

**A Reader in  
Sociology:  
Christian  
Perspectives**

---

---

---

---

---

# **What Meaning Has a Number?**

By Gordon Scott Bonham

C. P. DeSanto, C. Redekop & W. L. Smith-Hinds (Eds)

*Christian Perspectives: A Reader in Sociology*

Pages 75-90

Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press. (1980).

Numbers are commonplace in American society. One class of number is called “statistics.” The main function of statistics is to help the observer move from a subjective view of phenomena to an objective view, and to communicate that objective view with others. For the Christian, or any other person who has felt overwhelmed by statistics, or who has encountered statistics used in an effort to tear down beliefs or values, a few general statements may be helpful. Statistics are tools. What the tool does depends on the purpose of the user, how appropriate the tool is for the job, how sharp the tool is, and the skill of the user. The tool itself is neutral. There is a tendency for some to use statistics to attack or tear down some point of view or hypothesis rather than to support or build up a point of view. This is because statistics are better at disproving than they are at proving. It takes only one contradictory example to disprove, while it takes the absence of any contradictory example over a multitude of tests to prove.