

Census Shock!

What shock?

On 29th November 2022, BBC reporters Rachel Russell and Harry Farley published an article under the screamer: ‘Less than half of England and Wales population Christian, Census 2021 shows’.¹

Well, in my case the screamer worked – it certainly caught my attention. More, it moved me to write this brief article in reply.

An appalling ignorance – an appalling, fearful delusion – lies (how apt a word!) at the heart of all this. That’s the real sadness – sadness, please note, not shock. So serious is this delusion, so far-reaching are its consequences, I publish this piece hoping to un-delude as many as possible.

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The number of Christians in England and Wales in 2021 was just less than thirty million. And that was supposed to be a shock!

Not so! If only! The shock would have been to learn that there really were thirty million Christians in England and Wales! The real sadness – sadness, not shock, I say again – is that anybody – millions, in fact – are deluded enough to have such a woolly, wrong-headed notion of what a ‘Christian’ is!

And this matters! Eternal issues hang on it.

How do people get into this state? For a start, instead of consulting the maker’s manual, men have come up with their own definition, or blindly accepted the definition concocted by others. How foolish!

When I want to know how something works, or what to do when something goes wrong with some gadget or other – a warning

¹ BBC News website 29th Nov. 2022.

light comes on, whatever – I consult the handbook. Odd though it might seem, I work on the peculiar principle that the manufacturer ought to know how his product works, that he has spelled out what I need to know about the apparatus, and how to use it. Am I unique in this? Do medical practitioners not consult the pharmacopeia? Do court officials not consult legal precedents and laws enacted by Parliament? Or do they make it up as they go along? Do they stick a wetted finger in the air, and lemming-like follow the crowd over the precipice?

It's all to do with this word 'Christian'.

The great essential, surely, is to find out what the Bible means by 'Christian'. Now it may surprise some to learn that although the word 'Christian' is used in the Bible, it isn't used much.

It first saw the light of day, probably as a derogatory nickname or dismissive label stuck on believers by their enemies:

In Antioch the disciples were first called Christians (Acts 11:26).

Two things stand out: *First*, the disciples did not define themselves with the name – with any name, as far as I can tell; but that was how their enemies tagged them: 'Christians'. *Secondly*, it is clear that the outstanding thing about believers, as far as their enemies were concerned, was their connection with Christ.

The second scriptural use of the word is in Agrippa's dismissive retort to Paul:

In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian? (Acts 26:28)

The third time (and the only time by an apostle) is in Peter's first letter:

If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? (1 Pet. 4:16-17).

This unique reference must serve as the main source for our understanding of what a Christian is. Clearly, in those days, being known as a ‘Christian’ would mark you out as godly, different from the world, separated from pagan culture and its idols, and – far from it being a socially-acceptable tag – being known as a ‘Christian’ would have spelled trouble for you, and trouble with a capital T.

But with the invention of Christendom, things changed. And how! Since that time, use of ‘Christian’ has – like Topsy – mushroomed,² ‘Christian’ being larded over with ever-thickening layers of confusion, distortion and downright error, all as direct consequence of Christendom. Christendom? That political-religious corporation brought into existence by the shenanigans of the Fathers in cahoots with the Roman emperors, Constantine and Theodosius. The tortuous manoeuvrings of these politicians, writers, teachers, theologians, preachers and opinion-formers produced the monstrosity of Christendom, leading to the unscriptural notions of belonging to a Christian country, State religion, clericalism, priestcraft, sacramentalism and sacerdotalism, infant baptism and infant regeneration, church buildings, sacred space, church attendance, worship services, and so on.³ Churchianity and Christendom-Christians had been born. Christendom lives and thrives – what an oxymoron – to this day.

Listen to the sort of nonsense which Christendom has spawned and which people trot out as their definition of being a Christian. One of these might be yours:

‘I was born in, and belong to, a Christian country’.

‘My parents were Christians and I was christened as an infant, the minister duly pronouncing I was regenerate, a child of God, under

² The slave girl, when asked where she came from, replied: ‘I ’spect I growed’ (Harriet Beecher Stowe: *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, 1851). The idiom is often applied today to the sprawl of bloated corporations.

³ See my *The Pastor: Does He Exist?; Infant Baptism Tested; Relationship Evangelism Exposed: A Blight on the Churches and the Ungodly; The Priesthood of All Believers: Slogan or Substance?; Priesthood: Our Need, God’s Provision*.

the covenant, or declaring that he had sprinkled me because I was born under the covenant – or somesuch. Whatever, I am a Christian, and have been such from birth’.⁴

‘I go to church’.

‘I am religious’.

‘I am decent, sincere, respectable, live by Christ’s ethic’.

‘I went to public school,⁵ and have adopted the Christian ethic I was taught there’.

‘I play the game, especially cricket, keeping a straight bat’.

‘I keep the Christian festivals’.

‘I think Jesus was a good man’.

‘I do my best – what more can you want?’

* * *

As to that last, it’s not what I want: it’s what the Creator demands.

Let’s get down to brass tacks.

I quoted Peter (1 Pet. 4:16-17). I said it must be the starting point for our investigation of ‘Christian’. Read his letter and you’ll soon get the point. He wrote to people he called ‘Christian’. Very well. What did he mean by it? He was writing:

...to those who are elect... according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood... Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an

⁴ See ‘The BBC Gets It Wrong Again’ in my *New-Covenant Articles Volume Thirteen*, and on my sermonaudio.com page.

⁵ That is, in the UK, a fee-paying private school, often based on a so-called Christian foundation. That, in itself, illustrates how words can change – lose – their meaning.

inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet. 1:1-5).

As he went on to say, such people have:

... purified [their] souls by... obedience to the truth... [having] been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God (1 Pet. 1:22-23).

Peter recognised that they had:

...come to [Christ] [that is, they were trusting Christ as Saviour and Lord], a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, [and consequently,] you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... Unto you therefore which believe [Christ] is precious (1 Pet. 2:4-7).

As Peter described them:

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

Now these are the terms – the scriptural terms – which must be understood about a Christian. This is what we must mean when we use the word 'Christian': Christians are elect, regenerate, believing, separated, washed in Jesus blood, righteous in him; they are those to whom Christ is precious.

Indeed, as Paul put it, a Christian is someone to whom:

... Christ is all, and in all (Col. 3:11).

Much more could be said, but I want to set out the core truth.

The first great essential is regeneration:

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God... Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is

born of water⁶ and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you: 'You must be born again'. The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit (John 3:3-8).

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules (Ezek. 36:25-27; see also Ezek. 11:19-20).

Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him (Rom. 8:9).

Regeneration by the Spirit always leads to repentance, which is essential:

Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish... unless you repent, you will all likewise perish (Luke 13:3,5).

[God] commands all people everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30).

When the sinners who were convicted of sin under Peter's preaching on the day of Pentecost cried out as to what they should do, Peter replied at once:

Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:37-38).

Repentance is always accompanied by saving faith, trust in Christ, reliance upon him and his finished work. Paul preached the gospel:

...testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21).

...that they should repent and turn to God (Acts 26:20).

⁶ This is not baptism. The illustration speaks of washing, cleansing from sin, and which is explained by the next two extracts.

God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God (John 3:16-18).

When the Philippian jailer cried out, asking how he could be saved, Paul and Silas replied:

Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved (Acts 16:30-31).

Paul was categorical:

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Rom. 10:13).

How does all this dovetail? Like this:

To all who did receive [Christ], who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:12-13).

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out... No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the prophets: 'And they will all be taught by God'. Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me (John 6:37,44-45).

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out: 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'. Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified (John 7:37-39).

When [the Spirit] comes, he will convict the world concerning sin... because they do not believe in me (John 16:8-9).

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The notion that in 2021 the number of sinners in England and Wales who were regenerate, convicted of sin, converted to Christ in saving repentance and trust, and found Christ precious and all in all, had dropped to just less than 50%, and that this is headline news, shows, once again,⁷ just how far removed from reality the BBC has drifted. But, to be fair, since the monstrosity of Christendom has assumed so dominant a position in the West, nothing less can be expected. The idea that ‘Christendom Christians’ are real Christians is so far removed from reality that words fail. But as I have said, getting this wrong carries eternal consequences. Unless a sinner is truly converted to Christ, he will die as he was born – under the wrath of God (Rom. 1:18-32; Eph. 2:1-3). And eternal damnation is, in that case, inevitable.

May these words awaken many to call on Christ in saving trust, and so become real Christians.

As William Gadsby put it:

*Pause, my soul! and ask the question,
Art thou ready to meet God?
Am I made a real Christian,
Washed in the Redeemer’s blood?
Have I union
With the church’s living Head?

Am I quickened by his Spirit;
Live a life of faith and prayer?
Trusting wholly to his merit;
Casting on him all my care?
Daily panting,
In his likeness to appear?

If my hope on Christ is stayèd,
Let him come when he thinks best;
O my soul! be not dismayèd,
Lean upon his loving breast;
He will cheer thee
With the smilings of his face.*

⁷ As before, see ‘The BBC Gets It Wrong Again’ in my *New-Covenant Articles Volume Thirteen*, and on my sermonaudio.com page.

*But, if still a total stranger
To his precious name and blood,
Thou art on the brink of danger;
Canst thou face a holy God?
Think and tremble,
Death is now upon the road.*