

FAITH AMID SECULARITY

A CRITICAL EXPLORATION OF CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AMONG YOUNG ADULT PAKEHA CATHOLICS IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND.

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A thesis submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements of
the Degree of Doctor of Ministry

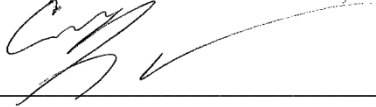
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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

This thesis is based upon original work by the author and a study of the relevant published works as indicated and acknowledged in the text.

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Date: 29 February 2012



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|----------------------------------|------|
| DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY | ii |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | iii |
| LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES | viii |
| ABSTRACT | ix |

| | |
|--|-------------|
| LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES..... | VIII |
|--|-------------|

| | |
|----------------------|-----------|
| ABSTRACT..... | IX |
|----------------------|-----------|

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----------|
| CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
|---------------------------------------|----------|

| | |
|---|---|
| Section 1: Background to the Research Study | 1 |
|---|---|

| | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Aim and Purpose of the Study | 1 |
|------------------------------------|---|

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Locating the Researcher | 4 |
|-------------------------------|---|

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Significance of the Research..... | 5 |
|-----------------------------------|---|

| | |
|---|---|
| Section 2: Methodology and Structure of the Study | 6 |
|---|---|

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| A Methodology at Two Levels | 6 |
|-----------------------------------|---|

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| The Use of Models..... | 7 |
|------------------------|---|

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Pastoral Theology..... | 7 |
|------------------------|---|

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Pastoral Theology and Sociology..... | 9 |
|--------------------------------------|---|

| | |
|---------------------------------|----|
| The Pastoral Circle Model | 10 |
|---------------------------------|----|

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| Section 3: Catholic New Zealand..... | 13 |
|--------------------------------------|----|

| | |
|--------------|----|
| Context..... | 13 |
|--------------|----|

| | |
|--|----|
| The People of Aotearoa New Zealand | 14 |
|--|----|

| | |
|---------------------------|----|
| Catholic New Zealand..... | 15 |
|---------------------------|----|

| | |
|--|----|
| Section 4: The Young Adult Pakeha Catholic in New Zealand Today..... | 18 |
|--|----|

| | |
|---|----|
| Catholic Identity and Religious Practice..... | 20 |
|---|----|

| | |
|---|----|
| Section 5: Charles Taylor and the Secular | 21 |
|---|----|

| | |
|--|-----------|
| CHAPTER TWO: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE | 24 |
|--|-----------|

| | |
|--------------------|----|
| Introduction | 24 |
|--------------------|----|

| | |
|---|----|
| Section 1: Spirituality and Gen Y | 24 |
|---|----|

| | |
|-------------------------------|----|
| Religious Individualism | 24 |
|-------------------------------|----|

| | |
|-----------------------------|----|
| Defining Spirituality | 27 |
|-----------------------------|----|

| | |
|--|----|
| The Case for Significant Spiritual Interest..... | 28 |
|--|----|

| | |
|--|----|
| The Case for Declining Spiritual Interest..... | 29 |
|--|----|

| | |
|--------------------|----|
| Belief in God..... | 33 |
|--------------------|----|

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Section 2: Catholic Identity in the Research Literature | 34 |
| Morality..... | 37 |
| Fading Boundaries | 38 |
| Section 3: Survival of Catholicism in the West | 39 |
| Catholicism in Decline | 40 |
| Reversing Decline | 42 |
| Deconstruction and Reconstruction | 45 |
| Conclusion..... | 47 |
| CHAPTER THREE: THE RESEARCH DESIGN..... | 48 |
| Introduction | 48 |
| Section 1: Methodological Considerations | 48 |
| A Four Element Framework..... | 48 |
| Epistemology | 49 |
| Theoretical Perspective | 50 |
| Methodology | 51 |
| Methods..... | 52 |
| Data Analysis | 55 |
| Section 2: Implementing the Research Design | 56 |
| The Sample Size..... | 56 |
| Participant Selection..... | 58 |
| Researcher Reflexivity | 60 |
| In-depth Interviews | 61 |
| Focus Groups | 62 |
| Grounded Theory Data Analysis..... | 63 |
| Ethical Issues..... | 65 |
| Conclusion..... | 66 |
| CHAPTER FOUR: THE RESEARCH RESULTS..... | 67 |
| Introduction | 67 |
| Section 1: The Extent of the Young Adults' Catholic Religious Worldview | 68 |
| Catholic Formation and Current Catholic Practice | 69 |
| Ecclesial Faith | 71 |
| Sacramental Imagination..... | 73 |
| Theology – Seeking Integration of Faith and Reason..... | 77 |
| Community..... | 79 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| Science and Religion..... | 82 |
| Summary Analysis | 83 |
| Section 2: The Nature and Extent of the Young Adults' Catholic Identity | 85 |
| Catholic Religious Individualism..... | 85 |
| Personal Morality | 86 |
| Catholic Identity..... | 87 |
| Summary Analysis | 90 |
| Conclusion..... | 90 |
| CHAPTER FIVE: SECULARIZATION AND THE YOUNG ADULT CATHOLIC | 91 |
| Introduction | 91 |
| Approaching Secularization | 91 |
| Disenchantment and the 'Buffered Self' | 93 |
| The Orthodox Theory of Secularization | 94 |
| Charles Taylor and Steve Bruce..... | 96 |
| Taylor's Three-Storey Secularization Model..... | 97 |
| An Age of Authenticity | 99 |
| Faith Amid Secularity - The New Zealand Study | 102 |
| Seeking Dwellers | 103 |
| A Vicarious Relationship | 103 |
| Postponing the Ideal | 106 |
| Pakeha Young Adults in New Zealand | 107 |
| Conclusion | 108 |
| CHAPTER SIX: A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION | 110 |
| Introduction | 110 |
| Section 1: Assent and Response to the Faith of the Church..... | 111 |
| The Ecumenical (Nicene) Creed | 111 |
| To 'Believe In...' | 114 |
| Section 2: <i>Faith Amid Secularity</i> and Credal Belief | 117 |
| "I Believe in One God" | 117 |
| "I Believe in One Lord Jesus Christ" | 120 |
| "I Believe in the Holy Spirit" | 123 |
| Section 3: Young Adults and Church: A Fragile Relationship | 127 |
| Summary of the Findings | 127 |
| The Individual's Sense of the Faith | 129 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| A Foreign Language..... | 131 |
| Conclusion: Faith Seeking Understanding within a Contemporary Worldview | 133 |
| CHAPTER SEVEN: RESPONDING TO THE RESEARCH FINDINGS..... | 135 |
| Introduction | 135 |
| Section 1: Summary Evaluation of the Research Findings | 136 |
| Evaluating the Young Adults’ Catholic Religious Worldview..... | 136 |
| Evaluating the Young Adults’ Catholic Identity..... | 137 |
| Section 2: A Pastoral Theological Response to the Pakeha Young Adult Catholic | 139 |
| Application Beyond the Current Sample | 139 |
| Pastoral Ministry with the Young Adult Pakeha Catholic | 139 |
| Section 3: The Call for Deeper Contextualisation | 147 |
| Re-Imagining Ecclesial Structures | 147 |
| Experiential Renewal of Catholicism..... | 148 |
| Catholicism and Modernity..... | 149 |
| Section 4: Limitations and Areas for Further Study | 152 |
| Limitations of the Current Study..... | 152 |
| Areas for Further Study..... | 153 |
| Concluding Comments..... | 154 |
| APPENDICES..... | 157 |
| Appendix One: Participant Information Sheet | 157 |
| Appendix Two: Interview Schedule..... | 159 |
| Appendix Three: Participant Consent Form..... | 165 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 166 |

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

| | |
|--|-----|
| Figure 1.1: <i>Faith Amid Secularity</i> as a Pastoral Circle | 11 |
| Figure 1.2: <i>Faith Amid Secularity</i> – Chapter Structure..... | 12 |
| Figure 2.1: <i>Faith Amid Secularity</i> – Chapter Two Methodology | 24 |
| Figure 3.1: <i>Faith Amid Secularity</i> – Chapter Three Methodology | 48 |
| Figure 3.2: Four Elements of the Research Process..... | 49 |
| Figure 3.3: The Four Levels of the <i>Faith Amid Secularity</i> Field Research | 55 |
| Table 3.1: Participants by Pseudonyms and Characteristics | 60 |
| Table 3.2: Example of a Coded Category and Responses..... | 64 |
| Table 3.3: Identified Thematic Categories | 64 |
| Figure 4.1: <i>Faith Amid Secularity</i> – Chapter Four Methodology | 67 |
| Figure 5.1: <i>Faith Amid Secularity</i> – Chapter Five Methodology..... | 91 |
| Figure 5.2: Taylor’s Mainstream Secularization Thesis | 98 |
| Figure 6.1: <i>Faith Amid Secularity</i> – Chapter Six Methodology | 110 |
| Figure 7.1: <i>Faith Amid Secularity</i> – Chapter Seven Methodology | 135 |

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the Catholic identity and religious worldview of Catholic young adults in New Zealand. The literature indicates that, in Western countries, the Generation Y age group (born 1981-1995) is largely absent from Catholic parish life and that their Catholic identity is increasingly tenuous. The original research outlined in this thesis explores the sense of being Catholic that is to be found among young adult Pakeha (i.e. of European descent) Catholics in New Zealand.

The underlying methodology for the study is provided by the peer reviewed pastoral circle model with its four stages of: contact; analysis; theological reflection; and response. The 'contact' stage in this project was achieved via qualitative field research involving in-depth interviews with nineteen self-identifying Catholic young adults. Focus groups were also employed and the results were evaluated using Grounded Theory analysis. The research findings were considered in relation to key concepts from Charles Taylor's recent account of secularization.

Consistent with the international research, the study finds a lack of Catholic identity and a general religious illiteracy. The young adults value being Catholic in a cultural sense though they do so from a distance. They choose, for the most part, not to engage regularly in religious practice in a community of faith. Though concerned to find a personally authentic path in life young adults today face a myriad of options and show little hesitation in adapting their Catholic faith to suit their own individual circumstances. The great majority of the participants in the study were found to have only a tentative and distant relationship with both God and Church.

The Nicene Creed is employed as a theological lens through which to further assess the beliefs of the study's participants. A pastoral theological response to the research is provided in the form of recommendations for young adult ministry based on the need to create relevant and contemporary Catholic identity. Important in this identity is a positive perspective on contemporary secularity demonstrating a willingness to look for and affirm the presence of God and the action of the Spirit. Finally, in the face of research findings that illustrate increasing disconnection with younger generations the case is briefly considered for a new and deeper contextualisation of Catholic faith amid secularity.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

One does not have to be an expert on generation Y – as it is called by some commentators – or on generation X which preceded it, to recognise that there is a gap. Unless we acknowledge the gap and try to find ways to cross it, we could face the prospect of the Church reducing even more in numbers and influence as the years go on.¹

Section 1: Background to the Research Study

Aim and Purpose of the Study

In Aotearoa New Zealand² the number of young people participating in Sunday Mass has declined significantly over the last two decades.³ The Catholic Bishops of NZ have sought to address this evolving reality with a range of pastoral initiatives aimed at responding appropriately to the perceived needs of young people.⁴ Although there have been occasional small increases in the numbers of young people attending Mass (e.g. in the months following Sydney's 2008 World Youth Day) the more significant trend continues to be a steady reduction in the presence of young Catholics in the Sunday assembly.

This growing absence of young people is not true of all ethnic and cultural groupings within the Catholic Church in NZ many of whom continue to express their faith through

¹ Michael Putney, *Mind the Gap: The Church in Australia 40 years after the Second Vatican Council* (Strathfield: Catholic Institute of Sydney, 2006), 8.

² *Aotearoa* is the original (Maori) name for New Zealand and literally means 'the Land of the Long White Cloud'. Although the full name 'Aotearoa New Zealand' is in common usage (acknowledging, as it does, the bicultural partnership that underpins New Zealand society), for convenience the acronym 'NZ' will be predominantly used in this study.

³ In 1996 this age group made up 15 percent of the total population (1996 Census). The 2001 *Church Life Study NZ* (CLSNZ) of Catholics across three of New Zealand's six dioceses attracted a response rate of just 9 percent for this age bracket. If participant numbers had reflected the population as a whole the expected response rate would be well over 15 percent (bearing in mind that children aged 0-14 years were not included in the CLSNZ study.) In 2003, the Diocese of Auckland (NZ) commissioned a report by the Pastoral Projects Office of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference analysing the data from the CLSNZ 2001. It found that although 20-29 year olds made up 12.7 percent of the NZ population (in 2001) they comprised just 5.6 percent of all NZ Mass attenders. Robert Dixon and Sharon Bond, "Connections for Life Profile – Our Life Together" (Melbourne: ACBC Pastoral Projects Office, 2003).

⁴ Responses have included the small scale (e.g. successful parish youth ministries), the medium scale (e.g. youth ministry movements such as *Antioch* and *Jesus4Real* camps) and the large scale (e.g. diocesan youth ministry offices and involvement in the international World Youth Days).

regular participation at Sunday Mass. Of growing concern, however, is the increasing absence of young New Zealanders of European descent. NZ is not alone in this decline with a similar fall off reported in other developed countries.⁵ Sociologists of religion differ in their interpretations of the likely long term prognosis for Christianity in general and Catholicism in particular.⁶ In Western Europe, Canada, Australia, NZ and, increasingly, the US, the Catholic Church struggles to come to terms with the steady exodus of its European population and especially its younger members.⁷

In NZ, Catholic faith formation generally occurs within a three-fold collaboration between family, faith community (parish) and school. With the increasing absence of young people from the Sunday assembly there is significant interest in understanding what is happening and what the contributing factors might be. Internationally, a considerable number of studies have been undertaken to explore young people's religiosity.⁸ In NZ, a nation with a relatively small Catholic population, comparatively little such in-depth study has been carried out.⁹

The 'practice' of Catholic faith can of course refer to many different things ranging from Sunday Mass attendance through to simple self-identification as Catholic. My own project seeks to assess Catholic faith practice among the young — an appraisal of how influential their faith is in their everyday lives. Faith practice understood in this way is about the extent to which they hold, what I will describe as, a 'Catholic religious worldview' — a sense of seeing the world through a Catholic lens (e.g. being part of an ecclesial tradition; being communal and sacramental/symbolic people; seeking the integration of faith and reason, etc.).

More than simply testing for practice in terms of church attendance, the present study seeks to explore the Catholic worldview of a sample of 18-28 year old Pakeha Catholics

⁵ Steve Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (London: Blackwell, 2002). Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994). Karel Dobbelaere, *Secularization: An Analysis at Three Levels* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002).

⁶ Refer to the discussion of secularization theory in Chapter Five of this thesis. (NB. Footnote references to 'this thesis' will from here on be referred to by the abbreviation *FAS*, i.e. *Faith Amid Secularity*.)

⁷ As evidenced in the research literature reviewed in Chapter Two, *FAS*.

⁸ E.g. John Fulton et al., *Young Catholics at the New Millennium: The Religion and Morality of Young Adults in Western Countries* (Dublin: University College Press, 2000). Dean R. Hoge et al., *Young Adult Catholics: Religion in the Culture of Choice* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 2001). Michael Mason, Andrew Singleton and Ruth Webber, *The Spirit of Generation Y: Young People's Spirituality in a Changing Australia* (Mulgrave: John Garratt Publishing, 2007).

⁹ According to census figures there were 508,437 Catholics in New Zealand in 2006 – 12.27 percent of the population (4,143,279).

in NZ.¹⁰ The findings will then be brought into dialogue with theories of secularization, especially that of Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, enabling deeper contextual insight into the reality faced by Catholic faith communities with regard to the religious and secular sensitivities of young adult Pakeha Catholics. A sociological investigation is proposed within an applied pastoral theological framework focusing on the young person and secular society.¹¹ The current study, *Faith Amid Secularity*, will incorporate contemporary social research methodologies into a theological study whose aim is to provide insight and assistance to Catholic pastoral leaders for the benefit of young Catholics and the Church as a whole.

Although increasingly absent from Sunday Mass, young Catholics themselves would seem to be less interested in discarding their faith altogether than in naming the terms of their Catholic association.¹² A recent Australian study entitled, *Catholics Who Have Stopped Attending Mass*, found that, for many, Catholic identity continued but often through alternative means:

This and related research suggests that there has been a change of understanding in the minds of many people about what it means to be Catholic and what obligations are intrinsic to Catholic identity. One result of this is the widespread attitude that weekly attendance at Mass is no longer obligatory, and that one can be a committed Catholic without attending Mass regularly.¹³

It has become problematic today to attempt to define Catholic identity solely in terms of Sunday Mass attendance. Catholic bishops and local pastoral leaders face the dilemma of what to do about the majority of their people who no longer see the fulfilment of a Sunday Mass obligation as determining of Catholicity. Knowing how young adult

¹⁰ i. The age group selected represents the greater part of Generation Y ('Gen Y'), those born between 1981 and 1995. The youngest of these were aged 14-17 years in 2009 (the year in which the research interviews took place) and were not included in this study. 18 years is the commonly accepted age for the move to young adulthood as the young person completes secondary education. For reasons of practicality and in order to narrow the focus specifically to young adults this study concentrates on the older eleven years of Gen Y – aged 18-28 years (in 2009). This age grouping for Gen Y is that most recently endorsed by the *Australian Bureau of Statistics* and adopted by Mason, Singleton & Webber in their comprehensive study of the spirituality of this generation. *Statistics New Zealand – Tauranga Aotearoa* adopts the Australian convention for the Baby Boomer category but makes no further reference to this generational typology. See Mason, Singleton and Webber, *Spirit of Generation Y*, 12. The *Australian Bureau of Statistics*, accessed November 9, 2009, <http://www.abs.gov.au/>. *Statistics New Zealand*, accessed November 9, 2009, <http://www.stats.govt.nz/>.

ii. 'Pakeha' is a Maori term in common usage in New Zealand. It is usually understood to refer to New Zealanders of European descent (Caucasian) and that is how it will be used in *FAS*.

¹¹ See Section 2 (p. 18) of this chapter for a brief explanation of the interface between pastoral theology and sociology. A psychological component will not be pursued in the current study in the interests of keeping the project tightly focussed on young people and secularity. Exploration of the relationship between psychology and declining religious participation could offer additional insight and may be pursued as a later project.

¹² As evidenced by the significantly large number of young people who willingly self-identify as Catholic in census figures but who do not participate regularly in any Catholic faith community. Refer footnote 3 above.

¹³ Robert Dixon et al., "Research Project on Catholics Who Have Stopped Attending Mass" (ACBC Pastoral Projects Office, 2007), 50.

Catholics understand their faith today is a vital first step in the provision of an adequate pastoral response. Such ministry is recognised as critical in addressing the aforementioned exodus of young adults, a situation that is clearly not a sign of a healthy and effective Christian community. While society in general and even many Catholics may perceive religious decline as somehow inevitable, those who are committed to the proclamation and living out of the gospel through local faith communities cannot but lament the apparent failure that such young adult absence implies. From a faith perspective it is a situation that demands attention, the result of a complex confluence of contemporary issues, the nature of which this study aims to illuminate.

This research includes consideration of the results of a qualitative study of a sample of nineteen Gen Y young people from around NZ. The field research project is fully outlined in Chapter Three and the results presented and analysed in Chapters Four and Five. In seeking to provide insight into the religious worldview of the contemporary young adult Pakeha Catholic, the following key research questions guided the field research:

1. To what extent do the young adult Catholics studied identify with, and draw meaning from, a Catholic religious worldview?
2. What is the nature and strength of Catholic identity among the young adult Catholics in the study?¹⁴

Locating the Researcher

I have sought a research question that would enable me to continue a long term interest in the pastoral care of young adult Catholics. In generational terms, I sit on the border between the two generations known as GenX and the Baby Boomers.¹⁵ This locates me as someone at the younger end of the generation that includes the parents of the subjects of this study. But, like the study's subjects, I share no memory of a pre-Vatican II Church, an era that Rymarz describes as of only receding historical interest for today's younger generations.¹⁶

¹⁴ Two further research questions emerged during the analysis of the results of the study. Both are theological in nature and neither was explicitly anticipated at the outset of the project. The additional questions relate to the assessment of participant belief and their specificity will be explained in detail in Chapter Six. See *FAS*, 116. The theological questions are:

1. What evidence is there of understanding and assent to credal tenets ('belief that' or *fides quae*)?
2. What evidence is there of personal and relational faith response ('belief in' or *fides qua*)?

¹⁵ Generation X ('GenX') – born 1966 to 1980. Baby Boomers – born 1946 to 1965. Refer footnote 10 above.

¹⁶ Richard Rymarz, "A New Catholic Narrative," *Compass: A Review of Topical Theology* 42, no. 3 (2008): 6.

From 1996 until 2008 I served as Advisor in Youth and Young Adult Ministry in the Archdiocese of Wellington collaborating in the development of youth ministry strategies and pastoral responses to the issues facing young Catholics. During this time I worked at the national level on a range of projects including the development of the NZ Bishops' framework for Catholic Youth Ministry, the development and implementation of a certificate course in youth ministry and the organisational leadership of the NZ pilgrimage to World Youth Days (WYD) in Rome (2000), Toronto (2002), Cologne (2005) and Sydney (2008).¹⁷ The Sydney WYD produced such an unprecedentedly strong response from young Catholic New Zealanders, and from the NZ Catholic Church as a whole, that it served to focus my attention more acutely on the experience and perspective of our contemporary young Catholics.¹⁸

Significance of the Research

The first document promulgated at the Second Vatican Council outlined the conciliar aims:

The Sacred council has set out to impart an ever-increasing vigour to the Christian lives of the faithful; to adapt more closely to the needs of our age those institutions which are subject to change; to encourage whatever can promote the union of all who believe in Christ; to strengthen whatever serves to call all of humanity into the church's fold.¹⁹

The Council desired to make the Catholic faith liveable in the modern age. Implicit in this statement is the recognition that times have changed and, as a consequence, so too should certain aspects of Church ministry developed in earlier times to address different social and spiritual issues. Reflecting on the challenges facing the Church in Australia 40 years after the Council, Michael Putney remarked that, "the Council has not yet been 'received' in its deepest levels by the Church."²⁰ He further noted that even as we strive to adapt our institutions it remains a task unfinished since there is always more that can be done to understand and respond to the signs of the times.²¹

¹⁷ i. NZ Catholic Bishops Conference, Tu Kahikatea - Standing Tall: A Framework for Catholic Ministry with Young People in Aotearoa New Zealand (Wellington: NZCBC, 2006).

ii. The Certificate in Catholic Youth Ministry is a seven-paper tertiary level qualification which is recognised as the industry standard qualification for Catholic youth and young adult ministry in New Zealand.

¹⁸ Over 4,000 NZ pilgrims travelled to Sydney at significant personal cost. If considered on a pro rata basis against the total number of active Catholics in NZ, this response rate is many times more than almost any other country.

¹⁹ Sacrosanctum Concilium, n. 1.

²⁰ Putney, *Mind the Gap*, 15. See also the hermeneutical treatment of this topic in Ormond Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II: Some Hermeneutical Principles* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2004).

²¹ Gaudium et Spes, n. 4.

The bishops' call to impart Christian vigour, adapt to current needs, foster union in Christ, and strengthen whatever promotes the gospel cause, provides much of the impetus for the current study. When one considers the already noted large-scale absence of young adult Catholics from Church life today it becomes apparent that we need to better understand our own secular culture as well as the perspective of the young. It is this understanding that the current study addresses on the basis of a careful listening to the situation and viewpoint of the young adult.

Faith Amid Secularity brings an original focus to the issue of the Catholic Church and its young adult members in a number of ways. The study will not only assess the Catholicity of the religious worldview of the 18-28 year old but will also seek to uncover and describe the actual Catholic identity of the young as they understand it. Furthermore, the study focuses specifically on young *Pakeha* New Zealanders in order to avoid the complicating factors that are necessarily introduced with a greater diversity of cultural and ethnic background. The study of similarities and differences here would in fact be of great interest but it is beyond the scope of this research project. Instead this restricted objective will enable a more careful analysis of the extent to which young adult *Pakeha* Catholics identify as 'Catholic,' even as they reflect the secularity of contemporary NZ society. Pastoral theology as a base discipline is particularly suited to this project since it grounds the venture in a contextual theological approach that calls for attention to the concrete situation, to sociological and theological reflection and, finally, to commitment to action.

Section 2: Methodology and Structure of the Study

A Methodology at Two Levels

From a methodological standpoint this study operates at two levels. It undertakes qualitative field research with a sample of young Catholics in order to ascertain as far as possible the nature and extent of their Catholic religious worldview. The research design for the field study component of this thesis will be fully explored in Chapter Three. Subsequent chapters then take up the analysis of the research findings and consider their implications for pastoral ministry. Underpinning the project and placing the field research methodology in a larger methodological context, is a pastoral theological model that will guide the analysis of the field research results and the subsequent shaping of a pastoral plan for action. The peer reviewed pastoral circle

model represents a powerful tool for this analysis and action and it will be outlined in full later in this chapter. Before then, however, I want to briefly consider the use of models in pastoral theology as well as clarifying the pastoral theological basis for the application of the pastoral circle.

The Use of Models

Avery Dulles introduced the use of models to comparative ecclesiology in 1974 and since then their use has become widespread.²² Well described by Dulles in his later work, *Models of Revelation*, a model is “a relatively simple, artificially constructed case which is found to be useful and illuminating for dealing with realities that are more complex and differentiated”.²³ A model connects aspects of an unknown (or lesser known) reality with peoples’ experience of something more familiar. In this regard it is similar to the way in which we, as human beings, use images for God that emerge from our own experience in our attempts to grasp a reality which, by definition, transcends us utterly. An effective model therefore exposes realities and truth about the subject of study that might otherwise be difficult to recognise or identify. Equally, however, no one model (or image) can ever uncover *all* reality or *all* truth of that which it seeks to model (or image). Just as surely as a good model will capture aspects of truth about the subject, so too, it must fall short of offering a complete picture.

Unlike Dulles’ models of the Church or Revelation however, which function as symbolic descriptions, the pastoral circle model to be applied in this project is a model of *operation* i.e. it is a ‘process model’ — intending to lead to action, to an outcome that improves a real life situation as opposed to solely seeking to increase our knowledge.²⁴ As with all models, it cannot claim to be the only or even the best approach but it has been shown to be a very effective one in pastoral situations.²⁵

Pastoral Theology

Pastoral theology is a branch of theology that resists simple definition.²⁶ It is popularly understood as being the application of the more speculative systematic theology to the

²² E.g. Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church: A Critical Assessment of the Church in All its Aspects* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd, 1974). Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd, 1992). Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).

²³ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 30.

²⁴ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 2005), 31.

²⁵ For a review of the model see F. Wijzen, P. Henriot and R. Mejia, *The Pastoral Cycle Revisited: A Critical Quest for Truth and Transformation* (New York: Orbis Books, 2005).

²⁶ Wesley Carr, *Handbook of Pastoral Studies* (London: SPCK, 2002). P. Lynch, *The Church's Story: A History of Pastoral Care and Vision* (St Paul's Publications, 2005). Paul Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in*

issues of everyday life. Having considered God, faith and doctrine in an abstract fashion it is pastoral theology that takes up real issues of everyday life and considers them theologically. But such an approach implies an unsatisfactory one-way relationship, beginning in theory and resulting in practice. Terry Veling suggests that pastoral (or practical) theology is in fact:

an attempt to heal this division, so that pastoral theology is never simply an afterthought or a derivative of systematic theology. So that theological reflection can regain its intrinsic connection to life. So that we can overcome the artificial distinction between thinking and acting and become more serious about both.²⁷

Veling's work serves to highlight the difficulty in tightly defining pastoral theology. He briefly uses the terms 'pastoral' and 'practical' interchangeably before settling finally on practical theology. Not only are 'pastoral' and 'practical' often treated as synonyms in their description of theology, but their meaning can also vary between locality and Christian denomination.²⁸

In Roman Catholic usage, pastoral theology has traditionally been linked to the presbyterate, the role of the pastor, in keeping with the shepherding theme from which it emerged. Vatican II however introduced a more comprehensive understanding of the term broadening its practice to include all Christians and its meaning to much more than simple application of doctrine.²⁹ Even the genre of the resultant documents bespoke a significant shift from previous councils with a pastoral style clearly replacing the more authoritarian approach of the Councils of Trent and Vatican I.³⁰

Although at risk of becoming overused and overly broad in application, the 'pastoral' is more than simply a significant element of all theology. Pastoral theology in its own right signifies an approach to theology that begins in the messiness of everyday existence. Rather than any secondary application of pre-defined theory, it begins with

Action (London: SPCK, 2001). Duncan B. Forrester, *Truthful Action: Explorations in Practical Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000).

²⁷ Terry Veling, *Practical Theology: On Earth as it is in Heaven* (New York: Orbis Books, 2005), 5.

²⁸ Maher cites the British example of British professor Oliver Donovan who moved from being Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology at the University of Oxford to become Professor of Christian Ethics and Practical Theology at the University of Edinburgh. Anthony Maher "The Theology of Witness: A Critical Exposition of George Tyrell's Pastoral Theology" (Doctoral thesis, Australian Catholic University, 2011), 67.

²⁹ Ormond Rush refers to the Council's 'pastoral intention' as emphasised by Pope John XXIII both in his opening address and in calling the Council in the first instance. Rush, *Still Interpreting*, 30-2. See also Joseph A Komonchak, "Vatican II and the encounter between Catholicism and liberalism," in *Catholicism and Liberalism*, ed. R. Bruce Douglass and David Hollenbach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

³⁰ See John W. O'Malley, "Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?," in *Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?*, ed. David G. Schultenover (New York: Continuum, 2007), 67-83.

careful observation and, most importantly, respectful listening. The theological search for understanding emerges out of a thoroughgoing awareness of the issues at stake, issues that are then brought before the five theological lenses of scripture, tradition, *sensus fidelium*, magisterium and the theologian.³¹

The ‘incarnated nature’ of pastoral theology finds a helpful parallel in the Catholic understanding of sacramentality or sacramental vision which Richard McBrien describes in the following terms:

The Catholic (sacramental) vision sees God in and through all things: other people, communities, movements, events, places, objects, the world at large, the whole cosmos. The visible, the tangible, the finite, the historical — all these are actual or potential carriers of the divine presence. ...Indeed, it is only in and through visible, material realities that we can encounter the invisible, spiritual God.³²

In a similar manner pastoral theology seeks an understanding of God’s presence in and through the issues of everyday life, always with an orientation starting from the concrete situation and moving toward an active response. Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, in first proposing their pastoral circle approach to social analysis (including the theological), described two approaches: the ‘academic’ and the ‘pastoral’. The academic, they claim, remains somewhat abstract, detached from any particular situation, whereas the pastoral takes an “historically committed stance, discerning the situation for the purpose of action.”³³

This study intends to bring to bear a pastoral theological approach that immerses itself in the experience and viewpoint of the young adult Catholic. Sociological analysis and theological reflection will follow with a view to action in the form of a contextual theological response intended to assist our bishops and other Catholic pastoral leaders.

Pastoral Theology and Sociology

In terms of an analysis drawing on current thinking in the area of secularization, the sociology of religion will by necessity provide a foundation for the investigation of the young adult’s Catholic religious worldview. Such a marriage between the theological and the sociological cannot however be assumed to be necessarily straight forward.

³¹ Rush, *Still Interpreting*, 66. Rush correlates *Dei Verbum*, n. 8, and *Lumen Gentium*, n. 12, to assemble these five ‘witnesses to salvific revelation’.

³² Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*, revised and updated ed. (Victoria: Collins Dove, 1994), 1196.

³³ Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice*, revised and enlarged ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 7.

Indeed, Neil Ormerod has drawn attention to significant problems that he feels demand attention at the outset of any such enterprise.³⁴ My own study intends to approach the sociological process of qualitative study with an acceptance of the presence of God in the people and communities in question. Consideration of just how possible a God-infused approach to the social sciences actually is remains beyond the scope of the current study. The issue can however never be very far from the discussion in this thesis, a fact that will perhaps be most evident in Chapter Five when Charles Taylor's work on secularization will inevitably lead me into a consideration of the sociology of religion.

The Pastoral Circle Model

Although popular understanding may still perceive theology as a somewhat disconnected theoretical activity, there is a growing acceptance that, whether practical, pastoral, moral or systematic, to be authentic, the discipline of theology must deal to some degree with the reality of lived human experience. In this sense all theology can be said to be contextual. Indeed, 'theology' emerges as more verb than noun, inevitably taking into account the situational factors in which it 'takes place'.³⁵ This contextual theological imperative is an acknowledgement that any form of 'a-contextual' theology is in reality a contradiction in terms.³⁶

The pastoral circle model is one of the most significant contextual theological models to have emerged in recent decades. Its roots lie in Paulo Freire's concept of 'praxis' (transforming reflection and action) and Juan Luis Segundo's subsequent 'hermeneutic circle' (the continuous emergence of new questions to challenge older theories due to newly arising situations).³⁷ The model was developed by Holland and Henriot in the 1970s and 80s as a result of their concern to combine theology with social analysis and it has since found favour with practitioners the world over due largely to the way in which it readily adapts to local situations.³⁸

³⁴ For an extended consideration of the issues involved see: Neil Ormerod, "A Dialectic Engagement with the Social Sciences in an Ecclesial Context," *Theological Studies* 66 (2005): 815-41. Neil Ormerod, "Ecclesiology and the Social Sciences," in *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Church*, ed. Gerard Mannion and Lewis Seymour Mudge (New York: Routledge, 2007), 643-58. Neil Ormerod, "'The Times They Are A-Changin'": A Response to O'Malley and Schloesser," in Schultenover, *Vatican II*, 153-83.

³⁵ Veling, *Practical Theology*, 4-5.

³⁶ A claim emerging from Karl Rahner's theological-anthropological project. See Thomas Sheehan, "Rahner's Transcendental Project," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 29-42.

³⁷ Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970). Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976).

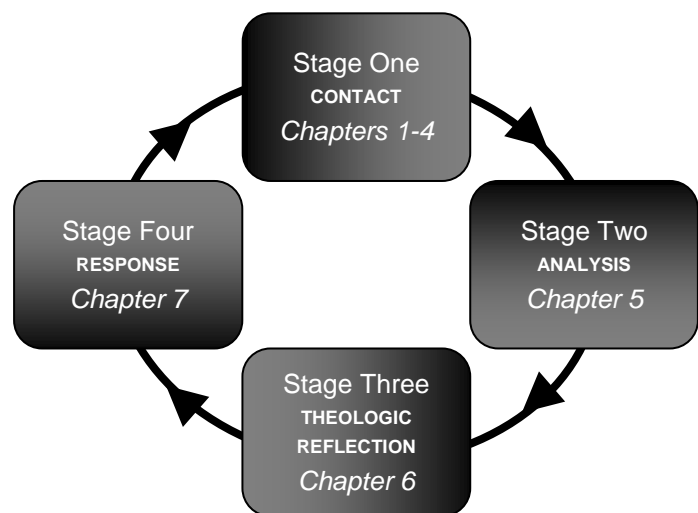
³⁸ Wijnsen, Henriot and Mejia, *Pastoral Cycle Revisited*, xix-xxii.

Consisting of four stages (contact / analysis / reflection / response), the genius of this process of observing, studying, reflecting and then responding is perhaps best demonstrated in the way that it surfaces in recognisable form in theology and ministry under any number of guises.³⁹ The open, cyclic nature of the process is intended to continue beyond one ‘revolution’, continually moving forward without ever returning to the exact same situation.

The choice of the pastoral circle as the underlying methodology for this study is justified on the grounds that a concrete pastoral issue is being addressed and an authentic response is needed. The declining involvement of young adults in Catholic parish life in NZ is of real concern and the attempt to understand it and respond appropriately requires a robust framework. The pastoral circle is felt to provide this with its four stages beginning with actual contact with the subjects concerned.

This thesis will be structured so that it clearly reflects the underlying pastoral circle model as illustrated in Figure 1.1:

Figure 1.1:
Faith Amid Secularity
as a Pastoral Circle⁴⁰



The first stage of the pastoral circle process deals with the concrete, normal situation. Critical questions are asked of the current state of affairs uncovering a reality that is judged to be unacceptable – in this case the declining presence of Catholic young adults. Accordingly, Chapters One through Four of this thesis will provide a thoroughgoing background to the project, including a review of the literature and an outline of the qualitative research design and its subsequent results regarding how young adults view their Catholic faith today.

³⁹ E.g. Joseph Cardijn’s *Young Catholic Worker* movement with its ‘See / Judge / Act’ motif (see Ibid., 9.) and the circle’s various Latin American, and more latterly, African and Asian applications (see Bevans, *Models*, 70-86.).

⁴⁰ This diagram will be reproduced at the outset of each subsequent chapter to guide the reader.

The second stage aims to extend our knowledge of the situation by addressing the question — why is this happening?⁴¹ In this thesis, Chapter Five will take up this challenge exploring the research results in light of Charles Taylor’s contemporary theory of secularization presented in his influential book, *A Secular Age* (2007).⁴²

Stage three of the pastoral circle is the specifically *theological* component and in this thesis it will take place in Chapter Six. This is the ‘moment of faith’ in which God’s presence — our understanding of God — is explicitly uncovered and acknowledged in the experiences and information collected. Wijssen, Henriot and Mejia name this as the, “moment of discerning the meaning of the situation in view of our shared values, our faith commitments, the teaching of the scriptures, the norms of our communities, (and) the wisdom of our ancestors.”⁴³

Finally, the fourth stage of the pastoral circle asks ‘What are we to do? How are we to respond?’ It is the time for praxis, suggesting ways forward and committing to concrete action on the issues at hand. Chapter Seven will attempt this by making recommendations for an appropriate pastoral response with young adult Catholics in the contemporary NZ context. The layout of this thesis in terms of chapter structure is summarised in Figure 1.2:

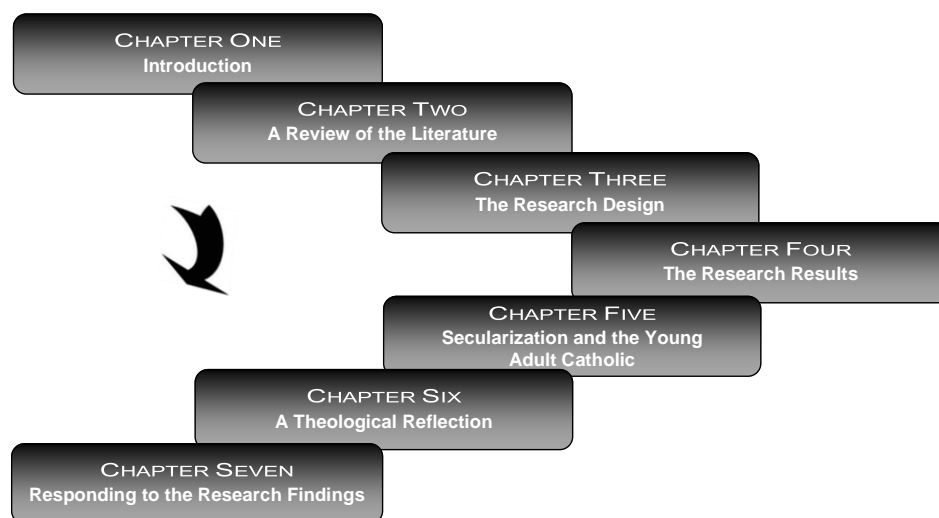


Figure 1.2: Faith Amid Secularity – Chapter Structure

⁴¹ Wijssen, Henriot and Mejia, *Pastoral Cycle Revisited*, 229.

⁴² With *A Secular Age*, Taylor won the 2007 Templeton Prize for progress toward research or discoveries about spiritual realities. In endorsing the book, acclaimed sociologist David Martin described it as follows: “... the book is an education in itself, and one among the select few that from now on you will have to read if you are thinking about social and intellectual bases of western attitudes to ‘the world.’” Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2007).

⁴³ Wijssen, Henriot and Mejia, *Pastoral Cycle Revisited*, 229.

Section 3: Catholic New Zealand

Context

In recent years the importance of context has been increasingly acknowledged in theology. Henri Bouillard is reported by Bevens as having asserted that theology that is not up-to-date (*actuelle* in French) is in fact false theology.⁴⁴ Outlining the premise for his book *Models of Contextual Theology*, Bevens says,

I think we can paraphrase Bouillard by saying that a theology that is not somehow reflective of our times, our culture, and our current concerns – and so contextual – is also false theology. Charles Kraft says practically the same thing when he says that theology, when it is perceived as irrelevant, is in fact irrelevant.⁴⁵

Each theologian is today recognised as shaping or colouring theology according to his or her own context.⁴⁶ Even as theology cannot be created in a vacuum, so too, it is never fashioned apart from the experience and perspective of the individual who undertakes it. Elaine Wainwright notes that if one sees theology as a discipline solely intent on examining the past in order to uncover embedded truths then context will appear of little relevance.⁴⁷ Such a ‘past-focused’ approach is rightly judged inadequate in that it allows little scope for the critical examination of the present, seeking only to apply ‘truths’ from an earlier time. “Philosophical, sociological, political and ecclesial movements in the latter half of the twentieth century have combined, however, to shake the foundations of such an approach to the doing of both theology and theological education.”⁴⁸ Today such contextual groundedness is expected in theological reflection, its precedent being undoubtedly set by the contextual awareness of the constitutions, decrees and declarations of the Second Vatican Council. To be human is to be a located being — to be formed by and to be part of some milieu — immersed in some culture. Veling draws on Gadamer in describing the vital link between knowing (or understanding) and being — to know or understand is to be. If we seek understanding,

⁴⁴ Bevens, *Models*, 5.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ See for example: Ibid. Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985). Veling, *Practical Theology*. Elaine Wainwright, "Looking Both Ways or in Multiple Directions: Doing/Teaching Theology in Context into the Twenty-First Century," *Pacifica* 18, no. 2 (2005).

⁴⁷ Wainwright, "Looking Both Ways," 125.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

as theology surely does, then we must engage as broadly as possible our whole way of being in the world.⁴⁹

In the field of theology, the naming of one's personal situation and perspective is increasingly considered vital to any theological introduction. This is not due to any exaggerated sense of self-importance but, rather, the realisation that perspective (interpretation, reception, hermeneutics) is critical to one's identity and thesis. Out of respect for the other, one must be honest about one's own 'situatedness' and so it is to the NZ context that I now turn.

The People of Aotearoa New Zealand

An island nation of Oceania, Aotearoa New Zealand has attracted migrants for some 800 years before which it was a land that knew no human habitation.⁵⁰ First came the NZ Maori in various waves and from uncertain origins. European immigrants followed in the late eighteenth century and, today, people of almost every nation on earth come to NZ seeking a 'better life' or a 'fresh start.' The signing in 1840 of *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* (the Treaty of Waitangi) between many Maori chiefs and representatives of the English Crown formed the basis of Maori and Pakeha coexistence from then on. In the century that followed, the numbers of European settlers steadily increased and Maori found their lands, culture and language under increasing threat as the new settlers took control of the country. For much of this time Maori and Pakeha lived quite separate lives coming to live in closer proximity only with the increase in urbanisation in the mid-twentieth century.⁵¹

The contemporary relationship between Maori and Tauwiwi (non-Maori) remains one of partnership under the Treaty of Waitangi.⁵² NZ is currently bringing to a close a period of restitution during which the various Maori tribes have sought and been granted compensation for historical grievances. Maori remain disproportionately highly represented in crime and negative health statistics indicating that there is progress to be

⁴⁹ Terry Veling, "Practical Theology: A New Sensibility for Theological Education," 11 (1998): 201.

⁵⁰ Michael King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 2003), 102-14.

⁵¹ King credits a steady and increasing rate of urbanisation among Maori in the 1950s for the beginning of the first widespread Maori – Pakeha contact since the 1860s. *Ibid.*, 470.

⁵² Whereas *Pakeha* generally refers to non-Maori of European descent, '*Tauwiwi*' is a broader term for non-Maori New Zealanders of all ethnicities. Tauwiwi more accurately describes the present-day non-Maori Treaty partner (represented by the New Zealand Government) as immigration patterns shift from a focus on European countries to those of Asia and the South Pacific. Census figures show that in 2006 immigrants from Asia equalled those from the United Kingdom and Ireland for the first time. While England still remains by far the most common birthplace of New Zealand residents born overseas, China has now moved into second place ahead of Australia and Samoa. Significant increases were also noted for residents born in India, South Korea, South Africa and Fiji. Census figures from *Statistics New Zealand*, accessed November 18, 2009, <http://www.stats.govt.nz/census/2006-census-data>.

made in the rehabilitation of the people as a whole. However, the country is experiencing something of a Maori renaissance in its celebration and development of Tikanga Maori (culture) as evidenced in the increasingly integral role Te Reo Maori (language) plays in NZ society.

In recent years a growing dissatisfaction has begun to emerge among some Pakeha in being identified in terms of what they are not (i.e. non-Maori). Whether Pakeha or Tauwi, this identification leaves one uncomfortably aware of being a late-comer, as someone with possibly only a tenuous claim on belonging. The situation is accentuated by the fact that the NZ Maori has never been described as ‘aboriginal’ but rather as the ‘indigenous’ people of NZ. The term indigenous is therefore seemingly unavailable to Tauwi despite the fact that many are now fourth and fifth generation New Zealanders. Pakeha historian, Michael King, reflects the growing desire to belong:

For me, then, to be Pakeha on the cusp of the twenty-first century is not to be European; it is not to be an alien or a stranger in my own country. It is to be a non-Maori New Zealander who is aware of and proud of my antecedents, but who identifies as intimately with this land, as intensively and as strongly, as anybody Maori. It is to be, as I have already argued, another kind of indigenous New Zealander.⁵³

King’s point is pivotal because it heralds a shift in identity from the European to the NZ. Part of the aim of this study is to examine to what extent a parallel shift is taking place in religious belief and practice among young Pakeha Catholics in NZ. It is my premise that a change is taking place in the way in which young Catholics perceive their faith and view their relationship with their Church. These elements will be explored in a three-way exchange between my own research data, Charles Taylor’s theory of secularization and contemporary pastoral theology.

Catholic New Zealand

At the 1840 signing of the Treaty of Waitangi between Maori and the British Crown, the representative of the Roman Catholic Church, Bishop Jean-Baptiste Pompallier, somewhat inadvertently set the scene for the future secularity of the fledgling nation. Concerned to avoid any copying of the English ‘established church’ system with its favouring of the Church of England, Pompallier sought and achieved sovereign

⁵³ Michael King, *Being Pakeha Now: Reflections and Recollections of a White Native* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1999), 239.

protection for all people regardless of religious choice.⁵⁴ From then until 1869, the character of NZ Catholicism was formed by the French, led in particular by the Marist Bishops Pompallier (1802-1871) and Viard (1809-1872). With their Vatican appointed Irish replacements (Bishops Moran (1823-1895) and Croke (1822-1902)) and the simultaneous Irish population explosion that accompanied the 1860s gold rush and government-sponsored immigration programmes, Catholicism in NZ quickly became the characteristically Irish church that it would remain for the next one hundred plus years.⁵⁵

In 2006 the Catholic Church in NZ consisted of half a million nominal Catholics, some 12.5 per cent of the total population.⁵⁶ It is estimated from diocesan Mass counts that approximately 16 per cent of these regularly attend Mass at a local parish and an unknown number practice their faith in ways that entail less frequent parish connection.⁵⁷ Of the six dioceses comprising the NZ Church, the Diocese of Auckland is the diocese of significant growth, benefitting as it does from the Auckland City's immigration linked expansion. All NZ dioceses are geographically large, posing considerable pastoral challenges for the provision of Catholic ministry in the outlying rural areas. An aging clergy intensifies this issue and each diocese is now preparing for a change in pastoral leadership style as NZ born priest numbers decline and immigrant priests, ordained deacons and lay pastoral leaders become more common.

The connection between ethnic culture and religion is a source of ongoing discussion as a once relatively mono-cultural Church finds itself rapidly increasing in cultural diversity. It is common to find different ethnic groups establishing their own faith communities sharing language, culture and religious practice. These communities often reach significant size if the country of origin had a strong Catholic culture and if there are sufficient numbers now living in NZ. Usually linked to major urban areas, these Catholics are today bolstering the numbers of both nominal and active Catholics in NZ. The situation created is one in which Catholicism is in fact increasing in its proportion

⁵⁴ King, *History of New Zealand*, 163. Pompallier actually wanted this just for his Catholic flock but the English-to-Maori translator of the Treaty, Reverend Henry Williams, not wanting to appear to emphasise the protection of Catholics, had the protection clause amended to include not only Catholics but also Methodists and those who retained their Maori religious practices.

⁵⁵ Michael King, *God's Farthest Outpost: A History of Catholics in New Zealand* (Auckland: Penguin, 1997), 93.

⁵⁶ Census figures from *Statistics New Zealand*, accessed November 28, 2009, <http://www.stats.govt.nz/census/2006-census-data>.

⁵⁷ Although census figures tell us how many New Zealanders affiliate with the Catholic Church, there is no reliable data to indicate exact Mass-going populations for the whole country.

of the overall population while almost all other mainstream denominations are seeing a steady decline in number.⁵⁸

In a local Church that welcomes cultural diversity, increased immigrant participation is a positive development and something that will have an even greater influence on the local Church in the years to come. Research aimed at a better understanding of such trends and the peoples involved would be of great benefit to the Church in NZ as it wrestles with the implications of increasing pluralism in both Church and society. As already indicated however, my own study intends to focus specifically on the young adult Pakeha New Zealander whose participation is declining even as the total number of those proclaiming to be Catholic in NZ continues to increase.

Though difficult to pinpoint precisely, NZ 'flavoured' Catholicism can be detected in a host of small ways that together culminate in a sense of being both 'Kiwi' and Catholic. It has something to do with location and landscape, with coastline, mountain range, geothermal areas (mud pools and geysers), native bush and rolling hills.⁵⁹ It has to do with being a small Church (on a world scale) and one that has always existed in the shadow of a larger, unofficial state Church (Anglicanism). A state-integrated and firmly established Catholic education system is fundamental in influencing thousands of young children and people whose engagement with their faith might otherwise be minimal.⁶⁰ It can be seen in the commitment to inclusive English language in Church texts⁶¹ as well as the inclusion of Te Reo Maori (language) in liturgy. A strong Pacifica influence is also highly audible and visible in the various liturgical music and rituals e.g. the 'enthroning of the Word' in which the lectionary is processed to the ambo with dance and music at the beginning of the Liturgy of the Word. Modern church buildings

⁵⁸ The exception being Methodism which is also bolstered by immigration, most importantly from the islands of the South Pacific. The Anglican Church, historically the largest Christian denomination in New Zealand, is projected to be overtaken by Catholicism at the next census (delayed due to the recent earthquakes in Christchurch). In 2006 the numbers affiliating with the Christian denominations were as follows: Anglican 554,925; Catholic 508,437; Presbyterian, Congregational and Reformed 400,839; Christian (not further defined) 186,234; Methodist 121,806. See the 2006 Census figures from *Statistics New Zealand*, accessed November 18, 2009, <http://www.stats.govt.nz/census/2006-census-data>.

⁵⁹ This connection to landscape and place is being increasingly explored by theologians and lay people. See for example Helen Bergin and Susan Smith, eds., *Land & Place - He Whenua, He Wahi: Spiritualities from Aotearoa New Zealand* (Auckland: Accent Publications, 2004).

⁶⁰ 64,000 (11%) of New Zealand's children are enrolled in the Catholic Schools system (2008 statistics). See the NZ Catholic Education Office Ltd website, accessed June 14, 2011, <http://nzceo.catholic.org.nz/pages/schools/schools-today.html>.

⁶¹ See Christine Cheyne, "Made in God's Image: A Project Researching Sexism in the Catholic Church in Aotearoa (New Zealand)" (Wellington: Catholic Commission for Justice, Peace and Development, 1990). This report led to a NZ Catholic Bishops Conference statement committing the New Zealand Church to inclusive language (among other things). See NZ Catholic Bishops Conference, "A Guide to Gender Inclusive Language in the Catholic Church" (1997), accessed August 30, 2011, <http://catholic.org.nz/nzcbc/fx-view-article.cfm?ctype=BSART&loadref=83&id=113>.

incorporate symbolic reference to the surrounding area and the priest's vestments often do likewise. The increasing diversity of cultures evident in all but the most rural of parishes, underpinned by bicultural partnership between Maori and Pakeha, marks out Catholicism in NZ as unique in the universal Catholic tradition. Even as Roman Catholic faith is gradually inculturated into the NZ context, Catholic New Zealanders continue to take pride in being part of the universal Catholic Church in what is well described as "God's farthest outpost".⁶²

Section 4: The Young Adult Pakeha Catholic in New Zealand Today

Although statistical data on NZ Catholic belief and practice is scarce and usually quite localised, available figures do confirm the absence of young adults aged between 20 and 29 years.⁶³ Anecdotal and statistical evidence indicates that those in their older teenage years are even more absent from Sunday Eucharist and it would appear that the last decade has seen a gradual lowering of the age at which the average young Catholic chooses to opt out of regular Church involvement.⁶⁴ Statistics produced for the Catholic Church in Australia illustrate a similar relative absence of the young there, a situation that has been gradually worsening in recent years.⁶⁵

Three factors that might be expected to have had an ameliorating effect on these trends are:

- i. Cultural religious identity: While young adult Pakeha Catholics appear to be increasingly absent, the children of first generation migrants tend to be strongly represented at Sunday Mass. Catholics (and those affiliating with other Christian denominations) of Pacific Island and especially Samoan ethnicity exemplify this with the ethnic faith community in many ways representing an extension of the kinship system of these people's cultures of origin. Similarly, other first and second generation migrants (e.g. Korean & Filipino) can be seen to maintain strong Catholic affiliation as part of their cultural communities. This was

⁶² Attributed to Father Theo Wanders MHM. See King, *God's Farthest Outpost*, 6.

⁶³ Dixon and Bond, "Our Life Together."

⁶⁴ In Dixon and Bond's 2003 report (Ibid.), the results of a question about Mass attenders' children (still living at home) who also attend their parents' parish, showed a marked drop off in late adolescence. 79 percent of 10-14 yr olds still attended while only 45 percent of those 15yrs+ did so. While this somewhat precipitous fall in attendance is between the early and late teenage years, it remains my contention that the age at which this fall off begins has been steadily lowering.

⁶⁵ In the period 1996 to 2006, while the number of Australian Mass attenders fell in all age groups under 60 years, the 20-29 year age group remained consistently the lowest attenders proportionate to overall attendance. Robert Dixon, Audra Kuncinunas and Stephen Reid, "Mass Attendance in Australia" (ACBC Pastoral Projects Office, 2008), 2.

demonstrably the earlier experience of the Pakeha Catholic community prior to the Second Vatican Council, a situation that has steadily diminished in the ensuing decades. It would appear that these peoples who today so vigorously hold to their Catholic faith as part of their immigrant culture, do not (as yet) reflect the secularizing trends affecting Western society as a whole.⁶⁶

- ii. Contemporary Traditionalists: In the US, there has been significant interest in the rise of what Thomas Rausch describes as “a new generation of adult Catholics..., some of whom seem to be more passionate about their faith, more ecclesial in its expression, and more concerned with their identity precisely as Catholic Christians”.⁶⁷ Rausch and others report that these young adults are more comfortable with traditional piety and Catholic devotions and are more likely to be familiar with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* than the documents of Second Vatican Council.⁶⁸ Although a parallel movement is observable in NZ, the numbers involved appear to be insufficient to significantly affect the overall rate of young Catholic participation as evidenced in Dixon and Bond’s report.
- iii. World Youth Day 2008: The 2008 World Youth Day event in Sydney generated significant energy and interest among NZ Catholics culminating in 4,000 mostly young pilgrims travelling to Sydney to participate. This amounts to 5 percent of the weekly Mass going population in NZ and represents a significantly higher proportion than other Western countries.⁶⁹ Despite this surge in Catholic involvement, however, NZ parishes are now experiencing similar levels of local youthful participation to that before World Youth Day.⁷⁰

Each of these three factors will be addressed later in this study. What is of particular note here is that despite their individual and collective significance, they appear

⁶⁶ See Helen Bergin and Susan Smith, eds., *He Kupu Whakawairua - Spirituality in Aotearoa New Zealand: Catholic Voices* (Auckland: Accent Publications, 2002). Gerald Arbuckle, *The Church in a Multi-Cultural Society: A Sociological Survey on the Pastoral Needs of Maori and Polynesian Immigrants in New Zealand* (Mount St Mary's Seminary, 1976). Colin Brown, "Church, Culture, and Identity: the New Zealand Experience," in *Culture and Identity in New Zealand*, ed. D. Novitz and B. Willmott (Wellington: GP Books, 1989).

⁶⁷ Thomas P. Rausch, *Being Catholic in a Culture of Choice* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2006), 87.

⁶⁸ Ibid. David Whalen, "The Emergence of the Contemporary Traditionalists," *Review for Religious* 61 (2002). Colleen Carroll, *The New Faithful: Why Young Faithful Are Embracing Christian Orthodoxy* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2002).

⁶⁹ See comment in footnote 18 above.

⁷⁰ Although no research has been undertaken in New Zealand, observation by diocesan youth ministry staff members confirm this situation. This was also the pattern that was found in Australia after WYD 2005 in Cologne. See Richard Rymarz, "The Impact of World Youth Day: A Twelve Month Follow-up of Under 18 Australian WYD 2005 Participants," *Australian Catholic Record* 84, no. 4 (2007).

surprisingly ineffective in reversing or even slowing the increasing rate of relative absence of young adults in the Catholic churches of NZ.

Catholic Identity and Religious Practice

Grace Davie has argued that a reduction in participation in Church activity cannot be simply equated with a loss of religious belief, i.e. faith can be real without the necessity of any active connection to faith community.⁷¹ Kelley and Evans categorise the decline in Church attendance in Australia over the last two decades as having little to do with loss of faith but instead amounting to another example of a widespread fall-off in civic engagement, the reasons for which, they maintain, remain unclear.⁷² Although such *believing without belonging* is not a new occurrence, Mason, Singleton and Webber take issue with a perspective that is well summed up in the popular catch-cry, 'one does not have to go to church to be a good Christian'. They point out that theologians and sociologists of religion have long agreed that religious belief (faith) is more than simple assent to certain ideas.⁷³ It also incorporates membership, involvement and commitment to the institution and its ideals.⁷⁴ To treat what amount to residual and private beliefs as *religious* belief is for Mason, Singleton and Webber to ignore religion's sociological dimensions in favour of a narrower, highly individualistic psychological assessment.⁷⁵ As we shall see in Chapter Five, Charles Taylor treats this issue of the social imperative of belief by highlighting the importance of a certain 'transformational' element in his definition of religion.

The link between the decline in religious attendance / participation and any decline in religious belief or faith is therefore a disputed one. An objective of the current study will be to shed light on exactly this issue of whether belief fades with reduction in regular Church participation. The ability for such large numbers of young adults to disengage from regular religious practice, either by proactive choice or by a more passive inertia, can be interpreted as indicating that they do not place great value on such overt religious behaviour, something that a believing person might reasonably be expected to do. Yet most still willingly self-identify as Catholic (as we shall see in the

⁷¹ Grace Davie, *The Sociology of Religion*, South Asia Edition ed. (London: Sage, 2007), 138-40.

⁷² M. D. R. Evans and J. Kelley, *Australian Economy and Society 2002: Religion, Morality and Public Policy in International Perspective 1984-2002* (Sydney: Federation Press, 2004). Cited in Mason, Singleton and Webber, *Spirit of Generation Y*, 52.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁷⁴ Compare Joachim Wach's, 'creed, code, cult & community' as a description of integral belief/faith with a 'belief' that appears to be little more than 'inconsequential opinion on matters religious.' *Ibid.*, 53-5.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 358. Davie herself has moved on from the notion of 'belief without belonging'. See 'A Vicarious Relationship,' *FAS*, 103-5.

research to follow), a valid membership claim, but with grounds that surely lie at the minimalist end of any interpretation of the membership descriptions provided in the documents of Vatican II.⁷⁶

Almost all young adult Catholics in NZ were raised by at least one Catholic parent. Many participated in Catholic parish communities and a majority were educated in Catholic schools. The evidence notwithstanding, one might expect that such an upbringing would have a significant influence on their Catholic religious identity and worldview. For some it no doubt has, but what is of interest in this study is how it is that the vast majority can so easily disconnect. It would appear that either Catholic religious identity has changed significantly for this generation or that the Church institution as a whole is simply failing to communicate the Gospel and shape such identity at all. These are issues that this study intends to explore via the already noted key research questions:

1. To what extent do the young adult Catholics studied identify with, and draw meaning from, a Catholic religious worldview?
2. What is the nature and strength of Catholic identity among the young adult Catholics in the study?

Section 5: Charles Taylor and the Secular

Charles Taylor argues that in Western society during the Middle Ages it was virtually impossible not to believe in God and yet today many of us find this not only easy but almost inevitable.⁷⁷ How this change occurred in Western society is the focus of Taylor's widely acclaimed work, *A Secular Age* (2007), an expansive study of the process of secularization in which Taylor searches for a contemporary understanding of religious belief. His search is galvanised by a dissatisfaction with what he describes as the 'subtraction stories' of secularization, those explanations of secularization that see it as an inevitable process of letting go of "earlier, confining horizons, or illusions, or limitations of knowledge."⁷⁸ Taylor's purpose is to counter such stories which inevitably suggest that what is revealed in the removal of these older constraints is

⁷⁶ "Incorporated into the church by Baptism, the faithful are appointed by their baptismal character to christian religious worship; reborn as sons and daughters of God, they must profess publicly the faith they have received from God through the church." *Lumen Gentium*, n. 2. The constitution goes on to identify the sacrament of confirmation as intrinsically missional (confirmed as "true witnesses") and the sacrament of eucharist as "the source and summit of the christian life".

⁷⁷ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 25.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

something that is uniquely, perennially human. Instead, he wants to show that “Western modernity, including its secularity, is the fruit of new inventions, newly constructed self-understandings and related practices”.⁷⁹ Modernization and secularization itself do not in his view inevitably entail the end of religion. There is space, Taylor believes, for openness to transcendence within modern and postmodern mindsets.

The significance of Taylor’s thesis for this study is that he poses a convincing argument for an understanding of modernity and modern secularity that allows for belief in transcendence and finds value in religious practice. Taylor sets out to show how Western society has had to come to terms with psychological, scientific, and sociological revolutions, each of which has impacted strongly upon religious belief.⁸⁰

In his earlier work, *Sources of the Self* (1989), Taylor established the foundation for his theory of secularization by describing the gradual ‘turn to the self’, the development of a sense of ourselves as beings of inner depth.⁸¹ He argues that it is this development of ‘radical reflexivity’ that enables us to think of ourselves as ‘selves’ – as individuals.⁸² During the period of human history from Augustine to Descartes the location of the source of ‘the good’ (to which we aspire) moves from beyond us to within us. Taylor traces the rise of a subsequent new affirmation of ordinary life after the Reformation, a perspective shift that moved Western society beyond previous understandings based on hierarchy and nobility.

In developing his notion of the modern ‘buffered self’, Taylor sees God having receded in the following three key ways:

- 1) In the ‘disenchantment of our world’ in terms of the abandoning of acceptance of active spirits, demons and moral forces in society;
- 2) In the secularization of society in terms of the reduction of God’s role and felt presence in the social order; and

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Psychologically: e.g. the development of the ‘buffered self’ — the way in which the modern self exists with a new sense of “its place in the cosmos: not open and porous and vulnerable to a world of spirits and powers.” Ibid., 27. See also Ibid., 37-41. Scientifically: e.g. the relationship between Darwin’s evolutionary theory and religion, Ibid., 378-379. Sociologically: e.g. the development of what Taylor calls the modern social imaginary (how society is understood), Ibid., 159-211.

⁸¹ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989). The notion of the ‘turn to the self’ is of course a familiar theme through this period in history (e.g. both Kant and Rahner explore it in considerable depth).

⁸² The term ‘reflexivity’ generally refers to the awareness of one’s own influence. E.g. for a researcher it involves taking into account the effect one has on the process and content of one’s work. ‘Radical reflexivity’ goes a step further in describing the very awareness of being aware. It brings into play conscious reflection on one’s existence as an individual, one’s sense that one stands alone, apprehending the world uniquely; influencing others profoundly.

- 3) In the move to a post-cosmic understanding of the universe in which natural events are no longer seen as ‘acts of God’.⁸³

But the key difference Taylor cites between the experiences of the Middle Ages and today lies in the common perception of ‘fullness’ in everyday life.⁸⁴ Around 1500, our highest spiritual and moral aspirations were inescapably God-related. For this to have changed, an alternative source of fullness had to emerge, one that did not rely on a sense of God-giftedness. Exactly this happened, Taylor proposes, with the origin and rise of *exclusive humanism*.⁸⁵ Along with the possibility of non-religious aspirations, the explosion in spiritual options that emerged during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has led to what Taylor describes as a ‘culture of authenticity’ - an understanding of life in which we each have our own way of realising our humanity.⁸⁶ The authentic life is achieved (or pursued) in finding and living out one’s own path. The alternative is to surrender to “conformity with a model imposed on us from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority”.⁸⁷

The notion of a ‘culture of authenticity’ offers immense possibility in understanding the overall worldview and, especially, the Catholic religious worldview, of today’s Pakeha young adult Catholic in NZ. Without needing to abandon religious belief, Taylor’s proposal opens up more convincing interpretations of the situation encountered by the Catholic Church in NZ (and abroad). How best can the Church understand and respond to 18-28 year old Catholics who relate to their Church in new, and possibly misunderstood, ways? Although his work is highly regarded for its breadth and scholarship Taylor is of course not without his critics and opposing views will be taken into consideration. But it is Taylor’s thesis that is given prominence in this work because, as we shall see, it builds on contemporary sociology of religion to provide a solid platform from which to interpret the religious identity of today’s young adult Catholic.

⁸³ In both ways 1 and 3, the advance of a scientific worldview is recognizable. But it is the subtraction story in which God’s recession is accepted as the unavoidable consequence of the development of science that Taylor consistently disputes.

⁸⁴ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 5-12.

⁸⁵ Preceded and aided by the move to Providential Deism with its inherent distancing of the God-human relationship. Ibid., 221-69.

⁸⁶ “It’s as though the original duality, the positing of a viable humanist alternative, set in train a dynamic, something like a nova effect, spawning an ever-widening variety of moral/spiritual options, across the span of the thinkable and perhaps even beyond.’ It is the fractured nature of the ‘nova’ and its relatively recent acceptance in whole societies that Taylor believes gives rise to the culture of authenticity with its mantra of, ‘do your own thing’. Ibid., 299.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 475.

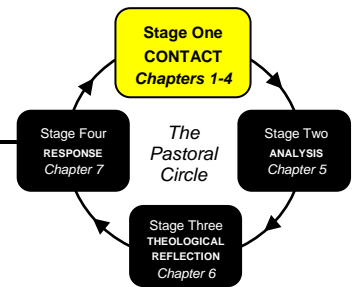


Figure 2.1: Faith Amid Secularity
– Chapter Two Methodology

CHAPTER TWO: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

In the previous chapter the background to this study was established and the underlying methodology and structure outlined. The Catholic NZ context was surveyed and the situation of the young adult Pakeha Catholic in NZ was initially described. The chapter concluded with an introduction to Charles Taylor’s recent work on secularization — included in this study for its utility in assisting the interpretation of the findings of my own research among young adult Catholics in NZ.

Although very little has been undertaken in terms of studies of the religious worldview of young adult Catholics in NZ, such research is readily available internationally, most notably in the UK, Europe, the US and Australia. The aim of this chapter is to draw out from these studies the main themes pertinent to my own research. I will however not be attempting to synthesize all of the findings of studies of young people’s religiosity — to introduce them in all of their specificity is beyond the scope of the present project. Instead, having reviewed the literature, I will identify a number of the key ideas that repeatedly emerge across the breadth of the research.

Section 1: Spirituality and Gen Y

Religious Individualism

Charles Taylor contends that the last fifty years have seen a deepening of the individualism that has come to characterise modern Western society.¹ He goes so far as to name the development a ‘cultural revolution’ in which self-orientation became a mass phenomenon. Perhaps most evident in the US, this pervasive individualism is however the *modus operandi* of the younger generations across the Western world.² In a recent

¹ To the moral/spiritual and instrumental individualism that already characterised the modern age, Taylor believes that the 1960s introduced a new ‘expressive’ individualism as a mass phenomenon. Taylor, *Secular Age*, 473.

² Taylor believes that the pervading ethos of individualism can largely be attributed to the influential role played by the more individual-focussed theology of Protestantism in US history. He explores this idea in considerable depth over three chapters of *A Secular Age* (Chapters 12-14, pp. 423-535) drawing on the work of Bellah and Martin.

column in the *National Catholic Reporter* a young (Gen Y) correspondent included the following statement that serves to illustrate what Taylor is suggesting. Reflecting on the diversity she recognises in contemporary Catholicism, Kate Childs Graham wrote:

*There are as many ways to live out our Catholic faith as there are Catholics. That's over 1 billion ways, for those of you who are keeping count. Sure, there are practices and beliefs that we hold in common, and, every once in a while, a group forms around one or two or three or four of these commonalities. But, at the end of the day, we are unique individuals. So, it makes perfect sense that we are unique Catholics as well.*³

An extensive study of young adult Catholics in the US (*Young Adult Catholics*: 2001) acknowledged the place of religious individualism as a “revered part of the American experience”.⁴ *Young Adult Catholics* pointed, however, to a dramatic acceleration since the 1960s in what they describe as a move from a Church of obligation to a Church of personal choice. Catholicism, they assert, has become less a binding community of discipleship than a “cultural tool kit of symbolic religion/spiritual wares from which it is possible to construct a personal religious identity”.⁵ *Young Adult Catholics* took the view that this was not an entirely negative development indicating instead a new and positive increase in the individual’s personal ownership of faith in keeping with the teachings of Vatican II.⁶ The individual has effectively moved from spiritual consumption to spiritual production. The conviction that one must craft one’s own religious identity now appears to be part of the DNA of today’s young Catholic. Sociologist Michelle Dillon contends that Catholic identity construction should not be thought of as solely driven by excessive individualism. Instead, she points to Vatican II as demonstrating the possibility of shifting boundaries, thereby publically validating a principle of doctrinal and institutional change within Catholicism.⁷ Regardless of the extent to which it is driven by individualism, individual and group Catholic identity

‘Individualism’ is also addressed in the *Young Catholics at the New Millennium* study. See Fulton et al., *Young Catholics*, 169.

³ Kate Childs Graham, “The Catholic Club: Are you in or out?,” *Young Voices, NCRonline*, (March 25, 2010), accessed April 27, 2010, <http://ncronline.org/blogs/young-voices/catholic-club-are-you-in-or-out>.

⁴ Hoge et al., *Young Adult Catholics*, 224.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁶ See especially *Lumen Gentium*, nn. 9-17 (Chapter II: *The People of God*).

⁷ Michele Dillon, *Catholic Identity: Balancing Reason, Faith and Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 25. See also James T. Fisher, “Young American Catholics: Who are they and what do they want?,” *Commonweal* Nov 23 (2001).

construction has repercussions for ecclesiology. The *Young Adult Catholics* research found that most Gen Y Catholics agree with Childs Graham (above) in pointing to the existence of a multitude of ways of being Catholic and in their determination to choose a Catholic 'style' that works for them.⁸

Selective behaviour of this type has long been decried as 'cafeteria Catholicism' by those who favour a more uniform ecclesial approach. An internet search of the descriptor turns up not only definitions but any number of websites denouncing the approach and issuing dire warnings for anyone refusing to accept the entire corpus of Church teaching.⁹ Doubtless, there is always room for challenge and reassessment of the criteria by which modern Catholics may shape their religious behaviour. It would however seem to be something of a lost cause to imagine that the trend toward individualistic Catholic identity construction can be easily reversed. An individualistic approach is now integral to almost every aspect of modern Western life, an unseen but pervasive belief system that underpins and colours all of our thinking.¹⁰

Paul Griffiths notes that Gen Y have grown up immersed in a relativist context that has convinced them of the subjectivity of almost all truth, belief and personal perspective.¹¹ Driven by a consumer mentality the modern Gen Y young adult sees no reason why truth claims emerging from religious communities should be treated any differently.¹² Critical judgment of the views of others (where these views are not causing anyone harm) is considered to be objectionable, making all but impossible any claim to religious uniqueness (i.e. truth).¹³ In view of this, Catholicism's claims to legitimate authority in religious matters strike real problems in the area of credibility with Gen Y who appear to have inherited their parents' deep suspicion of traditional institutions and their leaders.¹⁴ Rightly or wrongly, these reservations have been confirmed for a generation who, at a critical formative period in their lives, faced the full force of the revelations of clergy sex abuse and systemic failure in dealing adequately with abusers

⁸ Hoge et al., *Young Adult Catholics*, 226. It is interesting to note that the young adults in this study (20-39 years old in 1997) are between the ages of 34 and 53 years in 2011. The high level of individualism these authors found in young adults can now be assumed to be part of the lives of those well into middle age.

⁹ E.g. i. 'Cafeteria Christianity,' accessed December 14, 2010, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cafeteria_Christianity.

ii. 'What is a Cafeteria Catholic?,' accessed December 14, 2010, <http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-cafeteria-catholic.htm>.

iii. 'Cafeteria Catholics,' accessed December 14, 2010, <http://www.rosary-center.org/l146n4.htm>.

¹⁰ Christian Smith and Melinda Denton, *Soul Searching: the Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 143.

¹¹ Paul Griffiths, "Lights! Sound! Action! Gen Y and the Church of Choice," *Boston College Magazine* 2004, 53-4.

¹² Tim Muldoon, "Seeking the Seekers: Parish Ministry to Young Adults Today," *Church Magazine* 2008, 3.

¹³ Griffiths, "Lights!," 54.

¹⁴ Fisher, "Young American Catholics," 12.

and victims. Many agree with Rebecca Huntley (herself Gen Y) when she claims that, for her generation, the Churches now line up with corporations and governments on the growing list of big institutions that are not to be trusted.¹⁵ While not necessarily agreeing with the Gen Y stance, Rausch confirms that:

... if the Church really wants to speak to young adults today, it must recognize how deficient is its own credibility. Most young Catholics do not believe that a matter is resolved simply because authority has pronounced on it.¹⁶

Defining Spirituality

‘Spirituality’ proves surprisingly difficult to define largely due to the broad scope of its popular usage. Tacey almost inadvertently acknowledges this by exploring the experience and understanding of spirituality among university students without ever providing a succinct definition.¹⁷ For him spirituality has to do simply with ‘spirit’ understood as a deep primal source that is at once beyond humanity while paradoxically forming the very heart of human experience. His conviction is that there is a growing interest in the healing effects this ‘spirit’ has on life, health, community and well-being.¹⁸ Gary Bouma explores a definition by comparing and contrasting spirituality with religion before ultimately admitting that an adequate encapsulation is all but impossible.¹⁹ In their Australian research report (*The Spirit of Generation Y: 2007*), Mason, Singleton and Webber settle on their own working definition pointing out that there is no one true meaning and nor is their own an attempt to cobble together a range of the understandings in common usage (which are briefly surveyed).²⁰ Spirituality for them is a “conscious way of life based on a transcendent referent”.²¹ Deliberately inclusive of any religious worldview, this definition is broad enough to take in all cognitive structures that assist the individual in discerning meaning from life experience. The authors further explain that their concept of a ‘transcendent referent’ goes beyond the supernatural to encompass any ethical ideal that the individual may

¹⁵ Rebecca Huntley, *The World According to Y: Inside the New Adult Generation* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2006), 165. Huntley finds her Gen Y interviewees scathing in their assessment of Catholicism, especially in its treatment of women and homosexuals and in its handling of the sex abuse scandals.

¹⁶ Rausch, *Being Catholic*, 106.

¹⁷ David Tacey, *The Spirituality Revolution: The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality* (Sydney: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004).

¹⁸ Ibid., 1.

¹⁹ Gary Bouma, *Australian Soul: Religion and Spirituality in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1-30.

²⁰ Mason, Singleton and Webber, *Spirit of Generation Y*, 39.

²¹ Ibid.

pursue.²² Religion is subsumed into this definition of spirituality but so too are a whole range of apparently nonreligious belief and behaviour which the authors wish to test. *The Spirit of Generation Y* admits that this is stretching the term to the limit but the intention is to create a catch-all concept that can be subdivided into spirituality types.²³

Although usage of the term spirituality in the literature cannot be said to always imply the exact same meaning, it is useful at this stage to adopt a working definition. *The Spirit of Generation Y*'s characterization emerges as a practical option here being broad enough to make sense when applied across the literature while containing two critical elements that will recur in this study — spirituality as a significant factor in the life of the individual (*conscious way of life*) and the transcendent as a key point of reference (*transcendent referent*). For these reasons it is this definition (spirituality as *conscious way of life based on a transcendent referent*) that is implied in the use of the term 'spirituality' in this thesis.

Two schools of thought emerge from among the contemporary studies of spirituality among Gen Y. The first indicates that the level of interest in spirituality is as high as it has ever been while the second is far more pessimistic in its assessment of the data. Both perspectives and the studies which support them deserve attention.

The Case for Significant Spiritual Interest

In his study of the character of religious and spiritual life in modern Australia (*Australian Soul*: 2006), Bouma emerges convinced of the vitality of both. Examining both qualitative and quantitative data, he asserts that a cultural shift has taken place from a spiritual focus on rationality to one on experience.²⁴ Bouma interprets this transition as equivalent to a shift in perspective from Catholic 'tradition' to Protestant 'reason' (from the time of the Enlightenment), but more latterly moving to Pentecostal 'experience'.²⁵ He describes the present era as the time of the experiential — the spirituality of *Star Wars* in which people are encouraged to 'trust their feelings' much as Obi-Wan famously urged Luke Skywalker to 'trust the force!'²⁶ With the mainstream Christian denominations finding themselves increasingly marginalised (along with

²² Ibid., 40.

²³ Traditional, New Age, and Secular are the types identified. Ibid., 68-70.

²⁴ This parallels Taylor's proposal in *A Secular Age*. See especially Chapter 12ff.

²⁵ Bouma, *Australian Soul*, 86-105.

²⁶ Ibid., 93.

monopoly organisations of all types in society),²⁷ it is the Pentecostal movement within Christianity, with its emphasis on the experiential, that is uniquely positioned to benefit. Although Bouma finds older generations continuing to ignore religion, he recognises signs of spirituality among youth that, he believes, mark them out as both more religious and more conservative than their parents' generation. He points to examples such as the Christian community at Taizé (Christianity), Moslem activity on university campuses in Australia and the more open wearing of the traditional yarmulke by contemporary Jewish students. Of particular note is his citing of *The Spirit of Generation Y* research in support of this thesis when, as we shall see, its authors assess their research as demonstrating just the opposite.²⁸

Tacey is another strong advocate for the vigour of present-day spirituality, basing his assertions on his observation of students at La Trobe University.²⁹ Although not a formal study as such the popularity of his courses in spirituality and the exchange of ideas and experiences he witnessed left him convinced that what the young find lacking in credibility is not spirituality, but the dogged defence of an outdated worldview by the institutional churches. When this worldview is put aside, Tacey maintains, what is discovered among the general population is an interest in spirituality that has never been greater.³⁰

The Case for Declining Spiritual Interest

Others however have expressed reservation about this claimed explosion of interest in spirituality.³¹ The problem is generally felt to lie in the already noted breadth of the term — the broad sweep of beliefs and practices that are included under its umbrella. The common claim to be 'spiritual but not religious' is typically a declaration of a creed of personal choice freed from the restraining and moderating moorings of a community of faith.³² Once this floodgate of options is opened it becomes very difficult, not only to

²⁷ Bouma theorizes that this is because self-preservation becomes the primary goal of monopoly organisations and those who work for them, stifling their ability to change and rendering them increasingly out of touch with society. *Ibid.*, 140. See also David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 167-76.

²⁸ Bouma, *Australian Soul*, 210.

²⁹ Where he taught a course entitled *Spirituality and Rites of Passage*. See Tacey, *Spirituality Revolution*, 49-51.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ E.g. Bryan R. Wilson, "Reflections on a Many Sided Controversy," in *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis*, ed. Steve Bruce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). Bruce, *God is Dead*. Mason, Singleton and Webber, *Spirit of Generation Y*. Rausch. Robert Wuthnow, *All in Sync: How Music and Art Are Revitalizing American Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

³² Rausch, *Being Catholic*, 102.

define, but also to categorise and measure spirituality leaving researchers in the field having to continually experiment with ways of doing so.³³

A possible solution has been proposed in the report of a research project exploring the worldview of 15-25 year olds in the UK (*Making Sense of Generation Y*: 2007).³⁴ One of the aims of this project was to discover the nature of young people's spirituality and the researchers' findings led them to develop the theory of the 'happy midi-narrative' — a description of the storyline of the young person's worldview.³⁵ Falling between an individualistic 'mini narrative' and the traditional grand 'meta narrative', the midi-narrative is communal on a small scale — involving "me, my friends and my family".³⁶ The reference to it being 'happy' captures the holder's key belief that the universe and social world are essentially benign and life is 'okay'. Such a viewpoint was found to be common across the sample and it was underpinned by the secular sense that the world and all life within it are meaningful as they are i.e. without any need for belief in something beyond.³⁷ *Making Sense of Generation Y* further breaks down the 'happy midi-narrative' into a three-part sequence beginning with the aim and possibility of achieving happiness (through relationship); dealing with 'bad things' — obstacles along the way that can be addressed through supportive relationships; and finally to resolution in the achievement of the happy ideal (reached through growth and acceptance of help from others).³⁸

While these narratives do not bode well for the young person's sense of the value of institutional religion, they do point to a profound sense of the importance of the relational to life fulfilment (happiness). This search for (relational) happiness correlates with what Taylor describes as the contemporary search for authenticity, a key concept that will be used later in this thesis to assist in interpreting my own research data.³⁹ Of interest also will be the overlap between the narrative described above and that of the Catholic young adult in NZ who has been exposed, to a greater or lesser degree, to a Catholic religious worldview from an early age.

³³ Wuthnow, All in Sync. Rausch, Being Catholic.

³⁴ Sara Savage et al., *Making Sense of Generation Y: The World View of 16-25 Year Olds* (Church House Publishing, 2007).

³⁵ Ibid., 35-53.

³⁶ Ibid., 38.

³⁷ Ibid., 37.

³⁸ Ibid., 39.

³⁹ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 473-504.

The Spirit of Generation Y (2007) was a substantial study of Gen Y in Australia involving a national survey and over one hundred interviews.⁴⁰ The results are especially significant in that the researchers found that, contrary to more optimistic conclusions, today's young people are not active spiritual seekers. Individualism and relativism characterised the sample and, amongst those with a religious background, ignorance of their own religious traditions was high.

Just over half of Gen Y claimed to believe in God with 46 percent self-identifying as Christian. A little over a third of these were found to be really engaged (attending Church at least monthly, praying and believing in core doctrine) although even this category included some who were unsure about Jesus' divinity and resurrection.⁴¹ Parental example and enthusiasm emerged as crucial factors in the likelihood of the young person moving to a more committed level of spirituality. In fact the difference between Gen Y Christians and their Baby-Boomer parents (who are still Christian) was negligible on most measures of belief and practice.⁴² In seeking to account for this *The Spirit of Generation Y* theorizes that a 'cultural revolution' took place in the 1960s and 70s and that a steady process of secularization is continuing. Thus, it is deduced, there is little generational difference in belief and practice between the Baby-Boomers and Generation Y of the sort that existed between the Boomers and their parents. The only surprise in these results for the authors was that, "there has been *more* continuing decline than anticipated among the Boomers in the 25 years since the end of the 70s, and their children are taking off from this later low level, and are themselves already declining from that point".⁴³

Boomers' continuing decline aside, Gen Y did show lower levels of belief and practice than previous generations (at their age). In contrast to the opinion of the *International Social Science Survey Australia* which was sceptical that decline in Church attendance was due to religious reasons, *The Spirit of Generation Y* expected and found evidence of considerable change in belief, identification and attendance.⁴⁴ It noted however that a more powerful factor may well have been increasing individualisation resulting in a decline in 'joining' behaviour of all types.⁴⁵ For those who later abandoned their faith,

⁴⁰ Mason, Singleton and Webber, *Spirit of Generation Y*.

⁴¹ Ibid., 144.

⁴² Ibid., 84-5, 101, 301.

⁴³ Ibid., 315.

⁴⁴ Evans and Kelley, *Religion, Morality and Public Policy*, 38. Mason, Singleton and Webber, *Spirit of Generation Y*, 311.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 312.

The Spirit of Generation Y tentatively confirmed Wuthnow's study that there is a significant retaining of a whole range of Christian beliefs.⁴⁶ It is the so-called 'low cost' items such as religious belief that appear to be holding whereas the more demanding active involvement is declining.⁴⁷

Some final points of note from *The Spirit of Generation Y* include:

- Only 13 percent of Gen Y would declare that only one religion is true.
- Women are no more religious than men.
- Even when spirituality is perceived as a journey (Wuthnow), the reality is that fewer appear to be willing to embark on it.
- Gen Y are spiritual eclectics (often pulling together unrelated elements of spirituality from a range of sources) — even those still identifying with traditional spirituality.⁴⁸

The Spirit of Generation Y concluded that traditional religion is threatened by a new and radical 'isolation of the individual' that goes beyond an outdated concept of 'individualism' seen as minor deviation from the accepted norms of an integrated society.⁴⁹ Social support networks provided stable social structures that legitimated authority in various forms - parental, local community, civil society and by extension, religious (Christian) authority. Even as this society was nurturing the parents of Gen Y it was already beginning to change amid the social and cultural turmoil of the 60s and 70s.⁵⁰ By the time Gen Y made their appearance in 1980s the Western world was a different place — more economically driven and less concerned with the communal. Citing the work of Geertz, the authors of *The Spirit of Generation Y* note that authority does not exist in a vacuum and, as a result, those raised in the midst of weakened networks of social support (going well beyond the family) struggle to accept the validity of institutional authority of almost any sort, but especially that of religion.⁵¹ The new isolation of the individual is profoundly affecting Gen Y but also the older Gen X and Baby-Boomer generations. Gen Y, as with their Gen X predecessors, are not strongly influenced by social concern and neither are they much involved in citizenship

⁴⁶ The reservation was due to the fact that Gen Y are young and so cannot be far past the point of having given up their faith. Ibid., 305. See Robert Wuthnow, *Growing Up Religious* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990).

⁴⁷ Mason, Singleton and Webber, *Spirit of Generation Y*, 317-9.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 301-11.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 320.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 320-1.

⁵¹ Ibid., 321.

activities.⁵² As *The Spirit of Generation Y* notes, the main ambition in life for Gen Y appears to be able to say – ‘I did it my way!’⁵³

Belief in God

Going deeper than Church or religious affiliation, significant work has also been done on the conceptions of God held by young people today. Prior to her work on the *Making Sense of Generation Y* study (see above), Collins undertook a sociological study of one thousand and ninety (1,090) 15 and 16 year olds in the UK (*Immanent Faith*: 1999).⁵⁴ The results led her to conclude that most young people did not hold a transcendent notion of faith at all.⁵⁵ Collins found that for the majority of young people surveyed faith was ‘immanent’, i.e. it was organised around family, close friends and the self, and Christianity where professed held only transitory and occasional significance. For most of the young participants religiosity did not form a permanent part of the faith structure itself.⁵⁶ The *Immanent Faith* research involved a broader sample than my own study i.e. it was not limited to a purposive sample of self-identifying religious individuals.⁵⁷ Yet there is a resonance in its findings that is worth attention. Although my own sample of young adult Catholics certainly did hold a transcendent notion of faith in God, there was for many a significant reshaping of Catholic identity along the lines suggested by *Immanent Faith*. I will consider this issue in more depth in later chapters.

Another more recent UK study (*Mapping the Terrain*: 2010) found that 72 percent of Catholic young people (aged 15-19 years) want ‘to be happy’ as one of their top three life aspirations.⁵⁸ Although relational happiness emerged as relatively important (in marriage and with close friends), reference to relationship with God (e.g. ‘to be the person God wants me to be’) rated very low on the young people’s list of key goals. Of those self-identifying as Catholic only 35 percent were found to believe in a ‘personally involved’ God while a further 10 percent acknowledged a creative but impersonal God. Nineteen percent of these young Catholics said that they believed in a higher power

⁵² Ibid., 328-9.

⁵³ Ibid., 329-34.

⁵⁴ Sylvia Collins, "Immanent Faith: Young People in Late Modernity," in *Sociology, Theology and the Curriculum*, ed. Leslie J. Francis (London: Cassell, 1999).

⁵⁵ Ibid., 171.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 173.

⁵⁷ See ‘Participant Selection’, *FAS*, 58-60.

⁵⁸ Matthew van Duyvenbode, "Mapping the Terrain: the Reality of Young Catholics," Catholic Youth Ministry Federation, (2010), accessed March 10, 2010, <http://www.cymfed.org/CYMFEDresearchMAPPINGTHETERRAIN.pdf>.

while just fewer than 30 percent were unsure. Finally, 7 percent of them denied altogether the existence of any sort of God.⁵⁹

In a study of the religious and spiritual lives of US teenagers, Smith and Denton (*Soul Searching*: 2005) developed a description of what they found to be the de facto belief in the US especially among mainline Protestant and Catholic teens.⁶⁰ Dubbed *Moral Therapeutic Deism* this generalised creed centres on belief in a God who somewhat distantly watches over human life on earth, while expecting people to be ‘good, nice, and fair’ to each other. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself. Although there is no need to involve God in one’s life (except when problems arise), there is an inbuilt expectation that ‘good people like us’ go to heaven when we die.⁶¹ Immediately obvious are the similarities with both Collins’ findings on immanent relationships and those of *Mapping the Terrain* with regard to the search for happiness and the relatively impersonal nature of God. In her Masters study of Catholic teenagers in Whangarei, NZ, Trudy Dantis also found this belief to be prominent.⁶²

The *Soul Searching* study notes the important role individualism plays in shaping *Moralistic Therapeutic Deism* and it points to the attitude prevalent among the young in which “nobody *has* to do anything in life” (emphasis in original).⁶³ Regardless of the views of others, whatever one chooses is viewed as being just fine, if that is indeed what a person wants. Consequently, traditional religious languages and vocabularies of commitment, duty, faithfulness, obedience, calling, obligation, accountability, and ties to the past are nearly completely absent from the discourse of US teenagers. Instead, religion is presumed to be something that individuals choose and must affirm for themselves based on their present and ongoing personally identified needs and preferences.⁶⁴

Section 2: Catholic Identity in the Research Literature

In 1976 Andrew Greeley introduced a new category of Catholic identity as part of his analysis of several studies of young adults.⁶⁵ ‘Communal Catholics’ he described as

⁵⁹ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁰ The US National Survey of Youth and Religion. See Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 163.

⁶¹ Ibid., 162-3.

⁶² Trudy Dantis, "Journeying with God: Spirituality and Participation in Faith Related Activities among Catholic Youth in Whangarei" (Masters Thesis, Massey University, 2008), 100.

⁶³ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 143.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 143-4.

⁶⁵ Andrew Greeley, *The Communal Catholic: A Personal Manifesto* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976).

those who identified with Catholicism, enjoyed being Catholic, but participated minimally, held low expectations of the Church and did not take Church teaching and guidance seriously. Growing numbers of Catholics in the 70's, Greeley asserted, were in fact becoming 'communal Catholics.' The concept was found helpful by researchers and analysts and was used in the ensuing decades in explanatory accounts of a growing trend.⁶⁶ The aforementioned US study, *Young Adult Catholics*, argues however that the term is less applicable to the young today who no longer experience the Church as a distinct community and cultural tradition.⁶⁷ Rather than being 'communal Catholics' themselves, they are more the children of communal Catholics and, as we shall see, almost every indicator points to far less Catholic connection and commitment than their parents.

Young Adult Catholics concludes that young US Catholics' knowledge of the language and symbolism of the tradition is relatively limited — matching their lack of experience of Catholicism as a tight-knit cultural system. In addition, few have overlapping memberships in Catholic organizations or associations that would reinforce a distinctive Catholic identity. Today's young adult Catholic has less to identify with and no experience of an older, different way to fall back on. Few are old enough to have constructed a new Catholic identity over and against the old one, as did many (though not all) pre-Vatican II and baby-boomer Catholics.⁶⁸

Although they share with Greeley's 'communal Catholics' a remarkable belief in the uniqueness of Catholicism and a desire to remain identified as Catholic, today's young Americans are, however, less and less sure what it actually means to be so.⁶⁹ Testing for what young adults considered 'most essential' to Catholic identity revealed that key ecclesiological elements were being sidelined despite Vatican II's renewed teaching on their importance. Significant numbers of young adult Catholics did not view the Roman Catholic Church, the pope or the Church's structures as essential. Tradition was not considered a source of objective truth and the young adult connection to the Church

⁶⁶ E.g. Robert A. Ludwig, *Reconstructing Catholicism for a New Generation*, 2nd ed. (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000). Patrick McNamara, *Conscience First: Tradition Second* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992).

⁶⁷ Hoge et al., *Young Adult Catholics*, 222.

⁶⁸ Ibid. This new identity construction was in effect a prerequisite for the successful personal reception of the changes brought about by the Council.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 218-9. Rausch, *Being Catholic*, 111-4. The 'uniqueness' of Catholic faith lies in the conviction that it is unlike any other and that it is felt to be the 'right' or 'true' religion for these young people. It does not however imply uniqueness in terms of being 'true' or 'right' for others.

through the sacraments was also found to be limited.⁷⁰ The sense of uniqueness of Catholic identity among these young adults was more in line with assertions such as, ‘I can’t imagine being anything else!’ than with any sense of institutional Catholicism having a unique role in salvation history. Being Catholic was considered by them to be an accident of birth and while Catholicism may have been felt to be their ‘one true religion’, it could not be said to be THE ‘one true religion.’⁷¹

Young Adult Catholics notes that it was not anger but simply distance that led to young adult religious illiteracy and estrangement from their faith tradition, a situation in which they were not alone.⁷² Another major US study (*American Catholics Today*: 2005) found that although about half of the young adults said that they could not explain their faith to others, the situation was in fact worse for two of the three generations preceding them.⁷³ Religious illiteracy was found to be highest among pre-Vatican II Catholics, 59 percent of whom expressed difficulty in explaining their faith to others. But in terms of Catholic identity, the situation is reversed with the study clearly showing reducing levels of commitment from the oldest to the youngest Catholics. “On our three-item index of commitment, we found that 43 percent of pre-Vatican II Catholics but only 20 percent of Vatican II Catholics, 17 percent of post-Vatican II Catholics and none of the Millennial Catholics scored high (on commitment).”⁷⁴

Other studies overwhelmingly support the reality of this decline in Catholic identity in Western countries.⁷⁵ The *Young Adult Catholics* study claims that this lack of identity coherence has much to do with a weakened tension with non-Catholic Christians in the wake of the Vatican Council’s embrace of pluralism and enculturation.⁷⁶ For many contemporary Catholic young adults it is simply not clear what the difference is between their own tradition and that of their friends and neighbours attending the

⁷⁰ Hoge et al., *Young Adult Catholics*, 221.

⁷¹ Ibid., 223.

⁷² Ibid., 220.

⁷³ J. D. Davidson, *Challenging Assumptions about Young Catholics*, Cover Story - Survey of U.S. Catholics, (September 30, 2005), accessed March 21, 2010, http://natcath.org/NCR_Online/archives2/2005c/093005/093005r.htm. Initial results of this study were presented in the *National Catholic Reporter* in September 2005. A comprehensive analysis was subsequently published by the researchers as William V. D’Antonio et al., *American Catholics Today: New Realities of Their Faith and Their Church* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007).

⁷⁴ D’Antonio et al., *American Catholics*, 83. What D’Antonio and colleagues designate as ‘Millennials’ (born 1979-1987) this thesis refers to as ‘Gen Y’.

⁷⁵ James Davidson et al., *The Search for Common Ground: What Unites and Divides Catholic Americans* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 1997). Fulton et al., *Young Catholics*. Hoge et al., *Young Adult Catholics*. James D. Davidson and Dean R. Hoge, “Catholics After the Scandal: A New Study’s Major Findings,” *Commonweal* November 19 (2004). Mason, Singleton and Webber, *Spirit of Generation Y*.

⁷⁶ Hoge et al., *Young Adult Catholics*, 221ff.

church down the road.⁷⁷ Although there may be less call today to articulate one's Catholicity over against other Christian denominations, the *Young Adult Catholics* researchers suggest that there is potential for strengthening the tension with secular society on issues such as materialism, consumerism, individualism, and sexual morality without the necessity to compromise Catholicism's mission to positively transform culture.⁷⁸ To do so, however, is to enter the contemporary world of the young where individualism is deified and Church teaching and authority is very often considered *passé*. I will return to the findings and analysis in *Young Adult Catholics* later in this thesis.

Morality

A major piece of international research among young adult Catholics (aged 18-30 years) was conducted by a team of six Catholic sociologists whose intention was to explore the lives of young adults in a late modern or postmodern world. *Young Catholics at the New Millennium* (2000) sought to ascertain the extent to which the young adults embraced or rejected their home cultures and their accompanying religious and moral traditions.⁷⁹ The growing gap between the stance of the institutional Church on personal morality and the perspective and practice of most young Catholics was confirmed and the study concluded that external authority has largely been displaced by individual conscience.⁸⁰ In this regard, morality now operates primarily as an internal matter — reference to external rules and guidelines are regarded as clearly secondary. *Young Catholics at the New Millennium* finds young Catholics to be significantly more Protestant in outlook (i.e. individualistic in their Christianity) and less distinct from their secular peers than were previous generations of Catholics.⁸¹ As Catholic boundaries have blurred in recent

⁷⁷ Fisher, "Young American Catholics," 11.

⁷⁸ Hoge et al., *Young Adult Catholics*, 230.

⁷⁹ Fulton et al., *Young Catholics*, 160. Using a qualitative methodology involving life history interviews, approximately 45 young adults were questioned in each of six countries: two traditionally Protestant — the US and England; and four traditionally Catholic — Malta, Poland, Ireland and Italy. Respondents were selected to ensure gender balance, the participation of both singles and couples, and representation of the whole spectrum of Catholic involvement. As will be outlined in the next chapter, the methodology used in the research of Fulton and colleagues provided the foundation for that adopted in my own study in New Zealand.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 169. This finding supports Taylor's argument for the modern turn inward, the notion that he explores in considerable depth in his earlier book *Sources of the Self* (1989). It is this turn inward that underpins the modern search for personal authenticity. This will be explored in Chapter Five (FAS) when, with Taylor, I will endeavour to show it in a positive light.

⁸¹ Fulton et al., *Young Catholics*. The authors of the US *Young Adult Catholics* study (2001) make a similar observation: "These spiritual and contingent Catholics give selective assent to Church teachings. They have no interest or desire to change other people's beliefs.... They do not make the official language of the Church their own, nor are they consistently involved in the Church's institutional or sacramental life. They are disinclined to adhere to institutional clear cut standards for being a 'good Catholic,' and they want a more egalitarian, participatory, and democratic Church. They are 'good enough' Catholics (Wilkes 1996) who view Roman Catholicism as one denomination among others of equal legitimacy." Hoge et al., *Young Adult Catholics*, 223.

decades there has been a blending of messages from the secular society of late modernity with those of Roman Catholicism.⁸² Catholic teaching on issues such as birth control, divorce, mandatory clerical celibacy, homosexuality, and female ordination is felt by significant numbers of young believers to be unnecessarily exclusive, closing off the possibility of ongoing religious renewal for large numbers of Catholics who find themselves directly or indirectly affected by the clash of these teachings with their lived reality.⁸³

The *Young Catholics at the New Millennium* report shows, however, that moral principles do exist for Gen Y. Rather than being an out and out ‘anything goes’ generation, the young participants spoke of respect for the other and of being respected.⁸⁴ They knew what it meant to go ‘off the rails’ and they were deeply aware of the evil of violence.⁸⁵ Moral dilemmas were often considered, being played out (albeit as caricatures) with a thousand variations in soap operas and TV dramas.

Illustrating this, a US study of Catholic belief and religious activity (*Common Ground*: 1997) reported a shift in the typical understanding of what makes a ‘good Catholic.’⁸⁶ Whereas most pre-Vatican II Catholics understood being a ‘good Catholic’ to consist of following Church teaching and participating in the sacraments, post-Vatican II Catholics instead aligned the ‘good Catholic’ with a generalised understanding of being a ‘good person’.⁸⁷ ‘Doing the right thing’ and being nonjudgmental assume great importance, with the resultant dilemma for young adults in their relationship with the institutional Church, especially in the area of sexual ethics. Not surprisingly, studies consistently report young adult Catholic dissatisfaction with Church teaching on sexual and reproductive issues.⁸⁸

Fading Boundaries

Australian Richard Rymarz has done extensive work in the field of young Catholics and the passing on of faith.⁸⁹ In light of his own research and some of the studies presented

⁸² Fulton et al., *Young Catholics*, 170.

⁸³ Ibid., 176.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 171.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Davidson et al., *Common Ground*.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 118-20.

⁸⁸ E.g. Ibid., 120. Hoge et al., *Young Adult Catholics*. D'Antonio et al., *American Catholics*.

⁸⁹ See Richard Rymarz, "Constructing the Future: A Reflection on the Post-Conciliar Generations," *Australian Catholic Record* 76, no. 1 (1999). Richard Rymarz, "Lost Generation: The Cultures of Gen X Catholics," *Australian Catholic Record* 81, no. 2 (2004). Richard Rymarz and John Graham, "Going to Church: Attitudes to Church Attendance amongst Australian Core Catholic Youth," *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 26, no. 1 (2005). Richard Rymarz and John Graham, "Drifting from the Mainstream: The Religious Identity of Australian Core Catholic

above, he has recently proposed the need for a new narrative of Catholic identity.⁹⁰ With echoes of the *Young Adult Catholics* study's 'beyond communal Catholicism', Rymarz suggests contemporary young Catholic parents (and by implication anyone younger) are all but oblivious to the changes of Vatican II, a transitional period that is of only fading historical interest.⁹¹ He identifies a Church-wide weakening in the sense of the transcendent in favour of a more philosophically defined system of ethics, a move that has effectively softened the previously clear boundaries between Christianity and other groups in society.⁹² Without such boundaries, identity is weakened and, he argues, a group loses sociological validity. For Catholicism in the West this means looking increasingly the same as everyone else in a secular society, living as 'good persons' (as we saw above), but struggling to describe Catholic identity beyond nominal affiliation.⁹³ The net result is that Catholic faith is less identifiable and, according to Rymarz, less appealing in a secular world. He calls for the shaping of a new identity narrative that recognizes secularising influences even as it integrates elements of Catholic heritage with contemporary life.⁹⁴ He concludes by citing Bouma, a passage that I include here for its insight into the current situation. Bouma speaks of future young adults in Western society as:

... a cohort of religiously articulate young people who will have a much more developed sense of their spirituality than previous generations. They will be more demanding and sophisticated consumers in the religious marketplace. The religious organizations that rise to this challenge will grow; those that keep insulting their market — as is the case for much of what passes for mainstream Christianity — will not.⁹⁵

Section 3: Survival of Catholicism in the West

Completing this overview of studies of young adult Catholics, I want to briefly consider the future of Western Catholicism in general terms. Perhaps somewhat optimistically, Hornsby-Smith claims that what he sees in England is more about change than demise. For him, post-Vatican II Catholics have simply become more like everyone else,

Youth," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 11, no. 3 (2006). Richard Rymarz, "Who Goes to World Youth Day? Some Data on Under-18 Australian Participants," *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 28, no. 1 (2007). Rymarz, "Impact of World Youth Day."

⁹⁰ Rymarz, "New Catholic Narrative." He draws on the following research: D'Antonio et al., *American Catholics*. Bouma, *Australian Soul*. Mason, Singleton and Webber, *Spirit of Generation Y*.

⁹¹ Rymarz, "New Catholic Narrative," 6.

⁹² Ibid.: 8.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.: 9.

⁹⁵ Gary Bouma cited in Ibid.

making up their own minds even as they remain loyal to their Catholic faith.⁹⁶ In a similar vein, the *Young Catholics at the New Millennium* study identifies a fundamental change in the educational and socio-economic status of the ‘average Catholic’ in Western countries.⁹⁷ Catholicism is well beyond being the religion of rural communities and is now much more a middle class denomination than in previous centuries. As a result, a more sophisticated Catholic attitude has developed with less tolerance for unconvincing religious teaching and regulation. The *Young Catholics at the New Millennium* researchers further point out that:

Catholicism, unlike some forms of Protestantism, never established itself in the industrial heartlands of Europe except as the religion of migrant populations of Irish, Poles, Italians and others — and in all these cases with success only for one or two generations.⁹⁸

Such observations do not bode well for ‘younger’ Western countries such as NZ that, as has been demonstrated, continue to rely on migrant populations to maintain the numbers of Catholic faithful.

Catholicism in Decline

It is widely noted that religious institutional affiliation in Western countries is weakening.⁹⁹ In the *Young Catholics at the New Millennium* study today’s young adults are portrayed as being different from the Baby-Boomer generation although the authors stop short of agreeing with Robert Ludwig’s assertion that young adults are alienated from their Church.¹⁰⁰ Instead, *Young Catholics at the New Millennium* finds that the majority like being Catholic though this in a nominal sense that includes assent on most core issues of faith (e.g. the divinity of Christ, Resurrection, Incarnation, Trinity, etc.) but far less so on many key ecclesiological issues (e.g. Catholicism’s unique salvific role, papal primacy, teaching authority and sacramentalism).¹⁰¹ I am inclined to agree with this view and will show in subsequent chapters how it fits well with both Charles Taylor’s theory of secularization and my own research findings. The reduction in Catholic religious affiliation that is taking place today among Gen Y is more of a

⁹⁶ M. Hornsby-Smith, "Recent Transformations in English Catholicism: Evidence of Secularization?," in *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis*, ed. Steve Bruce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

⁹⁷ Fulton et al., *Young Catholics*, 165-6.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁹⁹ Hoge et al., *Young Adult Catholics*. Davidson et al., *Common Ground*. Fulton et al., *Young Catholics*.

¹⁰⁰ Hoge et al., *Young Adult Catholics*, 219. Ludwig, *Reconstructing Catholicism*, 13-5.

¹⁰¹ Hoge et al., *Young Adult Catholics*, 220-1.

lethargic drift than an angry or vehement exit (although this is clearly the experience of some young adults).

Certainly coercion of the young, in terms of Sunday Mass attendance, is less and less viewed as being a reasonable strategy. *Young Catholics at the New Millennium* reports that it is almost unheard of for young people to be forced to go to Mass in the UK or US (with the exception of cases where parents are first generation immigrants from places like Italy and Poland.)¹⁰² The UK *Mapping the Terrain* study found that, although 11-14 year old Catholics tend to hold more orthodox beliefs than older young people, the age at which they begin to question and decide against participation is now in the mid-teen years (around 15 years of age).¹⁰³ It further notes a persistent trend away from belief in a personal creator God at this early age. A recent Italian study by Paolo Segatti of Milan University (*Religion in Italy: 2010*) confirms a similar pattern with about half of Italians under 30 years of age (96 percent of whom are baptized) affirming that they ‘always’ believe in God.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, only 14 percent of these young people said that they ‘often’ think of themselves as Catholic. These are significant figures for one of the most traditionally Catholic of Western nations.

In the three areas of belief, participation and mission, *Young Catholics at the New Millennium* reports that US Evangelicals (who do not include Protestant mainstream and fundamentalist Christians) were consistently strong while Catholics were just as consistently weak.¹⁰⁵ The lack of an external threat to Catholic identity leads, the researchers believe, to reduced cohesive tension that would otherwise benefit the tradition. Where the potential for tension exists in relation to official doctrines, elements of these teachings (e.g. sexual issues) often lack credibility among young adults, in part because the doctrines do not evolve out of dialogue with them and/or because young adults seek principles and not rules in this regard. Many of the old symbols of Catholicism that have been weakened or discarded have yet to be reappropriated or replaced by viable new versions.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Fulton et al., *Young Catholics*, 164.

¹⁰³ Duyvenbode, "Mapping the Terrain," 5.

¹⁰⁴ A full report of this study in English proved unobtainable. A summary report can be found in the following online column: John Allen, "Why Rome scorns resignations, and a great week for wonks," *All Things Catholic, NCROnline* (August 13, 2010), accessed August 15, 2011, <http://ncronline.org/blogs/all-things-catholic/why-rome-scorns-resignations-and-great-week-wonks>.

¹⁰⁵ Hoge et al., *Young Adult Catholics*, 227-8.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 229.

This should not be entirely unexpected since the ‘handing on of faith’ has, in recent centuries, only really been successful in situations where Catholics were ethnically separated or in which Catholicism was in monopoly control of more rural populations.¹⁰⁷ *Young Catholics at the New Millennium* sounds the alarm, however, in view of the gradual distancing of the current generation of young adults from their Catholic faith. The future of Catholicism in the West is less about what today’s young adults believe and practice than how their children will respond. Given today’s young adults’ distanced identity and the shrinking of Catholic support structures, it would seem unreasonable to expect them to raise Catholic children who develop a significant depth of conviction in faith.¹⁰⁸

Reversing Decline

Young Catholics at the New Millennium differentiates between ‘traditional’ and ‘progressive’ core young adult Catholics.¹⁰⁹ They are ‘core’ because of their regular (weekly) Mass attendance coupled with some additional participation in a Catholic group of one sort or another. But whereas ‘progressive core Catholics’ focus on the local Church, are concerned with ongoing Church reform and inculturation, ‘traditional core Catholics’ are generally held to be more conservative, focusing on an authoritative Papacy and wishing to rehabilitate Church devotional practices and teachings that may have fallen out of vogue or found a less than accepting audience in recent years. In the UK and US it was the ‘progressive core Catholic’ that *Young Catholics at the New Millennium* found to be predominant (unlike in Ireland, Poland, Italy and Malta where the reverse was true.)

In contrast, journalist Colleen Carroll published in 2002 her observations of groups of traditional core Catholics (what she calls ‘young orthodox believers’) across the US. Carroll and her interviewees give the impression that we are witnessing the beginning of an immense turning of the tide of young adult belief. Although she acknowledges that she observed only a committed core of young Catholics, she does not hesitate to assert that their influence far exceeds their numbers.¹¹⁰ Her claim received an enthusiastic welcome from more conservative quarters in the US Catholic Church and aroused the interest of bishops across the Western world anxious for optimistic news with regard to

¹⁰⁷ Fulton et al., *Young Catholics*, 176.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 169-70.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 162-3.

¹¹⁰ Carroll, *New Faithful*, 4, 12.

younger Church members.¹¹¹ But most commentators found that she overstated her case and little support can be found for it in the data. Rausch, while agreeing that the incidence of 'traditional core Catholics' is significant, faults Carroll's book as suffering from "a too narrow construal of orthodoxy, identifying it with an equally narrow traditionalism and with religious communities and movements like the Legionaries of Christ, Regnum Christi, and Opus Dei."¹¹² Another study by Hoge and Davidson (*Notre Dame*: 2004), refers to Carroll's project and its proposal that young people are becoming more traditional, indicating that they have found no evidence to support this in earlier or current studies.¹¹³ Dixon finds a similar lack of any evidence for any trend towards 'orthodoxy' in Australia.¹¹⁴ Without doubt, 'traditional core Catholics' do exist, but not in such numbers as to indicate any significant change in the far more substantial group as many as half of whom have been shown to categorize their generation's relationship with the Church as a 'serious problem.'¹¹⁵

Writing in the journal *New Zealand Sociology*, Andrew Lynch sees the Catholic World Youth Day (WYD) events as examples of how one major Christian tradition is responding to the perceived threat of secularization.¹¹⁶ The WYD movement has emerged as an icon of young Catholic faith celebration over the last two decades. Attracting unprecedented numbers of young people willing to commit significant amounts in terms of funds and effort to participate as pilgrims, the now triennial event is a source of hope and inspiration for Catholics around the globe.¹¹⁷ The experience itself tends to have a strong impact on pilgrims and the people of the host city (and country) as well as on Catholic parishioners around the world who assist their young people to

¹¹¹ Favourable reviews were published in *AD2000* and *First Things* magazines. See Michael Gilchrist, review of *The New Faithful*, by Colleen Carroll, *AD2000*, November 2002, accessed May 20, 2011, http://www.ad2000.com.au/articles/2002/nov2002p16_1195.html. Aaron Belz, review of *The New Faithful*, by Colleen Carroll, *First Things*, November 2002, accessed May 21, 2011, <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-94077738.html>.

¹¹² Rausch, *Being Catholic*, 88.

¹¹³ Davidson and Hoge, "Catholics After the Scandal," 18-9.

¹¹⁴ In response to interest shown in Carroll's claims by bishops in Australia, the director of the Pastoral Projects Office (Australia), Bob Dixon, prepared a report for the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in which he notes that he found no supporting evidence for any such claim in relation to Australia. See Robert Dixon, "Is there a Trend toward Orthodoxy among Young Adult Catholics in Australia" (Melbourne: ACBC Pastoral Projects Office, 2004).

¹¹⁵ D'Antonio et al., *American Catholics*, 81-2.

¹¹⁶ Andrew Lynch, "Social Theory, Theology, Secularization and World Youth Day," *New Zealand Sociology* 23, no. 2 (2008): 43-6.

¹¹⁷ Estimated numbers (and hosts) since the event's inception in 1984 are as follows: 1984 (Rome/Vatican City) 300,000; 1985 (Rome/Vatican City) 300,000; 1987 (Buenos Aires) 1,000,000; 1989 (Santiago de Compostela) 400,000; 1991 (Częstochowa) 1,600,000; 1993 (Denver) 500,000; 1995 (Manilla) 5,000,000; 1997 (Paris) 1,200,000; 2000 (Rome) 2,000,000; 2002 (Toronto) 800,000; 2005 (Cologne) 1,200,000; 2008 (Sydney) 400,000.

attend.¹¹⁸ As a celebration of Catholic identity at a time when this is lacking for so many young Catholics, WYD is effective in energising the young and invigorating a level of commitment that usually sees pilgrims actively involved on their return.¹¹⁹

Mason, Webber and Singleton, authors of *The Spirit of Generation Y*, have continued their collaboration in undertaking a substantial three-phase study of Australian involvement in WYD 2008 (Sydney) entitled, *Pilgrims' Progress 2008*.¹²⁰ 113,000 Australian young people aged between 15 and 35 years registered for WYD 2008 representing just 6 percent of the Catholic Australians in this age band.¹²¹ In the Archdiocese of Sydney where the event took place, only 20 percent of local young Catholics registered while in the three immediately adjacent dioceses (in and around Sydney city), between 8 percent and 14 percent did so. Mason concludes that, apart from these dioceses, the proportion of Catholic young people attending WYD was very small.¹²² Of those who did attend, as many as three quarters were 'core Catholics' demonstrating that, while WYD was attractive to the committed Catholic young adult, it had an almost negligible effect on the vast majority of Catholics in the target age group.¹²³

There is little doubt however that WYD did have a significant impact on those who participated with 95 percent describing the experience as 'very good', 'the best of my life' or 'life-changing.'¹²⁴ Testing for the durability of WYD's influence the researchers found that five months after the event WYD pilgrims were not only still speaking of being more committed to their faith but also indicating that they were doing more in terms of personal action such as 'volunteering' and making charitable donations.¹²⁵ Because of this the authors were able to conclude that a key goal of the event, that of wanting to strengthen young people's faith, had been achieved for most of those who

¹¹⁸ Andrew Singleton, "The Impact of World Youth Day on Belief and Behaviour" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Denver, USA, October, 2009) http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/wyd/UPDATES/SSSR2009/091020_AS_SSSR_2009.pdf.

¹¹⁹ Ruth Webber, "Religious Involvement and Civic Engagement of World Youth Day Attenders" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Denver, USA, October, 2009) http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/wyd/UPDATES/SSSR2009/091022_RW_SSSR_2009.pdf.

¹²⁰ Survey and interview data was collected from pilgrims before, during and five months after the event. A range of reports and working papers can be accessed from: <http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/wyd/home.html>.

¹²¹ Michael Mason, "World Youth Day 2008: What did we gain?: What did we learn?," *The Australian Catholic Record* 87, no. 3 (2010): 3.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Core Catholics attend church regularly, most weekly. *Pilgrims' Progress 2008* classified respondents using a four-category system of which three categories equate to core Catholics ('devoted', 'involved', and 'open'). The extent to which the 'core Catholic' category required subdividing highlights just how unrepresentative WYD attendees as a whole are of the entire Catholic population. See Mason, "What Did We Gain?," 4-5.

¹²⁴ Ibid.: 8.

¹²⁵ Ibid.: 15.

took part.¹²⁶ Whether this is maintained in the lives of the pilgrims as time goes by is yet to be seen.

Rymarz carried out an earlier study into the impact of WYD 2005 (Cologne) on Australian pilgrims aged less than 18 years (*The Impact of World Youth Day: 2007*).¹²⁷ Chief among his findings was that those actively Catholic beforehand came back more committed but, after just a year, living out this commitment began to prove difficult. Although his findings concurred with Mason and colleagues' with regard to the strong impact WYD had on pilgrims, Rymarz found it questionable as to whether the resultant commitment would survive the pilgrims' pending transition from secondary school to tertiary study or work. As would later be confirmed by Mason and colleagues, Rymarz noted that for those not active as Catholics beforehand, the experience was enjoyed but did not show an influence in their lives in any lasting way.¹²⁸

Deconstruction and Reconstruction

Even as they acknowledge the reality of a young Church in relative crisis, commentators appear reluctant to call for out and out reform. Ludwig does so in *Reconstructing Catholicism for a New Generation*, describing the undelivered promise of the Second Vatican Council and the subsequent 'greying' of Catholicism and descent into polarization.¹²⁹ He suggests that possible answers lie in the retrieval of what he terms the 'experiential base for religion.'¹³⁰ Drawing on the work of Greeley and Campbell among others, he calls for greater exploration of the Catholic sacramental tradition, taking more seriously the importance of myth and ritual in the Christian story. Greeley has researched and written extensively in this area of what he calls the 'Catholic imagination' a topic to which I will return later in this thesis in conjunction with Taylor's theory of the disenchantment of Western society.¹³¹

¹²⁶ Ibid.: 16.

¹²⁷ Rymarz, "The Impact of World Youth Day."

¹²⁸ In an article reflecting on WYD 2008 in Sydney, Rymarz expresses disappointment in what he perceives as a lack of personal invitation resulting in relatively small numbers of Australian school-age pilgrims taking advantage of their own local WYD. Mason and colleagues disagree pointing to the tremendous effort that went into encouraging young people in almost every (Australian) diocese. Anecdotal evidence from my involvement as a national organiser suggests that in both Australia and New Zealand Catholic secondary schools generally remained somewhat sceptical of the value of mass-participation and so did not encourage large numbers of their senior students to attend. Concern about safety, logistics and cost also contributed to what Rymarz rightly sees as a lost opportunity. See Mason, "What Did We Gain?," 16. Richard Rymarz, "WYD 2008: Some Seasoned Observations," *Australian Catholic Record* 85, no. 4 (2008): 467.

¹²⁹ Ludwig, *Reconstructing Catholicism*.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 45-56.

¹³¹ Key examples of Greeley's publications in this areas include: Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Myth: The Behavior and Beliefs of American Catholics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990). Andrew Greeley, *Religion as Poetry* (New

Although the *Young Adult Catholics* study takes issue with the high level of alienation Ludwig ascribes to today's young adults, they too include the need to emphasise sacramentalism as one of three key ways of building a positive Catholic identity.¹³² They further propose closer examination of the liturgical context, the building of better communities, and better religious education for young adults as ways forward.¹³³ Rymarz asserts that young people lack a solid cognitive foundation from which to develop a meaningful worldview and recommends a more cognitively rich religious education.¹³⁴ *The Spirit of Generation Y* researchers draw attention to a finding shared by every study that they reviewed as well as their own, i.e. the religious illiteracy by all but a small proportion of the most committed.¹³⁵ Perhaps most disconcerting of all was the fact that Catholic education appeared to make little if any difference to this situation. *The Spirit of Generation Y* insightfully notes that in an age of information overload, it appears that today's young people have learned to filter incoming information discarding, almost without trace, anything that appears irrelevant to their worldview and ethos.¹³⁶ The authors conclude by emphasizing the need to work experientially with Gen Y, assisting them to reflect on their experiences with critical consciousness.

Tacey goes further, joining Ludwig in pointing to the inadequacies of an institutional Church intent on defending what he describes as its own outdated worldview.¹³⁷ This situation finds unfortunate reinforcement from a 'trickling down scientism' that sees young people citing dissatisfaction with fundamentalist positions not actually held by their own Churches (e.g. a literal interpretation of the Genesis creation story) as grounds for abandoning their faith.¹³⁸ This too will be further examined later in this thesis.

The *Young Catholics at the New Millennium* researchers believe that ecclesial change is necessary and possible although they are quick to label any potential outcomes as uncertain.¹³⁹ Recognising that change in religion has generally been instigated through new religious movements or reformation from the grassroots upwards, the present Vatican policy appears to deliberately facilitate only those movements which do not

Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1995). Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

¹³² The other two being i) a renewed emphasis on the struggle for justice and peace, and ii) the centrality of community and the promotion of the common good. Hoge et al., *Young Adult Catholics*, 233.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 234-5.

¹³⁴ Rymarz, "Constructing the Future," 30-2.

¹³⁵ Mason, Singleton and Webber, *Spirit of Generation Y*, 345.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ See especially Tacey, *Spirituality Revolution*, 75-91.

¹³⁸ Mason, Singleton and Webber, *Spirit of Generation Y*, 349.

¹³⁹ Fulton et al., *Young Catholics*, 177.

threaten the present internal organisational structure.¹⁴⁰ The authors further assert that the current Church administration appears reluctant to expose the Church to the whole range of possibilities that might otherwise emerge and begin to facilitate needed ecclesial change.

Conclusion

Study after study in the last two decades has warned of a significant shift taking place in the attitudes and, what I have called, the Catholic religious worldview of young adults. Many of the studies have tried strenuously to find signs of hope that what we are seeing is akin to a generational anomaly — indication, however small, that things will return to normal soon. In view of the accumulation of findings presented in this chapter however, such optimism appears misplaced. The literature overwhelmingly describes a shifting young adult landscape over against an ecclesial determination to stand firm on key elements of Catholicity including those that are unpalatable to younger generations of Catholics. Whether in fact there is room for the accommodation of different perspectives, the careful discernment of what is fundamentally (unchangeably) Catholic and what is historically conditioned practice, is a question to which I will return in later chapters. First however, it is important to consider if the NZ situation does indeed reflect the same trends and findings of the studies from around the Western world.

¹⁴⁰ In particular those that keep the male and celibate priesthood of the Latin Rite intact, and preserve the dominance of the Papacy, the Vatican dicasteries and the diplomatic corps structure. Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE: THE RESEARCH DESIGN

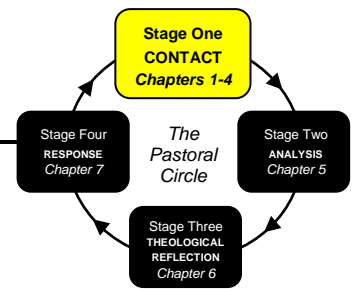


Figure 3.1: Faith Amid Secularity
– Chapter Three Methodology

Introduction

The aim of this research project is to explore the Catholic religious worldview of a group of Gen Y Pakeha Catholics in NZ. This chapter continues the ‘contact’ stage of the adopted pastoral circle methodology by presenting the field research component of the project; a critical engagement with the subjects themselves. The first section explores the various methodological issues that are part of any research process and the relevant decisions made in my own study. Section two outlines in more detail the research design that is specific to this study.

As will be elaborated below, the study adopts a ‘constructionist’ epistemological stance embedded in the interpretivist theoretical perspective of ‘symbolic interactionism’. ‘Grounded theory’ was chosen as the underlying methodology reflected in the qualitative methods of in-depth interview and focus group. The grounded theory methodology informed the coding and analysis of the data which was facilitated by the use of NVivo data analysis software.¹

Section 1: Methodological Considerations

A Four Element Framework

Approaching social research as a research practitioner one is struck by the almost overwhelming range of methodological possibilities and the often confusing links between the various theoretical elements that underpin such research. It is helpful in considering an outline of the research design developed for this project to identify four distinct levels of the research process. With the research question(s) identified, appropriate and practical research methods are considered — techniques adopted to

¹ Developed and marketed by QSR International Pty Ltd. See: <http://www.qsrinternational.com> and Pat Bazeley, *Qualitative Data Analysis with NVivo* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2007).

enable the collection and analysis of data. Behind these methods lies the research methodology — the strategy or design that makes sense of the selected methods and links them to the sought outcomes. Underpinning the methodology is the adopted theoretical perspective, a philosophical stance informing the methodology and placing a context around the entire process. Embedded in both theoretical perspective and methodology lies one's chosen epistemology.² Michael Crotty captures this four level relationship as can be seen in Figure 3.2:

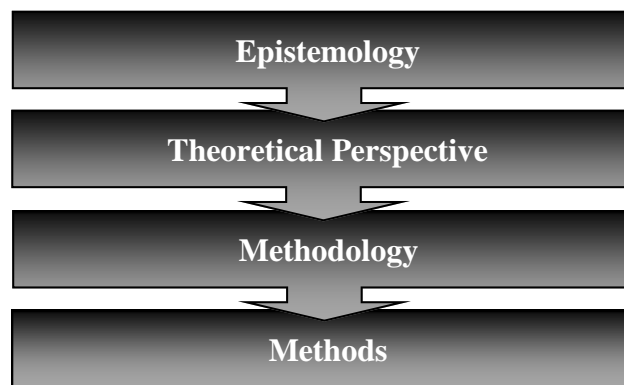


Figure 3.2: Four Elements of the Research Process³

Crotty describes these four basic elements of any research process as research ‘scaffolding’, a useful framework on which to ‘hang’ the selected elements that comprise the research project. In this chapter, Crotty’s four-level framework will be used to clarify the methodological decisions made at each level in the current project.

Epistemology

The deepest of the four levels, epistemology, seeks to deal with questions of how it is that we know what we know. As a researcher the answer I give to this question largely determines what I will look for and how I will go about doing so.⁴ In this regard, my choice of epistemology equates to the choice of what my research will understand and count as valid knowledge.⁵ Three epistemological approaches in particular have become common in social research.

² Michael Crotty, *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process* (Crows Nest NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1998), 8.

³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴ J. Swinton and H. Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 32.

⁵ Carol Grbich, *New Approaches in Social Research* (London: Sage, 2004), 129.

- i. *Objectivism* is the epistemological approach that sees meaning and meaningful reality as independent of any observer or consciousness.⁶ Objectivism implies a search for objective truth and, today, it usually leads to a positivist theoretical perspective involving experimental methodology and quantitative methods.
- ii. *Constructionism* is the epistemological approach that sees meaning in the interaction of the human mind with the realities of the world. It rejects the idea of objective reality existing independently of any mind and sees meaning as constructed rather than discovered. Constructionism is to be differentiated from constructivism which views the individual engaging with, and making sense of, objects in the world. Constructionism denies this more objective approach, asserting instead that we are born into a world of learned cultural meaning. It is enculturation that shapes our thought and behaviour.⁷
- iii. *Subjectivism* is the epistemological approach that arises out of structuralist, post-structuralist and postmodern thought. Here meaning is neither discovered nor constructed but, rather, it is imposed by a subject onto an object. Meaning lies, therefore, ‘in the eye of the beholder’ (the subject) and the object itself does not contribute to the meaning at all.

Although these descriptions risk oversimplifying the case, they do nevertheless provide a glimpse of the key category of *meaning* and how it exists or is produced. With regard to Catholic identity and religious worldview, meaning clearly falls between the two extremes being neither totally objective (set, measureable, unchanging) nor totally subjective (individual, lacking any objective reality). What it is that makes a person Catholic or how it is that they perceive their world through Catholic eyes will inevitably involve elements of both approaches. A constructionist epistemology makes allowance for this middle ground by starting from the assumption that the perception of truth and knowledge is, to a greater or lesser extent, constructed by individuals and communities.⁸ For these reasons it is a constructionist epistemology that underlies this project.

Theoretical Perspective

Explaining the theoretical perspective is in effect to name the assumptions being brought to the research project.⁹ These assumptions will inevitably reflect an embedded

⁶ Crotty, *Foundations*, 8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁸ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 35.

⁹ Crotty, *Foundations*, 7.

epistemology — positivist assumptions arising from an objective epistemology, postmodern assumptions from a subjectivist epistemology, and so on. In the case of my own project (and in fact most contemporary social research), the theoretical perspective that emerges from a constructionist epistemology is that of *interpretivism* — an approach developed specifically to counter attempts to apply positivist methodologies to the social endeavour.¹⁰ Interpretivism concerns itself instead with the pursuit of understanding (Weber's '*Verstehen*') in the human and social sciences and it includes a range of sub-perspectives including phenomenology, hermeneutics and symbolic interactionism. This last is the theoretical perspective that is being adopted in my own project. At its core lies the assumption that it is both possible and necessary to put ourselves in the place of the other in order to understand them and their perspective. Abandoning any thought of detached observation, this perspective looks for culturally developed explanations of the social world within a particular historical context.¹¹

Methodology

Leaving aside methodologies belonging to other theoretical perspectives (experimental research, discourse analysis, etc.), interpretivism's different branches each generally correspond to a specific research methodology. The methodology most commonly associated with symbolic interactionism is *ethnography*, itself borrowed and adapted from anthropology.¹²

Ethnographic inquiry in the spirit of symbolic interactionism seeks to uncover meanings and perceptions on the part of the people participating in the research, viewing these understandings against the backdrop of the people's overall worldview or 'culture'.¹³

But ethnography and its key research method of participant observation pose significant problems in terms of the amount of time and resource they require.¹⁴ Needing to avoid this problem but also wanting to maintain flexibility in terms of any potential outcomes it was a variant of ethnographic research, the methodology of *grounded theory*, that was selected here. Grounded theory is a methodology that allows for the emergence and

¹⁰ Ibid., 66.

¹¹ Ibid., 67.

¹² Ibid., 4.

¹³ Ibid., 7.

¹⁴ Judith Bell, *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First-Time Researchers in Education and Social Science* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2005), 17.

development of theoretical ideas directly from the data itself.¹⁵ Rather than any imposition of predefined theory onto the data, this methodology attempts an ongoing openness to the possibility of answers not necessarily envisioned before or even during the data gathering. Grounded theory will be considered in more depth shortly in relation to the analysis of data. As a methodology it is the child of symbolic interactionism and a specifically tailored form of ethnographic inquiry.

Methods

We have already established that the term ‘method’ in research most accurately refers to the concrete ways in which we collect and analyse the research data. Research methods are commonly divided into the quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative methods involve observation and measurement (often counting) and feature attempts at researcher ‘objectivity’ in which every effort (and claim) is made to avoid contaminating the data through personal involvement.¹⁶ Qualitative methods, on the other hand, concern themselves with understanding and interpreting the constructed or imposed perspectives held by the various participants in the social setting.¹⁷ The quantitative approach is deductive, i.e. it works from the ‘top down’ to investigate a theory, and it prizes generalisability. The qualitative approach is inductive, i.e. it works from the ‘bottom up’ looking for patterns in specific data, and only then formulating theories.

It is important to realise that no approach (epistemology, theoretical perspective or methodology) automatically disqualifies the use of any particular method.¹⁸ Crotty notes that, in the past, most of what we now consider to be qualitative methodologies were in fact carried out in a thoroughly empiricist or positivist fashion.¹⁹ Moreover quantification is not off-limits to qualitative methodologies as is clearly seen in the sense that measuring and counting will almost certainly have their place in any research. It is, however, equally important to maintain some consistency between the assumptions

¹⁵ Crotty, *Foundations*, 78. Successful and peer reviewed research that have utilised this methodology in recent times include two Australian studies reported in: Dixon et al., "Research Project on Catholics Who Have Stopped Attending Mass."; and K. Engebretson, *Connecting: Teenage Boys, Spirituality and Religious Education* (Homebush NSW: St Pauls, 2006). For an earlier condensed report on the latter study, see: K. Engebretson, "Teenage Boys, Spirituality and Religion," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 9, no. 3 (2004).

¹⁶ Corrine Glesne and Alan Peshkin, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction* (New York: Longman Publishing Group, 1992), 6.

¹⁷ Ibid. Bell, *Doing Your Research Project*, 6.

¹⁸ Ibid., 5. Crotty, *Foundations*, 14-6.

¹⁹ Ibid., 15.

made at the philosophical level and the type of information sought concretely in the field.

Given that what is being sought in this project is insight into the young adult's religious perspective and Catholic identity it was immediately obvious that field work with young Catholics was essential. It was also recognised that any such field research methods were necessarily limited by time and resource constraints that are inevitable within such a course of study. The use of survey methods was considered but rejected on the basis that more open-ended methods would lead to the type of data that would enable analysis using grounded theory. Understanding of a sample of young adults studied was required but rigorously valid truth claims that could be generalised to the larger population were not. For these reasons, quantitative methods were abandoned at the outset.

Whereas quantitative research seeks a statistically significant volume of data, qualitative methods look for depth. Observation, interview, narrative analysis and case history are typical examples of the kinds of qualitative method that enable the researcher to enter the world of the subject to some degree. The potential for exploring ideas of identity and religious worldview from the perspective of the participant would be vastly increased with these approaches. Having already noted above the difficulty posed by resource-costly ethnographic methods, the decision was made to instead focus on the use of in-depth interviews and focus groups as the two main methods.

It is commonly accepted today that, when working with values, meanings, feelings and beliefs, the in-depth interview is one of the best available generators of valuable insight.²⁰ The flexibility and adaptability of the interview process allows for the interviewer to follow up ideas and to investigate responses in order to clarify what is being said.²¹ Although this offers a huge advantage over less interactive methods, it does highlight the unavoidable issue of the danger of bias, an issue I will return to shortly under the title 'researcher reflexivity'. Although in-depth interviews are time-consuming they do represent one of the most efficient data gathering techniques available and one which is very often of real value to the interviewee.²² In my study,

²⁰ C.f. Glesne and Peshkin, *Qualitative Researchers*, xi-xvi. N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln, "The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research," in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), 1-32. James P. Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1979).

²¹ Bell, *Doing Your Research Project*, 91.

²² Glesne and Peshkin, *Qualitative Researchers*, 91-2.

open-ended, semi-structured interviews were, for the above reasons, selected as the key method of data collection.²³

A subsequent decision was made to support the interviews with facilitated focus groups. Unlike an individual interview, the focus group is a social process in which ideas and reflections are shaped by participants in response to each other.²⁴ Together they develop a consensus that is not necessarily reflective of their individual opinion but which they reach as part of group interaction in a specific place and at a specific time.²⁵ Power dynamics very often come into play in the form of strong personalities who can dominate proceedings if they are not well managed.²⁶ Yet the value of the focus group is substantial and the impact of the above issues can be reduced through careful and skilful facilitation. The potential for the introduction of new data as well as the possible validation of data from the in-depth interviews makes the focus group a useful supporting tool of qualitative research and one which I therefore chose to utilise.

The combination of these two methods (interview and focus group) with earlier observations and international studies was felt to offer sufficient triangulation for the project.²⁷ Reflecting on the role of the researching practical theologian, Swinton and Mowat specifically recommend such an 'eclectic and multi-method approach' because of the ensuing possibility of borrowing the best of what is available (within accepted models of qualitative research) while avoiding being unnecessarily constrained by any single approach or model.²⁸

Recalling Crotty's four element model, my own field research project can now be expressed as shown in figure 3.3 (over page):

²³ The following two studies are examples of successful, peer reviewed research projects utilising a similar interview process. Fulton et al., *Young Catholics*, 22-5. Hoge et al., *Young Adult Catholics*, 247.

²⁴ Rosaline Barbour and John Schostak, "Interviewing and Focus Groups," in *Research Methods in the Social Sciences*, ed. Bridget Somekh and Cathy Lewin (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2005), 43.

²⁵ J. Sim, "Collecting and Analysing Qualitative Data: Issues Raised by the Focus Group," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 28, no. 2 (1998).

²⁶ Bell, *Your Research Project*, 162-4.

²⁷ Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*, 3rd ed. (Saint Paul, MN: Sage Publications, Inc., 2001), 61-2.

²⁸ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 50.

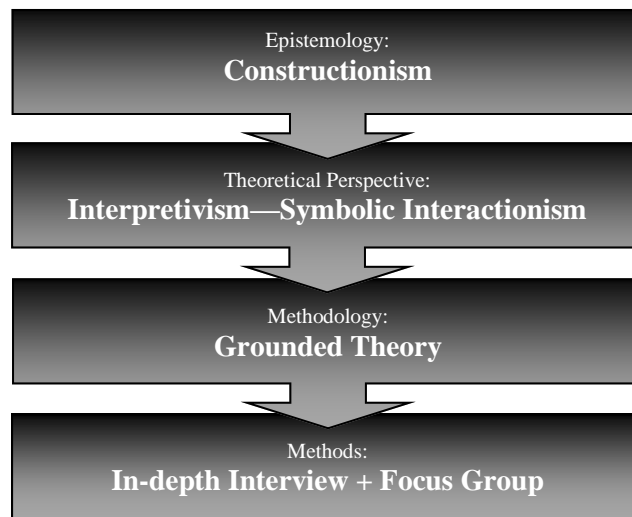


Figure 3.3: The Four Levels of the Faith Amid Secularity Field Research

Data Analysis

Originally proposed by sociologists Glaser and Strauss as the ‘constant comparative method’, grounded theory analyses the data with a view to formulating theories from the various themes and categories that emerge.²⁹ Grounded theory is not interested in hypothesis testing but instead seeks to initiate exploration and allow explanatory theories to suggest themselves from what is found. Glaser and Strauss eventually parted company after disagreements over the application of their methodology and the theory has since undergone significant development, being applied today in a range of variants.³⁰

Grounded theory involves a series of steps in data collection and analysis. Note-taking, coding and memoing are followed by the careful sorting of emerging categories before the final ‘writing up’ phase. The constant comparison aspect reveals itself in the way in which the researcher continually compares his or her findings back and forth amidst the data. Initially this involves the comparison of data with data, but as theory emerges, interview/observation data is increasingly compared with the emerging theory.³¹

In recent years significant progress has been made in the refinement of computer software designed specifically to assist with qualitative data analysis. NVivo is perhaps

²⁹ B. G. Glaser and A. L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies of Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1967).

³⁰ E.g. the increasingly differentiated versions of grounded theory developed by the original authors. C.f. N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005). Crotty, *Foundations*.

³¹ Bob Dick, *Grounded Theory: A Thumbnail Sketch*. Resource Papers in Action Research (2005), accessed April 29, 2010, <http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arp/grounded.html>.

the most well known example of such software enabling the importation of entire interview transcripts and their subsequent coding and sorting in a variety of ways. The actual process of data analysis using computer is the same as that involving pen and paper but with the advantage of vastly increased speed and comparative potential. NVivo (version 8) was utilised for data analysis in this research since it enabled the most efficient analysis possible while allowing theory development consistent with grounded theory methodology.

Section 2: Implementing the Research Design

Details of the research design of the *Faith Amid Secularity* study are presented in this section. Issues pertaining to sample size and selection are addressed as are the challenges posed by researcher reflexivity. Details of interview, focus group and subsequent data analysis are outlined before a treatment is made of the various ethical issues that arose during the project. Copies of the *Participant Information Sheet*, *Interview Guide*, *Focus Group Schedule* and *Consent Form* are supplied as referenced appendices.

The Sample Size

A common misunderstanding with regard to qualitative studies relates to the perception that the research findings should be transferable to the population as a whole or even to an entirely different population. The desire for high levels of generalisability emerges from the contemporary fascination with scientific empiricism based on a burden of evidence that can be sought from quantitative studies involving large samples with tightly defined data. The statistical accuracy afforded by such studies, however, comes at the expense of their ability to address in any depth the ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions of meaning that lie behind the data set and their own (usually) closed questions. With regard to my own study, a quantitative methodology would be unable to illustrate and explain in any depth what, for example, such notions as ‘sacrament’, ‘sin’ and ‘salvation’ might mean to young people and how they contribute to a Catholic religious worldview.³²

Qualitative studies of the type being undertaken here are generally constructed to address the meaning that is to be found in the language chosen by the interviewee and

³² Fisher, "Young American Catholics," 9.

the nuance they provide. Experience has shown that sample sizes do not need to be large to generate valid qualitative data. Although smaller qualitative samples (15-30) are common in postgraduate research due to resource limitations, the evidence of more substantial studies involving greater funding and collaboration also demonstrates that a large sample size is unnecessary unless one specifically aims to extrapolate results more broadly.³³ If, instead, the intention of the study is to generate inferences as to why individuals believe, feel or think the way they do, then a sample need only include as many participants as are required to find recurrent themes.

The intention of this *Faith Amid Secularity* research project is to gain insight into the Catholic perspective of a select group of young adults. Informed reflection on why they may hold this perspective and subsequent suggestions as to what an appropriate pastoral response might include will follow. It is not my purpose to explain the thinking of all young adults but rather to strive to make some sense of the perspective of those taking part in this study. As Swinton and Mowat state:

... it is not the qualitative researcher's responsibility to generalize. Their responsibility is to provide as rich and thick a description of the situation in hand as possible. If people want to test that for generalisability, then that is a secondary task. The primary task of the qualitative researcher is to ensure the accuracy of their description. Qualitative research thus provides the data that will enable future researchers to explore the possibility of transferability and to find models that describe a situation and that have transferrable structures.³⁴

Nineteen in-depth interviews were carried out in this study supported by three focus group discussions. The sample design was based on that originally developed for the *Young Catholics at the New Millennium* study and was intended to ensure representation across four specific characteristics: gender; age; church involvement; and geographical location. These will now be more thoroughly explained.

³³ E.g. Dixon and colleagues' study into Catholic Mass attendance for the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (2006-7) — 41 interviews. The *Young Catholics at the New Millennium* study (2000) involving six researchers and six countries — 45 interviews in each country. The *Young Adult Catholics* study (2001) — 75 interviews. Hornsby-Smith's highly regarded research into English Catholicism has often relied on very small samples, e.g. his *Roman Catholic Beliefs in England* study (1991) — 12 interviews. See Dixon et al., "Catholics Who Have Stopped Attending Mass." Fulton et al., *Young Catholics*. Hoge et al., *Young Adult Catholics*. M. Hornsby-Smith, *Roman Catholic Beliefs in England, Customary Catholicism and Transformations of Religious Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

³⁴ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 46.

Participant Selection

Theoretical sampling is the norm for grounded theory — the process of collecting, coding and analysing data in order to reach a decision about what further data collection should take place.³⁵ Although an element of purposive (purposeful or nonprobability) sampling is inevitable in the early stages of theoretical sampling, subsequent sampling is driven by the emerging categories and theory.³⁶ There are however difficulties with theoretical sampling in qualitative research and in some cases it is a practical impossibility. Sandelowski et al note that “neither ethics committees nor funding agencies are likely to approve a research project without a clear specification of the kinds of subjects desired for the study.”³⁷ Other complications relate to the limitations of project scale and the intensity required to bring about the aim of a qualitatively ‘rich and thick description’ as described above by Swinton and Mowat.³⁸ As an alternative purposive sampling is increasingly accepted as being advantageous to smaller qualitative research projects in that it allows the selection of information-rich cases from which the greatest insight can be drawn.³⁹

A purposive sampling method was adopted in this study due to the impracticalities of theoretical sampling.⁴⁰ The aim was to provide a non-random sample of interview and focus group participants who were, in the researcher’s opinion, most likely to be able to adequately address the key questions. As indicated, the purposive method of sampling has the advantage of increasing the likelihood of selecting particular cases with the greatest potential to provide information relevant to the project.⁴¹ In this case it entailed the selection of candidates who met specific combinations of characteristics of gender, age, church involvement and geographical location. Only candidates meeting the prescribed criteria were invited to participate in the research.

³⁵ Imelda Coyne, "Sampling in Qualitative Research. Purposeful and Theoretical Samples; Merging or Clear Boundaries," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 1997, 625.

³⁶ Ibid., 629.

³⁷ Cited in Ibid., 628.

³⁸ See FAS, 57.

³⁹ Patton and Coyne both claim that all sampling is in fact purposive with Patton differentiating sixteen strategies for such sample selection. See Coyne, "Sampling in Qualitative Research," 629, and Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation*, 243-4. For further discussion of sampling in qualitative research see Anthony Onwuegbuzie and Nancy Leech, "Sampling Designs in Qualitative Research: Making the Sampling Process More Public," *The Qualitative Report* June 2007, 238-54.

⁴⁰ A similar purposive sampling strategy was applied in the international *Young Catholics at the New Millennium* study of Fulton et al.

⁴¹ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 69.

- Gender

An even spread of males and females was sought. The final result was that nine males and ten females were interviewed while three males and six females took part in the focus groups.

- Age

To ensure some spread across the Gen Y age group of 18-28 years, two categories were established: 18-22 years and 23-28 years. Ten interviewees were in the younger bracket and nine in the older.

- Church Involvement

Adapting Fulton and colleagues' model, three categories of Catholic involvement were established and defined as follows:

1. **Core Catholics** (7x) — Young people who are regular (weekly) church attenders and who are also active in terms of performing a role in church-related activities beyond normal congregational participation.
2. **Intermediate Catholics** (6x) — Young people whose attendance at church ranges from frequent to little attendance and are not involved in performing a role in church-related activities beyond normal congregational participation.
3. **Disengaged and Former Catholics** (6x) — Young people who attend church just 1-2 times annually or perhaps never attend. These young people may have disassociated themselves from their Church and/or their Catholic faith.⁴²

For simplicity's sake the 'core Catholics' category was not further divided into 'traditional' and 'progressive' subcategories as happened later in *Young Catholics at the New Millennium*.⁴³ Initially participants self-selected to which of the three given categories they belonged on the basis of the above explanations. The individual's choice was later cross referenced against his or her interview responses to ascertain its accuracy.

- Geographical Location

The research sample was taken from three geographical locations, one from each of three of the six Catholic dioceses of NZ. A major urban area (8 interviews, 1 focus

⁴² These categories are based on those used in the large-scale, six-nation, *Young Catholics at the New Millennium* study with which I will later draw comparison. See Fulton et al., *Young Catholics*.

⁴³ Ibid., 162-3.

group), a provincial city (4 interviews, 1 focus group) and a rural town (7 interviews, 1 focus group) were included.⁴⁴ Actual locations cannot be revealed as to do so would be to jeopardize the confidentiality of participants especially in the provincial and rural areas.⁴⁵

Table 3.1 provides a full list of participants (by pseudonym) arranged according to the above four criteria.

| | 18-22 yrs | | 23-28 yrs | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> |
| Core | Robert [urban] | Sarah [urban] | Donald [rural] | Ana [prov.] |
| | | Frankie [urban] | Roger [rural] | Catherine [urban] |
| Intermediate | Andrew [rural] | Theresa [prov.] | Steven [rural] | Brianna [rural] |
| | Josh [prov.] | Nicole [rural] | | |
| Disengaged or Former | Trevor [urban] | Hannah [prov.] | Jim [urban] | Katie [urban] |
| | Dave [urban] | | | Malissa [rural] |

Table 3.1: Participants by Pseudonyms and Characteristics

The task of finding and recruiting suitable participants was challenging and therefore involved the assistance of a local research agent in each locality. From their familiarity with the Catholic population over a good number of years they were able to discretely match potential participants with the various criteria sought. As the researcher I then approached the individuals by means of a ‘cold call’ i.e. individuals had no prior knowledge of the proposed research. If willing to participate they were added to the above matrix until all of the above twenty four segments were filled. The five that are now blank in the above table represent the five situations in which a participant either withdrew at the last minute or simply did not turn up for their interview. As it became apparent that the nineteen interviews represented an adequate sample, replacements for the missing five were not sought.

Researcher Reflexivity

The importance of ‘researcher reflexivity’ i.e. the awareness of one’s impact and influence on all aspects of the study, is critical to the process of qualitative research. In

⁴⁴ Populations of one million+, fifty thousand and five thousand respectively.

⁴⁵ See ‘Ethical Issues’ section in this chapter. *FAS*, 65-6.

more positivist research methods (quantitative surveys, polls, etc.) the researcher attempts or at least claims to stand objectively detached from the study's 'subjects', maintaining the appearance of having no influence at all on the research outcomes. In qualitative research, however, the researcher acknowledges the necessity of interaction *with* another person (or people) in order to make meaningful inference from what is communicated.⁴⁶ Researcher reflexivity is the critical self-awareness of the two-way nature of this engagement. It enables the researcher to operate as an 'insider' while reflecting on what effect his or her role is having on the research process.⁴⁷

The very fact that the subject material of this study attracted my interest is a result of my significant investment in this area of pastoral ministry with young people over many years. The advantages of insider research lie especially in familiarity with the topic and/or setting and can be quite considerable. In my case, familiarity with the life and faith stages of young adults as well as with pastoral ministry and theology was enormously helpful. Being a fellow Catholic, I shared with the participants an understanding of 'things Catholic' which facilitated the interview conversation. Reflexive awareness, however, required that I be constantly alert for my own assumptions as to what the other might know or understand in any particular area of Catholic identity. Open-ended and supplementary questions enabled me, as the interviewer, to clarify ambiguous or unclear responses in order to reduce the likelihood of incomprehensible transcripts later on.

In-depth Interviews

The interviews were of one hour's duration and took place either in the home of the participant or in an agreed central location. Each participant had initially spoken with me by phone and, having expressed a willingness to consider an interview, was sent a research *Participant Information Sheet* (Appendix One) by email. It was during this first phone call that participants were asked to tentatively self-identify their level of Catholic involvement allowing me to check that the study's various categories were being covered. This identification was subsequently checked during the interview. A week or so later I again phoned the participants to clarify any detail or concerns and, if they were still willing to participate, to make an appointment for their interview. As noted above,

⁴⁶ Glesne and Peshkin, *Qualitative Researchers*.

⁴⁷ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 59-62. Bell, *Your Research Project*, 50-5.

24 interviews were scheduled and 19 actually took place. Each interview was digitally recorded for later transcription and analysis.⁴⁸

An *Interview Schedule* (Appendix Two) was prepared aimed at exploring the interviewee's perception of Catholic faith. It included three sections as follows:

- 1) Personal Religious Background (10 minutes) — intended to establish the extent of Catholic experience, upbringing and formation.
- 2) Current Overt Religious Practice (10 minutes) — intended to establish the extent of current Catholic faith practice.
- 3) Catholic Worldview (40 minutes) — intended to explore the presence and extent of a Catholic perspective on life and to reveal detail of the individual's religious identity.

The major third section was further divided into the following four categories:

- a. Ecclesial faith (10min) — intended to explore the participant's understanding of the Catholic ecclesial tradition and structure.⁴⁹
- b. Sacramental imagination (10 min) — intended to explore the participant's understanding of sacramentality, image and symbol.
- c. Theology seeking integration of faith and reason (10min) — intended to explore the participant's understanding of the relationship between Catholic faith and modern science and the role of both the cognitive (head) and affective (heart) in Catholicism.
- d. Community (10min) — intended to explore the participant's understanding of the Catholic focus on community especially with regard to sin, salvation and social justice.

Focus Groups

In each geographical location a focus group was carried out, introducing group dynamics into the interview process. Six participants were confirmed for each focus group but unfortunately, in all three cases, three of the participants withdrew at the last

⁴⁸ See the *Ethical Issues* section for details of confidentiality in handling recordings and transcripts. *FAS*, 65-6.

⁴⁹ In both the 'ecclesial faith' and 'sacramental imagination' sections a word association technique was introduced as an alternative way to elicit participant response. Admittedly a quite different method than the in-depth interview within which they took place, word association allows the participant to express a linguistic connection with the least possible interviewer interference. "Word associations comprise a method of retrieving information regarding the stimulus object via links in the memory network and are relatively pure indicators of the way human knowledge is mentally represented." Annette de Groot, "Representational Aspects of Word Imageability and Word Frequency as Assessed through Word Association," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition* 1989, 824-45. See *FAS*, 72ff.

minute or simply did not turn up. Although this meant that the group dynamic was weakened by the lack of numbers, it was decided to include the data obtained from the groups because it still held validity as a support to the in-depth interviews. In two focus groups (urban and provincial) the focus group participants were a mix of previously interviewed participants and new participants. In the third (rural) all were previously interviewed participants. Each focus group lasted one hour and was digitally recorded, the questions used being drawn from the third section of the in-depth *Interview Schedule* (Appendix Two).

Grounded Theory Data Analysis

The recorded interviews and focus groups were carefully transcribed and checked to ensure that they were word-for-word accurate. The transcripts were then imported into NVivo where they were first auto-coded according to the specific question.⁵⁰ This enabled immediate comparison of the nineteen interviewees' responses to the various issues raised in the interview guide (ecclesial faith, sacramental imagination, etc).

The data was then manually coded by closely reading the first interviewee's response and taking note of potential themes and categories. The second interviewee's response was then read and coded in relation to the first but also with an eye to the suggestion of further themes and categories. This process was continued for all nineteen interviews, a laborious project but one greatly assisted by the software's 'drag and drop' coding capability. Table 3.2 (over page) provides an example of a key category (Catholic Identity) and exemplar responses.

⁵⁰ To ensure my own competency with the software, I completed two days of professional training with Victoria University (Wellington) in the use of NVivo. Frequent use was subsequently made of Bazeley's text, *Qualitative Data Analysis*.

| Category: Catholic Identity | Pseudonym |
|---|-----------|
| <i>I didn't go to church for 2 or 3 years, whatever, but um, it's not something that I can ignore. Like I just, it's just part of me, it's who I am.</i> | Ana |
| <i>Like I still am a Catholic but I'm probably not as good at being a Catholic as I was before.</i> | Catherine |
| <i>Well, like, I don't really have much of a relationship like, I, I'm just, you know, sort of just another kid that just goes to church, or did go to church with the um... but they weren't really my friends and I didn't really care.</i> | Dave |
| <i>Oh I'm proud to be... I'm not ashamed of being – we are like a family now. It's just something you do; don't try and be Catholic.</i> | Donald |
| <i>I definitely see myself as Catholic, probably not the best, most amazing example of being Catholic, but I do believe that I'm in the right place.</i> | Frankie |
| <i>Well I've been at..., you know, done everything so I'm technically a full blown Catholic but I, I wouldn't... now I wouldn't class myself as a Catholic.</i> | Hannah |
| <i>I always wanted to be a Catholic and I was happy and proud that I was.</i> | Jim |
| <i>Um, I still feel pretty strongly about the fact that I'm Catholic. If anyone asked me I wouldn't hesitate twice about saying that I'm Catholic. However, I'd fully explain that I don't practise regularly.</i> | Katie |

Table 3.2: Example of a Coded Category and Responses

Over time some categories were merged and others discarded leaving four key categories and related theories which are briefly outlined in Table 3.3 (below). These categories will be explored in subsequent chapters especially in relation to the secularization theory of Charles Taylor.

| Category: | Emerging theory |
|--|---|
| Issues of Catholic identity | Catholic identity strongly claimed but lacks depth. Cultural association with Catholicism highly valued while religious significance is generally unacknowledged or downplayed. Low levels of knowledge regarding the 'detail' of Catholic faith i.e. 'religious illiteracy'. |
| Inherent individualistic approach to the religious | Strong defence of the right of each to believe as they choose; the right to shape their own version of Catholic faith. |
| Issues of morality (especially sexual morality) | Willingness and desire to see their Church speak on moral issues but cautious reservation of their own right to decide for themselves on all moral issues. |
| The relationship between science and religion | For many an uncomfortable accommodation between what are perceived to be incompatible positions (e.g. creation vs. evolution). |

Table 3.3: Identified Thematic Categories

Ethical Issues

Ethics in research equates to respect for the persons involved as research participants. This respect is demonstrated in the application of accepted standards for research involving human subjects, summarised by Tolich as the assurance of privacy, confidentiality, anonymity and safety both during the course of the research and also as a consequence of any circulated (or published) results.⁵¹ In my own study, clearance was sought and granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Sydney College of Divinity before any field research began.⁵²

The research required those involved to reveal personal information to me as the researcher and, furthermore, to give assent for this information to be revealed (albeit anonymously) to strangers via the research results. For this reason participants were made fully aware of the intention of the research via the *Information Sheet* (Appendix One) and ensuing discussion. Each was further required to read and sign a participant *Consent Form* (Appendix Three) declaring their involvement to be voluntary and informed.

A key ethical consideration is the importance of protecting the identities of participants, something made more challenging by the decision to carry out research in smaller communities. Catholic identity in small-town NZ is generally known and therefore the selection and protection of a sample from within such a community required the greatest attention to detail. This included the strong recommendation that a pseudonym be adopted to disguise personal identity. Participants were also made aware of the inadvisability of discussing their involvement in the local community as this could very easily compromise their own, and others', anonymity. The overall discretion with which the research was handled in the local community was paramount especially in relation to the involvement of the local research agent.

⁵¹ Martin Tolich, ed., *Research Ethics in Aotearoa New Zealand* (Auckland: Pearson Education New Zealand Ltd., 2001).

⁵² In my application to the SCD Human Research Ethics Committee copies of all proposed documentation to be used in the research were supplied (see Appendices 1-3, FAS). The committee, chaired by Prof Warwick Wilson (University of Western Sydney), issued the following notification on 22 July 2009. **Decision:** *The Committee congratulated this applicant on the thoroughness and detail of information. The applicant clearly had a good understanding of the ethical issues involved. The application is given ethics clearance, subject to one minor addition. It should be made clear to the participants that anyone with access to the safe cannot have access to the voice recordings because they are "digitally locked". The applicant should also be aware that, if there may be few young Catholics in the rural town of (N) who attended WYD08, affirmative answers may have the potential to expose the respective participants.* **Recommendation:** *Ethics clearance is granted subject to the additional information referred to above being included in the Participant Information Sheet.* NB. Both of these recommendations were actioned in full.

Another fundamental ethical issue was the risk of introducing an element of coercion in participant selection. To address this, the three agents used in the study were made aware of the importance of discretion in nominating potential participants and agreed not to mention the research unless approached by a participant who wished to discuss it. All participant contact was initiated by me as the researcher and the identity of the agent was only revealed if the participant specifically asked how I had acquired their name. In this situation participants were informed that they were one among many names provided by the agent (who was named) and they need not fear the issue being raised by the agent unless they themselves instigated it.

Participants were aware that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without fear of repercussion. After the interviews and focus groups, each transcript was provided to the respective participant for checking and amendment if necessary and all were carefully de-identified except for the agreed pseudonym. While most took the opportunity to read through their interview scripts, only two participants requested minor changes to better reflect their opinion.

Conclusion

In Chapter One the research problem was described and, in Chapter Two, the relevant literature reviewed. In this, the third chapter, the methodological issues underlying field research in general and the various specific decisions made in the case of this particular study have been introduced and explained. Issues of epistemology, theoretical perspective, (research) methodology and methods have been considered and applied to my own field research. The study's research design has been presented providing insight into the way in which the data was collected and analysed. In this thesis the first three chapters are preliminaries to the full entry into the pastoral circle that takes place with Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE RESEARCH RESULTS

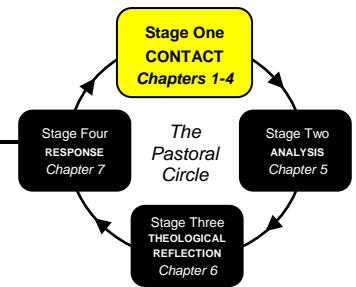


Figure 4.1: Faith Amid Secularity
– Chapter Four Methodology

I think, a lot of people slip out of the religion in the transition between sort of high school and... leaving primary school sort of early high school, through that period. Like I think you've got a lot of younger kids and sometimes when they get a lot older they'll go back. But there's still a big gap between sort of the 20-30 year olds that go to church. So I think that's sort of... why is that happening?

Steven¹

Introduction

Chapter Four completes the initial 'contact' stage of the pastoral circle model adopted as the overarching methodology for this *Faith Amid Secularity* study (see Figure 4.1 above). This chapter will analyse the research data making an assessment of the extent of the participants' Catholic worldview before attempting a description of the contemporary Catholic identity that the participants appear to be forging. Chapter Five (the 'analysis' phase) will then bring these findings into dialogue with contemporary theories of secularization, especially that of Charles Taylor. Chapter Six (the 'theological reflection' phase) will utilise the *Nicene Creed* to theologically develop some of the ideas that result before Chapter Seven (the 'response' phase) describes elements of a contextual response and the growing call for a more comprehensive contextualisation of our Catholic Christian faith.

The intention of stage one of the pastoral circle model is to uncover the concrete reality of the issue as it exists in society. This can be done in a number of ways (e.g. observation, life history, etc.) each of which has its strengths and weaknesses. One of the most effective is to actually go out and listen carefully to the people concerned, making every attempt to ascertain their perspective on the issues at hand. In seeking to address the fall-off in Pakeha young adult involvement in Catholic parishes in NZ this

¹ Male, rural, intermediate Catholic aged 23-28 yrs. [NB. Quotes from research participants in this study will be referenced in this manner (i.e. gender, geographical location, category of Catholic involvement and age). To maintain confidentiality, names given are pseudonyms.]

study needed to hear their stories and responses. It was decided that this would be best achieved in the field. In order to keep the inquiry tightly focussed, nineteen in-depth interviews were carried out supported by three focus groups and it is the transcripts from these encounters which constitute the study's base data.

The questions put to the young adult interviewees in this study were one step removed from directly addressing the reasons young adults might give for their participation / nonparticipation in local parish life. The interviews instead sought a response to how the young adult saw his / her own Catholic faith and how that faith affected their view of the world. The inevitable subjectivity of the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee is understood here to be a strength rather than a weakness. In a qualitative study of the nature of the one being undertaken, the personal view of the subject is perfectly valid and it is the later task of the researcher to investigate the data for emergent themes and relevant discoveries across the range of responses received. What follows in this chapter are my own findings in this regard.

Section 1: The Extent of the Young Adults' Catholic Religious Worldview

The field research was guided by the already noted two key research questions:

1. To what extent do the young adult Catholics studied identify with, and draw meaning from, a Catholic religious worldview?
2. What is the nature and strength of Catholic identity among the young adult Catholics in the study?

The first of the two key research questions is addressed in this first section of the chapter. The results from the interviews and focus groups are summarised in terms of five broad categories that were established prior to the researcher entering the field. The first deals with the Catholic upbringing and formation of the participants as well as their current Catholic practice. The remaining four categories (outlined briefly in the previous chapter) serve to subdivide an examination of the participants' Catholic worldview into the four areas of ecclesial faith, sacramental imagination, theology seeking integration of faith and reason, and community.²

² See *FAS*, 62.

Catholic Formation and Current Catholic Practice

Being Catholic...was almost... was a way of life really. Just, Catholicism was... has been and always will be a part of it really. Robert³

- **Childhood Catholicism:** The participants in the study all self-identified as Catholic (in one of three categories: core, intermediate and disengaged or former Catholic) and all recalled at least some significant Catholic influences in their upbringing. For those at the lower end of Catholic engagement this was limited to a period of regular attendance at Mass as a child accompanied by one parent. For those with the greatest Catholic influence it involved Catholic education (primary and secondary), weekly Mass attendance plus involvement in other parish activities and a keen awareness of ‘being Catholic’ during childhood. The great majority of participants fell somewhere in the middle however experiencing some Catholic education (primary, secondary or both) and attending Sunday Mass regularly if not weekly. It was notable that for most there was little memory of any explicit Catholicity in the home. While many did speak of prayer together, for the majority, this was limited to grace before the main meal. Although most recalled some discussion of religious beliefs at home this seems to have been sporadic and any recognition of the liturgical calendar was largely limited to the seasons of advent (Christmas) and lent (Easter).
- **Sacraments of Initiation:** Participants were generally well aware of the circumstances of their own reception of the sacraments of initiation (i.e. their parish, age, Godparents, etc.) although memories were understandably limited due to their young age at the time. About two-thirds were still in touch with their Godparents. Memories of 7-8 year old Confirmation and First Communion were generally limited to such things as having to ‘dress up’ and there being ‘lots of food’. Many of those who were confirmed in their early teens spoke of having enjoyed the sacramental preparation programme but few could recall anything of their actual Confirmation day.
- **Catholic Education:** With regard to Catholic education participants were, on the whole, positive about the experience. When asked to characterise any difference between their Catholic schooling and that provided by state schools, they generally struggled, indicating uncertainty as to what actually made their school Catholic (beyond its religious education curriculum). Most appreciated the freedom they had felt to ‘be Catholic’ at school and some specifically mentioned their appreciation of the

³ Male, urban, core Catholic aged 18-22 yrs.

opportunity to participate in liturgy and well-run retreats. Several of the core Catholic participants complained of an overemphasis on other religions in the syllabus (as they experienced it) at the expense (in their view) of ‘solid’ teaching about Catholic Christianity. They called for more committed Catholic teachers and remembered with admiration those few who, the interviewee felt, believed what they taught and clearly exhibited an extensive background understanding.

- Being Catholic: Rather than any desire to turn away from their faith, most participants expressed a past and current contentment with being Catholic. The degree of Catholic faith involvement and conviction clearly varied but the participants shared an overwhelmingly positive attitude to being Catholic. They regarded highly their Catholic moral values with several naming the ‘golden rule’ as the most important — i.e. treating others as you yourself would wish to be treated. Oft repeated however was the observation that their sense of being Catholic had declined through their later teen and young adult years. This was reflected in their current lack of Catholic involvement in almost anything other than Sunday Mass. Very few currently participate in the Church’s devotional life, parish or diocesan events or groups beyond the Sunday assembly. A small majority claimed that they did pray privately in some form and, of these, most characterised their prayer as being to them in some way Catholic. Seven had taken part in the Sydney World Youth Day the previous year (2008) and all who did were enthusiastic about the experience. Of these seven, three now self-identified as core Catholics and four as intermediate Catholics.
- Young Adult Catholicism: Asked the extent to which they had questioned their faith since leaving school, a surprising number felt that they had not done so in any significant way. More typical was an experience of slipping away from faith practice — a general loss of interest without real concern to reflect and formulate questions. Some had questioned and as a result strengthened their faith but more appeared to simply retain an unquestioned confidence in their Catholicism. These last were, by-and-large, those with the least current involvement in any faith community indicating that their earlier faith perceptions remained unchallenged, at least for the time being. A few perceived Catholicism to be simply one option among many equal religions (that they might choose) and, though grateful for the Catholic faith they had received, ‘being Catholic’ was now less important to them. Negative and positive peer pressure clearly exerted an influence on faith practice especially in the early young adult years after leaving school. Finally, in relation to resolving personal ‘faith questions’, most felt that

they did have someone to whom they could go — a personally familiar priest in many cases. A good number indicated that they would simply ‘work it through’ themselves without seeking any outside help.

- **Residual Catholicism:** While the core Catholic young adults remained actively connected to their Church, the majority of the participants relied on earlier formative experiences for their Catholicity. Opportunities for growth linked to current Catholic experience were all but nonexistent and, although they expressed allegiance to their Catholic faith, their responses indicated that their Catholic religious worldview was little changed from their childhood and teenage years, with very little depth of understanding evident behind the memories.

Ecclesial Faith

The Catholic Church... I guess you could say that other churches have tradition but the Catholic Church goes back a long way. So I think it has a very strong foundation and also a very strong leadership and of course, having travelled, wherever I've been, even though there are of course different things culturally that enter into the church, it's still the same format and you can always be sure that the same kind of spirit is going to be there. Joseph⁴

This section aimed to investigate the interviewees’ understanding of the ecclesial nature of Catholicism, especially its tradition and structure.

- **The Catholic Church:** Participants were first asked to describe the Catholic Church and then to further their description by comparing Catholicism with other Christian traditions and finally with other religions. Most participants demonstrated uncertainty in responding to these questions and it became clear that they had not considered them before. A number articulated a sense that Catholicism was ‘very traditional’ (something of which many of them approved) and the idea of the Church as a ‘welcoming community’ was also repeated. Although the responses varied widely (e.g. ‘big’, ‘multicultural’, a ‘tower of strength’, an ‘empire’) there was a clear perception that the Catholic Church was a significant and global religious tradition. Most struggled, however, to go beyond their own experience of local Church community and articulate anything of this universal institution. Catholicism was felt to be bigger and more institutional (‘stable’, ‘older’ and ‘more historical’) than other Christian denominations. The Catholic Eucharistic and Marian traditions were identified by several participants and, in general, Catholicism was felt to be ‘more open’ (more accepting of all-comers)

⁴ Male, provincial, core Catholic aged 23-28 yrs (focus group participant).

than other Churches. Comparing Catholic Christianity with other religions, however, was beyond most participants' ability.

- Church Authority: A word association exercise was carried out to draw out participant understanding of ecclesial traditions of authority especially in view of today's renewed recognition of the role of the laity. Four concepts were proffered and an enormous range of ideas for each was generated.⁵ Not unexpectedly, members of the hierarchy featured strongly (i.e. priests, bishops, cardinals and the pope). In response to the trigger words 'Catholic leadership', the words 'lay' and 'laity' were noticeably absent, but terms such as 'elders', 'principals', 'nuns', 'voluntary', 'committees' and 'friends' suggest an awareness of the contemporary broadening of this role beyond the hierarchy. Although some responses indicated a negative attitude toward Catholic leadership, authority and hierarchy (e.g. 'old', 'stupid', 'skew-whiff', 'dark', 'scary') there was no indication of any general disillusionment with clerical leadership. On the contrary, the solid majority of terms generated were positive.
- Papacy: Participants were affirming of the importance of the papacy, seeing it predominantly as a figurehead position providing unity in the Church. Some described the Pope himself in near-monarchical terms ('ruler', 'decision-maker') while one said he is, 'like the Church' and another, 'the closest thing to God on earth'. These last two were core Catholics and, along with most interviewees, they ascribed to the Pope the role of oversight of the Church as a whole without any evident consideration of collegiality in the task.
- Bishops: The bishop's role too was felt to be important today though the majority struggled to say what that role might be. Most participants drew on their societal experience and described him as the 'manager (or 'boss') of the priests' or similar. Several felt he was there to correct Catholics and priests with one participant noting that his 'shepherd's staff' (crosier) was a 'rod of correction' albeit to be used 'pastorally' [sic]. He was also recognised as being a 'shepherd', an 'encourager', a 'decision-maker', an 'administrator', a 'figurehead' and a 'role model'. Missing was any indication of the bishop's role as teacher despite the fact that, for seven participants at least, this was an episcopal role that had featured for them at the previous year's World

⁵ The four phrases, to which the participants were invited to respond with the first three words that come to mind, were: 'Catholic decision making'; 'Catholic leadership'; 'Catholic authority'; and 'Catholic hierarchy'.

Youth Day in Sydney.⁶ In each of the three dioceses visited, however, all but one participant were able to personally name their bishop.

- Dialogue with Local Bishop: In the interview, the participants were asked to imagine that their bishop had joined them for an open and informal conversation, eager to hear their perspective on critical issues he faced. They were invited to share with him their thoughts in three specific areas: the Church, contemporary society, and young people. The chance was not seized upon with most participants again struggling to think what they might like to say to the bishop. Not surprisingly there was a call for more integration in liturgy of contemporary modes of communication and expression (e.g. music) even as they reassured their bishops that they valued Catholic tradition. In varying words, the young participants identified what they felt was a faith and value vacuum existing in society today. They also acknowledged the large scale exodus of their own age group from Church involvement. But in general they were at a loss to know how to advise the bishop in addressing these situations. On one hand they invited the bishops to challenge young people to live out their faith in mission. On the other hand they warned of the ineffectiveness of simply instructing young people to obey Church teaching.
- Catholic Tradition: The young participants appeared just as uncertain as any Church leader about what their age group might be seeking today. A final note in this section records the surprisingly high rating the participants gave to Catholic tradition (not further defined). Even as they acknowledged that the young do not relate well to the 'old things', they were simultaneously very positive about the need to retain tradition as at the heart of Catholic faith itself.

Sacramental Imagination

God is present in all of them (the sacraments). If you think about it like in the Eucharist, God is there — like, that's it, there! Baptism, he's there — you're in the church... he's bringing you into the church. Holy orders, he's there doing his thing.
Brianna⁷

Questions in this section were intended to explore the participant's understanding of sacramentality, image and symbol.

⁶ "Catechesis was a highlight for many pilgrims and most express the desire for more. The role of the bishop as teacher was highlighted and provides a challenge in ensuring ongoing opportunities for youth and young adults to gather with their bishops." National World Youth Day Committee (NZ), "Handover Document," (New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference, 2008), 12.

⁷ Female, rural, intermediate Catholics aged 23-28 yrs.

- Typically Catholic: Interviewees were asked to list anything at all that they felt was typically Catholic. Cited by more than a quarter of participants were the ‘sign of the cross’, ‘Sunday Mass’, ‘the Pope’, ‘Mary’ and ‘Easter’. Other popular responses included ‘big families’, ‘Eucharist’, ‘saints’, ‘statues’, ‘stations of the cross’, ‘wine and communion bread’ and ‘Christmas’. Mentioned by two participants were ‘Jesus’, ‘the rosary’, ‘prayer(fulness)’, ‘nuns’, ‘sacraments’, ‘genuflecting’, ‘Baptism’, ‘reconciliation’, ‘the offertory’ and ‘confirmation’. A further sixty-five typically Catholic things were identified by participants covering the broad spectrum of Catholic life.⁸ The scope of this response serves to indicate that, although lacking confidence in articulating their Catholic faith tradition in any systematic fashion, these young Catholics are aware of the hallmarks of Catholicism, both cultural and theological.
- Grace: In the 1980s, Andrew Greeley developed a series of tools to quantitatively test for what he described as, the ‘Catholic imagination’ — the tendency of Catholics to see God as near to us and the world as graced by God’s presence.⁹ The GRACE and TRACY scales that he developed subsequently indicated that there was indeed a measurable difference between Protestants and Catholics, a difference that he further asserted could be used to predict religious belief and behaviour. The GRACE scale consisted of four seven-point continuums between distant and intimate images of God (God as father-mother; master-spouse; judge-lover; king-friend) with Catholics tending to score more toward the intimate end. The TRACY scale consisted of just two seven-point continuums testing one’s view of the world and human nature (the world as evil-good; human nature as bad-good), with Catholic responses tending toward the ‘good’ perspective. Adapting Greeley’s two scales for use as indicative qualitative tools, I set out to explore the Catholicity of my own interviewee’s views of God, creation and humanity.¹⁰

On two of the GRACE scale markers, participants in my study were strongly ‘Catholic’ in their imaging of God, the majority seeing God more as friend than king and more as lover than judge. On the other two markers however the opposite was true with a strong majority claiming to see God more as father than mother and more as master than spouse. On the TRACY scale, it was the more optimistic view that emerged strongly with the majority of participants recognising ‘goodness’ (as opposed to evil / sin /

⁸ It should be noted that *typically* Catholic does not necessarily imply *exclusively* Catholic. E.g. prayer, baptism...

⁹ Greeley, *Catholic Myth*, 34-64.

¹⁰ The observations here can only be very general but nonetheless they offer some insight into the worldview and Godview of the participants.

badness / corruption) as basic to both the created world and to human nature. Similarly, when questioned as to the extent to which they sensed the presence of God in the world around them, the overwhelming response was strongly affirming. Participant after participant expressed the closeness of God felt in nature and in the people around them. For example, asked (separately) to what extent they saw God as present in the world, Sarah and Trevor replied:

In everything I think. Yeah, I'll be walking along the street and I'll like feel the breeze and then I, like, feel God in that, kind of thing. Or like I'll see like two people holding hands or something and, I know it's cheesy, but you know... [laughs]. I think it's important. Sarah¹¹

Yeah, um, everywhere. In good actions undertaken everywhere, the Spirit's there. I'm sort of a big believer in what goes around, comes around and I think God's definitely a big part of that. Trevor¹²

Although only indicative, these results do appear to confirm the Catholic sense with which these young Catholics approach both Creator and creation.

- **Sacrament:** In a more direct engagement with Catholic language, participants were asked to describe what 'sacrament' meant to them. Somewhat surprisingly many had to ask what was meant by the word 'sacrament', but when some of the seven sacraments were mentioned as a starting point, they generally showed more understanding referring to 'steps' (in life), 'rites of passage' and 'sacred things'. Prompted to indicate what value they placed on the Catholic sacraments, participants were generally enthusiastic about their importance. Exceptions included one participant who felt that sacraments are too exclusive by nature and another who thought that they unhelpfully attempt to contain God who in reality is present everywhere. The sacraments that were held as being particularly important were Baptism and Eucharist, the latter felt to be specifically linked to Catholic identity. Anointing of the Sick and Holy Orders rated least important in all likelihood due to the participants' lack of experience with them. Overall, there were glimpses of sacramental understanding: e.g.

I guess (sacrament) is something important for the Catholic religion. Yeah, like it's one of the traditions like you go through the seven stages. Well, cos, obviously you

¹¹ Female, urban, core Catholic aged 18-22 yrs.

¹² Male, urban, disengaged or former Catholic aged 18-22 yrs.

do them all at different ages so... as you progress through life. The different stage is appropriate to you. Steven¹³

But awareness of the practical details of the sacraments appeared very thin and, with one or two exceptions, little depth was evident in terms of sacramental theology: e.g.

... there's four sacraments right? (Interviewer: Seven.) Seven! Okay, see I'm not very good on that. But there's four in the Mass — there must be because that's what the priest told us...? Frankie¹⁴

I think it's almost... if you do those (sacraments) you're proving yourself loyal to God. Like, you're saying, 'look, I've done this.' It makes me more, I don't know, he'll be more happy with me if I do this; I'll be closer to him if I do this. If I do all these things you know he'll be happy with me. Hannah¹⁵

- **Catholic Imagination:** A final word association exercise attempted to gauge the extent of Catholic imagination by inviting spontaneous response to each in turn of four key words: Jesus, Church, God, and Mary. Again, a wide variety of responses resulted with each of the following terms being suggested by two or more participants.

Jesus: *saviour, friend, God, Mary, Joseph, Holy Spirit, resurrection, Christ* (plus 35 other terms each proffered only once).

Church: *community, believers, a building, Sunday, boring, family* (plus 6).

God: *creator, father, powerful, heaven, king, everywhere, Holy Spirit* (plus 35).

Mary: *mother, love/loving, woman, wife, virgin* (plus 25).

Most participants had little trouble responding although 'Church' proved to be more of a challenge than the other three terms. 'Boring' was the only pejorative response in the entire exercise and it itself was used only twice. 'God' generated a relatively masculine response while Mary, not surprisingly, evoked a strongly feminine one. Interestingly, the additional single responses tended to broaden the concept of God ('forgiving', 'lover', 'acceptor', 'believer', 'good', 'friend'...) whereas, though equally prolific, the additional Marian words stayed largely with the traditional 'caring mother' image of Mary ('caring', 'graceful', 'soft', 'supportive', 'kind'...). Though not hugely revealing, this exercise did serve to indicate that the participants made, with relative ease, what could be described as 'Catholic connections'.

¹³ Male, rural, intermediate Catholic aged 23-28 yrs.

¹⁴ Female, urban, core Catholic aged 18-22 yrs.

¹⁵ Female, provincial, disengaged or former Catholic aged 18-22 yrs.

Theology – Seeking Integration of Faith and Reason

Oh, I've..., I don't know, I've got a funny way of working it out. I've made a way of making sense for myself. Like, it (creation) all happened but for me it's kind of like, God did it so that it would make sense for others who didn't want to believe. Yeah, I don't know how I worked it out but it, cos it, something had to have happened, it didn't just go [clicks fingers]. Yeah, so, the evolution obviously occurred, well, yeah well that's how I see it and it's just a way of explaining it, really. Robert¹⁶

A series of questions in the interviews explored the relationship between faith and reason and, in particular, that existing between faith and science.

- **Science and Faith:**¹⁷ When asked how well they thought that Catholic faith and modern science fitted together responses varied widely. The creation / evolution clash featured strongly for most participants. Many expressed confusion as to how to deal with a literal reading of the Genesis creation story when they were equally convinced of modern science's claim to the theory of evolution. These young adults clearly felt that a literal interpretation of scripture was incumbent on Christians, a perception more likely derived from media representations of Christian faith than from widespread misinformation being taught in Catholic schools. Some had resolved this difficulty by developing or adopting their own compromise stories e.g. seven days meaning seven 'spans of time' (but not a 24 hour period), or, Adam and Eve being the actual chromosomal and mitochondrial ancestors of humankind. A few participants were adamant that faith and science must be opposed to each other but more of them either chose not to concern themselves with the issue or felt that the relationship between science and faith was improving. A considerable amount of confusion was evident between scientific knowledge per se and its ethical application. Here a perceived clash between faith and the (un)ethical use of science was explained as evidence of the incompatibility of science and faith in general. Science was seen by some participants as offering a challenge to faith to review its traditional teachings that, they felt, were based on now outdated scientific knowledge and worldviews. Alternatively, faith was viewed by several as offering something of a 'conscience' to the scientific endeavour though a sense of incompatibility between the two was much more common: e.g.

'I don't think they're too related. Well, I just sort of think that God created the earth the way it is and um, like science might be able to change things but it'll never change the fact that he created it.' Steven¹⁸

¹⁶ Male, urban, core Catholic aged 18-22yrs.

¹⁷ See the 'Science and Religion' section of this chapter for further exploration of this topic. FAS, 82-3.

¹⁸ Male, rural, intermediate Catholic aged 23-28 yrs.

- Changing Church: In seeking to explore their sense of an evolving Church, participants were invited to compare the contemporary Catholic Church with the Church of the past. Once they had attempted this, they were then asked to note how they saw the Church as variously unchanging, changed / changing, or still in need of change. Popular among the unchanging elements identified were the fundamentals of ‘creed’ and ‘belief’, ‘tradition(s)’, ‘Eucharist’ and ‘liturgy’ and a central focus on ‘God’ and ‘Jesus Christ’. Also felt to be unchanging by more than one participant were the ‘rituals’, ‘the bible’, ‘priests’ and ‘pope’, ‘Catholic sacraments’, ‘values’ and even ‘buildings’. In response to what has changed, or is changing, (vernacular) ‘language’ and ‘music in liturgy’ stood out. More than one participant noted a growing ecclesial openness, increasing family-friendliness and a more approachable clergy in a Church in which ‘faith by fear’ had all but disappeared. Others felt however that we had become more ‘secular’ as a Church — ‘more like the rest of society’.

Nearly half of the sample either felt that there was nothing that still needed to change or were unsure of what might need changing. Others however were more assertive calling for the Church to become more appealing to the young and to improve its music in liturgy. More than one participant suggested that change was needed in the diocesan priesthood (due to lack of candidates) with both married clergy and the ordination of women mentioned as possible solutions. One participant wanted to see a greater variety of ‘speakers’ (homilists) in Church and the expansion of the 3-year lectionary cycle. Others felt that increased openness was needed along with greater acceptance of homosexuality and the beliefs of others.

- Mystery and Faith: When questioned on the place of mystery in Catholic faith there was an emphatic response from almost everyone that mystery in fact lay at the heart of faith and was the very essence of what faith was about. Responses such as, ‘isn’t that the whole idea?’ and, ‘it’s inherently mysterious!’ were repeated. ‘Mystery’ appeared to be understood as a puzzle, a descriptor of something unknown or not understood: e.g.

Dunno, for me heaps of it’s mystery cos... I don’t know [laughs]. But there’s probably answers to everything I’d imagine. Is there a book somewhere — the Catholic book [laughs]?! Brianna¹⁹

¹⁹ Female, rural, intermediate Catholic aged 23-28 yrs.

Its use as pointing to the transcendent was less common though it was there for some:
e.g.

You mean like God? I reckon that there's... it's key, it's sort of like if you knew what was up then you wouldn't have faith. So, having the mystery is just sort of perfect you know because then it just entails on each individual how they perceive God and how they perceive things and I obviously perceive things differently to other people, and I feel, even though I'm not going to church and stuff, I can still have this connection because... who is God? Dave²⁰

Only one participant seemed to have a different attitude and, preferring certainty, firmly asserted that, 'people don't go to Church to be confused!' When asked to consider the head (cognitive) vs. heart (affective) balance of the Catholic Church today, most participants admitted to a more heart-focussed personal approach to faith. They were aware of a more intellectual side to their Church but they felt disconnected from it. Religion was an affective practice for most.

- Faith Disconnected from Reason: The religious experience of the great majority of the young participants was of faith that remained largely disconnected from reason. Accommodations appear to have been made by most of those with a more active faith so that their young minds, formed and educated in a science-oriented world, can continue to believe in the face of empirical evidence that they perceive to question, even debunk, that very belief.

Community

So, when I eventually get married and have children I'd like to go to church, like, take them to church from a young age and get them baptised and have First Communion, and then later in life they can choose whether they want to continue with the Catholic faith or... not. Oh and, yeah, I'd like to get married in a church. Katie²¹

A fourth and final category of investigation set out to explore the participants' sense of Catholicism as a communal faith especially with regard to sin, salvation and social justice.

- Christian Community: The responses to the very first question here served as a fair indicator of what was to come — a commitment to the idea and principle of the communal but a lived reality that showed little evidence of its practice. Almost all

²⁰ Male, urban, disengaged or former Catholic aged 18-22 yrs.

²¹ Female, urban, disengaged or former Catholic aged 23-28 yrs.

agreed that gathering to celebrate the Eucharist was important for (Catholic) Christians, many naming it as *very* important. Key reasons given for the importance of such gathering included the need to support each other as Christians and to be a visible sign of a unified Church. And yet, as we have seen, the majority of participants did not often themselves participate in this way. Most surprising was the conviction with which some ‘disengaged’ participants affirmed this response even though they themselves almost never chose to participate. (e.g. Hannah²², who had not had any Catholic interaction for years explains: *‘I think it’s good. Yeah, it kind of bonds people together.’*) The apparent contradiction, as we shall see in Chapter Five, is seemingly explained by the young adult’s utter conviction that each is free to follow his / her own path. If one finds value in active Catholicism then gathering is a good thing. This choice to participate, however, must be completely voluntary — it is for those who want it.

- Sin: Each participant was asked to talk about his or her conception of ‘sin’ and how important they thought the idea was today. Every one of them felt that an understanding of sin was important — a concept of failure that was part of being human. Similarly, all of the interviewees recognised that sin held a social aspect and all could explain how, in small groups, communities and society as a whole, collective sin takes place. In their descriptions of what sin was to them, terms like ‘bad’, ‘nasty’ and ‘cheating’ arose frequently among those who had little or no current connection with Church life. In this group too, attempts to define ‘sin’ tended to spontaneously draw reference to ‘breaking the Ten Commandments’, something that did not arise among those with regular involvement in Church life. For these last, the relational element of ‘going against’ Jesus / God was important and there appeared a greater awareness of variation in degree of wrongdoing as well as of the contextual factors that played a part. In short, those currently actively participating in a faith community showed a more nuanced and relational understanding of sin.
- Salvation: When asked to explain what ‘salvation’ meant to them, most participants struggled, one-third of them saying things like, ‘I don’t know’, and / or, ‘I haven’t really thought about it before’. ‘Being saved’ from sin, evil, hell, etc. appeared more familiar language and it was obvious that the concept of salvation was largely unexplored theological territory to most. Although talk of the ‘afterlife’, ‘heaven’, and ‘last judgement’ did arise it became apparent that there was something of an expectation of

²² Female, provincial, disengaged or former Catholic aged 23-28 yrs.

salvation without any clarity on what that might mean. One ‘disengaged’ participant stated that she did not believe in an afterlife and that we did not need to be saved, the corollary being that Catholics needed to ‘grow up’ and ‘take responsibility’ for their own mistakes (i.e. ‘sins’) rather than expecting someone else to step in and save them.

- The Common Good: Pursuing the extent of their understanding of the ‘common good’, participants were asked to consider the responsibility that Catholics had for the wellbeing of others in society. Indicating their opinion on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = full responsibility / 5 = no responsibility at all) no participants selected 4 or 5.²³ The most common opinion was 2 with five individuals choosing the full responsibility option (1). Many others stated that they would choose 1 except that they felt people also had to take some responsibility for themselves. A third of the sample however opted for the middle position, 3. While there was clearly a sense of concern for their neighbour, a good number of these young adults sought to balance a sense of their own individual responsibility with acknowledgement that this role could be delegated to some other agency.
- Church Voice on Moral Issues: In the last section of their interview each participant was asked whether they thought the Catholic Church should be speaking out today in each of four specific areas: ecology, life issues, sexual morality and poverty. On both life issues (abortion, euthanasia, bioethics, etc.) and poverty there was near unanimous support for an outspoken Church. Most participants sought to clarify that the question intended an official public statement from the Church before concluding that this was a good idea. In the area of sexual morality, two-thirds of participants felt the Church should be speaking out but the others were unsure and two were opposed. Several expressed real concern that taking a ‘laying down the law’ approach simply did not work today when what was needed was a convincing case for the Church’s position. Care for the environment was the issue that attracted the least support for a Church voice. Just under two-thirds did think the Church should be heard officially and publically on the issue but there was more reservation in their responses with some giving assent while admitting to being quite unsure of the connection between Church and ecology. Seven participants thought it was simply not the Church’s area of interest and felt it should be left to ‘the Greens and their mates’. Few were aware that the

²³ After some initial confusion, ‘responsibility’ was loosely defined for the participants as ‘holding a duty of care and concern’.

Church had in fact already spoken out on the topic and some of the ‘no’ responders were at a loss to imagine what the Church might have had to say.²⁴

- An Individual’s Community: Although the study participants were well schooled in the link between Catholic faith and community, they were far less convinced of the need for their own involvement in it. Although they demonstrated substantial awareness of wrongdoing today, any guilt seemed well offset by a deep conviction that God would be there for them in the end.²⁵ While largely concerned for the wellbeing of others and the earth, they were equally happy to let someone else handle the role on their behalf.

Science and Religion

Although not itself a full section in the interview schedule, the important issue of the relationship between science and religion warrants further consideration in this section addressing Catholic religious worldview. I have already noted the antipathy that most participants felt to lie between religious faith and the modern scientific perspective. The creation vs. evolution conflict was the key illustration proffered although some few participants also mentioned scientific problems with miracle stories in the gospels. Most of the participants had experienced Catholic religious education from a syllabus that included carefully prepared consideration of the issues involved in biblical interpretation. Yet, for most, their concerns were anything but allayed and more than one admitted feeling that the situation was too complex for them to be bothered with. Two young adults who had been motivated to pursue these issues further within Catholic education demonstrated an informed position noticeably lacking in all of the other participants.

The roots of the confusion appear to lie in the relative religious illiteracy of young adult Catholics combining with media messaging that is, I suggest, as underestimated as it is ubiquitous. Whereas religious education clearly struggled to hold their interest as teenagers in secondary school, these young adults have been willing participants in a burgeoning world of communications media from their earliest years. But the assumed ‘Christian’ messaging that achieves airtime, and is therefore influential on young adult Catholics who are not regularly engaged in a church community, is a more sensational,

²⁴ The basis for their puzzlement appears to lie in their (unquestioned?) belief that the role of the Church is religious and therefore other-worldly. The Church is rightly concerned for people and their welfare here on earth but its key point of focus is the next world rather than this one.

²⁵ Cf. with Moral Therapeutic Deism. See *FAS*, 34.

evangelical Christian approach.²⁶ Here there is certainly antagonism towards the modern scientific perspective, the biblical fundamentalist position being largely unwilling to compromise in its interpretation of contemporary issues. Whereas Catholicism is equally uncompromising in the pursuit of truth, the Catholic position does not however afford the Christian scriptures uncritical pre-eminence in addressing modern scientific questions. This important distinction appears to have been lost on the majority of the young Catholic participants in the study.

Confusing the picture and further convincing the young adults of a fundamental divide between science and religion is their own apparent confusion between science itself and the ethical application of scientific discoveries. Bioethics is an example of one such area with more than one participant pointing to Catholic concern with stem and embryonic cell research. It is in cases such as this that the Catholic voice is occasionally heard in the media reinforcing in the minds of the young Catholic an exaggerated clash between faith and science. It is difficult to know what might be done to try and address this ignorance of the actual Catholic position among young adults in only irregular contact with their Church. The media, on the other hand, suffers from no such lack of access to the attentions of Gen Y.

Summary Analysis

What then can be said about the extent to which these young adults identify with, and draw meaning from, a Catholic religious worldview? There is no doubt that a sense of being Catholic has been passed on to them through the formative experiences of their youth. They value their Catholic culture, grateful to some extent for its values and traditions. The study's young adults appreciate the seven sacraments as rites of passage in a social world increasingly devoid of such traditional marker events. These young adults demonstrate a strong Catholic sense of the presence of God, exhibiting a Catholic conviction of the goodness of humankind as part of a created order understood to be fundamentally good. The reality of human failure and wrongdoing however is familiar to them but, even as they admit their own weakness, they remain essentially optimistic about their own future with God. Though from an undeniably scientific generation, they work hard to accommodate rather than abandon faith even when their own

²⁶ This has been illustrated in New Zealand in recent years by the repeated appearances in the media of evangelical church leader Bishop Brian Tamaki and his Destiny Church. Issues have ranged from Destiny's practice of tithing and their leader's apparently affluent lifestyle through to opposition to the government's social agenda. Destiny's literal interpretation of scripture has often been highlighted and thereby normalised as generically Christian in subsequent media coverage.

misunderstanding of Church teaching places science and faith in unnecessary competition.

I propose that one way of making sense of these findings is to consider a Catholic religious worldview as operating at the following three levels:

1. the superficial level of nominal affiliation (i.e. claiming the name Catholic and many of the cultural elements that accompany such ‘membership’);
2. the intermediate level of conscious engagement — choice to participate (i.e. regular engagement with a local Catholic faith community — active and mutual support of other (Catholic) Christians); and
3. the deeper level of learned values and culture (i.e. a ‘Catholic sense’ of the presence of God, of the value and richness of symbol and image, and of concern for the vulnerable.)

My observation is that these young adults possess a relatively resilient Catholic religious worldview at the first and third levels but not at the second. At the superficial (nominal identification) and deeper (values) levels, the research findings support the claim that they hold a Catholic worldview. But in the middle ground, the everyday engagement of faith with life, there appears to be disconnection. As I will shortly elaborate, their commitment to being culturally Catholic cloaks a vast gap in their knowledge, understanding and practice of the breadth and detail of their faith.

These young adults’ personal sense of Catholic faith tends to include almost contradictory positions on the place of the old and the new. They readily juxtapose pride in tradition with dislike of the traditional. They appear to long for guidance but resent being told what to do. The worlds of religion and science continue to sit together uncomfortably for them, underlining the overwhelming efficiency of the societal messaging that claims to define *the* Christian position on so many crucial issues. Where Catholicism may hold a more open position than that of the biblical literalist churches, this nuance is mostly lost on these young adults. They are convinced of the value of faith community but not so much as to actually want to put it into regular practice. They are the children of their own humanitarian age in that they see it as important that the individual and society speak and act for charity and justice. As Catholics they know they are called to participate in this social role but they see the role of their Church as

focussing more on the sacred in a way that they themselves feel has less to do with their own everyday lives.

Section 2: The Nature and Extent of the Young Adults' Catholic Identity

In this section, several key themes are drawn from the data and developed. These will later form the subject material of our conversation with the theory of secularization. Here, however, they are seen to colour the Catholicity of the individuals; framing and forming a Catholic identity that differs in many ways from that previously known to pastoral leaders. While the basic elements of Catholic identity remain the same, the lived faith experience of these young adults is more distant, more 'on their own terms' than that of previous generations. It is to the second of the two key research questions that I now turn:

- What is the nature and strength of Catholic identity among the young adult Catholics in the study?

Catholic Religious Individualism

Chapter Two of this study noted the findings of the literature with regard to the prevalence of an individualistic approach to faith among Gen Y Catholics. My own study has served to confirm a similar situation among NZ's young adult Pakeha Catholics. Among the more extreme versions of what the *Young Adult Catholics* study called the 'church of personal choice'²⁷ was captured by one participant:

But I do believe in God and I've sort of like just carved my own little religion sort of..., I just do my own thing but still talk to God. Dave²⁸

Again and again in this study participants expressed their awareness of the Church's expectation of regular participation and, as noted, they generally supported the idea. But in practice the majority did not achieve this and were guarded as to whether they would likely do so in the future. In typical Gen Y fashion, the study's young adult participants held strongly to the conviction that each individual has the right to believe as they choose — the right to shape their own version of Catholic faith.

These observations of religious individualism support the three-tier model of 'being Catholic' that was introduced above. At the nominal level, a sense of belonging is

²⁷ Hoge et al., *Young Adult Catholics*, 225.

²⁸ Male, urban, disengaged or former Catholic aged 18-22 yrs.

achieved at very low personal cost. At the deepest level, one's values are formed largely before one has any sense of being moulded or shaped. They are in effect an integral part of us. It is then in the middle ground of how I choose to live my faith — what concrete expression it will have in my daily life — that Gen Y's acknowledged individualism makes its presence most strongly felt. From their perspective, that others expect more is not of great concern. For Gen Y, no one has the right to judge and what really matters is that each of us is left free to shape our own religious expression.

Personal Morality

The current study also confirmed the findings of overseas studies in the area of morality and especially sexual morality.²⁹ A common theme that emerged was the naming, in different ways, of the individual's conscience as the final (and, in some cases, only valid) arbiter of moral decision making. Also reflected was the *Common Ground* study's earlier noted observation of a post-Vatican II shift to an understanding of the 'good Catholic', not as someone who followed Church teaching, but rather as someone who was a 'good person'.³⁰ This notion included the generous and inclusive individual who above all, remained nonjudgmental toward those around them. One participant who gave tentative support to the Church speaking out on sexual morality sums up the attitude of the less-committed majority of the young adult interviewees:

*You know, you can smoke as much drugs as you want but if you're just such a nice guy and you..., whether or not you go to church or whatever, but if you're a nice guy and you don't bring anyone down, you're just bringing (building) people up, and stuff like that, you're almost ten times better than a Catholic person that is bringing other people down for not being a Catholic. Dave*³¹

Dave is expressing the common (though not necessarily justified) conviction that it is better (i.e. laudable and more authentically Christian) to be a good person who is disengaged from faith practice (and even possibly involved in dubious social behaviours) than to be actively involved and *judgmental*. The implication in this statement and many others was that this latter behaviour was felt to be all too common among active Catholics.

An interesting contrast arose however between the young adults' perception of the place of Church teaching as compared with their own personal moral decision making. As

²⁹ E.g. Fulton et al., *Young Catholics*, 163, Hoge et al., *Young Adult Catholics*, 231.

³⁰ Davidson et al., *Common Ground*, 119.

³¹ Male, urban, disengaged or former Catholic aged 18-22 yrs.

noted earlier in this chapter, most participants felt it was important that their Church teach publically in the area of sexual morality. Yet there was a repeated qualification to this assertion — such teaching was felt to be for those who engaged actively with the Church and should not be directed beyond these confines. In most such cases this ‘beyond’ included the young adult making the claim thus effectively allowing for affirmation of the idea of moral teaching while denying its application in their own circumstances. Once again external authority is juxtaposed with individual conscience in a less than comfortable relationship. The young adult participants appear to desire authoritative moral guidance but at a safe distance and preferably aimed at more committed Catholics than they feel themselves to be.

The blurring of the previously distinct boundary between Catholic moral norms and those of society at large is well advanced for the study’s Gen Y participants.³² Moral decision making is viewed as an entirely internal affair and the individual’s right to privacy there is considered paramount and decisive.

Catholic Identity

The existence of elements of a Catholic religious worldview in the study’s young adult participants has been established above. The question that remains to be addressed from the research is that pertaining to the nature and strength of the Catholic identity that exists among the research participants. Initial observations indicate that, while their Catholic identity is strongly claimed and in many cases deeply rooted, it lacks intelligibility and coherence. As a consequence the young adult appears to see no convincing reason why they should actively participate in a Catholic faith community. Cultural association with Catholicism is highly valued while the religious significance of the baptismal call to discipleship is generally unacknowledged.

As we have seen, the young adult Catholics in this study are typical of their generation in that they reflect the attitudes and perspectives of contemporary secular society. As such they possess a Catholic identity that bears little contrast with the secular humanism of their non-Catholic (and non-Christian) peers in that society i.e. the difference between the two appears minimal. They struggle to see the value of commitment to what looks increasingly like a remnant gathering of like-minded (and increasingly older) Catholic Christians. Rather, their sense of faith directs them to live well, as a

³² Fulton et al., *Young Catholics*, 169, Hoge et al., *Young Adult Catholics*, 123.

‘good person’, applying the moral principles that they know and believe in.³³ In this NZ study, they did not see this as less Catholic though a sense of guilt or resignation did usually accompany their admission of reducing involvement. Self-effacing when it came to talk of holiness, piety or the sacred, they are however quick to defend themselves if they sense external judgment of their situation.

Catholic identity in these young adults is framed within their own inherently individualistic outlook and, as such, individual conscience is everything to them while communal commitment and institutional loyalty are more matters of expediency. Something similar appears to apply with regard to knowledge of the detail of their faith tradition. Religious literacy simply has no great relevance to them though, as we have seen, this is not a new phenomenon.³⁴ It does however epitomize the approach to knowledge of this generation, immersed as it is in the internet and a seeming ‘information overload’. One does not need, and should not attempt, to ‘know’ everything — a futile task since knowledge is constantly changing and expanding.³⁵ Instead, one simply needs to know how to get the information when it is needed (e.g. ‘Google’ it) and this is lived out in a Catholic identity that values, albeit from a distance, a Church that has the knowledge and wisdom. Whether such an approach has a future beyond this generation is a question that the Gen Y participants largely do not ask although it can be seen in the comments of some who noted that would likely become more active as Catholics when they had children of their own.

The Catholic identity of the study’s young adults was almost entirely free of fear of a vengeful God, instead being remarkably sure in its conviction that a loving God would be there for them in the end. While it is easy to criticize this as typical of a *Moral Therapeutic Deist* take on belief in God, it can also be interpreted as a modern recapturing of a New Testament God image more in keeping with the life and teaching of Jesus in the gospels. Hope and trust in a God who is less interested in my attendance at Mass than my attempts to live as a ‘good person’ underlies a perspective that can be too easily dismissed. The young adult’s relationship with the Church fits within their (post)modern secular mindset — it is unashamedly utilitarian. To them, claims of

³³ Fulton et al., *Young Catholics*, 171.

³⁴ D’Antonio et al., *American Catholics*, 83. See also Chapter Two, Section 2, ‘Catholic Identity in the Research Literature,’ *FAS*, 34-39.

³⁵ One might describe this as ‘*Wikipedia epistemology*’ in that it reflects an approach to knowledge that aligns well with the Wikipedia online encyclopaedia to which anyone is able to contribute by adding items and updating or correcting information. Its expansion in recent years has been phenomenal.

exclusive access to God (sacramental, ministerial, etc.) carry an inherent contradiction. On one hand they value what is perceived as the uniqueness of Christ's presence in the Church (especially in the Eucharist) but, on the other hand, they are convinced of the individual's free and unconstrained access to God both within and apart from institutional religion. They acknowledge that the Church and its ministers are 'faith experts' but they are equally sure of the reality of God's presence well beyond the confines of Catholicism. When asked how they saw God present in the world around them, two young adults responded as follows:

Um, in priests... leaders... good, positive leaders. Newborn babies, like on the farm in spring when the calves are born – new life. Yeah, in nature... a lot. Donald³⁶

When I think of God I think of him as... um, he's a... him and me, like he's very personally mine but he, you know, everyone else has their own God, like their own one to look after them. He is out there. Hannah³⁷

All of the participants in the current study had been raised Catholic and had, therefore, experienced the normal 'growing into' faith that accompanies a Catholic upbringing.³⁸ Missing from this journey was any adult rite of passage; an opportunity or requirement for them to claim adult faith as their own. Being Catholic was indubitably part of their identity but almost entirely lacking for most was a sense of conversion to being a committed disciple of Jesus Christ.³⁹ Their situation may be likened to that of one's family — having been born into this cultural grouping and raised according to its norms, its influence on the individual is profound. It remains wholly possible however to grow apart from the family if the social bonds are not regularly reinforced and if no transformational (crisis) element arises to strengthen the commitment. Though they acknowledged active involvement in a faith community as ideal, it was apparent that this study's young adults saw little reason to consider this as a practical option for themselves.

'Just some days I think, 'Oh I should really be going to church.' But then... yeah, just every now and then. You know, like I went to a wedding on the weekend just gone and it was a full Mass and then, after that I was, like, 'oh, I quite miss going

³⁶ Male, rural, core Catholic aged 23-28 yrs.

³⁷ Female, provincial, disengaged or former Catholic aged 23-28 yrs.

³⁸ Especially the sacraments of initiation and their accompanying preparation programmes but also regular involvement with parish community.

³⁹ Compare with Taylor's 'transformation' – see Taylor, *Secular Age*, 430-5.

to church – I should probably go more often.’ And then... [laughs], but that’s soon past my mind!’ Katie⁴⁰

Summary Analysis

All of these observations lead to a somewhat paradoxical conclusion. Despite the conviction of their self-identification as Catholic, the young adults in the NZ study in fact reflect a Protestant theological influence and a growing sameness across denominations that was found to increasingly characterise the Christianity of their generation in the US studies.⁴¹ There is a Catholic identity that, beyond cultural and practical detail (e.g. sacraments, schools, etc.) and deeply ingrained values, appears to be largely indistinguishable from the Christianity of their Protestant peers. They equate being a ‘good Catholic’ with being a ‘good person’ and, in the case of the most ardent core Catholics, the similarities with devout evangelical Protestants were marked e.g. evangelical fervour, individualistic approach to salvation, etc.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented a summary of the key findings from my research project among nineteen young adult Pakeha Catholics in NZ. These research results conclude the ‘contact’ phase of the adopted pastoral circle model. Acknowledging the dwindling presence of young adult Catholics at Mass each week, I have, in a sense, entered their world and asked them how they see and understand a broad range of things Catholic. What has emerged is a repeated portrait of a young person who claims Catholic identity but who is largely uncertain of what it is that they are actually claiming. In every way they are typical of their generation — individualistic, humanitarian, scientific, media immersed, free of past ideas of a judgmental God, etc. Though they value their Catholic culture, it is more as a heritage; the background presence of a comforting religious faith in which they choose for the most part not to engage on any regular basis. In Chapter Five we move to the analysis phase asking the question: why is this happening? Charles Taylor and, to a lesser extent, other secularization theorists will offer insight in the attempt to answer this question. Chapter Six will then take up a theological reflection on these analysed findings before Chapter Seven attempts a contextual theological response as a possible way forward for the Church of NZ.

⁴⁰ Female, urban, disengaged or former Catholic aged 23-28 yrs.

⁴¹ Notably an individualistic Christian perspective. See *FAS*, 37-8. See also: Fisher, "Young American Catholics," 11. Fulton et al., *Young Catholics*, 135-6. Hoge et al., *Young Adult Catholics*, 221ff.

CHAPTER FIVE: SECULARIZATION AND THE YOUNG ADULT CATHOLIC

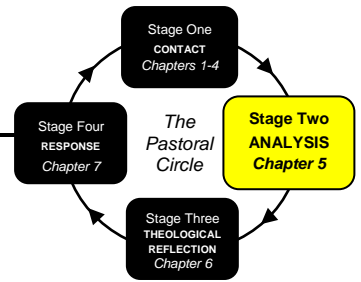


Figure 5.1: Faith Amid Secularity
– Chapter Five Methodology

Introduction

The international studies surveyed in Chapter Two together with my own research outlined in Chapters Three and Four confirm a shift in the way in which today's young Catholics relate to their faith tradition. While Gen Y Catholics value their faith heritage, most of them are not expressing this appreciation by actively participating to the extent the Church has known in the past. Chapter Five will now address the question of why this might be so beginning with consideration of the broader context of the theory of secularization. Providing a lens for this examination will be Charles Taylor's recent magisterial work, *A Secular Age*.¹ A number of the key concepts raised by Taylor will be explored with special attention given to his notion of the current era being an 'age of authenticity'. In keeping with my methodology based on the pastoral circle model, 'contact' was made with Catholic young adults in Chapter Four and the intention now is to provide some 'analysis' of the situation of their declining participation in Sunday Mass (see Figure 5.1 above). To this end, the second half of the chapter will return to my field research findings, bringing Taylor's thought to bear in order to better understand the nature and extent of the Catholic identity of this study's Gen Y participants.

Approaching Secularization

In his introduction to *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor acknowledges the complexity of the issue of 'the secular', the subject with which he intends to grapple.² Although almost everyone agrees that the phenomenon of secularity has become part of modern Western society in a way that simply was not the case in earlier times, what this 'secularity' actually amounts to is far from clear. Taylor proposes a three-fold approach to the examination of our age as secular, asking whether or not we are now witnessing:

¹ Taylor, *Secular Age*.

² Ibid., 1-22.

- 1) a separating out of religion and state? And/or
- 2) a fall off in religious belief and practice? And/or
- 3) a change in the conditions for experiencing the spiritual?³

The first of these three elements addresses the move away from a pre-modern situation under which the political organisation of all societies was intrinsically connected to faith in God. This approach to secularity focuses on public spaces (the economic, political, cultural, educational, professional, and recreational) and there is little if any expectation today that what takes place here will direct us toward God or religion. The second bears directly on the aspect of secularization that has been repeatedly underlined in this thesis — that of the decreasing involvement of Western people in traditional religious practices as well as a claimed reduction in religious belief. The third category is peculiar to Taylor and introduces the question of the nature of belief in a less-believing society. Whereas aspects 1 and 2 can be readily seen to assume more traditional religious forms, element 3 opens the door to a range of possible beliefs and commitments that may today be broadly defined as religious. It is this last factor that is of greatest interest to Taylor as well as to my own project since it moves beyond the simple identification of change (separation, decline or reformation) to ask *how* belief might be possible today — what forms it might take and how it potentially differs from that of previous eras.⁴ The fundamental shift that Taylor wants to highlight is how we in the West have moved from a situation where (during the Middle Ages) unbelief in God was simply not an option, to one in which unbelief is a realistic, almost default position, in contemporary Western society.⁵

Chief among Taylor's concerns is his dissatisfaction with accounts of secularization that equate the process to a letting go of earlier superstitions or ignorances — what he calls 'subtraction stories'.⁶ Too often this is the interpretation given to the state / religious differentiation identified in element 1 (above) when, in fact, the reality is more about the recognition of what is, and is not, the role of religion in modern society. Taylor suggests the example of a modern Christian doctor — although unlikely to recommend his or her

³ Ibid., 1-3.

⁴ José Casanova and Karel Dobbelaere have each advanced their own three tier models for understanding secularization but neither includes something of equivalence to Taylor's 'conditions of belief' category. Space disallows treatment of these models here — suffice to say that there is substantial overlap in the areas of societal differentiation (religion and state) and the decline in religious participation. See José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). Karel Dobbelaere, *Secularization: An Analysis at Three Levels* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002).

⁵ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 3.

⁶ Ibid., 22.

patient seek healing by touching a relic, the doctor's medical vocation will nonetheless be deeply influenced by his or her faith.⁷ This experience of the living out of faith is what Taylor wants to explore in his third element.

Disenchantment and the 'Buffered Self'

The 'subtraction stories' approach is however all too common today and is shored up, Taylor contends, by a tendency to confuse the process of secularization with what he describes as 'disenchantment'; the declining concern with the supernatural that steadily gained ground with the Enlightenment.⁸ European society during the Middle Ages was a time of 'enchantment' — a notion that can be difficult for the modern mind to accurately grasp. Cosmos and natural world were understood to speak vividly of the divine and to provide clear indication of God's purpose and action. Western society was 'God-infused'.⁹ But as well as encountering God everywhere, people also experienced an 'enchantment' that ran to a world of spirits and demons. It is in such a world that we can say that belief in the transcendent was really not optional. Equally though, it was well accepted that the serious business of Christianity belonged to the elite; the ruling classes, the clergy and the religious. For the majority of people, religious experience was a varied mix of distant sacred ritual and much closer magic and superstition.¹⁰ Taylor refers to these, respectively, as high and low 'speeds' of religious practice.¹¹ It was the desire for reform — for a closing of the gap between the 'speeds' of the religious professionals and common people — that began the process of 'disenchantment'. Teaching began to focus on fear of retribution from a vengeful God; death and judgement became key categories in convincing people to give up their reliance on magic which slowly became universally regarded as evil. As Taylor summarises; "The hegemony of the juridical-penal model plays an important role in the later rise of unbelief, both in repelling people from faith, and in modifying it in the direction of Deism".¹²

⁷ Ibid., 426.

⁸ Ibid., 25ff.

⁹ Taylor is quick to point out that 'society' is a modern term for what was then understood, "as polis, kingdom, church, or whatever". Ibid., 25-6.

¹⁰ At least that is how it looks to us. The merged world of Christian and other beliefs was no doubt a coherent lived experience for the people of the time and was an effective and time-honoured way of achieving balance in an, at times, frighteningly harsh world.

¹¹ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 62.

¹² Ibid., 78-9. These two directions, toward unbelief and toward Deism are subsequently further developed. Taylor also notes that this same drive to reform (a 'rage for order' that led to an increase in intense piety) led to recognition of the need to find God in everyday life. This in turn gave new significance to the 'ordinary' which, ironically, "prepares the ground for an escape from faith, into a purely immanent world." Taylor, *Secular Age*, 145.

Developed at length in Taylor's earlier work, *Sources of the Self*, the concept of the 'buffered self' describes the modern person as substantially 'bounded', protected if you like from the uncontrollable influence of spiritual beings, both good and bad.¹³ It sits in contrast to the earlier 'porous self' of the enchanted ages. Taylor believes that the formation of the 'buffered self' is fundamental to the gradual move from an inherently connected society, to the conception of the modern self as 'individual', and society as a collection of individuals.¹⁴

The Orthodox Theory of Secularization

During the Enlightenment the Western world, especially the elites, moved steadily toward a 'Deist' understanding of the God-human relationship.¹⁵ With God at a distance, benevolent but increasingly removed from everyday experience, humanist thought almost inevitably evolved into *exclusive humanism*, ultimately denying the existence of God and the need for religion altogether. This immensely complex series of developments foreshadows the decline of the traditional forms of religious life in Western society and serves to underpin the contemporary mainstream theories of secularization subsequently developed by sociologists.

Modern sociology emerged as a critique of the rising social influence of industrialization and urbanization integral to which was the recognition that long established religious structures were under attack due in large part to their rootedness in the now challenged pre-modern political and economic order.¹⁶ The sociology of religion, initially consisting mainly of theories of religious decline, formed a specific focus for the founding fathers of sociology — for Comte, Marx, Weber, Durkheim and Simmel — wrestling as they were with the dramatic changes taking place in the societies of which they were a part.¹⁷ The roots of secularization theory lie in the Enlightenment and in the subsequent reaction against socially entrenched religion in Europe. Although they approached the topic from different perspectives, the giants of sociology all contributed to the foundation and development of what has become known as the 'orthodox' theory of secularization, a proposal Wallis and Bruce describe as,

¹³ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*.

¹⁴ In his earlier book (*Ibid.*, 130ff.) he develops the related concept of 'radical reflexivity' – self-awareness such that I am understood to be aware of my ability to reflect. This self-'awareness of awareness', combines with the sense of the 'buffered self' to help explain the quite radical detachment of the modern individual from others and from the natural world.

¹⁵ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 221-69.

¹⁶ Davie, *The Sociology of Religion*, 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.; J. Beckford, *Social Theory and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 41.

“...one of sociology’s most enduring research programmes.”¹⁸ In essence it was felt that religion was on the wane as human beings recognised that they no longer needed religious belief systems to explain the world around them.

The theory of the inevitability of religious decline was almost universally accepted in sociology during the twentieth century and it was not until the 1980s that serious doubts as to its validity began to emerge.¹⁹ Martin describes the governing frame of the standard model as being underpinned by modernization and also by the contrast in religiosity between either the high-Middle Ages or the high-Victorian era and our own times.²⁰ Wallis and Bruce see the orthodox model as asserting a possibly two-way causal relationship between modernization (a complex concept in itself) and the declining social significance of religion.²¹ What had been near universally accepted religious practice steadily became an optional extra in Europe; a leisure activity practiced by a dwindling minority. From having been one of the most religious societies in the world Western Europe was transformed into one of the most secular places on earth.²²

Though a multifarious collection of hypotheses and explanations, the orthodox theory of secularization nevertheless gathered momentum through the 1960s and 70s spurred on by reports of diminishing church participation in Europe and, to a lesser extent, across the Western world. Subsequent objections to the theory range from protest over the legitimacy of the philosophically confused thinking involved (Martin²³), through to outright denial that any such trend is taking place (Starke and Finke²⁴). Peter Berger, who began his sociological career as one of the architects of the modern orthodox theory of secularization, famously changed his mind declaring his earlier assumptions false and the world as in fact as ‘furiously religious’ as ever.²⁵ Martin, on the other hand, expressed reservations about the whole debate as early as 1965 but has since gone

¹⁸ Roy Wallis and Steve Bruce, "Secularization: The Orthodox Model," in *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis*, ed. Steve Bruce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 8.

¹⁹ Steve Bruce, "The Curious Case of the Unnecessary Recantation: Berger and Secularization," in *Peter Berger and the Study of Religion*, ed. L. Woodhead (London: Routledge, 2001), 87.

²⁰ David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 124.

²¹ Wallis and Bruce, "Secularization," 11.

²² Martin, *On Secularization*, 124.

²³ David Martin, "Towards Eliminating the Concept of Secularization," in *Penguin Survey of the Social Sciences*, ed. J. Gould (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965).

²⁴ Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

²⁵ Peter Berger, "The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview," in *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, ed. Peter Berger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns Publishing Co., 1999), 2.

on to develop nuanced and insightful scholarship in the area of secularization that is now highly regarded by his peers, Charles Taylor among them.²⁶

Charles Taylor and Steve Bruce

In *A Secular Age*, Taylor notes two key objections that can be raised against the process of secularization both of which, he feels, are easily answered by the secularization thesis.²⁷ The first, questioning whether religion has really receded in our era at all, he finds to be futile since it is not difficult to show the reduction in both the societal influence of religion and in popular religious participation. A second objection questions whether there really was any past golden age of religion from which Western society has receded.²⁸ Although Taylor concedes that the case for earlier religious practice may well be overstated, the second objection is untenable once one appreciates the formerly integral nature of religion to all pre-modern Western societies.²⁹ In answering these objections Taylor finds common ground with Steve Bruce perhaps the most well-known current defender of the orthodox theory of secularization. Two statements from Bruce's writing are quoted by Taylor and both are cited here so that the nuance that Taylor wishes to bring to the debate can be illustrated. The first is a definition of religion formulated by Wallis and Bruce in a chapter outlining the orthodox model of secularization:

Religion for us consists of actions, beliefs, and institutions predicated upon the assumption of the existence of either supernatural entities with powers of agency, or impersonal powers or processes possessed of moral purpose, which have the capacity to set the conditions of, or to intervene in human affairs.³⁰

Taylor wants to take this definition a step further. Beyond people's beliefs and actions in relation to God, he focuses additionally on the *transformational* element of faith — that urge to act in ways that surpass what is required for reasonable mutuality.³¹ Whereas exclusive humanism is content with working for mutual human flourishing as a highest goal, Taylor believes that religion, and especially Christianity, involves a

²⁶ For Martin's initial concerns with the secularization project, see his chapter entitled *Towards Eliminating the Concept of Secularization* (pp. 169-82) in J. Gould, ed., *Penguin Survey of the Social Sciences* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965). His most recent book, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory* (2005) brings up to date his earlier watershed work, *A General Theory of Secularization* (1978).

²⁷ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 427.

²⁸ Starke argues strongly for this case in Rodney Stark, "Secularization, R.I.P.," *Sociology of Religion* 60, no. 3 (1999): 255-60.

²⁹ See especially Chapter One – "The Bulwarks of Belief," in Taylor, *Secular Age*, 25-89.

³⁰ Wallis and Bruce, "Secularization," 10-1. cited in Taylor, *Secular Age*, 429.

³¹ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 430.

transformation of the individual and of society. This involves the calling of adherents to share in God's love (agape) such that self-giving is motivated to move beyond simple fairness to a selfless service to other people. It is this aspect of religion that for Taylor is so polarized in Western Christianity. 'Transformational (agape) Christianity' finds itself at odds with post-Enlightenment 'mutual flourishing Christianity' — two differing perspectives (or 'tempers') that Taylor names the 'transformational' and the 'immanent'.³² Today, many Western Christians find themselves caught between these two extreme positions, not comfortable with either, but nonetheless defining themselves in relation to these poles. Although aware of the Jesus example of selflessness (i.e. they are not committed materialists in terms of the morality of mutual benefit) they are however wary of the costly demands of any transformational position perceived as being overly enthusiastic (even fanatical).³³

Having added the 'transformational' to Bruce's definition of religion, Taylor initially agrees with Bruce on the definition of secularization found in the introduction to the same work cited above:

Although it is possible to conceptualize it in other ways, secularization primarily refers to the beliefs of people. The core of what we mean when we talk of this society being more 'secular' than that is that the lives of fewer people in the former than in the latter are influenced by religious beliefs.³⁴

But Taylor now wants to describe the phenomenon in terms of a fall-off (reduction in influence in people's lives) of a 'transformation' perspective.³⁵ And even this is inadequate for the explanation of secularization he ultimately wants to suggest.

Taylor's Three-Storey Secularization Model

As outlined above, Taylor's three-fold depiction of secularization indicated that, for him, secularization consisted of: 1) separating out the roles of religion and state; 2) religious decline; and crucially, 3) reference to the conditions of belief today — *what it is to believe today*. To illustrate how his own project diverges from the mainstream theories of secularization, Taylor now proposes comparing the orthodox theory to a three-storey dwelling as depicted in Figure 5.2 (over page).³⁶

³² Ibid., 431.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Steve Bruce, ed., *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 6. cited in Taylor, *Secular Age*, 430.

³⁵ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 431.

³⁶ Ibid., 431-2.

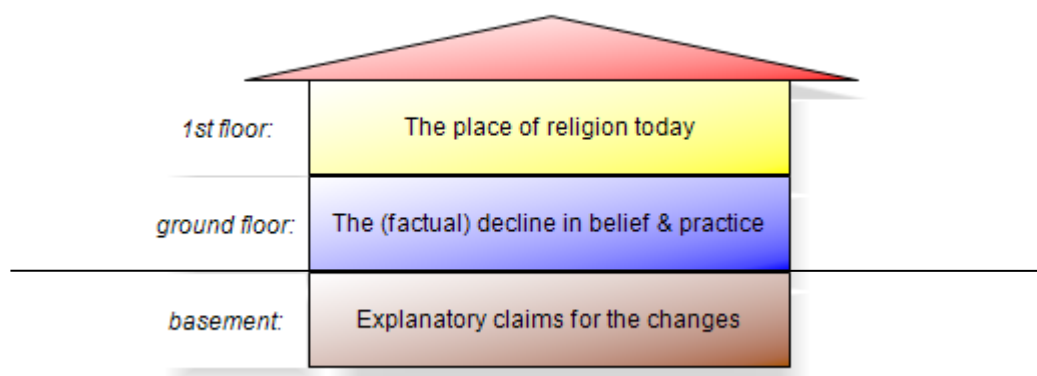


Figure 5.2: Taylor's Mainstream Secularization Thesis

The ground floor is the location of all factual claims relating to the decline of religion, both in terms of numbers and influence, and this is the level at which Taylor is in agreement with the orthodox view of secularization. Below ground in the basement of the model are sited the various attempts to explain why these changes have come about and it is here that the sociology of religion focuses with the expected diversity of opinion. The key, however, for Taylor is the upper storey, the domain of his third element of secularization — the place of religion and the conditions of belief today.

Much of the current confusion and disagreement about secularization, Taylor believes, is due to imprecision about which floor one has in mind. It is insufficient to claim the support of others (as Bruce does, claiming the backing of both Berger and Martin) for secularization theory based solely on their agreement at the ground floor level — i.e. that such decline has taken place.³⁷ There is much more to consider not only in terms of why this change has taken place (the basement), but also where this leaves religion today (the upper storey). These two storeys (basement and upper) are not at all disconnected — the grounds one attributes to religion's decline correlate closely with how one perceives the role of religion today.³⁸ For Bruce for example, the fragmentation of religious culture is causal of religious decline and, following on from this, growing indifference to religion among the populace will, he predicts, lead to religion's final demise.³⁹ For Taylor, however, the grounds for the decline are more complex than that and to him it is highly improbable that people's interest in the

³⁷ Ibid., 432.

³⁸ Taylor also introduces at this point the idea of 'unthought', a term borrowed from Foucault. With it he draws attention to the impossibility of total detachment from one's personal framework beliefs and values as a theorist. 'Unthought' is the real stumbling block of neutral social science since "determining just what has happened depends on a host of interpretive judgments, on issues such as the exact nature of religion, or the content of Christian faith, and these will be deeply coloured by our substantive beliefs." Ibid., 428.

³⁹ Bruce, *God is Dead*, 42, Steve Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World: from Cathedrals to Cults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 4. Both cited in Taylor, *Secular Age*, 434-5.

religious (the ‘demand for religion’) might just dwindle and disappear.⁴⁰ Instead what he perceives is that there is indeed decline in the forms of religion the West has traditionally known (especially Christianity) but something else is happening as well. The conditions of belief have changed but what is emerging is belief nonetheless. This third element, the place of religion (the conditions of belief) today, is the location of the interest of my own study. As outlined in Chapter Four, while there is less active Church participation for my study’s Gen Y sample, what is left is more than just a residual interest in their faith. If Taylor is correct religion is not declining so much as reconstituting — changing forms:

... the interesting story is not simply one of decline, but also of a new placement of the sacred or spiritual in relation to individual and social life. This new placement is now the occasion for recompositions of spiritual life in new forms, and for new ways of existing both in and out of relation to God.⁴¹

An Age of Authenticity

Nearly two decades before publishing *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor explored the modern Western preoccupation with personal self-fulfilment in his monograph, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (1991). There he argued strongly for the recognition of a firm middle ground between possible positions of total support or, alternatively, outright derision for the self-fulfilment perspective.⁴² Behind the apparent self-centredness of the perspective Taylor sensed the presence of a powerful moral ideal and it was to this that he wished to draw attention. Adopting the term ‘authenticity’ from Lionel Trilling’s earlier work, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1971), Taylor used it to describe what he felt was at heart an honest desire for the ‘higher’ or the ‘better’.⁴³ The tragedy he lamented was not so much that there was opposition to what was pejoratively labelled a self-indulgent, morally lax form of egoism, but that the voice of defence of this ‘authenticity’ was being lost in a ‘soft relativism’ that cloaked an underlying and laudable principle of mutual respect.⁴⁴ *The Ethics of Authenticity* was Taylor’s attempt to rehabilitate the higher motives that he was convinced underpinned the current fascination with self-betterment.

⁴⁰ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 435.

⁴¹ Ibid., 37.

⁴² Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991). Originally published (in Canada) as Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity* (Toronto: Anansi, 1991).

⁴³ Taylor, *Ethics*, 15-6.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 16-7.

Taylor places his positive assessment of the ethic of authenticity into the larger context of the process of secularization in a chapter in *A Secular Age* entitled, *The Age of Authenticity*.⁴⁵ The last half century, Taylor asserts, has seen an enormous societal shift in the Western world — the spread of what can be described as mass ‘expressive’ individualism.⁴⁶ In the decades following the 1960s a cultural revolution took place focusing attention on the individual’s self-fulfilment as the key goal or purpose in life. This personal search for fulfilment or authenticity is grounded in the individual’s sense of what is important and of value. The pervading ethos suggests that such values are private and ought not to be challenged. Decried by many social commentators as relativism and individualism run amok, there is no doubt that the inward focus of contemporary culture causes many today to lose sight of concerns that transcend them personally.⁴⁷ To a large degree such short-sightedness is fostered by the consumer revolution fuelled by a post-war affluence in the general population unknown to earlier generations. Within this a specific youth market has been identified and a receptive youth subculture nurtured for predominantly economic reasons.⁴⁸

But far from being an unreflective and solely economically driven impulse, the concern for being true to oneself is, for Taylor, a new cultural development with real and positive potential. The search for authenticity flows over into the religious thinking of the modern individual seeking an expressive outlet that is ‘right for them’. In Taylor’s words, “the religious life or practice that I become part of must not only be my choice, but it must speak to me, it must make sense in terms of my spiritual development as I understand this.”⁴⁹ For previous generations, it would have seemed absurd to leave one’s own Church to join an unfamiliar one. Today, however, younger generations find it equally absurd to consider adhering to a spirituality that does not ‘feel right’ or meet one’s own perceived needs.⁵⁰ This is especially true for those not raised from childhood within a faith tradition but, even for those who are, alternative options now abound and one of the most appealing, as we saw in the research presented in Chapter Two of this thesis, is to distance oneself altogether from institutional religion and even from spirituality.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 473-504.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 473.

⁴⁷ Taylor cites Bloom, Bell, Lasch and Lipovetsky as all lamenting the change. Taylor, *Ethics*, 13-4.

⁴⁸ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 474ff.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 486.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 489.

⁵¹ See *FAS*, 29-33.

Recognisable in this ‘personal search’ mentality is a religious application of John Stuart Mill’s ‘harm principle’, i.e. no one has the right to interfere with me for my own good, but only to prevent harm to others.⁵² Over the last century, the ‘harm principle’ has become embedded in contemporary Western culture and is now popularly accepted as an incontestable standard. Nowhere has this been more evident than in the area of sexual mores, an issue that Taylor identifies as being at the heart of the erosion of limits on individual happiness and fulfilment.⁵³ The sexual revolution begun in the 1960s was energised, according to Taylor, by the same drive to discover one’s own authentic identity; to claim recognition of sexuality and to rehabilitate bodily sensuality (“the overcoming of the divisions between mind and body, reason and feeling”).⁵⁴ With a changed moral landscape, new moral forms inevitably emerge and those who have been through or emerged after the turmoil must discern what among them is good or authentic.

A key underlying principle in all of this for Charles Taylor is that it is simply unhelpful to mount ‘root and branch’ attacks on the search for authenticity as if there is nothing of value to be found there.⁵⁵ Change has taken place and nothing can be done to return us to a previous era. What is required is an openness to the new; a courageous commitment to seek out the ways and forms in which the people of today wish to express their spirituality — to journey with people rather than to require them to conform to a single ‘tried-and-true’ path. With regard to this creative openness Taylor sees an unlikely meeting of minds between hard line secularism and Roman Catholic leaders lamenting the loss of a more uniform Catholicism. In his words:

What Vatican rule-makers and secularist ideologies unite in not being able to see, is that there are more ways of being Catholic Christian than either have yet imagined... As long as this monolithic image [of Catholicism as offering a single non-negotiable path] dominates the scene, the Christian message as vehicled by the Catholic Church will not be easy to hear in wide zones of the Age of Authenticity. But then these are not very hospitable to a narrow secularism either.⁵⁶

⁵² John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (New York: Longman, Roberts and Green, 1869). Cited in Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 484.

⁵³ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 485.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 502.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 481.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 504.

I agree with Taylor's conviction that there is something new and positive in the ethic of authenticity that so characterises this age. What we appear to be witnessing is less the simple laying aside (subtraction) of older, now redundant, religious notions but instead the multiplication of, in many cases, quite valid spiritual options. It is not surprising that this quiet storming-of-the-ramparts of traditional religion threatens many of those who are themselves still immersed within it. What remains to be seen however is exactly what this shift to a more pluralist mindset actually means for contemporary Western religion and spirituality. A satisfactory answer to this question will, in relation to this thesis, necessarily offer some explanation as to the findings of my own research, confirming, as it does, many of the trends found in the international research in related fields.

Faith Amid Secularity - *The New Zealand Study*

The young adults involved in the current NZ study demonstrated many of the features of the new spiritual landscape. Although largely unfamiliar with other religious traditions, and even somewhat unfamiliar with their own, they were relatively comfortable with their faith, having adapted their level of belief and participation to fit their own perceived need for religion at this point in the lives. They demonstrated no difficulty at all in claiming Catholic identity while remaining blissfully unaware of much Church teaching and self-understanding. Where this awareness was present, it was generally not considered extraordinary to dissent or ignore teaching that the individual felt was unhelpful or 'out-of-date'. Typifying the modern concern for the personal authentic search, most of the Pakeha young adult sample saw Catholicism as one path among many valid religious options.

But for the nineteen interviewees in my study there was an apparent reluctance to themselves go elsewhere and consider joining other religions or Christian denominations. For these Catholic-raised young adults, Catholicism was home, even in the instances where the young person held their Catholic faith at 'arm's length' from their everyday life. An intriguing juxtaposition existed for many of them between their pride in Catholic tradition on the one hand, and their dislike of many traditional elements on the other. Even as they proudly claimed their Catholic heritage (or at least part of it) they acknowledged the disdain that they and other young people often felt toward (for example) church music, boring services, and sexual moral teaching centring on abstinence. While they valued their Catholic identity, it was clear that the way that

the majority lived their faith was on their own terms — from participation to belief in certain tenets of Catholicism. Their religious and spiritual needs varied from active communal involvement and support through to (the more common) personal faith buoyed by the knowledge of being part of something bigger even when the connection was rather tenuous.

Seeking Dwellers

Robert Wuthnow's categories of religious 'dwellers' and spiritual 'seekers' have been used by commentators for the last decade to differentiate between those who participate in traditional forms of religion and those who discard such forms in favour of seeking (or developing) their own.⁵⁷ Taylor concurs, seeing these as the foundation for two types of 'religious sensibility' — the 'dweller', favouring an authority that restricts options but offers security, and the 'seeker', opting for a somewhat open-ended spiritual quest.⁵⁸ These need not of course be seen as polar opposites. However, as with the judgment made of the 'ethic of authenticity', vocal representatives of the 'dweller' camp tend to force the extreme view while the 'seeker's' voice is largely lost in their individual search for spiritual meaning. Taylor believes however that despite the often vehement dialectic of the extremes, it is the middle ground where much of today's spiritual / religious life is located. Applied to the NZ sample this assertion is borne out by the recurring tendency of the Catholic-raised young adult to claim their Catholicism even as they exercised a clear willingness to pick and choose their Catholic faith expression.

A Vicarious Relationship

Grace Davie introduced the phrase *believing without belonging* in 1990 as a possible description of Britain's religious future and it found immediate appeal, quickly spreading beyond the bounds of scholarship and into popular usage.⁵⁹ The concept was intended to capture a sense of the changing shape of faith rather than its fading altogether. *Believing without belonging* attracted strong criticism however from quantitative social scientists such as Voas and Crockett who felt the empirical evidence disproved it — people's 'belonging' (active participation in religion) was reducing but

⁵⁷ Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁵⁸ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 512.

⁵⁹ Grace Davie, "'Believing Without Belonging': Is This the Future of Religion in Britain?," *Social Compass* 4, no. 37 (1990), D. Voas and A. Crockett, "Religion in Britain: Neither Believing nor Belonging," *Sociology* 39, no. 1 (2005): 11-2.

so too, they asserted, was their ‘belief’ in terms of assenting to key credal statements.⁶⁰ Davie has since acknowledged these criticisms with regard to orthodox belief and recently conceded to Voas and Crockett’s call to allow the notion of *believing without belonging*, in their words, to “enter honourable retirement”.⁶¹ But Davie remains unconvinced that *all* belief can be shown to be fading and she cites recent European Values Studies data as indicating a strengthening of the looser and more heterodox elements of belief in places where the institutional capacities of the Churches are most diminished.⁶² Here one can detect resonance of Taylor’s dissatisfaction with Bruce’s theory that the religious impulse will eventually yield to widespread religious indifference.⁶³ What Davie holds to here, Charles Taylor would support.

In response to the criticism of *believing without belonging*, and also in light of French sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger’s work on memory and tradition, Davie has now developed a more refined concept relating to religious ‘vicariousness’.⁶⁴ *Vicarious religion* refers to “the notion of religion performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number, who (implicitly at least) not only understand, but, quite clearly, approve of what the minority is doing”.⁶⁵ Religion is perceived almost as a public utility and a clear shift is recognised among the general populace from universal religious obligation to religious consumption.⁶⁶ Consistent with consumer behaviour in

⁶⁰ Voas and Crockett, "Religion in Britain," 23. Others agree with Voas and Crockett’s assertions. Evidence is available to suggest that the longer one is absent from church involvement, the more key Christian beliefs weaken. i.e. lack of belonging leads eventually to a lack of believing. Mason, Singleton and Webber cite the work of André Charron in Montreal who mapped out stages of progressive unbelief as follows:

- i) abandonment of regular attendance at religious services;
- ii) alienation from the institutional church;
- iii) non-belonging to the church as a community of believers;
- iv) fading of Christian values in practice (where there is no real impact of belief on social commitment or individual morality);
- v) collapse of the credibility of Christian meaning for life (often rooted in difficulty with, or rejection of, some specific content of the faith);
- vi) withdrawal from belonging in faith to Jesus Christ (this being the point in the process of ‘distancing’ where one arrives at unbelief in the strict sense);
- vii) rejection of a personal God;
- viii) apathy at all religious questioning – religious indifference.

Bellamy et al found a similar pattern in their 2002 study of the decline of participation in Australian churches: “There is evidence that adherence to conventional Christian beliefs recedes with time away from church...” J. Bellamy et al., *Why People don't go to Church* (Adelaide: Openbook, 2004). Both pieces of research cited in Mason, Singleton and Webber, *Spirit of Generation Y*, 53-4.

⁶¹ Davie, *Sociology of Religion*, 140-57. Voas and Crockett, "Religion in Britain," 25.

⁶² Davie, *Sociology of Religion*, 140.

⁶³ Bruce, *God is Dead*, 42. Taylor, *Secular Age*, 435.

⁶⁴ Grace Davie, "Is Europe an Exceptional Case?," *The Hedgehog Review* Spring & Summer (2006): 24-7. Grace Davie, *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Davie, *Sociology of Religion*, 126-8 & 40-43. Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, English ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

⁶⁵ Davie, "Exceptional Case?," 24.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*: 27-9.

other arenas, religion is then availed of by the individual and the populace as and when necessary and a certain expectation is held that it will be available when called upon.

Taylor finds the notion of vicarious religion useful for further elaborating his own conviction that the relationship of people to traditional religion is shifting rather than ending. Davie is attempting to capture (in Taylor's words):

... the relationship of people to a church, from which they stand at a certain distance, but which they nevertheless in some sense cherish; which they want to be there, partly as a holder of ancestral memory, partly as a resource against some future need (e.g. their need for a rite of passage, especially a funeral); or as a source of comfort and orientation in the face of some collective disaster.⁶⁷

Now it can be well argued that it is with a sense of vicariousness that the young adults in the NZ study approach their Catholicism. From a 'hot' participating Catholic religious identity, the majority of the Pakeha young adults have undergone (or been socialised into) a shift (Taylor calls it a 'mutation') to a 'cold' religious identity — more ambivalent about their Catholic involvement and holding a "certain degree of dissidence from the Church's official morality (which these days will be strongest in the domain of sexual ethics)".⁶⁸

But the varying degree of vicariousness with which the young adults relate to their Church is not to be easily equated with a pending complete departure. The individualisation so inherent to the search for authenticity and so apparent in contemporary NZ society does not necessarily imply a break with traditional religion. Although the individual today feels a fundamental urge to pursue their own spiritual sense, the path they choose to take in exploring that sense is an altogether different matter.⁶⁹ For many, perhaps most, a collective component to that spirituality will remain central even though the 'mode' or 'form' of its expression will vary and be the individual's choice. It is not that in their search for authenticity the modern young person has become simplistically self-centred — it is just that they will reserve the right to choose how and where they themselves join others.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 522.

⁶⁸ Ibid. Taylor borrows McLuhan's categories of 'hot' and 'cold' media and applies them to forms of religion.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 516-8.

⁷⁰ "Individualisation does not mean ignoring others or following an ethic of pure self-interest. Young people can and do, live for others while thinking of themselves." Collins-Mayo citing the work of U. Beck and E Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization* (London: Sage, 2002). Sylvia Collins-Mayo and Pink Dandelion, eds., *Religion and Youth* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010), 4.

Postponing the Ideal

With the obligation factor removed, the choice of religious or spiritual expression ('religious consumption') is largely beyond coercion and is free to be addressed in whatever manner proves most appealing or helpful to the individual. Taylor points to the ongoing importance of the festive in people's lives, "moments of fusion, which wrench us out of the everyday, and put us in contact with something beyond ourselves".⁷¹ Rock concerts, World Youth Days and one-off assemblies of the sort that surround highly resonating events (e.g. Princess Diana's 1997 funeral) capture this desire for the irruption of the transcendent into our ordinary lives. The community of Taizé in France receiving its thousands of young visitors as religious searchers is another fine example. Perhaps more challenging would be to identify the smaller scale transcendent experiences that occur in a more common place manner in the course of the modern young person's life. Although my own study did not explore this area it would be a fruitful matter about which to pursue follow-up research.

The Pakeha young adults in this *Faith Amid Secularity* study showed every indication of carrying a (Catholic) religious identity defined by forms from which many of them now keep a good distance.⁷² As we have noted, they see themselves as being Catholic and yet they reserve the right to maintain an independence from regular involvement in things Catholic. Their position is, if not new, certainly one that has now become eminently acceptable in Western society and there is no gain to be made from its disparagement. Trying to make sense of this shift, a clue appears to be found in the tendency of the young to idealize a morally higher ethic to which they themselves aspire in principle but not in action. Related to the notion of vicariousness introduced above, the intention maybe to pursue the spiritual / moral ideal sometime in the future, while in the meantime, it is enough to deal well with one's busy life and to admire the achievement of the ideal in the lives of those who realise it today.⁷³ This sympathy was popularly expressed in 2005 in pop singer Robbie Williams' hit single 'Make Me Pure'. Its recurring anthem borrowed from Augustine, "Lord make me pure (chaste), but not yet," encapsulates the more extreme version of the vicarious attitude. 'I do want to live a moral, spiritual life,' they seem to be saying, 'but just not yet'. As Taylor notes, for most people it is more a sense that, with busy lives, the seeming complexity of focusing

⁷¹ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 516.

⁷² Ibid., 521.

⁷³ Ibid.

on spiritual and moral demands is better postponed since there is little incentive for it to be faced squarely in the present.⁷⁴

Critical here is the recognition that the Catholic young adults (and in fact everyone in this religion-at-a-distance category) still hold an attachment to a transformation perspective even as they knowingly choose not to act on it in their own lives. Although they may at times lose sight of it, they willingly acknowledge the lived ideal on occasion in the lives of others and at these times the perspective of transformation is brought sharply back into view.⁷⁵ Such success stories are not limited to the religious (e.g. Mother Theresa, Mary McKillop, Suzanne Aubert) but also include high profile examples outside of religion (e.g. Nelson Mandela, soldiers commemorated on ANZAC day, etc.). An inverse reaction may also contribute to a sharpening of the ideal when we consider the anger and disgust displayed toward those who dramatically fail to reach an expected high level of the lived ideal (e.g. Tiger Woods, abusive clergy). But the famous examples should not be permitted to cloud our recognition of the ideal as also to be witnessed in the lives of local persons, personally known individuals towards whom one has the greatest respect for the way in which they live out their lives.

Pakeha Young Adults in New Zealand

All of this goes some way toward making sense of a recurrent theme in the data — that young adults who say that they believe usually do not see any particular reason to actively do anything about it. These young people can and did vociferously affirm the importance of gathering as Eucharistic community even as they themselves chose almost never to participate. Some expressed the intention of doing so in the future but others were more hesitant, clearly doubtful as to why they would ever feel the need to ‘go to church’. Yet it is not the personal search for an authentic life with which they decline to engage but rather the forms of traditional religion on offer in the local churches.

So, in terms of ‘belief’, it would appear to be a case of nominalism winning out over secularism.⁷⁶ Taylor and Davie point to the consistent examples of people turning to the Churches in the event of funerals and national disasters demonstrating a religious identity still shaped by traditional forms from which people are normally somewhat

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Davie, *Believing without Belonging*, 69-70. Taylor, *Secular Age*, 520.

detached.⁷⁷ These, Taylor believes, illustrate the ongoing if now almost subliminal significance of the Christendom project of earlier periods in the West. It is not that a return to such a mission is imminent, recommended or even possible, but its memory remains strong even though latent.

The nature and conditions then of contemporary belief have changed. Anthropologist Abby Day asserts that any discussion around ‘belief’ today must necessarily hinge on what is meant by the term ‘belief’.⁷⁸ Her own conclusion is that the observed religious decline in Western society (which she equates to secularization) is less the product of modernization than “a relocation of belief from the transcendent and spatial to the mundane and temporal”.⁷⁹ I would argue however that although this may be an adequate, even obvious, statement with regard to those who admit to no religious belief at all, the reality for those who profess faith in God and at least nominal allegiance to Catholic Christianity is somewhat different. While my own interviewees did indeed demonstrate a consistent conviction of the existence of a personal God, present in the world around us (in the mundane and temporal), there was no indication that belief in the transcendent was therefore eclipsed. In a disenchanted society, the transcendent may no longer be a topic of daily reflection — the temporal and mundane preoccupy our attentions. But for the reasons given above, the occasional awareness of the presence of God or Spirit; the irruption into our lives of the transcendent, leads to an acknowledgement of, and belief in, its reality by the contemporary believer.

Conclusion

Many Catholics today accept and live with forms of contemporary Catholicism involving a certain distance, passivity and a less than self-assured sense of the necessity of Christianity to general moral order.⁸⁰ Those who favour these ‘cold’ forms are generally uneasy when confronted with the self-confident, even strident, assertions of their fellow Catholics who subscribe to more ‘hot’ Catholicism. It would be incorrect to assume however that their queasiness in the face of more assertive Catholics demonstrates a lack of commitment. My own research has shown that faith in God really does matter to those occupying the middle ground (with its ‘cold’ forms) even as its expression is more guarded, more privately held. The international studies as well as

⁷⁷ Davie, *Believing without Belonging*, 88-91. Taylor, *Secular Age*, 520-1.

⁷⁸ Abby Day, "Believing in Belonging," in *Religion and Youth*, ed. Sylvia Collins-Mayo and Pink Dandelion (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁸⁰ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 522.

my own also indicate that it is here that the great majority of Catholic Christians are to be found today.

In Chapter Five I have placed the findings of my own research project under a microscope fitted with a lens supplied by Charles Taylor and his understanding of secularization. Analysing the sample of Pakeha young adults from around NZ has found that they do indeed exhibit the tendencies and attitudes that Taylor identifies among the remnant (Catholic) Christians of modern Western society. With Taylor I am able to conclude that, on their own personal spiritual journey (search for authenticity), young adults are faced with an incredible array of options, paths they can choose to tread. Significant among these remains the traditional religious form of Catholicism but, with few qualms about disregarding religious authority today, the Catholic young adult feels free to adopt and adapt as s/he feels the need. The conditions of belief have indeed changed.

In keeping with my pastoral circle methodology, Chapter Six will now continue the analysis of the research findings from a theological rather than sociological perspective.

CHAPTER SIX: A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

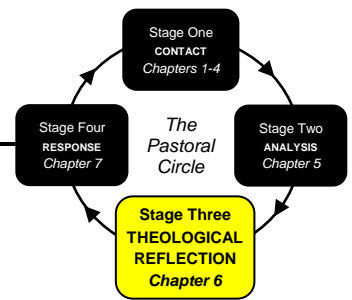


Figure 6.1: Faith Amid Secularity
– Chapter Six Methodology

Introduction

The first three chapters of this thesis examined the issues pertaining to the decline in participation of young adults in church life, surveyed the relevant literature and outlined the qualitative methodology that would be employed in this research (see Figure 6.1 above). Chapter Four consisted of a particular focus on the concrete, normative reality of youth culture and marked the entry point into the pastoral circle methodology which provides the study with an ongoing *modus operandi*. The first of four stages in the pastoral circle, this ‘contact’ stage consisted of field research and provided primary resource material upon which to base subsequent analysis and pastoral strategies. The second ‘analysis’ stage of the pastoral circle was then undertaken in Chapter Five. The original research findings were examined with particular reference to the recent writings of Charles Taylor and his key concepts of individualism and authenticity in relation to contemporary secularity.¹

The task in Chapter Six is to complete the ‘theological reflection’ stage (stage three) of the pastoral circle. In the process of drawing together the qualitative research questions, specialized theological terminology was largely avoided on the grounds that such language was most likely to be unfamiliar to the participants and to utilize it would risk confusion. Chapter Five’s analysis of the research findings was conducted in the light of sociological exploration into perceived secularization. By contrast, the application of the pastoral circle’s third stage in the current chapter is intentionally theological. Scripture and tradition (including credal belief) are brought to bear on the research findings. Stage three of the pastoral circle is, in effect, a stage of discernment utilising tools of theological analysis.²

¹ Taylor, *Ethics*. Taylor, *Secular Age*.

² “The moment of discerning the meaning of the situation in view of our shared values, our faith commitments, the teaching of our scriptures, the norms of our communities, the wisdom of our ancestors (such as that found in proverbs).” Wijsen, Henriot and Mejia, *Pastoral Cycle Revisited*, 229.

This Chapter will employ the Ecumenical (*Nicene*) Creed as a theological lens through which to further assess the beliefs of the Pakeha young adults. In sections one and two, the Creed will be applied as a tool to evaluate the participants' understanding of their faith. Elements of Catholic identity and worldview, on which I have already touched in previous chapters, will re-emerge as part of the evaluation. The third section of Chapter Six will briefly summarise the overall findings of the research and provide a foundation for the development of a pastoral strategy to engage young adult Pakeha Catholics.

Section 1: Assent and Response to the Faith of the Church

The Ecumenical (Nicene) Creed

Creeds were originally professions of faith closely connected with rites of Christian baptism.³ The *Apostles' Creed* has its origins in an early form dating from the end of the second century but was, however, largely unknown in the Eastern churches who instead took as their key text the *Ecumenical Creed* of the First Council of Constantinople (381).⁴ Popularly, though inaccurately, known today as the *Nicene Creed* this longer credal statement was developed and agreed upon with an eye to the clarification of orthodoxy and the refutation of error especially that of Arianism with its reduction in the significance of the Logos.⁵ Well before this however, Tertullian and Irenaeus were already in the second century speaking of a 'rule of faith' including summary statements of key Christian teachings. What began as *kerygma* (proclamation of faith) quickly became a *symbol of Christian faith*, both telling the Jesus story and becoming part of the liturgical life of the early church. As problems arose (especially Marcionism with its flesh-spirit dualism), and their ecclesial impact grew, the creed became the standard measure of orthodoxy — a rule of faith to safeguard traditional doctrine.⁶

These multiple functions of the creed continue today and the catechetical, liturgical and doctrinal roles played by the Nicene Creed in particular can be readily recognised in the

³ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Creed: What Christians Believe and Why it Matters* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 19.

⁴ Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins and Dermot A. Lane, eds., *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1990), 261.

⁵ Berard Marthaler, *The Creed: The Apostolic Faith in Contemporary Theology*, revised ed. (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1993), 10. This version of the creed would remain unchanged apart from the sixth century addition, and eleventh century papal confirmation, of the controversial *filioque* clause (the Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son), a change ignored by the Eastern churches.

⁶ Johnson, *The Creed*, 46-9.

life of the contemporary Church.⁷ Although subordinate to the authority of scripture the Creed provides an accepted and succinct summary of Christian belief that stands alone in terms of stature in Christian tradition. For Catholics this was illustrated in 1967 with Pope Paul VI's promulgation of his Apostolic Letter, *Credo of the People of God*, in which he paraphrased and contextually applied, in his words, "the creed of Nicea, the creed of the immortal tradition of the holy Church of God".⁸ A more recent demonstration of the Creed's ongoing significance can be seen in the content structure of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994), the first part of which is a substantial explanation of the faith of the Church based on a clause by clause exploration of the Creed.

It is important to acknowledge that all creeds, without exception, are shaped by the particular context in which they are composed. Amid the range of personal and collective creeds that have been formulated, the Ecumenical (Nicene) Creed has an essential value and is thus accorded a privileged place in the Christian tradition.⁹ Kelly describes it as "a classic articulation of faith in the history of Christian self-expression," while for Marthaler it is a timeless summary that "at a critical moment in history reaffirmed the apostolic teaching regarding the God who is one and three, who is at once transcendent and incarnate".¹⁰

In seeking to make some assessment of the Catholicity of a sample of Pakeha young adults in contemporary NZ, the Creed will here be employed as a lens through which the research data will be examined to ascertain the extent to which the young participants can be seen to hold to the Apostolic teaching of the Creed i.e. the faith of the Church. Only broad strokes are envisaged and, by utilising the techniques of grounded theory data analysis (outlined in my third chapter), the interview data here can be legitimately explored for the specific purpose of evaluating responses.¹¹ Transference to a broader population (generalisation) is not the aim of this research but rather the

⁷ Catechetically – as an integral part of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA); Liturgically – as a key element of the celebration of Eucharist; Doctrinally – as evidenced in its foundational use throughout the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The *Ecumenical (Nicene) Creed* will from here on be referred to simply as the 'Creed'.

⁸ Pope Paul VI, *Holemi Hac Liturgia*, n. 3

⁹ Marthaler, *The Creed*, 364-80.

¹⁰ Tony Kelly, *The Creed by Heart: Re-learning the Nicene Creed* (Melbourne: Harper Collins, 1996), 24. Marthaler, *The Creed*, 372.

¹¹ See pp. FAS, 63-4.

intention is to describe in general terms, though as accurately as possible and without arbitrary judgment, the Catholic belief of the nineteen young adult participants.¹²

One focus will be the extent to which the young adults are accepting or rejecting the *fide quae creditur* (the content of the Church's beliefs) as represented by the key tenets of the Creed. But more than this, evidence will be sought for a Catholic (Christian) response — *fide qua creditur* — a response that goes beyond mere assent to a code of belief; i.e. evidence of the impact that faith has in the young adult's perception of everyday life.¹³ As these issues are explored other critical questions will be kept in mind to reduce the risk of 'reading in' meaning that is simply not justified. These will include:

- i. Is the participant's meaning being accurately understood?
- ii. Is there evidence that s/he understands the import of particular subjects?
- iii. Is his or her response well considered or does it seem to be more a 'safe' response in line with what s/he feels is expected?¹⁴

It is intended that this method of assessing the Catholic faith of the nineteen young adults will provide further insight as to how they understand their own faith and what impact it makes upon their lives.

In submitting the interview transcripts to the focussed light of the Creed, its traditionally accepted subdivision into three articles of faith will be adopted. Although there have been a number of other numerical divisions over the centuries (especially for the Apostle's Creed), it is the Trinitarian pattern that is widely and consistently accepted as being the most appropriate (i.e. facilitating understanding) in pedagogical function.¹⁵ Most notably, the three-fold division is adopted by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in its use of the Creed as a summary of baptismal faith in three parts — God's gift to humanity as the Author of all that is good (Father), as Redeemer (Son) and as Sanctifier (Holy Spirit). The latter pneumatological article further consists of two parts;

¹² Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 46.

¹³ It is of course entirely possible that some young adults may be found to exhibit such a response while *not* assenting to certain Catholic beliefs. This possibility will be explored in some detail in the following section - *To 'Believe In...'*.

¹⁴ The interrogation of the research data in this fashion is common in the research literature. The *Young Catholics at the New Millennium* study utilised qualitative life history data collection methods to shed light on more general research questions (e.g. 'In what ways does late modernity impact upon the religious and moral consciousness and outlook of those young people who have experienced at least some form of Catholic socialization?'). Fulton et al., *Young Catholics*, 20-5. Research involving more quantitative approaches, tends to ask direct questions on 'belief' before drawing more general conclusions. See for example Hoge et al., *Young Adult Catholics*. Mason, Singleton and Webber, *Spirit of Generation Y*.

¹⁵ Marthaler, *The Creed*, 11.

the first affirming the divine nature of the Spirit and the second acknowledging the Spirit's sanctifying role in the life of the Church. These three major articles will form the basis of Section Two of this chapter. Firstly, however, clarification is needed as to the significance of the key statement that begins each article i.e. 'I/We believe in...'.¹⁶

To 'Believe In...'

A natural movement from the individual/personal to the collective/communal can be seen in the shift from the 'I believe...' of baptism (*Apostle's Creed*) to the 'we believe...' of the Eucharistic community (*Nicene Creed*).¹⁶ In fact both are continually affirmed in any authentic public proclamation of the latter since, if such communal profession is sincere, it must necessarily have been preceded by the individual's heartfelt declaration, 'My Lord and my God, I believe in *You*'.¹⁷ This personal response (the *fides qua creditur*) is what Christians understand as the 'act of faith' — a response to God's call revealed and recognised in the person of Jesus Christ. The act of faith speaks of a new and transformed perspective, a deep and free commitment to living out the Gospel in everyday life.¹⁸

It is in reference to this deeper level of response that one recognises the inadequacy of the unqualified term 'belief' to capture today what was originally intended by its use in the formulation of the Creed. Drawing on the etymological studies of William Cantwell Smith, Marthaler shows how the meaning of 'belief' gradually slipped until, from the end of the Middle Ages, its original intent was better captured by the word 'faith'.¹⁹ A modern understanding of 'faith', having to do with complete trust, confidence and willingness to follow whatever the cost, continues to be closer to what was originally meant by 'belief'. Even so, the intent of the Creed is in fact not lost in its current wording when it is recognised that what is proclaimed is not simply 'belief', but 'belief *in*', a phrase much closer in our contemporary lexicon to the concept of faith.²⁰

Simple 'belief' implies relatively straightforward assent to a given proposition and its meaning often reflects a minimal level of acceptance as is illustrated in the way the

¹⁶ Ibid., 20-1.

¹⁷ Henri de Lubac, *The Christian Faith: An Essay on the Structure of the Apostles' Creed* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 319. This response does not necessitate a full understanding of the theological detail of the Creed but rather turns on the individual having at some point been, as Kelly puts it, "immersed in the living experience of faith". Kelly, *Creed by Heart*, 18. He earlier notes that, "The authentic rule of faith must have a deeper source. If it is not from the heart, with the full play of faith's experience and meaning, even the most sacred articulations of the faith congeal into something odd and external, and actually block the character of faith as a radically personal act." p. 14.

¹⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994). n. 160.

¹⁹ Marthaler, *The Creed*, 19-20.

²⁰ Kelly, *Creed by Heart*, 35.

supposedly reassuring assertion, “I believe you,” frequently carries with it an uncertainty — an inherent doubt as to the degree of the belief. But to ‘believe *in*’ (someone) is to move into a personal relationship at a quite different level — a relational commitment that inevitably encompasses significant response.²¹ Christians know this as discipleship and it is well exemplified in the New Testament writings of St Paul. Consider for example the following excerpt from his letter to the Church in Galatia:

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal 2:19-20)

‘Believing in’, as alluded to above, is generally reserved for a *person* — it is belief founded on an interpersonal relationship. Although we may say that we “have faith in an institution” or perhaps “believe in a cause”, strictly speaking, it is normally a *person* in whom we believe and have faith.²² St Augustine distinguished between belief on (or by) God’s authority (*credere Deo*), belief that God exists (*credere Deum [esse]*) and belief in God per se (*credere in Deum*), and he further asserted that only the latter equates to true faith. The first two forms are in fact contained within the third and, as St Thomas later affirmed, all three together constitute the single act of faith.²³

This deeper understanding of faith (‘believing in’) is more than a belief that can simply be appended to a busy life as one more commitment among many others. There is nothing superficial about faith as authentic response. It is not a niche of religious activity in an already full and well-principled life. ‘Belief in’ faith is more like a method; an approach or entire perspective that affects all other aspects of the life of the believer.²⁴ Faith understood at this level aligns with what Taylor calls the ‘transformation perspective’ — the *agape* (self-sacrificing love) commitment that goes beyond allegiance to mutual human flourishing (the *immanent*). Such transformation is characteristic of authentic Christianity and, as we saw in the preceding chapter, it is this which Taylor claims is in decline in the modern secular age.²⁵

²¹ For Kelly – “enabling the believer to ‘indwell’ the divine reality with a kind of inside knowledge of God”. Ibid. Marthaler also notes that this response is necessarily both individual and corporate. Marthaler, *The Creed*, 21.

²² Ibid., 24.

²³ See Aquinas, T. “*The Existence of God*,” in the *Summa Theologiae*, Part I, Question 2. Both references cited in Marthaler, *The Creed*, 24.

²⁴ Ibid., 26-7.

²⁵ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 430-7. This transformation equates to the repentance (*metanoia* in Greek) Jesus speaks of in Mark 1:15 – “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; **repent**, and believe in the good news.”

As noted earlier, Taylor believes that many contemporary Western Catholics locate themselves between the poles of transformation and immanence because they cannot completely adopt a position at either extreme.²⁶ The materialism that accompanies the latter is unacceptable but neither are they willing to accept the strong and costly claims of the transformational view.²⁷ Even though the field is usually defined by the two positions of transformation or immanence (ignoring the middle position or unfairly assimilating it to the other side), the majority of contemporary Catholics avoid the extremes and live out their faith somewhere in between.

It would be a mistake then to align ‘belief in’ exclusively with the transformation perspective. Clearly, for many Catholics, their relational commitment to God and Jesus Christ is both personal and significant — it is ‘belief in’; it is authentic faith. Recalling the model of Catholic religious worldview presented in Chapter Four (with its three levels of i. nominal affiliation, ii. conscious engagement, and iii. learned values and culture), such ‘belief in’ is to be found to varying degrees in Catholics at the latter two levels.²⁸ In this chapter evidence will be sought of ‘belief in’ on the part of those who, for whatever reason, do not choose to express their Catholicity through regular engagement with the local Catholic faith community. If it can be established that such faith is evident in young adults who make this choice, then the question must be asked as to why the normal means of faith expression for the Catholic community no longer appeal to them.

As the interview data is now re-engaged, two additional questions will help tighten the focus on the original key research questions relating to the extent of Catholic worldview and the nature and strength of Catholic identity. The theological questions are:

1. What evidence is there of understanding and assent to credal tenets (‘belief that’ or *fides quae*)?
2. What evidence is there of personal and relational faith response (‘belief in’ or *fides qua*)?

²⁶ See FAS, 96-7.

²⁷ Taylor, 431.

²⁸ See FAS, 84.

Section 2: *Faith Amid Secularity* and Credal Belief

“I Believe in One God”

The problem of ‘God-talk’ emerges with the very first words of the Creed i.e. the issue of what can and cannot be said when attempting to describe or name the transcendent. As essential as they may be, no single image of God is of itself an adequate representation of whom we wish to speak — God is always more than any human word or concept can capture.²⁹ But this fact does not negate the value that an effective image of God holds for human beings in enabling us to gain a glimpse of an aspect of who God is (for us). As long as we are conscious of the partial nature of all such images and, in so far as we remain open to their reinterpretation and critique, then the use of a range of images is a practical, healthy and necessary part of religious belief.³⁰

The first article of the Creed places before us both the dilemma of the human need to utilise images when referring to God. The transcendent is at once ‘God’, ‘Father’, ‘almighty’, and ‘creator’, images illustrating the indispensable tension that must necessarily accompany our limited efforts at depicting that which is by nature beyond us. Juxtaposed in this article are the mystery of a transcendent ‘God’, the familiarity of a relational ‘Father’ and the awe-ful respect demanded by an omnipotent ‘almighty’. In the creative act the three different images are seen to come together — the all-powerful and uncreated other who loved creation and humankind into existence. In claiming to believe in this God, the Christian acknowledges all of this including the gracious promise of a personal relationship with the transcendent.

The Research Findings – Article One: The sense of mystery that surrounds the human attempt to grasp God’s transcendence was certainly evident among the young adult participants in my research.³¹ As reported in Chapter Four, a sense of the incomprehensible sat comfortably with them and some voiced the opinion that the mystery of God, the unknown element, was in fact at the heart of Catholic faith. The

²⁹ Catechism of the Catholic Church. n. 42.

³⁰ The recognition and use of images for God has been constant in the Christian tradition from the very beginning. Key examples include:

i. the Genesis story of humankind’s creation in God’s image (Gen 1:26);

ii. St Augustine’s in depth exploration of the image of God as part of his complex work *De Trinitate* (On the Trinity). See Saint Augustine, *Man’s Case History: The Image Perfected*, Book XIV of The Trinity, (New York: New City Press, 1991), 370-93.

iii. St Thomas’ thorough treatment. See: “How God is Known By Us,” *Summa Theologiae*, Part I, Question 12.

For Christians the key image of God is the person of Jesus Christ, the subject of more than half of the text of the Creed. This Christocentric second article will be the focus of the next subsection.

³¹ See *FAS*, 78-79.

following series of young adult comments on the place of mystery in Catholic faith serves to illustrate the remarkably similar perspectives that they shared as a group:

I think that's almost the most important part of it really? Like, I mean if you're... if you are a practising Catholic and you are because you want to then you would definitely have a belief in the abstract and things that you cannot see. I just don't see how you could be without it. So I think a strong belief in the mystery is very necessary and has a crucial place behind it. Trevor³²

And that's probably a part of why people are Catholic cos they don't know... you know that intrigue. Donald³³

There is a huge amount of unknown and people are just hoping that they'll find out what that is. Hannah³⁴

I suppose a lot of people... when they say, "do you believe in God?" and I say, "yes," and then they, like, get you to explain, but I can't really explain it. I just know that there is a God and, yeah, how do you... you can't see him, he's not in front of you but, so how do you know he's there? So that's a bit of a mystery to me I guess. Katie³⁵

...who is to say what God is? I've sort of — God is such a mystery that I've sort of made up my own God in a way you know, and I suppose I'm not really very religious at all because I don't like keep to going to church and stuff. Dave³⁶

These young adults, so at home with the unknown to which they were drawn, were quite comfortable expressing their belief in God in a wide range of different images. The word association exercise exploring Catholic imagination (described in Chapter Four) produced forty-two different descriptors many of which amounted to personal images of God.³⁷ 'Father' featured along with other images and associations that indicated the relational nature of the young adults' belief in God (e.g. 'loving', 'forgiving', 'acceptor', 'helper', 'friend'...). As a keenly involved core Catholic, Sarah felt this relationship very strongly:

There's that awesome feeling that you just have to like surrender yourself to God and just trust in him, yeah, I think everyone has to have that and that's what faith kind of is. Sarah³⁸

³² Male, urban, disengaged or former Catholic aged 18-22 yrs.

³³ Male, rural, core Catholic aged 23-28 yrs.

³⁴ Female, provincial, disengaged or former Catholic aged 18-22 yrs.

³⁵ Female, urban, disengaged or former Catholic aged 23-28 yrs.

³⁶ Male, urban, disengaged or former Catholic aged 18-22 yrs.

³⁷ See FAS, 76.

³⁸ Female, urban, core Catholic aged 18-22 yrs.

Also prominent among the associations made were equivalents to the other credal images (e.g. ‘omnipresent’, ‘creator’, ‘all-powerful’, ‘king’, ‘everywhere’...). God as creator was also affirmed in the science vs. religion tension discussed in earlier chapters.³⁹ The very fact that so many of the participants refused to discard a fairly literal notion of creation, even when they lacked the knowledge to resolve the seeming contradiction posed by a scientifically backed theory of evolution, serves to illustrate a profound commitment to the credal image of the creator God.⁴⁰

Greeley’s *Grace Scale* of relational images of God further confirmed the young adult’s willingness to engage with a range of different metaphors even some with which they were less familiar. This was evident in reactions to being presented with the idea of God as ‘lover’ and ‘spouse’. Despite initial hesitation, God as ‘lover’, for example, was strongly identified with, in contrast to God as the more familiar divine ‘judge’. God’s presence in creation was strongly affirmed by almost all participants, a typical response included:

Definitely in terms of nature, like I’m a big nature lover so, you know, the morning sky, the trees... all that stuff. And I think too just in people like when you see goodness in a person, you think, you know, ‘there’s God somewhere there.’ And too in circumstances when things... sort of miraculous things, seemingly miraculous things that happen or... you know. The way that something... like a coincidence - might be a great coincidence but you think, ‘maybe there’s something more there?’
Ana⁴¹

- Review – Article One: There is ample evidence in the research of assent to the key tenets of the opening article of the Creed including belief in the credal attributes of God (Father, almighty, etc.). Beyond a willing affirmation of the transcendent nature of God, nine of the young adults also demonstrated a strong sense of relationship centring on the presence of God in their own lives, the lives of others and in the world around them. This included all of the core Catholic young adults and two of the intermediates. For the remaining intermediates and all of the disengaged young adults the sense of relationship with a loving God was more uncertain and in at least two cases was limited to what might be described as a distant connection with a transcendent God.

³⁹ See FAS, 77 & 82-3.

⁴⁰ It should be noted however that most of the young adults appear to have never really evaluated the science vs. bible paradox. Whether this is due to apathy on their part or the recommendation of other more ‘senior’ Catholics (parents, teachers, priests, etc.) that it is unnecessary or too difficult to do so, remains uncertain.

⁴¹ Female, provincial, core Catholic aged 23-28 yrs.

“I Believe in One Lord Jesus Christ”

Immediately obvious in both second and third articles is the giving over of a substantial part of the Creed to extended explanation of the relationship between the Father, Son and Spirit. It is this concern with theological precision in seeking to further define the Trinitarian relationship that led C. H. Turner to say of the Creed (in relation to its antecedents), “the old creeds were creeds for catechumens, the new creed was a creed for bishops”.⁴² This observation is particularly pertinent to the current study dealing with present-day young adult Catholics because the credal understanding that can be expected of them must surely align more with that of catechumens than that of bishops, charged as they are with preaching and teaching as key ecclesial roles.⁴³ Moreover, since my research did not explicitly attempt any systematic testing of credal consent among the young adult participants, for reasons outlined, evidence of belief must be sought amid their interview responses to questions exploring Catholic elements of the ecclesial, the sacramental, the theological and the communal.

A summary of the second article is called for in terms that can be understood by the contemporary Catholic person professing belief in this one Lord Jesus Christ. Essentially, the second article proclaims that:

Jesus Christ is at once God and Son of God. For us he became like us, human, born of a woman, Mary, through the work of the Spirit. Suffering and dying out of love for humanity, he rose again to life. He is now with the Father but will return and his kingdom will never end.

Rather than testing for comprehension of the theologically demanding detail of the credal tenets, it is evidence of assent to the above foundational credal notions that is now sought in the research transcripts. Additionally, the notion of relational ‘belief in’ is pronounced in the second article which focuses on the person of Jesus Christ; God become human like us. Belief in Jesus Christ is fundamentally about a relationship with him and a subsequent desire to follow him, to live as his disciple.⁴⁴ It is evidence that the young adults understand and attempt to live such a relationship themselves that is now sought in the research data.

⁴² Quoted in Marthaler, *The Creed*, 83-4. Marthaler also notes that the clauses dealing with the Trinitarian relationship are in fact the most obvious difference between the Nicene and Apostles’ Creeds.

⁴³ Catechism of the Catholic Church. nn. 888-892.

⁴⁴ Cf. the call of the first disciples, Mk 1:16-20.

The Research Findings – Article Two: In my research the strongest source of evidence pertaining to the young adults’ belief about Jesus is again to be found in the word association exercise related to sacramental imagination. The name ‘Jesus’ produced forty-three different associations covering an enormous range of ideas and, between them, making reference to almost all of the key credal notions.⁴⁵ The extent of the coverage that was achieved across the nineteen young adults was in fact quite impressive when it is noted that each participant was asked for just three words or phrases in response to the name ‘Jesus’.

The spread of terms and phrases offered may be divided into three overlapping categories as follows:

1. Terms / phrases relating to doctrinal belief e.g. ‘Saviour’, ‘God’, ‘Holy Spirit’, ‘Mary’, ‘resurrection’, ‘Christ’;
2. Terms / phrases relating to a popular conception of Jesus e.g., ‘Joseph’, ‘Mary’, ‘beard’, ‘Christmas’, ‘carpenter’, ‘magic’, ‘role model’;
3. Terms / phrases with a specifically personal relational meaning e.g. ‘friend’, ‘caring’, ‘companionship’, ‘lover’, ‘loving’, ‘awesome’, ‘role model’.

The first category can be seen to align with the doctrinal tenets of the Creed while the second is informed by a popular cultural understanding of Jesus.⁴⁶ The third consists of terms that are only likely to be used by someone who either is, or has been, in what I am describing as a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. When these categories were cross-referenced with the three categories of Catholic involvement (core, intermediate, disengaged) an interesting trend emerged. In this sample of nineteen young adults, personal relational terms were far more common among the core Catholics than the intermediates and they were not used at all by the disengaged or former Catholics. Alongside their relational associations, the core Catholics demonstrated their familiarity with the Creed by offering a predominance of doctrinal associations while, for them, descriptors from popular culture did not feature. For the latter (disengaged) group, popular cultural associations predominated whereas the intermediate Catholics favoured the doctrinal and popular categories equally. While it is important not to read into this pattern more than it can in fact support, the results do suggest that not only assent to

⁴⁵ See *FAS*, 76.

⁴⁶ Under these definitions, ‘Mary’ (for example) fits in both of the first two categories and ‘role model’ fits in the second and third. The word association for ‘Mary’ in her own right produced far more popular cultural interpretations than terms that might be categorised as doctrinal. See the description in subsequent paragraphs.

credal tenets but also relational faith ('belief in') weakens with weakening connection to the local faith community.

Also of note in the word association exercise, but this time in relation to the name 'Mary', thirteen of the nineteen participants immediately offered the Marian relationship with Jesus i.e. 'mother' or 'mother of Jesus'. Only two proffered 'virgin' as an association and, interestingly, neither were core Catholics. A total of thirty associative terms and phrases were suggested, most, as noted in Chapter Four, relating to the popular 'caring mother' image of Mary.⁴⁷

Two separate questions asked the young adults to comment on the importance of Eucharist for them personally and for the Christian community as a whole. Almost unanimous agreement resulted in the high value placed on Eucharist but only two participants for each question spontaneously made reference to Jesus Christ suggesting that, for most, the connection between Jesus and Eucharist is less than immediately obvious.

Research findings with regard to perceptions of sin and salvation also provide insight as to the young adults' belief in the Creed's second article. As discussed in Chapter Four, almost all agreed on the importance of a concept of sin but those with less current connection to Church tended to align it with the breaking of rules, especially the Ten Commandments. The more involved Catholics, on the other hand, seemed to view it in more relational terms (e.g. separation from God) suggesting again a relationship-focussed faith. The invitation to comment on what 'salvation' meant to them elicited a range of responses that in general were more characterised by positivity (i.e. an optimistic outlook on life) than any expected notions of 'being saved from sin and hell'. Although the theology of atonement was evident (most of the core Catholics made reference to Jesus' death for our sins) the overall sense was that salvation had to do with forgiveness and 'keeping us on track' in life viewed optimistically. The responses gave the impression that, in general, these young adults struggled with a concept of needing to 'be saved' from something. 'Salvation' was apparently not a familiar notion and certainly not one upon which most had reflected. One might conclude that the optimism characteristic of *Moral Therapeutic Deism* has left little room for a soteriology that may incorporate a sense of a judgmental, vengeful God.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ See FAS, 76.

⁴⁸ Cf. Ibid., 34, 73-4 & 87.

- Review – Article Two: Once again, there is evidence here of assent to the doctrinal tenets of the second article and there was nothing in the participants' responses that would suggest dissent from credal belief. But there appears less evidence of personal and relational faith associated with the person of Jesus Christ. The difference between those with active Catholic involvement and those more on the periphery was this time more pronounced. The more actively involved in an ecclesial community the more likely a young person related personally to Jesus Christ viewing sin as damaging to that relationship. Interestingly, they were also more likely to describe salvation in terms of atonement even though this clearly did not sit easily with them. It may be that those who maintain their connection with Church in so doing foster a more committed personal relationship with the Jesus Christ. Alternatively, it could be that those who feel such a relationship choose to express it by continued involvement in Sunday Mass and other Church activity. In all likelihood a mixture of the two scenarios is at work.

“I Believe in the Holy Spirit”

The very name of the third person of the Trinity has its origins in metaphor.⁴⁹ *Spirit* comes from the Greek *pneuma*, itself a translation of the Semitic *ruah*, referring to real but invisible forces. Wind or breath are common translations indicating that *spirit* is dynamic — a life force, energising and invigorating, sometimes gentle and at others, tempestuous.⁵⁰ From the very beginning of Christianity, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, has been acknowledged as a divine reality. Paul's assertion that “no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3) clarifies the integral nature of the work of the Spirit with that of the Trinity. By the fourth century, however, with a significant movement of Christians (the *Pneumatomachoi*) denying the divinity of the Spirit, the Church was forced to address quite specifically the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Godhead; between Spirit and Father and Spirit and Son.⁵¹ What was finally agreed became the third article of the Nicene Creed, a succinct yet thorough rendering that confirms beyond doubt Christianity's conviction of the divinity of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is ‘Lord’ and ‘giver of life’ and is to be worshipped equally with the Father and Son.

⁴⁹ Yves Congar suggests, ‘breath’, ‘air’, ‘wind’ or ‘soul’. See Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, Three-Volume Work in One Volume ed. (New York: Crossroad Herder, 1997), Vol I, 3.

⁵⁰ For more on the Spirit as ‘breath of life’ see Dennis Edwards, *Breath of Life: A Theology of the Creator Spirit* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2004).

⁵¹ Johnson, *The Creed*, 34. Kelly, *Creed by Heart*, 2-6. Marthaler, *The Creed*, 242-6.

Crucially linked to the Spirit-focussed clauses are the final two sentences of the Creed dealing with the Church, sacramental theology, resurrection and eternal life. The connection between the Spirit and the Church (and its belief) has a long history. Yves Congar reminds us that “however far we go back in the sequence of confessions of faith or creeds, we find the article on the Church linked to that on the Holy Spirit”.⁵² For St Augustine, the Church was the Spirit’s temple, and for St Paul, the Spirit was the giver of, and unifying agent in, all Christian charisms expressed in the ongoing life of the Church.⁵³

Having established that credal ‘belief in’ necessarily implies personal relationship, it can be seen that professed belief in the final clauses of the Creed involves, in an inseparable manner, relationship with the Spirit who animates and is always present in the Church. To believe in the unity, holiness, universality, and apostolic nature of the Church, in one baptism, in resurrection and in eternal life is to believe in the Spirit at work in the Church today. But these things are not simple notions whose meaning is obvious on first reading.⁵⁴ The challenge in evaluating the evidence is to discover the extent of personal understanding, of assent, and of relational ‘belief in’ the various truths captured in the Creed’s third article.

The Research Findings – Article Three: Although the word ‘spirit’ was not used in the interview questions, it was mentioned sixteen times in the young adult responses, fourteen of these explicitly referring to the Holy Spirit. These fourteen examples, however, came from just four young adults. Clearly, for them, the Spirit was a reality with which they were familiar. The context of its use included: description of God’s presence in the world; word association with ‘God’ and ‘Jesus’; and a causal understanding of the link between God and the sacraments. Notably, of the four participants in question, three (responsible for twelve of the sixteen citations) had significant experience with the charismatic movement in either Catholic or Protestant settings.⁵⁵

In a one hour interview exploration of a wide range of faith-related topics, fifteen of the Catholic young adults made no reference whatsoever to the person or role of the Holy

⁵² Congar, *I Believe*, Vol II, p. 5.

⁵³ St Augustine reference cited in Ibid. St Paul reference - see 1 Cor 12:4-11.

⁵⁴ Space does not allow their extensive treatment here but it can be accepted that the theological significance of each of these technically precise terms is not well grasped among the contemporary Catholic population in general and the nineteen young adults in this study in particular.

⁵⁵ One of those from the latter felt that, from her experience, the Spirit was more present in Protestant churches.

Spirit. This is striking in that it suggests that although they may believe in the Trinitarian conception of God the Holy Spirit, it is clearly not a key notion that faith-talk triggered as a matter of familiarity.

Turning to profession of ‘belief in’ the four ‘marks’ or ‘notes’ of the Church (*one, holy, catholic and apostolic*) the context remains the Spirit’s ongoing presence. To ‘believe in *one* Church’ is to acknowledge both a sense of ecclesial uniqueness and an awareness of unity amid diversity.⁵⁶ The *catholicity* or universality of the Church is bound up with this oneness. It implies both wholeness and unity such that the Apostles’ Creed can leave out the Church as *one* taking it as read in the profession of belief in the ‘holy catholic Church’. Throughout the research data, belief by the young adults in the oneness and catholicity of the Church was evident. As noted earlier, five participants explicitly cited fundamental credal belief (in various terms) as among the most stable of elements in the Church. Underlying these more explicit examples was a more implicit sense of Catholic unity in diversity — a personal awareness of belonging to a united tradition albeit one that was sometimes expressed differently both between and within nations and cultures.

The holiness *of* and *in* the Church was taken for granted by the young adult participants even in the face of the well-publicised difficulties and accusations of shortcomings faced by Church leaders e.g. the clerical abuse scandals. As reported in Chapter Four, word associations relating to Church leadership and authority were overwhelmingly positive and the high value placed on sacraments by the participants also indicated their sense of holiness.⁵⁷ Though they might question and even disagree with some aspects of Church teaching, there was nothing in the interview data to suggest that these young adults had any doubt that the call to holiness was realised within the Church.

This observation strikes an interesting contrast with the earlier discussed notion of the young adults’ tendency to postpone the ideal in their own lives. The sacred reality of their Church may be very much part of their Catholic identity but, on a more personal level, holiness is something which is more likely to be intended by them as a long term goal rather than something to which they themselves currently lay claim. Such a perspective can be seen in the way in which so many of the young adults could hold to the importance of Eucharist for Catholics while simultaneously admitting their own

⁵⁶ Johnson, *The Creed*, 262-3. Marthaler further asserts that the emphasis is on the latter – unity in diversity. See Marthaler, *The Creed*, 294.

⁵⁷ See *FAS*, 72-3 & 75-6.

current lack of participation. The seeming contradiction of this situation was in fact recognised by most of them even as they admitted that they felt no inclination to address it in the immediate future. Among the demands on their time, participation in Sunday Eucharist simply did not rate that highly.

Apostolicity is in essence about mission and witness.⁵⁸ With the witness of the apostles themselves as a foundation, Christians who profess belief in a Church that is apostolic are in effect claiming relationship with a missionary Church — pledging to bear witness to Jesus Christ in their own lives. While they clearly saw the Church as linked historically to the apostles (e.g. via the papacy), the evidence in the data suggested that the majority (three-quarters) of the young adults did not see themselves as called to be involved as contemporary witnesses in the mission of the Church. Although indicating almost unanimous approval for their Church's active commitment to works of justice and service, such work was clearly considered a task for other (Catholic) Christians. In terms of evangelisation, the idea of Catholic missionary activity was similarly the task of others.⁵⁹ Except in the case of a few of the core participants, the interviews gave a clear indication that the idea of bearing witness to Jesus Christ — being ready, willing and able to explain their own faith to others — was foreign to them.

As has already been noted, Baptism and the other sacraments were highly esteemed though the basis for this regard is uncertain since the young adults' knowledge of the sacraments was generally limited. Resurrection and eternal life were not directly addressed in the interview questions although 'going to heaven' did arise twice in responses to the question on salvation. One disengaged participant had this to say:

Well I don't think there is heaven and hell. I think... I don't even know if I think there is life after death? I think your body is a vessel for yourself but I don't know what happens when your body dies. I don't know where you go. Hannah

Apart from this one young woman however, the participants gave no sense of discontent with such core doctrine and there is no evidence to suggest that any of the young adults would have had difficulty in professing their belief in the final section of the Creed.

- Review – Article Three: There is little evidence to suggest that assent to the third article of the Creed poses any real dilemma for the research participants. Equally though, it is

⁵⁸ Marthaler, *The Creed*, 302-10.

⁵⁹ And for some it would have raised the additional tension emerging from Gen Y's commitment to individualism and privacy in matters of religion. As already noted, Christian faith (and more so Catholicism) is commonly considered by Gen Y to be just one path among many equally valid options. See *FAS*, 24-7.

evident that for most of them, the third person of the Trinity does not feature strongly in their personal understanding of relationship with God. This is arguably the key finding in relation to the third article, a finding argued from the absence of evidence to support significant relationship and therefore, admittedly, a finding that should not be overemphasised. Despite the central importance to Catholic faith of the Holy Spirit, fifteen of the nineteen young adults made no spontaneous link of any sort to the Spirit in the course of the research interviews.⁶⁰

Section 3: Young Adults and Church: A Fragile Relationship

Summary of the Findings

From the results of this study of nineteen young adult Pakeha Catholics in NZ a number of key findings have been established. The individualism that has been noted as characteristic of contemporary society, typifies the approach to religion of the young adults in the survey.⁶¹ For about two-thirds of the young people, their Catholicity is faith on their own terms — a cultural religious connection that involves belief but little intellectual engagement nor heartfelt passion. On moral issues they respect and even welcome Church teaching though they hold it at arm's length, careful to protect their own, conscience-guided, right to decide.⁶² Their understanding of personal morality equates being a good Catholic with being a good person understood as being generous, inclusive and nonjudgmental. In this, as in so many other ways, they differ little if at all from their secular humanist peers.⁶³ Theirs is a distant Catholic identity characterised by a vicarious relationship (i.e. held in reserve) with a religion most of them little understand and which has little obvious active connection with their everyday life.⁶⁴ This 'cold' (i.e. ambivalent, dissident) religious identity does not negate the fact that at a very deep level, and without significant awareness nor understanding, they appear to perceive the world through 'Catholic eyes' — they feel the presence of God, they value

⁶⁰ It could prove valuable to investigate this further in subsequent research. Since Christian faith often associates dynamism and empowerment with the Spirit, there may be some connection between young adult unfamiliarity with the Spirit and the lack of Christian zeal (e.g. desire to be actively involved in their Christian communities) seemingly evident among them.

⁶¹ See *Ibid.*, 24-7 and 84-5.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 85-6.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 102-4.

symbol and sacrament (though more the idea than the practice), and they hold their Church, its leaders, institutions and mission, in relatively high esteem.⁶⁵

Living in Taylor's 'buffered' modernity, these young adults do not fear the uncontrolled influence of negative (evil) spiritual beings.⁶⁶ Their perspective on God leans toward the beatific deity of *Moral Therapeutic Deism* and its optimistic assumption that God is with them and will be there for them when needed.⁶⁷ These young adults, like their peers, believe deeply in the need to pursue their own unique journey of faith and life.⁶⁸ For many, Catholicism is a foundation, a place from which to explore but also one with which they do not want to lose all contact. For others, the authentic search may involve any of a myriad of different paths and they will go where they feel drawn. Although these young adults are quietly proud of and confident in their own religion (and denomination), their own faith is clearly not felt to be necessarily right for everyone as is illustrated by their reluctance to pass any judgment on the religious beliefs of others. The study's participants reflected the tendency to uphold a moral and religious ideal for themselves even though they were content to postpone its active pursuit for future years.⁶⁹

Finally we can now add the findings of the previous section of this Chapter analysing the young adults' 'belief in' through the lens of the Creed. Assent to the content of beliefs taught by the Church (*fides quae creditur*) posed no great difficulty for the young adults, although their awareness and understanding of the detail of this belief content was demonstrably thin (e.g. the sacraments).⁷⁰ Depth of personal relationship with God (*fides qua creditur*) varied widely among the participants. Although impossible to measure with absolute accuracy, my observations suggest that less than a quarter of the nineteen participants in the study demonstrated a profound personal response to God's self-communication, the majority maintaining a more tentative, distant and, in many cases, isolated relationship with their God. The evidence also suggests a somewhat unsurprising connection between deeper relational response and regular involvement with a Catholic faith community.⁷¹

⁶⁵ Ibid., 71 (leadership), 73-4 (God's presence), 74-5 (symbol and sacrament), and 104 ('cold' religious identity).

⁶⁶ Ibid., 92.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 34.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 98-101.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 105-6.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 82-3.

⁷¹ Ibid., 122.

The Individual's Sense of the Faith

The Church has consistently held that the Spirit is present to each believer, guiding him or her as a 'teacher within'.⁷² Karl Rahner and Ormond Rush have both argued that there is an authenticity in the individual's act of faith in the revelation of God (*fides qua*) that is not dependent on accurate knowledge of the detail of the content of faith (*fides quae*).⁷³ The individual, Rahner and Rush believe, has a Spirit-given capacity to form his or her own idea of God and of salvation in Jesus Christ. Rush names this as the individual's 'sense of the faith' (*sensus fidei*), an understanding arising out of the interplay between *fides qua* and *fides quae*.⁷⁴ This *sensus fidei* is the personal interpretation and application of the faith that would be demonstrated should the individual endeavour to explain their faith to someone else.⁷⁵

But it is clear that the subject of both Rahner and Rush's assertion is not standing on the periphery of Church life as so many Catholic young adults are. Rush clarifies:

...the subject of the *sensus fidei* is a baptized and committed Christian who in an act of faith (*fides qua*) responds to God's outreach through Christ in the power of the Spirit and participates in the sacramental life of a community of faith and its wider mission in the world.⁷⁶

Similarly Rahner, in addressing the need for contemporary Christians to synthesize their faith with all they know and experience, speaks of how "the formed Christian must be aware of the 'hierarchy of truths', must know the effectively central and existentially meaningful roots of the faith so as to deepen this understanding and, while not denying, pay less attention to what is secondary".⁷⁷ However the proportion of young adults who would qualify for this category of Christian commitment is, as we have seen, small and getting smaller.⁷⁸ Certainly, of the nineteen young adults in my own study, only about four of the seven core participants could accurately be described as being this

⁷² E.g. John Paul II quoting St Augustine: "The Spirit ... is promised to the Church and to each Christian as a Teacher within, who, in the secret of the conscience and the heart, makes one understand what one has heard but was not capable of grasping: "Even now the Holy Spirit teaches the faithful," said Saint Augustine in this regard, "in accordance with each one's spiritual capacity. And he sets their hearts aflame with greater desire according as each one progresses in the charity that makes him love what he already knows and desire what he has yet to know." Cited in Ormond Rush, "Sensus Fidei: Faith 'Making Sense' of Revelation," *Theological Studies* 62 (2001): 238.

⁷³ Karl Rahner, "The Act of Faith and the Content of Faith," in *Theological Investigations* 21 (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 152, Rush, "Sensus Fidei," 239.

⁷⁴ As compared with the *sensus fidelium* understood to refer to the communal sense of the faith. Rush, "Sensus Fidei," 236.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 240.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 240-1.

⁷⁷ Cited in *Ibid.*, 239.

⁷⁸ See Chapter One for evidence of this shrinkage.

committed. The importance of connection to Christian community is underscored by Richard Gaillardetz who writes:

The character and significance of an individual's response to Church teaching both influences and is influenced by the ecclesial community. The response of the active Christian committed to an ecclesial community cannot be the same as the response of a Christian who lives on the periphery of an ecclesial community.⁷⁹

The temptation must be avoided then to optimistically overstate the 'Catholicity' of the majority of the study's young adults who are well described as standing on or near the margins of the Church. For an authentic 'sense of the faith' to be present, both Rahner and Rush agree that, as well as assent to credal tenets (*fide quae*), a heartfelt and sincere response to God's outreach (*fide qua*) is necessary entailing commitment to an ecclesial community and including participation in the sacraments. Following this line of argument, the absence of such conviction and commitment, as in the case of some fifteen of the nineteen young adults in my study, can only indicate an underdeveloped *sensus fidei* in terms of a Christian faith response.

Another explanation is however possible when one considers Anselm of Canterbury's famous definition of theology as *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding). In an era in which fear and guilt are no longer effective motivators of Mass attendance, the individual's understanding of his or her faith becomes critically important. Theology understood as 'faith seeking understanding' implies that today's younger Catholics, among them those of Gen Y, are arguably all theologians-in-waiting in that they appear increasingly unwilling to acquiesce in their *sensus fidei*. They desire to understand the relevance and connection of their faith to their daily lives and it would appear that if that growing understanding is not being nurtured and challenged, Gen Y, perhaps more than any previous generation of Catholics, do not hesitate to abstain from participation in the faith community. On the issue of theology defined as 'faith seeking understanding', Francis Sullivan notes:

The understanding of faith which theology seeks is an understanding that is appropriate to the culture in which we live today. It is crucial for faith that it be appropriate to the mental and cultural level of the individual believer, and of the church as a believing people. The life of faith is in danger when a person's

⁷⁹ Richard Gaillardetz, *Teaching with Authority: A Theology of the Magisterium in the Church* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1997), 256.

understanding of what he or she believes remains at a childish level, when that person's secular education is appropriate for a mature adult.⁸⁰

A Foreign Language

Whether we judge as insufficient the *sensus fidei* of the young adults in my study or whether we conclude that their absence is due more to a lack of stimulation of that life of faith, we cannot deny their desire for God nor their sense of ownership of their Catholic religious faith. Both of these things have been shown in this thesis to be strong. But the question must be asked: when they do turn their minds to God, why is it that they no longer find themselves drawn to express and develop their faith in communion with their local Catholic faith community? The disconnect is not driven by ill will and it was clear in the research that these young adults are far from being spiritually vacuous. Yet even as self-proclaimed Catholics their spirituality does not propel them toward their Church but instead remains seemingly unaddressed amid the busyness of everyday life in modern secular society.

Roger Lenaers argues that what in fact has happened is that the *language* of the Church, so familiar and acceptable to Christians for over a thousand years, has steadily become a foreign language to the contemporary Western Christian. By 'language' Lenaers means the words and their combinations used and understood by a community as well as the systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings using signs, sounds, gestures, etc with commonly understood meanings.⁸¹ Language belongs to cultural groupings, some ethnically defined, but some also institutionally bounded including the different religions.

The Christian cultural group in its Western form has over the ages developed various means of expressing its collective thoughts and feelings: its own language in the narrow and broad sense of the word. It has formulated laws and creeds, shaped rituals and enforced them, built churches and monasteries, and decorated them. It has given expression to its conscious and unconscious ideas, expectations, fears, joys, certainties and doubts, in words and in images, in colors and in sounds.⁸²

Grounded initially in the experiences and ideas of the early Church, the language in which the gospel message was expressed evolved only slowly, reflective always of the

⁸⁰ Francis A. Sullivan, *Creative Fidelity: Weighing and Interpreting Documents of the Magisterium* (Alexandria NSW: E.J. Dwyer, 1996), 7.

⁸¹ Roger Lenaers, *Nebuchadnezzar's Dream or the End of a Medieval Catholic Church* (New Jersey: Gorgias Press LLC, 2007), 6.

⁸² *Ibid.*

surrounding dominant culture. But with the advent of exclusive humanism in the sixteenth century and the subsequent rise of the modern sciences, the language that had served the Church so well began to lose ground. Words and images began over time to shift in meaning (as we saw earlier with the term ‘belief’) while rituals, practices and rules gradually became obsolete.

For the majority of people today, asserts Lenaers, this language has become a dead language system understood only by those who are especially devoted to it. Although the Second Vatican Council did much to ‘update’ ecclesial belief and practice, the Church continues to struggle to confront the deeper reform that must precede language and articulation. For Lenaers, it is a medieval vision of the world that the Church continues to express and it is this worldview that has ceased to speak to contemporary people.⁸³

Recalling Charles Taylor’s ‘three-storey dwelling’ model of the theory of secularization introduced in Chapter Five it can be seen that Lenaers’ critique of the current ecclesial worldview is rightly located among the explanatory claims for the changes that are taking place in modern Western society (Taylor’s basement).⁸⁴ Moving well beyond agreement that decline in religious belief and practice is taking place (Taylor’s ground floor), such explanatory claims are, as we have seen, very much related to how one perceives the role of religion today (Taylor’s upper floor). While it can be reassuring to point to contemporary expressions of religion and spirituality within (and without) Catholicism, as Taylor does in the passage quoted in Chapter Five of this thesis, for Lenaers (and others) a more fundamental updating is seen as critically necessary before there can be any chance of truly addressing the cause of religious decline in the West.⁸⁵

It is not a prognosis that is easily accepted nor applied as it necessarily entails a courageous modernization that goes well beyond the reforms of Vatican II and will inevitably impact every aspect of Church life. Beginning from our credal notions of who and what God is, so many beliefs and practices with origins in a now untenable medieval theological worldview face critique.⁸⁶ Theological issues such as atonement (sacrifice), worship (liturgy) and even Trinitarian belief will need reviewing in light of a

⁸³ Ibid., 9.

⁸⁴ See FAS, 98 as well as Taylor, *Secular Age*, 431-2.

⁸⁵ Lenaers is not alone in identifying ossifying religious structures, traditions and language as key to understanding religious decline. Variations on this idea will be considered in the work of Daly, Ludwig and Routhier in Chapter Seven.

⁸⁶ For treatment of these and related themes see: Richard Lennan, *Risking the Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Pierre Hegy, *Wake Up, Lazarus!* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2011).

contemporary cosmological worldview. Ecclesial practices rooted in these beliefs such as hierarchical Church structure, gender roles, and authority will subsequently require re-examination. Clearly, much is at stake with what is nothing less than a paradigm shift. But equally clearly, as my own and others' research has shown, to ignore the fact that such a shift has already taken place in (Western) society is to ignore the 'signs of the times' and to risk proclaiming the gospel in terms that are comprehensible to fewer and fewer people.

Conclusion: Faith Seeking Understanding within a Contemporary Worldview

It would seem that a large part of the problem faced by contemporary Catholicism is the difficulty of stepping back and considering our situation from a sufficiently removed vantage. At the heart of the notion of 'faith seeking understanding' is the faith of the Christian or theologian him or herself.⁸⁷ We believe so we seek to understand. And yet, immersed in centuries of Catholic tradition it can be very difficult to discern from within exactly what is essential and to what extent it is contextually conditioned and in need of renewal. In his opening address to the bishops at Vatican II Pope John XXIII drew our attention to this distinction when he said: "The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way it is presented is another."⁸⁸

Change, it would appear, is too easily judged to be a subtraction or reduction — "our 'traditional' predecessor minus something," as Taylor describes it.⁸⁹ He himself has explored Matteo Ricci's Jesuit experiment in China as a possible image of what it might mean to gain some distance-related perspective in our modern situation.⁹⁰ Ricci deliberately chose to withhold critique of his interlocutors until he had gained and expressed an appreciation for what was good and great in their civilisation. Similarly, it may be only by finding something of a 'Ricci-distance' that the Church can hope to approach our own secular reality without preconceptions and, in Taylor's words, "allow ourselves to be enthused and horrified by its different facets".⁹¹ The positive and praiseworthy in modern secular society is the place to engage in the first instance. Today's younger generations know no other world and, as we have seen in the research

⁸⁷ Sullivan, *Creative Fidelity*, 5.

⁸⁸ Cited in Francis A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1992), 10.

⁸⁹ Charles Taylor, "A Catholic Modernity?," in *A Catholic Modernity? Charles Taylor's Marianist Award Lecture*, ed. James L. Heft (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 107.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 15. Although not entirely applicable in that we are simply too close to be able to relate to our own time and culture as Ricci did to the Chinese, the image does serve to highlight the challenge we face.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 107.

reported in this thesis, they do not relate well to a worldview that is grounded in an era that they cannot understand. If, as Sullivan has noted (above), the understanding of faith is predicated on appropriateness to mental and cultural level, how much more is it predicated on appropriateness to the worldview of the current age?

Chapter Six thus concludes its theological reflection on the research findings and, more broadly, the situation the Church is encountering in modern Western society. Only one further step remains in our contextual application of the pastoral circle model to the revealed situation of the Pakeha young adult Catholic in NZ — a response. Critical elements of Church ministry with young adults will now be considered and a pastoral strategy presented that takes account of the research findings.

CHAPTER SEVEN: RESPONDING TO THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

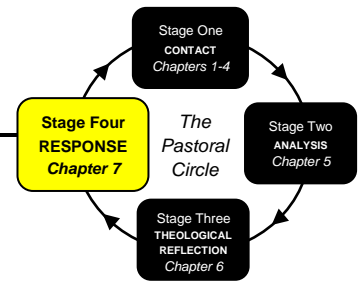


Figure 7.1: Faith Amid Secularity
– Chapter Seven Methodology

Introduction

The concluding chapter represents the final ‘response’ stage in the pastoral circle methodology that has framed my exploration of the disconnection between NZ young adult Pakeha Catholics and their Church. The study has sought to assess the extent of young adult identification with a Catholic worldview and to determine the nature and strength of their Catholic identity. In order to achieve this aim a two-level methodology has been utilised incorporating a component of qualitative field research as part of the larger application of the pastoral circle model.

The first four chapters described the problem of young adult nonparticipation, surveyed the international literature and outlined the field research methodology and results. They represent the initial phase of the pastoral circle, the ‘contact’ stage, an opportunity to listen carefully to the voice and situation of the young adult participants. Chapter Five moved the study into stage two, the ‘analysis’ phase of the pastoral circle in which the situation of the young adult Catholics was considered in relation to Taylor’s theory of secularization. Chapter Six continued the analysis from a theological perspective (stage three of the pastoral circle) employing the Nicene Creed as a lens for the assessment of the young adults’ Catholic faith.

The fourth stage of the pastoral circle methodology seeks an appropriate response in light of the previous three stages (see Figure 7.1 above). Wijssen, Henriot and Mejia suggest that any such response must consider both short and long-term strategies to be effective.

*How do we respond? Move through steps of planning, acting, and evaluating in order to effect the desired change in the situation. What strategies are called for, what short-term steps and what long-term steps are needed to bring change?*¹

¹ Wijssen, Henriot and Mejia, *Pastoral Cycle Revisited*, 229.

The present chapter represents the pastoral circle's fourth stage applied in my own study and the various pastoral strategies that will be proposed herein will include both short and long term considerations. The aim of this final chapter is to propose a response that will inform the wider ecclesial debate in NZ with regard to effective ministry with young adult Pakeha Catholics.

The chapter will begin with a summary of the research findings in relation to the two key research questions which guided the field research.² The New Zealand context revealed by this study will be addressed in Section Two via the presentation of elements of a contextual theological response aimed at fostering the ongoing engagement of young adult Pakeha Catholics. Section Three will seek a more substantial response to the disconnection identified in my research by considering some of the voices calling for a review of the way Catholicism relates to contemporary Western society as exemplified in the New Zealand situation. The chapter will conclude with a brief summary of the limitations of my study and the identification of potential areas for further research that have emerged.

Section 1: Summary Evaluation of the Research Findings

Evaluating the Young Adults' Catholic Religious Worldview

- Research Question One: To what extent do the young adult Catholics studied identify with, and draw meaning from, a Catholic religious worldview?

Each of the nineteen participants made a personal claim to the nomenclature 'Catholic'.³ Along with this nominal affiliation almost all demonstrated a significant 'Catholic sense' of the presence of God, of the value and richness of symbol and image, and of concern for the marginalised.⁴ In this regard they can be said to have exhibited something of a Catholic religious worldview. In relation to everyday engagement in Catholic religious practice, however, there was a noticeable lack of active participation. Distinctive characteristics of Catholic culture (e.g. devotional involvement; the wearing or use of any identifiably Catholic articles (e.g. scapulars, rosary beads, etc.); any personal ascetic practice (e.g. fasting, abstinence, etc.)) were largely absent. Lack of confidence with regard to their personal understanding of Catholicism characterised

² The research questions are reproduced below and over the page.

³ See *FAS*, 69.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 72-5, 80.

both the substance of answers as well as the nervous uncertainty displayed as the young adults pondered their responses.⁵ Although they were very comfortable self-identifying as Catholic at the outset of the study, most exhibited embarrassment at their own lack of understanding of what they recognised to be central themes of Catholic faith.

It should be noted that there were a small number of participants who had successfully assimilated the Church's 'language', developing a sense of 'Catholic belonging' illustrated in their regular and relatively enthusiastic participation in their local Catholic parish.⁶ These young adults clearly identified with a Catholic worldview with which their lives were now integrally connected.⁷ For the great majority however (three quarters of those surveyed), their Catholic religious experience was characterised by uncertainty and a discomfort born of a sense of disconnection with the institutional Church.

There appears an inherent contradiction between, on the one hand, Catholic self-identification coupled with a deep-level of Catholic consciousness and, on the other, an almost complete lack of day-to-day Catholic sensibility. While the Catholic formation of these nineteen young adults has inculcated what can be described as a subconscious Catholic perspective, most of them remain unconvinced of any need to take active ownership of this worldview by investing in their own ongoing understanding of, and involvement with, Catholicism. What this illustrates however is less a contradiction than an adaptation of religious worldview to suit the individual's personal circumstances. As we saw earlier, it is typical of the individualism that has been found to characterise Gen Y, a hallmark of the way in which they carry their Catholic identity.⁸

Evaluating the Young Adults' Catholic Identity

- Research Question Two: What is the nature and strength of Catholic identity among the young adult Catholics in the study?

Here it is helpful to distinguish between (i) Catholic faith as a *belief system*, and (ii) the Catholic Church as an *institution*.⁹ All of the young adults self-identified as Catholic and, with one exception, they willingly claimed and were proud of their Catholic faith.

⁵ Ibid., 86-8.

⁶ 'Language' refers to all of the various systematic means of communication that take place within the Church. Ibid., 130-2.

⁷ Four participants could be described in this way. Ibid., 128.

⁸ Ibid., 26 & 84-5.

⁹ The two are admittedly inseparable theologically but the point here is to address a difference that appears to exist between the young adults' personal perspective on Catholic faith and their relationship with the institutional Church in which that faith has traditionally been expressed.

All demonstrated ready acceptance of key beliefs although with only a relatively superficial level of understanding. Although institutional Church leadership was admired¹⁰, it was so at a distance and with little apparent comprehension as to the roles of the various hierarchical leaders.

The young adults were clearly less attached to institutional elements of Catholicism (i.e. ritual participation, following of Catholic moral teaching, etc.) than they were to the more familial/cultural aspects of being Catholic (i.e. the belief that I am Catholic because I was raised and educated Catholic).¹¹ This was illustrated in their absence from regular involvement and also in their desire to think and make moral decisions for themselves rather than automatically obeying Church teaching.¹² The nature of the Catholic identity observed was more akin to cultural affiliation than religious conviction and its strength varied from the almost completely disconnected through to those whose engagement was comprehensive.¹³ Of particular note were the four participants whose Catholic identity could be described as strong, a description that could not be used of the Catholic identity of the remaining three core, nor any of the intermediate or disengaged participants.¹⁴ In a sample selected not to mirror the general population but to provide similar numbers of examples in three categories of Catholic involvement (disengaged, intermediate and core), we can realistically expect to see higher numbers of the more strongly Catholic than would be the case in the general self-identifying Catholic population.¹⁵ For more than three-quarters of the sample in this study Catholic identity was, to a large degree, superficial — apart from denominational terminology, it was a Catholic identity that was almost indistinguishable from what would be the expected Christian identity of their Protestant peers.¹⁶ In fact, religious terminology aside, there appeared little difference from what one would realistically expect from any non-religious young adult ‘people of good will’.¹⁷

¹⁰ Only three out of nineteen could not name their local bishop.

¹¹ Ibid., 82-4.

¹² Ibid., 80-1,

¹³ Ibid., 58.

¹⁴ By Catholic identity I mean having substantial understanding of, and commitment to, key Catholic faith content.

¹⁵ In any random sample of self-identifying young adult Pakeha Catholics in New Zealand, those fitting the category of core Catholics (young people who are regular (weekly) church attendees and who are also active in terms of performing a role in church-related activities beyond normal congregational participation) would be expected to be considerably less than a third. See the statistics on church attendance in Chapter One.

¹⁶ Ibid., 89 and, for comparison with the international literature, Ibid., 38-9.

¹⁷ This observation finds an interesting resonance with Taylor’s description of the Enlightenment shift toward Providential Deism. Taylor asserts that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries human flourishing became the key purpose of humanity’s existence. With the fading of a sense of grace, of mystery and of a God-desired human transformation, God became a distant benefactor and it was but a short step from there to a position of exclusive humanism without need of God at all. See Taylor, *Secular Age*, 221-34.

Section 2: A Pastoral Theological Response to the Pakeha Young Adult Catholic

Application Beyond the Current Sample

As I turn to respond to the situation that has been explored throughout this thesis and summarised above, it is necessary to again address the issue of generalisation. I have noted that the intention of my own NZ qualitative study was to furnish an accurate description of the situation of the nineteen young adults who took part in the study. Without further (quantitative) research it would be illegitimate to transfer the results directly from this *Faith Amid Secularity* study to the broader young adult Pakeha Catholic population in NZ. But given that the NZ study indicated strong similarities among a diverse group of individuals (i.e. in terms of gender, age, location, and Catholic involvement) and, also, given that the results reflected those of similar studies carried out in recent years in other Western countries¹⁸, there is no reason why the characteristics I have uncovered should not also be common to the broader NZ population. Therefore, what is proposed here is indeed a more extensive application. What follows is a pastoral theological response informed by:

- i. my own research findings;
- ii. by the findings of a range of international studies; and
- iii. by key notions from Taylor's theory of secularisation.

Pastoral Ministry with the Young Adult Pakeha Catholic

In light of the research findings it is proposed that effective attempts to engage young adult Pakeha Catholics in NZ will necessarily focus on the development of a relevant and contemporary *Catholic identity*.¹⁹ Such Catholic identity will, however, be inadequate if it ignores or rejects the present context in favour of an earlier Catholic culture developed in a quite different era. Stress on discontinuity with the contemporary context is what Boeve describes as 'anti-modern theology' (finding truth solely in past contexts) and it contradicts the Second Vatican Council's understanding of "the presence and function of the church in the world of today."²⁰ It is my contention that what is needed is a fresh conception of Catholic identity; namely a renewal that is

¹⁸ E.g. Fulton et al., *Young Catholics*. Hoge et al., *Young Adult Catholics*. Mason et al., *Spirit of Generation Y*. Duyvenbode, *Mapping the Terrain*.

¹⁹ For treatments of the decline in Catholic identity and its importance going forward see: Anthony M. Abela, "Young Catholics in Malta: Similar Origins, Multiple Destinations," in John Fulton, *Young Catholics*, 45-8. John Allen, *The Future Church: How Ten Trends Are Revolutionizing the Catholic Church* (New York: Double Day, 2009), 83. Dillon, *Catholic Identity*, 253, Hoge et al., *Young Adult Catholics*, 221-4.

²⁰ *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 2. Lieven Boeve, *God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 31.

ongoing and framed according to the original and enduring principles of Catholic faith recaptured in the teaching of Vatican II. If renewed Catholic identity is to appeal to the contemporary young adult, Catholic faith must bring the life and teaching of the gospel into our contemporary context with less reliance and emphasis on devotional practices developed in past eras. In most cases these devotions developed as a result of the increasing codification of the Roman liturgy following the Council of Trent.²¹ With the evolution of the Mass circumscribed, popular devotions became a way for local and contemporary expression to make its way into public and private prayer.

Such a process of contextualisation is again needed today – an up-to-date shaping of the means of expression of Catholic identity that draws on contemporary culture and context even as it acknowledges and builds on the centrality of the Eucharist to Catholic life.²² Balancing the universal against the particular (local) is a critical challenge. It requires the identification and preservation of what rightly belongs to the core of the tradition coupled with a willingness to concede what are, within the collection of Catholic traditions, more historically conditioned accoutrements (to a greater and lesser extent), products of what Aylward Shorter calls ‘Christianity’s previous inculturations’.²³

What has become evident in this study, reinforcing similar findings in the studies addressed in Chapter Two, is that relatively recent modes of Catholic participation (holy days, devotions, ritual rules and moral teaching) are inadequate to the task of carrying Catholic identity into the future.²⁴ Moves to rehabilitate practices that originated in the Counter-Reformation Church are not finding significant resonance today.²⁵ In a modern secular age the ‘language’ in which the religious and spiritual needs of young adults is expressed, and in which they must be addressed, is no longer the same as that which served the Church for much of its history.²⁶

In view of the analysis of the research findings in this study, I believe it is fundamental that a new contextualisation of Catholic identity among young adults in NZ will:

²¹ Carl Dehne, "Devotion and Devotions," in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, and Dermot A. Lane (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1990), 286. McBrien, *Catholicism*, 1071-2.

²² Pope John Paul II develops a similar theme of renewal in relation to spiritual communion. See Pope John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, nn. 43-45.

²³ Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 256.

²⁴ Fulton et al., *Young Catholics*, 169. Hoge et al., *Young Adult Catholics*, 222. See also ‘Residual Catholicism’, *FAS*, 71.

²⁵ See ‘Reversing Decline’, *Ibid.*, 42-5.

²⁶ See ‘A Foreign Language’, *Ibid.*, 130-132. For a concrete example consider the concern with authenticity in life that has emerged in the contemporary era. See *Ibid.*, 98-101. Taylor, *Secular Age*, 473-504.

- i. facilitate their encounter with God;
 - ii. emphasise relational incarnation;
 - iii. recover the theology of sacrament;
 - iv. locate the Church as a companion on the journey of life;
 - v. be optimistic toward secularity;
 - vi. offer constructive critique of contemporary secularity.
- Facilitating the young adult encounter with God: The research clearly showed that young adult Catholics today have a deep-seated belief in the presence of God and a fundamental trust that God will not abandon them.²⁷ That such a conviction has been successfully fostered is to be celebrated, providing a foundation upon which to build Catholic identity. The focus of the Church's pastoral ministry needs to be on inspiring this awareness of God in the lives of young adults and in the world around them. Like Jesus in the gospels, the role of Catholic pastoral ministry is to point to the Kingdom of God.²⁸ Continued emphasis on the unconditional love of God is vital. With fear of punishment no longer an effective motivator for Catholic spirituality, it is the attractiveness of Jesus' promise of a fulfilling life (Jn 10:10) that must become the central call of Catholic faith.
 - An emphasis on relational incarnation: The description of the Catholic Christian's 'personal relationship with Jesus' that has gained popularity in recent decades underscores the importance of overcoming a predominantly transcendent understanding of the God-human relationship. In the person of Jesus, known through his actions and teaching, Christians believe that God is most fully revealed to us. It is, therefore, in relationship with Jesus — God incarnate — that one is led to a sense of the transcendent yet personal God of Christianity. The correlation between the individual's sense of personal relationship with Jesus Christ and his or her active Church involvement emerged in this study as an indicator of the perennial importance of fostering this personal relationship.²⁹ A significant note of critique is sounded, however, by the emphasis Catholic theology places on the inherently communal nature of Christian discipleship. This corporate character serves to protect against any over-

²⁷ Refer 'Grace', Ibid., 73-4, and 'Catholic Identity', 86-9.

²⁸ Success in this area appears to have been sporadic. The very best examples of senior secondary school, tertiary student and young adult retreats often capture this facilitation of the young adult encounter with God.

²⁹ Karl Rahner elaborates the nature and practice of this personal relationship of love for Jesus in his handbook of contemporary spirituality. See Karl Rahner, *The Practice of Faith: A Handbook of Contemporary Spirituality* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 114-20.

individualisation of the personal relationship with Jesus Christ by underlining the importance of the communal context.

Faith in the risen Christ remains indissolubly part of Christian identity but it is the accessible Jesus of history who must also remain central. Indeed it is only because of our Christian belief in the resurrection that such a relationship is possible. As Rahner says, “were he not the Resurrected One ... then our love would surely be no more than the quest (ultimately, a meaningless quest) of an ideal in history’s past.”³⁰

- Recovery of the theology of sacrament: The seven Sacraments and the Catholic principle of sacramentality were held in high regard by the young adult Catholics in this study.³¹ Their understanding of the sacraments, however, lacked theological depth and leaned heavily toward the anthropological category known as ‘ritualizing’.³² Despite demonstrating little grasp of the theological dimension of sacrament, young Catholics still understand the sacraments (as well as the Christian funeral ritual) as important rites of passage.

Edward Schillebeeckx has argued that the contemporary split between anthropology and theology means that the sacramental rituals no longer relate well to our every day experience and, as a result, people are choosing not to participate.³³ But Boeve questions whether it is a matter of relevance, pointing to the relative success of the (anthropological) rite-of-passage function of the sacraments.³⁴ For Boeve, it is the theological dimension — the mediation of the encounter of the God of Jesus Christ — that has faded; it is this Christian particularity that is in need of recovery. Such a recovery does not necessarily entail a break with contemporary culture since this response is not motivated by an anti-modern stance. What is needed is a recapturing of the specifically Christian narrative of sacramental theology such that, in Boeve’s terminology, the God-oriented dimension of Christian ritual praxis ‘interrupts’ (challenges) everyday experience even as it finds resonance and continuity in contemporary life.³⁵

³⁰ Ibid., 116. See also Pope John Paul II’s ‘A Face to Contemplate’, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, nn. 16-28.

³¹ See *FAS*, 75-6.

³² Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 96.

³³ I am reliant on Boeve’s summary of Schillebeeckx’s arguments here since the article in which they were made is not available in English. See Ibid., 94.

³⁴ Ibid., 97.

³⁵ Ibid., 107. Boeve in fact challenges the theory of the existence of a singular secular culture in Western Europe, arguing instead that what has taken place has been a process of ‘detraditionalization’ resulting in a contemporary plurality of religious belief.

- Locating the Church as a companion on the journey of life: A key perception in the modern secular age is, as we have seen, the conviction that each person must find his or her own authentic path. Catholicism at the local level has, in response to the current crisis of young adult detachment, the opportunity to recast itself as spiritual companion on life's journey. The disconnect between young adults and Church involvement that has been confirmed by this research highlights the reality that, after the school years, the Church plays little part in the lives of the majority of young adult Catholics in NZ.³⁶ The current experience of communal worship that is the norm in our parishes is not what the young adults are seeking or, it is realistic to assume, they would be attending in greater numbers. As the research showed, young adult absence is less a protest than the result of being unconvinced of the relevance of regular Church involvement to their everyday lives.³⁷ The young are of course interested in their own life journey, its authenticity and its ultimate direction.³⁸ Pastoral ministry with young adults is more likely to succeed if it takes seriously these authenticity-related concerns, focussing on how ministry might be possible with a community of fellow pilgrims each with a different experience of what it means to follow Jesus Christ and to search for God in daily life.³⁹ To act as a companion on life's journey requires of the Church a willingness to suspend authoritarian rule in favour of the honouring of individual conscience over external authority i.e. a commitment to witness rather than to control. The research consistently shows that the modern young adult is convinced of the primacy of his / her own conscience and no amount of appeal to divinely mandated authority is likely to gain their submission. It is not a case of the young not needing or wanting guidance; it is the realisation that today's young people are socialised with a natural immunity to obligatory regulations based on automatic institutional authority. The young adult does in fact need and want guidance but it must be provided within a framework of perceived autonomy. In play is a complex psychology of negotiation and the young adult needs to be reasoned with and convinced in terms that s/he understands amid the context of his/her own thoroughly modern milieu.⁴⁰

³⁶ See Footnote 3, *FAS*, 1.

³⁷ See *Ibid.*, 82-4.

³⁸ See 'An Age of Authenticity', *Ibid.*, 98-101, and 'Postponing the Ideal', 105-6.

³⁹ At the 1995 World Youth Day in the Philippines, Pope John Paul II called for the Church to become the travelling companion of the young as Jesus was with the disciples of Emmaus. The analogy is a good one in so far as the relationship takes place in the context of the young peoples' lived experience. Cf. Luke 24:13-35.

⁴⁰ Two examples illustrate this point: 1) The way in which many of the young adults demonstrated a willingness to support the Church's voice on moral issues (especially poverty) because they felt aware of and convinced by the arguments. 2) In two cases a well-educated (tertiary qualified) young adult interviewee demonstrated in the interview

- Optimism toward secularity: A critical element of Matteo Ricci's sixteenth century mission to China offers a pertinent example as to how Catholicism might more fruitfully engage secularity. At a time when the Church's missionary efforts showed little sensitivity to the culture and spirituality of indigenous peoples, Ricci pioneered a method of encounter that involved the immersion of both missionary and Christian faith in the world of the other.⁴¹ His stance in the face of a largely unknown Chinese culture was curious and optimistic, endeavouring to recognise what was reflective of the good; of Christian values. Secularity is morally ambivalent and, as such, it contains elements to be commended as well as others to be criticised.⁴² Celebrating aspects of secularity as they are seen to reflect gospel values indicates in word and action that, as Catholics, we do not stand in automatic opposition to the modern world — a world that fundamentally reflects the culture of the Christianity that shaped it. Today's young adults are living products of modern secular society and a default stance of negativity toward that society risks their unnecessary alienation. There is much to be applauded in contemporary Western culture; e.g. the concern for individual freedom, human rights, tolerance and acceptance of that which is 'different' (unfamiliar), authenticity, individual expressiveness, inclusivity, etc. All of these can be recognised as Christian (gospel) values adopted by Western society and accepted today quite separately from their Christian roots.⁴³ Only when these sound aspects of modern secularity are acknowledged is the ground prepared for a just and needed critique of those elements within secular society that do indeed need to be challenged.
- Towards a constructive critique of contemporary secularity: In any process of contextualisation there will arise elements of culture that conflict with the values of the gospel to such a degree that they must be addressed. The ideal situation is one in which those within the culture itself are brought to an awareness of the tension with the gospel and become convinced themselves of the need for change. This is especially true when dealing with today's young adults who are so thoroughly immersed in contemporary

the belief that creationism was part of current Church teaching. Later (once all interview procedures were concluded), I discussed with these young adults the Church's position on creation and evolution and it came as an enormous relief to them to realise that science and Catholic teaching were not automatically at odds.

⁴¹ Thomas Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 226. Owen Chadwick, ed., *The Reformation*, vol. 3, *The Pelican History of the Church* (Hammondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1964), 338. Taylor, "A Catholic Modernity?," 15-6.

⁴² See Ronald Rolheiser, *Secularity and the Gospel: Being Missionaries to Our Children* (New York: Crossroad, 2006), 41-3. Secularity is not to be confused with secularism — the former is a state in which religious and nonreligious views are permissible but none is considered preeminent. Secularism, on the other hand, finds it necessary to attempt to eliminate religion. See Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 55.

⁴³ Taylor traces in detail the rise of exclusive humanism with its integration of the gospel right through ordinary life in Western society. See especially Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 221-95.

secular society. The young are often aware that shortcomings exist and they can be highly critical of aspects of contemporary secular culture that are sensed to be inadequate.⁴⁴ Overt and consistent criticism of issues such as ‘individualism’ and ‘relativism’ from those who the young perceive to be in some way removed or ‘out of touch’ with secular society is unlikely to achieve the desired response. A more effective response is to propose a plausible and convincing alternative, one that young adults can recognise as desirable and just. It is not that Gen Y (or any other generation for that matter) should be the measure of all judgment. Rather, it is a desire to ensure that entire cohorts are not inadvertently ostracized by the choice of method Church leaders make in applying gospel witness to contemporary culture. Moreover, the prophetic voice of (gospel) faith will find resonance only in so far as it is felt to genuinely reflect the way in which the Church actually lives and teaches. This awareness serves to highlight the importance of the popular perception of the Church and its doctrine; that is a Church that institutionalises authoritarian or discriminatory practices cannot expect to be easily heard when it is critical of these practices elsewhere.⁴⁵

A series of four symposia held in the US between 2002 and 2004 concluded that there are four key areas in modern Western secular society in which a prophetic voice is especially needed.⁴⁶ The participants identified the need for concerned Catholics to witness to:

- The nonviolence of God — amid increasing violence, fundamentalism and notions of a vengeful God, society needs to hear tell of God’s love — the call to favour turning the other cheek over seeking to bring about justice through violence.
- Forgiveness — lying at the centre of Jesus’ moral message, witness to forgiveness, reconciliation and God’s healing are desperately needed.⁴⁷
- Simplicity of life — in contrast to Western secularity’s major moral flaw of unbounded consumption and a subsequent growing dissatisfaction with

⁴⁴ This was evident in my own research in the young adults’ concern with regard to abortion, euthanasia and the social injustice of poverty. *FAS*, 81-2.

⁴⁵ Although not specifically addressed in my research, other studies report a growing problem in this area. From the *US Young Adult Catholics* study: “... it is clear that a number of Church teachings, particularly in the realm of human sexuality, erode the Church’s credibility among many young adult Catholics. Our interviewees repeatedly mentioned birth control, homosexuality, women’s place in the church, married priests, and women priests as the problematic issues.” Hoge et al., *Young Adult Catholics*, 231.

⁴⁶ The findings of the symposia were summarised and many of the key papers collected in the above mentioned volume. See Rolheiser, *Secularity and the Gospel*, 2006.

⁴⁷ “The litmus test for being Christian is not whether one can say the creed and mean it, but whether one can forgive and love an enemy.” *Ibid.*, 77.

possessions and achievements, simplicity of life is a countercultural message that is sorely needed.

- The possibility of community — beyond excessive individuality and despite differences, society needs models of how community can be formed and maintained.⁴⁸

The symposia participants further appealed for Catholic Christians to see their mission to secular society as witnessing to fidelity and stability in a culture marked by their opposites. The perennial call to stand within contemporary culture in solidarity with the poor, the powerless and the vulnerable was also made.⁴⁹

What stands out in the above critique of contemporary secular culture is the emphasis on *witness* as opposed to criticism and admonishment.⁵⁰ Such witness, the living out of the gospel in everyday life, is the particular calling of the laity and it is a hallmark of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council:

It is the special vocation of the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will. They live in the world, in each and every one of the world's occupations and callings and in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life which, as it were, form the context of their existence. There they are called by God to contribute to the sanctification of the world from within, like leaven, in the spirit of the Gospel, by fulfilling their own particular duties.⁵¹

There will inevitably be times when firm opposition to a 'creeping secularism' (secularity becoming anti-religious) is called for, but by and large it is the example of Catholic Christianity lived out in everyday life (i.e. in business, politics, education, medicine, the service trades, etc.) that will prove most effective in the ongoing evangelisation of culture and society.

⁴⁸ "One of the most important things that Christianity has to say to secular culture is that real community is possible and that real community is living, working, and worshipping with those who are different from us." Ibid., 79.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 61.

⁵⁰ Such witness strikes a balance between the poles of excessive alignment with contemporary culture on the one hand and its outright rejection as irredeemable on the other. Examples abound wherever Christianity is lived communally in reflective tension with contemporary society. (e.g. Catholic worker communities, religious order communities, etc.) Lieven Boeve proposes a new theological method of 'recontextualization' that interrupts normal life with the particularity of the Christian narrative. By avoiding unnecessary condemnation and dismissal of contemporary culture, but equally by resisting the temptation to wholly align with it, his method has the potential to interrupt and provoke reflection on the gospel amid contemporary (post)modern life while allowing it to continue. See Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 2007.

⁵¹ Lumen Gentium, n. 31.

Section 3: The Call for Deeper Contextualisation

As the Western Church moves into the third millennium with fewer active young members, the need for a far-reaching response is increasingly being acknowledged.⁵² The disconnect between young adult Catholics and their faith tradition that has been addressed in this thesis can be read as symptomatic of a more extensive rupture between the Church and the contemporary Western population. The suggestion here is that the contextualisation of the Catholic faith that is needed is of such a magnitude that it may require a broadening of our understanding of the concept of ‘contextualisation’ itself in order to adequately encompass the extent of the changes needed in the very structure and language of the Church.⁵³

Re-Imagining Ecclesial Structures

One such contextualisation is captured in Gilles Routhier’s call for a ‘paradigm shift’ from adaptation to refounding.⁵⁴ At a time when we are witnessing a reduction in the resources the Church has had at its disposal up till now, Routhier believes that the Church faces the double danger of retreat into a reduced parish ministry base while, simultaneously, avoiding the necessity of mission to modern secular culture. Neither of these developments is an acceptable prospect for Christians who take seriously the mission call of the gospel.

The pastoral situation we find ourselves in encourages the use of creativity and imagination to restructure our whole pastoral system and undertake total reform, something beyond a simple facelift or a replastering of a façade. It is time for rebuilding.⁵⁵

Our current parochial structures were established for the pastoral care of the faithful and, according to Routhier, they now find themselves burdened with the role of mission for which they are not suitable. Mission came first and parish was established to nurture those who were evangelised. While adaptation of existing structures and approaches is encouraged to a certain degree in the Vatican documents, what is in fact now needed is a ‘refounding’ of the Christian experience — a move from restructuration to

⁵² As evidenced by the examples to follow in this section.

⁵³ *FAS*, 131-3.

⁵⁴ Gilles Routhier, "From a Project of Adaptation to Refounding: Working out a Guided Image of Mission in Secularized Societies," in Rolheiser, *Secularity and the Gospel*, pp. 151-67.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 160.

reinvention.⁵⁶ For Routhier, Vatican II did not go far enough in discarding outdated forms of Church practice. The renewal that began at the Council is progressing far too slowly and what is urgently needed is greater discontinuity with much of what the Church struggles to relinquish.⁵⁷ As Routhier puts it, “we are entering into a new stage in the history of Christianity in the West; we live in a new world, one in which the Church cannot simply dream of reestablishment, reconquest, or restoration”.⁵⁸ Above all else, creativity in mission is called for. What is needed is the envisioning and development of new modes of Catholic Christian activity in the community coupled with a move away from reliance on the parish as the basic model.⁵⁹

Experiential Renewal of Catholicism

In a similar vein, but going well beyond traditional ecclesial structures, Robert Ludwig makes a plea for the retrieval of the experiential base of all religion and especially Catholicism.⁶⁰ For Ludwig Catholicism needs reconstructing for a new era whose situation is now utterly different from that of preceding centuries. Today the context in which Catholicism must situate itself is the reality of global pluralism, democracy and individual self-determination.⁶¹ Ludwig names four essential building blocks for the reconstructive process each centring on a different but related personal experience: the experience of Jesus, of grace, of sacramental community and of liberation. It is this ‘experiential’ element that is key, so much so, that Catholicism is described by Ludwig as being essentially an experience.⁶²

It is the human experience informed and understood metaphorically by the experiences of others, stretching back two thousand years and beyond, and by the rich and diverse pattern of stories and symbols, practices and ideas, that interpret and hand on those experiences. It is *the experience of God*, the

⁵⁶ Routhier analyses the Vatican II texts for occurrences of the notion of adaptation (sixty three in all) and notes that, just as the Church was revising its understanding of universality, two profoundly impacting historical phenomena were beginning to unfold — the decolonization of the South and enveloping cultural change in the West. These two elements render the Council’s encouragement of ‘adaptation’ as just a beginning — a recommendation to ‘patch up’ our old clothes. But, Routhier claims, the bishops could not have known how soon new clothes would become necessary. *Ibid.*, 153-6.

⁵⁷ The debate over the continuity/discontinuity of Vatican II is crucial and will continue to shape theological reflection in the years ahead. For a recent treatment of this issue see Neil Ormerod, “Vatican II - Continuity or Discontinuity? Toward an Ontology of Meaning,” *Theological Studies* 71 (2010).

⁵⁸ Routhier, “Adaptation to Refounding,” 156.

⁵⁹ For more on this notion of refounding see Gerard A. Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church: Dissent for Leadership* (Sydney: St Paul’s Publications, 1993). Arbuckle’s most recent work looks more closely at culture and inculturation and calls strongly for a freeing up of central control in Catholicism in order to begin to bridge the gap between gospel and culture. See Gerard A. Arbuckle, *Culture, Inculturation & Theologians: A Postmodern Critique* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2010).

⁶⁰ Ludwig, *Reconstructing Catholicism*. See also my earlier comment on these ideas in *FAS*, 45-7.

⁶¹ Ludwig, *Reconstructing Catholicism*, 60.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 59.

immense mystery that is both source and continuing context of everything that exists, informed and interpreted through the historical event and symbolic understandings of Jesus of Nazareth.⁶³

This experiential base resonates strongly with the various elements I have proposed above as a new contextualisation of Catholic identity. A focus on the essentials of Catholicism is needed such that what is simply superstructure (the inculturations of previous cultures) can be let go of and what is infrastructure (essential meanings and belief) can be reframed and redescribed for new generations in terms they understand and can themselves own.⁶⁴

Catholicism and Modernity

Gabriel Daly confronts the challenge of the relationship between Catholicism and modernity by contending that a vital way forward for Catholicism is the reappropriation of a reality that is usually subsumed under the imprecise label of the ‘mystical’.⁶⁵ The reality he identifies is a perspective on the world that readily finds God mysteriously present in the cosmos rather than apart from and over against it. Such an approach confirms the work of both scientist and theologian in the same way as the two perspectives come together in the person and work of Blaise Pascal.⁶⁶ But whereas Catholic Christianity has focussed from its earliest centuries on the importance of defined theoretical explanation, what is needed today is a new recognition of the importance of the pre-conceptual experience. As Daly puts it:

I am merely observing that to conduct the engagement (with modernity) exclusively on the conceptual plane is to by-pass the primary interface between faith and culture. Secularization is an undifferentiated experience before it is a conceptual threat to doctrinal tradition... The Catholic magisterium continues to think and act primarily on the conceptual plane, whereas the crisis is occurring primarily on the plane of the pre-conceptual experience.⁶⁷

The crisis to which he refers is precisely the dilemma that has been uncovered in this *Faith Amid Secularity* study — a far-reaching disconnection between the contemporary

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ The debate over the role and significance of experience in Christian faith remains strong. Boeve calls the described process of reframing, ‘recontextualization’ and it is this which he proposes must replace the method of ‘correlation’ in theology. For a full discussion of his ideas see Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 37-41.

⁶⁵ Gabriel Daly, "Catholicism and Modernity," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LIII, no. 4 (1985).

⁶⁶ “That reality is a way of approaching the world, a readiness to find God mysteriously, i.e., sacramentally, present in the same cosmos as that observed by scientists, who approach it quite properly with the *esprit de géométrie*, as Pascal the scientist did. Is it not, however, the province of the theologian to point out that the same cosmos can be approached with the *esprit de finesse*, as Pascal the Christian did?” Ibid.: 787.

⁶⁷ Ibid.: 788-9.

Westerner and Christian faith practice. For Daly what is missing is the imaginative, the affective, and the intuitional, elements that need to be brought to the fore to operate alongside the discursive, the logical and the scientific. Even as Catholicism gradually abandons an innate and antagonistic defensiveness toward the explanatory power of modern science,⁶⁸ it must acknowledge the extent to which it has dealt with faith in recent centuries as if it were itself scientific. It is apparent in the research reported in this thesis that Western young adult Catholics find doctrinal formulas increasingly incomprehensible and their underlying images less and less convincing. What we are seeing is what Daly calls a ‘linguistic collapse’ within Catholicism, a growing inability to adequately name God coupled with a stubborn determination to maintain the definitions developed by our theological predecessors in a quite different age.⁶⁹ Speaking of an earlier era of unquestioned self-assurance, Daly says:

They named not only with confidence but with abandon, and they have left us a heritage which both enriches us and embarrasses us. They have left us a game to be played as they played it, but we are no longer sure that we are playing on the same field, with the same ball, or under the same rules.⁷⁰

It is not that doctrinal formulas have no cognitive role in the Church. Today, however, it has become critical to acknowledge the inadequacy of our doctrinal formulation to capture all that is important in the Christian faith. As a consequence of this shortcoming, it is vital that the Church begin to more actively encourage the creative exploration of faith experience. Behind doctrine and formula lie experiences which, Daly notes, take precedence over them, experiences that are accessible in ways that go beyond the speculative intellect.⁷¹ “The institutional Church may seek to control the formulas, but it has absolutely no control over the experiences from which they derive.”⁷²

The experiences to which Daly refers are surely witness to the work of the Spirit. Daly’s notion of the variety of experience of God’s presence corresponds well with Taylor’s conviction that the currently recognised ways of being Catholic Christian are only the beginning of what is possible and what will inevitably unfold.⁷³ By limiting the legitimate expression of Catholic faith to past modes the Church risks failing to recognise new and creative possibilities of faith experience that resonate with

⁶⁸ Daly points to the 1907 condemnation of modernism as a basis for this claim.

⁶⁹ Daly, “Catholicism and Modernity,” 792.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 788.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Taylor, *Secular Age*, 504. See also *FAS*, 101.

contemporary generations. To insist on a form of authoritarian heteronomy at a time when the limitations of its usefulness are unquestionably evident is to succumb, in Daly's words, to a "Catholic form of fundamentalism".⁷⁴ The cost of such a rearguard defence of ecclesiastical magisterium is increasingly obvious in the disconnection the Church finds with modern generations, the large majority of whom cannot relate to the worldview and modes of operation and expression that continue to be required of Catholics.

The 'turn to the subject' that began with Descartes and became normative in the West with the Enlightenment started an inescapable process that can now be seen to require an inevitable rethinking of modern religion and, within it, Catholic Christianity. One hundred years ago George Tyrell was already recognising the disconnect that has been highlighted in this study. Dismissed from the Jesuits and excommunicated as a Modernist, Tyrell's observations are increasingly recognised as relevant to today's questions of meaning and modernity.⁷⁵ Somewhat prophetically he warns of the consequences if contemporary human experience of God is disregarded:

[Our forefathers] knew nothing of that fatal discord which arises when religion is derived from outside and civilisation from inside. To their belief we must return in a better form, and derive both one and the other from God, but from God immanent in the spirit of man [sic]. Else we must expect to witness a steady advance of that alienation of the laity from the Church, of which there are manifest signs all round us.⁷⁶

For Tyrell the root of the problem was the steady closing off in his own time of the magisterium to the legitimate influence of the *sensus fidelium*, the lay people of God. It would seem that the call for deep-seated change is hardest to hear from within the relatively isolated confines of the institutional Church.⁷⁷ And yet the call today is increasingly difficult to avoid even though its demands are intensely challenging. What

⁷⁴ Daly, "Catholicism and Modernity," 794. Heteronomy here refers to a worldview that holds our created world as subject to another world (heaven) where God lives.

⁷⁵ For a recent collection of essays about Tyrell and his thought see Oliver P. Rafferty, ed., *George Tyrrell and Catholic Modernism* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010).

⁷⁶ George Tyrrell, *Through Scylla and Charybdis: or The Old Theology and the New* (London: Longmans, Green, 1907), 383.

⁷⁷ Speaking of the difficulty many Church leaders have in finding the positive in the contemporary, Pope John XXIII's words as he opened the Second Vatican Council remain apt: "In the daily exercise of our pastoral office, we sometimes have to listen, much to our regret, to voices of persons who, though burning with zeal, are not endowed with too much sense of discretion or measure. In these modern times they can see nothing but prevarication and ruin. They say that our era, in comparison with past eras, is getting worse, and they behave as though they had learned nothing from history, which is, none the less, the teacher of life. They behave as though at the time of former Councils everything was a full triumph for the Christian idea and life and for proper religious liberty. We feel we must disagree with those prophets of gloom, who are always forecasting disaster, as though the end of the world were at hand."

must be understood however is that what is being asked of the Church today is not capitulation to religionless secularity, but acknowledgement that the transcendent is to be encountered in secular as well as explicitly religious forms.⁷⁸

Section 4: Limitations and Areas for Further Study

Limitations of the Current Study

A key characteristic of the pastoral circle model is the notion of its ongoing incompleteness; it is by definition a repeating cycle.⁷⁹ Its application in this thesis serves to underline the parallel conviction that pastoral theology too is an ongoing, never-finished project. As such it relies on the continuous interchange of ideas and experiences; an ongoing conversation between all partners.⁸⁰ This dialogue is a key strength that pastoral theology brings to the relationship between Christianity and modern secular society. Truth is to be found in the dialogue between the partners in a pluralist and multicultural society and can no longer be assumed to be captured in a worldview of monoculturalism.⁸¹ Applied to the situation of young adult Catholics in modern Western society, a pastoral theological response must witness strongly to the universality of Christian faith by acknowledging the voice and perspective of the young themselves.⁸²

The danger inherent in the ongoing conversation between faith and culture is equally apparent. It is a limitation that relates to the risk of giving away too much to secular culture — of ‘selling out’.⁸³ For this reason a certain wariness in the engagement between Christianity and secularity is appropriate although this must not be allowed to become the guiding motif as it has in the past and threatens to do again today.⁸⁴ Contextualisation must go beyond the mere juxtaposition of ideas in order to achieve a synthesis that is truly enlightening of the cultures involved.⁸⁵

⁷⁸ Daly, "Catholicism and Modernity," 794.

⁷⁹ FAS, 10-2.

⁸⁰ Bevans, *Models*, 90.

⁸¹ Shorter, *Theology of Inculturation*, 18-20. For more on this shift see in particular David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 1-27.

⁸² Cf. the words of Pope John Paul II: "To this end, we need to make our own the ancient pastoral wisdom which, without prejudice to their authority, encouraged Pastors to listen more widely to the entire People of God. Significant is Saint Benedict's reminder to the Abbot of a monastery, inviting him to consult even the youngest members of the community: "By the Lord's inspiration, it is often a younger person who knows what is best"." *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 45.

⁸³ Bevans, *Models*, 94.

⁸⁴ The Church's late nineteenth century campaign against modernism exemplifies this default stance of suspicion and the antipathy that usually accompanies it.

⁸⁵ Bevans, *Models*, 95. Cultures here can include for example ecclesial, indigenous, national or youth culture.

A possible limitation of my own study emerges from the postmodern challenge to discard a secular characterisation of Western society in favour of greater acknowledgement of growing Western pluralism.⁸⁶ Clearly the idea of contextualisation becomes problematic if the notion of a secular society is abandoned in the face of the juxtaposition of a myriad of cultures and religions that go to make up postmodern pluralist society. While I agree that it is vital to continue to explore this reality of engagement with broader society in contemporary New Zealand, the strategies presented in this thesis have a more narrow application. In this project I have been concerned with the undeniable influence of secularity upon the young adult Pakeha Catholic even as the society around them becomes increasingly pluralist. In the years ahead as the composition of the Church continues to change, more account will need to be taken of the influence of pluralist society and the growing reality of the Christian Churches becoming increasingly just one religious option among many.⁸⁷

Areas for Further Study

In the interests of sharpened focus and project manageability the scope of the research undertaken in this study has been deliberately limited in terms of sample size, ethnicity, age, and religious affiliation. In any one of these areas additional research could be undertaken to broaden our understanding of the impact of secularisation. Greater insight into such realities can only be of assistance to pastoral planning in the local Church.

As noted in Chapter One, a study involving other ethnic groups in NZ would certainly yield data of significant comparative interest. It is important however that any such research be undertaken with, and preferably by, members of the ethnic groups in question.⁸⁸ It is well understood today that the subtleties of ethnicity and culture are often indiscernible to outsiders while the risk of inadvertent harm caused during the research process is greatly increased.⁸⁹

With regard to Catholic religiosity in NZ, there is significant interest in the peculiarities of one generation as compared to another. A more age-inclusive study carried out on otherwise similar lines to my own research could be undertaken to explore the Catholic

⁸⁶ See comment on the work of Boeve, *FAS*, 142, footnote 35.

⁸⁷ For a considered theological treatment of this issue see Boeve.

⁸⁸ See for example J. Ball, "Nothing About Us Without Us: Restorative research partnerships involving Indigenous children and communities in Canada," in *Exploring Ethical Research with Children*, ed. A. Farrell (Berkshire: Open University Press/McGraw Hill Education, 2005).

⁸⁹ L. T. Smith, "On Tricky Ground: Researching the Native in the Age of Uncertainty," in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2005).

identity of other particular age groupings. Such age group comparative data is available in many of the international studies and it would be of value to ascertain how the NZ situation does or does not reflect overseas findings.⁹⁰

Also of considerable interest would be a study of faith and secularity in which the experiences of different Christian denominations in NZ were compared. The emphases of Catholic and Protestant traditions are often markedly different and research into the various experiences and responses of the different Christian traditions in relation to secularity could be illuminating. Equivalent research has been undertaken in Australia and the US and it would be of value to explore whether the NZ context replicates the overseas findings.⁹¹ Beyond this, research into the impact of secularity on other religions could also yield informative comparative results.

Finally, as noted at the end of the preceding subsection (*Limitations*), further research into the implications for Catholicism of NZ society's growing pluralism would be of real value for better understanding Catholicism's prospects. In particular, and as a development of the current project, the impact of postmodern pluralist society on the religious identity of young New Zealanders born and raised as Christians could offer valuable insight into our changing situation. It is only with such understanding that the Church's pastoral planning can hope to appropriately address the challenges that lie ahead.

Concluding Comments

The problem of secularization is not the same as the problem of enlightenment. Enlightenment was of the few. Secularization is of the many.⁹²

With these words, historian Owen Chadwick pinpoints the immensity and swiftness of the current secularization of Western society when compared with the much more gradual impact of the Enlightenment. The evidence suggests that the Catholic Church in NZ is experiencing the gradual detachment of its young adults from active ecclesial involvement. Simultaneously, a general religious illiteracy has taken hold among young Catholics; unfamiliarity with the tradition that makes only the more remarkable their

⁹⁰ See for example James D. Davidson, *Catholicism in Motion: The Church in American Society* (Liguori, Missouri: Liguori/Triumph, 2005), Hornsby-Smith, *Roman Catholic Beliefs*.

⁹¹ See for example Mason, Singleton and Webber, *Spirit of Generation Y*. Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*. Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁹² Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 9.

continuing desire to be called ‘Catholic’. How long this will be maintained is impossible to estimate with any certainty.

A fundamental change has taken place running in parallel to post-Vatican II efforts to modernize Catholicism. It is clear today that fear for the fate of one’s soul cannot be restored by the Church as a key method of motivation for faith practice. The significant societal shift that has occurred has seen an embracing of the autonomy and subjectivity of the individual such that modern young adults in Western society are largely immune to the multifaceted aspects of coercion to which previous generations were susceptible. Moreover their world is immense — cosmological — and their search for God within that world renders them incapable of relating deeply and personally to monarchical images formed in, what is to them, the ancient past.

Whenever Catholics gather to ponder the situation of declining participation, there is inevitably a repeated call for the Church to ‘listen to young people’. But is the Church really ready to listen? Reflecting on the proceedings of a recent Fordham University conference entitled ‘*Twenty-Somethings and the Church: Lost?*’ Tom Beaudoin insightfully notes the following in his blog response.

...deep listening is predicated on a willingness to be changed by the encounter, to have one’s conceptions, even basic conceptions, revised by the other (as well as a trust that the other brings this same fundamental openness). This openness, as much literature on interreligious dialogue shows, is not a weakness or a bracketing of real difference, but rather the limit-test [sic] for whether the truth of, in, and through the other can be acknowledged, and thus whether real hearing can happen.⁹³

Beaudoin’s point is that it is no longer of any use to describe as dialogue a situation in which one partner has no intention or ability to be open to change at a significant level. Meeting young adults ‘where they are’ is of little use if it is only to try to convince them why the Church is right about God, faith, church, sex, justice, etc.⁹⁴ What is needed may in fact be beyond what is possible for the contemporary Catholic Church.

The Church must learn to hold more loosely to much of what it has for so long been certain. Courage is needed to be able to admit that the Church does not understand everything and has much to learn in a new era in human history. This is the lesson of a

⁹³ Tom Beaudoin, "Twenty-Somethings and Catholicism: Reflections on the Fordham Conference," *America – The National Catholic Weekly*, *In All Things* group blog, (January 31, 2011), accessed February 16, 2011, http://www.americamagazine.org/blog/entry.cfm?entry_id=3852.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

disconnecting young adult membership. To engage the coming generation of adult Catholics requires of the Church a willingness to join them on their search for authenticity — a commitment that can only lead to a rediscovery of the Church's own authenticity as it seeks to announce the Kingdom of God in a new epoch.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Cf. 'An Age of Authenticity,' in Taylor, *Secular Age*, 473-504.

APPENDICES

Appendix One: Participant Information Sheet



Participant INFORMATION SHEET

Research Study

Faith Amid Secularity: *a critical exploration of Catholic religious identity among young adult Pakeha Catholics in Aotearoa New Zealand.*

What is the study about?

There is a lot of interest today in what young people believe and how they understand the place of religion in their lives. This study will explore the influence and extent of a Catholic perspective in the lives of contemporary young people. The participants will be aged between 18 and 28 years and will all self-identify as Catholic to a greater or lesser extent.

Who is carrying out the study?

The study is being conducted by Chris Duthie-Jung (the researcher) and will form the basis for the degree of Doctorate of Ministry at the Sydney College of Divinity under the supervision of Anthony Maher (Lecturer – Catholic Institute of Sydney) and Robert Dixon (Director - Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Pastoral Projects Office).

What does the study involve?

The researcher will interview approximately 24 young people for about 1 hour each. Interviews will be recorded (audio only) and later transcribed. Focus groups of about 1 hour in length will also be used to allow discussion and the consideration of others' viewpoints. These will also be recorded and the recordings transcribed.

How much time will the study take?

Each interview and focus group discussion will take about 1 hour.

Can I withdraw from the study?

Being in this study is completely voluntary - you are not under any obligation to consent. You may withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty or prejudice.

Who will see my transcript?

Only the researcher and possibly an assistant engaged to assist with the transcription process. Both of these people will be aware of the importance of confidentiality in their work. Your transcript will be de-identified (names removed so that only the researcher knows to whom it refers – using a simple code). After the project is completed, a copy of the digital recording of your interview will be securely stored (in a safe) for five years as is required by the university. This file will be digitally locked ensuring that it remains accessible only to the researcher. After this five year period it will be deleted.

Will I get the chance to check my transcript if I wish?

Participants will be given the opportunity to view the transcript/s of their interview/focus group discussion to ensure accuracy. Only then will transcripts be analysed by the researcher to draw out recurring and significant themes.

[over]

Faith Amid Secularity:

A critical exploration of Catholic religious identity among young adult Pakeha Catholics in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Will the study benefit me?

The study aims to be of benefit to participants by allowing them to explore their personal understanding of religion and its place in their lives.

Can I tell other people about the study?

Yes. Keep in mind however that, with the Catholic community being relatively small in New Zealand, the identification of research participants can pose a problem. This said, no real names will be used in the final report and every effort will be made to disguise the identity of participants.

Will anyone else know the results?

All aspects of the study, including results, will be strictly confidential and only the researcher will have access to information on participants. A report of the study will form the basis of the researcher's doctoral thesis and may be submitted for further publication. Please note however that individual participants will not be identifiable in any such report.

What if I require further information?

When you have read this information, Chris Duthie-Jung will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact:

Chris Duthie-Jung (Researcher)

Email: c.duthie-jung@wn.catholic.org.nz

Phone: 04 889 0996 (Lower Hutt Office)

Mobile: 021 0230 5149

Anthony Maher (Supervisor)

Email: amaher@cis.catholic.edu.au

Phone: +61 2 9752 9516 (Sydney Office - CIS)

Robert Dixon (Assoc. Supervisor)

Email: r.dixon@ppo.catholic.org.au

Phone: +61 3 9953 3456 (Melbourne Office – ACBC PPO)

Do I need to sign a Consent Form?

Yes. If you are happy to participate in the project, the researcher will ask you to sign a consent form giving permission for the use and storage of the checked transcript of your interview and/or focus group for the outlined research purposes. Again, you will have a chance to amend the transcript before it is used in the study analysis.

What if I have a complaint or concerns?

Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact:

The Director of Research,
Sydney College of Divinity

Phone: +61 2 9889 1969

Fax: +61 2 9889 2281

Email: gmoore@scd.edu.au

This information sheet is for you to keep

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Appendix Two: Interview Schedule

FAITH AMID SECULARITY *A critical exploration of Catholic religious identity among young adult Pakeha Catholics in Aotearoa New Zealand.*

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Part One: Personal Religious Background (10 minutes)

1. Were your parents Catholic?

YES (at least one Catholic parent)

- To what extent was Catholic faith part of your home life e.g., prayers, stories, discussions or rituals?
- Did your family celebrate or observe major religious festivals e.g., Easter/Christmas, lent/advent, feast day, days of obligations?

YES - How were these observed?

NO - (Continue)

- How actively Catholic would you say you were as a family, e.g. did you:
 - go to church every Sunday?
 - belong to Parish groups or any other Catholic organisations?
- Were there any other ways that being Catholic affected the way your parents and family lived their lives?
- Did your parents talk to you about their religious beliefs?
- How actively Catholic would you say your parents are today?

NO

- When did you decide to become a Catholic yourself?
- What led to your decision? (People, events, occurrences?)

2. Do you know how old you were when you were baptised?

- Do you know where your baptism took place?
- Tell me about you Godparents, are you still in touch with them today?

3. Did you make your first Communion, get confirmed, etc.?

- What do you remember about any of these occasions?

4. Did you attend a Catholic primary or secondary school (or both)?

YES

- How do you feel about your Catholic education?
- In your opinion, what made it different to a local state school?
- I'm interested in how well you think Catholic schools encourage faith in kids:
 - *What would you say your school/s did well in this area?*
 - *What do you think they could have done better to help you grow as a person?*
 - *Any changes you'd like to see happen in Catholic schools?*

NO

- Did you take part in any faith or religious education classes or groups while you were growing up?
 - YES
 - *How did they encourage you in your faith do you think?*
 - *What do you think the Church could do to help kids who aren't in Catholic schools grow in their faith?*
 - NO
 - *Where did you learn about Catholic faith? What was that like?*

5. Did you ever seriously question your faith or consider stopping being Catholic while at school?

YES

- What were the circumstances around that?

NO

- *(Continue)*

6. Were you, or any members of your family, involved in other (non-Catholic) churches or religions?

YES

- Tell me about that.

NO

- *(Continue)*

7. If you had to sum up what it meant to you to be Catholic as you were growing up, what would you say?

| |
|--|
| Part Two: Current Overt Religious Practice (10 minutes) |
|--|

8. How strong do you feel is your sense of being Catholic today?

- How would you describe your relationship with the Catholic Church?

9. I'm interested in what Catholic practices you take part in these days. Do you participate in:

- Sunday Mass
 - *[If YES] How regularly?*
- Public devotions or prayer (other than the Mass)?
- Personal (private) devotions or prayer?
 - *Do you think of this personal prayer as Catholic?*
- Parish or other church events?
- Diocesan or regional Catholic events?
 - *Did you take part in WYD08 in Sydney?*
- Any other Catholic groups or movements?
 - *Which groups or movements?*

10. Questioning our faith is a normal part of life. To what extent would you say you have questioned your faith since leaving school?

- Was this associated with any other event in your life?
- Was it influenced by your peer group; your workplace; your faith community; etc.?
- Do you find yourself asking questions about your faith today?
 - YES
 - *What kind of questions?*
 - *How do you go about resolving faith questions these days?*
 - NO
 - *(Continue)*

| |
|--|
| Part Three: Catholic Worldview (40 minutes) |
|--|

| |
|------------------------------------|
| A) Ecclesial faith (10mins) |
|------------------------------------|

11. How would you describe the Catholic Church today?

- How would you describe it in relation to other Christian churches?
- How would you describe it in relation to other religions?

12. I'd like to try a word-association exercise – is that okay? I'll say a 2-3 word phrase (each begins with the word Catholic), and I'd like you to simply say aloud the first five or so words that come to mind.

- Catholic decision making.

- Catholic leadership.
- Catholic authority.
- Catholic hierarchy.

13. What do you understand as the Bishop's role in the Church today?

- How important do you think it is today?

14. What about the role of the Pope?

- What do you understand as his role?
- How important do you think it is today?

15. If I were to bring the local bishop (name) in here now (do you know him?) and we were able to speak very honestly and informally (positive or negative), what would you want to say to him about:

- the Church?
- society today?
- young people?
- anything else?

16. Does Catholic tradition matter much to you? Can you explain that a bit?

| |
|--|
| B) Sacramental imagination (10mins) |
|--|

17. I'd like you to consider for a moment 'things' that you feel are typically Catholic – anything at all – what comes to mind?

- Are these things more positive or negative for you?

18. There are many different ways of picturing God. I'd like to know the kinds of images you are most likely to associate with God. I'm going to give you some contrasting (quite different) images on a scale of 1-7. Where would you place your image of God between each pair of images?

| | | |
|--------|---------------|--------|
| Mother | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Father |
| Master | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Spouse |
| Judge | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Lover |
| Friend | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | King |

- 19. People have different images of the world and human nature too. I'd like to know the kinds of images you have. I'm going to give you two sets of contrasting images. On a scale of 1-7 where would you place your image of the world and human nature between the two contrasting images?**

| | | |
|--|---------------------------|--|
| The world is basically filled with evil and sin. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | There is much goodness in the world which hints at God's goodness. |
| Human nature is basically good. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Human nature is fundamentally bad and corrupt. |

- 20. To what extent do you see God as present in the world around you?**

- 21. 'Sacrament' is a very Catholic concept – what does it mean to you?**

- What value do you place on the Catholic Sacraments?
- Are there any of particular importance to you?

- 22. Let's try some more word-association. Just tell me the first 5 words that come to mind for each of the following:**

- Jesus
- Church
- God
- Mary

- 23. How important is the Eucharist (the Mass) to you?**

- Can you explain for me why you think Eucharist (or Mass) has this meaning for you?

| |
|-------------------------------------|
| C) Faith and reason (10mins) |
|-------------------------------------|

- 24. In your opinion, how well do modern science and contemporary Catholic faith fit together?**

- Can you name any specific areas?

- 25. What do you think Catholic faith has to offer the modern scientific world?**

- 26. What do you think the modern scientific world has to offer Catholic faith?**

- 27. If you compare the Catholic Church today with the Catholic Church of the past:**

- In what way would you say it is unchanging?
- And in what way do you feel it has changed and is changing?
- Do you think there are any ways in which it still needs to change?

- 28. In your view, is there any place for 'mystery' in Catholic faith?**

29. It's sometimes said that being Catholic today is about keeping the heart and head in balance. By heart we mean things like faith, belief & love whereas by head we might mean thought, knowledge & intellect. How well do you feel the Church is doing this today – keeping its head and heart in balance?

| |
|------------------------------|
| D) Community (10mins) |
|------------------------------|

30. How important do you think it is for Christians to gather as a community to celebrate Eucharist today?

31. What do you think about sin – how important do you think it is?

- Does sin have a social aspect in your view, i.e. is it an individual thing or is there a 'group' aspect to it?

32. And what about salvation – what does that mean for you?

33. What responsibility do you feel Catholics have for the wellbeing of others in society?

34. Do you feel that the Catholic Church should be speaking out in the area of:

- Ecology / care for the environment?
- Life issues?
- Sexual morality?
- Poverty?

Conclusion

35. Is there anything you would like to add that you think we might not have covered?

36. Is there anything you would like to say about the interview itself?

Appendix Three: Participant Consent Form



CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

The Project: ***Faith Amid Secularity: a critical exploration of Catholic religious identity among young adult Pakeha Catholics in Aotearoa New Zealand.***

Supervisor: **Mr Anthony Maher**

Student Researcher: **Chris Duthie-Jung**

I (*the participant*) have read and understood the information provided in the Participant Information Sheet. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, aware that I may withdraw at any time. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

I have also been made aware that the research data is required to be stored for a minimum of 5 years. I agree to the secure storage of de-identified data for the required period.

Name of the Participant: (*Block letters*)

Signature: Date:/...../.....

Signature of the Principal Supervisor:

Date:/...../.....

Signature of the Student Researcher:

Date:/...../.....

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