Contemporary Catholicism in England and Wales:
A statistical report based on recent British Social Attitudes survey data

Stephen Bullivant
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. Anweck 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, Karen 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. 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 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

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 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

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. 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.
During this time, the most noticeable change is in the numbers of people affirming Anglicanism: from almost one in two in 1982, 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. 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.

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

![Pie chart showing religious upbringing percentages: Anglican 35.4%, Catholic 19.0%, Other Christian 8.2%, Non-Christian religion 23.7%, No religion 13.7%]

Fig. 1.4 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.

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).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>2014 estimate (millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total adult (i.e., 18+) population*</td>
<td>45.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Catholics*</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cradle Catholics*</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Office for National Statistics, mid-2014 estimate. NB: All figures rounded to nearest 100,000.

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 total population of England and Wales, this accounts for several million individuals.

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 whole of England and Wales. From the age of 45 upwards, the Catholic percentages broadly mirror those of the general population.

The difference is largest for the Anglicans: over a third of the English and Welsh population who a) were raised in a specific religious or non-religious setting (i.e., light column), and b) who now identify with that background (i.e., dark 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 with that background. 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 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.

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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 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.

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.)

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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, West Midlands, and Yorkshire and Humberside, it is around half.
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 presents the Catholic retention figures (as shown in fig. 3.1) of those born-and-raised in selected Christian denominations in England and Wales and-raised 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.

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.17 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 great majority – 92.3% – of current Catholics were raised Catholic. Conversely, somewhat fewer than one in ten current Anglicans 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 with no religion. One in every twenty say that they were brought up with no religion. One in every two thousand say that they were brought up with no religion. One in every ten thousand say that they were brought up with 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.

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 (i.e., those who now identify as X, who were brought up as X who no longer identify as X) to (i.e., those who now identify as X, who were brought up as something other than X). The Baptist and Methodist ratios are somewhat better: four and seven disaffiliates for every one convert, respectively.

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

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) 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.18

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 religious one. Categories b), c), and d) therefore represent those who have disaffiliated away from their denomination of upbringing.

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) are converts, of one sort or another, to their current denomination.

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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 (i.e., those who now identify as X, who were brought up as X who no longer identify as X), and the proportions of those who currently identify with a given denomination who were brought up as such (i.e., those who now identify as X, who were brought up as something other than X). The Baptist and Methodist ratios are somewhat better: four and seven disaffiliates for every one convert, respectively.

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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 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**

The above pie chart divides the self-reported church attendance of the Catholic population of England and Wales into four categories.21 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 fulfillment of the Catholic obligation to attend Mass on a Sunday (cf. Catechism 2180).

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 attend 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.22 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.

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. 4.2: Frequency of church attendance by cradle Catholics in 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 (16-24, 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 definition23) 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 just to under two in five when one includes all those attending less often, but at least monthly.

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

The same holds true at the opposite end of the spectrum. Three in ten Catholic women the proportion is closer to one third.

Two-fifths of Catholic men rarely or never attend Mass, outside of special occasions. Among Catholic women the proportion is lower than this.

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.

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

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

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

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 and 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 guards 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.
1. For details of other projects, please see www.stmarys.ac.uk/benedict-xvi/catholic-research-forum.htm.


3. 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 concern those with the BSAs (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. Voss and S. Bruce, ‘Research Note: The 2001 Census and Christian Identification in Britain,’ Journal of Contemporary Religion 16/1 (2001), 23-8; and A. Day, Believing in Belonging: Belief and Social Identity in the Modern World (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

4. 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 accidently ‘no-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 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. Staniland et al., ‘The Measures of American Religion: Toward Improving the State of the Art’, Social Forces 79/1 (2000), 291-318.


7. That said, it could be argued that the startpoint of the graph, 1980, 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%.

8. 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.

9. ONS datasets available online at: http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.htm?

10. 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. Trubowitzeska and S. Bruce, ‘Why are Women More Religious than Men?’ Oxford University Press, 2012.

11. For example, from data the 2014 British Election Study suggest that 91% of the British population (i.e., including Scotland) identify as White, with 8% claiming to be ‘White British’, and 5% ‘Any other White Background’. However, while 91% of British Catholics also identify as White, 82% afirm ‘White British’, and 9% ‘Any other White background’ I am very grateful to Dr Ben Clemonte for supplying me with these figures.

12. 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 tens of a percent). This is especially so, 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 it 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.

13. 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.

14. 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.

15. 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.)

16. See previous endnote.

17. 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 1861 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.

18. It 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.


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

21. This is a simplification of the BSA’s own triartmental division of categories. For reference, the BSAs original categories and the ones employed in the present report, are given below:

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

22. 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.

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

24. 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).

25. 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 these years’ worth of pooled data. It is worth pointing out that the BSA is nationally representative in terms of both age and sex.

26. See above endnote.
