

Article

# The Science of Cathedral Studies: Exploring Demographic Profile, Motivational Intentions, and Perceived Impact among those Attending the Holly Bough Service in Liverpool Cathedral

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Received: 18 August 2020; Accepted: 11 September 2020; Published: 21 September 2020



**Abstract:** The Holly Bough service is a unique pre-Christmas event, combining musical excellence and theological depth, crafted by the founding dean of Liverpool Cathedral in the early twentieth century for the Fourth Sunday of Advent. Located within the developing science of cathedral studies, this paper analyses the demographic profile, motivational intention (drawing on religious orientation theory) and perceived impact on spiritual wellbeing (drawing on Fisher's four dimensional model) among 564 participants who completed a detailed survey at the service held in 2019. The data demonstrated a mix of ages, a sense of Anglican commitment to this form of event-belonging by those who return year-on-year and invite friends to join them, and a perceived beneficial impact on all four dimensions of spiritual wellbeing.

**Keywords:** cathedral studies; Christmas; spiritual wellbeing; ways of belonging; religious orientation theory

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. *The Science of Cathedral Studies*

The notion of the science of cathedral studies was introduced and illustrated by Francis (2015) who drew together in one volume ten original research projects, integrated by collaboration within one research group, exploring different aspects of *Anglican cathedrals in modern life*. This research group is rooted within the school of empirical theology, a branch of theological enquiry that takes seriously theories and methods shaped within the social sciences (see Cartledge 1999; Francis and Village 2015). Each of the ten original research projects reported in this volume stands as a complete scientific investigation in its own right and demonstrates how disciplined investigation of a clearly defined research question can advance knowledge of relevance to the development and refinement of cathedral ministry and mission in England and Wales today. Taken together the ten studies demonstrate both qualitative and quantitative methods at work, addressing the kind of research questions for which these different approaches are best suited. Taken together the ten studies demonstrate the usefulness for cathedral studies of theories shaped in sociology (e.g., social capital theory), theories shaped in

psychology (e.g., religious orientation theory), theories shaped in religious studies (e.g., the spiritual revolution theory), and theories shaped in empirical theology (e.g., the theology of individual differences).

As examples of quantitative studies, [Francis and Williams \(2015a\)](#) explored the experience of 269 worshippers attending the morning services at Llandaff Cathedral, Wales, UK. Drawing on social capital theory, they assessed the different forms of capital that the worshippers generated in that social arena. Contrary to some common speculation, the study indicated that the cathedral does not primarily draw those who enjoy anonymity and wish to escape from parish commitment; rather the cathedral attracts worshippers because of the friendly atmosphere, or because of the style of worship, and attendance exerts a positive impact on the development of personal, social, and spiritual capital.

[Francis and Williams \(2015b\)](#) explored the motivational styles of 592 worshippers attending three different cathedrals, drawing on religious orientation theory that distinguishes among intrinsic, extrinsic, and quest motivational styles. This study indicated that some cathedrals were better at welcoming the quest orientation than others.

[Lankshear et al. \(2015\)](#) compared the profiles of the Sunday congregations at Southwark Cathedral (263 adult worshippers) with the profile of the congregations attending parish churches within the Woolwich Episcopal Area (6042 adult worshippers). This study draws attention to key ways in which the cathedral congregation is different. In simple demographic terms, there were within the cathedral higher proportions of men, younger people, people who are single, or in non-married relationships, and people in full-time employment. This demographic profile suggests that the cathedral may be reaching some people whom the parish churches may find it more difficult to reach.

[Francis et al. \(2015\)](#) reported on a survey of 2695 visitors to St Davids Cathedral, profiling their engagement with a range of spiritual practices (shaped by spiritual revolution theory), alongside their engagement with conventional Christian practices. This analysis highlighted the ways in which visitors to cathedrals bring with them contrasting worldviews and contrasting spiritual quests. Cathedrals may need to be aware of the disparate worldviews embraced by their visitors and be both willing and equipped to engage with these worldviews.

As examples of qualitative studies, [ap Sion \(2015\)](#) focused attention on the 'ordinary prayer' of those who made use of the prayer board in Bangor Cathedral. The content of a thousand prayers posted was analysed in terms of the issues that concerned the authors, for whom or for what they were praying, and whether a desired outcome was specified. Comparisons were made with findings from an earlier study of Lichfield Cathedral using a similar analytical framework. It was shown that the prayer board facility was accessed by a broad cross-section of the local community, as well as by visitors from further afield, and that there were interesting differences in emphasis between the prayer requests left in Bangor and Lichfield, possibly related to the character of the cathedrals.

[Burton \(2015\)](#) focused attention on the comments written by more than a thousand visitors to one cathedral over a period of more than three years. Drawing, like *ap Siôn*, on the principles of ordinary theology, Burton distinguished between the cathedral as tourist attraction (engendering positive and negative responses) and as house of God (to which visitors responded as a holy place, a place of calm, a place that inspired thought, and one that stimulated reflection on personal beliefs). Burton recommended that cathedrals facilitate the gathering of such valuable reflections on the cathedral through the visitors' book, and he encouraged cathedrals to produce a welcoming desk and an inviting chair. He also urged staff to read and analyse visitors' written comments, which become windows into the souls of those who pass through and offer encouragement and challenges to those who maintain and administer cathedrals, whether as tourist attractions or as the house of God.

[Muskett \(2015\)](#) surveyed the websites of all 42 cathedrals in England in order to analyse the characteristics of cathedral Friends' associations and assess their significance. She distinguished between these associations' capacity to generate money, prayer, and volunteers for cathedrals, and to create opportunities for social networking and learning for members. It was shown that this mode of Friendship is sustained by information and that passive participants appear to be able to share

(albeit vicariously) benefits of and commitment to the cathedral community's cause. The theory of passive participation in voluntary associations, on which Muskett drew for this study, suggests that cathedral staff should not underestimate the contribution made to cathedral life by those who are not squarely in the regular worshipping community, but who engage with the cathedral more remotely.

### 1.2. *The Science of Cathedral Studies at Christmas*

Within the developing science of cathedral studies, extending to include cathedral-like greater churches, a small cluster of studies is beginning to emerge around the theme of Christmas. Phillips (2010) reported on an exploration of the Christmas story and its meaning as told by members of the congregation at the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols held at York Minster on Christmas Eve 2007. Murphy (2016) reported on eight qualitative interviews with people who attended the Christmas Eve Carol Service at Holy Trinity Church, Stratford upon Avon in 2015. Muskett (2017) presented a narrative case study exploring the six-day Christmas Tree Festival in St Wolfram's Church, Grantham in 2015. This festival featured a large artificial skating rink in the centre of the nave, as well as 105 Christmas trees in the side aisles and chancel, decorated by local businesses, charities, church groups and individuals. Coleman et al. (2019) explored how Christmas presents both an opportunity and a challenge for cathedrals, drawing on data from an interdisciplinary study of four English cathedrals: Canterbury, Durham, and York (all Anglican), and Westminster (Roman Catholic).

Working within a quantitative tradition, in a series of papers, Walker (2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2015) reported on detailed surveys conducted at carol services held in Worcester Cathedral and in Lichfield Cathedral. The first of these papers (2012a) reported on data provided by 393 participants at the carol services in Worcester Cathedral in 2009 who completed the New Indices of Religious Orientation (Francis 2007). This instrument distinguishes between extrinsic religious orientation (where religion serves other ends), intrinsic religious orientation (where religion is an end in itself), and quest religious orientation. Quest orientation seeks to capture the concept of doubt, provisionality, and tentativeness concerning religious questions. It recognises that an important part of religiosity can be the attraction of living with questions and continuing on a religious journey of exploration. The core finding from Walker's analysis was that the quest orientation was in much greater evidence among those who attended the cathedral carol service than among those who attended churches on a normal Sunday. Walker noted this as an opportunity for cathedrals to engage with people who come with religious questions, seeking further progress with their religious quest.

In the second paper, Walker (2012b) reported on data provided by 239 women and 164 men at the carol services in Worcester Cathedral in 2009 who completed the Francis Psychological Type Scales (Francis 2005; Francis et al. 2017). This instrument generates a psychological type profile in terms of two orientations (introversion and extraversion), two perceiving functions (sensing and intuition), two judging functions (thinking and feeling), and two attitudes (judging and perceiving). A series of congregation studies has demonstrated that churchgoers are far from being representative of the population as a whole. Anglican congregations are somewhat weighted toward introversion and toward sensing, and heavily weighted toward feeling (see Francis et al. 2007a; Francis et al. 2011; Francis et al. 2016). The main finding from the study reported by Walker (2012b) is clearly reflected in his choice of title, 'O come all ye thinking types: The wider appeal of the cathedral carol service'. Reflecting on this finding, Walker observed that the comparable data on Anglican clergy (see Francis et al. 2007b) suggests the likelihood that Anglican church services are largely planned and led by feeling types who will have a predisposition to assume that the idiom that works for them on Sundays is also the one to use when devising services for special occasions like Christmas carol services. Working on this assumption, however, may misjudge the distinctive needs of those who present for the annual cathedral carol service. Walker's findings were subsequently replicated in a study by Francis et al. (2020) among 193 participants attending Christmas carol services at Bangor Cathedral.

In the third paper, Walker (2013), drew on data provided by 1151 participants completing questionnaires during two carol services in Worcester Cathedral in 2009 and two carol services in

Lichfield Cathedral in 2010, in order to examine closely the responses of the 460 individuals categorised as occasional churchgoers, that is as attending less often than six times a year (see [Francis and Richter 2007](#)). Walker examined these responses through the lens of ‘ordinary theology’ as refined by [Astley \(2002, 2003\)](#). Walker’s data allowed him to apply this lens to six themes: reflecting on attending the carol service, reflecting on the carol service experience, reflecting on the Christmas story, reflecting on Christian belief, reflecting on moral issues and concerns, and reflecting on public religion. Walker concluded that for these occasional churchgoers, rather than faith collapsing into a combination of sentiment, culture, and aesthetics, it retains for many a significant religious content from which can be constructed a picture of the ordinary theology of the participants. Walker finds within this ordinary theology that:

a high expectation is placed on the possibility of encounter with God through participation in the style of worship offered at a carol service; the high return rate to the service suggests that their past experience supports that expectation. The attraction and positive experience of carol service worship may owe much to the fact that the Christmas story is heard there as a narrative gateway to the mystery of God, rather than as coded doctrine; and it would seem that there is a real intention on the part of the occasional churchgoers present to enter through that gateway, rather than passively to observe what is going on beyond it.

([Walker 2013](#), p. 44).

In the fourth paper, [Walker \(2015\)](#) addressed the two direct questions ‘who attends and why?’ drawing on the data provided by the 1151 participants from Worcester and Lichfield. The demographic data demonstrate some clear contrasts with the typical Anglican Sunday congregation. There are higher proportions of men (42%), of younger people (36% under fifty), and of occasional churchgoers (40% attended less than six times a year). The attitudinal data suggests that what is most likely to appeal to these participants at the Christmas carol service is an inclusive and liberal Christian faith, a faith that engages them in their daily lives, invited them onto a mystical journey, is visible and engaged in the public realm, accepts and respects their ordinary expression of faith, does not require them to hold fast to details of dogma, accommodates prevailing views on human sexuality, and works in open partnership both with other Christian traditions and with other world faiths. Walker concludes also that:

there is evidence that these attendees are flexible in their church attendance and hence may be more open to regular churchgoing if what is offered engages with them in an attractive and well-presented way without requiring them to change their fundamental positions. For those who believe such a faith to be a parody of Christianity, such attenders present a forbidding challenge, but for other such attenders present an opportunity to engage with a favourably disposed population.

(p. 128).

## 2. Research Question

Against this background the aim of the present study is to explore the demographic and motivational characteristics of the people who attended the annual Holly Bough service at Liverpool Cathedral on the Fourth Sunday of Advent 2019. Liverpool Cathedral stands as the largest cathedral in England, the fifth largest in Europe, and the seventh largest in the world. Designed by Giles Gilbert Scott as a fine example of the development of modern Gothic architecture, Liverpool Cathedral was consecrated on 19 July 1924 long before its completion in 1978 (see [Kennerley 2008](#); [Thomas 2018](#)). The Holly Bough service holds a unique place in the calendar of Liverpool Cathedral and is distinct from the two carol services held in Liverpool Cathedral on Christmas Eve.

The Holly Bough service was designed by Frederick William Dwelly, the first Dean of Liverpool Cathedral, who is celebrated by his biographer [Kennerley \(2015\)](#) as a ‘liturgical genius’. In some senses

this service stands in the tradition of the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols that was inaugurated in King's College Chapel, Cambridge, on Christmas Eve 1918, but it differs from that long-established service in two important ways. First, it was designed not for Christmas Eve but for the Fourth Sunday of Advent when the liturgical mood is quite different. Second, it was designed not only as a vehicle for a rich choral tradition and the proclamation of scripture (with five rather than nine readings from scripture, and one non-scriptural reading), but also as a vehicle for liturgical drama and powerful symbolism.

The central drama of the Holly Bough service follows the fifth reading. Attention is turned to the west end of the cathedral where a life-size manger is already in place. From the west end an Advent candle stand entirely wrapped in holly and crowned with five lit candles is carried in solemn procession to the high altar, above which the reredos displays the crucifixion. The drama is enhanced by the way in which the lights are dimmed. In this way, the Holly Bough represents the Christ progressing from crib to cross, linking liturgically the glorious birth and the humiliating death of the one for whom the Season of Advent is still preparing. At the high altar the Dean blesses the Holly Bough, and the Bishop concludes the service with the final reading, collect and blessing.

The five readings from scripture included in the service were: Isaiah 11: 1–9; Luke 1: 26–35, 38; Matthew 1: 18–25; Luke 2: 1–7; and Philippians 2: 5–11. Alongside seasonal material sung by the choir, the congregation were invited to sing traditional carols: "Once in royal David's city"; "In the bleak midwinter frosty wind made moan"; "Angels from the realms of glory"; "O come, all ye faithful"; and "Hark! the herald-angels sing".

Re-voicing the question posed by Walker (2015), the question addressed by the present study becomes: Liverpool Cathedral Holly Bough service: who attends and why?

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Procedure

When people came into the cathedral for the Holly Bough service the welcomers gave them a copy of the service and a white envelope containing the questionnaire and a pen. The welcomers invited participants to complete the questionnaire. This invitation was reinforced by the video screens organised around the cathedral to relay the service. The front page of the questionnaire carried the following message from the Dean.

*As Dean of this wonderful cathedral I would like to listen to and to learn from the many people who come to our special services preparing for Christmas. By listening and learning I hope to be able to plan wisely for the future.*

*This survey has been designed with two parts. I would like to invite you to complete part one while you are sitting and waiting for the service to begin. Then toward the end of the service there will be an opportunity for you to complete part two.*

*Everything you tell us is completely confidential and anonymous. Please feel free to answer as honestly as you can. We want to find out what people are really feeling and thinking about what we are doing as a Cathedral.*

*Please finish completing the questionnaire before you go, and leave the questionnaire on your seat.*

*Thank you for your help and cooperation.*

#### 3.2. Instrument

The questionnaire comprised two parts. Part one, completed while waiting for the service to start, contained three sections. Section 1 explored demographic and background information, including age, sex, employment status, social status, relationship with the cathedral, religious affiliation, and frequency of worship attendance. Section 2 presented 50 Likert-style items assessed on a five-point scale from disagree strongly, through not certain, to agree strongly. These items explored religious identity

and motivation, reasons for attending the service, and personal wellbeing assessed by the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (Hills and Argyle 2002). Section 3 presented the Francis Psychological Type and Emotional Temperament Scales (Francis 2005) designed to assess orientations (extraversion and introversion), perceiving functions (sensing and intuition), judging functions (thinking and feeling), attitudes (judging and perceiving), and emotionality.

Part 2, completed toward the end of the service, presented 49 Likert-style items assessed on a five-point scale from disagree strongly, through not certain, to agree strongly. These items explored the perceived impact of attending the service, and for the second time assessed wellbeing via the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (Hills and Argyle 2002).

### 3.3. Analysis

The present paper draws on three components of this survey, demographic profile (who came to the cathedral?), motivational intentions (why did they come?), and perceived impact of the experience (what effect did they experience?).

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Demographic Profile

The first part of the questionnaire concerning demographic data was thoroughly completed by 564 participants.

Sex. While the Church of England is good at collecting and publishing counts of church attendance, its mechanism for collecting the data does not provide profiles of the sex and age of those who attend (see Church of England 2019). For information of this nature congregation surveys are needed. The recent detailed survey of 31,521 churchgoers throughout the Diocese of Southwark reported that 35% of Anglican churchgoers were male (see Francis and Lankshear forthcoming). Walker (2013) study of 1151 participants attending carol services reported that 44% were male. At the Holly Bough service 37% were male (Table 1) suggesting that this service attracted a lower proportion of men than Walker's carol services.

**Table 1.** Sex.

	N	%
Male	207	37
Female	335	59
Other/missing	22	4

Age. Within the Diocese of Southwark, Francis and Lankshear (forthcoming) reported that 21% of churchgoers were under the age of forty, 30% were in their forties or fifties, 35% were in their sixties or seventies, and 9% were aged eighty or over. Walker (2013) study of those attending carol services found a younger age profile with 30% under the age of forty, 41% in their forties or fifties, and 29% aged seventy or over. At the Holly Bough service 20% were under the age of forty, 33% in their forties or fifties, and 46% were aged sixty or over (Table 2) suggesting that this service attracted a lower proportion of younger participants than Walker's carol services.

**Table 2.** Age.

	N	%
Under 20	21	4
20–29	47	8
30–39	46	8
40–49	69	12
50–59	118	21
60–69	138	25
70–79	92	16
80+	28	5
Missing	5	1

Employment status. Within the Diocese of Southwark, [Francis and Lankshear \(forthcoming\)](#) reported that 36% of churchgoers were in full-time employment, 16% in part-time employment, and 36% were retired. At the Holly Bough service a similar pattern emerged with 38% in full-time employment, 11% in part-time employment, and 36% retired (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Employment status.

	N	%
Full-time employed	212	38
Part-time employed	62	11
Self-employed	37	7
Student	26	5
Homemaker/carer	10	2
Unemployed	5	1
Retired	203	36
Missing	9	2

Type of work. Table 4 presents the responses to the question ‘In your present or most recent work do you regard yourself as . . .’. The data demonstrate that 61% located themselves in professional occupations, with a further 16% in semi-professional occupations.

**Table 4.** Type of work.

	N	%
Unskilled manual worker	8	1
Semi-skilled manual worker	17	3
Skilled manual worker	30	5
Semi-professional	91	16
Professional	345	61
Student	28	5
Missing	45	8

Connection with Liverpool. Table 5 indicates that over half of the participants in the Holly Bough service lived within ten miles of Liverpool Cathedral.

**Table 5.** Connection with Liverpool.

	N	%
Live within ten miles of cathedral	306	54
Live over ten miles away	251	45
Missing	2	1

Connection with Liverpool Cathedral. Table 6 makes it clear that the Holly Bough service was reaching far beyond the regular congregations, but at the same time not proving strongly attractive to the regular congregation. Seven out of every ten participants (69%) regarded themselves as occasional visitors to the cathedral. This high proportion suggests a kind of brand loyalty to Liverpool Cathedral among those who consistently come back for occasional visits. A further 8% were visiting for the first time. In other words, the Holly Bough service gave Liverpool Cathedral that unique opportunity to reach out on this occasion to a large number of people who may not be coming back for some time.

**Table 6.** Connection with Liverpool Cathedral.

	N	%
Member of the congregation	36	6
Regular visitor	89	16
Occasional visitor	387	69
Visiting for the first time	46	8
Missing	6	1

Hearing about the service. The questionnaire gave the participants the opportunity to indicate how they had heard about the service in terms of six mechanisms and to tick all that applied. Table 7 demonstrates that almost half of the participants (48%) were there this year because they had been there last year. The experience of the Holly Bough service makes an impact that draws people back. The second key influencer concerned friends who had attended in previous years and discovered something that they wished to share with others (24%). The cathedral website played a part by being consulted by 22% of the participants. Generally, social media, the Cathedral Christmas leaflet, and local news played a less important part.

**Table 7.** Hearing about the service.

	N	%
Came last year	263	48
Friends invited me	132	24
Cathedral website	120	22
Social media	51	9
Cathedral Christmas leaflet	41	8
Local news	23	4
Missing	15	3

Religious affiliation. The survey included the list of the six religious traditions included in the census for England and Wales for the first time in 2001, preceded by the category 'none' (Francis 2003; Sherif 2011). The data presented in Table 8 indicates that the majority of participants (84%) self-assigned as Christian and that 14% self-assigned as none. There was a small group of participants from other faith backgrounds.

**Table 8.** Religious affiliation.

	N	%
None	79	14
Christian	475	84
Buddhist	3	1
Hindu	1	0
Jewish	2	0
Muslim	0	0
Sikh	0	0
Missing	4	1

Christian denomination. Table 9 indicates that 70% of those who self-identified as Christian were Anglicans, 20% were Catholics, 5% belonged to other Christian groups, and 4% did not identify a specific denomination.

**Table 9.** Christian denomination.

	N	%
Anglican	334	70
Catholic	95	20
Orthodox	2	0
Pentecostal	3	1
Methodist	10	2
Presbyterian	6	1
Baptist	3	1
Quaker	1	0
Welsh Presbyterian	1	0
No denomination specified	20	4

Public worship attendance. Social scientists tend to identify as churchgoers people who attend services at least six times a year apart from occasions like weddings and funerals (Richter and Francis 1998; Francis and Richter 2007). On this criterion, Table 10 indicates that slightly over half of those attending the Holly Bough service would be classified as non-churchgoers (52%), compared with (46%) who would be classified as churchgoers. Among the churchgoers, 21% report as attending nearly every week. Among the non-churchgoers, 11% report as never attending. The Holly Bough service clearly attracts people who bring with them differing connections with church.

**Table 10.** Public worship attendance.

	N	%
Never	64	11
At least once a year	232	41
At least six times a year	97	17
At least once a month	46	8
Nearly every week	118	21
Missing	7	2

#### 4.2. Motivational Intentions

The second part of the questionnaire which explored motivational intentions was thoroughly completed by 499 participants. In other words, 65 participants gave up after completing the demographic section. The second part of the questionnaire contained four groups of questions concerning self-assessed religiosity, motivation for attending the Holly Bough service, intrinsic religious motivation, and quest religious motivation. The notion of intrinsic religious motivation is rooted in the work of Allport and Ross (1967) and is concerned with the importance that individuals attribute to religion in shaping their personal lives. The three components of this construct are identified as integration, public religion, and personal religion. The notion of quest religious motivation is rooted in the work of Batson and Ventis (1982) and is concerned with the importance that individuals attribute to the religious quest rather than to attaining religious certainty. The three components of this construct are identified as existentialism, self-criticism, and openness to change. Intrinsic religious motivation and quest motivation were assessed in the questionnaire by the New Indices of Religious Orientation (NIRO; Francis 2007). It is important to recognise that intrinsic religious motivation and quest religious motivation are not exclusive categories. The same individuals may score high on both, or score low on both.

*Self-assigned religiosity.* Following such studies as the *Spiritual revolution: Why religion is giving way to spirituality* by Heelas and Woodhead (2005), commentators on the place of religion in contemporary societies have tended to invite participants to assess themselves on scales of religion, spirituality, and belief in God. Table 11 demonstrates that between one half and two-thirds of the participants at the Holly Bough service rate themselves positively on all three scales: 55% count themselves as a religious person, 66% count themselves as a spiritual person, and 64% count themselves as believing in God.

**Table 11.** Self-assessed religiosity.

	N	%
I am a religious person	274	55
I am a spiritual person	329	66
I believe in God	319	64

*Motivation for attending Holly Bough service.* There may be diverse reasons for people attending services at Christmas. Building on the work of Walker (2013), the present study identified the six reasons listed in Table 12. The data presented in this table demonstrated that the top motivation was to enjoy the Christmas music (95%), followed by to keep a traditional Christmas (84%) and to remember the Christmas story (82%). Three quarters of the participants cited the motivation to celebrate Christmas with friends (77%), and to experience the true meaning of Christmas (76%). The proportion fell to 62% who cited the motivation to worship the Son of God.

**Table 12.** Motivation for attendance.

	N	%
To enjoy the Christmas music	476	95
To remember the Christmas story	407	82
To keep a traditional Christmas	420	84
To experience the true meaning of Christmas	379	76
To worship the Son of God	308	62
To celebrate Christmas with friends	386	77

*Intrinsic religious motivation.* The scale of intrinsic religious motivation (Table 13) suggests that up to half of the participants attending the Holly Bough service carry with them a significant depth of Christian commitment, although this is not the kind of Christian commitment reflected in weekly attendance. Rather it is the kind of commitment that Walker (2017) characterises as reflected in engaging with events. Thus, while just 19% say that they allow almost nothing to prevent them from going to church on Sundays (a figure closely reflected in the 21% who attend church nearly every week according to Table 10), 48% affirm that church attendance is important to them as a place to share fellowship with other Christians. Twice as many participants attribute importance to personal prayer compared with those who attribute importance to weekly church attendance. Thus, 38% affirm that they pray chiefly because it deepens their relationship with God, and 45% affirm that they pray at home because it helps them to be aware of God's presence. Almost half of the participants affirm that they try hard to carry their religion over into all their other dealings in life (48%), and 44% agree that their religious beliefs really shape their whole approach to life.

**Table 13.** Intrinsic religious motivation.

	N	%
My religious beliefs really shape my whole approach to life	222	44
I try hard to carry my religion over into all my other dealings in life	239	48
I allow almost nothing to prevent me from going to church on Sundays	97	19
The church is important to me as a place to share fellowship with other Christians	241	48
I pray at home because it helps me to be aware of God's presence	226	45
I pray chiefly because it deepens my relationship with God	190	38

*Quest religious motivation.* The scale of quest religious motivation (Table 14) suggests that up to half of the participants attending the Holly Bough service carry with them a significant commitment to the quest orientation. Their religious commitment is one of enquiry, seeking and testing faith, rather than longing for certainty and for unchanging truths. In terms of the existentialism component, 28% of the participants say that they were driven to ask religious questions by a growing awareness of the tensions in their world, and 42% affirmed that their life experiences had led them to rethink their religious beliefs. In terms of the self-criticism component, 49% said that for them doubting is an important part of what it means to be religious, and 52% affirmed that they value their religious doubts and uncertainties. In terms of the openness to change component, 37% said that they are constantly questioning their religious beliefs, and 52% affirmed that, as they grow, they expect their religion to grow and change as well.

**Table 14.** Quest religious motivation.

	N	%
I was drawn to ask religious questions by a growing awareness of the tensions in my world	140	28
My life experiences have led me to rethink my religious beliefs	208	42
I value my religious doubts and uncertainties	259	52
For me, doubting is an important part of what it means to be religious	244	49
As I grow and change, I expect my religion to grow and change as well	258	52
I am constantly questioning my religious beliefs	183	37

#### 4.3. Perceived Impact

Toward the close of the Holly Bough service the participants were invited to reflect on their experience of attending the service. This part of the questionnaire was thoroughly completed by 420 participants. In other words a further 79 participants did not take up the opportunity to return to the second part of the questionnaire when space was offered in the structure of the service for them to do so during improvisation on a Christmas theme by the cathedral organist. To facilitate and to structure this reflection the questionnaire offered the prompt 'Attending the service today in Liverpool Cathedral ...' The items following this invitation were designed to reflect the conceptualisation of spiritual health or spiritual wellbeing as advanced in a series of studies by Fisher (1998, 2004, 2010, 2011, 2016). According to Fisher, spiritual wellbeing is reflected in the quality of relationships that each person has in four domains: with the self (the personal domain), with other people (the communal domain), with the world around us (the environmental domain), and with a personal or impersonal transcendent other (the transcendental domain). Fisher's conceptualisation of spiritual wellbeing has been operationalised through several instruments: the Spiritual Health in Four Domains Index (SH4DI; Fisher et al. 2000), the Spiritual Health And Life-Orientation Measure (SHALOM; Fisher 2010, 2016; Gomez and Fisher 2005a, 2005b, and Feeling Good, Living Life (Fisher 2004)). The items presented in Table 15 build on this tradition of measurement.

**Table 15.** Perceived impact.

	N	%
<i>Personal</i>		
to reflect on my personal wellbeing	310	74
to feel better about myself	277	66
to feel less stressed about myself	262	62
to open my eyes to the good in myself	217	52
to connect better with my inner self	273	65
<i>Communal</i>		
to reflect on my relationship with other people	309	74
to feel better about my relationships with other people	269	64
to feel less stressed about my relationships with other people	235	56
to open my eyes to the good in other people	274	65
to connect better with other people close to me	271	65
<i>Environmental</i>		
to reflect on my relationship with the world	276	66
to feel better about my relationship with the world	226	54
to feel less stressed about my relationship with the world	203	48
to open my eyes to the good in the world	262	65
to connect better with the natural world	203	48
<i>Transcendental</i>		
to reflect on my relationship with God	260	62
to feel better about my relationship with God	234	56
to feel less stressed about my relationship with God	195	46
to open my eyes to the good in God	235	56
to connect better with God	238	57

Note: N and % are the sum of the agree and strongly agree response.

The data presented in Table 15 suggest that across all four domains the participants in the Holly Bough service perceive a positive impact of attending the service on their level of spiritual wellbeing as conceptualised and operationalised within Fisher's relational model. In terms of the personal domain, between half and three quarters of the participants affirm that attending the service in Liverpool Cathedral has helped them to reflect on their personal wellbeing (74%), to feel better about themselves (66%), to connect better with their inner self (65%), to feel less stressed about themselves (62%), and to open their eyes to the good in themselves (52%).

In terms of the communal domain, between half and three quarters of the participants affirm that attending the service in Liverpool Cathedral has helped them to reflect on their relationships with other people (74%), to open their eyes to the good in other people (65%), to connect better with other people close to them (65%), to feel better about their relationships with other people (64%), and to feel less stressed about their relationships with other people (56%).

In terms of the environmental domain, between just under half and two thirds of the participants affirm that attending the service in Liverpool Cathedral has helped them to reflect on their relationship with the world (66%), to open their eyes to the good in the world (65%), to feel better about their relationship with the world (54%), to feel less stressed about their relationship with the world (48%), and to connect better with the natural world (48%).

In terms of the transcendental domain, between just under a half and just under two-thirds of the participants affirm that attending the service in Liverpool Cathedral has helped them to reflect on their relationship with God (62%), to connect better with God (57%), to feel better about their relationship with God (56%), to open their eyes to the good in God (56%), and to feel less stressed about their relationship with God (46%).

## 5. Conclusions

Working within the emerging field of the science of cathedral studies, and drawing in particular on earlier research that had concentrated on the experiences of those attending carol services in cathedrals and greater churches, the present paper has reported on a survey conducted among participants at the Holly Bough service held in Liverpool Cathedral on the evening of the Fourth Sunday of Advent 2019. This paper focused on three aspects of the survey in order to provide a demographic profile of the participants, to explore their motivational intentions in attending, and to examine the perceived impact of the service on their spiritual wellbeing. The new data generated by the survey suggest the following three conclusions.

First, the demographic profile identified the Holly Bough service as an event that has built up a faithful following among occasional churchgoers who recognise this as an event to which they wish to return year by year and to invite friends to come with them. About half of the participants live within ten miles of the cathedral, while the other half travel further distances. Overall the age profile and the ratio between men and women is roughly in keeping with what may be expected of Anglican churchgoers, and there is a heavy weighting toward an educated and professional clientele.

Second, the motivational profile shows the participants to be drawn to the service more by the musical excellence than by the purely religious occasion. However, among those attending there is a considerable level of spiritual interest and religious belief in God. Many of these participants feel that they belong in Liverpool Cathedral and that they are religiously motivated. Their attachment is less to the activity of weekly attendance and more in line with Walker (2017) appreciation of attachment belonging to events. If this event were not to be sustained, then the sense of belonging brought with these people would no longer be validated. Their understanding of being Christian is motivated by espousing a serious religious quest that is open to change and development rather than by commitment to dogma or to easily codified faith. In the light of Walker (2017) analysis of the significance of belonging to the Anglican Church through commitment to events (for example, the Holly Bough service that happens once a year), in contrast with activities (for example, the Cathedral Eucharist that happens every Sunday), Liverpool Cathedral may be wise to count these regular (yearly) attenders among its committed members.

Third, the perceived impact of the service on spiritual wellbeing is quite profound. When invited to reflect seriously at the end of the service, well over half of the participants go away feeling better: feeling better about themselves, feeling better about other people, feeling better about the world, and feeling better about God. Here is perhaps the secret of Liverpool Cathedral at the heart of a busy and bustling city. It makes an impact for good on the lives of people who engage with it during the major events that characterise both the religious and the secular calendar.

The present paper has not exhausted the detailed evidence generated at the Holly Bough service. Already some further tightly focused analyses of these data have been undertaken and reported elsewhere. Francis and Jones (2020) employed these data to examine in greater depth the thesis that cathedrals may act as agents of psychological health and wellbeing in secular societies. Francis et al. (forthcoming) examined the data generated by the Francis Psychological Type and Emotional Temperament Scales (Francis 2005) completed by participants at the Holly Bough service, testing the thesis that events of this nature attract to the cathedral a richer range of psychological types than are attracted to the Sunday services.

Moreover, the findings already presented raise questions about some differences detected among the group of participants and the findings offered by Walker (2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2015) from the carol services conducted in Worcester Cathedral and in Lichfield Cathedral. The point is that the Holly Bough service is not a typical carol service, but a service specially constructed to be celebrated on the Fourth Sunday of Advent. This is not a service designed simply to celebrate the Nativity of Christ but, within the context of the Season of Advent, to link the forthcoming joy of birth with the sombre recollection of crucifixion and death. For Liverpool Cathedral the carol services take place on Christmas

Eve. Further research is now needed to examine both the similarities and the differences between the participants at the Holly Bough service and at the two Christmas Eve Carol Services.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, L.J.F.; Data curation, N.P. and E.W.; Formal analysis, L.J.F. and U.M.; Investigation, S.H.J.; Methodology, L.J.F.; Project administration, S.H.J. and N.P.; Writing—original draft, L.J.F.; Writing—review & editing, S.H.J., U.M. and N.P. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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