



**Religion and Education:**

**The Voices of Young People in Ireland**

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## **Part 1: The Greer Legacy**

### **1. Profile of Protestant sixth-form religion in Northern Ireland 1968-2011: The Greer legacy**

*Christopher Alan Lewis, Leslie J. Francis & Ursula McKenna*

#### **Abstract**

The aim of the present study was to build on John Greer's systematic set of studies concerned with teenage beliefs and values conducted among samples of sixth-form students attending County and Protestant voluntary schools in Northern Ireland in 1968, 1978, 1988 and 1998. The present study replicated the earlier surveys for a further time in 2011. The results of the first four surveys provided a unique snapshot of the gradual decline of religious affiliation, belief and practice across the latter part of the twentieth century in a nation which had continued to resist the secularisation process so eroding the place of religion in the neighbouring nations of England, Wales, and Scotland. The results of the fifth survey conducted in 2011, however, demonstrated a clear drift away from the churches toward a more secular future.

*Keywords:* Northern Ireland, sixth-formers, religion survey, secularisation

## **2. Denominational differences in students' religious and moral values in Northern Ireland: Still worlds apart?**

*Leslie J. Francis, Christopher Alan Lewis & Ursula McKenna*

### **Abstract**

Northern Ireland has been a country deeply divided by the denominational distinction between Catholics and Protestants. The division has been reflected in and supported by separate educational systems for Protestant and Catholic students. According to Murray in the mid-1980s this segregated system of schools resulted in young people growing up 'worlds apart'. In 1979 Greer initiated a series of empirical enquiries concerning the distinctive religious, moral and social cultures of students educated in the two school systems. The present study builds on research first carried out by Greer in 1984 and extended in 1998 that investigated and compared the religious beliefs and values of students educated in Catholic and Protestant schools. The new data provided by 1,591 students attending Protestant schools and by 1,618 students attending Catholic schools in 2011 demonstrated that there remain some significant and consistent differences in the profiles of the religious and moral values of the two denominational groups. Some of the implications of this finding for accounts of the nature of the process of secularisation and for education and schooling in Northern Ireland are considered.

*Keywords:* Northern Ireland, students, denominational differences, religious and moral values

### **3. Growing up Catholic in Ireland: The intersectionality of gender and nationality**

*Leslie J. Francis, Andrew G. McGrady, Kevin Williams & Ursula McKenna*

#### **Abstract**

Young Catholics growing up on the island of Ireland are part of one world-wide Roman Catholic Church, sharing in the one heritage and tradition. At the same time young Catholics in Ireland are growing up in two different social, political, and religious cultures. In the Republic of Ireland, the Catholic Church had enjoyed decades of political influence, but is now situated in an increasingly secularised culture. In Northern Ireland, the Catholic Church has coexisted within a religiously segregated society alongside the significant presence of Protestant and Reformed Churches. Drawing on data generated from a survey conducted during 2011 among sixth-form students in Northern Ireland and senior cycle students in the Republic of Ireland, the present study employed the notion of intersectionality (embracing gender and socio-political context) to interrogate differences in the religious beliefs and practices and in the moral values of self-identified Catholic students: 3,015 in the Republic of Ireland and 1,624 in Northern Ireland. The data draw attention to the effects of both gender and cultural context in shaping two somewhat different expressions of Catholic identity within the two jurisdictions on the relatively small island of Ireland.

*Keywords:* Catholic identity, Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, young people

#### **4. What can we learn about young people's religious experience, and why should we bother? Reflections on a study from the Republic of Ireland**

*Jeff Astley*

##### **Abstract**

John Greer initiated a research tradition through his questionnaire surveys that asked about the incidence and nature of religious experience among secondary school students in Northern Ireland. Tania ap Siôn replicated these surveys, extending Greer's analysis into nine categories representing the content and context of religious experience (answered prayer, conversion, death, depression and sickness, difficulty of description, exam concerns, God's presence, guidance and help, and miscellaneous), while also noting their setting and frequency. This chapter develops the Greer tradition further, discussing more recent data from students in the Republic of Ireland and identifying some further issues that are posed by attempts at a nuanced understanding of reports of religious experience from survey material, both in this case and more generally. The chapter concludes with a general reflection on the value of studying this aspect of school students' own experience.

*Keywords:* Religious experience, guidance and help, answered prayer, Republic of Ireland

## **Part 2: The Millennial Generation**

### **5. Catholic identities, religious faith and moral values: An empirical enquiry among 16- to 19- year-old male students in the Republic of Ireland**

*Andrew McGrady, Ursula McKenna & Leslie J Francis*

#### **Abstract**

Against the background of the changing religious landscape of the Republic of Ireland, this study was designed to explore the connections between Catholic identities and both religious faith and moral values at the beginning of the twenty-first century in order to provide a baseline for future studies. Catholic identities are conceptualised as comprising the intersection between religious affiliation and religious practice. Drawing on data provided by post-primary students between the ages of 16 and 19 years, collected in 2003 from 65 Catholic voluntary secondary schools, comparisons were drawn between five groups of young men: 96 who claimed affiliation with no religious group and 1,231 Roman Catholic students distinguished by four levels of mass attendance: weekly (614), at least once a month (265), several times a year (254), and never (92), leaving six who did not report on their level of attendance. The data demonstrated that the religiously unaffiliated young men retained some vestige of the religious heritage of Ireland, while weekly mass attending young men embraced a number of secular norms and values. While Catholic identities remained important, their significance was eroding.

*Keywords: Republic of Ireland, Catholic young men, religious faith, moral values.*

**6. When women cease to be more religious than men: The changing face of sex differences in religious affect among young adult Catholics in the Republic of Ireland**

*Leslie J. Francis, Andrew McGrady & Ursula McKenna*

**Abstract**

Empirical research studies within Christian and post-Christian cultures have consistently reported higher levels of religious practice, belief and affect among women than among men. The present study reported the responses of 1,583 16- to 17-year-old and 1,191 18- to 19-year-old Catholic students within the Republic of Ireland who completed the McGrady Religious Affect Scale (McRAS) in 2003. Among neither age group was a significant difference found between the scores recorded by males and by females. This finding is consistent with the view that young Catholic women may be losing confidence in their religious heritage more rapidly than young Catholic men.

*Key words:* attitudes, Christianity, young adults, Catholics, Republic of Ireland

## **7. Republic of Ireland in 2003: Exploring sex differences**

*Andrew G. McGrady, Leslie J. Francis & Ursula McKenna*

### **Abstract**

Against the background of the changing religious, cultural and social landscape of the Republic of Ireland, this study was designed to explore the religious identity of 16- to 19-year-old school-leavers in single sex Catholic voluntary secondary schools in the early 2000s. Drawing on data provided by 1,648 young women and 1,231 young men who self-identified as Catholics, the analyses explored the themes of religious attendance, sacramental participation, self-assessed religiosity, personal religiosity, anticipated future religious engagement, influences on religiosity, and religious affect. The most important findings from the study is that both young male and young female Catholic school-leavers perceive themselves as being less religious and less institutionally affiliated than their perceptions of their parents. While, in accordance with general findings elsewhere young women are more likely to engage in prayer than young men, within the Republic of Ireland young women feel less positively about the Church than young men and are more likely to feel alienated from institutional Catholicism.

*Keywords:* Catholic Church, Catholic voluntary secondary schools, single sex schools, Republic of Ireland, religious identity, religious affect



**8. The McGrady Index of Parental Attitude toward Catholic Schools (MIPACS):  
Reliability and validity among Catholic parents within the Republic of Ireland**

*Andrew G. McGrady, Leslie J Francis & Ursula McKenna*

**Abstract**

Drawing on data provided by 2,838 parents of Catholic students attending second-level Catholic schools within the Republic of Ireland in 2003, this study introduces the McGrady Index of Parental Attitude toward Catholic Schools (MIPACS). This instrument displayed good internal reliability ( $\alpha = .84$ ) and good construct validity, assessed in terms of motivations for choosing a Catholic school, preferred choice of school, and satisfaction with the school. The individual items generate insight into Catholic parents' expectations regarding Catholic voluntary secondary schools and suggests that in 2003 parental support for the religious ethos of such schools was waning. It is recommended that replication of this original study would document the extent to which parental attitude toward Catholic schools may have undergone further change.

*Keywords:* Catholic schools, Republic of Ireland, Catholic parents, parental attitudes.

## **Part 3: Religious Education and Religious Diversity**

### **9. Exploring the social benefit of religious education in post-primary schools within the Republic of Ireland: An empirical enquiry among 13- to 15-year-old students**

*Gareth Byrne, Leslie J. Francis & Ursula McKenna*

#### **Abstract**

Religious Education as currently conceived within post-primary schools in the Republic of Ireland, following the introduction of State-sponsored syllabuses, in 2000 and 2003, is designed to equip students to understand their own religious tradition or non-religious worldview and also to reflect on the religious traditions and worldviews of others. It seeks to help young people live within the religiously diverse communities that make up Ireland today, promoting respect for diverse religious and non-religious ways of living. Drawing on a survey of 3,000 13- to 15-year-old students from schools across the Republic of Ireland, this study examines the effect of learning from religious education on attitude toward religious diversity as relevant for community cohesion. The data demonstrate that, after taking individual differences in personal factors, psychological factors and religious factors into account, learning from religious education in school adds significantly to shaping a positive attitude toward religious diversity. This finding suggests that reducing commitment to religious education of this kind within post-primary schooling in the Republic of Ireland is likely to render young people less well equipped to live with religiously diversity and consequently to damage community cohesion.

## **10. Sustaining churchgoing young Catholics in the Republic of Ireland: Assessing the importance of parental example**

*Gareth Byrne, Leslie J. Francis, Bernadette Sweetman & Ursula McKenna*

### **Abstract**

In light of the recognised decline in church attendance among young Catholics within the Republic of Ireland, this study examines the pattern of church attendance among 1,942 self-identified Catholic students between the ages of 13 and 15 years within a survey of 3,000 students attending second level schools across the nation. Multiple regression analyses were employed to assess the predictive power of five sets of factors: personal factors (sex and age), psychological factors (psychoticism, neuroticism, and extraversion), parental religious identity (treating mothers and fathers separately), parental religious practice, and peer-related practice. The data suggested that young Catholics who practise their Catholic identity by attending church do so largely because their parents are Catholic churchgoers. Moreover, young Catholics are most likely to keep going if both mother *and* father are Catholic churchgoers, and if they discuss faith with their mother. Peer-related factors and psychological factors add no additional predictive power to the model. These findings point to the importance of the Catholic Church in the Republic of Ireland investing in the education and formation of Catholic parents.

*Keywords:* Catholic, Republic of Ireland, young people, church attendance, parental influence, *Share the Good News*

**11. Exploring the personal, social and spiritual worldview of male adolescent atheists  
within the Republic of Ireland: An empirical enquiry**

*Gareth Byrne, Leslie J. Francis , Ursula McKenna & Bernadette Sweetman*

**Abstract**

The changing religious landscape of the Republic of Ireland is reflected in lower levels of religious practice and in increasing levels of non-belief. This study examines the personal, social and spiritual correlates of atheism among adolescent males (13- to 15-years of age) by comparing the views of 286 atheists with the views of 719 theists across ten domains: religious belief, belief in transcendence, belief in science, evolution and creation, personal wellbeing, cultural diversity, respect for religion, signs of religious diversity, influences on views about religion, and importance of religion. The data demonstrate the significant personal, social and spiritual differences between male adolescent theists and atheists in Ireland.

*Key words:* worldview, theism, male, adolescence, atheism, religious plurality, Republic of Ireland

**12. Turn up the volume:  
Hearing what the voices of young people are saying to religious education**

*Sandra Cullen*

**Abstract**

The research presented in this book turns up the volume on the voices of young people. Behind every statistic presented in the data is an individual whose voice, views and beliefs have been influenced by particular contexts. The relationship between individuals and their context can be interrogated using Boeve's threefold description of sociocultural developments in Europe that have an impact on religion and consequently on religious education: detraditionalisation, the individualisation of identity formation, and pluralisation. Turning up the volume on the voices of young people reveals that there are significant features to their engagement with religion. It suggests that religious education with young people can only be undertaken with them as conversation partners in the imagining of appropriate forms of religious education for contemporary contexts.

*Keywords:* voices of young people, conversation partners, contemporary contexts, diversity, religious education, identity