

## CHAPTER 3 – THE STATUS OF THE LAITY IN THE CHURCH IN SOUTH AFRICA

### 1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

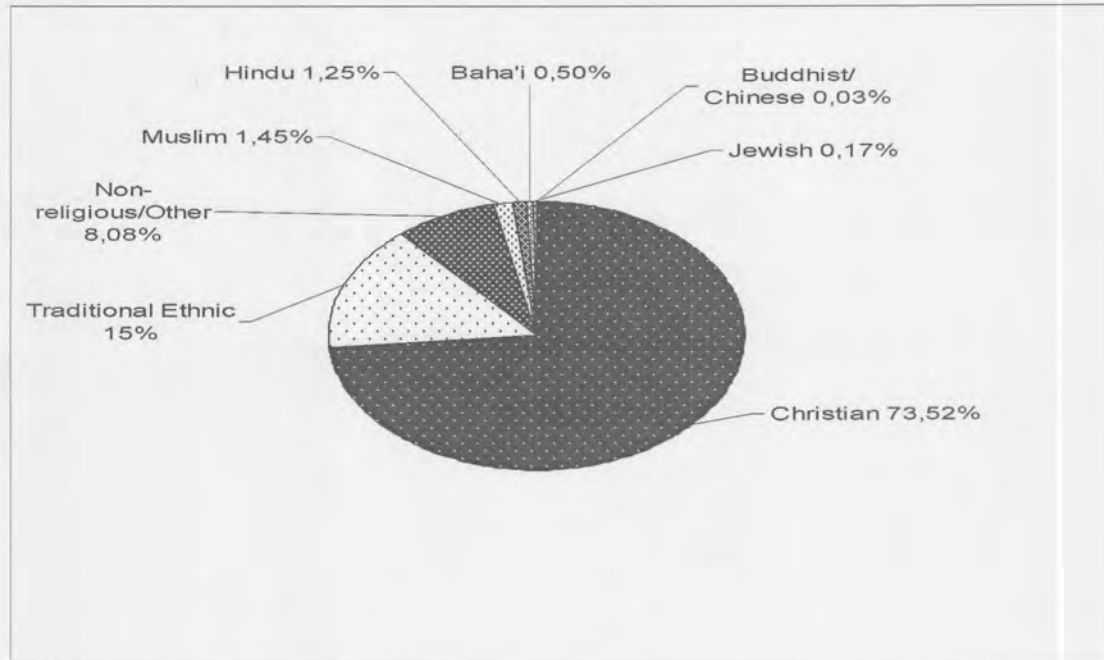
Life in South Africa has changed over the last ten to fifteen years. There have been changes in technology, national politics, lifestyle choices, education, health care and family dynamics. During these years, there have been shifts in a number of areas pertaining to the religious beliefs of the Christian Church in South Africa as well as the religious beliefs of the population in general. With the great number of changes, it is only natural to expect important and observable changes in the spiritual life of the nation, as well.

It is well known that South Africa is the richest and most industrialized country in Africa and the world's biggest exporter of non-petroleum minerals, such as, gold, platinum, chrome, diamonds and coal. It has a well diversified economy which is making constant progress.

There is a freedom of religion with a strong push to give all religions equal say. According to *Operation World* (Johnston (ed.) 2001:576), the following figures were recorded of percentages of people for the population (41 million) of their religion in South Africa in 2001:

• Christian	73,52%	29 684 861
• Traditional ethnic	15%	6 056 487
• Non-religious/Other	8,08%	3 262 428
• Muslim	1,45%	585 460
• Hindu	1,25%	504 707
• Baha'i	0,5%	201 883

- Jewish 0,17% 68 640
- Buddhist/Chinese 0,03% 12 113



According to an article written by Erasmus and Hendriks in *The Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* introducing the World Value System's 2001 set of data on religious affiliation in South Africa, "reflects a country that strongly associates with Christianity (77%) or with religion, as such (82,4%)..." However, "this data suggests that Christianity is set to decline, while the Muslim religion and the cluster that does not associate with denominational religion, will grow" (November 2003, 96).

Like any census, data compilation can be filled with errors. According to a report titled "*Religion in South Africa: The 2001 Population Census Data*" by Hendriks and Erasmus on an overview on "how the count was done and how it differed from previous censuses" (March 2005:88), realistically, they point out "there are serious classification and compilation errors which render some of the trends really unreliable" (March 2005:110).

This is obviously somewhat of a frustration. It is still believed that data can help to point and indicate which direction one is to go in.

The people of South Africa have moved well through the transition from an *apartheid* system to a non-racial democracy – despite the feared bloodbath just before the first democratic elections in 1994. The country is functioning adequately after two successful elections – 1994 and 1999 – under the new democracy. There is another upcoming election in 2009 which is being planned and is in the process. Over the last 20 years, active efforts have been, and continue to be, made to try and reverse the anomalies of the past. Much progress has been made but there is still quite a way to go. There has been a major growth in strategies by organizations aiming to serve and support wherever possible – both locally and beyond the South African borders. There has been a tremendous growth in groups and institutions helping those who are disadvantaged, such as, the homeless on the streets, those living in “squatter camps”, the unemployed, those having been affected by crime, the many who have been abused, and the millions who have been distressed by AIDS.

While observers admit that the post-apartheid government is doing its best to transform society into a prosperous, well-administered modern society, the fact remains that there is a widespread perception among South Africans that things are not moving fast enough.

Young people in particular are demanding jobs; education and health care are still sorely lacking; and many citizens in South Africa these days walk around with a gun since they say there is not enough of a police presence to combat crime.

According to page 1 of *The Star* newspaper of 04 July 2007, murders, violent house robberies, hijackings, cash-in-transit and bank heists have shot up. The number of police officers slain is the highest in three years. But the police claim

they are winning the war against crime. The spike in violent crimes, and yet another failure to meet the government's annual target of decreasing crime by seven to 10 percent painted a grim picture at the release of the national police statistics on Tuesday, 03 July 2007. In an interview on the national television broadcaster (SABC) on the same day, Safety and Security Minister Charles Nqakula and National Police Commissioner Jackie Selebi acknowledged concerns about the increase in home robberies, saying that during such break-ins "people get raped, children get abused, there is often a car hijacking involved."

South Africa, where nearly 53 people are killed each day, has among the highest murder and rape rates in the world – and an international reputation as a violent society. The South African public, however, has become increasingly critical of the government's handling of crime, particularly after ministers' comments about people "whinging" about crime and comments by President Thabo Mbeki saying there was no evidence people thought crime was spinning out of control.

Since the 1990's, South Africa has developed a reputation for being "the crime capital of the world" – in other words, that crime levels here are at least as high, but usually higher, than those with which the rest of humanity must contend. This consensus is at the core of any conversation and has become so entrenched that arguments to the contrary often come across as either disrespectful of crime victims or as politically distressing. Attempts to compare crime across different jurisdictions – an exercise which is necessary to rank South Africa at the top of a world crime league table – must confront and overcome a number of enormously difficult challenges.

With the above in mind, these challenges obviously affect people – both physically and spiritually. The insecurity of many unstable leaders in government, some unfair laws, many injustices, the decline in the moral integrity of the country, and the corruption, has left many people – Christian and non-

Christian – quite unsatisfied. It is for this reason that these statistics are mentioned because the above is on most people’s minds when answering a questionnaire or the likes.

One cannot make great strategic decisions unless one is well-informed about the community one is dealing with and wishing to influence. The objective of the statistics recorded in this study is to provide one with a viewpoint on the current faith of the approximately 48 million people in the country of which approximately 51% are female (according to “*Mid-year population estimates 2007*” from Statistics South Africa – available online from [www.statssa.gov.za](http://www.statssa.gov.za)). The statistics collected will help to understand a way forward as we interpret the behaviours, observations and decipher the findings.

We have examined the religious perspectives and beliefs of some of the population of South Africa. The information described in this report is based on telephonic interviews and questionnaires completed with a nationwide random sample of 300 adults conducted during June 2006 and April 2007. Those interviewed or those who completed questionnaires were from throughout the geographical spreading of the country. Of those contacted to participate in the survey, 72% responded positively thus giving 216 interviews and questionnaires of completed, useable information to be used for this research and report.

## **2. OUTCOME OF QUESTIONNAIRES COMPLETED**

A format of the questionnaire is attached but to follow are the questions and feedback with observations.

### **Do you consider yourself to be Christian or of some religious faith?**

South Africans are increasingly designing their lifestyles in ways that meet their needs more efficiently. This is true even in the spiritual realm, as evidenced by

the rapid growth of participation in house churches across the nation. Whereas most people think of “going to church” as attending a service at one of the many church buildings located throughout their community, it seems that millions are trying out new forms of spiritual community and worship, with many abandoning the traditional forms altogether.

It is no overstatement to say that multitudes of people in the organized church are very busy, and even too busy, and this busyness seems to be spreading speedily throughout the culture. It is especially evident in the leadership positions of churches in South Africa – it seems that both genders have been affected. In many cases, people affected display a lifestyle that is so congested that the infected individual can neither enjoy nor nature a healthy relationship with God.

South Africans have overwhelmingly viewed themselves as Christians since the nation became a Republic in 1961. There are minor fluctuations that occur from year to year in the statistics, but the figures generally hover around 75%-83%. It is the younger generation (born 1985-2002) that is not overly comfortable with the label “Christian” and is not ready to abandon the faith that they are most comfortable aligning with. Those born in the 1960’s and 1980’s went through a similar period 20 years ago before emerging somewhat less likely to embrace the “Christian” identity, but largely associating with it.

Of note are also some minor demographic variations that are worth noting. Women are typically more likely than men to adopt “Christian” as their religious identification (80%). Also, university/college graduates are consistently less likely than less highly-educated adults to claim to be Christian (77% of university/college graduates compared to 87% of adults with some university/college training and 84% without any university/college background).

Adults who say they are mostly conservative on political and social matters are far more likely than those who describe themselves as mostly liberal on such issues to say they are Christian (92% versus 63%).

**What is the denomination or affiliation of the church you attend most often?**

During the early-nineties, Christian churches increased slightly in affiliation. This could be contributed to the fear among people just before the 1994 democratic elections. Toward the late nineties, Christian churches suffered slight losses in affiliation (0,3%). That appears to have been reversed since the turn of the century. Christian churches – all 185 varieties found in South Africa (Johnstone 2001:111) – now consistently claim 72% of the Christian public.

However, there is a distinct pattern that the younger a person is, the less likely they are to affiliate with a Christian church. This is due to younger adults being less likely to call themselves Christian and partially attributable to the distaste for labels of any sort, or “membership” in religious organizations.

Demographic patterns of interest show that woman were more likely than men to claim to be associated with a Christian church (60% versus 51%). Political conservatives were twice as likely as self-defined liberals to align with a Christian church (71% versus 36%). The gap between these two segments of the population appears to be widening as time goes on.

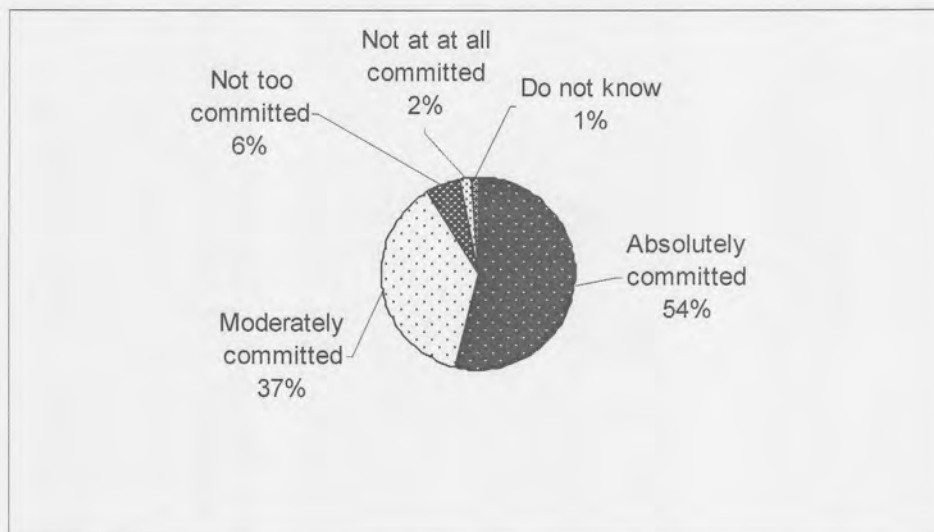
Among people of the Christian church in South Africa, 18% are Evangelical, 23% Charismatic and 7% are Pentecostal.

**Overall, how committed are you to the Christian faith? Are you absolutely committed to it, moderately committed to it, not too committed to it or not**



at all committed to it? (Asked only among those who describe themselves as “Christian”)

- Absolutely committed: 54%
- Moderately committed: 37%
- Not too committed: 6%
- Not at all committed: 2%
- Do not know: 1%



The current level of absolute commitment (54%) generally means that half of all adults who are self-described Christians claim to be absolutely committed to Christianity. What is more interesting though is the massive gap between levels of commitment registered among the four adult generations. 65% of adults older than 60 years of age claim to be absolutely committed, compared to about 58% of those between 40 and 60 years of age. There is a minority (42%) among those between the ages of 24 and 59 years of age that are absolutely committed and just 27% among those aged between 18 and 23 years. If these patterns remain stable for a number of years, they spell trouble for the Christian church.



From the data collected, another pattern of interest is that the more highly educated an adult is, the more likely he/she is to claim to be absolutely committed to Christianity. Presently, 64% of university/college graduates make such a claim, versus 56% among those who attended but did not graduate and 47% of adults who did not attend university/college.

Political conservatives are far more likely than liberals to be absolutely committed (70% compared to 43%). Likewise, Protestants were much more likely to be absolutely committed than were those of other denominations (58% versus 43%).

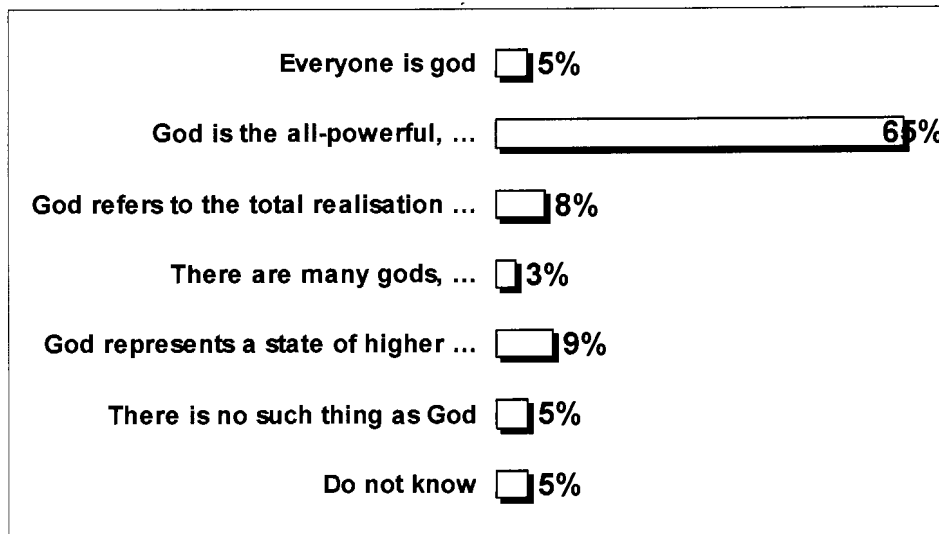
A huge gap in commitment was discovered between evangelicals (97%), non-evangelical born again adults (58%) and notional Christians (39%). Overall, 92% of radical Christians said they were absolutely committed.

From a “big picture” point-of-view, it is notably realized that only half of the people who call themselves Christian are mentally committed to the faith. Given that this is a “costless” question – that is, it requires no genuine commitment other than verbal consent to the significance of the faith in their mind – this level is unfortunately low.

**There are many different beliefs about God or a higher power. Please tell me which one of the following descriptions comes closest to what you, personally, believe about God.**

1. **Everyone is god. (5%)**
2. **God is the all-powerful, all-knowing, perfect Creator of the universe who rules the world today. (65%)**
3. **God refers to the total realisation of personal, human potential. (8%)**
4. **There are many gods, each with different power and authority. (3%)**

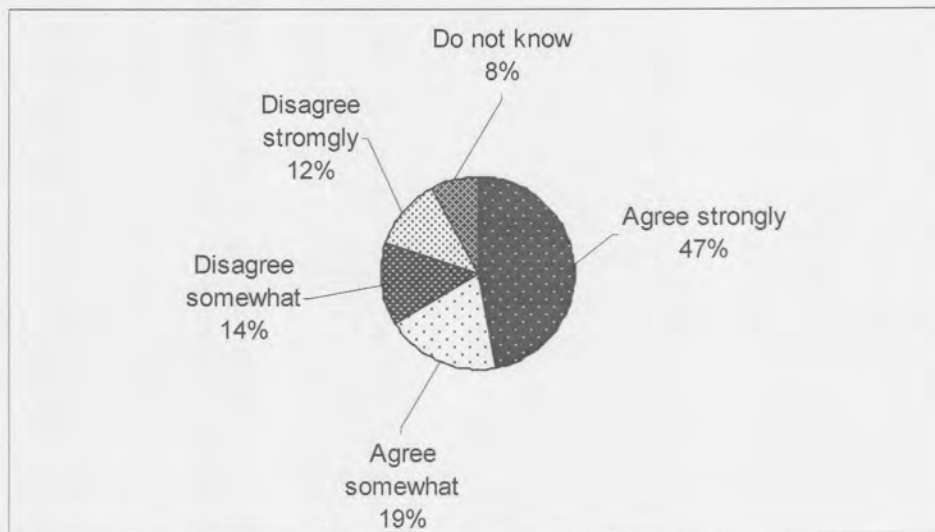
5. **God represents a state of higher consciousness that a person may reach. (9%)**
6. **There is no such thing as God. (5%)**
7. **Do not know. (5%)**



From the statistics and feedback given, it would seem that the younger a person is, the less orthodox their view of God tends to be. It was not surprising that 78% of women interviewed had an orthodox view compared to 64% of men having that belief. It also seems that the more affluent people are, the more likely they are to possess an alternative view of God. Liberals were also more likely to reject the orthodox description of God (just 46% endorsed it, compared to 83% among conservatives). What was also of interest is the fact that 35% of the adults associated with faiths other than Christianity, and 20% of all atheists and agnostics held an orthodox view of God.

**Some statements were read about some people's beliefs. People have a variety of beliefs on these matters. People were asked to respond to these statements: "The Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles it teaches." Do you strongly agree, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat or disagree with that statement?**

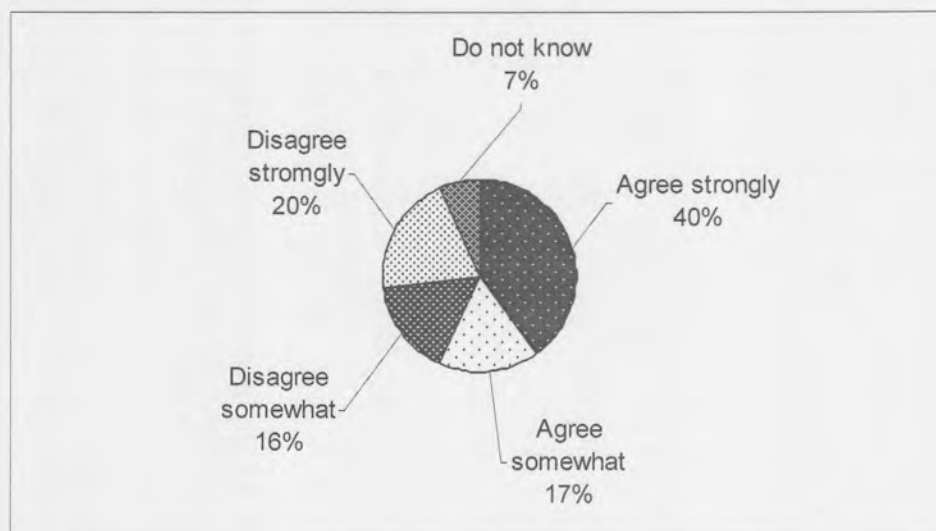
- Agree strongly 47%
- Agree somewhat 19%
- Disagree somewhat 14%
- Disagree strongly 12%
- Do not know 8%



It seems that there is a slow increase in the number of adults who embrace the teachings of the Bible as accurate. This may be because of the situation people find themselves in – many times, a place of insecurity. Also, from those interviewed, the older a person is, the more likely they are to accept the accuracy of the teaching in the Bible. Women remain considerable more likely than men to accept the accuracy of the Scriptures (59% of women versus 38% of men). The less well-educated and the less affluent a person is, the more likely they are to embrace the Bible. Conservatives are almost four times as likely to view the Bible as accurate in the principles it teaches (68% versus 18%).

People were asked whether they agree or disagree – no matter whether they believe what other people believe. People were asked, “Do you, personally, have a responsibility to tell other people your religious beliefs?” People were asked whether they agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat or disagree strongly with that statement.

- Agree strongly 40%
- Agree somewhat 17%
- Disagree somewhat 16%
- Disagree strongly 20%
- Do not know 7%

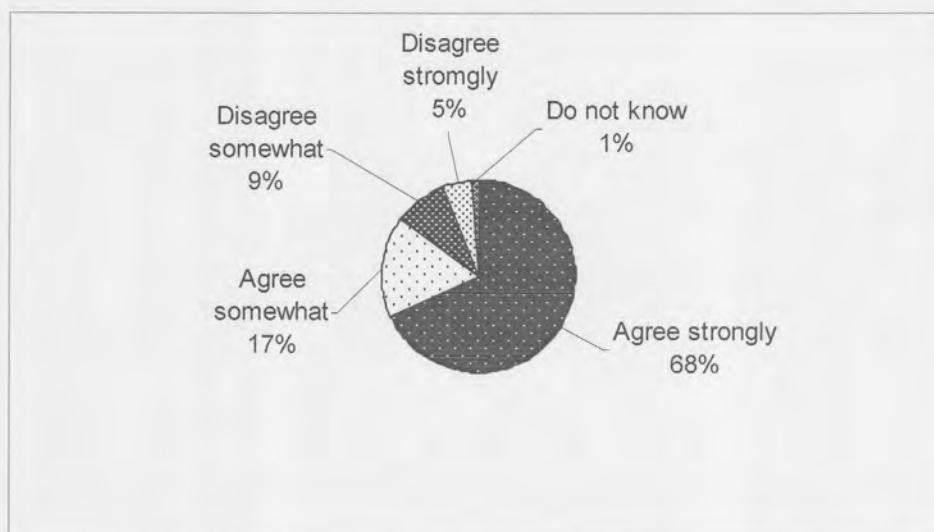


Although some people do not firmly believe that they have a duty to share their religious beliefs with other people, there seems to be a sense of responsibility that people are prepared to embrace with reference to the evangelistic perspective. Currently, two out of every five adults hold that position. Surprisingly, men and women reflected a very similar level of agreement on this factor (37% men and 41% of women).

Poorer individuals were considerably more likely to strongly agree with the notion of having a responsibility to have spiritual conversations. Conservatives were three times more likely than liberals to do so – a majority of conservatives strongly affirmed this idea (52% of conservatives versus 14% of liberals). It must be said that only 34% of whites strongly agreed that they have this responsibility, 58% of blacks claimed it.

People were asked, “Your religious faith is very important in your life.” People were asked whether they agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat or disagree strongly with that statement.

- Agree strongly 68%
- Agree somewhat 17%
- Disagree somewhat 9%
- Disagree strongly 5%
- Do not know 1%



Nearly seven out of ten people interviewed strongly assert that their religious faith is very important in their life these days. While South Africa has been



described as a “religious nation”, this is a very high level for the perceived significance of personal faith.

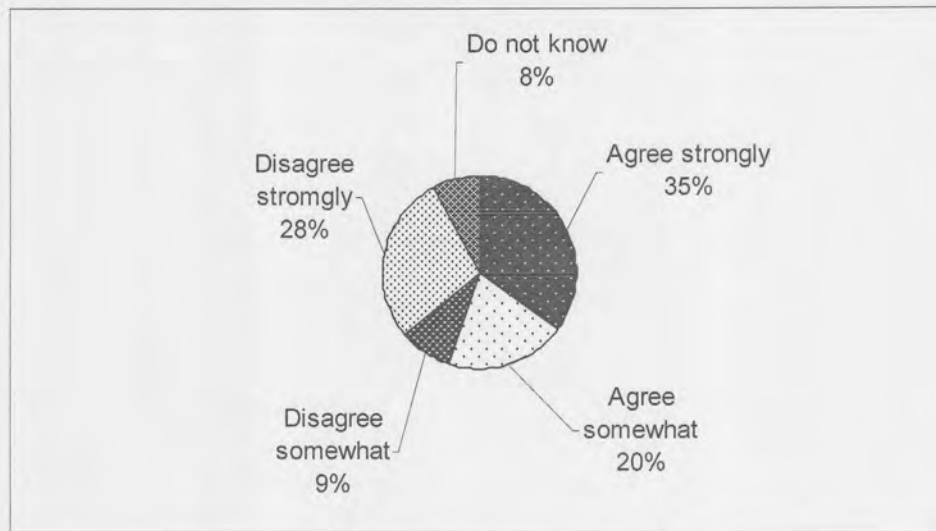
Age plays an important role in understanding this phenomenon. Women emerged more likely than men to agree with this statement and people without a formal education were more likely than those with one to state this. Nine out of ten blacks strongly concurred, compared to two out of three whites.

Four out of five conservatives agree with this statement, compared to less than half of all liberals.

**People were asked, “If a person is generally good, or does good enough things for others during their life, they will earn a place in Heaven.” People were asked whether they agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat or disagree strongly with that statement.**

- Agree strongly 35%
- Agree somewhat 20%
- Disagree somewhat 9%
- Disagree strongly 28%
- Do not know 8%





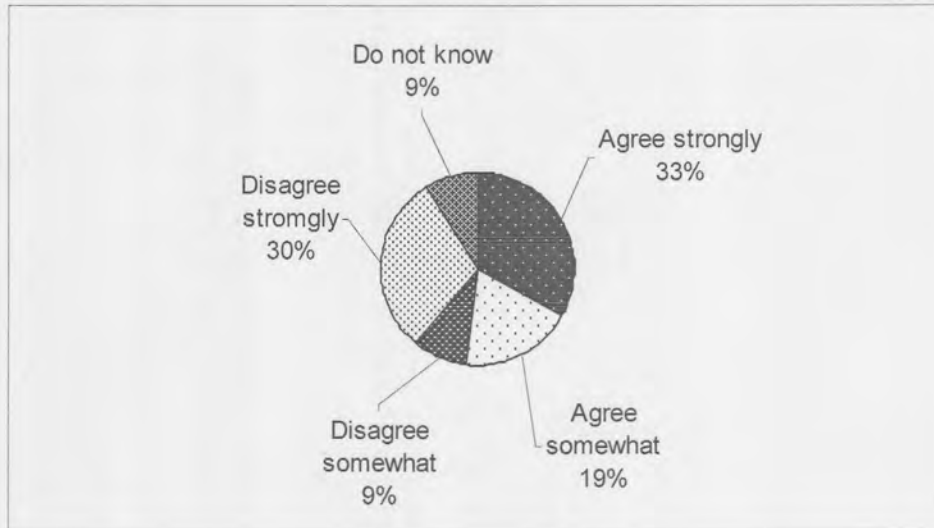
The demographic distinctions related to this measure are limited. Political conservatives are twice as likely as political liberals to strongly disagree with this statement (46% of conservatives versus 24% of liberals). It was interesting to record that there are nearly twice as many blacks that strongly agree as opposed to whites. There is no real explanation for this.

The most intriguing insight drawn from this question, however, is the fact that just 37% of the non-evangelical born again adults strongly reject the idea of salvation by works. In other words, even though they personally claim that their salvation is a result of grace rather than works, they hold open the possibility of people gaining salvation by either means.

People were asked, “The devil, or Satan, is not a living being but is a symbol of evil.” People were asked whether they agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat or disagree strongly with that statement.

- Agree strongly 33%
- Agree somewhat 19%
- Disagree somewhat 9%

- Disagree strongly 30%
- Do not know 9%



Given the stated commitment to the Bible and to the Christian faith, it is cause for concern to learn that only three out of every ten adults strongly disagree that Satan is merely a symbol of evil. People believe in the concept of evil, but not the embodiment of evil, or the implications of a living agent of evil.

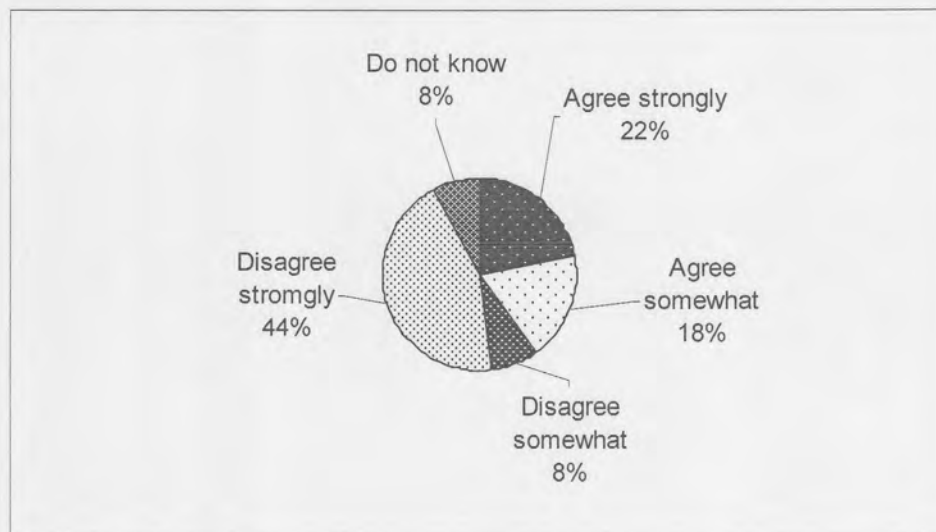
The greatest challenge to Church leaders is to address the fact that only one out of every four non-evangelical born again adults strongly disagrees with the idea of Satan as merely symbolic. To place this in context, that proportion is statistically equivalent to the percentage among atheists and agnostics.

As might be expected among people who see their life as immersed in a spiritual battle, a large majority of devout Christians (65%) strongly rejected this statement.

**People were asked, “When He lived on earth, Jesus Christ was human and committed sins, like other people.” People were asked whether they agree**

strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat or disagree strongly with that statement.

- Agree strongly 22%
- Agree somewhat 18%
- Disagree somewhat 8%
- Disagree strongly 44%
- Do not know 8%



The divinity of Jesus has been questioned for centuries, even in best-selling novels such as *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown (2003). A large share of the South African population – including millions of Christian – have bought the idea that Jesus Christ was a historical figure and a great man, but not God incarnate. Just four out of ten adults firmly reject the notion of Jesus having sinned on earth.

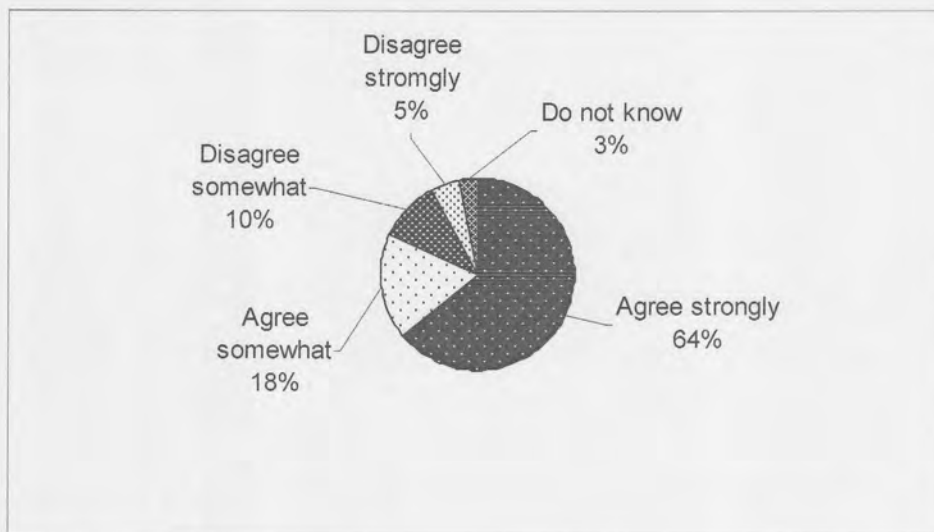
Again, the biggest gaps relate to ideology (68% of conservatives strongly reject the idea that Jesus sinned, versus only 22% of liberals). With reference to ethnicity, 58% of Blacks reject the sin claim, while 39% of Whites do so.



Among the non-evangelical born again adults only half firmly dismiss the statement. That pales in comparison to the more than four out of five devout Christians who do so. Four out of ten adults associated with non-Christian faith strongly disagreed with the statement, while only one out of eight atheists and agnostics joined in the dissent.

People were asked, “The single, most important purpose of your life is to love God with all your heart, mind, strength and soul.” People were asked whether they agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat or disagree strongly with that statement.

- Agree strongly 64%
- Agree somewhat 18%
- Disagree somewhat 10%
- Disagree strongly 5%
- Do not know 3%



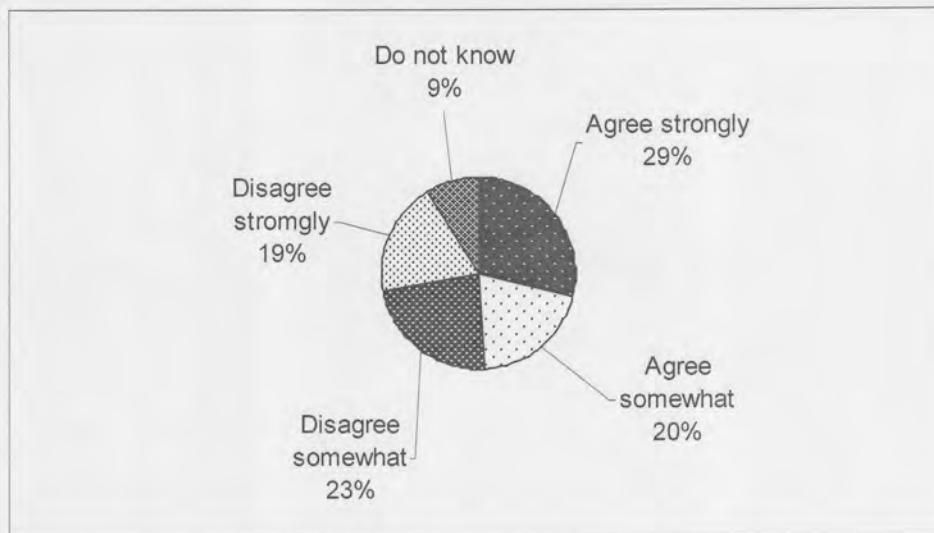
While the results of this question at first glance looked encouraging, placing the outcome in context dampens the enthusiasm considerably. The fact that nearly

two-thirds of adults firmly accepted this sentiment as representative of their life is undermined by the finding that when they were asked earlier in the survey to identify the highest priority in their life, a majority of people said “family” was their top priority.

There were demographic gaps worthy of noting. Women were more likely than men to strongly affirm their life objective (73% versus 52%). The positive correlation with age – the older a person was, the more likely they were to strongly agree – was again evident, ranging from less than half of those under 21 years of age to more than three out of four among people 60 years of age or older. More wealthy individuals were far less likely than poorer people to embrace this statement (44% versus 78% respectively). Just over 90% evangelicals strongly affirmed the statement, which was higher than the 74% of non-evangelical born-again adults, the 56% among notional Christians, 48% among those aligned with other faith groups, the 12% of atheists and agnostics, and even 46% among the “un-churched”.

**People were asked, “Success in this life is determined only by your obedience to God; nothing else matters.” People were asked whether they agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat or disagree strongly with that statement.**

- Agree strongly 29%
- Agree somewhat 20%
- Disagree somewhat 23%
- Disagree strongly 19%
- Do not know 9%



Most South Africans do not see life success in spiritual terms; they define it in tangible, physical, material, achievement-oriented terms. That explains why less than one-third of all adults strongly agreed that success in life is determined solely by their degree of obedience to God.

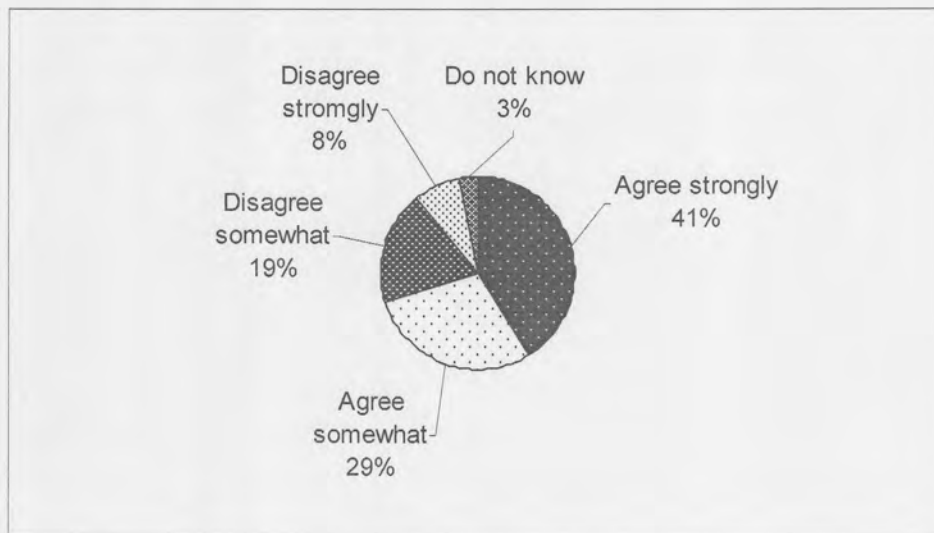
Women are somewhat more likely than men to embrace the idea of obedience as success (39% versus 22%). Adults older than 40 years of age were much more likely than those under 40 years of age to accept the idea (38% versus 21%). One out of four adults strongly agreed with the notion, except in poorer communities (42%) where nearly half accepted the concept.

Surprisingly, just over half of the evangelicals (56%) strongly accepted the statement, 36% among non-evangelical born-again adults, the 32% among notional Christians, 21% among people of other faiths, and 6% of the atheists and agnostics.

**People were asked, “You are completely committed to personally making the world and other people’s lives better.” People were asked whether they agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat or disagree strongly with that statement.**



- Agree strongly 41%
- Agree somewhat 29%
- Disagree somewhat 19%
- Disagree strongly 8%
- Do not know 3%



The most intriguing realization emerging from the feedback from this question is that people apparently do not see the idea of “making the world a better place” to be a spiritual notion or a biblical command. Sincere interest in improving lives, which described a minority of the population, were across-the-board demographically, with a few noteworthy exceptions.

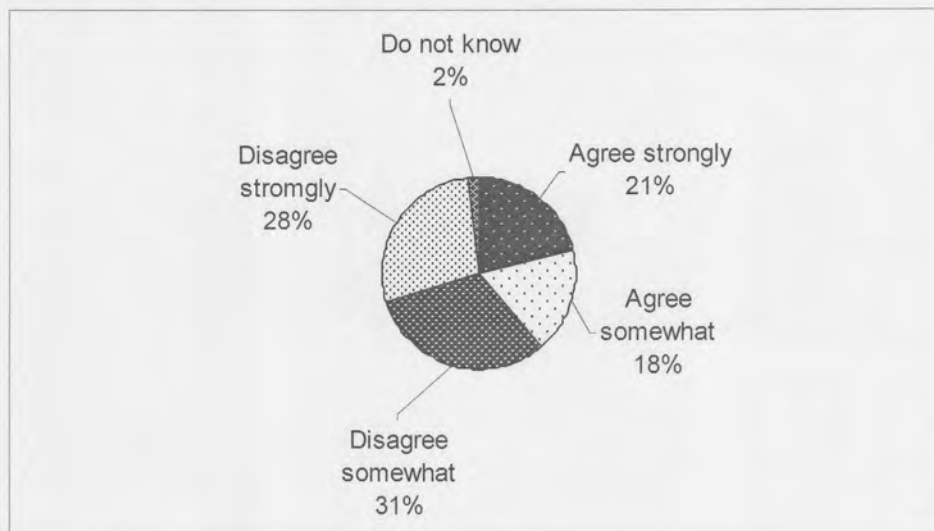
People over 40 years of age were more interested in pursuing this ideal than were younger people.

It is surprising that even in a costless survey question, less than a minority of people admits to be compelled to make the world a better place. The survey did not explore the reasons why people did not embrace the idea, but other research

suggests that people's selfishness, busyness and feelings of powerlessness amidst a large and complex world contribute to the commitment to global enhancement.

People were asked, "You cannot become a complete and mature person unless you belong to a community of faith that influences you." People were asked whether they agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat or disagree strongly with that statement.

- Agree strongly 21%
- Agree somewhat 18%
- Disagree somewhat 31%
- Disagree strongly 28%
- Do not know 2%



Very few South Africans are sold on the idea that you cannot become a complete and mature human being without the influence of a faith community. As an independent, democratic nation of self-absorbed individuals, relatively few people

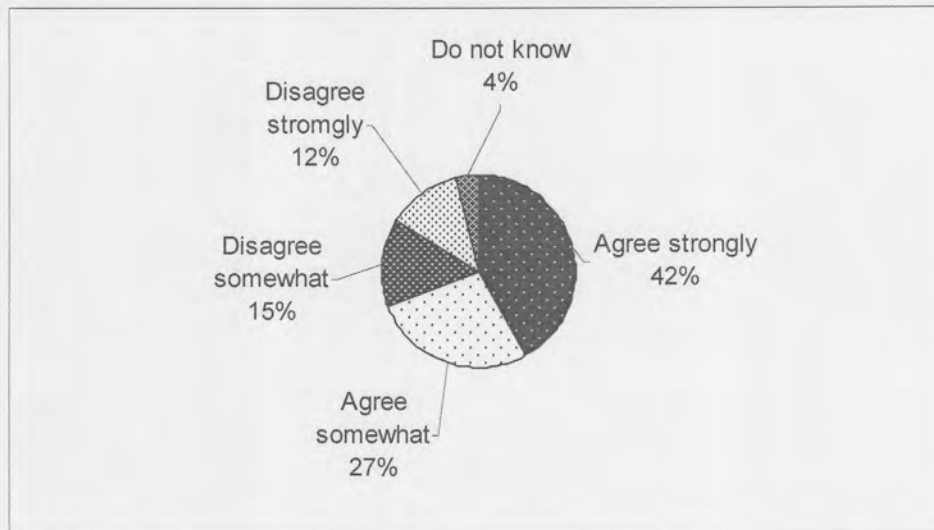
see the value of, much less the biblical command for, significant involvement in a faith community.

People who stood out because of their belief in the power of community to transform a person were, surprisingly, those between 18 and 22 years of age (25% strongly agreed with the statement). Black South Africans were also a high percentage (39%) in their belief in the power of community to transform a person. Evangelicals were 21% and those more conservative were 22%.

The groups least likely to assign great importance to such community life were atheists and agnostics (3%), the un-churched (8%), and liberals (6%).

**People were asked, “You are in control of your life.” People were asked whether they agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat or disagree strongly with that statement.**

- Agree strongly 42%
- Agree somewhat 27%
- Disagree somewhat 15%
- Disagree strongly 12%
- Do not know 4%



Nearly half of all South African adults firmly believe that they are in control of their life. Just 12% strongly reject the idea.

The types of people most likely to believe that they are in control of their life included men (56% versus 31% of women); adults who were not born again (57% compared to 33% of all born again adults); unchurched people (57%) and 56 % of liberals.

Born again Christian – this question was asked to those who called themselves “Christian” as per the third question above.

- Have you ever made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in your life today?

Some statements were read to people about what will happen to them after they die. They were asked which statement best describes their own belief about what will happen to them after they die. (The following statements were read).

**Which one of these comes closest to what you believe? 1. When you die you will go to heaven because you have tried to obey the Ten Commandments. 2. When you die you will go to heaven because you are basically a good person. 3. When you die you will go to heaven because you have confessed your sins and have accepted Jesus Christ as your Saviour. 4. When you die you will go to heaven because God loves all people and will not let them perish. 5. When you die you will not go to heaven. 6. You do not know what will happen after you die.**

Of those that answered the third question, (54%) said they were absolutely committed to the Christian faith. Numerically, this 54% is the equivalent of about 26 762 000 born again adults – that is, people over the age of 20 and 80+ – as per the statistics given by South Africa’s *“Mid-Year Population Estimates of 2007”* (available online from [www.statssa.gov.za](http://www.statssa.gov.za)). More than two-thirds of that number is drawn from the age group of 20-44.

Interestingly, it was found that six out of every ten adults who have an “active faith” – that is, they read the bible, prayed, and attended church in the past seven days – were not born again.

### **PERSONAL RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT TO CHRISTIANITY**

**The following question was asked: “In the last seven days, did you read from the Bible, not including when you were at church?”**

32% of people answered this question positively. It seems that the older a person is, the more likely they are to read the Bible during the week. The same could be said for women in contrast to men; and people from lower income groups in contrast to those of greater means.

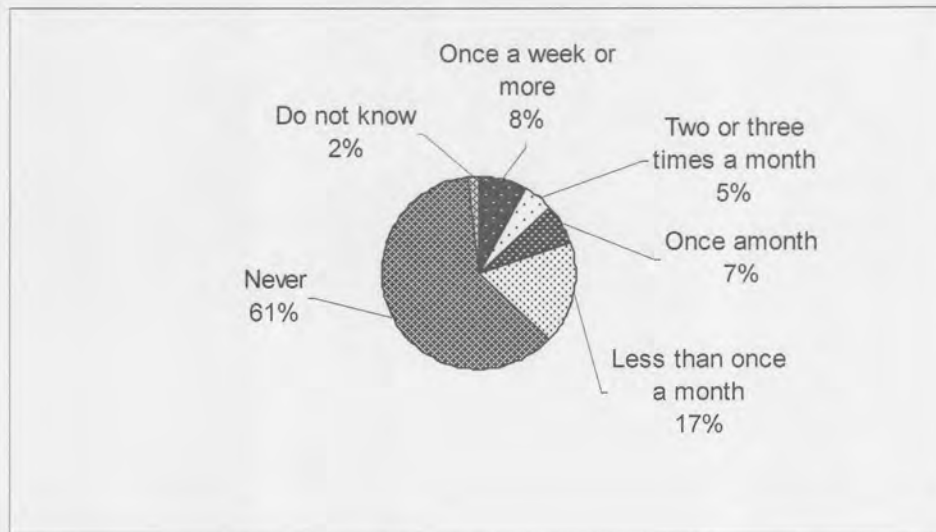
**The following question was asked: “In the last seven days, did you attend a church service, not including a special event such as a wedding or funeral?”**

35% of people claim that they attended church. Overall, it seems that women remain more likely to attend than are men. Among the religious sector, 78% of evangelicals and 63% of non-evangelical born again adults attend church in a typical week, compared to 58% of people who attend church but would not put themselves under the criteria of those who would be classified as “born again”. It is also interesting to note that there are a significant number of people who associate themselves with non-Christian faith groups.

**The following question was asked: “How often, if ever, do you attend a religious service in someone’s home or some other place, that is not associated with a local/congregational type church: At least once a week, two or three times a month, once a month, less than once a month, or never?”**

Once a week or more	8%
Two or three times a month	5%
Once a month	7%
Less than once a month	17%
Never	61%
Do not know	2%





The growth of involvement in home-cells or house churches in recent years has been significant. It seems that, currently, nearly one out of every ten adults participates in a house church in a typical week, with a similar number participating once a month, and an additional nearly two out of ten involved less often. Overall, this constitutes nearly four out of ten people participating in a house church.

The report of the most regular house church participants (that is, those who attend once a week) shows that men and women are equally likely to participate, as are people across the age groups and socioeconomic divisions. This growth is especially noteworthy among evangelicals – one out of every three (32%) participate on at least a weekly basis.

**The following question was asked: “In the last seven days, did you volunteer some of your free time to help a church?”**

19% of the people interviewed said they had volunteered to do something in the church. These volunteers still tend to be the older members of the congregations (one out of every three among those over 60 years of age compared to one out of five among those under the age of 40 years). Women and married adults are

more likely to volunteer to do something in the local church. More than half of these that volunteered were evangelicals.

**The following question was asked: “In the last seven days, did you pray to God?”**

86% of the people interviewed claim that they have prayed to God in the past week. Prayer is more common among those in the poorer financial bracket as opposed to the more affluent people. Also, almost every evangelical interviewed had prayed. It was also interesting to note that three out of four adults associated with other faiths prayed in a typical week and even four out of ten atheists and agnostics admit to praying.

**The following question was asked: “In the last seven days, did you participate in a small group that meets regularly for Bible study, prayer or Christian fellowship?”**

It seems that there is one out of every four people who participate in a “small group” or “cell group”. The “Alpha Course” and “Purpose Driven Life” courses that have been very effective in drawing people to these groups. A majority of evangelicals are engaged in a small group (62%) which is nearly double the amount of the non-evangelical born again adults (29%).

**The following question was asked: “In the last 12 months, did you explain your religious beliefs to someone who had different beliefs, in the hope that they might accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour?”**

We need to acknowledge that evangelism means many things to many people. To born again Christians, it is most likely to be practiced by trying to live in a way that attracts attention and hopefully generates questions regarding the reason for their faith-driven behaviour. However, many born again adults share their faith

verbally – especially those in the Charismatic movement – in the hope of bringing an “unsaved” person to the cross of Christ.

Presently, it seems that 38% of born again adults share their faith in Christ, in some manner, with non-believers during a 12-month stretch. It is those in their mid-twenties that share their faith the most with others – quite opposite to any other statistic discovered. It seems the older people get, the less likely they are to share their faith openly. Men are also more likely to share their faith as opposed to women.

**The following question was asked: “In the past seven days, did you read from your Bible, not including when you were at church? Did you attend a church service, not including a special event such as a wedding or funeral? Did you pray to God?”**

The current level of faith activity is a good measure of simple faith engagement in our culture today. That level is presently 29% of those interviewed meet the above criteria. Displaying an active faith increases with age, ranging from just 11% among those aged between 18-21 to 24% among those aged between 22-40, 46% of those aged between 41-60, and 72% of those between 61-80. Women remain more widely engaged than men (53% versus 24%).

### **3. INSIGHTS FROM THE INFORMATION COLLECTED**

#### **3.1. General Comments**

There are many who will say that their faith is very important in their life (64%). Nearly two-thirds of those participating in this survey firmly embrace the idea that, “the single, most important purpose of [their] life is to love God with all [their] heart, mind, strength and soul.” However, a deeper look at people’s full range of

spiritual beliefs, behaviour and commitment, raises a number of interesting observations.

Most South Africans still embrace the traditional view that God is the all-powerful, all-knowing, perfect Creator of the universe who rules the world today (65%). There are very few who possess the traditional orthodox views about Jesus and the devil. Currently, 33% agree strongly that “the devil is not a living being but is a symbol of evil”. Also, 22% agree strongly that “when He lived on earth, Jesus Christ was human and committed sins, like other people.” Twice as many (44%) disagreed strongly with this statement, which is a better indication – however, not an excellent one. Each of these beliefs is fundamental to the Christian faith and certainly a more moral lifestyle.

From a Christian perspective, it is rather disheartening to see that less than half (47%) of those participating in this survey agree strongly to the statement, “the Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles it teaches”.

There are only 20% of those participating in this survey that found it crucial to tell others about their belief. 40% of the people disagree strongly with, having a responsibility to tell other people about their religious beliefs – despite 68% of those participating in this survey agreeing strongly that their religious faith is very important in their lives. There is somewhat reluctance to sharing one’s faith with others.

To the statement whether “a person is generally good, or does good enough things for others during their life, they will earn a place in Heaven”, it was interesting to note the mixture of response. One would have imagined there to be more people agreeing with this statement (35% agree strongly and 20% agree somewhat as opposed to (9% disagreeing somewhat and another 28% disagreeing strongly). This indicates to people’s belief is one of “good works” directing people to heaven.

Less than a third (29%) of those participating in this survey felt that “success in this life is determined only by your obedience to God; nothing else matters.” Another 20% agree somewhat. This is concerning as there is a strong perception that success is measured by the amount of material possessions one can accumulate. Success is not measured by one’s commitment to spiritual matters – even though there are many who are “spiritual” but not committed to any institution or organization per se.

On the contrary, there are many (41%) who “are completely committed to personally making the world and other people’s lives better” – that is the statement they agree strongly with. Adding the 29% who agree somewhat with the same statement, makes it seven out of ten people wanting to make the world and other people’s lives better. The irony is that when it comes to practically putting the intention into practice, the figures do not make sense to the intention.

### **3.2. Issues of a Spiritual Nature**

Edging in to issues of a more spiritual nature with those participating in this survey, one-fifth (21%) felt strongly that one “cannot become a complete and mature person unless you belong to a community of faith that influences you”. Many have become immersed with their own activities and agendas and do not see the need for community. There seems to be extremes in this regard. Some are very involved while others are not involved at all. This is certainly true amongst the younger generation where it is the black youth (39%) who believe in the effectiveness of community – what is called “*Ubuntu*”, which is the African philosophy of “*people are people because of other people!*” There is still an underlying philosophy that has enabled many people to see the effectiveness of the community and where people can meet, recognise and understand one another.

What also needs to be kept in mind is that “Modernistic Western churches are being challenged to reframe themselves in nothing less than a new theological paradigm. In this regard it is advantageous to be in Africa where realities are sobering, as well as challenging” (Hendriks 2001:64).

More than four out of ten (42%) of those participating in this survey felt that they are “in control” of their lives. This is hard to believe when one looks at the high rate of crime, suicide, dysfunctional families, etc.

### **3.3. Personal Religious Engagement**

With reference to personal religious engagement – only asked to those who are Christian – one sees that not even one-third (32%) read their Bible on a regular basis (not including when they are at church). Also, 35% claimed that they attend church on a weekly basis yet only 25% of those 35% attend a “home-cell” type gathering during the week. From a “missional” perspective, this is very real cause for concern. It makes sense, therefore, why only less than one out of every five (19%) Christians participating in this survey volunteered to do something in their free time at a local church. Ironically, most of these volunteers were elderly people.

It was somewhat more encouraging to see 86% of the Christians participating in this survey claimed to have prayed to God in the past week. Again, what is alarming is the low amount of people participating or attending a “home-cell” or “cell-group” (25%). Many feel that attending church occasionally will be sufficient for them to grow spiritually and make an impact or difference in the society they live in – even though 38% of the Christians participating in this survey shared their faith in Christ in the past 12 months.

Of those who were Christians participating in this survey, less than one-third (29%) read from their Bible, attended church and prayed in the last seven days.



It would be an adequate observation, therefore, to state that most South Africans do not have strong and clear beliefs, largely because they do not possess a coherent biblical worldview – that is, they lack a consistent and holistic understanding of their faith. Many South Africans say they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ yet they believe He sinned while on earth. Many believers claim to trust what the Bible teaches, but they reject the concept of a real spiritual enemy or they feel that evangelistic activities are not a priority but rather optional. Millions of South Africans feel personally committed to God, yet they have their own “belief system” or are “spiritual people” in their “own way”.

Although one needs to be cautious about reading too much into figures, one needs to be cautious not to become too casual among those who move too far from basic accepted, traditional views. It eventually raises the question, to whom and what are people committed to? Also, people are spiritually active, but to what end in their “own way”?

We are well aware that behaviour is driven by core beliefs. It is possible to find changes in behaviour without concurrent shifts in beliefs related to that behaviour, but without change in the underlying beliefs, the changed behaviour is unlikely to remain changed. In most cases, the behaviour will eventually revert back to its original state because there is not a mental, emotional and spiritual support system to sustain the alteration in activity.

There is always the possibility that the changes in the behaviours observed will produce some permanent transitions in beliefs. For example, it may be that there may be a dramatic increase in Bible reading that could produce a new understanding of biblical content. It is possible that more church attendance would lead to a deeper relationship with God. It is reasonable to expect more widespread involvement in home-cells and small groups to produce some degree of change in people’s lives – if there is correct and appropriate teaching and if

there is a conscious effort toward this intention. While such transitions do not occur often, there is always the hope that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, lives will be changed. Since God works through people to accomplish His purposes, it is an exciting challenge for Christian leaders to seek His guidance toward facilitating a genuine period of renewal and revival in this country.

Hendriks makes an excellent observation in mentioning some of the challenges facing South Africans:

“If South Africa wants to face and even have a future, it must face the past. The different groups of people in this country can learn to trust each other (then start working together) only if they are allowed to tell one another their stories. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission could not achieve this ideal for the population as a whole. The church has a vital role to play in this regard” (2001:65).