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Retaining young Catholics in the Church: Assessing the importance of parental example

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Abstract

Drawing on data from a survey conducted among 9,810 young people in England, Scotland, and Wales, this study examines parental and peer influence on church attendance among 2,146 13- to 15-year-old students who identified themselves as Catholics. 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 Catholic churchgoers are most likely to keep going if both mother *and* father are Catholic churchgoers. Among this age group of young Catholics both peer support and attending a church school are also significant, but account for little additional variance after taking parental churchgoing into account. The implication from these findings for a Catholic Church strategy for ministry among children and young people within England, Scotland and Wales is that it may be wise to invest in the education and formation of Catholic parents.

Keywords: Catholic, churchgoing, young people, parents, peers

Introduction

Many of the key documents emanating from the Catholic Church on Catholic education stress the collaboration of three core agencies (parents, school, and Church) in the faith formation of young people. Among these three agencies primacy is placed in the hands of parents, especially in those social contexts in which non-Catholic or secular influences are strong. The position of the Catholic Church on this partnership among parents, school, and Church is illustrated from reference to the following primary documents: *Gravissimum Educationis* [Declaration on Christian education] (Second Vatican Council, 1965); *Lumen Gentium* [Dogmatic constitution on the Church] (Second Vatican Council, 1964); *Evangelii Nuntiandi* [Evangelization in the modern world] (Paul the Sixth, 1975); *The Catholic school* (Congregation of Catholic Education, 1977); *Catechesi Tradendae* [On catechesis in our time] (John Paul the Second, 1979); *Familiaris Consortio* [The role of the Christian family in the modern world] (John Paul the Second, 1981); *The religious dimension of education in a Catholic school* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988); *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1993); *The Catholic school on the threshold of the third millennium* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997); *General directory for catechesis* (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997); and *Educating today and tomorrow: A renewing passion* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2014).

Primacy of parents in Catholic education

The ministry of parents is seen as essential to the very core of the Catholic Church's mission in a modern plural, secular society. The Christian family is the domestic church (*Lumen Gentium* 11), where 'the different aspects and functions of the life of the entire Church may be reflected: mission; catechesis; witness; prayer...' (*General Directory for Catechesis* 255)

In our own time, in a world often alien and even hostile to faith, believing families are of primary importance as centres of living, radiant faith. For this reason, the Second Vatican Council, using an ancient expression, calls the family the *Ecclesia domestica*. It is in the bosom of the family that parents are ‘by word and example ... the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children’. (*Familiaris Consortio* 1656)

Within this ‘domestic church’ parents are the primary educators in the faith (*General Directory for Catechesis* 255; *Gravissimum Educationis* 3)

Hence, parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children. Their role as educators is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure in it. The right and duty of parents to give education is essential... . (*Familiaris Consortio* 36)

The parents’ responsibility in this ‘domestic church’ is by their word and example to be the first preachers of the faith to their children (*Lumen Gentium* 11). In other words, the parents’ responsibility is to sustain a family life that encourages the transmission of faith:

Indeed, in the same way as the Church, the family ‘is a place in which the Gospel is transmitted and from which it extends’. The family as a locus of catechesis has a unique privilege: transmitting the Gospel by rooting it in the context of profound human values. On this human base, Christian initiation is more profound: the awakening of the sense of God; the first steps in prayer; education of the moral conscience; formation in the Christian sense of human love, understood as a reflection of the love of God the Father, the Creator. It is, indeed, a Christian education more witnessed to than taught, more occasional than systematic, more on-going and daily than structured into periods. (*General Directory for Catechesis* 255)

This is a two-way process in so much that parents not only communicate the Gospel to their children, but from their children they can themselves receive the same Gospel as deeply

lived by them (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 71). The role of parents in the education and evangelisation of their child is 'original and irreplaceable. It assumes the characteristics typical of family life itself, which should be interwoven with love, simplicity, practicality and daily witness' (*Familiaris Consortio* 53).

The family's catechetical activity has a special character, which is in a sense irreplaceable. This special character has been rightly stressed by the Church, particularly by the Second Vatican Council. Education in the faith by parents, which should begin from the children's tenderest age, is already being given when the members of a family help each other to grow in faith through the witness of their Christian lives, a witness that is often without words but which perseveres throughout a day-to-day life lived in accordance with the Gospel. (*Catechesi Tradendae* 68)

Catholic education is, however, not the sole responsibility of the parent, they are aided and supported by both the Catholic school and the Church and parish, who should be 'collaborators with parents in the spiritual and intellectual formation of their children' (Frabutt et al, 2010, p. 24). In turn parents have a responsibility to collaborate in this partnership, they have a right and an obligation to choose a school that supports this Catholic education (*Gravissimum Educationis* 6).

As those first responsible for the education of their children, parents have the right to *choose a school for them* which corresponds to their own convictions. This right is fundamental. As far as possible parents have the duty of choosing schools that will best help them in their task as Christian educators. Public authorities have the duty of guaranteeing this parental right and of ensuring the concrete conditions for its exercise. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2229)

Frabutt et al (2010, p. 28) identified this 'original, primary and inalienable right' as 'the most central theme in regards to parents and education'.

Catholic school contribution to Catholic education

For the Catholic Church the central purpose of the Catholic school is to assist in its universal mission; to assist parents in the education of their children; to serve the needs of the local church; and to be a service to society (Stock, 2005, p. 16). The Catholic Church has always viewed Catholic schools as being essential in its evangelising mission. The English Bishops' first priority, after the restoration in 1850, was to set up Catholic schools, even to the extent of building a school with a chapel in preference to a church without a school (Arthur, 1995, p. 15).

The Catholic school (1977) emphasises that the school is an intrinsic element of the Catholic Church; 'Christ is the foundation of the whole educational enterprise in a Catholic school' (34). It forms part of 'the saving mission of the Church', and aims to form 'in the Christian those particular virtues which will enable him to live a new life in Christ' (36). The Catholic school thus prioritises 'the formation of a spiritual and moral life as realised in Catholic religious culture and practice i.e. the enhancement of Catholicity among their students and its development to contemporary conditions' (Grace, 2016, p. 191).

The religious dimension of education in a Catholic school (1988) makes a clear distinction between catechesis and religious education in the Catholic education offered in school. 'Catechesis' or personal growth in the faith which 'happens most especially in a local Church community' and the aim of the school which is knowledge and specifically religious education which 'tries to convey a sense of the nature of Christianity and how Christians are trying to live their lives' (69). However,

The distinction between religious instruction and catechesis does not change the fact that a school can and must play its specific role in the work of catechesis. Since its educational goals are rooted in Christian principles, the school as a whole is inserted

into the evangelical function of the Church. It assists in and promotes faith education.

(Religious dimension of education 69)

The importance of the role of the school cannot be underestimated as given the time spent there for many young people it becomes seen as ‘as an extension of their own homes’ (*The Catholic school on the threshold of the third millennium 27*). Catholic educators (Grace, 2002, 2016) highlight that it often becomes the young person’s parish as well. Recent Church documents bear witness to this, ‘Catholic schools are often the only places where young people encounter the bearers of Good News’ (*Educating today and tomorrow: A renewing passion 8*).

At the heart of Catholic education there is always Jesus Christ: everything that happens in Catholic schools and universities should lead to an encounter with the living Christ. If we look at the great educational challenges that we will face soon, we must keep the memory of God made flesh in the history of mankind – in our history – alive. (*Educating today and tomorrow: A renewing passion 8*).

The distinctive mission of Catholic education is more difficult than in the past and ‘the responsibilities for the quality of mission integrity in the schooling system has become more demanding’ (Grace, 2016, p. 191).

Catholic church and parish contribution to Catholic education

At a parish level, the local church has an obligation to support both parents and schools. The parish is ‘the Eucharistic community and the heart of the liturgical life of Christian families; it is a privileged place for the catechesis of children and parents’ (*Catechism of the Catholic Church 2226; Lumen Gentium 11*)

Family catechesis, therefore, precedes, accompanies, and enriches all other forms of catechesis... Encouragement must also be given to the individuals or institutions that, through person-to-person contacts, through meetings, and through all kinds

of pedagogical means, help parents to perform their task: the service they are doing to catechesis is beyond price. (*Catechesi Tradendae* 68)

As Frabutt et al (2010, p. 25) highlight in their study, this obligation often falls to the local parish priest ‘because, despite new and innovative models of school governance, he is still responsible for “arranging everything so that all the faithful have a Catholic education” (canon 794 §2)’.

Pastors should remember that, in helping parents and educators to fulfil their mission well, it is the Church who is being built up. Moreover, this is an excellent occasion for adult catechesis. (*General Directory for Catechesis* 179)

The key theme that resonates throughout the church documents is the importance of the partnership, the collaboration between parents, school and church. As Cardinal H. E. Zenon Grocholewski (2015) highlighted, the Catholic Church’s focus on Catholic education is in a response to the concern expressed by many believing families.

The priority we are now giving to the education in the faith of the new generations does not mean that we are abandoning our commitment to the family, which is primarily responsible for education. Rather, we are responding to the widespread concern of many believing families, who fear, in today's social and cultural context, that they might not succeed in passing on to their children the precious heritage of the faith. (Address of his Holiness Benedict xvi to the participants at the ecclesial convention of the Diocese of Rome Monday, 5 June 2006)

Empirical perspective

One of the main puzzles explored by social scientific research into the effectiveness of Catholic education concerns the marked discrepancy between the number of people who profess Catholic identity but who do not engage in attending the public rituals of local churches. Grace Davie (1994) characterised such discrepancy as ‘believing without

belonging’, while Francis and Robbins (2004) preferred to speak of ‘belonging without believing’. The extent of this disjunction between self-assigned religious affiliation and religious practice among young Catholics has been quantified by distinguishing among three groups of young Catholics who report no church attendance, some church attendance, or weekly attendance. For example, the evidence has been marshalled by Francis (1986a, 2002) in England, by Egan and Francis (1986) in Wales, by Francis and Egan (1987) in Australia, by Francis and Egan (1990) in the United States of America, by Francis and Gibson (2001), and Francis, Penny, and Neil (2017) in Scotland, and by Francis, Byrne, Sweetman, and Penny (2016) in the Republic of Ireland.

These statistics raise questions about the factors that may lead to higher attendance rates among some Catholics than among others in England, Scotland and Wales today. This study sets out to explore new data on levels of church attendance among 13- to 15-year-old Catholics and to do so against a background of theory and data exploring the correlates of church attendance among young people more generally. The main issues discussed in previous research include parental influence, peer influence, personal factors, psychological factors, and school-related factors.

The first factor to take into account is the influence of *parental example*. It is neither surprising nor undocumented that there is a strong correlation between levels of church attendance among young people and levels of parental church attendance. Francis and Gibson (1993) evaluated the research evidence available at that time and contributed to the cumulative evidence by reporting on their study among 3,414 11- to 12-year-old and 15- to 16-year-old students attending all the secondary schools in the city of Dundee, Scotland. Their data were modelled to compare the influence of mothers and fathers on male and female adolescents within the two age groups. In relation to frequency of adolescent church attendance, the findings demonstrated that parental influence was important for both sexes

and both age groups, that there was little difference in overall parental influence on sons and daughters, that the extent of this influence increased rather than decreased between the ages of 11 to 12 and 15 to 16, that mother's practice was a more powerful predictor than father's practice among both sons and daughters, and that parental influence was strongest when both parents were churchgoers. The early findings of Francis and Gibson (1993) have been given more recent support by Francis, Penny, and Powell (2018) who drew on a sample of 6,256 young churchgoers between the ages of 8 and 14 years attending a range of denominations in Australia, and by Francis (under review) who drew on a sample of 645 young Anglicans between the ages of 13 and 15 from England and Wales.

The second factor to take into account is the *influence of peers*. Drawing on data provided by 10,153 young people between the ages of 8 and 14 who participated in the 2001 Church Life Profile Study designed for use primarily in England (Churches Information for Mission, 2001), Francis and Craig (2006) set out to evaluate the influence of peers as well as of parents on the development and maintenance of a positive attitude toward Church during those years. Their findings confirmed the crucial role played by parents, but also suggested that having friends attending the same church is also important among this group of young people, the majority of whom were under the age of 12 years. On the other hand, in his study among 645 young Anglicans between the ages of 13 and 15, Francis (in press) found that peer-related factors added no additional predictive power to frequency of church attendance after parental church attendance had been taken into account.

The third set of factors to take into account are *personal factors*, and in particular age and sex. In terms of age, the drift away from church attendance during early- and mid-adolescence has been well documented. For example, Kay and Francis (1996) drew on a series of surveys conducted in 1974, 1978, 1982 and 1986 that linked declining church attendance between the ages of 11 and 16 with the development of less positive attitudes

towards Christianity more generally. In terms of sex differences a great deal of empirical data concerned with Christian belief and practice internationally indicates that women tend to be more religious than men (Francis, 1997; Francis & Penny, 2014). From a sociological perspective, it has been argued that the Christian churches have become increasingly a highly feminised environment from which men feel alienated (Brown, 2001). From a psychological perspective, it has been argued that the male leadership in many denominations currently model a feminine personality profile (Francis, Jones, Jackson, & Robbins, 2001; Robbins, Francis, Haley, & Kay, 2001).

The fourth set of factors to take into account are *psychological factors*. The debate concerning the potential connection between individual differences in personality and religion has been long-established within the empirical psychology of religion. The problem has been in part one of agreeing on a stable model of personality through which to focus the debate. When Argyle (1958) undertook his pioneering review of available literature, he concluded that there was no clear evidence to support a consistent linkage between personality and religion. When Argyle conducted his third review four decades later, he recognised that sufficient evidence was now at hand to revise his decision. Drawing on Eysenck's three dimensional model of personality (see Eysenck & Eysenck, 1991), Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle (1997, p. 164) concluded that 'there *is* a connection with religiosity'. Eysenck's dimensional model of personality identifies three core and stable factors named after their respective high scoring poles as extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism. The first dimension progresses from introversion through ambiversion to extraversion; the second dimension progresses from emotional stability through emotional lability to neurotic disorders; and the third dimension progresses from tendermindedness through toughmindedness to psychotic disorders. In the late 1970s Francis and colleagues began a systematic programme of research to test the connections between these three dimensions and

individual differences in religiosity, beginning with studies reported by Francis, Pearson, Carter, and Kay (1981a, 1981b), Francis, Pearson, and Kay (1983a, 1983b), Francis and Pearson (1985a, 1985b), and Francis (1992) concluded from the growing body of evidence that psychoticism was the ‘dimension of personality fundamental to religiosity’ (p. 645) and subsequent research has tended to confirm that position (for review see Lewis & Francis, 2014).

The fifth factor to be taken into account concerns the *school* factor. Both in England and Wales and in Scotland the Catholic Church has kept a significant presence within the state-maintained system of schools. In Scotland the 1918 Education Act enabled the Catholic Church to develop distinctive denominational state-maintained schools without cost to the Church (Scotland, 1969). In England and Wales the 1944 Education Act offered the provision of voluntary aided status for distinctive denominational state-maintained schools still drawing on church monies for the school properties (Cruikshank, 1963; Murphy, 1971). A long tradition of empirical research has tried to identify the influence of Catholic schools in Scotland and in England and Wales on shaping students’ religious attitudes, values and behaviours, including work reported by Francis (1979, 1986b, 1987), Rhymer and Francis (1985), Francis and Carter (1980), Boyle and Francis (1986), and Village and Francis (2016).

Research question

Against this background, the primary research question addressed by the present paper concerns assessing the strength of the relationship between parental example (in terms of Catholic identity and Catholic practice) and the frequency of church attendance among 13- to 15-year-old Catholic adolescents in England, Wales and Scotland. This research question will be set in the context of exploring the effect of personal factors (sex and age) and psychological factors (psychoticism, extraversion and neuroticism) on patterns of church attendance before exploring the effect of parental example; and the effect of peer influence

after taking into account parental example. Finally the effect of attending a Catholic school will be taken into account.

Method

Procedure

Within the quantitative strand of the Young People's Attitude to Religious Diversity project, classes of year-nine and year-ten students (13- to 15-years of age) in England, Scotland, Wales, and London (as a special case) were invited to complete a questionnaire survey. The sampling frame set out to gather data from at least 2,000 students in Scotland, 2,000 students in Wales, 2,000 students in London, and 2,000 students from the rest of England, with half of the students attending schools with a religious character within the state-maintained sector (Anglican, Catholic, and joint Anglican and Catholic) and half of the students attending schools without a religious foundation within the state-maintained sector. The participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity, and were given the choice not to participate. The level of interest show in the project meant that very few students decided not to take part in the survey. All told 2,328 students participated from Wales, 2,751 from Scotland, 2,315 from London, and 2,416 from the rest of England.

Instrument

The survey was designed for self-completion. In the present analysis the following variables were used.

Religious affiliation of students, mothers and fathers was assessed by the questions 'What is your religion?', 'What is your father's religion?', 'What is your mother's religion?' followed by a checklist that included the option 'Catholic'.

Church attendance of students, mothers and fathers was assessed by three questions 'Apart from special occasions (like weddings), how often do you/does your mother/does your father attend religious services (e.g. at church, mosque, or synagogue)?' followed by the

options: never, at least once a year, sometimes, at least six times a year, at least once a month, nearly every week, and several times a week.

Parental and peer support were assessed by seven items assessed on a five-point Likert scale: agree strongly, agree, not certain, disagree, and disagree strongly.

Personality was assessed by the abbreviated form of the Junior Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised (JEPQR-A: Francis, 1996). This instrument proposes three six-item measures of extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism. Each item is assessed on a dichotomous scale: yes and no.

Analysis

The present analyses were conducted on data provided by the 2,146 students who self-identified as Catholics: 1,160 from year nine, 970 from year ten, and 16 of undisclosed school year; 934 males, 1,203 females, and 9 of undisclosed sex. Of these 2,146 students who self-identified as Catholics, 1,886 attended a church school, and 260 attended a school without a religious foundation.

Results and discussion

Mapping the profile of young Catholics

- insert table 1 about here -

The first step in data analysis involved mapping the profile of the 2,146 students who self-identified as Catholics. Table 1 presents the frequency of church attendance reported for the students themselves and for their parents. The data show that weekly attendance was reported for 27% of the students, 28% of the mothers and 16% of the fathers, while 23% of the students, 28% of the mothers, and 39% of the fathers were reported as never attending.

- insert table 2 about here -

Table 2 presents levels of parental religious identity and support as the sum of the agree strongly and agree responses. Considerably greater support is provided by mothers than by fathers. Thus, 77% of mothers overall identified as Catholics compared with 56% of

fathers; religious identity was thought to be important to 44% of mothers, compared with 28% of fathers; 27% of the students often talked about religion with their mother, compared with 18% who often talked about religion with their father.

- insert table 3 about here -

Table 3 presents levels of peer support as the sum of the agree strongly and agree responses. The majority of the Catholic students had friends who are Christians (85%), but the proportions dropped to 17% who often talked about religion with their friends and to 17% who considered that most of their friends think religion is important.

Testing the instruments

- insert table 4 about here -

The second step in data analysis involved testing the psychometric properties of the abbreviated form of the Junior Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised. Table 4 presents the alpha coefficients (Cronbach, 1951) together with the means and standard deviations. The alpha coefficients for the extraversion scale and for the neuroticism scale are satisfactory for such short instruments (DeVellis, 2003). The weaker alpha coefficient reported by the psychoticism scale is consistent with the known difficulties involved in operationalising this dimension of personality (Francis, Brown, & Philipchalk, 1992). The mean scale scores are in line with the data reported by the foundation paper for this measure (Francis, 1996).

Examining correlations

The third step in data analysis involved exploring the bivariate correlations between the frequency of the students' church attendance and the range of predictor variables assembled for the analysis. These correlations are presented in the first column of table 5 grouped within the six fields of personal factors, psychological factors, parental religious identity, parental religious practice, peer-related factors, and school-related factors. In terms of personal factors, the correlation coefficients indicate no significant association with age

but a small significant positive correlation with sex (indicating that females recorded a higher level of church attendance than males). While age and sex are routinely predictors of frequency of church attendance in general populations, in terms of higher frequency associated with being female and being younger (Kay & Francis, 1996), the age factor is not significant among the very restricted age group of self-identified Catholics included in the present study (year-nine and year-ten students). In terms of personality factors, higher levels of church attendance are significantly correlated with lower psychoticism scores, lower extraversion scores, and higher neuroticism scores. The stronger correlation with psychoticism is consistent with the view advanced by Francis (1992) that psychoticism is the dimension of personality fundamental to individual differences in religiosity and supported by a large number of subsequent studies (see Lewis & Francis, 2014).

In terms of parental religious identity higher levels of church attendance are significantly correlated with having parents (both mother and father) who are Catholics, and with having parents (both mother and father) for whom their religious identity is important. In terms of parental religious practice, levels of church attendance are significantly correlated with both mother's and father's levels of church attendance and with talking about religion with mother and with father. In terms of peer-related factors, levels of church attendance are significantly correlated with having friends who are Christians, with talking with friends about religion, and with having friends who think that religion is important. In terms of school-related factors, there is a small positive correlation between levels of church attendance and attending a church school.

Engaging multiple regression

- insert table 5 about here -

The third step in data analysis involved exploring the cumulative impact of the six groups of predictor variables (personal factors, psychological factors, parental religious

identity, parental religious practices, peer-related factors, and school-related factors) on individual differences in students' levels of church attendance. Table 5 presents the series of six regression models, in which fixed order entry was employed. In model one, just personal factors were entered (sex and age). In model two, psychological factors were added (psychoticism, neuroticism, and extraversion). In model three, parental religious identity was added (mother Anglican, father Anglican, importance of mother's religious identity, and importance of father's religious identity). In model four, parental religious practice was added (mother's church attendance, father's church attendance, talking about religion with mother, and talking about religion with father). In model five, peer-related factors were added (having Christian friends, talking about religion with friends, and having friends who think that religion is important). In model six, school-related factors were added (attending a church school).

The six regression models presented in table 5 build up an incremental picture of parental and peer influences after personal factors (age and sex) and psychological factors (psychoticism, neuroticism, and extraversion) have been taken into account. It is model six that is most revealing when all six sets of predictor variables are taken into account. This model confirms that parental church attendance provides the strongest prediction of church attendance among young Catholics. More frequent attendance is associated with mother attending church ($\beta = .57$) and with father attending church ($\beta = .25$). These two factors operate cumulatively with the stronger influence being when both parents attend church. Moreover, after parental church attendance is taken into account, talking about religion with mother or with father offers no additional positive influence on church attendance frequency. After parental religious practice has been taken into account, some small further additional predictive power is provided by peer-related factors, especially having friends who think

religion is important. After the other factors are all taken into account, attending a church school adds further (but very small) prediction of higher levels of church attendance.

Conclusion

This present study was established within both a theoretical context and an empirical context. The theoretical context gave weight to the teaching of the Catholic Church on the partnership and collaboration of three agencies within the field of Christian education (parents, school, and Church) and noted the particular emphasis on the primacy of parents, especially within societies in which non-Catholic or secular influences are strong. The empirical context gave weight to empirical research that identified the influence of six factors in shaping individual differences in the Christian commitment of young people (personal factors, psychological factors, parental religious identity, parental religious practice, peer-related factors, and school-related factors). Against this background of theoretical and empirical considerations, the primary research question addressed by the present study concerned assessing the strength of the relationship between parental example (in terms of Catholic identity and Catholic practice) and frequency of church attendance among 13- to 15-year-old Catholic adolescents in England, Wales, and Scotland, while also taking into account the effects of personal factors (sex and age), psychological factors (psychoticism, extraversion, and neuroticism), peer-related factors (religious support among friends) and school-related factors (attending a church school). This primary research question was addressed by new data provided by 2,146 students who self-identified as Catholics. Five main conclusions emerged from the analyses of these new data.

The first conclusion emerged from mapping the profile of young Catholics (between the ages of 13 and 15 years) within England, Scotland and Wales. Within the sample over a quarter of the young people who identify themselves as Catholics (27%) are attending church nearly every week, while over a third (35%) are there at least once a month. The majority of

young people who see themselves as Catholic also see one or both of their parents as Catholic: 77% see their mother as Catholic and 56% see their father as Catholic.

The second conclusion emerged from the correlational analyses. Taken alone each of the aspects of parental religious identity (mother identified as Catholic, father identified as Catholic, mother's religious identity is important to her, and father's religious identity is important to him), each of the aspects of parental religious practice (mother's church attendance, father's church attendance, mother talks about religion, and father talks about religion), and each of the peer-related factors (having Christian friends, talking with friends about religion, and having friends who think religion is important) are individually significant predictors of levels of church attendance among young Catholics. All of these factors operate together as part of a complex system and consequently none should be trivialised or disregarded. Nonetheless, multiple regression analyses are able to draw out priorities within this complex nexus of inter-relationships.

The third conclusion emerged from the regression models in direct response to the primary research question concerned with assessing the combined influence of parental religious identity and parental religious practice on levels of church attendance among young Catholics. The data demonstrated the key importance of religious practice. Among 13- to 15-year-old Catholics those who stay in church are those whose parents are there also. In this case the influence of mother is stronger than the influence of father, but the strongest influence is when both parents are there in church. When parental church attendance has been taken into account, no additional variance is accounted for by parental conversation about religion. What parents do is more important than what parents say.

The fourth conclusion emerged from the regressions models in respect of assessing the influence of peer-related factors on levels of church attendance among young Catholics *after* parental influence has been taken into account. The data demonstrated that peer-related

factors contributed only small additional predictive power within the regression model. In this sense the main influence remains within the home and among parents.

The fifth conclusion emerged from the regression models in respect of assessing the influence of attending a Catholic school. After parental influence and peer influence have been taken into account, attending a Catholic school adds only marginal additional predictive power to the models.

These research findings may carry important implications for the way in which the Catholic Church in England, Scotland and Wales conceptualises ministry among young people. The major implication is that those young people who feel connection with the Catholic Church (by self-identifying as Catholics) seem to do so because their parents see themselves as Catholic. Young Catholics who practise their Catholic identity by attending church seem to do so primarily because their parents are Catholic churchgoers. Among this age group peer support and attending a church school seems insignificant in comparison with parental support. The implication from these findings for Catholic ministry among children and young people is that it may be wise to invest in the education and formation of Catholic parents in order to enable them, in turn, to nurture the Christian formation of their young.

A challenge to invest in the education and formation of Catholic parents is part of the wider challenge facing a number of Christian Churches to engage in lay adult Christian education with sufficient seriousness to enable Christian adults living in a secular and religiously diverse society to draw intelligently on the intellectual resources of the Christian faith. In a recent collection of essays, Astley (2015), an Anglican theologian and philosopher of Christian education, shaped the notion of 'Discipleship Learning' to capture the educational and formational capacity of programmes rooted in Christian theology. In the same collection of essays Francis (2015), an Anglican theologian and Christian educator detailed a BA in theology for discipleship that has run in Wales, Canada, and Cyprus. Neil

(2015), an Anglican theologian and Vice Chancellor of an Anglican university, drew on a qualitative study to profile the impact of this BA in theology for discipleship and the Christian lives and vocation of a sample of the participants. While such programmes require rigorous conceptualisation and delivery, the strategic investment may be fruitful in retaining the church involvement of young adults and in influencing the Christian trajectory of their children.

A limitation with the present study concerns the relatively small number of self-identified young Catholics on whom the analyses have been conducted. From an original data base of 9,810 young people from across England, Scotland, Wales and London 2,146 self-identified as Catholic. There would be benefit now in replicating the study among a larger sample of young Catholics.

Note

Young People's Attitudes to Religious Diversity Project (AHRC Reference: AH/G014035/1) was a large-scale mixed methods research project investigating the attitudes of 13- to 16-year-old students across the United Kingdom. Students from a variety of socio-economic, cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds from different parts of England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, with the addition of London as a special case, took part in the study. Professor Robert Jackson was principal investigator and Professor Leslie J. Francis was co-investigator. Together they led a team of qualitative and quantitative researchers based in the Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit, at the University of Warwick. The project was part of the AHRC/ESRC Religion and Society Programme and ran from 2009-2012.

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Table 1

Frequency of church attendance

	Self %	Mother %	Father %
Never	23	28	39
At least once a year	12	18	15
Sometimes	23	9	9
At least six times a year	8	6	5
At least once a month	8	6	5
Nearly every week	25	24	14
Several times a week	2	4	2
Don't know	0	6	11

Table 2

Parental religious identity and support

	Mother	Father
	%	%
Identities as Catholic	77	56
My mother's (father's) religious identity is important to her (him)	44	28
I often talk about religion with my mother (father)	27	18

Table 3

Peer support

	Self %
I have friends who are Christians	85
I often talk about religion with my friends	17
Most of my friends think religion is important	17

Table 4

Personality measures: Scale properties

	N items	alpha	Mean	SD
Extraversion	6	.68	4.81	1.48
Neuroticism	6	.69	3.12	1.82
Psychoticism	6	.54	1.50	1.23

Table 5

Regression models on student church attendance

	r	model 1	model 2	model 3	model 4	model 5	model 6
<i>Personal factors</i>							
Sex	.05*	.05*	-.00	-.01	.02	.01	.01
School Year	.02	.02	.02	.04	.03	.03*	.03*
<i>Psychological factors</i>							
Psychoticism	-.15***		-.16***	-.09***	-.08***	-.08***	-.08***
Neuroticism	.05*		.04	.03	.04*	.04**	.04*
Extraversion	-.06**		-.04	-.03	-.01	-.01	-.00
<i>Parental religious identity</i>							
Mother Catholic	.14**			.05*	-.05***	-.05**	-.05**
Father Catholic	.15***			.07**	-.02	-.02	-.02
Mother's identity important	.39***			.33***	-.00	-.02	-.02
Father's identity important	.32***			.18***	.04	.03	.03
<i>Parental religious practice</i>							
Mother's attendance	.72***				.58**	.57***	.57***
Father's attendance	.59***				.25***	.25***	.25***
Talk with mother	.38***				.06***	.04	.04
Talk with father	.31***				.03	.00	.00
<i>Peer-related factors</i>							
I have Christian friends	.16***					.02	.02
Talk with friends	.29***					.05*	.05*
Friends think religion important	.28***					.07***	.06***
<i>School-related factors</i>							
Attend a church school	.04*						.03*
Total R ²		.00	.03	.24	.61	.62	.62

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$