regular attenders.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, the BSA 2012-4 sample included no Catholic men aged 18-24 who said that they attend church at least weekly.<sup>25</sup> Women aged 18-34 (i.e., in the two youngest age categories), however, make up around one in eight of all weekly-or-more Mass-goers. Combining these with the 5.9% of all such attenders who are men aged between 25 and 34, under-35s of both sexes account for around one-in-five of all ‘weekly-or-mores’.

Fig. 4.7: Frequency of church attendance among Catholics in England and Wales, by race/ethnicity



Data source: BSA 2012-14, Weighted data. Number of valid cases in each group ranges between 600 (White (all)) and 20 (Mixed/Other). Percentages shown may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

In previous graphs, we have shown the relative frequencies of church attendance across the different genders (fig. 4.4) and age groups (fig. 4.5) of English and Welsh Catholics. Fig. 4.7 presents a similar breakdown according to the racial and ethnic make-up of English and Welsh Catholics. (Please see figs 2.4 and 2.5 for the relative proportions of each category within the Catholic population as a whole. As was noted earlier, the BSA datasets do not distinguish between different types of ‘White’ respondents.)

Most obviously, church attendance is strongest among Blacks and Asians. Two-thirds of Black Catholics, and three-fifths of Asian Catholics, say that they attend church at least weekly. When one adds all those who say that they attend at least monthly, the proportions rise to eight out of ten Black Catholics, and nine out of ten Asian Catholics.

This contrasts with those in both the White (who, of course, account for the great majority of the overall Catholic population: see fig. 2.4) and Mixed/Other categories. Only a quarter of the former, and a fifth of the latter, say that they attend Mass at least once a week. In both groups, a large proportion attends church rarely or never: two-fifths of White Catholics, and over half of those who identified with the Mixed/Other category. This compares to just one in ten Black Catholics. There were no Asian Catholics in the sample who said that they attended church so infrequently.<sup>26</sup>



# Conclusion

By way of conclusion, we wish simply to reiterate two things stated in the Introduction:

- The purpose of this report is very simple: it aims to provide a set of reliable, up-to-date statistics on the overall state of Catholicism in England and Wales.
- If this report works as we hope it will, then the foregoing pages should largely speak for themselves.

This report, in common with the Benedict XVI Centre's **Catholic Research Forum (CRF)** initiative as a whole, has an avowedly practical, pastoral end. We hope that the data presented here will provoke interest, thought, and discussion. (And not just within the Catholic community: there is, we believe, much that is noteworthy here for members of other denominations and religions, and indeed for the – as we have demonstrated – large and growing numbers of people who affirm no religion.)

Certainly, there are many areas and issues highlighted here that would profit from further, deeper investigation. The report also raises implicit questions concerning both the causes of, and possible responses to, some of the facts and trends and identified in the preceding pages. Such matters, however, go beyond the remit of this particular report: we have restricted our commentary to clarifying and explaining the data themselves.

Above all, this maiden CRF report is being published – for free – to serve as a resource for others. We trust that it proves an interesting and useful one, and look forward to producing many more.

# Technical Note

Each year the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey, administered by NatCen Social Research, conducts face-to-face interviews with over 3000 British adults, selected by random probability sampling. Those invited to participate are contacted by post twice in advance of the interviewer's visit. The response rate, typically in the region of 50%, is high. With weighting, the BSA dataset is nationally representative across a range of key demographic variables (e.g., region, age, and sex). It is accordingly held in high regard by sociologists and statisticians.

The full 2014 dataset was released to researchers in October 2015, and is thus the most up-to-date available for this report. Most of the analyses herein are based, however, on a combined ('pooled') dataset, comprising the 2012, 2013, and 2014 waves. This has been done for two reasons. Firstly, to increase the overall sample size (including, of course, the number of Catholics). This is particularly important when one is breaking down the data into more and more precise subgroups (e.g., 'cradle Catholics, who still identify as Catholic, and who live in the East Midlands'). Secondly, averaging out one's data over three years guard against the risk of undue credence being accorded to an anomalous year.

Since the focus of this report is the Catholic Church in England and Wales, data for Scotland (which is of course included in the BSA dataset) have been excluded from the analysis.

# Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For details of other projects, please see [www.stmarys.ac.uk/benedict-xvi/catholic-research-forum.htm](http://www.stmarys.ac.uk/benedict-xvi/catholic-research-forum.htm).

<sup>2</sup> A notable exception here are the statistics on abuse allegations collected by the Catholic Safeguarding Advisory Service (CSAS), and published each year in the Annual Report of the National Catholic Safeguarding Commission (NCSC). For an analysis of the first decade's worth of these data, please see: S. Bullivant, '10 Years of Allegation Statistics, 2003-2012', *National Catholic Safeguarding Commission: Annual Report 2013/14*, 38-41.

<sup>3</sup> NB: This is a notably smaller proportion of the population identifying as Christian than recorded by the national Censuses of both 2001 and 2011. The discrepancy between the Census and a large number of other social surveys (which generally concur with the BSA's lower figures) has been much discussed. While this is not the place to delve too deeply into technical issues, it is worth noting that the Census' religion question ('What is your religion?') is rather different to the BSA's ('What religion, if any, do you consider yourself belonging to?'). On this subject, see: D. Voas and S. Bruce, 'Research Note: The 2001 Census and Christian Identification in Britain', *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 19/1 (2004), 23-8; and A. Day, *Believing in Belonging: Belief and Social Identity in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> This category is, however, an awkward one. For example, there are strong grounds for thinking that it includes both those with only a relatively weak sense of Christian belonging (i.e., they have no specific attachment to any Christian community, but still identify as Christian, perhaps for cultural or national reasons), and often highly committed members of avowedly 'non-denominational' churches. For our purposes here, therefore, it makes little sense to treat 'Christian – no denomination' as a coherent grouping alongside Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, and Baptists. That said, a much more detailed analysis of this category than is possible within the scope of the present work would indeed be very valuable – not least since it includes so large a minority of the English and Welsh population (indeed, larger than the Catholic share).

On the problems of catch-all 'no denomination' categories, and an attempt to subdivide similar ones in American datasets, see B. Steensland et al., 'The Measure of American Religion: Toward Improving the State of the Art', *Social Forces* 79/1 (2000), 291-318.

<sup>5</sup> For details on the various subdivisions within England, please visit: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/geography/beginner-s-guide/administrative/england/regions-former-gors/index.html> (last accessed on 25 November 2015).

<sup>6</sup> On this point, it is perhaps worth comparing some of the case-studies assembled in D. Goodhew (ed.), *Church Growth in Britain: 1980 to the Present* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> That said, it could be argued that the startpoint of the graph, 1983, was an anomalously low year for Catholic affiliation: after it, every year for which we have data up until 1989 records the Catholic population at just over 10%.

<sup>8</sup> Of course, and as with all such survey questions we are dealing with in this report, it is up to the individual respondent to interpret what is meant to be 'brought up', or not, in a religious tradition.

<sup>9</sup> ONS datasets available online at: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/reference-tables.html?edition=tcm%3A77-368259> (last visited 25 November 2015)

<sup>10</sup> Not surprisingly, this much-documented 'gender gap' (which extends far beyond England and Wales, and indeed, beyond Christianity) has been the focus of a great deal of scholarly attention. See, for example, M. Trzebiatowska and S. Bruce, *Why are Women More Religious than Men?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> For example, data from the 2014 British Election Study suggest that 91% of the British population (i.e., including Scotland) identify as White, with 88% claiming to be 'White British', and 3.5% 'Any other White background'. However, while 91% of British Catholics also identify as White, 82% affirm 'White British, and 9% 'Any other White background'. I am very grateful to Dr Ben Clements for supplying me with these figures.

<sup>12</sup> Note, however, the small percentages being dealt with here. Given likely margins of error, due caution should be exercised in placing too much weight on slight differences (especially in terms of tenths of a percent).

<sup>13</sup> This is especially so since, according to the Church's formal teaching, even those who no longer regard themselves as Catholics remain part of the Church by virtue of their baptism: e.g., '*Baptism incorporates us into the Church*'; 'Baptism seals the Christian with the indelible spiritual mark (*character*) of his belonging to Christ. No sin can erase this mark, even if sin prevents Baptism from bearing the fruits of salvation' (*Catechism* 1267, 1272). This fact does not, of course, obviate the empirical one that significant numbers of cradle Catholics do no longer consider themselves to be Catholic in any meaningful sense.

<sup>14</sup> For a much fuller discussion of these topics, see: S. Bullivant, 'Catholic Disaffiliation in Britain: A Quantitative Overview', *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 31/2 (2016), 1-17.

<sup>15</sup> NB: The numbers given at the extreme right of the graph are for 2014 only; these differ from the percentages given in fig. 3.1, which are based on the mean of three years' data: 2012, 2013, and 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Obviously, these are not intended to exhaust the full range of denominations present in England and Wales. The four here have been selected on grounds of both current numbers and historical importance. (On the problem of the 'Christian - no denomination' category, please see endnote 4, above.)

<sup>17</sup> See previous endnote.

<sup>18</sup> Admittedly, some caveats must be made with such low proportions. The ratio of 'one in thousand' is based on there being 2 people from a non-Christian religious background out of our sample of 1681 current Anglicans: that is, 0.12% of the total. A single extra person would give us 0.18%, which, when rounded up to 0.2%, would give a ratio of 'one in five hundred': a *seemingly* considerable difference.

<sup>19</sup> Which is not, of course, to say that there are no such Baptists or Methodists in the whole of England and Wales. Their numbers are, however, presumably so small that none have been 'picked up' within the BSA sample.

<sup>20</sup> There is a significant body of research literature questioning the reliability of self-reported measures of religious practice, some of it Catholic-specific. 'Religious over-reporting' is a well-documented phenomenon, at least in America. See, for example, C. K. Hadaway et al., 'What the Polls Don't Show: A Closer Look at U.S. Church Attendance', *American Sociological Review* 58/6 (1993), 741-52; M. Chaves and J. C. Cavendish, 'More Evidence on U.S. Catholic Church Attendance', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 33/4 (1994), 376-81.

The data presented here should, therefore, be interpreted with a degree of caution. The extent to which they reliably correlate, or not, with other kinds of data (e.g., direct Mass attendance counts) would be a very fruitful area of inquiry – albeit one that is beyond the scope of the present study.

<sup>21</sup> This is a simplification of the BSA's own ninefold division of categories. For reference, the BSA's original categories and the ones employed in the present report, are given below:

BSA	Current report
'Once a week or more'	<i>Once a week or more</i>
'Less often but at least once in two weeks'	<i>Less often, but at least once a month</i>
'Less often but at least once a month'	
'Less often but at least twice a year'	<i>Less often, but at least once a year</i>
'Less often but at least once a year'	
'Less often than once a year'	<i>Never or practically never</i>
'Never or practically never'	
'Varies too much to say'	<i>(Excluded)</i>

<sup>22</sup> There is strong evidence, also derived from BSA data, to suggest that Catholic disaffiliates who now identify with a different religion or denomination (as opposed to none) tend to display high levels of religious practice. See S. Bullivant, 'Catholic Disaffiliation in Britain: A Quantitative Overview', *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 31/2 (2016), 1-17.

<sup>23</sup> For example, the biannual World Youth Day gatherings, initiated by Pope St John Paul II, are explicitly targeted at those aged 16 to 35.

<sup>24</sup> Of course, this does not necessarily equate to the profile of those attending Mass on any given Sunday (which will include all the weekly-or-mores as well as varying proportions of those who attend less regularly).

<sup>25</sup> Obviously, this does not mean that there are no such people in England and Wales (in fact, I know some myself). However – as previously noted in endnote 19, above – it does testify to their relative paucity within the population as a whole: there are too few of them, that is, to reliably show up in sample like this, even with three years' worth of pooled data. (It is worth pointing out that the BSA is nationally representative in terms of both age and sex.)

<sup>26</sup> See above endnote.

<sup>27</sup> For full sampling, weighting, and other methodological details, see: NatCen Social Research, *British Social Attitudes 2014 User Guide*, available online at [http://doc.ukdataservice.ac.uk/doc/7809/mrdoc/pdf/bsa2014\\_userguide.pdf](http://doc.ukdataservice.ac.uk/doc/7809/mrdoc/pdf/bsa2014_userguide.pdf) (last accessed on 20th November).





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