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# Church Going

An empirical approach to nominalism among  
Anglicans in the Republic of Ireland.

by

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of the requirements for the degree of  
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## SUMMARY

This thesis adds a new contribution to the field of empirical theology pertaining to nominalism. The thesis explores the belonging, beliefs and practice of nominal Irish Anglicans. It seeks to unearth the reasons they give for their identification with the Church of Ireland. The method used in the exploration is primarily quantitative with a brief qualitative element. The instrument employed is a questionnaire, based on the template employed by Richter and Francis and Francis and Richter on church-leaving.

The thesis opens by introducing the Church of Ireland in the religious context of Ireland. The frame is widened to Europe, before examining the literature surrounding the debate on nominalism. A method is outlined to locate nominal Irish Anglicans in order to obtain and analyse their views as to their belonging, belief and practice. There follows an empirical analysis to explore the beliefs of nominal Irish Anglicans and the reasons they give for reducing their church attendance. The analysis is thematic, following the pattern used by and the earlier work of Richter and Francis (1998), Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005) and Francis and Richter (2007).

This thesis concludes by offering a summary of the findings before providing an explanation as to why nominal Irish Anglicans continue their identification with the Church of Ireland. It suggests how some of the discoveries may shape future research. The thesis ends by considering the implication of the results for the Church of Ireland.

## INTRODUCTION

Philip Larkin (1955) the poet, a baptized but not committed Anglican, spent five years working in Ireland as a librarian. In 1954 he wrote the poem *Church Going*.

Once I am sure that there is nothing going on  
I step inside, letting the door thud shut.  
Another church: matting, seats and stone,  
And little books; sprawlings of flowers, cut  
For Sunday, brownish now, some brass and stuff  
Up at the holy end; the small neat organ;  
And a tense, musty, unignorable silence;  
Brewed God knows how long.

Larkin, according to MacMonagle (2007, pp. 83-84) wrote the poem having come across a discarded church in Ireland. For MacMonagle, 'He [Larkin] only enters a church if he knows that it is empty, that "there's nothing going on"'. MacMonagle adds that 'Larkin's title...*Church Going*...could also imply that the church is dying away, disappearing, going'.

This study is set in Ireland in 2006 and focuses on church-going in the Church of Ireland. The aim of it is to discover why many Irish Anglicans identify with the Church of Ireland and yet do not participate in the life of the church. This introduction will detail how the research question will be explored and the reasons behind the exploration.

Chapter One, *Ireland, an Exceptional Case*, introduces the Church of Ireland in the religious, political and historical context of Ireland. Ryan (1984, p.14) has observed: 'In religion, as in many other areas of life, the word "Irish" in a European context is almost synonymous with unique'.

In a largely Roman Catholic country, the Church of Ireland is a small church with a tiny population, less than 3% of the present total population. This chapter sets out to ascertain how the state has enumerated the religious composition of the population over time. Likewise the chapter will attempt to show how the Church of Ireland has counted its members before exploring the relationship between the state and church enumerations.

Chapter Two, *A Sense of Belonging*, seeks to place the exceptionality of Ireland in religious terms, in a wider frame. It will do so in a number of ways. First, it will consider the relationship between belonging and two other related dimensions: belief and practice. Secondly, the chapter will assess religious belonging in Ireland in several contexts: European, an Irish Catholic connection and then a small Irish Anglican parish community. Finally it will enlarge the frame by reviewing the literature surrounding the debate on belonging, belief and practice.

The purpose of Chapter Three, *Methodology*, is to outline the method used to obtain and analyse the views of nominal Irish Anglicans as to their belonging, beliefs and practice, in order to answer the central research question: why do many Irish Anglicans identify with the Church of Ireland and yet do not participate in the life of the church. The chapter will underline the challenge of locating a sufficiently large and representative sample of nominal Irish Anglicans to gather their views. Consideration will also be given to the choosing of an appropriate methodology from which data will be generated for analysis. Finally the chapter will set out how the data will be processed and presented for analysis. This will be shaped by a pilot project and the earlier work of Richter and Francis's (1998) *Gone but Not Forgotten*, the follow up by Francis and Richter (2007) *Gone for Good? Church-Leaving and*

*Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* and Francis, Robbins and Astley's (2005) *Fragmented Faith: Exposing the Fault-lines in the Church of England*.

Chapter Four, *Credo*, sets out to discover the creedal beliefs of the nominal Irish Anglicans featured in this study. Belief or faith can be understood in a number of ways which will be explored in the chapter. In particular the chapter will focus on three doctrinal creeds against which to assess the orthodoxy of Anglican belief: beliefs about God, beliefs about Jesus Christ and beliefs about life after death. The aim of the chapter is to understand to what extent people remain Anglicans, in terms of belief, without engaging in church life.

Chapter Five, *Fides*, will build on the previous chapter, *Credo*, by looking at the way in which beliefs are expressed. The chapter will follow two pathways distinguished by Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005): Paths of Truth and Paths of Spirituality. Paths of Truth can be thought of as the ways truth claims can be asserted and tested. Paths of Spirituality will examine the outworking of an individual's faith in real life, that is, what a person does with what they believe.

Chapter Six, *The Changing Scenes of Life*, is the first in a series of analysis chapters which will explore the reasons that nominal Irish Anglicans give for reducing their church attendance. This chapter, as the others in the series, will follow the earlier research that Richter and Francis (1998) and Francis and Richter (2007) undertook in England with regard to church-leaving. This chapter will explore the linkage between life changes and changing church attendance. In particular, it will seek to explore the impact which predictable and unpredictable changes in life, have on church attendance.

Chapter Seven, entitled *Day by Day*, will follow on from the previous chapter's examination of life's changes by considering how people change and grow. The chapter will seek to establish the extent to which nominal Irish Anglicans express their distance from church in terms of growing up and changing. This in turn may contribute to an understanding as to why some people say they belong to the Church of Ireland, yet rarely, if ever attend.

The aim of Chapter Eight, *Faltering Faith*, is to consider to what extent loss of faith plays a part in the distancing of nominal Irish Anglicans from church. The chapter will build on Chapter Four which seeks to delineate the creedal beliefs of those who belong to the Church of Ireland but who rarely if ever attend church. Faith is a nuanced concept and this chapter will endeavour to explore the nature of loss of faith and how it contributes to an understanding of the central research subject of this study.

Chapter Nine, *Disconnect*, is concerned with the uneasy sense of disconnection apparent in contemporary Ireland. The aim of this chapter is to examine the degree to which nominal Irish Anglicans explain their distance from church in terms of disconnection. In the first instance, the chapter will explore the complexion of disconnection. Secondly it will discuss the linkage between disconnection and the loss of ground by religion in modern societies like Ireland. The chapter will then seek to contribute to addressing the key research question at the core of this study.

Being part of a church is to belong. The purpose of Chapter Ten, *Not Belonging*, as the title suggests, is to find out if nominal Irish Anglicans feel at odds with the local church in a relational sense. To this end the chapter will explore the

contours of belonging as mapped by Richter and Francis (1998) and Francis and Richter (2007) in order to broaden an understanding of the reasons why people say they belong, but rarely relate to the church in terms of attendance.

Chapter Eleven, *Disillusionment*, addresses the issue of ecclesial belonging which according to Berger (1993) is expressed sociologically in community. If that is the case, why do so many nominal Irish Anglicans absent themselves from the life of the church? The aim of this chapter then is to examine the extent to which non-church-going Irish Anglicans explain their distance from the church in terms of disillusionment. The chapter will attempt to probe the issue by following Francis and Richter's (2007) template research in *Gone for Good? Church-leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*.

Chapter Twelve, *Being Let Down by the Church*, will follow on from the previous chapter's exploration of disillusionment by considering the subject of disappointment. Francis and Richter (2007) found that a significant number of their respondents felt let down by the church in one way or another. The aim of this chapter is to consider to what extent disappointment, being let down by the church, is responsible for the lack of practice among nominal Irish Anglicans.

Chapter Thirteen, *Qualms, Theological and Moral*, sets out to examine the problems of theology or belief and morality or behaviour which mitigates against church attendance among nominal Irish Anglicans. The purpose of this chapter is two fold: first, to establish the contribution theology and morality play in understanding nominalism in an Irish setting; and second, to offer explanation as to why many Irish Anglicans identify with the Church of Ireland, yet do not attend church on a regular basis.

Chapter Fourteen, *Talkback*, will be the last chapter in the analysis section of the study. It will diverge from the quantitative approach used in the previous chapters, to overcome some of the limitations of a quantitative approach identified by Richter and Francis (1998). Therefore the style of the chapter will be qualitative; the aim is to allow respondents to reply with their own voice to three open-ended questions. These questions will be designed to contribute to an appreciation as to why Irish Anglicans retain their identification with the Church of Ireland, without actively participating in the life of the church.

Chapter Fifteen, *Conclusion*, will draw all the strands together and attempt to answer the key research question.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **IRELAND, AN EXCEPTIONAL CASE**

**Introduction**

**Atypical Ireland**

**A Formative Census**

**The Great Divide**

**The Troubling of the Waters**

**Trauma.**

**The Years of Readjustment**

**Light at the End of the Tunnel**

**Counting the People of God**

**Conclusion**

## **Chapter 1: Ireland, An Exceptional Case**

### **Introduction**

This chapter is concerned with introducing the Church of Ireland in the religious landscape of Ireland. It begins with a consideration of the exceptional nature of Ireland in religious terms in comparison to its neighbours. It then sets out to ascertain how the Irish State has enumerated the religious composition of the population over time, with particular reference to the Church of Ireland. There follows a discussion of the Church of Ireland's attempt to count the people of God and to ascertain the levels of church practice. What emerges is a disparity in numbers between the state's and the church's enumeration which raises the issue of nominalism. According to Brierley (2007) nominalism is the term used in the sense of difference between a stated adherence to a faith and a committed application of that faith. The chapter concludes by drawing the discussion together and by preparing the ground for understanding what constitutes belonging to the Church of Ireland.

### **Atypical Ireland**

The Republic of Ireland is, in religious terms, atypical. It is the only largely Catholic state in the northern part of Western Europe. Catholic identity has been a solid feature of Irish life since the time of the Reformation. Moreover, until comparatively recently, indices relating to affiliation, practice and belief all affirm the strength of Catholicism in Ireland. In the 2002 census (Central Statistics Office, 2004a), 88% of the population self-assigned as Roman Catholics. According to MacGreil (2009, p. 19), 91% of Irish Catholics attended Mass weekly in 1974; only 5% never attended Mass. By 1989, weekly Mass attendance among Catholics stood

at 82%. In reviewing Western European values, Ashford and Timms (1992, p. 40) also confirmed the very high rates of belief among Irish Catholics: 96% believe in God, 85% in heaven and 84% believe in sin.

Protestantism is a minority religion in the Republic of Ireland, accounting for just less than 3% of the population according to the 2002 census (Central Statistics Office, 2004a). The Church of Ireland, a province of the Anglican Communion, has consistently been the largest Protestant denomination in the Republic of Ireland and is the focus for this study. It can be argued that the terms 'Church of Ireland', 'Protestant' and 'Anglican' are synonymous in the Irish context. Religious identification has been a crucial factor in the emergence of modern Ireland. Indeed, the two states on the island of Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, reflect the religious differences between Catholics and Protestants on the island. Religion matters in Ireland and the features of religious affiliation, belief and practice are live issues in contemporary Ireland, as well as having historical import. Unlike Northern Ireland, where the Catholic minority has increased in size since the partition of Ireland, the smaller Protestant minority in Southern Ireland has shrunk from pre-partition times.

### **A Formative Census**

The religious enumeration of Ireland in 1834 by the Commissioners of Public Instruction entitled the *First Report of the Commissioners of Public Instruction* was the first reliable religious census taken in Ireland's history. Official censuses had been taken in Ireland, in 1813, 1821 and 1831 but these pioneering efforts did not attempt to enumerate the religious composition of the population. As such, for Macourt (2008, p. 38), the 1834 enumeration represents a benchmark in

the division of Ireland's population according to religious affiliation in the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

The Commission itself was established by Parliament (House of Commons, 1835a, p. iii) under Lord Brougham, to investigate public and religious education in Ireland. Brougham's Commission was one of a series of reports, commissions and returns requested by the Westminster Parliament in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century into the state of the Anglican Church in Ireland.

Brougham's Commission was a statistical exercise, undertaken by 22 commissioners and conducted at parish level. Between them, the commissioners visited every parish in Ireland to establish the number of people belonging to the Church of Ireland. In addition, they ascertained the number and rank of clergy officiating within each parish, whether the clergy were resident or not and if there was a church in the parish. They also recorded the times and periods of divine service in each parish church, along with the average number of persons usually attending each. They also estimated attendance for the previous five years and whether it was increasing or decreasing. The commissioners (House of Commons, 1835b, pp. iii-iv) did not confine their investigations to the Church of Ireland; they also enumerated the numbers in other places of worship, Roman Catholic and other Protestant denominations, the number of clergy officiating in each and the population of each parish belonging to these other groups.

If in the abstract, the basic unit of ecclesiastic government was the parish, in practice for Akenson (1971, p. 55), it was the benefice, that is a church living held by a clergyman. Often a clergyman had a single parish as his benefice, but in many

cases two or more parishes were formally united and held by a single clergyman; the combined parishes constituted his benefice.

In effect, the Commissioners of Public Instruction (House of Commons, 1835c, pp. 20-23) visited each benefice, rather than parishes. The details of their enumeration were published according to benefices of single parishes, or benefices of grouped parishes throughout Ireland. Thus 1,390 Church of Ireland clergy made returns to the commissioners. In addition, they were also supplied with information from 868 Roman Catholic parishes and 210 Presbyterian congregations.

The 1835 report (House of Commons, 1835d, p. 7) determined that the number of adherents of the Established Church (the Church of Ireland) for what was to become the Irish Republic was approximately 450,000 or 8.25% of the total population of just under 5 ½ million.

How reliable was the 1834 census of religious affiliation undertaken by the Commissioners of Public Instruction? The commissioners (House of Commons, 1835e, p. 6) were themselves aware of the possibility of erroneous data supplied by clergy. They sought to guard against this possibility by using the returns for the 1831 census as their benchmark. Macourt (1977, p. 170) asserts that in evidence produced at the time of the 1861 census concerning public reaction to the enumeration of 1834, the results were varied but on balance, it seems to have been favourable. In spite of the limitations of the Report, in terms of population structure, with regard to age, gender and occupation, the 1834 census is of value as a prime source of religious affiliation in Ireland.

## **The Great Divide**

Between 1834 and 1841, Ireland's population rose slightly by 3%. This was the last time that the national population increased for the remainder of the century and well into the next. By 1861, Ireland's population had fallen by nearly 25% from the 1834 total. The causes which led to a dramatic decrease of population in the period under discussion, were twofold: mortality and migration. These were caused by the Great Famine, as a result of the failure of the potato crop for several years from 1845. For Bowen (1978, p. 311), the Great Famine provided the history of 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland with its great divide. A great deal changed in the largely Church of Ireland community of the South and West of Ireland. Their numbers were sharply reduced by the haemorrhaging of emigration.

## **The Troubling of the Waters**

The years 1861 to 1911 marked the last phase of relative assurance for Southern Irish Anglicans, when a new political situation changed conditions in a way which before would have been unimaginable. The census of 1861 confirmed the numerical position of Southern Anglicans as a small and geographically concentrated minority. In effect, the census data provided crucial ammunition for those who sought to challenge the position of the Church of Ireland, Anglo-Irish landlords and the political union with Britain (Akenson, 1971, p. 41).

It is not the purpose of this study to trace the Parliamentary passage of disestablishment but rather to assess its impact on the Church of Ireland. Lyons (1971, p. 22) held that many in the Church of Ireland favoured reform rather than disestablishment; when it came, it was something of an anti-climax. The disestablishment terms were generous. The Church of Ireland remained with much of

its wealth intact, its property secured and its social and educational position in the country undiminished. Moreover, full autonomy was restored to the Church.

By 1870, a new constitution for the Church of Ireland was drafted and a General Convention of clergy and laity met, which laid most of the foundations of the church as a voluntary organization (Akenson, 1971, p. 278). One of the most important features in the process of disestablishment was the enhanced position of the laity. After 1869, lay people as a group acquired large-scale influence and power in the church. Disestablishment also produced a new financial reality. Lay people were expected to pay more of the church's expenses than in the past. In return, for their financial commitment, lay people expected a greater say in the running of the church which transpired in the governance of the church by a pyramid of Synods and Committees (McDowell, 1975, p. 56). Local loyalties, either parochial or diocesan, allied to the enhanced influence of the laity, became a forceful factor in the disestablished church. In addition, there was a strong belief that the church had a duty to all its members. Hence for McDowell (1975, p. 73), the smaller and more scattered the church population, the greater the need for a local pastor, the resident clergyman.

Without doubt, the administrative changes in the Church of Ireland between 1861 and 1911 were profound. Administratively, the changes were far more revolutionary than those brought about at the time of the Reformation. The ability of the Church of Ireland to absorb and survive the change was a remarkable indication of its vitality and viability, despite a continuing decrease in numbers as outlined in Table 1:1.

## **Trauma.**

Having survived the rigours of disestablishment, rural agitation and the subsequent reform of the 'Land Question', which transferred the ownership of land away from the Protestant landed classes, the years between the censuses of 1911 and 1926 were arguably some of the most traumatic in the history of Ireland.

Collectively, the number of Church of Ireland members in Southern Ireland fell by 34% in the inter-censal period concerned. The decline was the largest since 1834, both in terms of scale and rapidity. In fact, between 1911 and 1926, the decrease in the number of Irish Anglicans was incomparably greater and the decrease of Roman Catholics smaller than any previous inter-censal period. For Bowen (1983, p. 20), the loss of Anglicans during this period was disproportionately high, some six times greater than the decrease of the population at large in what became the Irish Free State.

It is one thing to describe the demographic changes which affected the southern Church of Ireland population between 1911 and 1926; it is altogether more difficult to account for them. Fitzgerald (2003, p. 148) suggested that there were three main reasons responsible for the decline at the time of partition. In the first place, partition cut Protestants off politically from their Northern co-religionists and so many of them relocated to the U.K. Secondly, the First World War drastically reduced their numbers. Finally, the War of Independence and the Civil War which followed put many of them at risk, especially in rural Ireland. In addition, Keane (1970, p. 169) notes that two other reasons have been advanced to explain the decline, notably the dismantling of the British administration in Southern Ireland and the demographic forces at work in the Protestant community.

The Church of Ireland population was weakened numerically and in spirit by a combination of factors. The fundamentals of demography worked against them. Long term trends: low birth rate, late and infrequent marriage, a restricted occupational structure, an ageing population and, above all, a propensity to migration which had been in operation since the 1840s, were crucial to the enervation process.

By 1922, Irish Anglicans faced their new situation weakened and intimidated by the trauma of World War, a War of Independence and a brewing Civil War. They were in every sense a minority as never before. During this period of trauma, the Protestants of Southern Ireland had an advocate in the Church of Ireland (Church of Ireland, 1920). In the autumn of 1919, for example, during the War of Independence, the Standing Committee of the General Synod passed a resolution in which they expressed their horror and indignation regarding the outrages committed in Ireland at the time. They also placed their sympathy with police, soldiers and others who suffered. Furthermore, at the height of the disturbances in the spring of 1922, Patton (1922, p. 262) recounts the Archbishop of Dublin leading a delegation from the General Synod to wait on Michael Collins, the rebel leader, to enquire 'if they were permitted to live in Ireland, or if it was desired that they should leave the country'.

Perhaps of equal importance was the Church of Ireland's stance against the *Ne Temere*, a papal decree on mixed marriages. The General Synod of 1911 (Church of Ireland, 1911) protested against the decree as an 'intolerable interference in the ordinary law and a grave menace to the social life of our people'. In reality, the *Ne Temere* decree had little immediate impact, as mixed marriages were still comparatively rare in the early part of the twentieth century. However, as the century progressed, the mixed marriage situation in which the Protestant partner had to undertake to raise subsequent children as Roman Catholics, became a grievous

wrong in Protestant thinking. In the struggle to survive, the close bond between the Church of Ireland and its people in Ireland was greatly strengthened.

### **The Years of Readjustment**

At the time the 1926 Census was taken, Irish Anglicans found themselves in a new constitutional arrangement of the Irish Free State. Since 1926 up to the end of the twentieth century, six census returns have been organized in which there was a question on religious affiliation. On each occasion the Anglican population decreased significantly, along with other smaller Protestant denominations as shown in Table 1:2.

In the 35 years between 1926 and 1961, the Church of Ireland population in Ireland diminished at a rate of 1% a year while the Roman Catholic population held its own for a time, before undergoing a small decline. The year 1961 marked a demographic watershed, for thereafter the Roman Catholic population recorded a first substantial increase since the Great Famine, while the Church of Ireland decline appeared to be levelling out. From 1961 to 1991, the Church of Ireland population in the Republic of Ireland declined by around 0.5% per year. In contrast, the total population grew by 25% in the same period. During this period something new emerged in the religious landscape of Ireland, a growth in the religious affiliation categories as follows: 'Not-stated religion' grew from 5,625 to 83,375 and the 'No religion' category rose from 1,107 to 66,270 (Central Statistics Office, 2004a).

### **Light at the End of the Tunnel**

The census of 2002 saw a dramatic reversal of the decline of the Church of Ireland population which grew by nearly 30% since 1991, as can be seen on Table 1:2. The overall population rose to just under four million, the highest total since the

formation of the State in 1922. Gilmore (2007, pp. 122-128) attributed the unprecedented growth in Anglican numbers to three factors: immigration, a younger age profile and the absorption of Catholics from mixed marriages. Surpassing the Church of Ireland population in 1991-2002 was the number of people specifying that they had 'No religion' which more than doubled to 138,264 or 3.5% of the total population (Central Statistics Office, 2004a).

Macourt (2008, p. 26), who has written extensively on the religious question with regard to the national census in Ireland, differentiates what constitutes 'belonging'. What do people mean when they answer 'Church of Ireland' in the national census? Do they attend worship and how regular is their attendance? Do they believe the church's teachings? Is it a case of being baptized, confirmed or going to a Church of Ireland school? Do they contribute financially or otherwise to the work of a Church of Ireland parish? The Church of Ireland itself recognises various kinds of 'belonging': baptism, confirmation, registered vestrypersons, on a church membership list, attendance, making an identifiable contribution to church funds. If this is the case, there are many competing definitions of what it is to 'belong' to the Church of Ireland. For Francis (2008, p. 149), census affiliation needs to be understood in its own right and not merely as a poor approximation for other dimensions of religion, for example, religious beliefs and religious practices. Fane (1999) drawing on the work of Bouma (1992) advances that religious affiliation is 'in its own right, socially significant particularly when it is subdivided by denomination' (Fane, 1999, p. 117).

## Counting the People of God

The increase of the Anglican population in the Irish Republic reflected in the 2002 census, underlined a peculiarity of Protestant demographics, that is, the consistent and growing disparity between religious affiliation measured by the national census and the denominational figures obtained by the Church of Ireland. This trait was identified in the 1970s, by the report *First of All* (Church of Ireland, 1979a), published by the Priorities Committee of the Church of Ireland in 1979. Commentating on the reduction of diocesan populations, the Report (Church of Ireland, 1979a) drew attention to the non-standard approach to statistics kept by the church and the exclusion of people whose church connection was nominal.

Deane (1986, p. 69) compared the population figures obtained from dioceses in the *First of All* report (Church of Ireland, 1979a) to those published in the 1981 census and limited his research to dioceses (see Appendix B, 1:1) which were wholly within the Republic of Ireland. The findings are available on Table 1:3. The general pattern is one of under-estimation by the church authorities; from 36% in the Dioceses of Limerick, Killaloe and Ardfert, to 9% in the Dioceses of Dublin and Glendalough. In one case, the Dioceses of Cashel, Ferns and Ossory, substantial over-estimation of 14% took place. Deane (1986, p. 69) commented that even allowing for difference in timing, it is 'clear that the present methods of calculating population by Church authorities are generally unreliable' He added caustically, 'if reliable statistics are not available, it is preferable to maintain silence rather than quote unreliable statistics'.

What does the broadly consistent under-estimation of church-based data represent? At one level, Deane's (1986) assertion that it is due to the unreliability of

diocesan censuses has some credence. Most diocesan censuses date to the 1970s. The Diocese of Ferns seems to be an exception, with figures available to the 1940s. Each diocese is responsible for administering its own census and there is considerable variation in the timing and detail of these. Some dioceses take an annual census based on the General Easter Vestry returns, e.g. the Dioceses of Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh. Others, for example the Dioceses of Cork, Cloyne and Ross, produce a census on a triennial basis. Some dioceses have a more sporadic approach, notably the Dioceses of Dublin and Glendalough whose last census, which was incomplete, was taken in 1999.

Likewise, there is considerable variation in the detail obtained by each diocese. Some dioceses simply require clergy to return a basic headcount of persons in each parish. The Diocese of Raphoe is a case in point, whereas the Dioceses of Cashel, Ferns and Ossory and the Dioceses of Cork, Cloyne and Ross, require a detailed categorisation of parish populations according to age, attendance, residency and subscribers. In all of these cases, the local rector is responsible for the returns. Parochial vacancies and non-returns for certain parishes are quite commonplace which affect the reliability and comparability of the diocesan censuses.

There is a more subtle reason which acts upon under-estimation, namely the financial arrangements by which clergy stipends are levied by the dioceses, with the exception of the Dioceses of Dublin and Glendalough. The southern dioceses in the Church of Ireland work a pooling arrangement, whereby the cost of stipends (set each year by the General Synod) is levied according to the number of people returned by the parishes across the diocese. This method of raising stipends means that the more populous parishes subsidise the less populous parishes, thus enabling smaller parishes to have resident clergy. In effect, the arrangement is levied on

church-goers, that is those who attend church on a regular basis, however that is defined. Thus rectors tend to restrict their returns on the basis of church-going rather than on general affiliation. Some dioceses, for example the Dioceses of Limerick Killaloe and Ardfert, make a distinction between regular church-goers, from whom a full levy is expected and irregular churchgoers, on whom a half-levy is reckoned. Whatever the actual arrangement, the net effect of pooling under-estimates the Church of Ireland population in parishes and dioceses. Local rectors tend to have an ‘official’ list which they return to the diocese on which they are levied and an ‘unofficial’ list of largely non-church-going Anglicans, of whom they are aware and to whom they occasionally minister. The extent of the under-estimation attributable to pooling is difficult to gauge but it exists nonetheless.

Macourt (2005, pp. 123-124) has demonstrated how the timing of the national census can inflate or deflate the local Church of Ireland population. In term time, many Anglican secondary school and third level students study away from home. Parts of Western Ireland have significant English immigrant enclaves; the Dingle Peninsula is one such example. During the summer months, the presence of tourists, particularly British and American visitors in tourist hot spots, can inflate Anglican numbers returned on the national census. There is, however, an acceptance by many voices in the Church of Ireland that there is a significant population of people who consider themselves Anglican but who also do not engage with the church in any meaningful way.

A third of a century elapsed before Deane’s (1986) call for the provision of reliable diocesan figures was realised across the Church of Ireland. In 2012, the General Synod of the Church of Ireland (Church of Ireland, 2012) adopted a statute enabling the collection of statistics relating to the Church of Ireland population

applying the same criteria church-wide. As a result of this statute, each local church open for worship, had to return a census form for three Sundays in November 2013: 3<sup>rd</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, in relation to the gender and age profile of those at worship on the designated Sundays. The forms were to be completed by those at worship. In addition the clergy in charge of each church was obliged to return details of the Church of Ireland population, within the area covered by each church: the number of registered vestrypersons, the number of households and the number of subscribing households. The numerical details for occasional offices for the years 2009-2012 were required for baptisms, confirmations, weddings and funerals. Lastly, numbers attending all services held in the parochial area under the auspices of the Church of Ireland were requested for the following occasions: Christmas Eve 2012, Christmas Day 2012, Holy Week 2013 and Easter Day 2013. An overview of the findings for those six dioceses wholly in the Republic of Ireland, can be found on Table 1:4.

At a superficial level, average Sunday attendance is remarkable as a proportion of membership, expressed as a percentage of vestrypersons. It ranges from 34% in the Dioceses of Cashel, Ferns and Ossory to 66% in the Dioceses of Dublin and Glendalough. The average Sunday attendance for the six dioceses is 57%. However the inclusion of the Christmas Day attendance in the statistics is revealing. In each of the six dioceses, the number of people attending Christmas Day services exceeds the number of registered vestrypersons. In the Dioceses of Tuam, Killlala and Achonry for example, the excess for Christmas Day attendance is almost twice the total of vestrypersons; whereas in the Dioceses of Cashel, Ferns and Ossory, Christmas Day attendances are 20% greater than the number of vestrypersons. Christmas Day is the apogee of church attendance in the Church of Ireland and is an indicator that the number who consider themselves as belonging to

the church, is greater than those who register their membership formally as vestrypersons. This becomes more obvious if the church attendance figures for the average Sunday is set against the national census figures.

In the majority of the dioceses concerned, average Sunday attendance is around 15% of the 2011 national census total for the geographical areas covered by the dioceses. In the Dioceses of Tuam, Killala and Achonry, the western diocese, average Sunday attendance, measured against the national census for the region, is around 6%.

The 2013 church census is on one hand marked by precision, enumerating core numbers by way of vestrypersons, subscribing households, average Sunday attendance, attendance for the major festivals of the church alongside the numbers involved in occasional offices, for example baptism. On the other hand, the enumeration exercise is laced with ambiguity. What represents the core membership of the church of Ireland? Is it those registered as vestrypersons, or those who subscribe to the local church? What about those under 18 years of age who are not entitled to be vestrypersons? As for attendance which benchmark is to be used: the so-called average Sunday, or attendance at the major festivals? What about the regularity of attendance which was overlooked in the exercise? On what basis is attendance to be gauged? Is it data from the exercise itself, for example the number of vestrypersons, or data from external sources, for example diocesan statistics or the national census?

At the presentation of the 2013 church census data (Church of Ireland, 2014a), the headline figure on attendance was obtained by comparing average Sunday attendance over and against the number of registered vestrypersons. No

attempt was made to give the broader picture of determining average Sunday attendance on the basis of the national census figures. In other words, nominal Irish Anglicans for whatever reason, were ignored.

## **Conclusion**

The task of this chapter was to introduce the Church of Ireland in the historical context, how it came to be what it is in the Republic of Ireland. Ireland's religious legacy is exceptional in comparison to its neighbours and the Church of Ireland has played a significant part in the exceptionality. Elliot (2009, p. 215) argues that partition in 1921 created two states, 'informed by separate religious identities'. The chapter has demonstrated the durable identification of people self-assigning as Church of Ireland in the national census taken virtually every decade in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The chapter has also charted the Church of Ireland's feeble attempts to count their people, probably born out of complacency or embarrassment.

What is clear is that a considerable number of people consider themselves Church of Ireland but play little or no role in the life of the church. What is not clear is the reasons for this which this study is seeking to discover. Commentators such as Brierley (1999), Voas and Bruce (2004), Francis (2008), Voas (2009) and Day (2010) have drawn attention to the concept of nominalism, which Day (2011, p. 174) argues is the 'largest form of Christianity today and the least understood'. The challenge in the next chapter is to explore how nominalism is far from being an insignificant, empty category but a socially significant phenomenon of what it is to belong, believe and practice – or not.

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**A SENSE OF BELONGING**

**Introduction**

**Belonging, Belief and Practice**

**Europe: Ireland Stands Alone**

**Irish Catholic Experience: Belonging, Belief and Practice.**

**A Microcosm of Protestant Belonging, Belief and Practice**

**The Wider Frame**

**Conclusion**

## **Chapter 2: A Sense of Belonging**

### **Introduction**

Religion matters in Ireland where it has been a life and death issue over many centuries. Even in more religiously tolerant England, religious belonging as Francis (2003, p. 46) points out, remains a sensitive subject.

The heart of this chapter will explore the enigma of religious belonging among Southern Irish Anglicans, a significant number of whom identified themselves as ‘Church of Ireland’ in the national census. However, only a minority actually participates in the life of the church as has been established in the previous chapter. The chapter begins with a consideration of the relationship between belonging and two other related dimensions: belief and practice. Using the relational lens of belonging, belief and practice, the chapter will go on to review religious belonging in Ireland in a European context and in an Irish Catholic connection, before focusing on a small southern Irish Protestant parish community and their collective belonging. The discussion widens the frame by reviewing the literature surrounding the debate on belonging, belief and practice, before drawing the consideration together in a conclusion.

### **Belonging, Belief and Practice**

At the very outset it is important to recognise belonging in terms of religious affiliation, as one dimension in which religion is given social expression. Affiliation describes the religious group with which people identify. It is a broader notion than church membership, though many affiliates consider themselves church members without defining what membership means and involves. In the Republic of Ireland, Church of Ireland affiliation has risen in the two most recent censuses, 2002 and

2011, in line with an overall population increase. However, as far as it can be accurately measured, Church of Ireland membership has declined from the 1960s, alongside shrinking church attendance. The consistent discrepancy between the national census returns, alluding to affiliation and the Church of Ireland diocesan returns referring to membership, would seem to suggest that religious affiliation is a poor predictor of other religious dimensions, namely belief and practice. Francis (2008, p. 150), however draws attention to the work of Bibby (1985), Bouma (1992) and Fane (1999), in their attempt to rehabilitate religious affiliation as a theoretically coherent and socially significant indicator. Indeed for Fane (1999, p. 116) religious affiliation may be a useful marker of religious commitment, especially where information on denominational identity is available, in this case the census material on religious affiliation in Ireland.

Belief, according to Francis (2003, p. 47), describes the religious formularies and doctrines to which individuals may or may not subscribe. One of the key tasks of this research is to establish the core beliefs of nominal Irish Anglicans. Davie (1994, p. 76) has explored the link between belonging and belief. In her view, belief is not self-generated nor does it exist in a vacuum. Rather it has form and content, shaped as much by the surrounding culture as by the individual believer. As Francis and Robbins (2004, p. 38) have pointed out, Davie's key concept of 'believing without belonging' has been taken to sum up the core of Christian religion in Britain in the final decades of the twentieth century. Believing it seems, persists while belonging continues to decline. The marked imbalance between these two variables permeates English religious life. However, Francis and Robbins (2004, p. 39) take issue with Davie's use of the word 'belong', which they argue has more to do with a state of

being than with a specific activity or set of activities, namely practice or church attendance.

Given Francis and Robbins' reservations about the meaning of belonging, the weight of empirical evidence would indicate that the believing without belonging epitaph does not fit Ireland. Both Irish Catholics and Protestants are quite prepared to belong as the self-affiliated data from a long run of census returns demonstrates. In the same way, all the available evidence indicates high levels of belief in Ireland, north and south. Davie (2002, p. 11) recognizes that the Irish people are quite different from their immediate neighbours in terms of belonging and belief. However, given the rapid changes in the noughties in Ireland, Davie (2013, p. 283) concedes that Ireland is becoming more like the rest of Europe, 'closer to the norm than it used to be'.

According to Francis (2003, p. 47) practice relates to 'the range of religious activities in which individuals may or not engage'. Compared to belief, religious practice in Ireland is more varied. Nevertheless there is a sense of decline in regular church attendance among Irish Christians of both Catholic and Protestant traditions. MacGreil (2009, p. 19) estimated that weekly church attendance fell from 91% in 1974 to 43% in 2007. Even the much reduced figure in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is still significantly above British and European norms. Francis and Robbins (2004, p. 40) drew attention to statistics provided by the Church of England, that 2% of the population in England attend an Anglican church on Sunday. Furthermore, they noted that Brierley (2001) had estimated between 7% and 8% of the population attended some form of church in England on any given Sunday.

## **Europe: Ireland Stands Alone**

The European Values Survey (E.V.S.) is a major cross-national survey of human values undertaken in 1980, 1990 and 2000. It began as a co-operative effort by a group of European sociologists. Their intention was to make systematic comparisons between attitudes in the various countries of Western Europe to begin with and has been extended beyond the confines of Europe. The E.V.S. is a sophisticated social science tool which accurately maps social and moral values across continents. As such, it is an invaluable source of empirical data in relation to religious attitudes and in particular to the concepts of belonging, believing and practice.

In her work entitled *Religion in Modern Europe*, Davie (2000, p. 4) draws on the 1990 E.V.S. data. She notes that there are five religious indicators recorded: denominational allegiance, reported church attendance, attitudes towards church, indicators of religious belief and some measures of subjective religious disposition. As far as denominational allegiance is concerned, the E.V.S. data adds little to what is already known. The Irish Republic is an overwhelmingly Catholic country with a tiny Protestant minority. Two of the other indicators: religious belief and reported church attendance are more germane to this study. Tables 2:1 and 2:2 are a summary of the findings with reference to the whole island of Ireland for 1990 and 2000 (Halman, Luijkx & Van Zundert, 2005).

As far as religious belief is concerned, both parts of Ireland greatly exceed the Western European norms. Both the Republic and Northern Ireland are almost identical to each other in terms of extremely high values in belief about God, heaven and sin and very high values of belief in life after death, the exception being the

belief about hell, the Republic having a lower score of around 20% than its Northern counterpart for both 1990 and 2000.

The comparison with Northern Ireland is important, in that Northern Ireland has a significant Protestant population including 257,788 people who identify with the Church of Ireland, according to the 2001 census reviewed by Macourt (2008, p.137). The inference drawn from the E.V.S. data would seem to suggest that Irish Catholic and Irish Protestant populations, whether Northern or Southern, share commonly held Christian beliefs that are well above Western European norms in the decade 1990 to 2000.

When allied to a strong sense of religious belonging, belief is a powerful predictor of a worldview. Two studies undertaken in Northern Ireland by Hickey (1984) and by Francis, Robbins, Barnes and Lewis (2006), underscore the sociological implications of belief and belonging. For Hickey (1984, p. 59), the terms ‘Catholic’ and ‘Protestant’ are essentially religious in meaning. They therefore have significance for the beliefs that their adherents hold. These beliefs in turn shape the lives of people who are committed to them. As a result, beliefs are of fundamental importance in shaping social attitudes and actions. Research undertaken by Francis, Robbins, Barnes and Lewis (2006, p. 202) highlighted the significant differences in world views between adolescents educated within the two school belief systems in Northern Ireland. In addition, in their view, Protestants and Catholics seem to inhabit different ‘moral universes’, reflecting the different moral values espoused by their God.

In her examination of religious practice and secularisation in the mid-1980s, Nic Ghiolla Phadraig (1986, p. 141) observed that ‘formal religion still provides the

background of the more important landmarks in people's lives'. For Nic Ghiolla Phadraig, the extent to which ethnic identity is bound up with religion is one of the critical issues in the study of religion in Ireland. Her research (1986, p. 73) indicates that identity depends largely on religious denomination. Belief is central to religious belonging and in both parts of Ireland the evidence would suggest that belief is important in forming identity. The analysis of the 1980 E.V.S. data for Ireland by Fogarty, Ryan and Lees (1984, pp. 8-10), drew the distinction between Protestant and Catholic belief. They concluded that Protestant belief in God, the soul, life after death, heaven and hell, the devil and sin, were much softer than Catholic belief. Lower proportions of Protestants pray and meditate, draw comfort and strength from their faith or claim to be religious people. The great changes in Catholic Ireland, catalogued by Inglis (2008) since 1980, may make the earlier conclusions of Fogarty, Ryan and Lees (1984) less firm.

Ireland is not as secular as many people in Europe seem to be. The majority of Irish people consider themselves as belonging to a church and consider themselves religious, according to the E.V.S. belief data. There is a powerful parallel in Ireland between high levels of denominational affiliation and belief in the chief tenants of the Christian faith. There is little or no evidence in the E.V.S. data of a loss of faith which again sets Ireland apart from her neighbours. It would appear that believing and belonging is an appropriate epitaph for Ireland, North and South.

The E.V.S. data for the frequency of church attendance in 1990 and 2000 presents a more varied picture than that for belief, as can be seen on Table 2:2. The very high frequency of weekly church attendance in the Republic dropped dramatically from 81% to 57% in a decade. Nonetheless, the much reduced 2000 figure for weekly church attendance in the Republic is still about three times the

European norm. Two reasons are frequently cited for this sharp decline in weekly church attendance.

First, the burgeoning of economic growth propelled the Irish Republic into becoming one of the wealthiest nations on earth, the so-called 'Celtic Tiger'. As Irish Catholics prospered, they became more secular, even more protestant with a lower case 'p'. In Inglis's view (1998, p. 206) Irish Catholics attained political, economic and social power, without needing Catholic religious capital which includes weekly church attendance. Although as late as 1990, it could be claimed that 85% of the Irish adult population attended church once weekly, the seeds of decline in Catholic practice were sown much earlier. As Foster (2007, p. 38) points out, Louise Fuller's magisterial study of *Irish Catholicism Since 1950* established the stirrings of change among Catholic intellectuals in the 1950s. Fuller (2004, p. 61) articulates the view of one Jesuit intellectual:

Too many people in Ireland are trying to make do with a peasant religion when they are no longer peasants anymore; we are a growing and developing middle-class nation, acquiring a middle-class culture and we must have a religion to fit our needs.

The early signs of movement associated with economic prosperity became an avalanche of decline in the mid-1990s onwards.

Second, the startling fall in Catholic religious practice in the Irish Republic coincided with the public exposure of clerical sexual abuse scandals from about 1993, which not only destroyed the Church's moral authority but shattered public confidence in the institution. Ferriter (2005, p. 737) recalls Mary Raftrey, producer of the Radio Telefis Éireann's documentary *States of Fear*, declaring that: 'virtually no industrial school under the supervision of the Catholic Church, where there were boys over the age of ten, has not had or is not having a police investigation into

sexual abuse'. Although much of the abuse was not unique to Ireland, the church, according to Ferguson (1995, p. 257), was not prepared or able to deal with the revelations of the 1990s and suffered accordingly.

In Northern Ireland by comparison, weekly church attendance dropped fractionally between the decade between 1990 and 2000 and is not that far off the 2000 Irish Republic figure for weekly church attendance. However, the number of people who never attend church in Northern Ireland is double that of the Republic, even though the latter doubled its non-attendance total in ten years. Both parts of Ireland are in many respects *sui generis*, with regard to religious identification. In Davie's (2002, p. 11) view the Irish Republic is very similar to Poland. Both countries are cases where religion has become a form of cultural defence against external domination, in Ireland's case, against the British.

In comparison to other Western European countries, either largely Catholic like Spain or with mixed Catholic and Protestant populations like Germany, Ireland, North and South, stands alone, in terms of religious belief and practice. At one level this observation strengthens rather than diminishes the use of religious affiliation as a reliable religious indicator; whereas the decreasing practice figures provided by the E.V.S. draws further attention to the issue of nominalism, which lies at the heart of this thesis.

### **Irish Catholic Experience: Belonging, Belief and Practice.**

The E.V.S. exercise, by its very nature, is on a macro-scale. Until comparatively recently, Irish churches, probably due to complacency induced by high levels of belief and practice, have not sought to conduct studies relating to the belief and practice of their own. In the roar of the Celtic Tiger and the unfolding

catalogue of clerical sexual abuse, Desmond O'Donnell (2002, p. 2), a Dominican Priest, conducted a national survey into the experience and attitudes of third level educated Irish young adults between the ages of 20 and 35 years, all baptised Catholics. The research was undertaken between March 1999 and March 2000, conveniently coinciding with the 2000 E.V.S. findings. It consisted of a 560 item questionnaire, 1110 copies of which were distributed in six universities, five colleges, two hospitals and three training institutes. 707 scorable questionnaires were returned. The respondents resided in the Republic and Northern Ireland.

As far as church attendance was concerned the respondents were offered a choice of seven replies. Five of these broadly correspond to the E.V.S. church attendance categories: Weekly, Monthly, Never, Not often and at Christmas or Easter. In addition, O'Donnell included two other headings: 'Only when at home' and 'No reply' and also established the gender of respondents. His findings are summarised in Table 2:3.

In comparison to the 2000 E.V.S. data, available at broadly the same time, weekly church attendance is 5% less in O'Donnell's survey, monthly 4% higher and never 2% lower for both male and females. O'Donnell's survey seems to intimate that young female Catholics are more diligent in their religious practice than young male Catholics. What is of perhaps more significance is that the figures obtained by O'Donnell and the 2000 E.V.S. are not too dissimilar with regard to church attendance. Any variance between the two studies is probably due to the narrower age range surveyed by O'Donnell in comparison to the E.V.S.

This is surprising given the anecdotal evidence of the 'greying' of Catholic congregations in the Republic. It also stands in contrast to Stephens's (2003) analysis

of the *Young Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey* undertaken in 2003, which puts Catholic youth practice at around half of O'Donnell's (2002) findings. It could be that O'Donnell's age range of third level students masks changes in church attendance among Catholic young people of secondary school age. O'Donnell's study included young third level Catholics in Northern Ireland. In Stephens's (2003) analysis of 15 to 17 year olds, 88% regarded themselves as belonging to a particular religion: 91% of Catholics and 88% of Protestants surveyed agreed that they were part of a religious community. Moreover, 70% of Catholics questioned and 59% of Protestant teenagers felt that their religious identity was more important than national identity. According to the same survey 63% claim to attend church regularly and 44% at least weekly which is broadly in line with the 2000 E.V.S. findings for Northern Ireland and not that far from O'Donnell's (2002) figures.

If anything the weight of empirical evidence is in contrast to the anecdotal witness to a generation gap in regular church attendance particularly among young Irish Catholics. Like adult Catholics, young Catholics attend church regularly and in significant numbers above the European norm. Whilst church-going among Catholics in the Republic has declined since the 1970s it continues to be a thriving practice in comparison with other European Catholic nations. O'Donnell (2002, p. 74) acknowledged that there was a generational gap between the young adults surveyed and their parents when they were the same age. Even in the area of religious practice, O'Donnell held that the younger generation inhabited a new world referred to by MacNamarra (2001, p. 15) who maintained: 'one meets parents who seek for their children a way between the constriction they themselves experienced and the need for meaning, identity and community values'.

Unlike the E.V.S., O'Donnell (2002) attempted to discover reasons that young Catholic adults gave for attending church. The results are précised in Table 2:4. On church attendance O'Donnell (2002, p. 16) concluded that intrinsic reasons which sprang from a desire to relate more deeply to God, predominated as prime motivations over extrinsic reasons like parental pressure. O'Donnell noted that in terms of a sense of community, there appeared to be something missing from the motives for attendance offered by most of his respondents despite papal overtures stressing the importance of communal worship around the Sunday Eucharist.

In reviewing O'Donnell's work, Forde (2002, p. 100) observed that the level of faith and practice among young educated Catholics was actually higher than he had expected. He suggested that the higher level of practice may have been affected by the particular circumstances of the survey and the sample. More tellingly, Forde (2002, p. 20) judged that there was a flimsy quality to the practice of young Catholics and a weakness of faith content: 'it is worrying that only 63% believed in the divinity of Christ – the core touchstone of Christian identity'.

How valuable is O'Donnell's work (2002) with regard to the persistent nominalism of Irish Anglicans? In the first instance, O'Donnell's findings corroborate the broad picture of religious belief in Europe in relation to Ireland even though O'Donnell's work focuses on young Catholics across the island of Ireland. Perhaps more importantly, O'Donnell's work touches on the area of motivation behind church attendance of young Irish Catholics. This counters a criticism of the E.V.S. approach levelled by Ryan (1983, p. 27) that considering the overall level of belief in Ireland, it is surprising to find that a very high percentage of Catholics never had a religious experience or never felt that they were close to God in any way. Moreover, O'Donnell's (2002) research into the subject of motivation for church

attendance does provide a bench marker, which can be tested in relation to young Protestant adults who were the subject of a local study by Kennerley (1998) in the late 1990s.

### **A Microcosm of Protestant Belonging, Belief and Practice**

If the E. V.S. offers a macro picture of belief and practice in Ireland, Virginia Kennerley's (1998) study *Participation of the Younger Men in a Country Parish of the Church of Ireland* provides a contrasting microcosm of what it is to belong, believe and practise as an Irish Anglican. Kennerley based her research in a scattered rural Protestant community of four Church of Ireland parishes of 312 people in an area of County Kildare, 40 miles south west of Dublin. She was the rector of the four parishes when the research was conducted in the mid to late 1990s. The Protestant community under consideration represented around 2.8% of the local population, a similar reflection of the national picture where Anglicans make up just less than 3% of the total population. As rector of four rural parishes, Kennerley was aware of the decline in church attendance from former years; the most notable absentees were young men. She was conversant with the issues regarding the inactive nature of young males in the church identified by Fogarty, Ryan and Lees (1984), Francis (1985), Davies, Watkins and Winter (1991) and Davie (1994). Kennerley focussed her work on two of the four parishes, Parish A and B as she designated them. The male population structure and church attendance of males for both these parishes is outlined in Table 2.5.

By regular, Kennerley indicates an average attendance of at least once a month in ordinary Sundays. Kennerley's figure of 38% regular church attendance by young Protestant males contrasts with O'Donnell's findings for young Catholic

males of 54%. Even allowing for different sample size and variation in age categories, the Protestant total is possibly more robust than anticipated. Likewise Kennerley's value of 42% for regular church attendance by adult males is only marginally above the young adult total but well below the 67% figure obtained from the similar 2000 E.V.S. study. The most obvious feature in Kennerley's findings is the regular attendance disparity between parish A and B. This was in spite of a similar socio-economic profile and population structure. Kennerley concluded that the four communities represented by the group of parishes for some unknown reason exhibited different attendance frequencies and participation patterns for which she sought some explanation, which is beyond the scope of this study. More appropriately, Kennerley based her research on two sources. First she conducted a series of structured interviews with a set of males under 45 years and another set of males over 45 years in Parishes A and B. Secondly, the structured interviews were also supplemented by a general parish questionnaire. Some 199 questionnaires were issued, with an overall return of 136 which is 65%.

In listening to the men of two parishes, what did Kennerley discover? First there was an admission of a decline in church attendance. The older men looked back at a time when Sunday morning worship was a special occasion. Weekly attendance was the norm well into the 1970s. The same cohort of men attributed the fall-off in church attendance to improved incomes and a higher standard of living which accompanied Ireland's entry into the European Union in the early 1970s. The younger men conceded that their church attendance had dropped from childhood norms. Interviewees pointed to a combination of factors: increased prosperity, a reduction in parental pressure to conform and a wider choice of leisure options at weekends, as the chief causes in declining church attendance.

As far as beliefs were concerned, both the younger and older men expressed both a diminution of belief and a persistence of belief. Some saw their position as 'belonging without believing' whereas others insisted that their faith was still important, with private prayer being particularly meaningful while their concept of God was still very strong. Retaining a degree of faith and holding onto old church-going habits appeared to be two very different things. While the more occasional attendees may have hung onto some vestiges of faith, they did not have the strength of commitment to attend church in any regular way.

The most striking discovery in terms of this study was Kennerley's detection that whether young men go to church or not, whether they believed or not, they remained very aware of their membership of the Church of Ireland. This finding drawn from the structured interviews was substantiated in the questionnaire responses exploring the relationship between church attendance and commitment. Respondents were asked on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 was 'Not at all important' to 5 'Very important' the significance of their: faith, membership of the Church of Ireland and local parish church.

Not surprisingly, regular church attendees were more likely to stress the importance of faith, 4.58 on the scale as opposed to 3.17 for occasional attendees. The importance of membership of the Church of Ireland scored 4.83 by regular attendees and 3.58 by occasional attendees. Belonging to their own parish church was weighted as 4.75 by regulars and 3.67 by the occasionals (Kennerley, 1998, p. 77).

As can be seen, the values for all three categories for regular church attendees is noticeably higher by around one full point than those of the occasional attendees.

In spite of that, membership of the Church of Ireland is more significant than faith for regular attendees and their parish church was more important than faith for occasional attendees. Even if one compares the responses of younger as opposed to older men to the same question, a similar pattern emerges: the importance of membership of the Church of Ireland and their local parish church marginally outscores the importance of faith. Kennerley (1998, p. 80) thus concluded that there was considerable correlation between the findings of the structured interviews and the questionnaire responses, and that the men questioned saw church more as part of their allegiance to community and tradition, rather than as a resource for spiritual help. This stands in contrast to O'Donnell's (2002) findings that for young Catholic men, intrinsic reasons for church attendance were far more significant than the extrinsic reasons, notably identification with community.

Interestingly, when Kennerley (1998, p. 81) went on to explore how her parishioners viewed their local church, it became apparent that the continuance of their local church was paramount. Respondents, male and female, regular and occasional attendees, young and old, all agreed on one value, that they saw church as important for children's upbringing, over and above spiritual support, social networking, Christian teaching, pastoral care and special family events. In other words, this minority Protestant community valued their children because they were the future of the Church of Ireland. The children embodied the Church of Ireland community's hope for its own future; its hedge against a continued decline (Kennerley, 1998, p. 83).

How much weight can be placed upon Kennerley's micro study in the context of this enquiry? On the debit side, Kennerley's study is particularly small, just four parishes, in reality only two parishes. This is a very small sample when one

considers that there are some 669 Church of Ireland parishes in the Irish Republic (Church of Ireland, 2006a). In addition Kennerley's sample population is skewed in gender. Out of 52 male parishioners in Parishes A and B, Kennerley (1998, p. 35) interviewed seventeen males, five from the older age cohort and twelve from the younger men.

According to the national census of 2006 (Central Statistics Office, 2007), for the area covered by the 4 parishes, there were up to 475 people who self-affiliated as Church of Ireland. There would appear to be no attempt in Kennerley's (1998) study to identify and incorporate into the study, the 163 other people in the area who self-identified as Church of Ireland members. The exclusion of these nominal Anglicans skews some of the study's findings in relation to this thesis. On the credit side, Kennerley's observation and findings with regard to a decline in church attendance is consonant with the national picture of a decline traced by MacGreil (2009). In spite of Kennerley's (1998) study being restricted to Anglicans, rather than the whole population and the fact that her methodology is incompatible to the national and European surveys conducted, the trend is unmistakably downward from an almost universally high attendance thirty years previous.

In particular, Kennerley's findings bear some resemblance to that of MacGreil (1991 p. 112) who estimated weekly church attendance in 1988/89 for Protestant churches (Church of Ireland, Methodist and Presbyterian) of 55% and a figure as high as 70% for monthly attendance. This compared with a weekly church attendance for Roman Catholics of 82%. This was higher than the findings of the E.V.S. study of 1980, estimating Protestant church attendance in the Republic at 43% for weekly and 33% for occasionally. The subsequent E.V.S. study for 1990 does not distinguish church attendance as Catholic or Protestant. However Whelan

(1994, p. 21) commented that ‘during the 1980s the proportion attending church more than weekly declined by about 20% and there is strong evidence for a decline in church attendance in all but the oldest age group’.

By comparison in Northern Ireland, Fahey, Hayes and Sinnott (2004, p. 38) estimated that in 1968 46% of Protestants attended church weekly, which had fallen to 37% by 1992 and to 34% in 2003; whereas, Catholic attendance had fallen from 95% in 1968 to 60% by 2003. According to Mitchell (2006, p. 24) Protestants overall remain almost half as likely to attend church weekly as Catholics. This would seem to infer that Southern Irish Protestants are more likely to attend church more regularly than their Northern co-religionists. When compared to rural Anglican Church attendance in England the rural Irish Anglican position, exemplified by Kennerley (1998), is impressive. Francis (1985, p. 42) concluded on the criterion of Sunday contact with churches, that only 4% of rural Anglicans could be regarded as active Anglicans in the mid-eighties. Davies, Watkins and Winter (1991, p. 208) suggest that average weekly church attendance in rural benefices is 3.9% of the total population, a figure almost identical to Francis’s 4%.

### **The Wider Frame**

Why is it then that Irish Anglicans, being a tiny minority of the total population, attend church regularly in significant numbers? Could it be something related to their minority status? Nic Ghiolla Phadraig (1986, p. 141) drew the connection between the proportion of people attending church and whether or not the group is a religious minority. She concluded that Catholics in Northern Ireland have a slightly higher attendance than those in the Republic, while Protestants in the Republic have a higher attendance than those in Northern Ireland. If minority status

influences church attendance for Southern Irish Anglicans as a symbol of communal solidarity, does the same status induce nominal, less active Anglicans to identify with the Church of Ireland, in belonging without practice and possibly belief? Hopefully some answers to this key question will emerge in later sections of this study.

Communal identity seems a critical notion in understanding religious affiliation, practice and belief among Irish Anglicans. As Kennerley (1998, p. 80) concluded, men in her study increasingly saw church as more a part of their allegiance to community and tradition than as a resource for spiritual help or salvation. Could it be that the peculiar interplay between religious affiliation, belief and practice among Irish Anglicans is a function of Protestantism itself? For Hickey (1984, p. 69), Protestantism can be viewed as a way of thinking, a world view, rather than to do with church attendance or belief necessarily. At the core of a Protestant understanding of the Christian faith is the idea of liberty, a freedom of thought and conscience, over and against the perceived authoritarianism of Catholicism. Liberty of thought and action in the religious sphere enables people to make sense of themselves and their place in the world. In Ireland, as Mitchell (2006, p. 15) points out, religion plays a crucial role in the identification process. Being a Protestant in an overwhelmingly Catholic country marks a boundary of belonging and gives expression to it.

The Protestant idea of liberty is associated with individualism; nonetheless as Durkheim (1915, p. 87) argued in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, religion can work as a kind of social cement which binds people together with a common purpose and belief system. For Durkheim, the nature of religious beliefs is much less important than the fact that people share common practices and values. Considered-Charon (1995, p. 17)

found that Church of Ireland people considered 'Protestant values' as marking them out from those of the majority Catholic population. Values such as honesty, hard work, free enterprise and freedom of conscience were associated above all with their own minority community. Although Considere-Charon found that Anglican people emphasised their good relations with their Catholic neighbours, especially in rural areas, there was some resistance to ecumenism on the grounds of the fear that it might undermine the cohesion of the Protestant minority.

More recently Warner (1997, p. 217) deliberated on the role religious activity plays in the creation of community. He argues that religion creates a certain amount of social solidarity even though individualism does not necessarily bind its members to a sense of collective conscience and/or practice. Thus it is quite feasible to belong without necessarily believing or practising. As Francis and Robbins (2004, p. 39) argue, belonging has more to do with notions of identity, than notions of participation. Members of the Irish Anglican population seem to belong in a way which is part of their identity rather than performing certain actions or beliefs which keeps identity alive. Kennerley's (1998) analysis demonstrated low levels of participation were often matched by high levels of esteem of identity. This is entering the field of 'Implicit Religion', which according to Francis and Robbins (2004, pp. 40-41) inhabits a hinterland between belonging and believing and belonging and practising.

The issue of nominalism is not unique to Ireland. In Canada for example, O'Toole (1996, p. 122) observed that over 80% of the population self-affiliated to particular Christian traditions in the 1991 census, although only around 30% of Canadians regularly attend church. In the 1981 New Zealand census, Hill and Bowman (1985, p. 92) found that around 75% claimed to belong to a Christian group

but put regular church attendance at around 10% of the population. In her review of nominalism in Canada and New Zealand, Fane (1999, p. 116) concludes there is confusion over what the information on the population's religious affiliations actually means and how it might be used.

Drawing on a 1980/81 national survey which discovered that around 90% of Canadians thought themselves as Catholic or Protestant, while only 30% attended church regularly, Bibby (1985, p. 300) asked Canadians to appraise the essence of their religion. Around 85% of Catholics and Protestants considered themselves as religious to some extent. Among the remaining 15% who did not think of themselves as religious, some 60% had some contact one way or another with church. From his findings Bibby developed the idea of 'encasement' in which Canadian Christians were encased within their various Christian traditions. Despite the nominalism of Canadian Christians, Bibby argued that the Christian traditions continued to exercise a strong influence over both active and nominal affiliates. For Fane (1999, p. 121), the main thing to draw from Bibby's analysis is that affiliated Christianity continues to be a socially significant, attitudinal and behavioural determinant. To what extent 'religious encasement' is a feature of southern Irish Anglican identity, will hopefully emerge later on in this study.

Bouma's (1992, p. 107) research in Australia views religious affiliation as a useful social category which gives some indication of the cultural background and the orientating values of a person. He goes on to posit a process through which cultural background and general orientating values are acquired. Bouma maintains that people have a meaning system, a set of beliefs, which answer questions about the meaning and purpose of life. A meaning system is substantiated by secondary plausibility structures which describe the social arrangements which articulate,

celebrate, perpetuate and apply beliefs. He viewed religious practice as one dimension of a plausibility structure. As Fane (1999, p. 118) noted, although self-assigned religious identity might imply commitment to a plausibility structure (practice) and adherence to its related meaning system (belief), she agrees with Bouma in suggesting that it might be equally more significant in terms of exposure to the particular cultural background that it represents. In other words, even non-church-goers and agnostics may still show the effect of the meaning system and plausibility structure with which they may identify.

The implications of Bouma's sociological theory of religious identification are significant in the understanding of Irish Anglican identification, as according to Fane (1999, p. 119), it informs attitudes and modes of behaviour. These in turn define who people are, or equally importantly who they are not, in the Irish context: not Catholic, not 'no-religion' but Church of Ireland. The value of this type of analysis is advantageous when interpreting Irish census data because it is inclusive of all those who claim a religious affiliation, not simply those who actually attend church on a regular basis or believe the tenants of their religion.

In contrast to the Australian or Canadian situations covered by Bouma (1992) and Bibby (1985) respectively, Irish Anglicans constitute a tiny minority in a national context. In Whyte's (1980, p. 4) view the Protestant minority was compelled to defend its religious tradition and distinct identity in the face of declining numbers and the presence of the monolithic Catholic majority. The threat to the minority community resulted in higher church attendance up to the 1980s and a separate social structure, focussed on education, health, leisure, sport and employment. This sense of threat to the very existence of a community gives the notion of identity a sharper focus.

## Conclusion

This chapter has sought to understand what it means to belong to the Church of Ireland. The chapter widened the frame by reviewing the work of Bibby (1985) in Canada and Bouma (1992) in Australia, in seeking further insight of religious belonging. Fane's (1999) reading of Bibby's and Bouma's work was useful in comprehending Irish Anglican belonging. For Fane (1999) it informs attitudes and behaviour; religious affiliation is a theoretically coherent and socially significant indicator. Belonging then, has more to do with notions of identity than with notions of participation.

The sense of belonging, of who people are, or are not, is not a fixed thing. Brubaker and Cooper (2000, p. 46) draw attention to the fact that through a life span people are engaged in an ongoing process of identification, with self and community. Communities act in Cohen's (1985) terms as symbolic constructions, based on the individual's feelings that they belong to a larger group. Communities defined by religion act as a kind of cultural reservoir from which categorisations of self, of who they are and who belongs, can be derived.

Colley (1992, p. 32) observed that in 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain, church attendance was in decline but the Protestant worldview was so ingrained in the culture that it influenced people's thinking irrespective of whether they attended church or not. Nominal Irish Anglicans belong to the Church of Ireland; it defines who they are and who they are not, in the Irish context. Being a Protestant in an over-whelmingly Catholic country marks a boundary of belonging and gives expression to it. This may well provide a key in understanding the central research question: why many Irish Anglicans identify with the Church of Ireland and yet do not participate in the life of

the church. The next chapter will set out the methodology by which nominal Irish Anglicans will be approached and analysed as to the nature of their belonging, beliefs and practice.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

**Introduction**

**The Methodology**

**The Instrument**

**The Sample**

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**The Presentation**

**Gender**

**Age**

**Occupational Status**

**Church Attendance**

**Religious Inheritance**

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## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the method used to obtain the views of nominal Irish Anglicans as to their belonging, beliefs and practice, in order to gain an understanding into the key research question: why do many Irish Anglicans identify with the Church of Ireland yet not participate in the life of the church. Shaping the research involved a number of phases which will be reviewed in the chapter. They include: choosing a methodology, the instrument used, locating the sample, processing the data and finally, the presentation of data. The chapter will conclude by drawing these various phases together and preparing the reader for the analysis chapters which follow.

By its very nature nominalism is a difficult and sensitive topic to investigate. Nominal affiliates of the Church of Ireland tend to be absent from church worship and they are unlikely to be involved in the life of the church. In addition religion in Ireland is a sensitive area to approach. For Protestants in particular, religion can be a private matter. Since partition, Southern Protestants have to a large extent, kept their heads down and got on with life, without a great deal of scrutiny (McCracken, 2002, p.122). Given these religious realities, any investigation probing the hinterland of Protestant nominalism would need to treat confidentiality and anonymity as paramount.

### **The Methodology**

In view of the research subject outlined above and the desire to undertake an extensive enquiry, the methodology chosen for the investigation was primarily quantitative and the instrument a questionnaire. Such an approach is systematic,

controlled and empirical. It allows all potential participants the chance to remain anonymous and to be treated with strict confidentiality. As Richter and Francis (1998, p. 168) point out, providing the group of people selected for the survey is sufficiently representative and the response rate is reasonable, it is possible to generalise from the selected group to the wider population it represents.

Considerable quantitative work in an allied socio-religious field, using the survey instrument, has been applied to good effect in recent decades in the British Isles. Francis (1994) in the *University of Wales, Church Participation Research Project*, Richter and Francis's (1998) *Gone but Not Forgotten*, the follow up by Francis and Richter (2007) *Gone for Good? Church-Leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* and Francis, Robbins and Astley's (2005) *Fragmented Faith: Exposing the Fault-lines in the Church of England* are all pertinent studies with regard to this research. The first three examples quoted above attempted to assess and illuminate the implications of church-leaving for the vitality of churches in England and Wales. The last study named, based on the *Church Times Survey* (Francis, Robbins & Astley, 2005, p. 9) sought to provide a comprehensive picture of committed Anglicans, in terms both of who they are and what they believe.

Taken together, the methodology applied in these four studies provides the template for this exercise in research for the following reasons. In the first instance, although three of these survey projects were aimed at church-leavers, there is considerable overlap with nominal affiliates. Such nominal affiliates of the Church of Ireland may have distanced themselves in terms of practice and possibly belief; they may have 'left' in one sense. It is also possible that they may never have 'joined' in the first place but through family associations, they perceive a belonging,

however vague, to the Church of Ireland. Again some of the terminology used in church-leaving literature is particularly appropriate in the context of nominalism for example: ‘disengaged’, ‘drifting’, ‘dropping out’ and ‘distancing’. Whether church-leaving and nominal belonging are related or not, will hopefully be drawn out in the course of this study.

In the second place, the church-leaving studies cited have included an Anglican dimension. Participants were drawn from both the Church of England and the Church of Wales, sister churches of the Church of Ireland. Is there something unique about the Anglican tradition, in admittedly different contexts, which gives rise to nominalism? To that end, the *Church Times Survey* (Francis, Robbins & Astley, 2005), although focused on committed rather than uncommitted Anglicans, may provide useful insight into the mix of belonging, belief and practice among nominal Irish Anglicans.

As Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005, p. 9) acknowledge, the precedent and inspiration for the *Church Times Survey* was Bibby’s (1986) work: *Anglitrends: Profile and Prognosis* which sought to reach a wider sample of Canadian Anglicans who attended or engaged with church.

### **The Instrument**

The instrument designed to undertake this research was adapted from those used by: Francis (1994) in the *University of Wales, Church Participation Research Project*, Richter and Francis’s (1998) *Gone but Not Forgotten*, Francis, Robbins and Astley’s (2005) *Fragmented Faith: Exposing the Fault-lines in the Church of England* and Francis and Richter’s (2007) *Gone for Good? Church-Leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Specifically it was adapted for nominal affiliates of the

Church of Ireland. The questionnaire was to be completed by respondents independently without the help of an interview. Anonymity was guaranteed. Such surveys tend to be more reliable and honest. To some extent such an approach overcomes the criticism of Bruce (2002, p. 197) towards Richter and Francis's (1998) *Gone but Not Forgotten* that the responses gleaned by interview were 'shaded by politeness and guilt'. The disadvantages of the adopted survey approach are obvious. There is a tendency towards a low return rate. Without interviews it is possible that respondents may be unable to understand and answer certain questions which undermine the value of the approach.

In the first place, the questionnaire sought to establish if the respondent considered themselves Church of Ireland or not. It opened with a section entitled 'About You'. The questions asked in this opening section were closed, pre-coded using a multiple choice format. The questions sought to discover the standard demographic characteristics of the nominal Irish Anglicans targeted in the exercise. Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005, p. 9), for example, posed such standard demographic questions in their work on the *Church Times Survey*.

The second section of this questionnaire entitled *Your Past* aspired to uncover the religious practices of the respondents' parents. For example, when the respondent was ten years of age, did their mother or father attend religious services? If so, what was the frequency of their attendance and what type of church was attended by both parents? Commentators such as Voas and Crockett (2005) and Cohen-Malayev, Schacter and Rich (2014) have highlighted the role of parents in the transmission of religiosity.

The past gave way to section three nominated *About Church Attendance* which focused on the respondents' religious practice and influences upon it, again using the pre-coded multiple choice format. The respondents simply needed to tick or mark the box which most accurately reflected their choice of answer. The complex nature of changing church attendance is clear in the literature: Voas and Crockett (2005), Francis and Richter (2007) and Davie (2013); and is an important element in this study.

Towards the middle section of the questionnaire, closed questions sought to elicit responses requiring attitudes, opinions and views. The section entitled 'Your Views' on Christian belief used a condensed *Church Times Survey* format of closed questions (Francis, 2001). These used a five-fold Likert Scale: Agree Strongly, Agree, Not Certain, Disagree and Disagree Strongly. Likert Scales, as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p. 325) point out, are 'very useful devices in research as they build in a degree of sensitivity and differentiation of response while still generating numbers'.

The penultimate section of the questionnaire, entitled *Your Reasons for Reduced Church-Going*, consisted of a series of closed questions using the Likert Scale previously described. The questions themselves were drawn from a battery of 200 questions used in three of the studies cited: *University of Wales, Church Participation Research Project*, (Francis, 1994), *Gone but Not Forgotten* (Richter & Francis, 1998) and *Gone for Good? Church-leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Francis & Richter, 2007).

To ascertain which questions were to be included in this research project and which others to possibly include, a pilot survey was undertaken. The aim of the pilot

survey was to increase as Wilson and McClean (1994, p. 47) suggest, the practicability, reliability and validity of the questionnaire. The pilot survey was given to a small number (20) of people known by the researcher as nominal Irish Anglicans. They were asked to complete around 200 questions and on the basis of their responses and some verbal feedback, 67 questions, with a few minor adjustments, were selected. One question was inserted with pertinent relevance to Ireland. All told, 68 questions were asked in this section entitled: ‘Your Reasons for Reduced Church Going’. Despite the reduced number of questions in this section, all related to the eight and fifteen-fold typology of questions as set out in *Gone but Not Forgotten* (Richter & Francis, 1998) and *Gone for Good? Church-leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Francis & Richter, 2007).

The final untitled section in the questionnaire consisted of three open-ended questions. The purpose of their inclusion was to give participants a final say to yield more nuanced data and to avoid imposing preconceived categories on the material. The insertion of this qualitative approach was adapted by Richter and Francis (1998) in *Gone but Not Forgotten* and Francis and Richter (2007) in *Gone for Good? Church-leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*.

Combining both quantitative and qualitative methods in one survey is in Richter and Francis’s (1998, p. 173) view, advantageous as it builds on the strengths and covers the weaknesses of both approaches. The purpose of the exercise as Oppenheim (1992, p. 121) remarks, is to ensure that respondents co-operate and complete the whole questionnaire. To that end, the sequence of the questionnaire followed good practice advocated by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p. 337) in beginning with unthreatening factual questions, moving to closed questions about

given statements, before finishing with more open-ended questions, seeking a more personal response. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix B, 3:1.

### **The Sample**

The challenge to locate a sufficiently large and representative sample of nominal Irish Anglicans was considerable. It has already been established in Chapter One that the size of the target community of nominal Irish Anglicans is open to conjecture. Using three benchmarks noted in Chapter One: the national census of 2002 (Central Statistics Office, 2004a), the membership of the Church of Ireland as calculated by Brierley (1995) in the Irish Christian Handbook and diocesan returns for 2000 which were used to calculate church-going and non church-going Anglicans; the target population falls between 21,000 and 63,000 people. In determining sample size for a probability sample, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p. 103) advise the researcher not only to consider the population size but also the confidence level and confidence interval. The former tells how sure the researcher can be when the response is made, expressed as a percentage. In this case the confidence level is 95%. The latter, also called the margin of error, is the degree of variation the researcher requires. A conventional sampling strategy Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p. 103) hold, would be to use a 95% confidence level and a 3% confidence interval. These strategies were adapted in this sample. On the advice of the supervisor, a sample of 1,000 questionnaires was sent to the target population.

Using the 2002 national census (Central Statistics Office, 2004b), ranked on the basis of the Church of Ireland population according to county as seen on Table 3:1, questionnaires were then allocated proportionately to clergy in the twenty-six

counties. The clergy acted as gatekeepers to the target community of nominal Irish Anglicans. Church of Ireland clergy working on the ground in parishes, as chaplains to colleges, schools and hospitals, have a unique access to the church-going and non-church-going Anglican population. Ireland's historical legacy has left much of the educational, health and social provision in the hands of the churches. Although a minority church, the Church of Ireland nonetheless is responsible for managing over 300 national (primary) schools, while 26 secondary schools are under Protestant management. In the same way, various hospitals and nursing homes throughout Ireland have a Church of Ireland input. Hospital chaplaincies tend to be held by resident parish clergy. Traditionally Protestants, wherever possible, tend to avail of Protestant schooling and usually identify themselves as Church of Ireland or Protestant in hospital admissions.

One thousand questionnaires were forwarded to the gatekeeper clergy selected on a county basis, using the Church of Ireland Directory (Church of Ireland, 2006a). The clergy contacted to act as gatekeepers in this research, were asked to forward the questionnaires by post to nominal Anglicans within their parishes and area. In particular, they were asked after Hoge, Johnson and Luidens (1993) to distribute the questionnaires to Church of Ireland people in their area who attended church less than six times a year, or who did not attend church at all. The gatekeeper clergy were assured that the exercise was completely confidential and at their discretion. A covering letter (see Appendix B, 3:2) accompanied the approach to clergy, setting forward the aims and purpose of the survey and their role in achieving it.

Following good practice, good-quality envelopes addressed to the gatekeeper clergy were used, accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope for the responding

reply. A letter from the researcher stating the aims of the research and gratitude for making the study possible was also included. A copy of the letter to the respondents can be found in Appendix B, 3:3.

Each batch of questionnaires allocated were coded and forwarded by post on Mondays and Tuesdays over the period February to March 2006. In theory postal surveys can reach large numbers of people over a widely scattered sample. The use of clergy gatekeepers increased the possibility of a poor response and such was the case, as the surveys began to trickle back. Of the 1,000 questionnaires sent, 203 were returned; of these 145 were scorable. A telephone follow up of all gatekeeper clergy was undertaken in April 2006, a month after the initial posting, requesting that if the questionnaires had not been already distributed they should be sent. Ten clergy felt that they could not forward the questionnaires; in addition 7 parishes were vacant without incumbents and the questionnaires not sent. Fourteen clergy admitted that they had failed to distribute the surveys but would do so. In response to the telephoned follow up, 87 questionnaires were returned and 62 were scorable. In total 207 scorable questionnaires were returned over a five month period after the initial posting.

It was clear that the use of gatekeeper clergy was limited in terms of the response rate of 21%. The number of scoreable questionnaires fell well short of that required for the sample size. Moreover the returned questionnaires were heavily skewed from middle age to old age respondents. In consultation with the research supervisor, it was decided to attempt another approach to widen the sample, especially in terms of younger respondents. This approach involved locating groups of Church of Ireland young people in secondary schools and colleges in the age group 17 to 25 years. Through the offices of the school and college principals or

chaplains, it was arranged to undertake a survey in situ, supervised either by class teachers and lecturers or by the researcher. Thus 500 further surveys were allocated in September and October 2006 to schools and colleges as outlined in Table 3:2.

As before in the initial tranche of questionnaires, a letter of explanation was sent to the participating colleges and schools (see Appendix B, 3:4). In all some 198 scorable questionnaires were obtained from this second phase over another five month period. This took the scorable total of completed questionnaires to 415, just above the lower end of an acceptable sample size. The low response, 22% of the 1500 questionnaires distributed, reflects the difficulty in identifying nominal affiliates of the Church of Ireland and a lack of willingness to engage with the questionnaire. The use of clergy as gatekeepers was problematic. It became apparent that quite a number did not bother to co-operate with the investigation; others sent the questionnaires to church-going people which nullified a significant number of returned questionnaires. In the same way, college principals or teachers did not differentiate between church attending and non-church attending students, which again rendered the returns as invalid. Despite these deficiencies, there was a sufficient response to make the sample large enough to be representative of the target population.

### **The Process**

As the questionnaires were returned over a period of ten months, the data was loaded onto a quantitative data analysis tool. In this case, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (S.P.S.S. Version 16), the most widely used statistical package for social sciences, was the preferred choice. After a period of twelve months from the initial batch of questionnaires having been sent out, the decision was made by the

researcher and supervisor to close and clean the data. The information from the questionnaires had been created by way of a codebook. The data was screened by checking for errors in the variables; in particular looking for variables which fell outside the range of possible values for a variable as recommended by Pallant (2007, p. 44). In the same way, the information was searched to correct any errors in the data file (Pallant, 2007, p. 47-49). The cleaning process was undertaken by the researcher in conjunction with the supervisor's colleague, Dr M. Robbins.

Of the 415 returned questionnaires, 99 were deemed unclean for analysis. The discarded returned questionnaires failed to meet three primary requirements: that the respondents were Church of Ireland, that they attended church less than six times a year and lastly that the completed questionnaires had sufficient responses across all sub-sections to make them usable in terms of analysis. In total 316 questionnaires were used as a basis for the data analysis which fell within the accepted parameters of a confidence level of 95% and confidence interval of 2% calculated online (Creative Research Systems, 2012). Using the S.P.S.S. analysis tool, the cleaned data was processed for the exploratory data analysis, by producing frequencies, percentages and cross-tabulations.

### **The Presentation**

As far as the presentation was concerned, the data in the 'Your Views' section of the questionnaire was sub-divided into two primary blocks: the first pertaining to beliefs, the second relating to the reasons for reduced church-going. The first block of 14 questions on beliefs was broken into two sections, which formed the basis of the two analysis chapters: Credo and Fides. The second block of 68 questions was re-ordered on the basis of themes derived from Richter and Francis

(1998) and Francis and Richter (2007). As a result, a further 8 chapters emerged for analysis which focused on: Life's Changes, Growing Up, Faltering Faith, Disconnect, Not Belonging, Disillusionment, Being Let Down by Church and Problems with Theology and Morality. The sub-division of the data into these smaller working blocks enabled a detailed analysis, combined with external comparisons to the work undertaken by Richter and Francis (1998), Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005) and Francis and Richter (2007).

In addition a number of personal variables from the data were selected for cross-tabulation, whereby one variable is presented in relation to another. This combining of categories is according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p. 509) a useful tool in showing general trends or tendencies in data. Richter and Francis (1998), Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005) and Francis and Richter (2007) had made great use of combining categories by way of cross-tabulation in their respective research. In all, five variables were selected for cross-tabulation: Gender, Age, Occupational Status, Church Attendance and Religious Inheritance.

## **Gender**

The first personal variable selected for cross-tabulation was gender, a standard category across a range of comparable studies in the field: O'Donnell (2002), Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005), Francis and Richter (2007) and MacGreil (2009). This study is interested in the way in which beliefs, attitudes and values towards church may vary between male and female nominal Irish Anglicans. In general, more women than men attend church. When examining the gender distribution among 'core Catholics' in the Diocese of Meath (Diocese of Meath, 2005, p. 7), it was discovered that those who were actively involved in the life of the

local church were 70% female. A similar exercise in the Church of Ireland Dioceses of Meath and Kildare (Church of Ireland, 2014a), found that women accounted for 56% of regular church-goers.

Greater religiosity among women has been attributed to two main forms of structural location theory. The first according to Francis and Richter (2007, p. 44), draws on the fact that men and women have different social roles. Women have a more family-centred role, whereas men have a more economic role. Churches tend to be family-centred in their appeal and women are more likely than men to identify with them. Secondly, Kay and Francis (1996, pp. 11-13) identified that women are under-represented in the workforce and therefore are less secularised, having more disposable time to devote to church participation.

However the workplace is changing in developed and evolving economies like Ireland where in recent decades more women have entered the workforce. In Ireland, women constitute 41% of the working population (Central Statistics Office, 2004c). In a study in the late nineties in the United States, Becker and Hofmeister (2001, p. 713) concluded that 'there was not a statistically significant relationship between full-time paid employment and any form of congregational involvement' on the part of women. In an evolving workplace the same researchers (2001, p. 718) concluded that 'men are becoming more like women in their religious involvement, rather than women becoming more like men'. Another study in the United States, this time conducted by Wilson and Sherkat (1994, pp. 155-156), also discovered another principle related to gender when it came to reducing church attendance and leaving church altogether. They found that women were much less likely to drop out of church-going, but if they did, they were no more likely than men to return to church.

Fanstone's (1993, p. 272) work in the United Kingdom in the early nineties, unearthed the different reasons that men and women gave for disengaging with the church. Men left because they found church-going irrelevant to their lives (60%). Women on the other hand were more likely to leave church because of domestic tension (67%), or because they didn't feel they belonged (59%).

MacGreil (2009, pp. 23-24) found that females have a higher level of practice than males but it was not as great a difference as was anticipated. He attributed this narrowing of gender religiosity to a sense of frustration and alienation felt by a proportion of Catholic women 'to ecclesiastical ceilings imposed upon women within the church structures'.

Of the 316 scoreable questionnaires obtained in the sample, 44% were male and 56% female. In the 2002 national census (Central Statistics Office, 2004d), males constituted 49% of the Church of Ireland population and females 51%. In the 2013 Church of Ireland (Church of Ireland, 2014a) census, women make up 57% and men 43%.

## **Age**

Age is another standard personal variable in studies of this nature: Richter and Francis (1998), O'Donnell (2002), Francis and Richter (2007) and MacGreil (2009). Before considering the generational legacy of nominal Irish Anglicans, it is well to define the terms. Following Mannheim (1952), a generation is a group of people born around the same time who live through a particular set of social, cultural, economic and political circumstances during the formative years of early adulthood (Collins-Mayo & Beaudoin, 2010, p. 17). It follows that these socio-historic conditions come to shape how the generations see the world. This in turn

influences the values people hold and how they express them in life which distinguishes them from the previous or succeeding generations.

Theorists vary in the labels they put on generations and the particular birth years they cover. Others critique the value of thinking in terms of generations at all and view it as a theoretical construct (Lynch, 2010, p. 34). Notwithstanding some of the general issues raised about generational theory, it may be a useful tool in examining the role age plays in the beliefs of nominal Irish Anglicans.

As far as age is concerned, the sample survey was categorised into four age cohorts, based on age in 2006. The under 25s, which correspond to Generation Y, were born after 1981; they make up 38% of the overall sample. Generation X was represented by those aged between 26 and 45 years of age, born after 1961; they constituted 31% of the sample. The Baby Boomers included those born between 1946 and 1961, namely 46 to 60 year olds, making up 21% of the sample. The final category was the smallest cohort of 10% comprising those aged 61 years and over, the so-called Builders' Generation. By comparison, the under 25s make up 31% of the Irish Anglican population, those between 26 and 45 years of age, 29%; those 46 to 60 year olds, 16% and those 61+, 24% (Central Statistics Office, 2004d). Again in the Church of Ireland census of 2013 (Church of Ireland, 2014a), of regular church attenders, the percentages according to the age cohorts adopted in this study were the under 25s, 25%, those between 26 and 45 years of age, 17%; those 46 to 60 year olds, 19% and finally those 61+, 39%.

Commentators suggest that age is the most important variable in the strength of its association with religious commitment (Voas & Day, 2007, p. 95). They hold that the decline in belief and practice is generational (Voas & Crockett, 2005, p. 11).

Indeed Voas and Crockett (2005, p. 15) found that older people were more religious than younger ones. The natural interpretation they offer in view of this is that religious decline is principally the result of differences between generations; each age cohort is less religious than the previous one.

### **Occupational Status**

Occupational status is a pertinent variable in modern society. In the Irish context, O'Donnell (2002, p.2) focused his research in faith and religion among young educated adults between the ages of 20 and 35, comprising student and professional cohorts. Likewise MacGreil (2009, p. 33) in his research on religious attitudes and practices in Ireland also included occupational status as a 'nominal' variable. He made the interesting observation that the lowest church attendance is among those with the lowest occupational status. He draws the conclusion that there should be a positive correlation between education and occupational status and it would therefore be reasonable to expect that those with a higher occupational status should have higher levels of church attendance.

The nominal Irish Anglicans surveyed in this study are heavily weighted towards professional occupations; 35% of the sample regarded themselves as professional people. Garret Fitzgerald (2003, p. 150), a former Taoiseach (Prime Minister) of Ireland, observed 'it is particularly notable that throughout the whole history of the independent Irish State, the Protestant population of the Republic has fully maintained its favourable socio-economic position'. According to Fitzgerald, the proportion of working Protestants in the three highest socio-economic groups: firstly commerce, insurance and finance, secondly management and administration

and finally the professions, accounted for 39.5% of the Protestant population in 1991.

The second largest occupational group at 21% identified themselves as students. This was hardly surprising given the strategy of going to schools and colleges in an attempt to locate sufficient numbers of nominal Anglicans. The over-representation of this occupational category in the study is apparent in comparison to the number of students 16 to 25 years of age in the overall Protestant population which is estimated to be 16% (Central Statistics Office, 2004d). The last discernable group, the manual workers, is a conflation of three occupational categories in the first section of the questionnaire, namely: skilled manual worker, semi-skilled manual worker and unskilled manual worker. They made up an under-representative 10% of the sample, compared to 13% in the national census (Central Statistics Office, 2004d). The remaining 34% of the sample categorised according to occupational status: unemployment and those who were retired, were omitted from the analysis due to their size and diversity.

### **Church Attendance**

It is generally accepted that church-going in Ireland has been on the decline for at least two decades. The literature is in agreement about this: O'Donnell (2002), Mitchell, (2006), Inglis (2007) and MacGreil (2009). Likewise if people attend church, they tend to do so less regularly than once was the case. In reviewing the Meath and Kildare Church Report, Seaman (2003) reported that 43% of church-goers said they attended weekly, 24% every couple of weeks and 18% occasionally. He drew the conclusion that people feel that occasional worship or worship every couple of weeks, is regular worship for them (2003, p. 10).

Francis and Richter (2007) highlighted the difficulty in specifying with any precision how church attendance can be measured to define church-goers and identify church-leavers. For them, church-leavers were defined as individuals who attended church less than six times a year not including Christmas, Easter, weddings or funerals after Hoge, Johnson and Luidens (Francis and Richter, 2007). This working definition was adapted for this study and in this section, by distinction being made between those who attend occasionally (less than six times a year), those who attend once (Christmas or Easter types) and those who never attend. However, in all three categories, attendance at baptisms, confirmations, weddings and funerals, was excluded from consideration.

### **Religious Inheritance**

The formative influence of parents and families in the transmission of religiosity to the next generation is well attested in the literature: Bibby (1985), Bouma (1992), Brown (2001), Voas and Crockett (2005) and King and Roeser (2009). The hypotheses, the stronger the religiosity of the parents, the more likely the offspring to attend church in later life, has been attested by Ruiter and Van Tubergen (2009, p. 882), whose multilateral analysis of 60 countries strongly supported the thesis. In the Irish context, O'Donnell (2002, p. 42) noted that the 1980 European Values System Survey rated Ireland the highest in Europe for the retention of its religious character. O'Donnell attributed this largely to the influence of the home. MacGreil (2009, p. 84) too, highlighted the role of parents and the home as critical in passing on one's religion to the next generation.

With this in mind, the last personal variable selected for analysis was religious inheritance or upbringing. The data was drawn from the *Your Past* section

of the questionnaire and in particular the response to the question: ‘When you were ten, how important was religion to you?’ using the five point Likert Scale: Not Very Important, Fairly Important, Can’t Say, Important, Very Important.

### **Collapsed Variables**

Following the practice of Richter and Francis (1998), Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005) and Francis and Richter (2007), the five-fold Likert Scale was collapsed into a three-fold scale: Agree, Don’t Know and Disagree. This was to sharpen the focus of the analysis while retaining some level of sensitivity and differentiation not to mention, enhance the presentation. In the succeeding analysis in Chapters Four to Thirteen, Table 1 for each chapter presents a three-fold Likert Scale: Agree, Don’t Know (represented by a question mark) and Disagree. In these chapters the intention is to highlight the affirmative responses as to matters of faith and the reasons that nominal Irish Anglicans give for reducing their church-going. Reference is made where necessary to the other two Likert categories: Don’t Know and Disagree, in order to retain balance and perspective. In each table the value of the variable is expressed in percentage terms to the nearest round figure.

In the second table for each analysis chapter, Gender is delineated with the single Likert category, Agree, according to percentage, shown for Males and Females. In the same way, Age is the third table in the analysis chapters, showing the Agree percentage for the single Likert category for the four generational groups according to age: Under 25, 26-45, 46-60 and 60+. The fourth table, Occupational Status, in each of the analysis chapters, presents the percentage for the Agree Likert category for the three occupational groups under review: Students, Professionals and Manual Workers. Likewise the fifth table tabulates Church Attendance in each of the

analysis chapters; the Agree heading according to percentage is indicated for those who attend church: Six Times or Less a Year, Once Annually or Never. Finally the fifth table in each of the analysis chapters demonstrates Religious Inheritance, the Agree category scored in percentage terms for two classes of respondent: those for whom religion was Important in childhood and those with an Unimportant religious upbringing in childhood. All the tables are presented in percentage terms, to the nearest round figure. Finally in each analysis chapter for Tables 2 - 6, the actual number of respondents according to type, (for example the number of males or females who responded in the Gender Table), are recorded as a footnote. This feature is deemed good practice by the American Psychological Association's Guidelines in research work of this kind.

## **Conclusion**

The challenges of researching nominalism and church-leavers have been well rehearsed by Richter and Francis (1998), Voas and Crockett (2005) and Francis and Richter (2007). The ethical dimension of religious preferences, in this case of Irish Anglicans, who rarely, if ever, attend their church, was equally demanding; notions of privacy, confidentiality and sensitivity were paramount in this research project. Anonymity had to be guaranteed to secure access and acceptance by the target population.

The chosen method of research, a questionnaire, was appropriate in the circumstances and followed good practice in the Irish context as per O'Donnell (2002) and MacGreil (2009). The largely quantitative approach facilitated gathering large scale data in order to make generalisations, as to why nominal Irish Anglicans

tend not to go to church. The qualitative element gave a trace of colour and depth to the broadly numerical analysis.

Designing the data collection instrument, the questionnaire, was crucial to the reliability and validity of the research. In retrospect, greater care and more time could have been spent in this critical area. The low and incomplete response would suggest that the questionnaire was too long, over-complicated and overwhelming to prospective respondents. The choice of a postal questionnaire was necessary in the context and every care was taken to facilitate a response. The role of gatekeepers, in this case clergy, was disappointing. Quite a number did not engage with the project, others failed to understand the purpose of the research, both of which contributed to the low response. This could have been overcome by selecting a smaller number of gatekeeper clergy, to have sought their approval to assist in the research and to brief them in person about the research requirements. It may even have been possible to obtain from the gatekeeper clergy contact with nominal members of the Church of Ireland. This in turn may have facilitated a telephone or online questionnaire, or even interviews with prospective respondents. Richter and Francis (1998, p. 172) and Francis and Richter (2007, p. 34) adopted such an approach which realised a higher response of 52% and 56% respectively.

Inevitably as Richter and Francis (1998, p. 174) conclude, ‘Some church-leavers will have slipped through our nets’, a factor undoubtedly applicable to this research project. Those who feel hostility towards the church or indifference to organised religion, or those who were never really committed to the church, are less likely to have completed or returned the questionnaire. Nonetheless, despite the limitations of the chosen methodology and its capacity to deal with deeply personal

religious motives, there are good grounds for confidence in analysing and interpreting the response, which will follow in succeeding chapters.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **CREDO**

**Introduction**

**Contours of Belief**

**God**

**Jesus**

**Eschatology**

**Gender**

**Age**

**Occupational Status**

**Church Attendance**

**Religious Inheritance**

**Conclusion**

## **Chapter 4: Credo**

### **Introduction**

‘The first big division of humanity is into the majority who believe in some kind of god or gods and the minority who do not.’ So wrote a ‘son of the Church of Ireland’, C. S. Lewis (1977, p. 39) in his classic *Mere Christianity*. For more than one thousand years, Christians in Western Europe knew the Apostles Creed only in Latin. Its opening words are ‘Credo in Deum’: ‘I believe in God.’ The title of this chapter, Credo, explores the beliefs of Irish Anglicans who affirm their belonging to the Church of Ireland by way of the census returns but who rarely if ever, participate in the life of the church. The chapter will seek to establish to what extent belief determines the belonging of nominal Irish Anglicans.

This chapter Credo will in the first place introduce the contours of belief pertaining to nominal Irish Anglicans. Secondly the chapter will provide an analysis of the survey findings relating to pathways of truth: belief in God, Jesus Christ and the Afterlife. Thirdly the chapter will provide an analysis of the beliefs of the nominal Irish Anglicans sampled in the survey according to five specific variables: Gender, Age, Occupational Status, Church Attendance and Religious Inheritance. Finally the chapter will conclude by drawing the analysis together and preparing the ground for the succeeding chapter.

### **Contours of Belief**

Belief or faith can be understood in a number of ways. It can refer to assent: believing certain things are true, for example in God, such is the essential starting point. It may also imply trust in Jesus Christ for example, a responsive act of the human will. Belief also implies commitment, a sense of belonging, a relationship

with God. The special relationship with God is for Christianity a personal reaction. It accepts that God is a person who desires spiritual contact (MacGreil, 2009, p. 10).

Belief in its different layers of meaning is central to the Christian experience. Indeed religious belief is a widely affirmed and recognised definition of religion (Frances & Richter, 2007, p. 23).

As Francis and Richter (2007, p. 23) point out, belief in God for example, is not necessarily synonymous with belief in the Christian God. Nonetheless in this study, the issue of belief in God was directed to those who affirmed their belonging to the Church of Ireland by way of a census return. Although no Christian tradition has a monopoly over belief in God, it is assumed that the respondents to the questions of belief analysed in this chapter, responded in light of the established beliefs of the church. These are encapsulated in the Preamble and Declaration of the Book of Common Prayer (Church of Ireland, 2004) and in the Articles of Religion which serving clerical and lay officers of the Church of Ireland are required to subscribe to. They are as one commentator puts it: ‘the title deeds of the church’ (Homfray, 2002, p. 87).

In exploring the pathways of truth, respondents to this study were asked to reply to three sets of creedal questions: about God, Jesus Christ and the Afterlife. The findings are outlined in Table 4:1. Public attitudes towards belief in God, Jesus Christ and the Afterlife have been taken and monitored by large-scale social surveys for the last forty years. The General Social Survey in the United States has taken the pulse of America and tracked the opinions of Americans, notably their religious beliefs, for the past four decades. It is widely regarded as one of the best sources of data for societal trends.

In Europe the European Values Survey began as a cooperative effort by a group of European specialists to make systematic comparisons between attitudes in the various countries of Western Europe, before incorporating Eastern Europe and beyond the confines of the continent. Like its American counterpart, General Social Survey, the European Values Survey is a highly reputable large-scale cross-national longitudinal survey of moral, religious, political and social values. The benefit for this study is that the European Values Survey incorporates Ireland, since its inception in 1981. In the United Kingdom, the British Social Attitudes Survey, is the primary social research survey. Since 1983, the British Social Attitudes Survey has monitored and interpreted the public's changing attitudes towards social, economic and moral issues.

In addition to these large-scale social surveys, questions relating to the creedal beliefs of Christianity have been posed by academic research. In Britain, Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005), in their study entitled *Fragmented Faith: Exposing the Fault-lines in the Church of England*, tested the fault lines of the Church of England by asking among other things, the creedal beliefs of English Anglicans. In the *Church Times Survey* (Francis, 2001), which gave rise to *Fragmented Faith: Exposing the Fault-lines in the Church of England* (Francis, Robbins & Astley, 2005), three questions were asked about God using a three-fold Likert Scale:

1. I believe that God exists.
2. I believe that God is a personal being.
3. I believe that God is an impersonal power.

In Ireland, the work of MacGreil (2009, p. 69), which stretches back into the 1970s, is another significant attempt to accurately assess creedal beliefs. He argues that sensed 'closeness to God' is evidence of the believer's understanding of God as personal.

## **God**

Having reviewed the spectrum of questions asked about God in other surveys, two questions were asked of respondents in this survey:

1. I believe that God exists.
2. I believe that God is a personal being.

In response to the first question, two-thirds of nominal Irish Anglicans are theists, affirming their belief in God, as can be seen on Table 4:1. A quarter of those questioned was agnostic and less than one in ten takes the atheist position. When compared to Britain with its high degree of nominalism, nominal Irish Anglicans appear to be more orthodox in their theism. In 2008 for example, fewer than four in ten Britons questioned held the theistic position. On the other hand, Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005, p. 64) found that 97% of committed lay English Anglicans had a very high level of belief in God. Again MacGreil (2009, p. 70) found that only a relatively small proportion of Catholics questioned did not believe in God.

While two-thirds of nominal Irish Anglicans have little difficulty in affirming their belief in the existence of God, the God in whom they believe may not necessarily reflect the historic understanding of the creeds. Belief in God is not merely an intellectual assent but implies putting trust or confidence in God. Although 66% of nominal Irish Anglicans affirm their belief in God, those who believe that God is a personal being drops to 46%. The agnostic category of

uncertainty as to belief in a personal God, rises to 36% while 18% of those questioned do not accept the view of a personal God. In contrast 82% of English committed Anglicans questioned by Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005, p. 31) believe that God is a personal being, 5% reject belief in a personal God and 15% are unsure. In Ireland, MacGreil (2009, p. 71) found that only 7% of Irish Catholics confirmed that they were not close to God at all, in other words, God is impersonal, while 15% of Irish Catholics were not very close to God; this perhaps can be interpreted as the agnostic position. Belief that God is an impersonal power, or an uncertain belief towards God as a person, is somewhat removed from orthodox creedal Christianity. Over half of nominal Irish Anglicans locate themselves in these states of unorthodox belief.

## **Jesus**

If the concept of God as received in the historic creeds is beyond many nominal Irish Anglicans, what of their views about Jesus Christ? Fundamentally Christianity is Christ. Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali (1995, p. 83) expressed this view as such: ‘Jesus Christ is the full, definitive and final revelation of God for us. Whatever else may be claimed of God, is to be judged in the light of this definitive revelation’. The first paragraph of the Apostles’ Creed (Church of Ireland, 2004, p. 112) speaks of God as ‘the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth’. The second speaks of God the Son. It is longer than the other two paragraphs, reflecting the debates of the Patristic church, relating to the person of Jesus Christ. The second paragraph of the Nicene Creed (Church of Ireland, 2004, p. 205) which focuses on the Lord Jesus Christ, makes it plain that Jesus was truly divine ‘the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one Being with the Father’. In the same paragraph, the Nicene

Creed affirms the humanity of Jesus who ‘was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made Man’. These creedal affirmations describe Jesus as divine and human, both God and Man.

The creeds (Church of Ireland, 2004, p. 112) also indicate the origins of the humanity of Jesus, that ‘He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary’. Jesus is Mary’s son, conceived by God the Holy Spirit, yet born of a human mother Mary. The second of the thirty-nine articles (Church of Ireland, 2004, p. 778), part of the title deeds of the Church of Ireland, underlines that ‘The Son...took man’s nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin of her substance’. Mary the mother of Jesus is one of the recurring features of Irish Christianity, Catholic and Protestant.

The historic creeds (Church of Ireland, 2004, p. 112) pass straight from the birth of Jesus to his death and resurrection: ‘For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father’. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the mainstay of Christian belief and without it, as St Paul (1 Corinthians 15: 14-17) declares, ‘Faith is futile and in vain’.

Questions about Jesus Christ are strangely absent in the major cross-national or national social surveys. Nonetheless Christological questions are a feature in the research literature. The three statements concerning Jesus Christ in this survey, namely: I believe that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man, Jesus’ birth was a virgin birth and Jesus rose physically from the dead; were drawn from Francis, Robbins and Astley’s (2005) work in *Fragmented Faith: Exposing the Fault-lines in*

*the Church of England*, in an English context and in O'Donnell's (2002) survey of young educated adults in an Irish arena. These three statements trace their origins to the creedal affirmations and are a litmus test of belief among the nominal Irish Anglicans surveyed in this study; the findings can be seen in Table 4:1.

The historic creeds as Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005, p. 31) point out base much of their understanding of the person of Jesus Christ on the birth and resurrection narratives in the Gospels. Nominal Irish Anglicans made virtually identical negative responses (22%) regarding the divinity of Jesus Christ and his physical resurrection (22%). Likewise the agnostic response to the divinity and resurrection of Christ resembled each other at 39% and 37% respectively. Only just under four out of ten nominal Irish Anglicans believe that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man and that he rose again from the dead. Moreover about a third of respondents hold to the virgin birth, a third are agnostic and a third dismiss belief in the virgin birth altogether.

The traditional theological position regarding these three key beliefs about Jesus Christ was clearly a minority view in the sample survey. This contrasts to over three-quarters of the Irish population, presumably Catholic, who believe in these three major tenants of Christian belief (McGarry, 2012a). Christological orthodoxy is also a feature of belief in Northern Ireland. Boal, Keane and Livingstone (1997, p. 110) in their survey of Belfast churchgoers found a high degree of Christological orthodoxy even when people were not regular church attenders. If the historic creeds have in Clarke's (2000, p. 118) view continued to be a 'plumb line' for orthodox Christian belief, nominal Irish Anglicans are off-plumb and broadly unorthodox in their views with regard to the person of Jesus Christ, his birth and resurrection.

## Eschatology

Eschatology is the Christian doctrine about the last things. The final three declarations asked of nominal Irish Anglicans in this chapter focus on belief after death: I believe there is life after death, I believe heaven is a real place and I believe hell is a real place. These three declarations follow the practice of the large cross-national and national social surveys. Belief in life after death according to Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005, p. 31) is a core component of faith in the historic creeds. They also asked these three eschatological questions in the Church Times Survey which was reported in *Fragmented Faith: Exposing the Fault-Lines in the Church of England* (2005).

For Richard Clarke, (Clarke, 2000, p. 60) Bishop of Meath and Kildare, the idea of life beyond the conclusion of human life on earth is a *sine qua non* for most Christians, yet just over half of nominal Irish Anglicans find belief in the afterlife remains central to their faith. Slightly over a third are agnostic about life after death and about two in ten reject such belief altogether as can be seen in Table 4:1.

With regard to heaven and hell, belief in heaven has survived much more strongly than belief in hell, a consistent trait in the cross-national and national surveys and in Francis, Robbins and Astley's (2005) work among English Anglicans. Just over four out of ten (45%) of nominal Irish Anglicans believe that heaven exists compared with almost three out of ten (28%) who hold that hell exists. Slightly over a third of those questioned (35%) are agnostic when it comes to belief in heaven and hell alongside the afterlife itself. Around a fifth (21%) dismisses the ideal of heaven as a real place and just under four out of ten (38%) reject belief in the reality of hell.

Significantly the figures generated by this study are at variance with the 2000 European Values Survey data for Ireland which scores belief in life after death at 79%, belief in heaven at 85% and belief in hell at 53% as can be seen on Table 2:1. It would seem that the nominal Irish Anglicans questioned are more ‘earthbound’ than their more devout Catholic and Protestant contemporaries. Even among devout Christian believers, Clarke (2000, p. 68) notes that less specific importance is given to life beyond this world. Nonetheless nominal Irish Anglicans are not in step with the Christian narrative which culminates in the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven which moves beyond time to an eschatology (Coghlan, 2009, p. 9).

The third part of this chapter will examine the creedal beliefs of nominal Irish Anglicans by the personal variables as set out in the previous chapter, namely Gender, Age, Occupational Status, Church Attendance and Religious Inheritance.

### **Gender**

Of the 316 scoreable surveys obtained in the sample, 44% were male and 56% female. Unlike the findings in the Church Times Survey, the men and women questioned in this study were divided by, rather than united in their religious beliefs (Francis, Robbins & Astley, 2005, p. 64) as can be seen in Table 4:2. Although six out of ten nominal Irish Anglican males believe in God and seven out of ten nominal Irish Anglican women believed likewise, males were somewhat more atheistic than females, 12% as opposed to 4% with regard to the existence of God. Men were also less inclined to believe in a personal God than women, 43% as compared to 46% respectively.

Again, gender plays a role in the Christological beliefs of nominal Irish Anglicans. Males and females share the same reticence in accepting the divinity and

humanity of Jesus Christ. As to belief in the virgin birth and the resurrection: 40% of males do not accept the virgin birth and 27% of males also do not believe in the resurrection; whereas 24% of women do not believe in the virgin birth and 18% disbelieve the resurrection. Belief in the afterlife is influenced by gender. Males are more sceptical about the existence of heaven (40%) and hell (46%) than females (15% and 31% respectively). Males consistently outscore females in unbelief in all of these key credal understandings. The figures for gender appear on Table 4:2.

The findings in relation to gender among nominal Irish Anglicans seem to be consistent with the general principle enunciated by Francis and Richter (2007, p. 44), that women are more religious than men.

### **Age**

If we are to understand religion in contemporary Irish society, we need to turn our attention to age. For Voas and Day (2007, p. 95), age is far more important than any other characteristic in the strength of its association with religious commitment easily trumping gender, education, employment, place of residence, denomination and so on. If this is the case among the cohort group of nominal Irish Anglicans, we should anticipate differences between the various generations in this key area of beliefs.

The findings in Table 4:3 show that unbelief increases with age. The Builders were 18% more sceptical about belief in God, 23% more uncertain about the afterlife and 36% more unsure about heaven than Generation Y. Generations X and Y were much closer in their belief values across the board, than the two older age categories. Belief was strongest in the Generations X and Y about God, the afterlife and the reality of heaven. Belief was weakest in these two younger age categories about

Jesus Christ, his person, birth and resurrection and about hell. The Baby Boomers were firmer believers in the existence of God, a personal God and the afterlife. They were more sceptical about Jesus, the virgin birth and the resurrection and very dismissive of the idea of hell. The Builders were strongest in their beliefs about God and the afterlife. They were slightly firmer in their belief in Jesus, his birth and resurrection than the Boomers. Whilst 39% of the Builders affirmed their belief in the afterlife, the existence of heaven and especially hell were rejected by 42% and 65% respectively.

Clearly the younger age cohorts are more certain in their creedal beliefs than the older cohorts. O'Donnell (2002, p. 8) found that 63% of Catholic young people under 25 years of age believed that Jesus was God in human form, although it is worth remembering that only a quarter of Catholic young people questioned by O'Donnell were not regular church-goers. Robbins and Francis (2010, p. 51) in their study of adolescent views among 13-15 year olds in England and Wales, found that only 21% of those who never attended church believed in God, which is over three times lower than that of Generation Y in this study. Mason (2010, p. 58) in his study of *The Spirituality of Young Australians* found that 51% of Generation Y said they believed in God, again a lower figure than the nominal Irish Anglican young people surveyed in this study. The resilience of orthodox creedal beliefs among young nominal Irish Anglicans is surprisingly noteworthy and may well be linked to the influence of denominational education in church primary and secondary schools.

### **Occupational Status**

Occupational status is a pertinent variable in modern society. Does what people do in in terms of occupation impact their core Christian beliefs? The nominal

Irish Anglicans surveyed in this study are heavily weighted towards professional occupations, 35% of the sample regarded themselves as professional people. The second largest occupational group, at 21%, identified themselves as students. The last discernible group, the manual workers, made up only 10% of the sample. The remainder consisted of small numbers of semi-professionals and non-manual workers, plus those who failed to complete the question. This compares to the national census of 2002 (Central Statistics Office, 2004e), when just under half of Church of Ireland workers were professional and 13% were manual workers. By discounting the 'other' occupational category because of the diversity of occupations named, one is left with three main occupational categories to analyse: students, professionals and manual workers, as can be seen in Table 4:4 which shows the findings of belief for these occupations.

Apart from belief that God exists, the professional category has consistently lower scores than the overall sample. The difference between the overall and professional scores is in the order of 4% – 7%. For example, with regard to belief in a personal God, the findings for the sample as a whole was 46% (Table 4:1) and for the professional classes, 40% (Table 4:4). The largest disparity between the overall and professionals scores relates to belief in the afterlife, 54% (Table 4:1) and 27% (Table 4:4) respectively, and belief in heaven, 45% (Table 4:1) and 30% (Table 4:4) accordingly.

Those in manual work have the most robust beliefs among occupational groups. Three quarters of them believe in God, one half of manual workers believe that God is personal. Again half of the manual workers questioned believed in the virgin birth, the resurrection of Jesus and the reality of heaven, 4 out of 10 also

believed in hell. The exception to the robust faith of manual workers was their belief in the person of Jesus which reflected the overall findings as in Table 4:1.

Not surprisingly the beliefs of students paralleled those of under 25 years of age, the so-called Generation Y. Students were strong in their belief about God, the resurrection and heaven. They were less inclined to believe in a personal God, the person of Jesus and the reality of hell. In terms of ranking, manual workers had the most conventional beliefs on the seven pathways of truth, followed by students and lastly the more sceptical professional groups with higher educational attainment than the manual workers and the younger students.

In his work among educated Catholics in Ireland, MacGreil (2009, p. 67) found as the level of educational achievement advanced, the frequency of daily prayer and weekly mass attendance decreased. The correlation between education and occupation in a population is not as clear as sometimes intimated. This is due to the influence of age, property, income, entrepreneurial skills and other factors, in addition to education. MacGreil (2009, p. 69) notes that the growing affluence in Irish society has led to a marked decline in religious practice and belief. Irish Anglicans remain conspicuously middle class and professional occupations dominate; their core creedal convictions are on the more sceptical side of belief. The link between growing affluence coupled with higher educational attainment and the marked decline in religious practice and belief is evident in these findings.

### **Church Attendance**

Does attendance, however sparingly, influence belief among nominal Irish Anglicans? Table 4:5 outlines the findings. When asked nowadays how important was religion to them, those who never attended church had a much weaker belief in

God (37%) and a less certain belief in a personal God (24%) whereas those who were occasional church attendees (less than six times a year) had a much stronger belief in God (68%) and a belief in a personal God (48%). Not surprisingly those who attended church the most, had the strongest belief in God (76%).

In the same way those who never attend church had considerably lower values for Christological belief than occasional churchgoers. Only 14% of non-attenders felt that Jesus was both God and man. Even fewer, 9%, believed in the virgin birth and 17% believed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In contrast those who attend church at least once a year show dramatically more Christological understanding: 41% believe that Jesus is God and man, 34% accept the virgin birth and 38% believe in the physical resurrection of Christ. These values rise for those who attend church for less than six times a year: they are 49%, 53% and 57% respectively.

Not unexpectedly those who never attend church have low values when it comes to belief in the afterlife, 15% which fell to 12% when it came to belief in hell. In comparison these figures rose to 30% and 19% respectively for those who attend church once a year while for those who attend church at most six times a year, the figures were 55% and 47% accordingly. Church attendance, however infrequently, does seem to have a positive influence on belief. Something remains, as Francis and Richter (2007, p. 97) conclude, 'many who have lost faith in the church, have not lost their faith in God'. Ultimately a retreat from commitment in this instance to church attendance is a retreat from commitment to the basic tenants of the Christian faith.

## **Religious Inheritance**

As O'Donnell (2002, p. 42) points out, the 1980 European Values System Survey rated Ireland highest in Europe for the retention of its religious character. In his survey of young educated Catholic adults, he sought to assess the influence of the childhood home with regard to religious formation and retention. He drew attention to 'talk about God and prayer frequency' in the childhood home. He also sought to gauge the influence of Catholic schools in people's relationship with God.

In the Church of Ireland, the link between home and parish is key to religious formation. Nonetheless if the home/parish link is weak or non-existent, Church of Ireland National Schools (primary) do provide an 'ethos' of spiritual formation, through R.E. programmes, assemblies with a core Christian content and linkage to the life of the local parish, especially at festival times. In attempting to assess the religious inheritance of home, school and parish in childhood and any influence it had on belief in later life, respondents were asked 'When you were ten how important was religion to you?'

The findings on religious inheritance proved revealing as can be seen on Table 4:6. There were higher belief values across the board in those for whom religion was important in childhood than the overall sample as seen in Table 4:1. Belief in God was strongly held (79%), as was belief in the resurrection of Christ (50%). Nearly a half of this category believed in hell. In comparison there were lower belief values in those for whom religion was not important in childhood than the overall sample and this too was consistent across the eight belief questions asked. For example, the highest belief value in this category was 52%, 27% lower than those for whom religion was important in childhood. Belief in the virgin birth, 28%,

and in the existence of hell, 23%, were the lowest values for those for whom religion was unimportant in childhood. Clearly the influence of religious upbringing in childhood prolongs belief in the core Christian beliefs examined in this chapter.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion beliefs matter because they motivate the lives of people who are committed to them. According to Hickey (1994, p. 59), the content of beliefs is what really matters. This chapter has explored the creedal beliefs of nominal Irish Anglicans who rarely if ever attend church. The analysis confirms that belief persists, particularly about God and the afterlife. However Christological belief and the eschatological destinations of heaven and hell are only held by a remnant of nominal Irish Anglicans. Compared to their Catholic counterparts, a creedal belief among the respondents is patchy. Given that until comparatively recently the vast majority of Catholics attended church, the comparison is not entirely fair. More direct comparisons with nominal Northern Irish Anglicans, or their English or Welsh counterparts would have been more helpful.

It is also clear from the analysis that the religious beliefs of nominal Irish Anglicans correlate with varying degrees with the indices of gender, age, occupation, church attendance and religious inheritance. Predictably women in the survey were firmer in their creedal beliefs than men. Again belief was strongest among the young; unbelief increases with age. The more robust faith of manual as opposed to professional workers, who were less credulous, was notable. It also stands that church attendance however infrequent does have a bearing on the retention of beliefs. Likewise the importance of religion in childhood prolongs belief amongst those who regard themselves as nominal.

The respondents in this study identified themselves as Church of Ireland. Religious belonging remains strong in Ireland, even among the young. Belonging in the context of this study does not equate to participation in the community of faith; church-going among this sample is low to non-existent. Belonging in this sense is more a case of identification, ‘centres of gravity’ to use Bailey’s (2010, p. 20) term with regard to implicit religion. The believing associated with belonging among nominal Irish Anglicans is uneven, most especially with regard to Jesus Christ. Davie’s (1994) concept of believing without belonging is not necessarily pertinent in this case. Nominal Irish Anglicans belong, they identify with the Irish Anglican tradition, are largely Protestant but their creedal beliefs are not orthodox in the main, most notably with regard to Christology. They can be best described as liberal which is probably a reflection of the Church of Ireland itself in the Irish Republic. As Bruce (1996, p. 36) points out, the ‘major elements of the Christian faith: the miracles, the virgin birth, the bodily resurrection of Christ, the expectation of Christ’s return, the reality of eternal damnation, have quietly been dropped from the teachings of mainstream Protestant churches’.

Francis and Robbins (2004, p. 52) challenge Davie’s (1994) earlier work, particularly her definition of belonging as being concerned primarily with religious practice. Instead they offered the category ‘belonging without believing’, at least in respect of Anglicanism. As this study has demonstrated, a substantial number of Irish Anglicans have ceased to connect with the church in any active sense but this chapter has shown that belief persists among the respondents. The Irish Anglicans questioned would appear not to conform to the type ‘belonging without believing’ as expressed in the pathways of truth, examined in this chapter. What of believing in a

broader sense of meaning? The next chapter will widen the belief spectrum and seek to ascertain how the beliefs of nominal Irish Anglicans are lived out and expressed.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **FIDES**

**Introduction**

**Paths of Truth**

**Paths of Spirituality**

**Gender**

**Age**

**Occupational Status**

**Church Attendance**

**Religious Inheritance**

**Conclusion**

## Chapter 5: Fides

### Introduction

Kiberd (1996, p. 82) reports that Oscar Wilde, a son of the Church of Ireland, in one of his characteristic jibes, suggested that ‘to be an Irish Protestant was to have no religion at all but who in their own lives by their professions and by their actions, indicated that they would have wished the situation otherwise’. This chapter entitled ‘Fides’ builds on the previous chapter, ‘Credo’, by examining what Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005, p. 10) distinguish as ‘Paths of Truth’ and ‘Paths of Spirituality’. The aim of the chapter is to establish if there is any link between the beliefs nominal Irish Anglicans hold and the attitudes and actions which arise from the beliefs. This may well help in understanding the role belief plays in the identity of non-church-going Irish Anglicans.

‘Paths of Truth’ can be thought of as the ways in which truth claims can be asserted and tested; in this case, beliefs about the Bible, beliefs about creationism over against evolution and beliefs about the exclusivity of the Christian faith. ‘Paths of Spirituality’ encompasses what McGrath (1999, p. 2) sees as the outworking in real life of a person’s faith; what a person does with what they believe. To this end, ‘Paths of Spirituality’ will focus on the role of prayer and whether those questioned regard themselves as religious or spiritual people.

Having introduced these two pathways, ‘Paths of Truth’ and ‘Paths of Spirituality’, the chapter will then go on to provide a commentary and analysis of the survey findings pertaining to the two pathways, after which the chapter will contribute an analysis on attested truth claims and what people do with them according to five specific variables: Gender, Age, Occupational Status, Church

Attendance and Religious Inheritance. The chapter will close by rounding off the analysis and anticipating the following chapter.

### **Paths of Truth**

‘Paths of Truth’ begins with the statement: ‘I believe that the character of God is revealed in the Bible’ which links belief in God with revelation. According to the findings in the previous chapter ‘Credo’, two-thirds of nominal Irish Anglicans believe in God, just under half of those questioned believe in a personal God as can be seen on Table 4:1. Peterson (2006, p. 23) reports that Christian communities over the centuries have insisted that the Bible reveals God’s ways to humanity, God disclosing himself in ways necessary and basic to our formation as human beings. Peter Adam (1995, p. 29) in drawing attention to the sufficiency of Scripture suggests that the Bible consists of the written words of God and therefore the Bible is sufficient to reveal among other things the character of God. Table 5:1 outlines the findings for ‘Paths of Truth’.

The first question posed in ‘Paths of Truth’ about the Bible differs from that asked by Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005, p. 65) which focussed on the inerrancy of the Bible and the cultural conditioning of Biblical truths. Likewise, it also differs from the question asked by O’Donnell (2002, p. 12) which centred on the use of the Bible among young educated Irish Catholics. In contrast the question asked about the Bible in this study seeks to probe the understanding of respondents with regard to God, as revealed in the Bible. The exposure to the Bible by many Irish Anglicans is considerable. Beyond the confines of Sunday worship, Irish Anglicans encounter the Bible in their primary and secondary school education and in formal and informal youth groups linked to the parish churches of Ireland. For example, Bishop Harold

Millar (1999, p. 30) of Down and Dromore Dioceses, suggests a prayer book tradition which focuses on the proclamation of the Word of God, through the reading of the Scriptures in order, through preaching, through ‘Word saturated liturgy’ where the Word is prayed, sung and spoken out, is a hallmark of Church of Ireland worship. Edna Longley (2002, p. 109), Professor of English at Queen’s University Belfast who grew up in Dalkey, County Dublin and attended a local Protestant secondary school, said of her upbringing: ‘The school was closely allied to the parish church. We said prayers every morning; we had scripture lessons and joined the Scripture Union. I am glad to have absorbed great Anglican words and rhythms’.

The response to the question about the Bible by nominal Anglicans is revealing as shown in Table 5:1. Nearly one half of the respondents (47%) agree that the character of God is revealed in the Bible, almost exactly the same number as those who agree that God is a personal being. Four out of ten nominal Irish Anglicans are agnostic about Biblical revelation and only slightly over one in ten (13%) disagree that the Bible reveals the character of God. It would appear that the Biblical grounding of many nominal Irish Anglicans still has resonance. Fane (1999, p. 120) tunders that Bibby (1985) in his work among nominal Canadian Anglicans in the 1980s posited a theory of religious encasement. Bibby’s argument is that tradition has a strong influential hold over its active and nominal members from which those who affiliate with the tradition, find it difficult to extricate themselves. It could be that the surprising strength of Biblical belief among nominal Irish Anglicans is a case of ‘fragmented’ commitment to traditional Christian tenants identified by Bibby.

In Rogerson’s (2009, p. 87) contribution to *Reading Genesis after Darwin*, he contends that public dialogue on Science and Religion either uses the early chapters

of Genesis in a naïve and simplistic way or rejects their relevance to contemporary questions. The second statement in 'Paths of Truth': 'I believe that God created the earth in six days and rested on the seventh', is rooted in the creationist / evolution divide apparent in public discourse in western societies.

Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005, p. 32) drew attention to the creationist / evolution divide among committed English Anglicans by asking the same question posed in this research. Like their English counterparts, uncommitted Irish Anglican creationists, who take the view that God made the world in six days and rested on the seventh, are in a minority. Almost three out of ten nominal Irish Anglicans (28%) hold the creationist position; twice as many as committed English Anglicans. Four out of ten (40%) nominal Irish Anglicans reject the creationist position and the remaining 31% keep an open mind on the matter, as indicated in Table 5:1.

What seems remarkable in these Irish figures is that even after 150 years of Darwinism, evolution has not eradicated the creationist position among nominal Irish Anglicans. In an international survey of over thirty European countries, in addition to the United States and Japan, Miller, Scott and Okamoto (2006, p. 766) tested the acceptance of evolution among a sample of adults. They found that levels of acceptance in European countries such as France and Sweden were higher than 80% with a percentage in the mid-70s for the United Kingdom. Likewise, Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005, p. 32) found that 69% of those surveyed believed in evolution. The acceptance of evolution among the nominal Irish Anglicans surveyed in this study is significantly lower than their fellow Europeans. As to why this is the case Rogerson (2009, p. 89) suggests that over the centuries Christians have accepted that the discoveries of science were to be welcomed and that they presented no direct challenge to a Christian belief about the divine origin of the universe. Despite the

general acceptance of Darwinian Evolution in Europe, a substantial number of nominal Irish Anglicans continue to hold that God is the universal cause of existence as exemplified in the opening chapters of Genesis.

A second point made by Rogerson (2009, p. 89) which may help account for the residual creationism, is that to be 'faithful' to the Biblical witness, is not necessarily to read it literally as in the six days of creation. How one reads and understands the Biblical material is a complex issue. It could be that for some to subscribe to evolution is to take a purely scientific and secular stance (Cogliati, 2010, p. 9). For others, to support creationism is to express religious convictions and fideism; that scriptural truth has primacy over scientific insights.

The Church of Ireland is a broad church, largely liberal Protestant in ethos. Although it has an active evangelical wing, fundamentalism is almost absent. The existence of a substantial minority of creationists found in this survey cannot be attributed to a fundamentalist worldview. However as Ammerman's (1987, p. 165) study of fundamentalist Christians in the United States suggests, there is a link between creationism and cultural context. The identification of a significant minority of nominal Irish Anglicans could be a feature of their cultural context as a religious minority in Ireland, in that sympathies lie with minority positions, irrespective of the issues involved, in this case, creationism. Ultimately the question regarding evolution or creation is misleading because it implies as Berry (1988, p. 103) suggests, that one or either is false, when in fact both could be true.

The poet, Louis MacNeice, (1941, p. 23) whose father was a Church of Ireland Bishop, wrote in his poem *London Rain* of a place 'where God and no God play at pitch and toss'. MacNeice's image minted seventy years ago in a very

different context is apposite for a contemporary plural Irish society. The third question posed in this section 'Paths of Truth' probes the issue of religious pluralism among nominal Irish Anglicans. The statement reads: 'I believe that Christianity is the only true religion'. Accordingly almost two-thirds of those questioned (65%) reject the idea, two out of ten have no formal view on the matter which leaves only 15% who believe that Christianity is the only true religion as can be seen in Table 5:1.

As Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005, p. 32) note, historically the Christian faith has made strong exclusive claims about the nature of salvation. Nonetheless a majority of nominal Irish Anglicans reject the notion of exclusivism. That is to say that, unless one expresses a personal faith in Jesus Christ or belongs to the right church, the only alternative is that one is lost eternally. As Hedges (2008, p. 18) notes, for an exclusivist, God only revealed himself through one means, Jesus, and through one tradition, Christianity.

Hedges (2008, p. 17) sets out a three-fold typology of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism as three basic categories into which Christian responses to other faiths can be fitted. If nominal Irish Anglicans are not exclusivists on the whole, what category do they fall into? Inclusivism refers to those who wish to include believers from other faiths among the saved. Pluralism however holds that no one faith has a monopoly on revelation or salvation. It is not clear from the question asked whether nominal Irish Anglicans are inclusivist or pluralist.

The question asked in this study was drawn from the work of Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005, p. 148) who also asked a supplementary question in the following statement: 'I believe that all religions are of equal value'. They concluded

that although many committed Anglicans were disinclined to support the view that Christianity is the only true religion, only a small number would go as far as claiming that all religions are of equal value. In other words, most committed Anglicans surveyed by Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005, p. 32) were disinclined towards inclusivism. Whether uncommitted Irish Anglicans are inclusivists or pluralist is impossible to tell given the nature of the question posed to them. What is clear is their rejection of the exclusive position with regard to other faiths.

Such rejection of exclusivism by nominal Irish Anglicans is at odds with their orthodoxy about Biblical revelation and their tenacity towards creationism. Why is this? A number of factors may be at play. Pluralism as Hilliard (2011, p. 5) suggests is often understood in the cultural context as tolerance. Irish Anglicanism is noted for an ethos of tolerance. Historically, Irish Anglicans lived in what Regan (2011, p. 531) describes as a 'coercive Hiberno-Christendom that was not sufficiently hospitable to the 'other' in terms of religious belief or those who did not embrace the Catholic ethos'. Irish Anglicans rejected the exclusivism of Catholicism and are probably wary of adopting an exclusive position for themselves or anyone else for that matter.

Again in the years between 2006 and 2011, Ireland became a multi-ethnic, culturally diversified society. Thousands of refugees, asylum seekers and economic migrants came to Ireland seeking a new life. With this influx of people came increasing religious diversity. For example, the number of Muslims increased from 19,147 in 2001 to 32,539 in 2006, an increase of 59%. (Central Statistics Office, 2007). According to Census 2006 there was a total of 420,000 non-Irish nationals resident in Ireland representing 188 different countries. Four out of ten of the non-Irish nationals, come from ten countries: China, France, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania,

Nigeria, Philippines, Poland, U.K. and U.S.A. (Central Statistics Office, 2008). In a plural Ireland, Irish Anglicans are only one of a growing number of minorities. Their identity is neither well served by exclusivism nor threatened by pluralism.

### **Paths of Spirituality**

Maier (1981, p. 7) draws attention to Scottish theologian John MacQuarries' phrase of an 'intense sense of presence' which lies at the very centre of Celtic Spirituality. The first question in this part of the chapter focuses on the spiritual exercise of prayer. The responses to all the questions posed in 'Paths of Spirituality' are found in Table 5:1. The statement probed in the survey, 'I believe that prayer is a vital element of living', draws on the 'intense sense of presence' typical in Irish Spirituality. The place of prayer in belief was also the subject of questions asked of respondents by Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005), MacGreil (2009) and O'Donnell (2002).

According to Table 5:1, just under half of those questioned agreed that prayer was a vital element of living. Additionally a quarter was not really sure that prayer was a vital element of living. Marginally over a quarter of respondents disagreed with the vitality of prayer as a part of living. Although those questioned rarely or infrequently attend church, it would appear that up to half of them pray. Prayer is primarily an inner disposition and prayer is an indicator of a relationship with God. Two-thirds of those surveyed believed in the existence of God and just under half believed that God is personal. Praying is of the essence of Christian existence and according to Packer and Nystrom (2009, p. 8) it involves beliefs, emotions, values, hopes and fears, certainties and uncertainties, knowledge and ignorance. Prayer is not confined to public worship and these Irish figures are consistent with surveys

which show people pray more than they are likely to admit. Robbins and Francis (2010, p. 53) for example discovered that 29% of the young people questioned in *The Teenage Religion and Values Survey in England and Wales* who never attend church, pray from time to time.

O'Donnell (2002, p. 11) observed that, because it is a moment of personal choice, personal prayer seems to be a good measure of faith. He goes on to add that the belief that one can speak spontaneously to God in prayer is probably one of the most authentic signs of faith. If that is the case for the young educated Roman Catholic adults surveyed by O'Donnell, it may well apply to up to half of the uncommitted Irish Anglicans surveyed in this study as can be seen on Table 5:1. In other words one of the clearest signs of faith, prayer, remains while belonging in terms of church attendance disappears.

Ireland, the saying goes, is the 'land of saints and scholars', a religious country where religion and religious practice have until recently been held in the highest esteem. At one level, all the uncommitted Irish Anglicans identified in this study self-assigned as 'Church of Ireland', a long established religious tradition in Ireland. Yet almost two-thirds of those questioned rejected religious exclusivism. Os Guinness (2010, p. 92) defines pluralism as 'the process by which the number of options in the private sphere of society rapidly multiplies at all levels, especially at the level of world view, faiths and ideologies'. Guinness goes on to suggest that in a pluralistic society, choice is not a state of affairs but a state of mind. The last two questions posed in this chapter focus on the state of mind of uncommitted Irish Anglicans, i.e. do they regard themselves as religious or as spiritual people?

These last two questions asked in this survey go beyond religious affiliation and probe the subtle difference between religion and spirituality. For Hunt (2002, p. 161), 'religion is linked with specific belief and actions, whereas spirituality is more about a frame of mind or a way at looking at the world'. According to Table 5:1 just under one in three of the sample regard themselves as religious, slightly over a quarter are uncertain about viewing themselves as religious while almost 45% do not see themselves as religious at all. The predominate view as not being religious stands in contrast to more affirming beliefs with regard to the existence of God, the resurrection of Christ, belief in life after death, the existence of heaven, the role of the Bible in revealing the character of God and the vitality of prayer exhibited in the sample.

What criteria should be employed in order to consider a person as religious? Harrison (2007, p. 243) proposes that until comparatively recently two criteria of religiosity have been widely regarded, namely that a person was affiliated to a religious institution and secondly that they hold religious views. Those questioned in this study clearly fall into both categories. How is it then that the majority of respondents questioned do not consider themselves as religious or are uncertain about their religiosity? For Harrison (2007, p. 250) there may be no clear answer as to whether a person is religious or not. One may have to conclude that the only possible criteria of whether a person is religious or not is what that person says, that they are or not religious. If that is the case, about half of the uncommitted nominal Irish Anglicans do not consider themselves as religious and just over a quarter are not clear about being religious.

What about the spirituality of the uncommitted Irish Anglicans questioned in this study? According to Hunt (2002, p. 160) over the past number of decades, the

word 'spiritual' has gone from being a technical word in theology, to being part of everyday parlance. Hunt in her work, *Understanding the Spirituality of People who do not go to Church*, was at pains not to define the word 'spiritual' in her research. It was felt important to give individuals the opportunity to interpret the word for themselves. The same approach was taken in this study. Well over half of those questioned considered themselves a spiritual people; just under a quarter were uncertain about naming themselves as spiritual. Only a fifth disregarded themselves as spiritual people. It would seem that those sampled are more comfortable being regarded as spiritual as opposed to religious people. What lies behind this? Finnegan (2010, p. 37) writing of *The Challenge of the New Spirituality in Ireland* draws the conclusion which may be helpful: 'The self has become the ultimate arbiter in matters religious and spiritual'.

In the third part of this chapter the 'Paths of Truth' and 'Paths of Spirituality' of nominal Irish Anglicans will be examined by the personal variables of Gender, Age, Occupational Status, Church Attendance and Religious Inheritance.

### **Gender**

Table 5:2 provides little evidence that gender has any role to play in the attitudes of nominal Irish Anglicans towards Biblical revelation. Males took a more scientific rather than creationist view about the beginnings of life, whereas the women surveyed were more inclined to favour the creationist position with a third of women accepting the Genesis account. Interestingly nominal Irish Anglican males and females were more conservative in their views on creation than their committed Anglican counterparts in England as researched by Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005, p. 65).

Similar proportions of nominal Irish Anglican men and women disagree with the exclusive claims of Christianity. The pluralist position adopted by nominal Irish Anglican males stands in sharp contrast to the more exclusivist position unearthed by Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005, p. 65) among committed English Anglicans. MacGreil (2009, p. 58) in his work among Irish Catholics found significant differences between males and females regarding the viability of prayer. Catholic women outscored their male co-religionists in frequency of prayer by around 15%. There was no such disparity between nominal Irish Anglican women and men in their attitude to prayer: 49% of the women questioned believed prayer as vital, compared to 44% of men. Women were more comfortable in being thought of as religious or spiritual compared to men which is consistent with the general principle that women are more religious or spiritual than men as outlined in the previous chapter.

## **Age**

As in the case of beliefs examined in the previous chapter, age played a considerable role in relation to 'Paths of Truth' and 'Paths of Spirituality'. As can be seen in Table 5:3, the under 25s, which correspond to Generation Y, were the most Biblicist of the generations. One in two of this youngest generation believed in the importance of Biblical revelation. Four in ten of them accepted the Genesis narrative about creation. Although Generation Y was less certain about the vitality of prayer than for example the young Irish Catholics surveyed by O'Donnell (2002, p. 11), somewhat surprisingly this youngest cohort were more reticent in describing themselves as spiritual compared to the overall sample.

Generation X representing those aged between 26 and 45 years of age was slightly more sceptical than the youngest set of people when it came to Biblical revelation and creation. Five out of ten of 26 to 45 year olds dismissed the Genesis narrative and three out of ten were agnostic about the same issue. Baby Boomers, 46 to 60 olds, were the least Biblicist of the generations (22%), while at the same time the most positive in acknowledging the vitality of prayer (47%). In the same way the Boomers and the Builders were more pluralistic in their worldview as seen in Table 5:3. The Boomers were more disposed towards describing themselves as spiritual (56%) and were firm in their rejection of being religious (48%). The older generations in this sample are noticeably less certain than the younger generations with regard to the 'Paths of Truth' and 'Paths of Spirituality'. This stands in contrast to data about youth religion which fits a wider pattern of declining religious identification and practice among young people in western societies (Hadaway, Marler & Chaves, 1993; Davie, 1994; Davie, 2000 and Brierley, 2006). It is not clear as to why this is the case for nominal Irish Anglicans. Perhaps it has to do with the proximity of the youngest age groups to denominational schooling at primary and secondary levels which decreases with age. Mason (2010, p. 60) in his study of the spirituality of young Australians noted that when the Boomers were in their teens and twenties in the late 1980s, they were like the present Generation Y, firmer in their belief but there has been a considerable decline in what they believe across the period. Whatever the reasons, the youngest generation in this sample is firmer in what they hold in attesting truth claims and in the outworking of what they believe.

### **Occupational Status.**

Those surveyed in this study have self-identified as Anglicans although they attend church less than six times a year. They comply with Harrison's first criteria of

religiosity that they have affiliated to a religious institution. However Harrison suggested that traditional beliefs no longer have a clear contested meaning. Does this pertain to the three occupational categories of professionals, students and manual workers, which together make up two-thirds of the sample?

According to Table 5:4, under half of the professionals questioned held the traditional belief that the Bible reveals the character of God; only two out of ten professionals rejected the traditional view; whereas the professionals were dismissive of creation with only one out of ten accepting the Genesis account of creation. Altogether professionals are firmer in their rejection of creationism than the overall sample. Likewise the professional class has a pluralist worldview; seven out of ten reject the exclusive notion that Christianity is the only true religion. In relation to prayer, professionals are slightly more prayerful than the overall sample, with half the category valuing prayer as a vital element of living. Interestingly only a quarter of professionals consider themselves as religious; half of them are disinclined to regard themselves as religious. On the other hand professionals are more inclined towards regarding themselves as spiritual; two-thirds were content to describe themselves as spiritual people.

In the light of the changes in the past decade in Ireland, Freyne (2012) suggested that the students of the noughties became ‘much more self-confident and self-expressive and free about realising themselves as individuals, which was not there before in Ireland’. The students questioned in this study viewed the Bible in a more conservative way than the overall sample as seen in Table 5:4. One in two students held the traditional view that the Bible reveals the character of God. Surprisingly four out of ten students considered the Genesis account of creation as valid. Students were more dismissive of prayer; four out of ten rejected the view that

prayer was vital to living. Half of the students questioned were reluctant to think of themselves as religious; one in three students did not regard themselves as spiritual people. The findings in the student category reflect a diversity of views with regard to the 'Pathways of Truth' and 'Pathways of Spirituality'.

As a proportion of those who declare an affiliation to the Church of Ireland, manual workers make up the smallest group in the occupational categories. Overall manual workers are more sympathetic to traditional Christian understanding. One in two manual workers is clear that the Bible reveals the character of God. Nearly four out of ten manual workers accepted the Genesis account of creation. Manual workers are the most sceptical of the occupational groups when it comes to accepting pluralism. Three quarters of those questioned in the manual category disagreed that other religions had a truth claim. Again three quarters of manual workers questioned endorsed the vitality of prayer. Around four out of ten manual workers considered themselves as religious. Manual workers as a whole were least favourable among the occupational groups in considering themselves as spiritual.

MacGreil (2009) in his work based on a national survey of religious attitudes and practices in the Republic of Ireland 2007-2008, divided his sample population into three occupational groups, one of which corresponds to the manual worker category in this study. MacGreil (2009, p. 163) found that eight out of ten manual workers had a positive view of prayer. The perceived influence of the respondents' religion in MacGreil's study was marginally higher than the findings in this study. Both the indicators for prayer and religion among the manual classes bear some similarity which gives weight to the findings drawn from this study as outlined on Table 5:4.

## **Church Attendance**

Gilmore (2007, p. 128) has drawn attention to the absolute and relative growth of the Church of Ireland population in the Republic of Ireland during the inter-censal period 1991-2006. Unlike many European societies, religious affiliation remains robust. However the growth in affiliate numbers does not seem to have been reflected in participation in many parishes. Religious practice has been on the decline in Ireland across most religious denominations since 2002. The most serious decrease has been in weekly attendance which fell in the two years from 2002 to 2004, from 55% to 45% (Church of Ireland, 2011a, p. 391). Gary Hastings (Church of Ireland, 2011b), Archdeacon in the western Church of Ireland Diocese of Tuam, contends that a cord has been cut, the tradition of passing on the faith, combined with weekly church attendance, is past. As a result, he believes the ‘vanishing point’ for many small Church of Ireland parish communities, will arrive in the next twenty years.

The findings in this section on church attendance are noteworthy. The sample was divided into those who never attend church, those who attend once a year and those who attend less than six times a year. Not unexpectedly, those who attended church more frequently had higher scores in the truth and spirituality claims tested as can be seen in Table 5:5. For example when it came to accepting the claims of the Bible, only a fifth of those who never attend agreed with the truth claim whereas six out of ten of occasional church attenders, believed in the traditional understanding of the Bible. Only one out of ten of those who never attend church accepted the Genesis account of creation while four out of ten occasional church attenders agreed with the Genesis narrative. Just 3% of non-attenders agreed with a pluralistic worldview and nearly a quarter of occasional church attenders thought Christianity as the only true

religion. Just over a fifth of non-attenders valued prayer, while six out of ten occasional attenders thought prayer vital. Only 5% of non-attenders considered themselves as religious which rose to 42% for occasional church attenders. Just under half of the non-attenders regarded themselves as spiritual; nearly two-thirds of the occasional attenders thought of themselves as spiritual. Weekly church attendance may be on the slide but nominal Irish Anglicans who are occasional church attenders, retain core beliefs, particularly about the Bible, prayer and spirituality.

### **Religious Inheritance**

The role of parents in the transmission of religiosity is conspicuous in the literature: Brown, (2001), Voas and Crockett, (2005) and Inglis (2007). To ascertain the passing on of religion respondents were asked, ‘When you were ten how important was religion to you?’ Not surprisingly the findings available in Table 5:6 showed that those for whom religion was important in childhood, retained higher belief values than those whose childhood experience of religion was unimportant. This was consistent across all of the six variables tested.

Traces of the ‘intense sense of the presence’ (Maher, 1981, p. 7) were most notable in the case of spirituality. Nearly three quarters of those whose childhood experience of religion was important considered themselves as spiritual. In contrast, four out of ten whose religious inheritance in childhood was unimportant, thought themselves as spiritual. Again two-thirds of the respondents with an important religious inheritance still believed that prayer was vital, over against a third of respondents whose religious inheritance was unimportant. Up to half of those whose religious experience in childhood was important, maintained a traditional Biblical

viewpoint, as against just over a third of those whose childhood religious experience was unimportant. A third of those with an important religious inheritance described themselves as religious as opposed to one fifth of respondents for whom childhood religious experience was unimportant.

## **Conclusion**

The expression of religiosity and spirituality of nominal Irish Anglicans has been analysed in this chapter under the guise of ‘Paths of Truth’ and ‘Paths of Spirituality’. Contrary to Wilde’s dictum ‘that to be an Irish Protestant was to have no religion at all’, those questioned in this survey still bear traces of religiosity and spirituality.

In light of the truth claims attested, the Bible remains an important source of revelation for up to half of those questioned. A dogged minority of nominal Irish Anglicans cling to the Genesis account of creation. Up to another third are open-minded over the debate between creationism and evolution. The findings with regard to pluralism are at variance with the more solid Biblical and creationist viewpoints. Hilliard’s (2011, p. 5) suggestion that pluralism can be understood as tolerance, may be helpful in this instance. Anglicans are among the most tolerant of Christian groupings in Ireland and their experience as a minority places a high value on tolerance.

As far as spirituality is concerned up to a half of nominal Irish Anglicans consider prayer as a vital part of living. Only a third of those questioned regard themselves as religious whereas up to half of the respondents thought of themselves as spiritual persons. There is clearly some interchange going on between belief as set out in the previous chapter and the expression of those beliefs considered in this

chapter. Religion does not simply refer to belief but to a kind of cultural framework that shapes life and enables people to construct identity (Lindbeck & Buckley, 2002).

There is sufficient evidence to suggest that Age, Church Attendance and Religious Inheritance play an important role in the truth and spiritual claims examined in the analysis. Younger nominal Irish Anglicans are more religious than their elders. This according to Davie (2002), Brierley (2006) and Garnett, Grimley, Harris, Whyte and Williams (2006), is at odds with the general consensus that younger people growing up in western societies tend to be less religious than older people. The Irish exception in this instance may be down to a number of factors: notably the importance of religion in Ireland and the educational system which is largely church-based. Hunt (2005, p. 35) suggests that religion can be a strong source of identity for people in a late modern world, providing ethical and personal narratives. Those who attend church however infrequently and those for whom religion was important in childhood are more amenable to the truth and spirituality claims attested in this chapter.

Belief, Hickey (1984, p. 60) argues, motivates the lives of people committed to faith which in turn accounts for the social reality of lived faith. What people believe and how they act upon those beliefs has been the kernel of this and the previous chapter. In the next set of analysis chapters, the focus will shift from belief and expressions of belief to the process of disengagement, and the reasons why the majority of Irish Anglicans cease to attend church on a regular basis.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **THE CHANGING SCENES OF LIFE**

**Introduction**

**Life's Changes**

**Relocation**

**The Unpredictable**

**Gender**

**Age**

**Occupational Status**

**Church Attendance**

**Religious Inheritance**

**Conclusion**

## Chapter 6: The Changing Scenes of Life

### Introduction

This chapter is the first in a series of analysis chapters which explore the reasons nominal Irish Anglicans give for reducing their church attendance. The chapter begins with an introduction to the concept that as life changes, church attendance may also change. Secondly the chapter will provide an analysis of the survey findings relating to the impact of life's changes on church attendance. Richter and Francis (1998, p. 65) draw attention to previous research from America which suggests that around a third of church-leavers attribute their disengagement to 'life changes'. The life changes in this survey fall into two categories: those involving movement, for example, moving away from home; secondly, unpredictable changes which are outside a person's control, for example, illness or bereavement. Thirdly the chapter will present an analysis of the repercussions of life changes of the nominal Irish Anglicans sampled in the survey according to five specific variables: Gender, Age, Occupational Status, Church Attendance and Religious Inheritance. Finally the chapter will conclude by ascertaining the link between life changes and changing church attendance.

### Life's Changes

According to Richter and Francis (1998), in *Gone but not Forgotten* and Francis and Richter (2007) in *Gone for Good? Church-leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, whose research is the template for this study, church attendance becomes part of the wider routine of life. Church-going is habitual, therefore when something happens to disturb the routine of life, church-going may be caught up in the wider process and may fall off or terminate altogether (Francis & Richter, 2007,

p. 126). It is important to add a caveat to this notion. Life in Ireland, like many developed countries, may be more changeable but church attendance may also be more fluid. Davie (1994, p. 27) cautions against the use of statistics as ‘stable concepts’ to measure something that is evidently mobile. People can move from church to church until they leave church for a period of their life or possibly altogether. Bearing that in mind the eight life changing factors identified in Table 6:1 will now be examined in two groups: those involving movement or relocation and those pertaining to changing status.

### **Relocation**

The first question asked in ‘The Changing Scenes of Life’: ‘I moved to a new area’, was drawn from Francis and Richter’s (2007, p. 126) work in *Gone for Good? Church-leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Thus moving to a new area can impact church participation. Research (Gallup, 1998, p. 45) undertaken in the U.S in the late eighties found that moving to a new community was a factor in 22% of cases of church-leaving. In contrast Fanstone’s (1993, p. 63) British survey, *The Sheep that Got Away* discovered that moving home was a cause in just 4% of church leaving. The findings of Francis and Richter (2007, p. 132) were significantly more than these two studies in that 33% of those questioned said that moving to a new area was a component of church leaving.

For much of the twentieth century, many Irish towns and villages had a static or declining population. Inglis (2008, p. 200) points out that the village of Ballivor, in County Meath, thirty kilometres from Dublin, had a population of around three hundred for over one hundred years, up until 1971. By 2006, the population of Ballivor had quadrupled. Ballivor’s experience is shared in many other villages and

towns in the commuter belt of the major Irish cities: Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Galway. The movement of people into such sleepy places has been dramatic. Irish census reports (Central Statistics Office, 2006) for the noughties attribute the movement of people into commuter fringe communities to three factors: population increase, immigration and marital breakdown. When asked if their church-going was affected by moving to a new area, 23% of Irish Anglicans agreed as such. Although some 10% less than the Francis and Richter (2007) figure for the same question, it still represents nearly one in four respondents as can be seen in Table 6:1.

The second question asked in this section ‘I went away to school, college or university’, is a variation of the question asked by Richter and Francis (1998, p. 74) in *Gone but not Forgotten* and Francis and Richter (2007, p. 320) in *Gone for Good? Church-leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* which stated ‘I went away to higher education’. The reason for the variation in this study is that Irish Anglican young people tend to leave home for secondary education before going on to higher or third level education. In 2006 there were 26 secondary schools under Protestant patronage open in the Republic of Ireland (Church of Ireland, 2006a, p. 228). Of these, only 10 were day schools. The majority of Protestant secondary schools had a boarding component which varied in size; at the top end, two-thirds of the school population were boarders, to one in ten students boarding at the lower end of the range. According to the Department of Education and Science (Department of Education and Science, 2008), in 2005/2006 some 133,000 young people were living away from home in schools and colleges.

The disruption to home life and church-going begins earlier for young Irish Anglicans than their English or American counterparts. Although many of those young Irish Anglicans maintain links with home and parish life, it is possible that no

one at home or school will know whether they are going to church or not. Bibby's (1997, p. 304) work shows how easy it is for church-goers to be lost as they move between one community and another. The transition to secondary school for Irish Anglicans who board is an opportunity to discard the social pressure from home to attend church. Moreover school chapel services run during weekdays, substitute for home church attendance. Anecdotal evidence from the written responses in this study in Chapter 14 suggests that compulsory school chapel can alienate young people from church. Beyond secondary school the unstructured nature of third level student lifestyles also mitigates against regular church attendance.

It is not surprising then, given the Irish context, that 29% of those questioned agreed that going to school, college or university was a factor in reducing their church attendance. The Irish figure is nearly twice that of Francis and Richter's (2007, p. 74) *Gone for Good? Church-leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* but much closer to the figure obtained in *Gone but not Forgotten* by Richter and Francis (1998, p. 320).

Moving home is one thing, finding a suitable church in a new area is not necessarily straightforward. The third question in this section: 'I moved area and could not find a church I liked', was taken from Richter and Francis's (1998) work in *Gone but not Forgotten* and Francis and Richter's (2007) *Gone for Good? Church-leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. The question presupposes that when people move location they will seek to find a church in their new locality. As Francis and Richter (2007, p. 127) point out, for some people it never occurred to them to try and find a new church in their new area. Others however, when they moved to a new area, tried to settle into a new church but failed to find a church that they liked or where they felt at home.

This is not surprising given the difficulty in assimilating into a new church. For Richter and Francis (1998, p. 69) there is much apprehension to overcome in walking into a strange church. It is particularly hard for singles and older people to pick up the threads of church-going. As Hadaway (1990, p. 83) has noted, some people tend to put this off for so long that they become accustomed to having their Sundays free.

Research in the United States by Roof (1978, p. 204) for example, suggests that those who are less rooted locally, the 'cosmopolitans', are more likely to discontinue their church going. Ireland in the two decades before and after the millennium became more global, cosmopolitan and secular than ever before. The number of Irish residents who were born outside of Ireland for example, increased by 25% between 2006 and 2011, accounting for 17% of the overall population (Central Statistics Office, 2012). In cosmopolitan situations studied by Wuthnow and Christiano (1979, p. 274), those on the move may avoid participation in community organisations, such as church, to protect themselves from the grief of leaving. Another factor at work in moving home and not finding a suitable church in the new area is denominational loyalty. Adherence to a particular denomination is no longer particularly important in consumerist societies like Ireland. Irish Anglicans are not dissimilar from their English counterparts in that as Francis and Richter (2007, p.136) observe, they are more committed to their local congregation than their denomination. When they move, they will not automatically gravitate to the local Church of Ireland parish but to a church that meets their needs. In the same way McKinley (2007, p. 136) found that when Nigerian Anglicans for example, migrate to Ireland, they rarely find a home in local Church of Ireland parishes.

Just over one in ten Irish Anglicans agreed that not being able to find a church they liked after a move, was a factor in reduced church attendance. By comparison the figure obtained by Francis and Richter (2007, p. 320) was 16%. The age scored question in *Gone but not Forgotten* for the same issue was in the range of 7% to 24% (Richter & Francis, 1998, p. 74). The inability to find a new church after a move is clearly a less significant issue in reduced church attendance than moving to secondary or third level education, or moving home in general. This may have to do with the lack of alternative churches in many Irish localities, or that Church of Ireland parishes are more uniform and less of a particular style, which reduces the difficulty of finding a church in a new locality.

The last question in this section, 'I had no transport to get to church', was drawn from Francis's (1994) earlier work in the University of Wales Church Participation Research Project. The question was asked in this survey for the following reasons. In the first place, it relates to the theme of movement considered in this section. Secondly, in the pilot surveys, it was a question that scored well. Thirdly the Church of Ireland in the Republic is an overwhelmingly rural and small town church, almost 90% of the parish churches open for worship are found in settlements with a population of less than ten thousand. A discussion paper by Fitzpatrick Associates (2006) drew attention to rural transport needs which was identified as one of the underlying levels of exclusion in rural areas. They estimated that around four hundred thousand people in rural Ireland perceived themselves as having rural transport needs. Despite this, just over nine out of ten people questioned said that the lack of transport was not an issue in church attendance. Table 6:1 demonstrates that only 6% of those questioned had transport issues which affected their church going.

## **The Unpredictable**

The second category of 'life changes' examined in this chapter falls into those changes which generally lie outside a person's control. The first of these factors considered was increased family commitments drawn from Francis and Richter's (2007) work in *Gone for Good? Church-leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* and shown on Table 6:1. Just over one in five of those questioned attributed family commitments to reducing church attendance. The corresponding figure in *Gone for Good? Church-leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* was one third (Francis & Richter, 2007, p. 320). At one end of life, Francis and Richter (2007, p. 129) discerned that parents are experiencing all sorts of demands from their children growing up in a mobile, globalised society. The emergence of Sunday sport for young people is particularly pertinent in this regard, especially underage rugby and hockey, sports which have a strong Church of Ireland following. MacGreil (2009, p. 12) draws the conclusion that the preoccupation with group sport on Sundays, marks a serious advance of secularisation in Ireland and must interfere with weekly worship.

At the other end of life, a major commitment comes with the role of carer with time given over to visit ageing parents who often may live at some distance. As Francis and Richter (2007, p. 130) discovered, this disturbed regular church attendance. Time in a modern society like Ireland is squeezed. People have to jostle increased family commitments into crowded weekends and regular church-going is affected as this study indicates.

One of the perennial complaints of Church of Ireland clergy is that there are too many alternatives on Sundays which mitigate against church attendance. The

Church of Ireland Board of Social Theology (Church of Ireland, 2010) responding to the extension of Sunday trading hours, made this press release ‘An extension of opening hours on a Sunday would put more pressure on workers, small businesses and churches and also be detrimental to family and community life’. In a globalised Ireland ‘traditional’ Sunday is being squeezed. Three out of ten of those asked attributed their reduced church attendance on having to work on Sundays which was broadly in line with Francis and Richter’s (2007, p. 321) findings.

In Catholic Ireland there is a strong commitment to family. Until comparatively recently, marital breakdown, leading ultimately to divorce, has been a taboo. Fuller (2004, p. 195) has demonstrated that the Catholic Bishops have strenuously opposed any change to a prohibition on divorce. Indeed divorce began legally in 1996 after a referendum when 51% voted in favour of the removal of the ban from the Irish Constitution. Those who were against divorce said that it would open the floodgates and destroy family life. It did not. The divorce rate in Ireland remains low by European standards. In 2007 for example, the Irish divorce rate was 0.8 per 1,000 of the population, the lowest rate in the European Union (Central Statistics Office, 2010).

Francis and Richter (2007, p. 131) identify the changing status from married to separation and divorce as a factor associated with disengagement from church. In Richter and Francis’s (1998, p. 70) view, marital breakdown and divorce disrupt established routines of church-going in a variety of ways. In the first place marital separation may lead to geographical relocation severing a church link. Finding a church that is sympathetic to divorcees can also be a difficult task. Moreover going to church on one’s own is more challenging than attending as a couple. Lastly access to children in a broken marriage may regularly take place on weekends and hence be

a further obstacle to regular church attendance. Francis and Richter (2007, p. 320) found that 8% of their sample, singled out marital breakup as affecting their church attendance. Interestingly, 5% of those questioned in this study identified marital breakdown for reducing church attendance.

For some people, disengaging from the life of the church is associated with the onset of illness. Francis and Richter (2007, p. 131) cite research in the United States where 4% of those who left church claimed that 'poor health' was a factor in their dropping out. Similar research undertaken by Fanstone (1993, p. 72) in Britain, came up with a comparable figure, where 4% identified sickness or old age as the reason for reduced church attendance. Although illness is no respecter of age, those in late middle to old age are more likely to present it as a reason for dropping off from church. When asked, 3% of the Irish Anglicans questioned in this survey, named illness as a factor contributing to reduced church attendance, as seen in Table 6:1. In a comparable study, 4.5% of MacGreil's (2009, p. 156) Irish Catholic respondents gave illness as a reason for not attending formal worship 'once a week or more often'.

Of all the unpredictable changes in life, bereavement is the most final and stressful. As Richter and Francis (1998, p. 66) note, according to the scale of stress factors devised by Holmes and Rake, the death of a spouse scores one hundred points, divorce seventy-three points and personal injury or illness, fifty-three points. The final question posed in this section of life's changes, 'I was bereaved', was drawn from Francis and Richter's (2007) work in *Gone for Good? Church-leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Intriguingly 10% of Irish Anglicans identified bereavement as a cause of reducing church attendance, an exact copy of Francis and Richter's findings. Bereavement can disorientate close family members, breaking the

routine of life, including church-going. Bereavement can also manifest itself in anger, particularly towards God, a reaction which does not foster church attendance. Sometimes those bereaved are disappointed from the lack of support they receive from church which is a double blow and discourages returning to church. The loss of a loved one is profound and one in ten of those questioned in this study were marked by it in relation to church attendance.

The third part of this chapter will explore the consequences of 'Life's Changes' on the nominal Irish Anglicans questioned in the survey with regard to church attendance on the basis of: Gender, Age, Occupational Status, Church Attendance and Religious Inheritance.

### **Gender**

It is clear from the findings on Table 6:2 that females are more affected by life's changes than males in reducing church attendance. In seven out of the nine variables tested, women outscore men with the exceptions of 'finding a new church after relocation' and 'transport issues in going to church'. Again females outscore the average findings set out in Table 6:1, most notably in the areas of Sunday working, increased family commitments, going away to school or college, bereavement and moving to a new area.

These findings in relation to gender difference are broadly in line with those of Francis and Richter (2007, p. 133) in *Gone for Good? Church-leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* who discovered that life's changes played a somewhat more important part in the path of disengagement from church among women than among men.

## Age

Relocating to a new area and then not finding a new church has played a firm role in contributing to a reduced church attendance in three of the four generational groups examined in this study, the exception being the under 25s, as can be seen in Table 6:3. Thus 31% of those aged 61+, the Builders, traced their disengagement from church to moving to a new area and so did 29% of those aged 26 to 45. The under 25s, Generation Y, not surprisingly were more impacted by a move to school or higher education; over a third of them attributed their reduced church-going to moving home for educational purposes. Among the Builder Generation, 22% attributed their disconnection from church to their inability to find a new church after moving area, the highest score in the four age categories. The unavailability of transport to go to church was only a significant factor among the under 25s which was not unexpected.

Church attendance by under 25s was particularly impacted by Sunday working as can be seen on Table 6:3. The role played by increased family commitments in withdrawing from church attendance was highest, 31%, among the Boomer generation. The significance of marital breakdown in reducing church attendance was notable in the oldest age group, 13% of whom attributed reduced attendance to marital breakdown. The import of illness on church attendance, rather surprisingly, decreased with age, although the scores across all generations were very low. The issue of bereavement however, did not vary much across the four generations and affected around one out of ten of all those questioned.

## **Occupational Status**

As far as occupational status is concerned, those in the professional classes attributed their disconnection with church most noticeably to relocation. Some 34% of this employment group traced their disengagement from church to moving to a new area. Likewise 36% of professionals identified the move to school or college as key to reduced church attendance. Again 18% of mobile professionals were unable to find a church in their new locality and reduced church-going accordingly. By comparison manual workers were less affected by relocation; 17% of this group highlighted moving area as a factor in reduced church attendance. Like their professional counterparts, 14% of manual workers found it difficult to join a new church after relocating. The issue of transport was negligible for both professional and manual workers, whereas students found transport issues more pertinent in reducing their church-going. Nearly four out of ten students cited the move to school or college as being responsible for their disengagement with church. Almost four out of ten of the student category identified Sunday working as an influence on their reduced church attendance which was in line with the under 25 age category in Table 6:3.

Four out of ten manual workers attributed their reduced church attendance to Sunday working. Similarly, three out of ten manual workers identified increased family commitments as responsible for reduced church attendance, the highest figure for the three occupational categories. The influence of marital breakdown was most notable in the professional group. Bereavement had the lowest impact on manual workers when it came to reducing church attendance as seen in Table 6:4.

## **Church Attendance**

When asked about life changing factors, those who never attend church had consistently much lower scores than those who were occasional church-goers, as can be seen in Table 6:5. The disruption of a move to school or college was cited by 16% of non-church-goers as responsible for loosening their church connections. The low scores of 5% with regard to finding a new church after relocation, 0% for transport issues, 8% for increased family commitment, 1% for marriage difficulties, would seem to suggest that for those who never attend church, 'life's changes' has little to do with their disconnection from church. The reasons lie elsewhere.

On the other hand, occasional church-goers, those who attend less than six times a year, are more affected by life's changes when it comes to attending church. Some 26% of those questioned identified a move to a new area as being responsible for a reduced church attendance. Likewise over a third of occasional attenders pinpointed the move away to school or college as a factor of disconnection. When they did move to a new area, 13% of occasional church-goers found it difficult to find a suitable church which again reduced regular attendance. Again, nearly 40% of occasional church attenders made out that Sunday working reduced their attendance at church and 26% of them cited increased family commitments.

The in-between group, the Christmas or Easter attendees, identified the move away to school and Sunday working as the most significant factors in their reduced church attendance. Like the occasional attenders, this middle group cited increased family commitments as an important reason for reducing their church attendance. Also, the emphasis on marital breakdown was highest in this middle group than the other two, when it came to reducing church-going.

## **Religious Inheritance**

The findings on religious inheritance in relation to life's changes, proved revealing. Those for whom a religious upbringing in childhood was important identified the move away from an area or home as significant in their reduced church attendance. A quarter cited the move itself; over a third pointed to the move to school or college as disrupting their church attendance while 16% of them also found it difficult to find a new church after the move. The unpredictable life changes: illness, family commitment and death, proved less significant in the thinking of those with an important religious inheritance as seen in Table 6:6. Sunday working was the only exception to this trend.

The contrast between those for whom religion was unimportant in childhood was telling. Of the 'movement' factors only the transport issue at 12% was above the average values as seen in Table 6:1. Likewise in the unpredictable life changes, one third of those with little or no religious inheritance identified increased family commitments as a reason for reduced church-going. With the exception of the two named factors: 'transport issues' and 'increased family commitments', the broad sweep of life's changes as indicated in the factors analysed in this chapter, seem to have little resonance with those who do not possess an important religious inheritance.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has tested the premise that as life changes, church attendance may also change. Of all the changes that can happen during the course of a person's life, this chapter isolated two categories: those involving moving home and some serious unpredictable changes such as marital breakdown, illness and bereavement.

For the nominal Irish Anglicans questioned in this survey, the highest scores were: Sunday working, 30%, followed by moving away to school or college, 29%, succeeded by moving away to a new area, 23%, and increased family commitments, 21%. Because of the scattered distribution of Irish Anglicans and the small number of secondary schools available, the move for education has an exaggerated impact on church attendance. Moving to school or college has disrupted regular church attendance among females, those under 25 years of age, students and professionals.

Again the impact of moving to a new area on church attendance was most keen among females, Generation X, Baby Boomers, professionals, occasional church attenders and those with an important childhood religious upbringing. Growing family commitments which may interfere with church attendance, was most at play among females, Generation X, Baby Boomers, manual workers and those with little or no childhood religious affiliation.

The lowest scores among the nominal Irish Anglicans questioned in this study tended to be those in the unpredictable change category, notably illness, 3%, and marital breakdown, 5%; only bereavement reached double figures at 10%. Females were slightly more sensitive to the role of bereavement. Age had little bearing on the impact of illness or bereavement towards church attendance. The marital breakdown effect on church attendance was noticeably higher among the Builders' Generation, those over 60 years of age. With the exception of the youngest age group and students, the unavailability of transport was a non-issue across the board.

The influence of the findings outlined in this chapter may be more subtle than the data reveals. The disruption of established routines by the factors considered in

the chapter may be in themselves insufficient reasons for nominal Irish Anglicans to attend church on a more regular basis. The low scores in the unpredictable changes section of this chapter are a point in case. In closing, Richter and Francis (1998) draw attention to a reflection from Hadaway and Roof (1979, p. 199): 'moving more than anything else implies change'. Physically moving home or moving away for education, or moving into a new phase of life with increased family responsibilities, changes people's church-going habits. The next chapter will go on to examine how church attendance can alter as people change and grow up.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **DAY BY DAY**

**Introduction**

**Faith Development**

**Growing Up**

**The Lives of Others**

**Time Demands**

**Costs and Benefits**

**Gender**

**Age**

**Occupational Status**

**Church Attendance**

**Religious Inheritance**

**Conclusion**

## **Chapter 7: Day by Day**

### **Introduction**

In the past two decades Ireland has changed dramatically. It has grown up and is now identified as one of the most globalized societies in the world (Inglis, 2008, p. 7). This chapter deals with change, examining the changes involved in growing up. As Francis and Richter (2007, p. 112) observe, ‘People change and grow, not only during the early years of life but throughout their life span’. The aim of the present chapter therefore is to examine the extent to which nominal Irish Anglicans explain their distance from the church in terms of growing up and changing. This in turn may contribute to an understanding as to why some people say they belong to the Church of Ireland yet rarely, if ever, attend church.

The chapter opens with an exploration of Fowler’s model of ‘faith development’ which has implications for people connecting or otherwise with church. Secondly the chapter analyses four main themes in the broad area of growing up and changing. These are described as: Growing Up, the Lives of Others, Time Demands and Costs and Benefits. Next, the chapter will examine these four main themes in light of the five specific variables set out for analyses: Gender, Age, Occupation, Church Attendance and Religious Inheritance. Lastly the chapter will draw the findings together for a conclusion.

### **Faith Development**

In recent decades, various faith development models have been proposed, building on the earlier work of Jean Piaget, a European psychologist. Piaget held that the way children understand their world is determined by the cognitive structures that develop sequentially as they grow (Griffiths, 2009, p. 158). James Fowler in

particular, built on Piaget's structural stages, to plot the changes tending to occur during a person's faith journey. For Fowler (1981, p. 14), faith is a means by which people experience self, others and the world in a way that shapes loyalties and commitments. Faith moves from one stage to another. In children of primary school age 'Intuitive Faith' develops into 'Mythic-Literal Faith', whereby a child moves from egocentrism to community awareness (Griffiths, 2009, p. 168). They come to an understanding that their story is interwoven with the story of their community. For children attending Church of Ireland National Schools, community awareness in terms of belonging is especially strong.

As children move on to secondary school, faith develops, Fowler (1981, p. 172) argues, into a tacit or unchallenged faith. This 'Conventional Faith' stage is marked as Griffiths (2009, p. 172) observes by two key features. Firstly young people will hold a strong set of values and will be able to articulate them but not be able to reflect on them. Secondly they tend to have a strong emotional attachment to the values they hold. The attendance of most Anglican young people in schools under Protestant management can reinforce an unspoken attitude of, we know what we believe or don't believe, even if we don't know why we believe or not believe it.

On leaving secondary school, young people in Fowler's (1981, p.182) view enter into a more 'Reflective Faith' stage, knowing what they believe and why that belief is held. This fourth stage which lasts into one's thirties, can involve distancing from one's previous assumptions and making one's own decisions. If this pertains among Irish Anglicans, it may well help in understanding the nominalism which is at the core of this study and which distances nominal Irish Anglicans from their church. Faith is a deeply personal thing and Griffiths (2009, p. 185) argues that faith development does not happen best in rigid environments where faith is presented as

absolute and cannot be critiqued or doubted. Irish Anglicanism is by and large, not a rigid church environment. It allows faith to develop, but does not necessarily demand a commitment to the life of the church. The Credo and Fides chapters confirm the resilience of core beliefs of nominal Irish Anglicans, in spite of their distance from the church as outlined in Tables 4:1 and 4:5. As Richter and Francis (1998, p. 55) point out, Fowler's model is not without its critics. Nonetheless if not interpreted too firmly, it is a useful tool in understanding how faith develops and the stages at which people are more susceptible to reducing church attendance.

### **Growing Up**

All eleven questions asked of respondents in this chapter, were drawn from Richter and Francis's (1998) work in *Gone but not Forgotten* and Francis and Richter's (2007) *Gone for Good? Church-leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. The first three questions deal with growing up and their responses can be seen on Table 7:1. Almost two-thirds of respondents agreed that 'they grew up and started to make their own decisions', although just over a quarter disagreed with the assertion. This compares to just over half of Francis and Richter's (2007, p. 319) affirmation respondents agreeing to the statement and four out of ten respondents disagreeing with the. It would seem that the nominal Irish Anglicans questioned in this survey were much more ready to exercise their own autonomy.

Interestingly just over half of those questioned did not blame the church for their distancing; they changed as they grew up. This was 12% less than Francis and Richter's (2007, p. 319) finding for the same question which might imply that the Irish Church itself was more culpable for the decision to drop-off attendance. In response to the third question in this section, only 36% of respondents held that the

‘church no longer helped them to grow’ which was very close to the 34% of respondents who disagreed with the assertion. It would appear that the weight of the response leans heavier towards the quest for personal autonomy in faith development, over and against differences with the church.

### **The Lives of Others**

The next three questions asked, come under the heading ‘The Lives of Others’ and are concerned with the influence of other people on the church leaving process. The findings can be seen on Table 7:1. Richter and Francis (1998, pp. 76-77) attest that the ‘foundations of church-going – or church-leaving – are laid in a person’s childhood during his or her most formative years’. They go on to suggest that ‘religious socialisation ‘ is most likely to be successful when parents are committed to faith and make a conscious effort to plant religious values in their children. On the other hand, over-emphasis on religion and particularly on church-going by parents, can be counter-productive. Adolescent children and young adults may walk away from church involvement because of this parental pressure.

The first question in ‘The Lives of Others’, tests this assertion. Surprisingly roughly a quarter of those questioned, attributed parental pressure as contributing to their distancing from church; whereas nearly two-thirds of those questioned dismissed parental coercion as a factor in their lack of engagement with the church. These findings resemble those of Francis and Richter (2007, p. 319). Parents are one thing, friends another. When questioned about the role of friends in non-church attendance, just under a third attributed their non-attendance to the fact that most of their friends did not attend church; whereas one in two of those questioned, rejected the influence of friends on their lack of church attendance. Personal autonomy rather

than peer pressure appears to be a more potent influence on church attendance among nominal Irish Anglicans.

When asked about the effect of their partner's non-church attendance, just under a quarter of those questioned replied that it did have a bearing on their own church attendance. On the other hand almost two-thirds of those questioned dismissed the effect of their partner's non-church attendance on their own decision to attend church. Francis and Richter (2007, p. 321) found that tensions within relationships, in a partner not attending church, affected the church-going of 32% of their respondents, as opposed to 55% who replied that their partner's non-attendance had no bearing on their own pattern of church attendance. The 'agree' scores for these three 'Lives of Others' questions were among the lowest of the eleven questions examined in this chapter, which is a telling observation.

### **Time Demands**

According to Francis and Richter (2007, p. 141), 'the majority of church goers have lives outside the church as well as inside the church and the constraints, pressures and demands of those "alternative lives" are also subject to change and fluctuation'. One of these demands is time. MacGreil (2009, p. 156) draws attention to the 'busyness factor' and the tensions that are generated between commitment to church and other demands that are made on time, on Catholic Church attendance in Ireland. The two questions asked in this section of the study, probe the tensions of the demands of time on church attendance and again can be seen on Table 7:1.

Just over six out of ten of those questioned admitted that they simply got out of the habit of attending church. A response of 61% in this regard is the second highest score in the chapter after 'I grew up and started to make my own decisions'.

Church-going is habitual but changes in one's circumstances can disrupt the habit of church-going which then drops away. The disruption of established routines in one's life may open up the way for other factors to operate and church-going may fall into this category. The disruption of a church-going habit, for whatever reason, may as Roozen (1980, p. 446) found, make people more conscious of the sheer irrelevance of the church to their lives. By comparison, Richter and Francis (1998, p. 74) found that getting out of the habit of going to church had the highest response, 71% in their 'Changes and Chances' category. The figure was 69% in their later survey in *Gone for Good? Church-leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Francis & Richter, 2007, p. 319).

Over half of those who responded to the second question asked in this section, agreed that they had 'found other interests and activities'. Three in ten disagreed with the assertion. Francis and Richter's (2007, p. 321) findings in *Gone for Good? Church-leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* were roughly similar to the Irish experience. It is clear that the demands of time have played an important role in disengagement from church in the Irish context. Six out of ten non-church attenders simply got out of the habit of church-going and one out of two found other interests and activities which made it impossible to attend church.

### **Cost and Benefits**

Christianity is a costly religion involving devotion to Christ and commitment to the community of faith, the church. Many churches including the Church of Ireland, make expectations of their members in terms of time, energy and money. In order to keep parishes functioning, the primary cost is the maintenance of ministry which means paying: the approved stipend, pension provision and car and office

allowances. A typical Church of Ireland parish requires in the region of €194 per annum from each parishioner (Dioceses of Kilmore, Elphin & Ardagh, 2013). That is a significant sum. Allied to this, churches make demands on their parishioners in: maintaining buildings, fund-raising and in attending worship, meetings, study groups, socials and the like. Belonging to a church as Richter and Francis (1998, pp. 90-91) observe 'can involve substantial financial, physical and emotional investment and it is a two-way bargain, for in return members can expect to receive all kinds of benefits'.

This notion of the costs and benefits of church involvement has been taken up by sociologists of religion, who have borrowed from the discipline of economics to understand the behaviour of churches and religious consumers. Iannaccone (1992, pp. 123-131) for example, is a prominent proponent of this approach. Using rational choice theory which presupposes that religion is treated by people in the same way they make other choices, those who attend church become Christian 'consumers'. Like all consumers, Christian consumers can weigh up the costs and benefits of their involvement with church.

The last three questions in this section take up this costs and benefits notion from the Christian consumer's perspective of 'meeting my needs'. The responses are outlined on Table 7:1. One of the most fundamental needs asked of churches is the spiritual wellbeing of an individual. Nearly four out of ten of those questioned in the survey felt that the church was not meeting their spiritual needs. A similar number of respondents disagreed with the assertion. On the wider front 42% of those questioned agreed that the church was not helping their needs, 35% disagreed with this contention. Needs were taken to include those things which people were looking

for from church: cultural, social and personal. Interestingly both these findings were in the same territory of those questioned by Francis and Richter (2007, p. 324).

Churches are very conscious of appealing to children, the so-called 'church of the future'. Parents as consumers want the best for their children socially, educationally and in a religious sense. The final question in the costs and benefits section, focused on the needs of children. Only 15% of respondents felt that the church was not meeting their children's needs, by far the lowest score among the eleven questions asked in this chapter. An emphatic 60% of respondents disagreed with the assertion. In this context, 11% of those questioned by Francis and Richter (2007, p. 190) associated their disengagement from church with the church's failure to meet their children's needs. From these data it is clear that around four out of ten of those questioned associated their disengagement from church because their general and spiritual needs were not being met. Church was not good value. A much smaller proportion of respondents came to the firm conclusion that the church was failing to meet their family needs. The size of the latter category may well reflect the overall sample of the survey in that 38% were under the age of 25, 88% were single and only 12% were married, separated, divorced or remarried; therefore those who took part in the survey with children were only a small part of the sample.

## **Gender**

According to Francis and Richter (2007, p. 118), males are more affected by the process of growing up when it comes to church attendance. Two-thirds of men in this study, attributed their distancing from church to growing up, as can be seen in Table 7:2. In the same way four, out of ten men felt that church was no longer

helping them to grow. Just over half the men questioned acknowledged that they had changed and the church was not responsible for their disengagement.

There was no evidence in the findings to suggest that gender played a role in the time demands, which distanced men and women from church attendance.

Women however, were more sensitive than men to the role that their non-church going friends had on their own church attendance. This was true for 35% of women as opposed to 29% of men. Again 30% of women were influenced by a non-church going partner, as opposed to 18% of men, when it came to church attendance.

More men than women attributed their reduced church-going to parental pressure, 28% as opposed to 21% respectively. Nelsen (1981, p. 639) discovered that boys are much less likely to follow in parental footsteps when it comes to religious participation. Girls on the other hand are generally brought up to be more conformist than boys. There were no significant differences however between the responses of men and women to the three cost and benefits questions asked in this section.

### **Age**

The notion that church is something you grow out of as you grow up, was more in evidence among those of Generation X and the Boomer Generation. Seven out of ten of those questioned in the 26 to 45 age category said that their distance from church was attributable to growing up and starting to make decisions on their own. This was compared to 64% of those in the under 25 age group, Generation Y, and 57% of those in the oldest age group, the Builders Generation according to Table 7:3. Likewise 60% of the Boomers, acknowledged that they had changed rather than the church being responsible for their declining church attendance. In similar vein, almost half of the Boomers and Builders were aware that the church was not helping

them to grow and hence they reduced attendance. In contrast just under a quarter of the youngest generational group questioned, Generation Y, associated their declining attendance with their changing attitude towards church. The lower scores for the under 25 year olds in relation to growing up and changing, may be seen as a transitional phase between the conventional attachments of adolescence and the distancing of a more reflective stage of faith development, identified by Fowler (1981, p. 172).

As regards the 'Lives of Others' questions, the role of friends in attending church or not, was lowest in the oldest age cohort. Six out of ten Builders and almost half of Generation X, related their limited attendance at church to the fact that none of their friends went to church. Similarly the influence of peers was also low, 23% in the under 25s, which is surprising given the significance of peer pressure among adolescents. Interestingly the resentment of being made to go to church by their parents was among some of the lowest scores in the variables analysed in this chapter. Parental coercion did not seem to be an issue for virtually two-thirds of the sample across the four age groups questioned.

On the other hand, time demands played a more significant role in reducing church attendance. This was particularly apparent for the Boomers and Builders Generations. Almost seven out of ten Boomers got out of the habit of church-going and six out of ten of the same age group, found alternative interests to church. Among the oldest generation group, six out of ten likewise got out of the habit of church-going; whereas just under four out of ten attributed their declining church attendance to finding other interests. The younger age groups were the least impacted by the demands of time on their church attendance.

Generally the cost benefit analysis of attending church or not was more evident in the two older generations, the Boomers and Builders. The scores for the under 25s were conspicuously lower for the church not meeting their general or spiritual needs. The two questions about children's needs or the needs of partners, were not unexpectedly relevant among the under 25s, whereas over half of the Boomers and Builders agreed that their church attendance was affected by the church not meeting their needs, both general and spiritual. The issue of the church not meeting their partner's needs was of noticeable concern for the oldest age cohort, the Builders. Almost five out of ten cited this as a reason for reducing their church-going.

### **Occupational Status**

According to Table 7:4, almost seven out of ten students and seven out of ten professionals, identified personal autonomy as the chief reason for church disengagement. Only five out of ten manual workers singled out the same cause for their distancing from church. Both students and manual workers were less inclined to acknowledge that they had changed over and against the church, as the reason for their reduced attendance: 45% and 38% respectively. Again students and manual workers recorded low scores, two out of ten students and one out of ten manual workers, in making out that the church did not help them grow.

When it came to the influence of others, students and manual workers again had low scores. Just two out of ten students and one out of ten manual workers, associated their non-church-going friends with their distancing from the church. Coincidentally students and manual workers had very low scores, 5% for both, in citing the needs of children as a cause for their reduced attendance. Also both

students and manual workers had almost identical scores, 55% and 56% respectively, when admitting that they had got out of the habit of going to church. These two occupational groups, students and manual workers, had lower scores than the professionals, when it came to identifying alternative interests as the reason for their reduced church attendance. Parental pressure, which had resulted in putting people off attending church when growing up, had minimal impact on all three occupational categories.

As far as the costs and benefits questions were concerned, the professionals were more aware of the church not meeting their general needs, 57%, and spiritual needs, 48%, when it came to dropping off going to church. The returns for students in this section not unexpectedly, correspond quite closely to the scores for those in the under 25 years of age category in the Age-Structure Sample as seen in Table 7:3.

The underscoring of manual workers is consistent throughout the eleven questions posed in this section. Why is this? It may well be that the questions posed in this part of the survey were less resonant with this group of workers, than other reasons for their reduced church attendance; or it may be that the small sample of manual workers at around 10% of the valid responses, skewed the results. If this were so, then the anomalous character of manual workers would be replicated in other sections of the study, which has not been the case to date. It is more likely that the questions asked of manual workers in this section of the study were less relevant to their reasons for lowered church attendance.

### **Church Attendance**

The pattern of responses in relation to growing up and changing in the sub-samples of church attendance is mixed as can be seen on Table 7:5. Those who

attended church more frequently (at least six times a year) had lower scores in the three growing up and changing questions, than the overall sample as outline in Table 7:1. There was little evidence that parental pressure played any role in deterring regular church attendance in this group of the sample; however almost seven out of ten of these occasional church-goers recognised that they simply got out of the habit of church-going. The fact that the church did not meet their particular needs did not seem to be a concern for this group of occasional church-goers.

Notably the scores for the middle group of church attenders (those who attended once a year), Christmas or Easter types, tracked the overall sample scores without exception. On the other hand, those who never attended church had very mixed scores. A high value was placed on personal autonomy; eight out of ten associated their distancing from church to growing up and making their own decisions. Six out of ten in this group insisted that they changed rather than church being responsible for their non-attendance. Half of the non-attenders admitted that the church was irrelevant to their growth. Less than half of those who never attended church recognised that they had got out of the habit of church-going. It may well be that they never went to church in the first place. Although six out of ten recognised that other interests demanded their time, half of non-attenders were very conscious that their general and spiritual needs were not met by church.

### **Religious Inheritance**

As MacGreil (2009, p. 84) points out, ‘the importance of handing on one’s religion to the next generation is one of the clearest indicators of one’s personal and group identity with one’s faith’. Table 7:6 reports on the findings of responses to the question: ‘When you were ten how important was religion to you?’ Interestingly

there was little variation from the overall sample responses for those for whom childhood religion was important, with two exceptions. The first was that 58% of this category agreed that their distancing from church had to do with growing up and making their own decisions, 7% less than the overall score; whereas 29% of the same group identified parental pressure as having some bearing on their reduced church attendance, 5% more than the overall sample score.

Furthermore there was a limited difference from the overall sample responses for those for whom childhood religious inheritance was unimportant. There were two exceptions to this generalisation: seven out of ten attributed their distancing from church to growing up and making their own decisions. Only a third of this category identified that they had got out of the habit of going to church, which probably means, given their non-religious inheritance, that they were unlikely to attend church in the first place. It would seem that religious inheritance or otherwise did not colour the responses to the growing up and changing questions to any significant extent.

## **Conclusion**

Growing up is a core concern for religious communities. Cohen-Malayev, Schacter and Rich (2014, p. 205) see it as key to the religious socialisation of the next generation. As people grow up, the content of their faith and the expression that it is given in terms of practice, as Richter and Francis (1998, p. 53) point out, will tend to change. In the light of this, four questions asked in this chapter elicited responses of over 50% namely: Growing up and making my own decisions, 65%; Got out of the habit, 61%; Found other interests, 54%; I changed not the church, 52%. These high responses are primarily to do with growing up and the demands of time.

The questions with the lowest scores in the chapter include: The church was not helping my children's needs, 15%; Parental pressure, 24%; My partner is not a church-goer, 24%; My friends are not church-goers, 32%. These lower responses are due to questions posed on the lives of others.

The mid-range response between a 33% and 50% was represented by: The church was no longer helping me to grow, 36%; The church was not helping my spiritual needs, 38%; The church was not helping my needs, 42%. These mid-range scores were confined to the concepts of costs and benefits on church participation.

The nuances between men and women, the generations, occupations, church and non-church attenders and religious inheritance, have been commented upon in detail; however the themes of growing up and growing out of the habit of church-going, recur across the sample categories. The nominal Irish Anglicans questioned in the survey would appear to follow a pattern discovered by Francis and Richter (2007, pp. 118-120). For Protestants, it is more important to make up their own mind about matters of faith. Mennell (1997, p. 20) observes that Protestantism tends towards fissiparousness, which is manifest in the highly schismatic nature of Protestantism but also in the very heavy emphasis that is placed on the autonomy of the individual and their encounter with God, mediated by their own personal understanding of the Bible. It is this factor which seems to be at work in the data relating to growing up and changing. Faith can flower as people grow, but it can also falter and the next chapter will focus on the role of faltering faith among nominal Irish Anglicans.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **FALTERING FAITH**

**Introduction**

**Believing and Belonging**

**Loss of Faith**

**Gender**

**Age**

**Occupational Status**

**Church Attendance**

**Religious Inheritance**

**Conclusion**

## **Chapter 8: Faltering Faith**

### **Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to consider to what extent loss of faith plays a part in the distancing of nominal Irish Anglicans from church. The chapter opens with a consideration of believing and belonging in the Irish religious landscape before probing how loss of faith influences church attendance. Choice, real or imagined, is a feature of contemporary western societies like Ireland. Choice, as Mouzelis (2012, p. 220) contends, ‘is a key element for understanding religious landscapes’. People choose to leave church because of an erosion of faith or because church itself has lost its meaning and so they disengage. The distinction between losing one’s faith and losing faith in the church is explored in the chapter by examining statistical responses to two sets of four questions. These responses will in turn be looked at through the lens of five specific variables: Gender, Age, Occupation, Church Attendance and Religious Inheritance. The chapter concludes by gathering the analysis together and anticipating the succeeding chapter.

### **Believing and Belonging**

Believing without belonging has, according to Voas and Crockett (2005, p. 11), become the catchphrase of much European work on religion in the recent past. The thesis attributed to Davie (1994) that religious belief is fairly robust even if church attendance is in decline, has been debated in the literature. An earlier analysis in Chapter Four ‘Credo’ of this study, confirms that belief persists among nominal Irish Anglicans especially about God and the afterlife as outlined in Table 4:1. Christological belief and views about the eschatological dimension of hell remain but are patchy. The findings of Chapter Five ‘Fides’, were also revealing in this

regard. Up to half of those questioned believed in the Bible as an important source of revelation. Nearly half of nominal Irish Anglicans considered prayer as a vital part of living. A third of those questioned had religious sensibilities and well over half considered themselves as spiritual people as seen in Table 5:1.

Although belief seems to persist among nominal Irish Anglicans the statistics from the Chapters 'Credo' and 'Fides' are revealing. Belief in a personal God is shared by just less than half of those questioned; nearly four out of ten are uncertain and almost two out of ten disagree that God is personal. A majority of respondents do not hold that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man, 39% are uncertain and 22% do not believe in the orthodox Christian teaching about the person of Jesus. Two-thirds of respondents do not accept that Christianity is the only true religion and almost half of those asked do not regard themselves as religious as seen in Tables 4:1 and 5:1.

Voas and Crockett (2005, p. 12) make a distinction between a 'strong' and 'weak' version of believing without belonging. The strong version according to them is characterised, with the exception of atheists, by the bulk of Europeans having religious or spiritual sensibilities. This situation has changed very little in recent years. However, they held that a weak interpretation of believing without belonging consists of a very broad definition of what it is to be religious and belief is allowed to be non-Christian, or not even religious altogether.

If nominal Irish Anglicans represent what Voas and Crockett consider a 'strong' version of believing, what about their belonging? Kennerley's (1998) argument, expressed in Chapter Two on 'Belonging', is that amongst Irish Anglicans, whether active or inactive, religious belonging is strong. There are two

key aspects to belonging: religious affiliation and attendance. Between 2002 and 2006 (Central Statistics Office, 2007), the number of people who stated that they had no religion in Ireland grew from 138,264 to 186,318 or 35% in the inter-censal period. The majority of this group were Irish nationals and they were concentrated in the age group, 20 to 49.

Commentators such as MacGreil (2011, p. 439) stress the relative stability of the religious profile of the Irish population over time and yet concede that low levels of leakage from the Roman Catholic Church inflated the 'No Religion' or 'Not Stated' religious categories in the recent Irish census. There is little or no evidence to suggest significant leakage from the Church of Ireland towards the 'No Religion' and 'Not Stated Religion' categories. In fact the census returns (Central Statistics Office, 2012) confirm the upward trajectory of Church of Ireland numbers from 115,611 in 2002 to 129,039 in 2011. With regard to self-affiliation, religious belonging amongst Church of Ireland people remains strong. Church attendance amongst Irish Anglicans is another matter. Macourt (2008, p. 143) maintains that in the Irish Republic the decline in church attendance was a feature of the Church of Ireland since before the 1920s. Unlike the Catholic Church, details for church attendance in the Church of Ireland are inconsistent and not comprehensive, as has already been established in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

Some parishes have attempted to do their own internal audit on church attendance and membership. One such is the Virginia group of parishes in County Cavan, 100 km north west of Dublin. The group which is in Kilmore Diocese, consists of four parishes: Billis, Killinkere, Lurgan and Munterconnaught. Three of the churches have a regular Sunday service, the fourth, Munterconnaught, has a service once a month. In 2013 the parish group was made up of 145 families which

breaks down to 315 people (McCauley, 2014). Average Sunday attendance in 2005 was 104 people, which dropped to 90 in 2010 before returning to 105 in 2013 or 33% of membership. Average attendance from 2005 to 2013 for three seasonal services was Christmas: 250 (79% of membership), Easter: 185 (59% of membership) and Harvest: 358 (107% of membership) (McCauley, 2014).

According to the latest national census figures (Central Statistics Office, 2012), the total population in the Virginia area increased by 23%. The evidence from this audit in the Virginia group of parishes demonstrates that belonging as indicated by membership and church attendance, remains robust but static. Like the wider Church of Ireland census taken in 2013, there was no attempt to determine how regular church attendance was, which is a failing. Compared to the broader spectrum of population contained in the national census, church attendance in the Virginia group is much weaker and probably a more helpful gauge in the context of this study.

### **Loss of Faith**

Some commentators consider that loss of faith is the chief reason for church decline. Bruce (1995, p. 47) contends that ‘those who explain their lack of church involvement by considerations other than a lack of belief are fooling themselves or fooling the researchers’. Loss of faith is a nuanced concept, the complexities of belief and unbelief and their relationship with church attendance is unclear. Religious belief in itself does not automatically translate into church going. Indeed some of those who cease going to church may have had no faith in the first place.

Michael Fanstone (1993, pp. 79-80) makes the helpful distinction between those who left church because of ‘God Issues’ and those who disengaged because of ‘Church Issues’. Four questions were asked in the survey which pertain to ‘God

Issues'. These were drawn from Richter and Francis's (1998) work, *Gone but Not Forgotten* and Francis and Richter's (2007) research in *Gone for Good? Church-leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. The results to these eight questions can be seen in Table 8:1.

The first of these statements was 'I reduced my church going because I lost my faith'. Of those who responded, 17% agreed that a loss of faith adversely affected their church attendance in comparison to 29% - 45% in *Gone but Not Forgotten* (Richter & Francis, 1998) and 32% in *Gone for Good? Church-leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Francis & Richter, 2007). In other words, the Irish response to the loss of faith issue was around less than half of the English response. Moreover six out of ten of those questioned disagreed with the contention that loss of faith was responsible for reduced church attendance. This would seem to reinforce that 'believing' remains persistent among nominal Irish Anglicans. Atheism it would seem is a minority option among even nominal Irish Anglicans. Intriguingly the number of Irish who describe themselves as 'a convinced atheist' fell from 13% to 10% in the period 2005 to 2011 (McGarry, 2012b).

The second 'God Issues' question asked in this section sought to associate church-leaving with the statement, 'I doubted my faith'. Some 36% of respondents agreed with the association of reducing church attendance with a doubting faith, double the figure for a loss of faith. When compared to Richter and Francis's (1998) result of 42% - 58% in *Gone but Not Forgotten* and Francis and Richter's (2007) findings of 43% in *Gone for Good? Church-leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, the Irish response to a doubting faith was still considerably less.

Faith or a loss of faith is experiential in what life does to people. The third question in this section probes the impression that for some people specific life experiences lead them to believe that in some way God had let them down. The number of nominal Irish Anglicans who distanced themselves as a consequence of feeling that God had let them down was relatively small. Such a view was expressed by just one in ten of respondents to the third question in this part of the survey. God was not the issue for 80% of nominal Irish Anglicans in the church leaving process. Coincidentally the Irish response was identical to the English findings in *Gone but Not Forgotten* (Richter & Francis, 1998) and *Gone for Good? Church-leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Francis & Richter, 2007).

The final statement in this section: ‘I have reduced my church going because I became aware of alternative ways of thinking and living’ was a copy of that asked by Richter and Francis (1998) and Francis and Richter (2007). This statement found greater resonance with Irish respondents with just over four out of ten agreeing with the assertion.

The Church in Ireland has bad press. David Sharrock (2009) writing in *The Times 2* laid it bare. The Catholic Church and its institutions in Ireland are so badly damaged as to be devoid of moral authority. Its only possible salvation lies in ‘prostrating itself before the courts of public opinion and natural justice’. Do those who describe themselves as Church of Ireland view their church in such a way as to distance themselves from its common life? Four questions on the ‘Church Issues’ were posed in this section of the survey. The first of these focussed on the illogicality of church teaching. The second majored on the unscientific nature of the teaching of the church. The penultimate ‘Church Issue’ question grappled with the exclusive view of Christianity as being the only one true faith. The final question dealt with an

old chestnut, that religion generates conflicts. As in the previous four ‘God Issue’ questions, all four of these ‘Church Issue’ questions were obtained from the earlier research of Richter and Francis (1998) and Francis and Richter (2007).

The impulse to de-supernaturalise Christian teaching has been a feature of twentieth century belief which has spilled over into the new millennium (Blamires, 2001, p. 6). Christianity is a supernatural faith and a barrier to belief by some is the illogicality of the major tenets of the faith to the modern mind. In response to the statement, ‘Many of the church’s teachings were illogical or nonsensical’, 36% of those questioned, confirmed that this view was instrumental in reducing their church-going. In contrast 40% of respondents did not see the illogicality of Christian teaching as an obstacle to faith. A slightly larger proportion of nominal Irish Anglicans, 41%, thought that the church’s teachings were difficult to reconcile with modern science. Although up to 37% of those questioned did not regard the church’s teachings as unscientific. Interestingly the figure of 41% who agreed that the unscientific nature of Christian teaching was a barrier to faith, was exactly the same value for those who dismissed ‘creationism’ in the earlier Chapter Five, ‘Fides’ as seen in Table 5:1.

Less than half of the nominal Irish Anglicans questioned agreed that it was increasingly difficult to believe that Christianity is the only true faith. This stumbling block to faith was instrumental in reduced church attendance. Coincidentally 48% of Francis and Richter’s (2007, p. 318) English respondents replied in a similar way to the same question. The highest ranked score in this and the two English surveys was obtained in the final statement: ‘So many people fight each other in the name of religion’ with 55% compared with Richter and Francis’s (1998) 65% and Francis and Richter’s (2007) 66%. The growing awareness of the role which religion plays in so

many conflicts throughout the world, proved to be the greatest challenge to belief on both sides of the Irish Sea.

The proximity of the Troubles in Northern Ireland which killed over 3000 people and intimidated many thousands more from their homes, was a stark reminder to Irish Anglicans of the link between religion and conflict. For Mennell (2002, p. 15) the outbreak of the troubles in 1969 brought to the surface the feelings held by many Southern Protestants that their northern co-religionists were intolerant and bigoted.

Taken together the response to the 'God Issues' and 'Church Issues' would seem to suggest that taking leave of the church for Irish Anglicans does not necessarily mean taking leave of God. Reviewing the *Changing Ireland: Attitudes and Values Survey*, published in 2012, Loscher (2012) observed, 'our faith is important to us. We are still a nation of believers although with a declining number of followers as measured by church attendance'. In terms of ranking, the 'God Issues' had much lower scores than the 'Church Issues' particularly in respect of the loss of faith and feeling that God had let them down. The scores for doubting faith and the lure of alternative lifestyles were more akin to the mid-range scores for the 'Church Issues'. The two highest scores in the set were those pertaining to the exclusive claims of Christianity and the role religion plays in conflicts. Exclusivity sits uneasily in a plural Ireland where in 2006, 15% of the population were born outside the island of Ireland (Central Statistics Office, 2008).

As MacGreil (2011, p. 7) observed, this changed the ethnic make-up of Irish society to the extent that a minority of people of different cultural, ethnic, racial, religious and social backgrounds are now present in many Irish towns and villages.

In Inglis's (2008, p. 125) view probably more than anything else the conflict between Catholics and Protestants raised global consciousness about Ireland. The annual Orange riots at Drumcree Church of Ireland from 1996, in Elliott's (2009, p. 253) view, alienated Southern Protestants and equated religion with conflict. The negativity of this may have a bearing on the respondents' distancing from church.

## **Gender**

Table 8:2 provides little evidence that gender plays a significant role in the attitudes of nominal Irish Anglicans towards faltering faith with the exception of loss of faith. Almost a quarter of men (24%) questioned admitted that a loss of faith affected their church going, twice that of the female response (12%) to the same question. For men more than women, loss of faith was likely to be attributed to intellectual problems with Christian teaching. Thus 41% of the men found that the church's teachings were difficult to reconcile with modern science, compared to 37% of the women. Likewise 44% of the men were aware of alternative ways of thinking or living, in contrast with 41% of the women. Whereas 58% of the women were conscious that so many people fight each other in the name of religion, only 51% of the men were.

## **Age**

Commentators such as Voas and Crockett (2005, p. 20) have concluded that the decline of belief in Europe is generational. Their research findings seem to suggest that older people are more religious than younger ones and this generational change is the key component of religious decline in Britain. MacGreil (2011, p. 450) too found that only one in 5 of 18 to 25 year old Roman Catholics attend mass, once a week or more often, with more than 4 in 5 of those over 70 years attend regularly.

The young, it would appear to MacGreil, are withdrawing from their religious Irish cultural roots

According to the findings in Table 8:3, it was the oldest group of respondents who were more touched by faltering faith issues than the young. Thus 25% of the oldest cohort as opposed to 16% of the youngest group agreed that loss of faith reduced their church going. Similarly 49% of the oldest group cited that the awareness of alternative ways of thinking or living distanced them from church attendance. The figure for the youngest group for the same variable was 40%. The same pattern was repeated throughout the 'Church Issue' categories. The nonsensical nature of church teachings impacted on 45% of the oldest cohort as opposed to 31% of the youngest group. Again 51% of the oldest group agreed that the unscientific aspect of church teachings reduced their church attendance. Only 36% of the youngest group took the same conclusion. Over half of the oldest group agreed that the exclusive claims for Christianity reduced their church going in comparison to 38% of the youngest group's response to the same question.

The gap between the youngest age group, Generation Y and the Boomer Generation, was less pronounced than that between the youngest and oldest age group but nonetheless it was there in the findings. The only exception to the overall trend was that 38% of the youngest group expressed that doubts or questions of faith reduced their church-going compared to 35% of the mid-age, Boomer cohort and 34% of the oldest group, the Builders. The contours of belief in the young attested in two of the earlier chapters: 'Credo' and 'Fides', were the firmest generationally as can be seen in Tables 4:3 and 5:3. The same trend appears to be at work here: the faith of younger people is less susceptible to the loss of faith issues addressed in this chapter. The reasons for this generational inversion are manifold. The legacy of

denominational education in both primary and secondary sectors is probably at work in this. The impact of the Christian ethos of Church of Ireland schools cannot be underestimated in the youngest cohort. The continued significance of confirmation is also a factor at play here. Candidates are normally prepared for confirmation when they are between 12 and 14 years of age. Most Church of Ireland young people in this age group attend confirmation preparation in their school or parish, whether they are regular church attenders or not. A number of dioceses and indeed parishes in Ireland have a developed youth ministry which reaches beyond the core community to those who have tenuous links with the church. Moreover as Macourt (2014, p. 39) points out, the Church of Ireland population in Ireland grew by 56% in the intercensal period 2002-2011, 26% more than the overall population increase. The growth of the Anglican numbers in Ireland has lowered the age profile of the church, which may well contribute to the generational inversion apparent in these findings.

### **Occupational Status**

According to Table 8:4 the findings for students are intriguing in that there is some distance between them and the scores for those aged under 25 years of age, presumably from whom the student body is drawn as can be seen on Table 8:3. This is particularly evident in the 'Church Issues' questions where e.g. 39% of students cited the illogicality of Christian teaching as influencing their church attendance compared to 31% of under 25s. The inflation of student scores in comparison to those under 25 years of age was also apparent in the 'God Issues' questions. Some 47% of students identified the draw of alternative ways of living, contributing to their distancing from church, compared to 40% of under 25s for the same question. The anomaly presented may well have a statistical source i.e. the actual returns, or may represent nuances between secondary school and third level students.

For the professional category there are two notable findings, marked by pluralism. Professional people were more influenced by alternative ways of living and a less exclusive view of Christian truth, than the average sample as outlined in Table 8:1. Those in the manual group of workers had a mixed response to the questions asked. The findings seem to suggest that the manual category was less influenced by alternative ways of thinking 29%, the illogicality of Christian faith 29%, the unscientific basis for Christian belief 33% and only 38% cited the exclusive claims of Christianity affecting their church attendance. On the other hand 22% of manual workers agreed that God had let them down, more than twice that of the overall sample, which had affected their church going; whereas 22% of the manual category doubted God, some 14% more than overall sample as can be seen in Table 8:1. The manual class do stand out from the other two occupational categories.

### **Church Attendance**

When asked about the ‘God Issues’ and ‘Church Issues’ which mitigate against regular church attendance, those who never attend church had consistently higher scores than the overall sample as can be seen in Table 8:5. Likewise those who were occasional churchgoers had persistently lower scores than non-churchgoers and the overall sample. The difference between the scores for the overall sample was most marked among non-church attenders; some 33% for lost faith, 66% for finding alternative lives and meaning and 75% for a rejection of the exclusive claims of Christianity. The only variable that was in anyway close to the overall norm was for God letting people down as can be seen in Table 8:1. Those who never attend church resonate firmly with the reasons for absenting church outlined in this section.

Those who fitfully attend church, Christmas and Easter types, were much less influenced by issues raised in this part of the study. Their scores were considerably less than the overall norms for all the ‘God Issue’ questions and for three of the ‘Church Issue’ questions as well as outlined in Table 8:1. This pattern was more markedly the same for occasional church attenders, only 10% agreed that loss of faith had affected their church going. Again only 30% of those questioned as occasional church attenders had difficulties with the exclusive claims of Christianity. Clearly the questions raised in this part of the study relating to a loss of confidence in God and the church, have only limited traction with occasional church attenders.

### **Religious Inheritance**

The findings with regard to religious inheritance in relation to the ‘God Issues’ and ‘Church Issues’ raised in this section are revealing. Those for whom a religious upbringing in childhood was unimportant had much higher scores across the board as can be seen on Table 8:6. A third of these respondents agreed that a loss of faith had reduced their church attendance. Just over four out of ten cited their doubts as contributing to distance from church. Over two-thirds of the same group had found alternative ways of living and thinking which drew them away from attending church. Half of those questioned identified the nonsensical nature of Christian belief and their dismissal of the exclusive claims of Christianity as reasons for reduced church attendance. Two-thirds of the category identified the conflicts fostered by religion as a contributory factor in their distance from church.

In general those for whom a religious upbringing in childhood was important had much lower scores than the former category whose religious inheritance was less important. Nonetheless four out of ten attributed their doubts, their alternative living

and the unscientific nature of Christian claims as factors in reduced church attendance. Again up to half of those questioned in this category had issues with the exclusivity of Christian claims and the role religion played in conflicts which impinged on their church attendance.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has charted some of the ways in which loss of faith may have distanced people from attending church. Have the nominal Irish Anglicans, the subject of this study, fallen out with God or the church for that matter? In spite of what has been measured, the findings confirm that belief remains firm; Irish Anglicans have not taken leave of God. As for the church, the evidence is more mixed. People still have a sense of belonging without necessarily attending church frequently or even not at all. This passive belonging seems to be a persistent feature of Irish Anglicanism. It finds resonance in Davie's (2013, p. 283) assertion that religion in Europe has moved from obligation (in terms of attendance) to consumption. Ireland in the Noughties was a culture marked by consumption or choice.

Religion can be both liberating and a source of intolerance. According to MacGreil (2011, p. 10) Ireland has had a sad history of intolerance and sectarianism. Not unexpectedly the two factors which had the most traction with respondents were the exclusive claims of Christianity and the role religion plays in conflicts. Gender and occupation had little impact on the findings. The strongest indicator was religious upbringing which had the most profound influence on loss of faith in God and in the church. The generational inversion of the findings was conspicuous and

runs counter to the conventional view that generations come to be less religious than their predecessors (Voas & Crockett, 2005, p. 18).

Believing and belonging are essentially connected. One commentator (Kirby, 1984, p. 37) has made a cautionary pronouncement on the persistence of faith and belonging in Ireland. 'The danger to faith and belonging is not unbelief but shallow faith and passive belonging. The danger is that religion will be reduced to a minor leisure time activity, a convention retained but only in the margins of life, something devoid of challenge or depth'. The next chapter will examine the grounds Irish Anglicans, with a passive belonging, give for disconnecting from the Church.

## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **DISCONNECT**

**Introduction**

**Self-Awareness**

**Relevance**

**Gender**

**Age**

**Occupational Status**

**Church Attendance**

**Religious Inheritance**

**Conclusion**

## Chapter 9: Disconnect

### Introduction

In the wake of the 2008 banking collapse in Ireland, Fintan O'Toole (2010, p. 4) appraised that 'it is not just money that has been lost; it is a sense of what, for better and worse, it meant to be us'. The uneasy sense of disconnection is the subject of this chapter. The aim of the chapter is to examine the extent to which nominal Irish Anglicans explain their disconnection in terms of growing self-awareness and the relevance of the church in their lives. Voas and Crockett (2005, p. 25) regard personal significance or growing self-awareness as pertinent to the loss of ground by religion in modern societies. In addition Francis and Richter (2007, p. 225) draw attention to the notion of 'relevance' as key to understanding the exodus from church by young people.

The chapter opens with an analysis of ten questions asked of respondents in two sets, with regard to self-awareness and relevance. These questions were framed from the earlier work of Richter and Francis (1998) in *Gone but Not Forgotten* and Francis and Richter (2007) in *Gone for Good? Church-leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. The findings can be found on Table 9:1. In keeping with previous chapters, the present one will go on to analyse the findings of those sampled in the survey on the basis of: Gender, Age, Occupational Status, Church Attendance and Religious Inheritance. Finally the chapter will draw the discussion together and outline conclusions.

### Self-Awareness

The contemporary world is marked by a preoccupation with self which traces its roots according to Brown (2001, p. 193) in the profound cultural changes of the

1960s that changed the way people believed and behaved. For Brown, the sixties were a turning point because from that era ‘a suspicion of creeds arose that quickly took the form of a rejection of the Christian tradition and all formulaic constructions of the individual’. For Bellah (1968, p. 86), this meant that individuals began to question religious assumptions and teachings and in turn to develop their own beliefs and values, based on personal experiences and needs. Because of the strength of the Catholic Church in Ireland the evidence suggests that Ireland’s comparatively high levels of religiosity only began to decline and conform to other Catholic countries in Europe by the mid-1990s (Donnelly, 2000, p. 83).

To that end the first two questions in this sub-section probed the disconnect between the individual and their participation in the life of the church. The first: ‘I felt my values were not compatible with church participation’ was mirrored by the second: ‘I felt my lifestyle was not compatible with church participation’. The responses to these two questions and the others in this set, may be found in Table 9:1.

A quarter of those questioned in Ireland agreed that their values diverged from the church which reduced their church-going. Whereas a third of those questioned by Francis and Richter (2007, p. 322) drew the same conclusion. Again three out of ten nominal Irish Anglicans felt their lifestyle was out of step with church teachings, thus reducing their church attendance. Francis and Richter’s findings for the same question was somewhat higher. Four out of ten of their respondents identified a conflicting lifestyle as incompatible with church attendance. These commentators attributed their findings for incompatible values and lifestyles to the growing self-awareness of individuals (Francis & Richter, 2007, p. 159).

When asked, a quarter of Irish respondents agreed to the third question in this sub-set: 'I was going to church for the wrong reasons'. This was somewhat lower than Francis and Richter's (2007, p. 322) finding, where a third of their respondents reduced their church-going for the same reason. Indeed up to half of those questioned in Ireland disagreed with the assertion of hypocrisy that they were going to church for the wrong reason, which is intriguing. How people 'construct, negotiate and perform beliefs' is in Day's (2011, p. 27) view a case of relatedness, locality and temporality.

The tension between a growing self-awareness of individuals and the public image associated with church attendance was examined in the fourth question in this sub-set: 'I wanted to follow my own spiritual quest'. Francis and Richter (2007, p. 322) had found that 36% of their respondents wanted to follow their own spiritual quest without necessarily attending church. The figure obtained in this study for the same question was 34% which coincidentally was in the same territory as two related questions asked in Chapter 7: 'The church was no longer helping me to grow' and 'The church was not meeting my spiritual needs' as can be seen on Table 7:1. For Day (2011, p. 26) the primacy of the individual has become sedimented within the sociology of religion. Hence 'belief is individual, invisible and therefore unverifiable'.

The final question in this sub-set: 'I believe you do not need to go to church to be a Christian' elicited the highest ranking score, not only in this set but in the entire study: 80% of nominal Irish Anglicans agreed with this statement compared to 75% of church-leavers questioned by Francis and Richter (2007, p. 327). An appeal to disinstitutionalised Christianity found a common resonance on both sides of the Irish Sea. What lies behind it? The invisibility of many Protestants in the

conventional measures of religiosity has been observed by Mitchell (2006, p. 135). She argues that ‘for many Protestants in Northern Ireland it is more likely to be religiously informed convictions and ideas, rather than separate religious practices which help constitute categorisations of self’. The same principle may be at work among their co-religionists south of the border. Ammerman’s (1997, p.212) work may also be helpful in understanding a disinstitutionalised approach to Christian faith. She argued that in modern societies, the complexities of lives means that some contradictions between beliefs and practices are to be expected. Thus one can be a self-assigned Anglican, a Christian, without attending church. Underlying this are basic differences of theology. For Trueman (2012, p. 156), Catholics see grace coming through sacramental participation in the Church whereas Protestants view grace coming to them through faith in Jesus Christ. Catholicism understands human nature in terms of substance; Protestantism regards it in terms of relation. The Protestant emphasis on an individual’s relationship with God in Christ, may mitigate against the corporate aspect of church attendance.

There is evidence within these findings that almost two-thirds of nominal Irish Anglicans did not see their non-church attendance as a matter of seeking their own spiritual quest, rather it was a case of their choice of not attending church. This coincides with Davie’s (2013, p. 280) contention that church attendance is ‘increasingly a model of choice rather than a model of obligation or duty’. This expression of individualisation, whereby the ethic of individual self-awareness and self-fulfilment, according to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002, p. 22), is the most powerful current in modern societies.

## Relevance

The notion of the relevance or the irrelevance of the church is the focus for the next set of questions in the chapter. For Kay and Francis (1996) the concepts of relevance or irrelevance, are key in understanding the drift of young people in particular, from the church. As such, the five questions asked of Irish respondents were drawn from the earlier work of Francis and Richter (2007). The findings can be seen on Table 9:1.

The first statement: 'I reduced my church going because the church failed to connect with the rest of my life' found resonance with up to half of the nominal Irish Anglicans surveyed. Francis and Richter (2007, p. 327) found a similar response in their research. The disconnect was such that there was little point in going to church because it seemed like 'another planet' (Francis & Richter, 2007, p. 227). A similar number of nominal Irish Anglicans (47%) identified with the second statement: 'Sermons were irrelevant to my everyday life'. Despite attempts by the Church of Ireland to encourage vibrancy among its preachers and their message, up to a half of those surveyed failed to recognise this. Again up to a half of those questioned were bored with church, about 11% higher than those questioned by Francis and Richter (2007, p. 327). Richter and Francis (1998, p. 114) make the observation 'People especially the young, often complain that the church is boring'. By that some mean it is not 'lively or entertaining enough while others are expressing a hunger for church that connects with the rest of their lives' (Richter & Francis, 1998, p. 114). If Davie (2013, p. 28) is right, that church attendance is increasingly a model of choice, rather than a model of obligation or duty, then up to half of those surveyed have made a conscious choice not to attend church. It is irrelevant to the rest of their lives or does not match their expectations.

Almost six out of ten nominal Irish Anglicans agreed with the fourth question in this sub-set: 'I reduced my church going because I was not interested in the activities on offer'. This was the second highest score in the series of questions asked in this chapter. By comparison just over four out of ten of Francis and Richter's (2007, p. 327) respondents agreed with the same statement. The high response to this question in an Irish context is intriguing. It would appear that nominal Irish Anglicans do not attend church because church does not match their expectations but rather, it is seen as disconnected from their everyday lives. The relationship between social and cultural change and religious activity is a complex one. Nonetheless MacGreil (2009, pp. 155-156) found that 'when asked for their reasons for not attending religious worship weekly or more often, the responses were as anticipated. Almost two-thirds did not attend because they just did not bother'. For MacGreil, this indifference, disinterest and apathy has its roots in a 'lack of serious commitment to religion in one's life'. This results in the marginalisation of religion in the social context and its irrelevance in personal affairs. The eclipse of commitment is central to understanding the nominal state of mind. Winter and Smart (1993, p. 642) in their study of a locale in rural England, concluded that in Anglicanism there is a 'vague notion of belonging' which is they suggest 'of a nominalist or minimalist kind'. This kind of minimalist thinking seems to be alive amongst nominal Anglicans across the Irish Sea.

The final question: 'I reduced my church attendance because I distrusted most institutions including the church' had surprisingly the lowest score not only in this sub-set but in the whole series of questions posed in this chapter. Only two out of ten nominal Irish Anglicans agreed that they distrusted church, in the same way as they did other institutions. This is remarkable given the sea changes in attitudes

towards key institutions in Irish society in recent decades. The turning point is usually identified as the 1960s when changes in the churches at a global level, combined with a period of unprecedented economic growth in Ireland, led in Kirby's (1984, p. 19) view to a new era of openness to outside influences. In turn this contributed to a new optimism for the future, combined with what Inglis (2007, p. 214) detected, a critique of the familiar institutions of Irish life, including the Catholic Church. By the noughties, the critique of the major institutions of the Irish State including the church, was translated into the language of disgust and distrust. As far as the Irish Catholic Church was concerned McGarry (2006, p. 46) observed 'what we are witnessing is the death of a form of church'. Its fall from grace has sent shock waves across Irish society.

By comparison, the Church of Ireland, as an institution, is still held in high regard by 6 out of 10 of the nominal Irish Anglicans questioned in this survey. What lies behind this benign view of the church is open to conjecture. In the first place the Church of Ireland has not been accused of abusing children in their care or trust in recent history. Secondly the Church of Ireland has been seen to be proactive in the care of children. For instance the child protection programme *Safeguarding Trust* (Church of Ireland, 2011c) was not only rolled out in the Church of Ireland since 2006 but it also has the added weight of being a statute of the General Synod. This means that it is binding on all concerned. Many in the Church of Ireland have a warm and nostalgic view of their childhood experience in the church. Bruce Arnold (2002, p. 25) recalled that when as a child and youth 'faith prospered within me and for ten years or so, I enjoyed an intense and rich spiritual life'. What is intriguing in this respect is that the bulk of those questioned who held a disinstitutionalised view of the Christian life, also held the institution of the church in good light.

## **Gender**

One of the most noticeable features apparent in the findings according to gender, is the pattern which emerges between male and female responses. Self-awareness issues played a larger role in the disconnection of women from church life than in the disengagement of men from church life. This applied to four of the five questions asked in the set, the exception being in the area of incompatible values, as can be seen in Table 9:2.

Women were more likely than men to attribute their disconnection with church to incompatible life style. Thus 36% of women replied that they reduced their church-going for this reason, compared to 25% of men. Women were more likely than men to admit that they reduced their church attendance because they deemed that they were going to church for the wrong reasons, by a margin of 3%. Again 82% of women as opposed to 78% of men, claimed that there was no need to attend church in order to be a Christian.

When it came to relevance, the men surveyed had higher scores than women across the sweep of questions. Thus 24% of men distrusted the church as an institution compared to 18% of women. Again 50% of men agreed that irrelevant sermons had a negative effect on their church attendance compared to 45% of women. Half of the men questioned claimed that the church failed to connect with their everyday lives. By contrast 48% of women took the same view. Boredom with church elicited a 52% response from men as opposed to 48% of women. The largest variance between men and women concerned the question of disinterest. Thus 61% of men agreed that they were not interested in the activities on offer in the church, compared to 53% of women.

Interestingly, these findings for nominal Irish Anglicans differ from those discovered by Francis and Richter (2007, p. 160). In *Gone for Good? Church-leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, they found that self-awareness issues played a larger role in the disengagement of men from church life, than in the case of women. They (2007, p. 231) also found that problems with relevance were a factor that had a highly similar level of influence in the disconnection of both men and women from church.

### **Age**

Voas and Crockett (2005, p. 24) contend that ‘everyone agrees that religion has lost ground. The key disputes concern by how much and in what way’. Their (2005, p. 11) conclusion to the debate is that decline is generational; the younger are less religious than the older groups in a population. Richter and Francis (1998, p. 39) drew attention to the ‘generation gap’ between those who had disconnected with church and those who remained. As with Voas and Crockett (2005), Richter and Francis (1998) argue that the far reaching social and cultural changes in the past decades, have played an important role in making younger generations less likely to attend church. Following on from that, they (Richter & Francis, 1998, p. 139) contend that different generations bring different expectations to church-going and church-leaving.

What evidence is there that the generational principle is at work in an Irish context among nominal Irish Anglicans? Of the four generational cohorts delineated in Table 9:3, the findings suggest that hypocrisy, disinstitutionalised faith, distrust and disconnection increase with age. For example 22% of under 25 year olds agree that they reduced church-going because of hypocrisy; they were going to church for

the wrong reasons. This percentage increases progressively to 37% among the over 60 year olds. Likewise disinstitutionalised Christianity increases with age, 87% of Builders agreeing with the statement: 'You don't have to go to church to be a Christian' compared with 70% of Generation Y.

Again 30% of the Builder generation identify distrusting the institution as a reason for reducing church attendance, compared to 12% of under 25 year olds. The churches' failure to connect with everyday life was felt by 54% of over 60 year olds in contrast to only 41% of under 25 year olds.

Two of the variables tested in this section of the survey displayed a slight variation with age: incompatible values increased from 25% for Generation Y to 28% for Builders; irrelevance likewise increased from 46% for Generation Y to 49% for the Builders generation. Another two of the variables had little or no pattern in the findings. One quarter of Generation Y reduced their church going because they wanted to pursue their own spiritual quest. This peaked to over four out of ten Boomers who likewise identified their own spiritual quest as a factor in reducing their church attendance before falling back to between 3 and 4 of the Builders for the same variable. The impact of boredom on church attendance was virtually the same, that is 50% across all the generational groups.

The generational principle identified by Voas and Crockett (2005) and Francis and Richter (2007) is not apparent in the relevance findings. Furthermore, problems with relevance were not significantly more prominent in the minds of the younger generation of Irish Anglicans who had disconnected with church. Indeed the Boomer and Builder generations were more distrustful about the church as an institution and more disinterested in what the church had to offer than the younger

generations. In Ireland it would seem Anglicanism has lost ground among the older age groups in the population, rather than among the young. Flory and Miller (2010, p. 12) draw attention to the decoupling of spirituality from religion, where since the 1960s many people pursue their own private individualistic and disinstitutionalised spiritual journey which takes precedence over commitment to a religious community). In their research they have found that post-Boomers, that is Generations X and Y, 'are willing to participate in religious institutions although within certain limits'. It may well be that this dynamic is at work among younger non-church attending Irish Anglicans than their older counterparts.

### **Occupational Status**

In relation to Table 9:4, those in the student category had lower scores across the board with the average findings, with two exceptions: life style issues and the relevance of sermons to their everyday lives. For some variables there were significant differences between the average scores and those obtained from students. For example only 12% of students distrusted church as an institution compared to 21% for the total sample as outlined in Table 9:1. Again 80% of those surveyed agreed that there was no need to go to church to be a Christian, compared to 72% of students who agreed with the same statement. If one compares these student findings to those for the under 25s in Table 9:3, the so-called Generation Y, the pattern is virtually identical: lower scores across the variables with the exception of incompatible lifestyles and the relevance of sermons to everyday life. For the sake of accuracy the scores for students are higher for these two variables, 37% and 51% respectively, than for the under 25 year olds of 33% and 46% accordingly. Lifestyle and relevance issues were identified by Frances and Richter (2007) and Voas (2010)

as key to understanding the disconnection of the young to institutionalised Christianity.

In comparison the professionals surveyed in the sample had almost uniformly higher scores than students or manual workers. The exception to this was their response to the question on incompatible lifestyles. Of all the occupational categories, professionals were more likely than the others to distrust the church as an institution (26%). The matters of relevance, connection, boredom and disinterest found resonance among the professional classes, as it did with Generation X and the Boomers in the previous section of this chapter as can be seen in Table 9:3.

In line with previous chapters, the manual class stands out from the other two occupational categories in relation to the variables measuring self-awareness and relevance. In the first sub-set of questions, the manual workers' scores were significantly lower when it came to values (11%), hypocrisy (13%) and individual spiritual quest (12%). These factors had little influence in reducing the church attendance among manual workers. Like the other two occupational categories, three quarters of manual workers agreed there was no need to attend church in order to be a Christian. When it came to the second sub-set of questions, manual workers identified the irrelevance of sermons (50%) and disinterest (63%) as key factors in their disconnection from church. They were much less concerned with distrusting the institutional church (13%), the failure of the church to connect with their lives (25%) and boredom (38%).

### **Church Attendance**

Not unexpectedly those who never attend church had consistently higher scores than the overall sample when asked about their disconnect from church, as

can be seen in Table 9:5. Some of the scores were notable, more than twice the norm for distrusting the church as an institution and nearly twice the norm in the case of incompatible values. In the same way, the scores for the incompatibility of life-styles was 20% more than the norm and the failure of the church to connect had a 27% increase over the norm as outlined in Table 9:1. The only variable shared with the other two attendance categories was that relating to the belief that church attendance was not necessary to be a Christian. Thus those who never attend church were the most sceptical in trusting the church. They were acutely aware of the divergence of their values and lifestyle with that of the church. Compared with the other two attendance categories, they were the most bored, disconnected and disinterested. They exemplify what Voas and Crockett (2005, p. 13) describe: ‘put simply, increasing numbers of people believe that belonging doesn’t matter’.

In contrast, occasional attenders (less than six times a year) had the lowest scores across all the variables with one exception: 85% of them agreed that one did not have to attend church to be a Christian. Davie (2013 p. 283) views this as evidence of a change from obligation to consumption. In her view, ‘religiously active Europeans now go to church because they choose to, sometimes for a short-period or sometimes for longer, sometimes regularly and sometimes less so; but they feel no obligation either to attend church in the first place or to continue if they no longer want to’.

The scores for those who rarely attend church, that is Christmas or Easter types, reflected the overall scores with only slight variations. Like the other two attendance categories the key variable was once again that one did not need to attend church to be a Christian; 84% of rare attenders agreed with this principle.

Nonetheless the fact that people attend church once a year is telling. Religion on occasions is a social pursuit, even in Irish Anglicanism.

### **Religious Inheritance**

Reference has already been made in Chapter Three to Ruitter and Van Tubergen's (2009, p. 82) work in attesting the principle: the stronger the religiosity of parents, the more likely their offspring will attend church in later life. When it comes to religious inheritance, those for whom religion was important in childhood had more consistent scores compared to those for whom religion was unimportant in childhood. Table 9:6 shows that those with a weaker religiosity of parents were more aware of incompatible values, their own spiritual quest, the irrelevance of sermons and distrusting the church as an institution as reasons for their disconnect from church. However the theology of disinstitutionalised Christianity identified by Francis and Richter (2007, p. 228) was only shared by 63% of this cohort, a significant drop from the norm as demonstrated in Table 9:1. The divergent scores for those with a less religious childhood probably reflects that the propensity to inherit faith or spiritual disposition is no higher, as Voas and Crockett (2005, p. 20) noted, than the probability of following in parental footsteps.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has looked at the disconnect between nominal Irish Anglicans and their church. Two themes have been explored in depth: the growing self-awareness of individuals and the relevance or otherwise of the church to the lives of those who identify with it. Of these two themes, the findings point to the role of irrelevance as key in understanding the disconnect. Half of those questioned felt that sermons were irrelevant, were bored with the church, had lost interest in what the

church had to offer and simply found that church failed to connect with the rest of their lives. Relevance mattered more to men than women; it was operative across the generational and occupational categories. It was keenly felt by those who never or rarely attended church. In spite of their childhood religious experience, relevance was pivotal in explaining disconnection from church. Around a quarter of those questioned attributed their disconnection to a growing sense of self-awareness. They acknowledged that incompatible values and lifestyles, forging their own spiritual journey and a feeling of hypocrisy had reduced their church going. Women were more self-aware in this regard and the youngest age groups felt the tension between lifestyles and church attendance more acutely than older cohorts.

Compared to the work of Francis and Richter (2007) and Voas and Crockett (2005), three things emerge from the findings. First a sense of disinstitutionalised faith is very strong among nominal Irish Anglicans. Although they sense a belonging to the Church of Ireland, eight out of ten of them hold that it is not necessary to attend church to be a Christian. Commentators such as Wuthnow (1994, p. 255) believe that religion can continue to be practised in an era of secularisation but is done so outside of the traditional institutional context.

Secondly there is an inversion of the generational principle in these findings. That is, the younger generations are more likely to attend church, than their older cohorts. Three explanations may be offered for this. It could well be that because more young people completed the survey than older age groups, it exaggerated the findings in this instance. Perhaps however the time lag in cultural changes between Ireland and the rest of Europe, identified by Donnelly (2000), may not have worked through to the youngest age groups as yet. Education has also been viewed by Garvin (1998, p. 79) as key to changing attitudes and the de-traditionalisation of

Irish culture. The explicit denominational nature of Irish education retains a significant hold on the young.

There is finally, little evidence in these findings to support the view that Anglicans unlike their Catholic co-religionists in Ireland, have lost confidence in their church as an institution.

Daly (2012, p. 13) in his examination of the Church as always being in need of reform, quotes Calvin's striking remark, 'Religion exists. Religion is possible and necessary. But it is man who is the beginning, the middle and the end of religion'. This chapter has explored the human dimensions of self-awareness and relevance in relation to belief and belonging. The majority of Anglicans in Ireland like those in this study have a disinstitutionalised faith. Their faith is a matter of what Davie (2013, p. 283) describes as 'choice rather than consumption'. Their church is generally irrelevant to their lives and their lives to some extent diverge from the values and obligations of the church. Their belonging is passive, operating in what Gans (1979, p. 9) describes as 'nostalgic allegiance', not necessarily accompanied by practice in everyday life or in Sunday worship. The next chapter will focus on the human dimension of relationships within the church and how some people have found themselves 'at odds' with the church and have distanced themselves from it.

## **CHAPTER TEN**

### **NOT BELONGING**

**Introduction**

**Contours of Not Belonging**

**Social Exclusion**

**Personal Marginalisation**

**Personal Visibility**

**Tensions**

**Gender**

**Age**

**Occupational Status**

**Church Attendance**

**Religious Inheritance**

**Conclusion**

## **Chapter 10: Not Belonging**

### **Introduction**

From the very beginning of the church, its life has been characterised by belonging ‘they devoted themselves...to the fellowship’ (Acts 2:42). Fellowship is the well-known Greek word *koinonia* which expresses the common belonging, *koinos*, of Christian living, that is shared as believers. Religion then as now, is a social pursuit, people belonging together. According to May (2011, p. 368), belonging is defined as a sense of ease with oneself and one’s surroundings. The aim of this chapter is to examine the extent to which nominal Irish Anglicans explain their distance from the church, of not belonging and in particular being at odds with the local parish church. In the first place the chapter will explore the contours of not belonging to the church. Secondly the chapter will go on to consider the response to seven questions in the area of being at odds with the church. These were drawn from the earlier work of Francis and Richter (2007). Thirdly the chapter will provide an analysis of not belonging according to the five specific variables: Gender, Age, Occupational Status, Church Attendance and Religious Inheritance. Finally the chapter will conclude by drawing the analysis together, to broaden an understanding as to why people say they belong but rarely relate to the church in terms of attendance.

### **Contours of Not Belonging**

Francis and Richter (2007, p. 170) draw attention to an early study in the field of church-leaving by Hartman (1976). Hartman discovered that one of the most frequently given reasons why people dropped out of church was that they ‘felt that

they did not belong and that others in the church...did not demonstrate any real love and concern for them’.

Voas and Crockett (2005, p. 13) are of the view that ‘belonging and believing’ are terms not to be interpreted too rigidly. They capture a mood and suggest a way of looking at things, perception is all-important. When it comes to distancing oneself from church it is according to Richter and Francis (1998, p. 121), ‘frequently related to the perception that relationships within the church are no longer close and supportive – indeed they may be disturbingly conflictual’. Richter and Francis (1998) cite a number of studies largely from the United States to demonstrate the importance of the relationship factor in the church which breaks belonging: Hartman (1976), Hoge (1981) and Savage (1976). Belonging usually precedes believing for new recruits to church. Those seeking to enter church life in Dudley’s (1979, p. 78) view, ‘consciously relate church membership with programme participation and religious values. When they leave however, they are more likely to blame a breakdown in personal relationships’. Indeed Dudley concluded in his study *Where Have All Our People Gone? New Choices for old Churches*, unless those joining a church receive recognition, esteem and a sense of belonging, they may feel let down and will tend to drop out.

When it comes to Ireland, MacGreil (2009, pp. 155-156) in his extensive study of Irish Catholics did not locate this relational factor at work among Catholics who had reduced their church going. On the contrary he concluded that factors such as indifference, work and illness, were the three chief reasons why Catholics reduced their church attendance. In contrast to Catholicism, Protestantism places great emphasis on the relational dimensions of faith: relating to God and relating to one another in the community of faith. To elicit the response of nominal Irish Anglicans

to the role that belonging plays in church attendance, seven questions were asked of respondents. These were drawn from the earlier work of Francis and Richter (2007, pp. 170-175), using their themes of: social exclusion, personal marginalisation, personal visibility, tensions and conflicts. An overview of the findings can be found in Table 10:1.

### **Social Exclusion**

This first theme focused on the perception that people do not feel part of the church; they do not fit in. Their exclusion may be as a result of either deliberate or accidental attitudes or actions, by those attending church. It may also be that some people find it hard to break into the heart of church life, to be active participants rather than passive spectators. Again some simply tire of trying to belong; it is not worth the effort, it is a chore.

The first question asked tested the belonging principle, 'I did not feel part of the church'. Almost half of the nominal Irish Anglicans asked agreed that they did not feel part of the church. This was the highest response from the seven questions. It compared well with the same question asked by Richter and Francis (1998, p. 134) and Francis and Richter (2007, p. 323) which was in the range of 58% and 45% respectively. The second question asked probed the participation issue, 'I was not allowed to play an active part in the church'. Only 12% of those asked agreed with this statement which was the lowest response among the seven questions. Likewise Francis and Richter (2007, p. 323) found an even lower response of 6% to the same question in their study. Eight out of ten Irish Anglicans disagreed with the statement which would suggest that participation in the church was not the problem but that the majority of those questioned did not seek active participation. The third question in

this set 'My participation in church had become a chore' found a higher response of 44% which again was in line with the findings of Richter and Francis (1998, p. 100), 31% to 51% and Francis and Richter (2007, p. 323), 41%. The essence of nominalism is passivity and it is not surprising therefore that these findings elicit what Voas and Crockett (2005, p. 15) describe as a rather 'passive kind of religious self' which contrasts with a 'very active form of belonging' where people attend church on a regular basis.

### **Personal Marginalisation**

The second theme highlighted the sense of personal marginalisation where individuals felt that they were not at the centre of church life. The fourth question asked: 'I felt powerless to bring about change within the church', probed this sense of personal marginalisation. Just under a third of those questioned agreed with this statement which is about mid-way in the responses to the seven questions asked. In comparison, Francis and Richter (2007, p. 324) found a lower response of 25% for the same question. Writing about the Irish context that has changed almost completely in the past half century, Littleton (2006, p. 27) observes that 'in an enquiring age, all authority figures and institutions are questioned and that the majority of people refuse to accept uncritically whatever is being promoted by others'. A significant body of Irish Christians want to see changes in their church but many, in this case nearly a third of nominal Irish Anglicans, feel powerless to make change and have as a result, walked away.

### **Personal Visibility**

The third theme focused on issues relating to personal visibility. Two statements were posed to respondents for their consideration: 'I felt there were not

enough people in the congregation' and 'There were not enough people of my age'. Francis and Richter (2007, p. 174) suggest that in small congregations people feel isolated and exposed. In their view it is not possible to retain invisibility in a small group. Moreover with the 'greying' of church congregations, younger people in particular can feel uncomfortable; there is no-one of their age who attends church. With regard to the first of these statements, 17% of the respondents agreed with the sentiment that the congregation was too small for their comfort. This was the sixth ranked of the seven questions posed in this analysis. The corresponding figure of 15% was obtained by Francis and Richter (2007, p. 323). The majority of Church of Ireland churches are rural and many of them are modest in size. Although there is clearly an over-provision of churches, it does not appear that Gill's (1993, p. 105) premise, 'too many churches inevitably means emptier churches; empty churches themselves may act as agents of overall decline in church-going', is as pertinent in the Irish context.

What of the age issue? Around a third of those questioned agreed with the statement: 'There were not enough people of my age'. This was more than the 22% response to the same question asked by Francis and Richter (2007, p. 323). Indeed the finding on the age issue resemble those relating to the role of friends in church attendance, cited in Chapter 7 of this study. When questioned about the influence of friends in non-church attendance, just under a third attributed their non-attendance to the fact that most of their friends did not attend church as seen in Table 7:1.

## **Tensions**

The final question in this section of the analysis focused on the experience of tensions in the relationships within the church. Just under two out of ten of those

questioned agreed that ‘relationships within the church had become soured’, whereas two-thirds of those questioned disagreed with the statement. Francis and Richter (2007, p. 323) found that 6% of their respondents agreed that ‘relationships within the church had become soured’. The Irish findings are intriguing. Are the Irish a more relational people? Are they more sensitive when relations are soured? The answer to such questions lie outside the orbit of this study but Irish priest, Donal Harrington (1999, p. 58), addressing the issue of ‘inactive’ Catholics, touched on the role of tensions within the church. ‘People see the parish as going about its own programme in a way that does not relate to them. It is not a community where relationships matter’.

It is no less an issue in the smaller Church of Ireland as Bishop Harold Miller (1999, pp. 33-34):

If there was one thing I could change about the Church of Ireland, it is that we would see the church as community rather than institution. One of the difficulties in moving from an institutional model of church to a community model, is that the latter is more demanding and therefore more threatening.

Perhaps the relational demands of church and the tensions that go with that, are such that some on the nominal fringe recognise and therefore distance themselves from involvement.

## **Gender**

To a large extent the issues related to not belonging functioned at similar levels among men and women as can be seen on Table 10:2. Only one of the seven variables in this section, however, recorded a statistically significant difference between the responses of men and women. Women tend to be more conscious of the absence of peers in a congregation than men; 41% of women agreed with the

assertion as opposed to 25% of men. Women were also, to some extent, more conscious than men of the souring of relationships within a congregation. On the other hand, the scores for men in this section were lower than the scores for women for four of the variables: not enough peers, not enough people, not allowed to participate and powerless to change. This might reveal some clue concerning the ways in which the experience of church life differs for men and women. The findings here are broadly in line with those recorded by Francis and Richter (2007, p. 178).

### **Age**

Voas and Crockett (2005, pp. 15-17) contend that each age cohort is less religious than the last and that people become more religious with age. What evidence is there to suggest this in terms of belonging or not belonging, in response to the questions posed in this section? The answer is mixed as can be seen on Table 10:3. In two of the seven items in this section, the scores recorded for the oldest age group were significantly higher than those for the youngest age group. Thus half of the over 60s agreed that they did not feel part of the church, compared to four out of ten for the under 25s. Soured church relationships were signalled by 30% of the oldest age group as influencing their belonging, compared to about half of that for the youngest age group.

In two of the other variables in this section, the scores recorded for the youngest age group were significantly higher than those for the oldest age group. Nearly half of the under 25s agreed that there were not enough people of their age in church, compared to 8% of those aged 61+. Francis and Richter (2007, p. 178) recognised 'it is the younger church-goers who are most likely to feel that they stand

out in the church congregation as too visible and as too different'. Again 15% of the youngest age group felt they were debarred from taking an active part in the church, compared to 6% of those aged 61 and over. Three of the other variables: the chore of church participation, not enough people in the congregation and the powerlessness to effect change, functioned at similar levels across all four generational groups. The most conspicuous variable of the three, the chore of church participation, found high levels of resonance across all the generational groups.

### **Occupational Status**

As far as social exclusion is concerned the professional classes felt the most excluded of the occupational categories. From Table 10:4, it can be seen that three out of five professionals felt that they did not feel part of church. A quarter of the manual workers felt excluded in that they were not allowed to play an active role. There were only minimal differences between the occupational categories when it came to regarding church participation as a chore, which was between 38% and 47% across the board. Manual workers were more inclined to be marginalised when it came to a sense of their powerlessness to effect change in the church. Nearly four out of ten manual workers felt this way, compared with just a quarter of students.

Students were the most likely to feel that they stood out in church congregations as too visible, much in the same way as the youngest groups in the age category as outlined in Table 10:3. Half of the manual workers questioned were also conscious of the visibility issue; there were not enough people of their own age attending church. The professional class was least influenced by the smallness of congregations, compared to the size of the building. Four out of ten manual workers agreed that the visibility issue, that there were not enough people in the

congregations, adversely influenced their church attendance. Finally it was the manual workers who stood out again from the other two categories when it came to tensions in the church. Only 5% of manual workers, the lowest score in the entire set, agreed that soured relationships in the church had an influence on their attendance.

### **Church Attendance**

When asked about issues concerning social exclusion which lessen church attendance, those who never attend church had much higher scores in two questions than the other categories, as can be seen in Table 10:5. Two-thirds of those who never attend church agreed with the statement, 'I did not feel part of the church'. Three-quarters of the same category regarded church involvement as a chore. Only 7% of those who never attend church felt that they were excluded from taking an active part in church. Interestingly somewhere between half and three-quarters of the three attendance categories, considered church involvement as a chore. Voas and Crockett's (2005, p. 13) premise, 'put simply, increasingly numbers of people believe belonging doesn't matter', is pertinent in these findings.

About three out of ten of each attendance category felt a sense of powerlessness when it came to change in the church. Those who never attend church barely took notice (7%) of the small size of the congregation; whereas nearly half of the occasional church attenders were conscious that there were not enough people of their own age in the congregation. The impact of soured relations within the church was marginally more important to those who only attended church once a year. Almost a quarter of the Christmas or Easter types agreed that broken relationships in the church, impacted their church attendance.

## **Religious Inheritance**

The findings with regard to the propensity to inherit faith or spiritual disposition can be seen in Table 10:6. A pattern is apparent in four indicators. Those with an important religious heritage have higher scores in the region of 9% to 11%, than those with an unimportant religious inheritance. This is the case in two indicators concerned with social exclusion: not allowed to be active in church and church-going is a chore. It is also evident in two indicators with respect to visibility: not enough people in church and not enough people of my own age in church. Those with an unimportant religious inheritance, who presumably attended church infrequently, may not have been seeking an active role in church, nor been taken by the smallness of the congregation. Yet over half of those with an inconsequential religious background were clear that they did not fit into church, they did not belong. Ruiter and Van Tubergan (2009, p. 888) make the connection that a strong religious inheritance provides a strong barrier to a decline in religiosity and vice versa. Something of this dynamic seems to lie behind the findings in this regard.

## **Conclusion**

Being part of a church is to belong. It is an expression of a powerful and pervasive human emotion. Belonging, according to May (2011, p. 368), has both an emotional component: 'feeling at home' and a political element of clan-making for space and recognition. The sense of 'feeling at home' and the drive for space and recognition can be fractured with a breakdown in relations in a church context. There is ample evidence in the literature Hartman (1976), Hoge (1981) and Richter and Francis (1998) which links church-leaving to a breakdown of relationships in church.

This chapter has sought to explore to what extent nominal Irish Anglicans explain their distance from church, due to relational issues.

Belonging is about identity and those questioned in this chapter have retained their Church of Ireland identity but what they have in common with regular church attenders has been stretched. Up to half of those questioned admitted that they did not feel part of church and that church participation was a chore, not worth pursuing. A feeling of social exclusion was very much in evidence. Moreover around a third of respondents identified that they felt powerless to change the church, they felt marginalised on the edge of church life. In the same way, a similar proportion of respondents were affected by visibility concerns; there were not enough people of their own age at worship. In most respects, issues relating to belonging, functioned at similar levels among women and among men. The same was the case among the three occupational categories.

On the other hand, there were nuanced differences relating to belonging according to age. The generational gap was inverted; the older age group felt more excluded and more aware of the impact of tensions in the church, than the young. For the young, the absence of peers in worship was the primary influence in their not belonging. Church attendance too, had a bearing on the findings. Those who rarely or if ever attended church, were more likely to identify social exclusion and soured relationships as mitigating factors in their distance from church. The connection between a religious inheritance and the responses to not belonging was also evident in the data.

The evidence from these data confirms that half of those questioned found it hard to fit in to their local parish church. Despite this, the identification of nominal

Irish Anglicans with their church persists, even if observance is no longer frequent or at all which is apparently paradoxical. What lies behind this paradox? For Jeanron (2010, p. 274), in Protestant thinking the sacred usually comes to people in 'thoroughly human values'. Identity according to May (2011, p. 369), is about 'belonging, about what you have in common with some people'. Voas and Crockett (2005) argue that the essence of nominalism is passivity. Therefore it is one thing to belong to the Church of Ireland in an abstract sense; this is quite different to belonging in the context of a local church. It is also not surprising that some people struggle to fit into the local church as Francis, Robbins, Williams and Williams (2007) have demonstrated. The next chapter will move beyond a sense of not belonging to a disillusionment with the church.

## **CHAPTER ELEVEN**

### **DISILLUSIONMENT**

**Introduction**

**Fragmented Vision**

**The Local Church**

**Issues on a Wider Canvas**

**Gender**

**Age**

**Occupational Status**

**Church Attendance**

**Religious Inheritance**

**Conclusion**

## Chapter 11: Disillusionment

### Introduction

In addressing the issue of ecclesial belonging, Berger (1993, p. 169) poses a series of questions. ‘Does one have to belong to a church at all? Must faith express itself in a community?’. In his view, the answer to these questions can be framed sociologically or theologically. From a sociological perspective, Berger argues a clear affirmative; belief and belonging are expressed in community. Again from a sociological perspective, Francis and Richter (2007, p. 198)) suggest that church communities function on a number of levels in ways very similar to other voluntary organisations. They draw attention to the work of Thomas and Finch (1990) on volunteering. Accordingly, their analysis (Francis & Richter, 2007, p. 198) suggested that one of the key reasons why people leave such voluntary bodies is because they become disillusioned with the organisation. If this is the case, Francis and Richter (2007, p. 198) contend that disillusionment may be more significant among those who distance themselves from church, where idealism and expectations are often assumed to be central to the Gospel.

The aim of this chapter therefore is to examine the extent to which nominal Irish Anglicans explain their distance from church in terms of disillusionment with the church. The chapter begins with an analysis of seven questions asked of respondents based on three themes: fragmented vision, the local church and issues on a wider canvas. These questions were drawn from a bank of questions asked by Francis and Richter (2007) in their work *Gone for Good? Church-leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. The findings to the seven questions may be found on Table 11:1. Furthermore the chapter will proceed to analyse the responses under the

headings: Gender, Age, Occupational Status, Church Attendance and Religious Inheritance, before drawing things together in the conclusion.

### **Fragmented Vision**

Gibbs and Coffey (2005, p. 226) claim that the church began as a movement driven by a vision:

It consisted of small groups of people who believed that Jesus was the Son of God and who committed themselves totally and unreservedly to him as Lord and Saviour. These groups replicated themselves throughout the Mediterranean world and beyond. They had no buildings. Their leaders were, for the most part, local people whom the apostles appointed and empowered. The movement had no social prestige or influential patrons. It operated from the margins and succeeded in infiltrating every level of society and department of life.

By comparison the contemporary church has a fragmented vision; which Francis and Richter (2007, p. 199) define as the ‘discontinuity between the ideal and the reality in the life of the church’.

The first assertion asked of respondents: ‘I was disillusioned by the church’s failure to live up to its ideals’ was similar to that posed by Francis and Richter (2007, p. 325). Almost a quarter of the Irish respondents agreed with the assertion. In comparison just over three out of ten of Francis and Richter’s (2007, p. 325) sample identified the same reason as contributing to their church-leaving. The second assertion tested in this series on vision, ‘The church lacked a sense of purpose and vision’, was again asked in Francis and Richter’s (2007) analysis in *Gone for Good? Church-leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. A third of the nominal Irish Anglicans asked, agreed with the statement which was the highest score in this series of questions and higher than Francis and Richter’s (2007, p. 325) finding; a quarter of their respondents felt that the church lacked a sense of purpose and vision. From

these data it is clear that disillusionment with the church as it is, as opposed to what it should be, has traction among the nominal Irish Anglicans surveyed in this study. Croft (2002, p. 33) highlights the importance of vision for the well-being of the church. He asserts that where there is no coherent vision among other things there will be ‘conflicts of expectation and direction and little momentum for change’.

### **The Local Church**

The Irish, O’Toole (2010, p. 48) observes, have a very strong sense of local belonging; it is each single enclosed locality that matters. Localism is played out in Ireland in any number of arenas: political, social, sporting and ecclesial. For the Church of Ireland (Church of Ireland, 1979b) a national system of parish churches and resident clergy is critical to its identity and mission. Attempts were made by central church bodies, for example the Sparsely Populated Areas Committees (S.P.A.C.) set up in 1956 and the Commission on Church Buildings established in 1986, to reduce the number of churches in use. Despite this, the number of church buildings open for worship is considerable given the population. In 2000, there were approximately 650 Anglican churches still open for worship in the Republic of Ireland (Hutchinson 2003, p. vii). In Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh Dioceses (Dioceses of Kilmore, Elphin & Ardagh, 2010) for example, 110 churches were open for worship in 2010, to serve a worshipping population of 4,000.

It could be said that the Commission on Church Buildings floundered on the rocks of localism. Two dioceses, Meath & Kildare and Cork, Cloyne & Ross invited the Commission to undertake the task to reduce the number of church in use. As a result, the number of churches open for worship in the two dioceses concerned fell by 33% and 21% respectively in the years after 1986 (Church of Ireland, 1990). The

‘from above’ approach of the Commission and the problems implementing the decisions it made locally in both dioceses, meant that other dioceses did not seek this particular route in dealing with the over-provision of church buildings. The Commission itself was wound up by the General Synod in 2008 (Church of Ireland, 2008).

Localism may have prevailed in the Church of Ireland over against the central organs of the church in dealing with the over-provision of churches but at what cost? The following assertions sought to ascertain the disillusionment of nominal Irish Anglicans in the quest to keep churches open and to find clergy to minister in them.

The first statement in this set on the local church: ‘I have reduced my church-going because the church was too much preoccupied with maintaining buildings’, resembled that asked by Francis and Richter (2007, p. 325). One quarter of those questioned agreed with the assertion, higher than the 17% score obtained in *Gone for Good? Church-leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. The self-reliance principle identified by Acheson (1997, p. 213) whereby Church of Ireland parishes are chiefly responsible for paying clerical stipends and maintaining parochial buildings, rather than the diocese or central church, seems to lie behind this high response. This coupled with an over-abundance of church buildings, as a result of local demands, means the self-reliance principle is locked into a maintenance mind-set, particularly with maintaining church buildings. Addressing the Diocesan Synod for the Dioceses of Tuam, Killala and Achonry in the west of Ireland in 2004, Bishop Henderson (2004) acknowledged the dilemma of maintenance: ‘I know in the West, we have too many churches but don’t underestimate the importance of buildings, they have unspoken value, they are a presence in the midst of the community’.

Following on from the issue of maintenance of buildings, the second statement asked in this set of questions deals with money. Taken from Francis and Richter's (2007) work nearly one in three of those questioned agreed that they had reduced their church-going because the church was too pre-occupied with money. In 2012, it costs somewhere in the region of €58,000 for a benefice to support a stipendiary minister or €185 per parishioner of a benefice (Dioceses of Kilmore, Elphin & Ardagh, 2012). The self-reliance principle, whereby parishes are responsible for running and capital costs places a strong emphasis on raising money; not surprisingly people can tire of the monetary demands placed on them and levels of disillusionment are significant in this instance. By way of comparison, Francis and Richter's (2007, p. 325) finding was 31% for a similar question on the church's materialism.

The last question in this set pertaining to the local church, raised the issue of factionalism. A quarter of those asked agreed with the statement, 'I was disillusioned by local factions within the church', the third highest score in this series of questions. In comparison, 21% of those questioned by Francis and Richter (2007) agreed with the same statement. The context in which the Church of Ireland ministers in Northern Ireland, has been described as 'tribal' (Macourt, 2008, p. 127). Church of Ireland leaders in the Republic of Ireland have used the same emotive term to describe attitudes in the Southern church towards those who are 'not one of us'. The Archbishop of Dublin and Glendalough, John Neill (2005), aware of factionalism in the church, set up a working group whose report *Welcoming Angels* was received at the Dublin and Glendalough Diocesan Synod in 2005. Eight years later in his presidential address to the Dublin and Glendalough Diocesan Synod in 2013, Archbishop Michael Jackson (2013) observed 'the problems acknowledged by

*Welcoming Angels* appear to persist'. He attributed factionalism, 'to the resistance in parishes of small groups of influential lay people who are against and fearful of change and the challenge to their comfort zones'.

### **Issues on a Wider Canvas**

The first of these issues to be asked of respondents concerned mixed or inter-church marriages. For much of the twentieth century, the Catholic Church's policy in Ireland in relation to such marriages was defined by the 1908 *Ne Temere* Decree; although this stipulation was subsequently loosened with the *Mixa Matrimonia* Decree of 1970 (Mitchell, 2006, p.16). For Fuller (2004, p. 17), it was this area of mixed marriages which caused uneasiness in relations between Protestants and Catholics in the Republic of Ireland. Under the terms enforced by the *Code of Canon Law*, the Catholic Church made demands of each party in a mixed marriage. They included: that the wedding ceremony was to be regarded as a second-class affair, that there was an obligation on the Catholic partner for the conversion of the non-Catholic partner and that a written guarantee was required from both parties that all children born in the marriage be baptised and raised as Catholics.

According to Macourt (2008, p. 96), the social and cultural position of the Church of Ireland as a small minority was such that there was no opposition to the *Ne Temere* Decree. Instead, officially, the Church of Ireland, like its Catholic counterpart, frowned on mixed marriages. On the ground, the stringent implementation of the Decree caused much anguish. O'Leary (2001, pp. 647-665) has pointed out that the *Ne Temere* Decree had a significant impact on Protestant numbers, Protestant morale and on Protestant / Catholic relations up until the 1970s. With this background in mind, the sixth assertion asked in this series tested the

sensitivities surrounding the subject, ‘I was disillusioned by the church’s attitude to mixed marriage’. This question was not asked by Francis and Richter (2007) in their research. Nearly a quarter of the nominal Irish Anglicans agreed with the statement.

The final question to be asked testing the disillusionment among nominal Irish Anglicans towards the church involved sectarianism. In many minds, in the Republic of Ireland, sectarianism was a Northern issue, brought into sharp relief from 1996 onwards, by the Drumcree stand-off (McKinley, 2007, p. 131). The Hard Gospel initiative of the General Synod 2006 – 2008, although having its roots as a result of Drumcree, sought to help the whole of the Church of Ireland to deal positively with difference: ‘the Hard Gospel project is no longer a “Drumcree Response Unit” but instead a movement to re-ignite the core principles of loving God and loving our neighbour in every corner of the Church of Ireland’ (McKinley, 2007, p. 130-132). For McKinley, ‘where the issue of Southern sectarianism is still most relevant is in the lingering lack of Southern Protestant social, civic and political participation,’ which he attributes to ‘a lack of political loyalty, denominational education and church-orientated activities. When asked to respond to the statement, ‘I was disillusioned by church-goers’ sectarianism’, almost a third agreed that sectarianism distanced their participation in church; the second highest ranked score in the series.

## **Gender**

By and large disillusionment with the church played a very similar role in the distancing of both men and women from the church, across all three themes explored in this section. The details of the findings can be seen on Table 11:2. The only two items in this section that received a statistically significant level in response between

men and women, concerned that of vision. While 28% of women were disillusioned by the church's lack of a sense of purpose and vision, the proportion rose to 40% among the men. Also women were more inclined than men to identify the issue of mixed marriages as a source of disillusionment, 27% compared to 21%.

## **Age**

When it comes to age, there were significant differences between the youngest age group (the under - 25s) and the oldest group (61 or over) across the three themes explored in this section, with the exception being the response to mixed marriages. According to the findings in Table 11:3, it was the oldest group of respondents, rather than the young, who were more disillusioned by the lack of idealism: 37% compared to 13%. The oldest group, rather than the youngest, was taken by the absence of direction and vision, 46% compared to 26%. Mason (2010, p. 57) in his analysis on the spirituality of young Australians, concluded that young people hold no 'overarching vision, whether religious or secular, inspiring them and shaping their lives'. This may help in understanding the low response of the youngest age group to the questions on fragmented vision.

Again the two oldest age groups: the Builders and Boomers Generations, had significantly higher responses in their disillusionment with the local church. In terms of money, 39% of those who were 61 and over and 40% of those aged between 46 and 60, were disillusioned with the church's preoccupation with money. With regard to factionalism, 36% of Builders and 31% of Boomers have distanced themselves from church attendance, compared to 14% of the youngest age cohort, Generation Y. There is little surprise in these findings given that it is the older age groups who bear the burden of time and financial contributions to the local church rather than the

young. The passing of time has exposed older generations to the corrosive impact of factions in the local church.

The response of the sample towards mixed marriages is intriguing with a very similar return across the age groups. This probably reflects not only the historic impact of this issue but the on-going sensitivities which transmit even to the youngest age group. As far as sectarianism is concerned, the Boomers made a significantly higher response, 42%, than all the four age groups. Hickey (2012, p. 97) holds with Honohan (2005) that it will require the major stakeholders in Irish life and in particular young citizens to ‘develop a deeper understanding about the ways in which their own interests are profoundly bound up in the interests of their fellow citizens’. This would likely counter the wretched clientelism, factionalism and sectarianism that bedevil Ireland.

### **Occupational Status**

In a number of ways issues with disillusionment carried different weights among all three occupational groups, as can be seen in Table 11:4. By and large the student group underscored in five of the items compared to the overall scores under question as outlined in Table 11:1. This was particularly the case for idealism, 16% compared to 24%, and factionalism, 14% compared to 25%. The tendency to underscore in comparison to the overall scores was also evident among the youngest age cohort, the under 25s as demonstrated in Table 11:3. This roughly corresponds to the student group.

The professionals on the other hand were broadly in line with the overall scores as can be seen on Table 11:1. There were two exceptions to this. First, 40% of professionals agreed that factionalism within the local church adversely influenced

their church-going. Secondly, 43% of professionals identified sectarianism as a source of disengagement from church attendance. Manual workers on the other hand, underscored across the items with exception to the issues of maintenance and factionalism.

### **Church Attendance**

When asked about disillusionment, those who never attend church had consistently higher scores than the overall sample as can be seen in Tables 11:1 and 11:5. Those who were occasional church-goers had generally lower scores than non-church-goers and the overall sample as can be seen in Table 11:1. The difference between the scores for the overall sample was most evident among non-church attenders with regard to a fragmented vision: some 39% for the church failing to live up to its ideals and 47% for an absence of vision and clear direction on behalf of the church. Again those who never attend church overscored by 10% from the norm in the area of mixed marriages. Clearly those who never attend church resonate firmly with the reasons for absenting from church as outlined in this section. In contrast, those who fitfully attend church, once a year types, were much less influenced by the disillusionment issues raised in this part of the study.

### **Religious Inheritance**

The findings with regard to religious inheritance in relation to disillusionment outlined in this section were mixed as can be seen on Table 11:6. Those for whom a religious upbringing in childhood was unimportant had higher scores in four items; most notably in the lack of vision issue. Half of those questioned attributed their disillusionment with the church because it lacked a sense of purpose and vision. They also had a much lower score, 16%, when it came to the

issue of factionalism in the local church. On the other hand, those for whom a religious upbringing in childhood was important, had scores which were broadly in keeping with the overall findings outlined in Table 11:1. This group identified a lack of vision and sectarianism as the most pertinent factors in their disillusionment with the church.

## **Conclusion**

Widespread distrust of social institutions including the church, is a feature of modern societies such as Ireland. Roof (1993, pp. 41-45) located the alienation and estrangement born of distrust to the aftermath of the Vietnam debacle in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s. This chapter has sought to examine one of the children of distrust, namely disillusionment, as expressed by nominal Irish Anglicans towards their church. From the data it is clear that these non-church-going Irish Anglicans had become disillusioned with the church in a variety of ways.

Disillusionment with the lack of purpose or vision in the church was the most significant response in this series of questions. Virtually one in three of those questioned identified a lack of purpose and vision as the chief factor in their disengagement with church. This was true for men more so than women, as it was for the older generation groups, those who never attend church and those with little or no religious inheritance. Sectarianism also raised its head in the findings which vindicates McKinley's (2007, p. 131) belief that sectarianism is not just a northern problem for the Church of Ireland. Lodge and Dunne (2010) in their work *Crossing the Boundary* illustrate how difficult it is for outsiders to be embraced into the Church of Ireland fold. The professional classes alongside Generation X, the

Boomers and Builders were particularly aware of the role of sectarianism in their distancing from church.

Interestingly the local church did not stand in the front line as far as disillusionment was concerned. Francis and Richter (2007, p. 204) found otherwise. The preoccupation with money was the chief source of criticism in the Irish findings, especially among the two oldest age groups, the load bearers in church-giving. Not unexpectedly the youngest were least impacted with the church's preoccupation with money and maintenance. They too had little concern with factionalism in contrast with the professionals, who were the most conscious of factions within the local church.

The response to the issue of mixed marriages was one of the lowest in this series of questions. This may well be as a result of the less stringent application of Catholic canon law in recent decades or the choice of marriage partners to disregard church teaching on the matter. Only those who never attend church or who had an unimportant religious upbringing in childhood, were more influenced by the mixed marriage issue in their response.

Given the context, the findings in this chapter are revealing. In a matter of decades the attitude of many Catholics in Ireland towards their church went from deference to disgust. O'Toole (2012, pp. 42-43) attributes the transformation to:

The extraordinary work of a single journalist, Mary Rafferty, of the sheer horror of physical and sexual abuse of children by priests, nuns and religious orders, and the breath-taking cynicism of bishops in covering it up, that transformed the gradual erosion of a system of power into a catastrophic implosion.

Disillusionment is a much weaker emotion than disgust. The disillusionment of nominal Irish Anglicans measured in this chapter is moderate in nature, calibrated

between 24% and 33% on Table 11:1. Their criticisms of the church are couched in realism: ideals which are rarely met, money matters, factions which are part of living and the sting being taken out of mixed marriages. Disillusionment does not appear to be responsible for their distance from the life of the local church which is insightful given the central research question. It is one thing being disillusioned by the church, it is altogether a different thing to be let down by the church, which is the subject of the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER TWELVE**

### **BEING LET DOWN BY THE CHURCH**

**Introduction**

**A Lack of Care and Support**

**Worship**

**Gender**

**Age**

**Occupational Status**

**Church Attendance**

**Religious Inheritance**

**Conclusion**

## Chapter 12: Being Let Down by Church

### Introduction

The Archdeacon of Limerick, Brian Snow (1984, p. 10), made this keen observation about the church in the mid-1980s: ‘Around the country the Church of Ireland has been sustained by the loyal support of people, who Sunday by Sunday come to church, to the House of God, to worship Him’. Snow was writing at a time of liturgical upheaval in the Church of Ireland as the Alternative Prayer Book, the Irish equivalent of the Alternative Service Book, was introduced with mixed reaction. There was a deep sense that people nourished for generations on the Book of Common Prayer, felt let down by the Church. The aim of the present chapter therefore, is to consider to what extent disappointment, being let down by the church, is responsible for the lack of practice among nominal Irish Anglicans. Two themes are traversed in the exploration: first, the lack of care and support that people experience from the Church and clergy; second, the disappointment expressed by people when it comes to worship. These twin themes will be analysed through the lens of: Gender, Age, Occupational Status, Church Attendance and Religious Inheritance, after which conclusions will be drawn and the ground prepared for the next chapter.

### A Lack of Care and Support

The Church of Ireland is a pastoral church with a particular view on ministry, expressed in a watershed report, *Directions: Theology in a Changing Church* published in 1970 (Greer, 1970, p. 153). The report was the first to provide a theological reflection on the ministry of the Church of Ireland. When asked about the need for a full-time ministry, there was an almost universal acceptance for the

traditional mode of ministry by most respondents, lay and clerical. Despite the innovation of non-stipendiary ministers in the 1980s, the Committee on the Ordained Ministry (Church of Ireland, 1994), established by the Standing Committee of the General Synod concluded, ‘the best interests of the Church of Ireland are served by the provision of full-time stipendiary ministers, resident in as many parishes as possible throughout Ireland’. In the view of the Commission on Ministry, ‘the ministry of the prebyterite is likely to continue to be borne by the parochial clergy where, with the people, they make manifest the local Christian family. Thus by their very calling, priests are essentially pastors’ (Report of the Commission on Ministry, 1981, p. 19).

Despite the numerous recommendations and suggestions from successive committees and Commissions on Ministry over the years since the mid-sixties, little has changed. The parochial model of a full-time ordained minister in charge of a variable number of parishes, remains dominant. The inbuilt conservatism of a small church, the instinct for survival and persistent maintenance mind-set means that pastoral care and support is primarily a clerical concern. Ministerial foundation for the bulk of serving clergy takes place in the Church of Ireland Theological Institute (Church of Ireland Theological Institute, 2013, p. 3) which identifies ‘Pastoral Care’ as one of the key ministerial characteristics it seeks to develop.

The first question asked in this set focussed on the way in which the Church was perceived as showing a lack of care when people needed it. Some 26% of those questioned agreed that the Church was not caring or supportive enough, as can be seen on Table 12:1. Interestingly, the score dropped to 20% of respondents who felt that the clergy did not provide sufficient care for them. The distinction between the church and the clergy is intriguing. Both of these questions were asked by Francis

and Richter (2007, p. 326) in *Gone for Good? Church-leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. They found that 20% of their church-leavers blamed the church for not being supportive and 16% located the lack of care squarely on the clergy. The Church of Ireland places high value on its pastoral care. It is somewhat disquieting that one in four of nominal Irish Anglicans find it otherwise, the second highest ranked score in the chapter.

Facing up to disturbing truths has according to Francis (2012, p. 53), been the lot of the Catholic Church in Ireland in this past two decades. Ganiel (2012, p. 18) reported that a 2012 survey of Irish Catholic priests revealed that 65% of them believed that the reputations of all priests had been damaged by the various abuse scandals. Words such as: ‘appalling’, ‘criminal’, ‘sickening’ and ‘troubling’ were recorded by Hayes (2010, p. 49) in his investigation on clerical abuse in Ireland. The litany of clerical abuse scandals has resulted in a significant alteration in the relationship between people and clergy in the Irish Catholic Church.

With this backdrop in mind, the third question asked in this set probed, ‘I reduced my church-going because the church’s pastoral care was abusive to me. The response of 7% was not only the lowest in the series of questions asked in this chapter but also in the entire battery of questions in the whole study. It compared to a very low score of 1% obtained by Francis and Richer (2007, p. 326) in their work. The higher Irish score may reflect the sensitivities on the abuse of clerical power in Ireland and the more specifically sexual question posed by Francis and Richter (2007).

To a large extent, the clergy-person can be thought of the personification of the local church. ‘Many’, the report of the Commission on Ministry (Report of the

Commission on Ministry, 1981, p. 17) noted, 'have perhaps come to think of the parish and particularly the rector as primary' in manifesting the church on the ground. The final question in the set focused on the change of clergyman in the local church setting. When asked, 15% of the sample agreed that, 'I found it hard to adjust to a new clergyperson.' This was a slightly higher response to that obtained by Francis and Richter (2007, p. 328) of 10% in their findings. The clergy-person is the main focus for the church's pastoral care. He or she is also the chief leader of liturgy and has the final say on the content and style of worship in the parish. The arrival of a new minister can bring with it the problem of change and adjustment on behalf of the parishioners in a parish or group of parishes.

### **Worship**

Worship is a door open to heaven. 'We lift up our hearts to listen to what God is saying, join the angels... we are there and he is here' (Church of England, 1995). Nominal Irish Anglicans by their very nature, have withdrawn from public worship to a large extent. The next set of questions posed in the sample sought to unearth some of the reasons for this and the findings are outlined in Table 12:1. The first of these questions focused on matters of style: 'I disliked the church's style of worship'. Some 27% of respondents agreed with the assertion, the highest ranked score in the chapter. In comparison, Francis and Richter (2007, p. 329) found that 21% of their church-leavers, also were of the same mind, when it came to disliking the style of worship.

In their analysis of church-leavers, Francis and Richter (2007, p. 253) discovered that some of their respondents found worship to be too mechanical. 'Some felt that there was too little sense of the presence of God in worship'. Public

worship is dying, Graham (1980, p.31) perceived but not because it has been replaced by something better. He judged:

Where else do folk get a chance to gather and ask what it is all about, to hear the greatest of all story-answers, to be judged honestly and forgiven fully, to remember the needs of others, to give without counting the cost, to listen to the heartbeat of goodness, to see the signs of God's living presence in the world that God loves?

Almost a quarter of the nominal Irish Anglicans asked agreed with the statement, 'I felt that there was too little sense of the presence of God in worship', which corresponded to Francis and Richter's (2007, p. 329) findings.

When it comes to worship, there is a good reason to describe the Church of Ireland as a liturgical church. According to Miller (2013, p. 88) it is liturgical in a number of ways. Primarily the roots of the church are in the Book of Common Prayer and until relatively recently that meant that nearly every word used in worship was read directly from the book. As in many Anglican churches, the Book of Common Prayer in the Church of Ireland, went through a series of revisions in an era of liturgical change, culminating in its present form introduced in 2004. Liturgical change brought tensions to the surface. When the Alternative Prayer Book was introduced in 1984 for example, some commentators saw it as deeply disturbing. It was not just asking people to substitute one set of words for another. 'It can be to them as if this were an attempt to take away what has been part of their being' (Snow, 1984, p. 10). Liturgical change challenged people's experience of the Church of Ireland and their loyalty to it. When asked, 'I did not like the new service book, 16% of those questioned agreed with the statement. This was broadly in line with the findings of Francis and Richter (2007, p. 328) in their analysis of church-leavers.

The last question asked in the set touched on the area of hymnody. Like liturgical change, changes in hymnody have the potential for fall-out. In reviewing the introduction of the Alternative Prayer Book from the perspective of a church organist, Davison (1984, p. 7) discerned, 'that change can be met with antipathy if not downright opposition'. For Bedlow (1983, p. 88) music is an aid to worship. In response to the introduction of the fifth edition of the Irish Church Hymnal in 2000, McCormack (2001, p. 115) detected, 'dissent voices raised in the bemoaning changes of words, harmonies and omissions'. Some 14% of respondents agreed that they did not like the new hymns, compared to 19% for the comparable question in Francis and Richter's study (2007, p. 328).

## **Gender**

Men and women questioned in this section were divided rather than united when it came to being let down by the church. In general men had higher scores than women, with one exception, concerning the care provided by clergy, as can be seen in Table 12:2. This issue was felt more keenly by women than by men. Thus 22% of women complained that the clergy did not provide sufficient care and support for them, compared with 17% of the men. The problem of abuse was given more prominence by males than females; 12% and 4% respectively. More men than women, 18% as opposed to 12% of women, found it hard to adjust to a new clergyperson. Men had more difficulty in accepting changes in worship than women. Thus 21% of men did not like the new service book, compared to 12% of women. Again 18% of men found fault with the new hymns, compared to 12% of women. Moreover 28% of men were also more acutely aware of too little sense of the presence of God in worship, compared to 19% of women.

## **Age**

Overall the distinction between different generations of nominal Irish Anglicans regarding being let down by the church lies between Generation Y and X on one hand and the Boomer and Builder categories on the other. The evidence for this can be seen on Table 12:3. With the notable exceptions of abuse and styles of worship, the scores for the older categories exceed those for the youngest groups. For instance, 31% of the Builder generation find church uncaring compared to 25% of Generation Y. With regard to changes in worship, 35% of Builders do not like the new service book, compared to 12% of Generation Y. The figures for the same item for Boomers and Generation X are 24% and 13% respectively. The ‘God hole’ evident in church worship is identified by 33% of Builders and 22% of Generation X.

The older cohorts in the sample were more exercised by the deficiencies of pastoral care and changes in liturgy and hymnody than the younger age groups which is understandable given their greater experience of life. Flory and Miller (2010, p.10) suggest that the post-Boomers are typically tolerant of other people’s beliefs and in fact enjoy the variety of different practices in worship, which too may account for the lower scores for Generations X and Y.

## **Occupational Status**

Issues concerning being let down by the church in terms of pastoral care and the experience of worship, hold similar weight across the three occupation groups, with some exceptions. An overview of these findings is available in Table 12:4. The scores for the student group are lower than the norm for the sample and broadly the same as those for the youngest age cohort found in Table 12:3. On the other hand,

the scores for the professional classes are higher than the student group, notably in the set of questions on pastoral care. For instance, 27% of professionals felt that the clergy had not given them sufficient care and support, compared with 17% of students. The findings for manual workers show the greatest variance. In some cases their scores are similar to the other two groups, for example, in feeling the lack of pastoral support from the church and disliking the new service and hymn books. In some respects however, the manual worker scores were much lower than the other two occupation groups. For instance only 11% complained about the style of worship, 14% felt there was too little sense of God in worship and no manual workers complained that the church was abusive to them. This variation in the manual worker findings may well have to do with the small number of returns as opposed to their particular perceptions.

### **Church Attendance**

Being let down by church presented a much greater problem among those who never attend church, across the two themes explored in this section. Thus 35% of those who never attend church thought the church was uncaring. Again, 36% of the same category complained about the style of worship. The only exception to this trend concerned the question with regard to disliking a new clergy person. Details of these findings can be seen in Table 12:5. It is hardly surprising that those who never attend church have issues with church when it comes to the quality of pastoral care and the experience of worship. Conversely those who attend church at least six times a year had generally the lowest scores among the three attendance groups. This was particularly true when it came to issues regarding worship. Only 9% of this category had complaints about the new service book and new hymn book. They also had the lowest score on the sensitive issue of abuse by the church. Once a year church

attenders too, had the most variable scores among the items tested in this section. For instance, they produced the lowest score, 17%, to the question concerning the uncaring nature of pastoral care by the church. On the other hand, they had the highest score, 11%, in relation to church abuse.

### **Religious Inheritance**

The findings of this variable leave little doubt that those with a religious upbringing in childhood live with an experience of church very different from those who had little or no religious inheritance in childhood, as can be seen in Table 12:6. In relation to pastoral care for example, those with little or no religious inheritance had consistently higher scores than their counterparts who had an important religious inheritance. Thus 15% of those with an unimportant religious inheritance identified abuse as a problem compared to 6% of those for whom religion was important in childhood. Again, 30% and 26% of those for whom religion was unimportant in their early years complained that the church and clergy were uncaring respectively. Correspondingly, 25% and 20% of those with a significant religious background agreed that the church and the clergy did not provide sufficient pastoral support.

With regard to worship, those with an important religious inheritance had higher scores than their fellows who had little or no religious upbringing in childhood. For example, 21% of those with an important religious inheritance, complained about the new service book and 20% about the new hymn book, compared to 11% and 5% respectively from those with an unimportant religious background. Again 24% of those with an important religious inheritance were aware of too little of God in worship, compared to 12% of those with little or no religious heritage.

## **Conclusion**

Ireland, according to MacGreil (2011, p. 5), has been affected by developments and social and cultural changes that have taken place throughout the world over the past number of decades. Ireland has become global, a consumer-based economy. Elliott and Lemert (2006, p. 196) argue that the way people survive in such societies is to become more aggressive. As a result, people complain and are critical of the institutions and organisations designed to serve them, including the church. Being let down by the church and articulating complaints against it, is one manifestation of this cultural shift. This chapter has sought to elicit responses from nominal Irish Anglicans, who felt let down by the church in two areas: pastoral care and the experience of worship.

What do the findings show? With regard to pastoral care, the findings point to deficiencies. A quarter of those questioned felt that the church was uncaring and unsupportive to them. A fifth agreed that they had been let down by clergy, who were uncaring towards them. Moreover the Irish findings in this area were higher than those obtained in the U.K. by Francis and Richter (2007, p. 326). The parish is often seen as the basic model of church, especially in the Church of Ireland where many accept it as part of the apparatus of church. These findings would seem to suggest that the parish has failed a significant minority of nominal Irish Anglicans and distanced them from the church. Likewise, in a church which places a strong emphasis on clergy and their care of people, the findings with regard to uncaring clergy makes difficult reading.

The traditional pattern of one-person ministry monarchically as the professional shepherd to a static flock has been found inadequate. As far back as

1981, the Report of the Commission on Ministry (Report of the Commission on Ministry, 1981, p. 6) heralded ‘the age of the layman’s church is with us’.

Nevertheless these findings would suggest that the Church of Ireland has some way to go, to create a community of faith, who are the church in a locality, exercising the ministry of care which Christ commits to his whole church.

In a culture which has been traumatised by a steady stream of disclosures of sexual abuse perpetrated by the church, the findings with respect to abuse are low. In fact they are some of the lowest scores in the entire study and probably reflect two things: the culture of power and insistent obedience typical of Catholicism in Ireland before 1970 had no place in the Church of Ireland. Barber (2002, p. 287) refers to a survey of religious and moral attitudes of Dublin Catholics in the 1960s. The following sample question provides a clear window on to a very different world than Irish Anglicanism. ‘Whatever the church tells me to do, I will do regardless of whether it makes sense or not: I agree, 61% and I disagree, 39%. Secondly the Church of Ireland recognised the damage that abuse could cause and established a vigorous child protection policy *Safeguarding Trust* in 1997 (Church of Ireland, 2006b). In effect it means this policy is binding on all who have contact with children in a church context. The Church of Ireland Code of Good Practice for Ministry with Children, which was first published in 1997 and was made legally binding in the Church of Ireland by the General Synod in 2006.

Worship, Davison (1984, p. 9) contends, is ‘not something laid on for people but something for which they are prepared to be part of’. Many factors shape liturgy and according to Greene (1987, p. 78), one of them is belonging. Whose worship is it anyway? It is the work of the people of God. If that is the case, these data show that a significant minority of nominal Irish Anglicans have concerns with the style of

worship and that in worship, they experience has too little of God. Unlike the work of Francis and Richter (2007) there was no opportunity for nominal Irish Anglicans to state what they disliked about the church's style of worship, which was unhelpful. Was it too formal or informal? Was it a case of being too traditional or too contemporary? Whatever it was, nearly one in three of those surveyed disliked the style of worship, the highest score in this whole series of questions. Again almost one in four of those questioned complained that there was too little sense of the presence of God in worship. In Walsh's (1997, p. 65) opinion, worship can trivialise and tranquilise the urge towards transcendence.

The data made it clear that men voiced a more critical view of the church than women across the whole range of questions asked. Likewise the older cohorts, the Boomers and builders were more disappointed with church than the younger cohorts, Generations Y and X. Once again however there were no significant differences between the occupational groups concerning pastoral care and worship. In terms of church attendance, those who attended occasionally found fault, more than those who rarely, if ever, attended. As far as religious inheritance was concerned, the findings make it clear that those with a bare religious heritage were critical of the care they received but were indifferent to the worship issue raised. In contrast those with a significant religious upbringing were more animated when it came to worship rather than the lack of pastoral care.

Churches, Richter and Francis (1998, p. 103) observe, 'are in the business of raising people's expectations'. A significant minority of the nominal Irish Anglicans surveyed were critical of the church with regard to its pastoral care and the heart of worship. They were less critical of the Church of Ireland in terms of abuse and the liturgical tools of worship, service and hymn books. What mattered to them was

praxis, how the church worked out its calling in care and worship. This then was the context in which theology was practised. The failure to care for people and to draw them into the presence of God, expressed by nominal Irish Anglicans is, in a sense, a failure of theology. The final chapter in this sequence of analysis will focus on the church's theological stance and how this distances people from its life.

## **CHAPTER THIRTEEN**

### **QUALMS, THEOLOGICAL AND MORAL**

**Introduction**

**Problems with Theology**

**Problems with Morality**

**Gender**

**Age**

**Occupational Status**

**Church Attendance**

**Religious Inheritance**

**Conclusion**

## **Chapter 13: Qualms, Theological and Moral**

### **Introduction**

The first chapter in the analysis section of this study, Credo, Chapter Four, introduced the contours of belief pertaining to nominal Irish Anglicans. The final chapter in the quantitative analysis section, completes the symmetry by examining the problems of belief (or theology) and behaviour (or morality) which influence church-going among nominal Irish Anglicans. The chapter begins with a consideration of theology and morality in an Irish context before examining the findings relating to belief and behaviour. Having explored these two themes, the chapter will then go on to provide a commentary and analysis according to five specific variables: Gender, Age, Occupational Status, Church Attendance and Religious Inheritance.

### **Problems with Theology**

Christianity is an incarnational faith, embedded in the culture of a particular society. One of the most astute observers of twentieth century Ireland was Basil Chubb (1982, p. 132) who in 1960 became the first chair of the new Department of Political Science at Trinity College, Dublin. He regarded the following characteristics as central to any understanding of Irish cultural life: conservative, authoritarian, loyal and anti-intellectual. According to Lyng (2005, p. 153), these four broad characteristics could also be applied, 'but with a more specific intensity to the Irish Catholic Church'. In the same way, these four characteristics could also be applicable to the Church of Ireland, probably to a lesser intensity.

The clergy are the main mediators of theology in the Church of Ireland. The findings of the Irish School of Ecumenics' survey of faith among lay people in

Ireland, affirms this (Ganiel, 2009, p. 4). In this survey, lay people were asked how much each of the following influenced their thinking about faith, religion or God: personal reflection, reading other books, family, friends, reading Scripture, own faith leaders, national faith leaders, international faith leaders, causes within the faith community and causes outside the faith community. What is notable in the findings was that for Catholics, the most important influences were outside the church. For Anglicans however, the most important factors were inside the church, with clergy holding the highest influence rank among Church of Ireland respondents. (Ganiel, 2012, p. 20).

Most Church of Ireland clergy are indigenous and receive their theological training at Trinity College, Dublin. Until the 1970s, it served not only as a seminary for would-be clergy but retained a Church of Ireland ethos as a secular university (Barnard, 2006, p. 258). Unlike their English counterparts, Church of Ireland clergy of whatever churchmanship, train together in the one seminary, the Church of Ireland Theological Institute, sitting for degrees in theology awarded by Trinity College Dublin.

The Church of Ireland is a small but broad church. Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005, p. 14) in their work, *Fragmented Faith: Exposing the fault-lines in the Church of England*, argued that the divisions in Anglican viewpoints were not random but they ‘reflect clearly identifiable fault lines in the very structure and composition of the Church of England’. For the Church of Ireland, the fault-lines run between: north and south, conservatives and liberals, evangelicals and Catholics. It is not possible, nor essential to examine these fault-lines in detail, to gain insight into the theological landscape of the Church of Ireland. However, the clergy of the

Church of Ireland provide a map to the theological tensions in a way that Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005, p. 7) discovered in the Church of England.

The *Partners in Mission* consultation (Mehaffey, 1983, p. 12) undertaken in the Church of Ireland in 1997, recognised the tensions in a church having to work in two jurisdictions. Bishop Mehaffey of Derry and Raphoe Dioceses, agreed that the church needed to face up to the tensions and disunity which are a consequence of the political and geographical divide in Ireland. Tensions between conservatives and liberals emerged most noticeably in the area of human sexuality. There is talk of schism in the Church of Ireland over the issue of homosexuality, as in other parts of the Anglican Communion. Speaking into the conservative and liberal camps, Hall (2007, p. 107) made an appeal: ‘If we allow the debate over homosexuality to shape the church’s future and define our identity, we have reduced our understanding of personhood to one of sexuality and we have turned our church into a morality club. If that is the case we should most certainly fear schism’.

Stresses between evangelicals and catholics stretch back into the history of the Church of Ireland, testing its unity. The disestablishment of the Irish Church in 1869, in Acheson’s (1997, pp. 207-208) view, brought these forces to the surface, particularly in the revision of the Canons and Prayer Book to be used in the disestablished church. It is difficult to gauge the strength of the evangelical and catholic parties in the church. According to the organising secretaries of the following church groups, currently, clerical membership of Affirming Catholicism in the Church of Ireland (Gamble, 2014), stands at 60. Evangelicalism in the Church of Ireland is represented by a variety of groups: Reform (McCann, 2014), Evangelical Fellowship of Irish Clergy (Press, 2014), the Church of Ireland Evangelical Fellowship (Kingston, 2014) and New Wine (McClay, 2014). Clerical membership

of these groups is around: 25, 50, 90 and 70 respectively. It must be remembered however, that there is a degree of overlap in the membership of these groups.

According to the Church of Ireland Directory (Church of Ireland, 2014b) for 2014, there are 931 clergy listed in the Church of Ireland. Of these, there are 502 stipendiary, 104 non-stipendiary and 325 licensed to officiate / retired clergy. Using the clerical membership of the various church groups in comparison with the total number of clergy in the Church of Ireland, it is possible to obtain a crude indication of the strength of the various theological spectrums within the church. Catholics represent less than 10% of the clerical total and evangelicals around 25%. Catholics are more numerous in the southern province and evangelicals, more numerous in the northern province of the Church of Ireland.

The statistics in Table 13:1 show that disagreement with the church's theological teaching was shared by one in five nominal Irish Anglicans. By comparison, between one in four and one in five of Richter and Francis's (1998, p. 118) respondents agreed with the same statement which they had formulated. Moreover a third of those questioned in Ireland accepted that they were tired of being told what to believe, about a similar score obtained by Francis and Richter (2007, p. 331) for the same question. Indeed Francis and Richter (2007, p. 278) saw this response in terms of the conservatism of the church's theological teaching which impinged on the personal quests of individuals. The Irish finding in this regard, illustrates the tension between individualism and the conservatism inherent in Irish Christianity which Ganiel (2012, p. 20) identifies.

Almost a quarter of the nominal Irish Anglicans questioned, complained that the church's teaching was too simplified and unchallenging. This was significantly

higher, by 7%, than the findings obtained by Francis and Richter (2007, p. 329) for the same question. It is clear from the Irish findings that the church's theological teaching has failed to engage with a sizeable minority of nominal Anglicans. This in Drumm's (1997, pp. 40-41) view is a classic failure of theology; it becomes 'opaque and quaint, indeed downright boring and irrelevant'. Again one in five of the nominal Irish Anglicans asked, agreed with the statement that they felt the church was too negative towards the outside world. Francis and Richter (2007, p. 331) found that about one in four of their respondents agreed with the same sentiment. Church, as Whelan (2010, p. 10) advocates, is not there for its own sake but to 'mirror to others the wonders of God's saving love'; therefore being outward looking involves a continued engagement with the world of which the church is intimately part. Foster (2007, p. 37) regards the thirty years from 1970 to 2000 as a 'transformation of cultural expectations, based not only on a new confidence in the wider world but also on the rejection of old authoritarian formations'. The tension between the church and the world is one that a fifth of nominal Irish Anglicans cite as distancing them from the life of the church.

Belief in its different layers of meaning is central to the Christian experience. Belief implies commitment, a sense of belonging to God and his people, the church. On commitment, Wald (1987, pp. 29-30) observes, 'religious ideals are potentially powerful sources of commitment and motivation' so that 'human beings will make enormous sacrifices if they believe themselves to be driven by a divine force'. Nevertheless contemporary Western societies like Ireland, have witnessed a retreat from commitment, in this instance, religious commitment. Berger (1993, p. 18) traces this feature back to pluralism which creates anxieties and tensions. In his view, it is 'possible to escape from them in opposite directions. One escape is into

false certainty and the other into an attitude that despairs of any possible access to truth'. The final question in this set on belief, 'it was unclear what commitment to the church involved', draws on these anxieties and tensions. A quarter of nominal Irish Anglicans agreed with the statement, a somewhat higher response to that obtained by Francis and Richter (2007, p. 332) of around a fifth of their sample.

### **Problems with Morality**

For Devlin (2007, p. 3), the moral and spiritual concern for the Christian believer is 'how should the contemporary Christian set about presenting and living out their message to society on this island at this time?'. Belief and behaviour, theology and morality, belong together. In their study of church-leavers, Francis and Richter (2007, p. 277) drew attention to the relationship between theology and morality and church-leaving. They observed that 'the balance between conservatism and liberalism is a perennial problem for the churches'; therefore the failure of churches to revise their theological stance in the light of culture changes and to trim their moral teaching to take modern perspectives into account, is seen to precipitate church-leaving.

The data in Table 13:1 show that disagreement with the church's stance on key moral issues was shared by a quarter of nominal Irish Anglicans. This was higher than the response relating to disagreement with the theological teaching of the church, as can be seen on the same table. In his review of 'Ethics, Communities and the Future' for the Church in Ireland, Kearon (1999, p. 76) draws attention to 'one feature of recent moral theology...the emphasis on the church as a moral community'. It is clear that a sizeable minority of nominal Irish Anglicans distance themselves from the church because they disagree with its moral principles.

Likewise, between three out of ten and five out of ten of Richter and Francis's (1998, p. 118) respondents also disagreed with the church's moral stance.

Around a quarter of those questioned were tired of being told how to behave by the church, about the same figure obtained by Francis and Richter (2007, p. 331) in their work. Ryan (1999, p. 58) articulates the moral dilemma of the church which lives as a minority in a culture which pays lip service to what it teaches and yet expects the church to serve as a not too troublesome conscience as long as it 'doesn't stir things up too much or make anybody feel too uncomfortable.

## **Gender**

Problems with theology were significantly more troubling for men than women as can be seen on Table 13:2. For example, when it came to theology, 22% of men, as opposed to 19% of women, identified that they disagreed with the theological teachings of the church. Again 26% of men compared to 22% of women, felt that the church's teaching was too simple and unchallenging. Moreover, 26% of men, as opposed to 22% of women, agreed that it was unclear what the church meant by commitment. On the other hand, similar proportions of men, 33%, and women, 34%, felt tired of being told what to believe by the church, the highest ranked variable in the set. In a similar way, problems with the moral stance of the church carried more weight among nominal male Irish Anglicans. Thus 29% of men complained that they disagreed with the moral teaching of the church, compared to 21% of the women. However, the complaint of being told how to behave by the church carried equal weight among male and female nominal Irish Anglicans.

## Age

In many ways, problems with theology and morality had different levels of influence among the four generational groups surveyed in the study. The findings are outlined in Table 13:3. Similar proportions of all four generational groups shared the view that they were tired of being told what to believe. The two youngest generational groups, Generation Y and Generation X, had the lowest scores, 15% and 17% respectively, with regard to the church's teaching being too simple. On the other hand, they had the highest scores across the generations when it came to clarity about what commitment meant. Interestingly Generation X were more challenged by the church being too negative towards the outside world, compared to the younger Generation Y. Generations Y and X were more aware of disagreeing with the moral stance of the church on key issues than the two older generational groups.

A third of the Boomer Generation complained that the church's teaching was too simple and unchallenging. Surprisingly only 17% of Boomers felt the church was too negative towards the world, as the Boomers according to Collins-Mayo and Beaudoin (2010, p. 18), were associated with the counter-cultural movement of the 1960s which saw a liberalisation of attitudes. Problems with theology were significantly more troubling for the oldest generation group, the Builders. For instance, over a quarter of the Builders had issues with the theological teaching of the church and its over-simplification. Moreover, similar proportions of the Builders Generation felt that the church was too negative towards the world and were unclear as to the meaning of commitment.

## **Occupational Status**

The differences between the occupational categories in Table 13:4 are intriguing. Students in particular complained about the theological and moral stance of the church and its insistence on what to believe and how to behave. For example, 25% of students disagreed with the theological teachings of the church, the highest score across the three occupational groups. Likewise, 35% of students were tired of being told by the church what to believe. Moreover, 33% of students had problems with the church's stance on key moral issues with 35% having problems with the moral behaviour the church demands. When compared to Table 13:3, the findings for the student cohort are higher than those for Generation Y, the under 25s, from which the student body is drawn. Perhaps one reason for the difference is that identified by O'Donnell (2002, p. 73) in his research into educated young Irish adults. He concluded that the challenges of those in third-level education are very acute, particularly when it comes to morality. The chasm between church teaching and the beliefs and practice of young people, especially students, probably lies behind these findings.

The findings for the professional classes show a degree of variability. In some instances, for example, in disagreeing with the church's theological and moral teachings, the professionals are in line with the overall sample score outlined in Table 13:1, whereas in tiring of the church's theological and moral admonitions, the professionals fall significantly below the overall sample score. Whilst in two instances, viewing the church's theological stance as too simple and too world denying, the professional scores are above the overall sample figure as seen in Table 13:1.

The variability of the findings is most pronounced in the case of manual workers. With the exception of their scores for being unclear as to the meaning of commitment and being tired of the church's moral strictures, all the other findings for manual workers were well out of line with the overall sample scores outlined in Table 13:1. Thus only 13% of manual workers disagreed with the theological teaching and 12% of them disagreed with the moral teaching of the church. It is hard to reconcile whether these are reflective of the views of manual workers or if the variable scores have more to do with the size of the sample for this occupational group.

### **Church Attendance**

On examination of Table 13:5, it is apparent that there is a correlation between the variables which represents disincentives to church-going and church attendance, in that, those who never attend church have consistently higher scores than those who infrequently or occasionally attend church. For example, just over half of the non-attenders complain of tiring of being told by the church what to believe. Likewise, four out of ten of those who never attend church dislike being told of how to behave by the church. A similar proportion of non-attendees consider the church's teaching to be too simplified and unchallenging. Furthermore around a third of those who never attend church, disagree with the church's theological and moral position. A quarter of those who never attend church are unclear as to what the church understands by commitment. By contrast, half of the same group do understand what the church expects by way of commitment and by implication, reject it.

On the other hand, those who attend church occasionally (less than six times a year) or even infrequently (once a year), are more amenable to the church's theological and moral teachings. For instance, 13% of the former and 16% of the latter, disagree with the church's theological teachings. Only 21% of occasional attenders complain of being told by the church what to believe, compared to 27% of infrequent attenders. These scores are significantly lower than the overall sample score for the same variable as outlined in Table 13:1. All of the three church attendance categories have roughly similar scores with regard to being unclear as to what commitment to the church means. Infrequent church attenders are less agreeable than occasional attenders when it comes to the church's moral teaching and its implications.

### **Religious Inheritance**

The formative influence of parents and families in the religious socialisation of the next generation has been acknowledged in Chapter Three of this study (King & Roeser, 2009, pp. 435-478). The findings of Table 13:6 seem to bear out the research findings insofar that, those with a background where religion was unimportant, have consistently higher scores, compared to those with a significant religious inheritance. The one exception to this relates to the question concerning clarity, regarding commitment to the church. The table shows that 37% of nominal Irish Anglicans with an unimportant religious inheritance, disagree with the theological teachings of the church, compared to 19% of those with an important religious inheritance. Over half of those with an unimportant religious inheritance tire of the church forcing them what to believe; whereas a third of those with an important religious upbringing agree with the same assertion. The difference between religious inheritance is also notable in the area of morality with a 42%

response from those with an unimportant religious inheritance, compared to 27% for those for whom religion was important in childhood. Likewise 45% of those for whom religion was unimportant in childhood took exception to the church's attempts to influence their behaviour, as opposed to 27% for those with an important religious inheritance.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the role theology and morality play in the disengagement of nominal Irish Anglicans from the church. The data makes it clear that between a quarter and a third of those questioned associate their distancing from the church with a sense of frustration with the theological teaching and moral stance of the church. In particular, they were resentful at being told what to believe and how to behave by the church. Again a quarter of nominal Irish Anglicans were unclear as to what commitment to the church involved and regarded the church's teaching as too simplified and unchallenging.

Men were more troubled than women with the theological and moral teachings of the church. Problems with morality carried more weight among the young and in particular the student cohort; although the oldest generation was more frustrated by the world denying stance of the church and its simplification of complex, theological and moral issues. Not unexpectedly, those who never attend church and those for whom religion in childhood was unimportant, had the greatest difficulties with the church's theological and moral teachings.

The quest for a 'tangible religion' which shapes how people consider God and themselves and how they live their lives, is challenging. A persistent minority of nominal Irish Anglicans find their church's theological teachings and moral

imperatives, problematic. These tensions are not new and can be traced back to the principles underpinning the theological foundations of the church. According to Hull (2012, p. 38), the Protestant principle holds that ‘God is not contained within any space but is free and above all spaces’. It follows then that if the experience of God is direct and immediate and framed in everyday life, its demands and decisions will have a particular individualistic hue. Irish Protestants have wrestled with theology and its moral implications over time. The findings in the chapter reflect the tensions between Protestant individualism on one hand and the inbuilt conservatism of Irish Christianity on the other hand. However commentators such as Inglis (2007, p. 217) see a convergence of Catholic and Protestant thinking on theology and morality in recent times, especially to those on the periphery of church. He writes:

The majority of Irish Catholics see and understand themselves as Catholic, they have a strong sense of belonging and loyalty to a Catholic heritage and accept most of the church’s key teaching and beliefs. Yet an increasing number of them are becoming spiritually and morally detached from the institutional church. Insofar as they see themselves as belonging to a religious heritage without embodying its beliefs and practice, they are becoming more like their Protestant counterparts.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### TALKBACK

#### Introduction

#### Question One

Life's changes

Growing up

Loss of faith

Disconnect

Not belonging

Disillusionment

Being let down by the church

Theology and morality

#### Question Two

Worship

*A matter of style*

*A matter of taste*

*A matter of level*

*A matter of time*

Belonging

#### Question Three

**Belonging**

**Faith**

**Ethos**

**Children**

**Conclusion**

## **Chapter 14: Talkback**

### **Introduction**

To close the analysis section of the study, this last chapter diverges from the quantitative approach used in previous chapters. The style here is qualitative, using broader, open-ended questions which gave people an opportunity to respond discursively through self-completed responses. Richter and Francis (1998, p. 168) contend that by its very nature: ‘the quantitative approach cannot do complete justice to the richness and complexity of people’s behaviour’. Whilst providing a broad analytical overview, the quantitative approach can disguise the nuances behind the data and ignore unexplored territory. As such, Francis and Richter (2007, p. 21) advocate employing the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, in a research project of this nature. Thus the aim of this chapter is to consider the self-completed responses to three questions asked at the tail end of the questionnaire. The responses to the three questions asked will be examined in turn. Finally the chapter will draw the responses together and outline conclusions.

### **Question One**

The first question asked of respondents sought to isolate the primary cause that nominal Anglicans give for not attending church: ‘If you had to choose just one main reason for reducing your church attendance, what would it be?’ In total, there were 263 written responses to this question. Not unexpectedly, quite a number of respondent wrote at length giving a number of reasons for their reduced church attendance, all of which were considered following the sequence adopted in Chapters Six to Thirteen i.e. from life’s changes to theological concerns.

### **Life's changes**

Church-going becomes part of the routine of life and when routine changes, church attendance may also change. Some respondents said that when they left home to go to boarding school, their contact with church fell away. For others the move to university was the main reason why they drifted away from church. Others said that moving to a new area disrupted their church attendance which never picked up again. In some instances the transition of a move was coupled by an inability to find a suitable church in their new locality. For example leaving home and not being able to find a new church was at the heart of this 31 year old male's reason for reducing his church attendance: 'I left home and the new church I found was not a welcoming place so I never went back.'

The issue of having no transport to get to church was identified by some, particularly in rural settings. By far the most common written response in relation to the impact of life's changes on church attendance, was having to work on Sundays. This was particularly the case for young people and students. An 18 year old male student commented: 'I am a student and in order to pay my way through college I need to work at weekends. So going to church is not possible as I have to work most Sundays and anyway I am too tired to even think about going to church.'

The second category of life changes identified in the written response falls in to those changes which generally lie outside a person's control. The most common of these was increased family commitments and changed family circumstances which prevented regular church attendance. One perspective on the impact of family commitments was given by this 47 year old mother: 'Commitment to my son who has special needs meant I could not go to church.'

For some, reduced church attendance was associated with illness and death. One respondent, a 52 year old woman, coupled bereavement with moving home as the reasons for not attending church: 'I moved too many times due to bereavement and I simply could not face going to church, even though people didn't know my story.' Interestingly no written response alluded to marital breakdown as the chief reason for reducing church attendance.

### **Growing up**

People change; they grow up and move on, including moving on from church. This was reflected in the written responses. One respondent, a 34 year old professional man, admitted: 'As I grew up, I started to rethink about faith and made my own opinions and decisions.'

For others, growing up was an opportunity to escape the claustrophobia of church. A 40 year old male from the south-east of Ireland admitted: 'I found the freedom to escape from the religious programming of my youth.'

Others acknowledged that they changed and their church attendance reduced as a result. One 56 year female from the west of Ireland acknowledged: 'I simply changed and was no longer interested in going to church. Religion doesn't play a big part in my life.'

Another respondent, a 41 year old professional male, commented: 'A youthful intelligent superiority gave way to apathy.'

Others laid the blame for their reduced church attendance firmly at the door of the church, arguing for example: 'The church was no longer helping me to grow.' In a needs driven culture, such as Ireland, others expressed the same kind of resentment in a more negative way: 'The church did nothing to meet my needs.'

One young female student was candid: 'The church provided me with no real reason to attend consistently, thus church attendances became more of an option, rather than a necessary event.'

Others too, were critical of the church in not meeting their spiritual expectations. One 43 year old woman from Cork disclosed: 'In the church I used to attend, there was not a good balance of worship, fellowship and study. There was little or no encouragement to reflect on theological and spiritual matters.'

For others it was the church's inability to meet the needs of their children which drove them away from regular church attendance.

The influence of other people on church attendance was clearly seen in the written responses. This 28 year old professional woman from Dublin resented the coercion of parents in making her attend church: 'I was made to go to church and Sunday school by my parents who never went to church themselves. They showed no commitment and when I grew up, I had no reason to go to church.'

Others were conscious of peer pressure, especially young people whose friends did not attend church. One 23 year old female student put it like this: 'Growing up, it was uncool to go to church as none of my friends went.'

By far the most common response with regard to growing up was time demands. Respondents repeatedly conceded that because of busyness, there was no time to go to church. For a number of the students questioned, week-end lifestyle issues had squeezed out church attendance. A 21 year old male expressed it like this: 'My life became more social and Sunday mornings were not good after a hectic Saturday evening nightclubbing.'

The demands of sport, leisure and recreation also played a significant role in the written responses, as one 51 year female from Cork divulged: ‘I preferred to do other interesting things on Sunday than sit in a pew for an hour.’

Many respondents, who admitted that they had got out of the habit of going to church, or they were just too busy with life to attend church, blamed the constraints of time.

For others, growing up and changing was expressed in terms of disinterest or indifference to church. A 39 year old Dublin male commented: ‘When I grew up and realised I could make up my own mind, I stopped going to church. It was not important to me. I couldn’t care less about it.’

Some respondents conceded that laziness was the reason they no longer attended church; put simply: ‘I could not be bothered.’

### **Loss of faith**

One of the chief reasons for reduced church attendance, according to some commentators, is a loss of faith. Fanstone’s (1993, pp. 79-80) distinction between those who left church because of ‘God Issues’ or ‘Church Issues’ became apparent in the written responses. Loss of faith in God or the church is a nuanced concept and the written responses reflected this. Only a small number of respondents attributed their distance from church because they had lost their faith in God. A 63 year old male from the Dublin commuter belt recorded: ‘I lost faith in God, although I am not sure if I ever had it in the first place. I found it difficult to go to church without questioning things all the time. I had to move on.’

A more frequent response to loss of faith was agnosticism. One male college student commented: ‘I am agnostic. I am unconvinced by the church’s teachings and

wish to find my own beliefs in a higher power. So I want to break free from all traditions which are too simple and unproven.’

Doubt was a feature for a substantial number of respondents. For example, a 29 year old professional woman revealed: ‘As a child I never doubted God, he was there. Now I look at the world with so much suffering and pain and it causes me to think, is there a God of love at all?’

Other respondents traced their disengagement from the church to becoming more aware of alternative ways of thinking and living. A 36 year old woman expressed this as: ‘I could no longer reconcile what in my opinion is the narrowness of Christianity which discriminates against women and gay people, with my own changing worldview.’

Likewise some respondents linked their loss of faith to difficulties in accepting that Christianity is the one true faith; for example, a 37 year old professional male noted: ‘I stopped going to church because of a loss of faith. I could not believe in the supremacy of Christianity over other religions. I find the church intolerably elitist and it cancels out its own teaching on love and the brotherhood of men.’

Some responses coupled loss of faith with conflict. The perception that the church by its stance was responsible in particular for conflict in Ireland, was not an infrequent response. For example, a 59 year old male commented: ‘I was ashamed that the Church of Ireland did nothing in my view constructive about the Drumcree and Holy Cross things in the North. So I shut the door on the church.’

A number of the written responses drew attention to the illogicality of church teachings. One male student found himself at odds with the church: 'Let's be honest. Much of what the church teaches is a load of bull! It just doesn't make sense.'

Likewise, some respondents were unable to reconcile belief and church participation with a scientific worldview while some found it impossible to go on accepting the exclusive claims of Christianity to be the only true faith. Another 19 year old male student from the west of Ireland remarked: 'The church restricts people's spirituality and its teachings are limited. All faiths should be regarded as equal, they are just different ways of worshipping the same god.'

### **Disconnect**

Commentators have drawn attention to ways in which life-style issues may encourage church-goers to disengage from church attendance (Richter & Francis, 1998). Some of those questioned felt their life-style was not compatible with participation in church. In the same way, some said that they felt their values were not in keeping with active church participation. Others said that the church did not give them room to pursue their own spiritual quest. A good illustration of what is meant by this was provided by the following response from a young male student: 'My belief was not dependent upon being an active church-goer, belonging to a community as such. For I held very different ideals and values and I was carving out a spiritual journey on my own. I didn't need church.'

The clash of values was taken up by some respondents as going to church for the wrong reasons. Hypocrisy lay at the core of some decisions to leave church. A 27 year old professional male conceded: 'I was attending simply because I thought it the right thing to do, as far as my family was concerned. But I never was fully

committed. There came a point when I recognised that this was hypocritical and I then just drifted away without anybody really noticing and asking why.’

The issue of the relevance or otherwise of the church, emerged strongly in the written responses. The underlying principle: ‘You do not have to attend church to be a Christian’ was articulated by quite a number of respondents. For example, a 37 year old female suggested: ‘I feel much closer to God at the top of a mountain where there is time to contemplate and appreciate all that God has created as opposed to church. In church there are so many distractions and the feeling of being judged by others.’

Many of those who responded voiced what Inglis (2007) describes as a disinstitutional faith. A good example of this attitude was from a retired 66 year old male: ‘You don’t have to go to church to believe in God and worship him. For me, religion is an individual’s relationship with God. Church is not necessary, in fact, it gets in the way.’

Many of those who responded had come to regard church as simply irrelevant to their lives. In particular, a significant number of respondents said that sermons did not connect with their everyday life. For example a 40 year old woman disclosed: ‘I didn’t find the whole thing spiritually fulfilling. I didn’t feel it made any sense to my life when I went. The sermons were totally irrelevant, above my head and pointless.’

Irrelevance in many of the replies gave way to boredom. Again and again, some respondents complained of being bored. One example from a 20 year old female student illustrates the sentiment: ‘It was all so boring, the hymns, the singing, the minister was so old and out of touch. Everything seemed old and boring.’

A 72 year old male from the Midlands picked up on the boredom factor when he observed: ‘The Church of Ireland services are the same now as they were when I was a young lad fifty years ago – drawn out and drab.’

The disconnect between church and the young was particularly evident in the written responses. For example, one 23 year old male manual worker commented: ‘Church had no bearing to my life. It all seemed a habitual ceremony, always the same. It didn’t touch the world that I lived in and so it didn’t touch me.’

Not surprisingly, many of the respondents owned up to not being interested in church or what it had to offer. A common complaint, expressed by a 59 year old female from Munster, was: ‘I had no interest in the service. It always appears to be the same. There was no sense of fun, innovation or excitement. I couldn’t be bothered with it anymore.’

The challenge of indifference to church which MacGreil (2009, p. 155) identified among Catholics, was palpable in the responses of nominal Anglicans in this regard.

### **Not belonging**

Churches are, Francis and Richter (2007, p. 170) observe, social institutions. There are many reasons as to why various people find it hard to fit in and be accepted, to belong. A sense of social exclusion was very much in evidence in the written responses. Some respondents said simply that they did not feel part of the church. Others spoke of a lack of community or welcome in their local church. Some had quite specific reservations when it came to a sense of belonging. One 48 year old professional female from Dublin felt: ‘It is impersonal, cold physically and humanly,

with no sense of community. I felt socially and culturally isolated. I didn't feel 'one of us.'

Another 31 year old female concluded: 'The church in my home town did not feel comfortable. I felt that the congregation resented my attendance.'

Another 45 year old professional man drew an unhealthy picture of his local church: 'I was unhappy about the clubby nature of parish life. It was so hard to break in and anyway it was so insular, conformist and a bit too much of "We're alright Jack!"'

In the light of such attitudes it is not surprising that quite a number of respondents found that going to church was a chore which was a disincentive to regular attendance. The smallness of Church of Ireland congregations and a missing generation of under forties was highlighted by a number of respondents as to why they had disengaged from the church. For example, a 32 year old male referred to the personal visibility issue in an empty church: 'I just felt so conspicuous when I opened my mouth to sing, it was as if I was singing a solo. Making verbal responses was just the same. There just weren't enough people on Sunday to cover my sense of embarrassment.'

A 19 year old male student observed: 'I was the youngest in church by a mile. I stood out like a sore thumb. I felt like I was in a service for people in a nursing home.'

Tensions too were recognised by some respondents as causing them to drop church attendance. One 20 year old from the Midlands complained: 'Our parish tore itself apart. There was a big falling out over a building restoration. People took different views about the changes to be made and it put people in different camps to

this day. I didn't get on with some of the parishioners and gave up attending church altogether.'

### **Disillusionment**

Churches, Richter and Francis (1998, p. 102) assert, are in the business of raising people's expectations. When they fail to live up to these expectations, people become disillusioned which in turn has a negative impact on their attendance. A failure to live up to its ideals was identified by a small number of respondents who had reduced their church-going. One young male student from the Midlands summed up his experience in these terms: 'I left church because it failed to live up to its ideals and values. I found that church people are hypocrites, they do one thing on a Sunday and another on a weekday. It was so off-putting.'

Other respondents were critical of the church because it lacked a sense of vision or imagination, there was no 'future tense' as one female in her thirties put it.

The preoccupation of the local church with maintenance and money was touched upon in some of the written responses. A 44 year old from the border region observed: 'They were always fund-raising, always looking for money', which was a typical response in this regard.

On a wider canvas, the vexed areas of mixed-marriages and sectarianism was commented upon in some of the written responses. A female respondent in her 70s expressed her disappointment with the church in stark terms: 'I am in a mixed-marriage. The difficulties that arose both during my initial relationship and even the marriage ceremony itself made me disillusioned by the word church and what Christianity means. I felt I was in a tug of war and I was the loser.'

The problem of sectarianism also raised its ugly head. A 52 year old male from the south-east noted: ‘Scratch below the surface and you come across a “them and us” attitude. The small mindedness and insular attitude of a number of people in my parish made it such an unattractive place to be part of.’

### **Being let down by the church**

The Church of Ireland is essentially a pastoral church which sets great store on the care of its people, primarily through its pastors, the clergy (Report of the Commission on Ministry, 1981, p. 19). A lack of care and support is regarded as a dereliction of the calling and duty of pastors. A disturbingly high number of written responses voiced concern that clergy were uncaring. A female student from the west of Ireland observed: ‘Some clergy are often the reason why people leave the church. They ignore people, even those who are in need. It would appear that they do not care.’

Some respondents touched on the behaviour of clergy which acted as a barrier to church participation. For example a 49 year old man from the Midlands complained: ‘The treatment of my spouse at a parish meeting by a clergyman and the subsequent lack of apology or contact or even any attempt to address the problem was lamentable. It put us off church completely. We will never go back as long as he is still there.’

In a few exceptional responses, the spectre of clerical abuse was raised. One 34 year old male was candid: ‘My clergy man is a dictator and a bully. His offensive behaviour towards my children’s grave was deeply upsetting. The death of my twin children was a bitter blow but I will never forgive how I was treated by someone whose job it is to care, not scare people.’

Other respondents felt let down by the church at large. One 43 year old Dubliner summarised his experience: ‘The church seemed to be only interested in attracting new members and didn’t seem at all interested in keeping and caring for those members it already had.’

The clergy person remains however, the chief focus for the church’s pastoral care. The departure of a rector and the appointment of a new clergyperson can bring with it the problem of change and adjustment on behalf of parishioners. A number of respondents were negatively affected by such changes. A 39 year old male from the Midlands expressed it in frank terms: ‘I found the arrival of a new clergyman to my parish very difficult. I found him very insincere and out of touch. He has no time for people and especially children which I find alarming. He is in a world of his own!’

Worship is central to the Christian experience. Francis and Richter (2007, p. 251) contend that ‘what actually happens in a worship service is likely to be crucial to whether people stay or drift away’. A number of written responses reflect the problems generated by changes in worship which precipitated their distancing from church. For example a 48 year old female from Munster disclosed: ‘I feel that I would like to go to church more but I feel that it is too long-winded and monotonous. When I was there I would drift away from the spoken words. When I looked around church it seemed to me that not many people were actually listening to what was being said never mind enjoying the experience.’

Some respondents felt there was too little sense of the presence of God in worship. It was too mechanical and predictable. One 20 year old female student observed: ‘They just mumble the prayers; stand when others stand, sit when others sit. The language used in most prayers and hymns is so out of date. I don’t know what half of them mean. Where is God in all of this?’

Other respondents focused specifically on the changes that had taken place in worship and liturgy. One 48 year old male from the south-east was scathing: ‘I don’t go to church regularly anymore because I am angry and saddened by the turfing out of the Book of Common Prayer, the Authorised Version and traditional hymns. These things are a very valuable heritage, like Shakespeare. No wonder so few people go to church nowadays.’

### **Theology and morality**

A small number of written responses reflected the issues people have, with the theological and moral stance of the church, which were a disincentive to attendance. Some respondents expressed concerns that the church was too evangelical or too liberal for their liking. Others thought the church’s teaching was too simple and not demanding enough; they were not sure what the church was trying to convey by way of commitment. One 52 year old male thought the church was too negative towards the world in the following terms: ‘As a teenager I looked at the church and it was so different to the world. The things the church was interested and excited about were so small compared to the big issues. It was like the church had turned its back on the world and was in a world of its own. That put me off attending.’

Another respondent, a 38 year old professional from Dublin, highlighted their disagreement with the moral teaching of the church: ‘The church has become too political. Instead of giving a lead, the church just follows political values and we know that in politics there [are] no real values.’

For some people the experiences of the past coloured their views about church and attendance. Some drew attention to their time in the armed services

where they were forced to attend church which put them off attending on a voluntary basis. Others spoke of the rigours of boarding school and the way in which compulsory church attendance had also a negative influence on their relationship with church.

## **Question Two**

A resolution (Church of Ireland, 2011d, pp. 393-394) proposed to the General Synod of the Church of Ireland in 2011, recognised a sense of priority and urgency of mission. To this end, the Church of Ireland Council for Mission (Church of Ireland, 2011d, p. 393) advocated the adoption of ‘Back to Church Sunday’ across the whole church. The initiative of encouraging those who absented themselves from regular worship was an indication that reaching out to the nominal fringe was on the agenda of the Church of Ireland.

The second question asked in the written response enquired ‘What action could the church take to encourage your attendance at Sunday service?’ In all, there were 220 written responses, 16% lower than the number of responses to Question One. The reluctance of some people to respond to this second question may be an indication that there was no action the church could take, to induce them to return to church. Evidence from the written responses to the same question suggests that for a substantial number of nominal Anglicans, nothing the church could do would persuade them to return to worship. Brief responses such as: ‘none’, ‘nothing’, ‘not sure’ and ‘don’t know’, made up around 30% of the written responses. Other respondents were more explicit in their replies. For instance, a 57 year old male manual worker from the north-west said: ‘I don’t believe there is anything the church

could do at this stage. It is really about me and not the church. I've made my mind up.'

Some were more sceptical about the church changing to facilitate their return. One 19 year old female student commented: 'The services need to be greatly changed for me to attend but frankly I can't see that happening. So there is nothing to be done.'

Indications of a disinstitutional faith identified by Inglis (2007) were unmistakable in quite a number of written responses. One reply from a 32 year old female captured the sentiment: 'I don't know. I don't hold that you have to attend church to be a good Christian. There is really no need to take part in organised religion.'

Despite the possibility of the church changing to accommodate a return to worship, a sizeable number of nominal Irish Anglicans ruled out any prospect of their return; there was no going back. For those who were more amenable to return, by far the key actions the church could take was to do with worship and belonging.

### **Worship**

Francis and Richter (2007, p. 251) identified three areas of concern in relation to worship, described thematically as: A Matter of Style, A Matter of Taste and A Matter of Level. In response to the written replies generated by nominal Irish Anglicans, a fourth theme can be added: A Matter of Time.

#### *A matter of style*

In terms of matters of style, the most frequent response was for a more informal, less traditional style. Terms such as: 'more friendly', 'more relaxed', a

‘more family atmosphere’, ‘more lively’, ‘use of more lively music’, ‘more interesting’, ‘more modern’, ‘more laughter’, ‘less formal’, ‘open’, ‘less pomposity’, ‘less dead and dreary’, ‘more exciting and entertaining’, ‘more interactive’, ‘more interesting’ and ‘better organised’ recurred repeatedly in the written responses.

The appeal to modernise services was apparent as expressed by a 39 year old professional man from the south-east: ‘The church needs to catch up with the modern world, to talk to the congregation and not at them. Drop all those old prayers that come from a time when people would not question what was being said. You need to catch and hold people’s attention and that is not easy.’

For others a change in the style of service was required. One young woman from Munster expressed it as such: ‘The services are so dull and dreary. I don’t feel the church will grow or attract young people unless the services are brought up to date. More musical instruments are needed other than the basic organ. Young people should be encouraged to form a band.’

The solemnity of church worship was criticised by some respondents. A typical response was from a 33 year old professional woman from Dublin: ‘In order for me to go back to church, would mean major change. The services are too solemn, some of the clergy are too old-fashioned in their style of conducting a service never mind preaching. Church should be a happy occasion, full of smiles, laughter and delight in praising God.’

On the other hand a small number of respondents thought a more formal and dignified style of worship would be conducive to their return to church. For example a 49 year old woman from the Midlands said: ‘Give us back the proper service. Attempts to attract younger people with accessible prose and childish hymns doesn’t work and won’t work.’

Some other respondents identified hymnody. One 26 year old post-graduate from the south replied: ‘More modern hymns are needed. The congregation should be encouraged to stand and clap and dance a little. Services should be lively and happy and swinging rather than dull, boring and too sedate.’

The resistance to change was expressed by a 40 year old male from the mid-west as: ‘Stop chopping all the time with new liturgies and hymnals etc. Recognise that just change isn’t necessary for change’s sake. There should be room for people brought up with a more traditional background, who enjoy the great old hymns.’

### *A matter of taste*

A much smaller number of respondents asked the church to address the matter of taste before they returned to worship. One respondent found worship to be too mechanical. A 38 year old female from Dublin wrote: ‘The services are too nerdy. There is so much said in word and song and too little space for silence and reflection.’

A 63 year old male advocated: ‘It could be more spiritual – rather than so mechanical’. Others drew attention to the need for variety and flexibility in worship to suit different tastes. For example a 30 year old professional woman from Dublin suggested: ‘I would return to church if it catered for all age groups ranging from children to older people. It needs to facilitate all people, to be more user-friendly. It is a case of take it or leave it, which is why many have stopped going.’

### *A matter of level*

The third theme that emerged in the written responses focused on matters to do with the level of worship, in relation to the services in general and sermons in particular. Many respondents insisted that services could be made more accessible

and participative. A 59 year old male manual worker from the Midlands suggested: ‘The service is too top down, the minister does virtually everything, there is no space for anyone else. Anyway he goes over everyone’s head with the words he uses. He needs to come down from his high horse and needs to be less pompous.’

Sermons too, came in for heavy attention. For example an 18 year old male college student from the south-west offered: ‘Perhaps make the sermons shorter, more interactive than someone speaking down to you and they need to be on more topical issues rather than obscure relics from the past.’

Another, a 22 year old female student, proposed: ‘The clergy should come down to the congregation and communicate to them in a natural way. Sermons should be relevant to present everyday life, not about the finer points of theology, more about living as a Christian in a very complex world.’

### *A matter of time*

A considerable amount of the written responses dealt with matters of time, when it came to worship. The appeal of respondents for shorter, more frequent and different time services was substantial. This appeal coincided with the busyness of people and their lack of time at weekends, evident from the findings in Chapter Six in this study. One respondent, a 19 year old female student who worked at weekends, expressed her frustration: ‘I am too tired on Sunday morning [which] for me is an unrealistic time. What about Sunday afternoon?’

Others pointed to the Roman Catholic tradition of Saturday night worship as a way forward. For example, a 21 year old male student questioned: ‘Why has the service always have to be on Sunday morning at some unearthly hour? Why not go

for Saturday evening? It seems to work for the Catholics. Or what's wrong with another week night, maybe Monday. Keep them short and snappy.'

Others appealed for services to be held on Sunday evenings. One retired professional man remembered: 'When I was young, I always went to the evening service. They have disappeared off the scene. Maybe it's time to bring them back and people like me would consider coming back.'

### **Belonging**

Human beings, Richter and Francis (1998, p. 121) suggest, 'have an abiding need to feel that they belong somewhere'. The need to belong is a consistent feature articulated in the written responses. One respondent, a 49 year old mother from Dublin, remarked: 'Let me in, spiritually, intellectually and emotionally as well as physically and financially. My daughter now goes to a new church with her friends from school and is so happy. Will her new parish welcome me?'

Another 51 year old man from the Midlands put it very pointedly: 'I was never asked to church.'

Some respondents drew a wider horizon of belonging in the community. For example a 38 year old woman from the north-west advocated: 'The church needs to create a sense of belonging. Anybody should be welcome at the door but the church is so removed from the wider community. There is such a big gap which it needs to fill before I would feel part of it again.'

An openness to be part of something bigger in an ecumenical belonging was mentioned by some respondents like this 63 year old retired man from the west: 'Why do we have to do things on our own? Why ignore the other churches in the town? Are we afraid of being swamped by them or what. We need to get together.'

Some criticised the Church of Ireland for being too proud and exclusive. For example, a 48 year old man from the Midlands appealed: ‘Be humble. Be inclusive. Be generous and open to other people. That will involve acceptance of others rather than the promotion of ourselves. We need to get real of how small and insignificant we are. Just get rid of the exclusivity.’

Some respondents spoke of a breakdown in relationships as the disincentive to returning to church. One 36 year old professional from Munster suggested: ‘The church always talks about itself as a family but the reality is otherwise. It’s more like a broken-down family where some don’t talk to the others but criticise them quite openly. Surely that’s not what it’s meant to be like, is it?’

Others expressed the sentiment in a more positive way. For example a retired 68 year old female from the commuter belt around Dublin said: ‘The church needs to build its community so that everyone can belong. It needs to be an integral part of its parishioners lives rather than one solitary hour each week.’

A minority of responses were very pointed in their demands. For example a 53 year old Dubliner demanded: ‘Get rid of the rector and appoint someone who actually cares and does some work.’

The theme of caring was picked up by another respondent, a 22 year old female student from the north-east suggested: ‘Get back to the nuts and bolts of caring for people, loving one another rather than all this confusion on social policies and moral issues. Leave that to the politicians.’

Another respondent, a 46 year old woman from the border region, articulated the need for support: ‘Some form of support group is needed where I live. The

church needs to help people trying to rebuild their lives after the trauma of illness, bereavement or marriage breakdown.’

A few respondents dredged up a breakdown in relationships within the church. For example a 54 year old male from the west demanded: ‘A full and frank discussion between the local clergy and bishop and my wife and myself. We need to clear the air’ and ‘Re-open the church where generations of my family attended, it was closed by the bishop. How does he expect me to go!’

Prejudice was identified by another respondent, a 35 year old female from the Midlands: ‘I won’t go back until all the bigots have gone and all the prejudice is thrown out.’

Finally one response made by a 47 year old woman from Leinster brought many of these proposals together, coupling with it a loss of identity:

There is a market out there which the Church of Ireland seems uninterested in. There are people disillusioned with other faiths. Our church is cold and unwelcoming. To be fair, some clergy try but others can’t be bothered. We seem to have forgotten our roots as a reformed church seeking to win the lost.’

### **Question Three**

The written responses to the third question in the qualitative section: ‘If you had to choose the reason for retaining your identification with the Church of Ireland, what would it be?’ were clustered around four themes: Belonging, Faith, Ethos and Children.

## **Belonging**

By far the most numerous response had to do with belonging. Respondents expressed their sense of belonging synonymously in terms of family, heritage, upbringing, baptism, culture, tradition, community and Protestantism.

In terms of family, there were a number of nuanced responses. For example, one 54 year old man from the west said: 'I am Church of Ireland because it is a family tradition and maintaining that is important in a small rural community.'

Another, a 34 year old Dubliner, shared: 'It's about family identity in a broad sense. It connects me to my past. It is part of my DNA.'

One 55 year old male manual worker from the Midlands made out: 'I don't believe in changing faith like one changes socks. We are what we are as a direct consequence of birth. I am glad I had no choice in the matter as I feel I belong.'

Another reply from a 40 year old female from Dublin made the connection between family and culture: 'It's part of my family, my culture. I have no reason to turn my back on it. I am proud of the Church of Ireland tradition and the part my family have had in it.'

A female respondent from Dublin spoke of the value of heritage in spite of human frailties: 'It has got to do with heritage, the way I was brought up. For me, church and God are the same. People make a bags of the church, and its people I disagree with not the church or God.'

Another respondent, a 32 year old professional woman from the south-east, coupled her heritage with a sense of obligation. She wrote: 'It's what I am, my

heritage with such a small population, I feel obligated to continue the culture and not let the population die out.’

A number of responses made the distinction between heritage and religion. For example a 20 year old male student from Cork articulated: ‘It’s difficult to say why I am Church of Ireland. It’s not a religious affiliation. I was brought up a Protestant. Perhaps it’s more to do with heritage, a tradition.’

A sense of inheritance or upbringing was much in evidence in the responses. A typical response was from a 26 year old female medic from Dublin: ‘I was born and brought up Church of Ireland and I would like to remain that way.’

Many respondents expressed their belonging in terms of culture. For example a 20 year old male student from the border region reasoned: ‘Being Church of Ireland is important to me. I am proud of that culture of openness and honesty. It’s an identity thing.’

Culture too, was linked to being a Protestant in a number of the responses. One respondent, a 35 year old farmer from the Midlands asserted: ‘I am Church of Ireland, a Protestant. I am proud of being one. I will stay one for the rest of my life.’

Allied to being Protestant, some respondents made mention of their disregard of the alternatives in Ireland. For example, a 53 year old manual worker from Cork conceded: ‘I’m Anglican; I’d be too disobedient for the Roman Catholic Church and too high for most non-conformist churches.’

Belonging, being part of a community, was valued by quite a number of respondents. A typical response came from a 34 year old male from the Midlands: ‘It’s being part of a community, being connected to other Church of Ireland people in the area, gives me strength and confidence that I am not alone.’

Others expressed their belonging in a religious sense of being baptised or confirmed in the Church of Ireland. For example, a retired 67 year old woman from Dublin confirmed: 'I was baptised and confirmed Church of Ireland and nothing could or would induce me to change.'

### **Faith**

The second theme drawn from the written responses with regards to identity was faith. The most common response to the third question as a whole was that of personal belief; put simply, 'I believe'. Others were more developed in their response. For example a 19 year old female student from Dublin shared: 'I still retain my identity with the Church of Ireland because I believe in God. Although the church has become a less important factor for me, it still hold that its teachings are true'.

Another, an 18 year old student from the south-west disclosed: 'I am Church of Ireland, a church which doesn't indoctrinate people into belief. I came to faith in Jesus freely of my own will and I still value that.'

For another respondent, a young male student, the Church of Ireland was: 'The only established faith that come closest to my views on Christianity and one's role in society.'

Some respondents spoke of their admiration for the Church of Ireland when it came to the enjoyment of and comfort in worship. For example a 52 year old woman from the Midlands admitted: 'I don't go to church very often but when I do I am always uplifted by the experience of worship, it is so beautiful and pure in such a cynical world.'

Another, a 57 year old woman from the north-west, drew great comfort: ‘I know I don’t go to church very often now, but it is a great comfort for me to know that there is a church in the village that is open for worship and welcomes people like me.’

Others spoke of their enjoyment as articulated by this 38 year old woman from the north-east: ‘I am still Church of Ireland because, if I go to church, I enjoy the services. There is always a variety of hymns. I also find it easy to approach my rector whenever I need him even though I barely attend church. They are so full of life and there are so many things going on if you are interested.’

Some respondents spoke very positively of their experience of clergy which cemented their identity with the Church of Ireland. One response made by a 31 year male manual worker from the south-east, was particularly glowing: ‘We have a brilliant rector. He restored my faith in God. Even though I rarely go to church, he visited me in hospital and kept in constant contact with my family. His goodness knows no bounds, it’s clergy like him that makes me proud to be Church of Ireland.’

For others it was the prospect of life’s journey which kept them identifying with the Church of Ireland. A 52 year old farmer from the Midlands expressed it rather gravely: ‘We are all going to die. I need to believe in life after death. At the point of death I will need the church and when I am buried I would like my funeral service in the local church.’

On a lighter note, a 23 year old female from the west, shared: ‘When I get married, I want the ceremony in my parish church. Even though I don’t go there, I would not want to be married anywhere else.’

## **Ethos**

Ethos, that is the essence or culture of the church, was the third theme which people gave for retaining their identity as Church of Ireland. Respondents such as this 52 year old professional from Cork, referred to the openness of the Church of Ireland as a reason for the continued association as follows: ‘The Church of Ireland, being Protestant, is an open church that freely invites in and accepts anyone without restrictions and no questions asked. This gives people the opportunity to see for themselves, to become Church of Ireland, for them to seek answers.’

Some respondents linked openness with a liberal viewpoint as a major attraction for retaining their links with the Church of Ireland. A 37 year old male from the mid-west expressed it like this: ‘I agree with the basic ethos of the Church of Ireland. I admire the open and liberal attitude of the church which is welcoming and allows members to make up their own minds.’

Quite a number of responses contrasted the ethos of the Church of Ireland with the Roman Catholic stance in Ireland. One retired 68 year old professional admitted: ‘I am very proud of my identity despite the church being a bit old-fashioned. It still has a more open mind than the other main Christian church in this country. I also feel that its values that were passed onto me when I was younger, have stood me well over the years.’

Some of the written responses attributed their affiliation to the Church of Ireland as not wanting to be Catholic. An example of this thinking was made by a 20 year old male student from the west: ‘I like the ethos and feeling of belonging to something different. Possibly more a case of not wanting to be part of the Roman Catholic majority. I am proud of the liberal and caring stand that the Church of Ireland has taken on a number of issues, like abortion and racism.’

Some respondents, who were clearly from a Roman Catholic background but now identified themselves as Church of Ireland, found the ethos of the church appealing. For example, a 35 year old professional man from Dublin reflected: ‘Having grown up Roman Catholic, I am now Church of Ireland. Why? It is less dogmatic and allows people to hold their own opinions. It is also less hypocritical in many ways. It is much more open than the Catholic Church.’

A number of the responses touched on the less hierarchical and more democratic ethos of the Church of Ireland like this 56 year old male from Cork: ‘The Church of Ireland values its members. Throughout its organisation it welcomes inputs from its members from select vestries to synods etc. Its bishops are accountable to its members. It also reflects its community; women for example can be priests and bishops. I like its stance on many issues which are complex.’

Other responses valued the minority nature of the Church of Ireland as being a compelling feature which fastened their identity. A 60 year old man from the border region remarked: ‘I like the fact that we are a minority church. It is always more interesting to be in the minority. As I have travelled throughout the world my membership of the Church of Ireland has given me empathy with other minorities and the situations they have to face.’

The word ‘respect’ recurred throughout the written responses to the third question with regard to the ethos of the church. For example a 56 year old man from Cork declared: ‘I respect the Church of Ireland; it rarely puts a foot wrong. Throughout history it has had the guts to stand up for what it believes, offering an alternative way of thinking to the monarchical Catholic model.’

In similar vein some commented on the decency of Church of Ireland people as a reason for retaining their identification with the church. One 59 year old man

from the Midlands observed: ‘There are a lot of decent people in the church doing valuable work. We would all be the poorer without them and the church which feeds their motivation.’

Other respondents spoke of the value of a Church of Ireland education in retaining their links with the church. A 20 year old male student from the mid-west expressed this as follows: ‘I went to a Protestant secondary school and I like what it stands for – it’s open-minded and non-judgemental. It takes care of people in a compassionate way, treats people with respect. Even though I don’t go, it means much to me.’

### **Children**

The fourth theme highlighted in the written responses as to why people continued their identification with the Church of Ireland, was children. Many expressed it succinctly as ‘for my children’, ‘for my son’ or ‘for my daughter’; others elaborated on this reason, like this 32 year old woman from Dublin: ‘I now have a family and I would like them to have the same experience and opportunity that I had. So I will re-join the church because it makes children special and does so much for them in church and school.’

Some clearly in a mixed marriage situation opted for the Church of Ireland because of their children. This respondent, a 27 year old woman from the north-east, sums up their intention: ‘It would be for my child. We christened him Church of Ireland so that he will be free to make up his own mind when he is older. Even though I am very sceptical, I feel he has a much better chance being brought up Church of Ireland.’

For some it was the spectre of child abuse that convinced them of the value of the Church of Ireland as this 37 year old woman from the Midlands disclosed: ‘I

think it's important to be brought up with Christian values and ideals. I also feel that my children would not be as vulnerable to abuse when involved in the Church of Ireland schools and activities.'

## **Conclusion**

A consideration of the written responses has been valuable for a number of reasons. First it brought colour, depth and nuance to the quantitative analysis. Secondly, in some instances, it opened up unexplored territory, ignored in the quantitative questions. The green and economic concerns of people, is a point in case. One male respondent from the West commented: 'The church never seems to deal with issues affecting the ecology of the earth. They seem quite happy to let power and money be in the hands of the few.' Thirdly it gave credence and corroboration to the quantitative findings. There is a correlation for instance in the frequency of responses in the first written question which are broadly in line with the range of scores obtained in the quantitative findings.

To that end the most frequent written responses had to do with life changes: growing up, finding other activities and interests, getting out of the habit and work. Likewise faltering faith issues were also heavily represented in the written responses: boredom, irrelevance and doubts were prominently expressed. Also the theme of disconnection occurred frequently in the written responses: not feeling part, not interested, no need to attend church to be a Christian were all conspicuous.

In contrast the least frequent written responses had themes such as: relocation, being let down by the church, disillusionment and differences in theology and morality. A number of reasons cited in the quantitative section for reduced church attendance did not appear in any of the written responses. They included for

example: feeling powerless to effect change, distrusting the church as an institution, a partner not going to church, feeling let down by God and marital breakdown.

As already has been mentioned, some of the responses to the first question for example revealed distinct reasons as to why people had reduced their church attendance which were not included in the quantitative questions. Among these were: the hierarchical nature of the church, the equal value of people in God's eyes, animal and human rights, economic and ecological issues and the ridicule some experience in the church because of their spirituality.

The response to the second question in the qualitative section was telling. It had the lowest response out of the three questions asked which could be interpreted as indifference to the church. Moreover, up to a third of the responses gave the distinct impression that the church could do little to persuade people to return to worship. For those who were prepared to consider a return to church, worship was key and to a lesser extent, belonging. Matters of style dominated the responses with regard to worship. Those who were open to church involvement wanted a radical change in public worship. They were seeking more informality, a greater degree of vitality and friendliness, greater participation and family involvement. They were also exercised by time with a plea for shorter services and more varied times rather than the Sunday morning norm. The nature of these demands may be redolent of the demands of youth which probably reflects the preponderance of young people in the sample.

However infrequent their church attendance, if at all, the response to the last of the open-ended questions, confirms the strength of identification nominal Irish Anglicans have with their church. It is primarily a case of belonging, a family

heritage and cultural attachment. It also has to do with belief, even though attendance is minimal or non-existent, faith is alive in these disinstitutionalised Anglicans. It also involves an outlook, an openness and liberality of spirit. It has to do with passing on something of value to succeeding generations which ties up with the emphasis on the family.

The value of this qualitative exercise to the overall study was to some extent compromised by the low response to the written questions, compared to the closed quantitative questions which had a much higher response rate. In part, the low response may have been a result of questionnaire fatigue, seeing that these were the final questions. It may also have been as a result of the fact that these qualitative questions were more challenging to the respondents, a demand that they were unprepared to face. Then again, it may have had to do with indifference which was picked up in the replies to Questions Two and Three. Nonetheless people were given the chance to express their views and the fact that many took the opportunity to do so, was insightful to the study as a whole.

## **CHAPTER FIFTEEN**

### **CONCLUSION**

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## Chapter 15: Conclusion

### Chapter One: Ireland, An Exceptional Case

Chapter One, sought first to present in context the exceptionality of Ireland in religious terms. The chapter demonstrated that Ireland remains an overwhelmingly Catholic country where 84% of people describe themselves as Roman Catholic (Central Statistics Office, 2012). Archbishop Michael Neary of Tuam, writing the forward to MacGreil's (2009, p. viii) work, *The Challenge of Indifference*, commented:

The evidence presented in the body of this [MacGreil's] report has confirmed that religion is still an important aspect in the life of the vast majority of adults in the Republic of Ireland with less than 5% of respondents stating that 'they do not believe in God'. (This figure was confirmed in the 2006 census report, that is 4.4% reporting 'No Religion).

In the second place the chapter endeavoured to demonstrate the way in which the State enumerated the religious composition of the Irish people with particular reference to the Church of Ireland. The frequency with which the religious question in the national census was asked, stretches back over 150 years. Despite changes in the formulation of the question asked in the census over time, Macourt (2008, p. 14) concludes the scarcity of objections to the question and the negligible numbers of those who refuse to answer it, are evidence that the Irish appear to understand what the question means. From 1861 to 1991, the Church of Ireland population in what became the Irish Republic, declined from 372,723 to 89,187 or by 76% (Central Statistics Office, 2012). In 2002 the Church of Ireland population increased for the first time in over 140 years to 115,611 and by 2011 the Church of Ireland population further increased to 134,365.

What do people mean when they answer ‘Church of Ireland’ in the national census? Macourt (2008, p. 27) distinguishes four possible definitions of belonging: baptism/confirmation, attendance at worship, register of vestry persons and a regular and identifiable contribution to the funds of the church. Ultimately the census authorities leave decisions as to what constitutes belonging to the individual who completes the census form. The chapter has clearly demonstrated the continuity and consistency of the national census as a reliable indicator of how many Irish people consider themselves Church of Ireland.

Finally the chapter sought to substantiate how the Church of Ireland enumerated its own people. In spite of the statistical information available in parishes and at diocesan level, the Church of Ireland had a *laissez-faire* attitude as to ‘counting the people of God’ (Macourt, 2008). What were the reasons for this? Deane (1986, p. 69) was forthright. The methods of calculating population by the church bodies were generally unreliable. At another level, the ‘self-reliant’ principle recognised by Acheson (1997) whereby Church of Ireland parishes were chiefly responsible for paying clerical stipends and maintaining parochial buildings, rather than the diocese or central church, had an input on who to count in and count out. There was little point including nominal people who did not attend regularly or contribute to parish funds, to a parish membership list, because the diocese would assess the parish financially on the basis of a broad membership list. Thus the membership list for each parish reflected a core group of attenders and givers as opposed to a wider group of people who belonged in some way to the Church of Ireland. The outworking of this was to amplify the underestimation of the Church of Ireland population by the church in comparison to the national census which was demonstrated in the chapter. With the advent of a standardised church census

introduced in 2013, a clearer picture of the underestimation emerged. According to the findings of the 2013 church census, between a third and two-thirds of registered vestry persons attend church on an average Sunday; however if the church attendance figures for the average Sunday are set against the national census figures, a different picture emerges. In the majority of the dioceses concerned, average Sunday attendance is around 15% of the 2011 census total for Church of Ireland people.

What is clear is that a substantial number of people consider themselves Church of Ireland but play little or no role in the life of the church. What is not clear are the reasons for this nominalism which lies at the heart of this study.

## **Chapter Two: A Sense of Belonging**

Having established that a significant number of Irish Anglicans affiliate and consider themselves Church of Ireland, Chapter Two sought to grasp an understanding of this belonging in relation to belief and practice. The consistent discrepancy between the national census returns, alluding to affiliation and the Church of Ireland returns relating to membership, would seem to suggest that religious affiliation is a poor predictor of belief and practice. Davie's (2002, p.11) work on believing and belonging in a European framework was insightful as to the nature of Irish religious belonging, belief and practice. Davie demonstrated that the Irish are different from their immediate neighbours when it comes to belonging and belief; however Davie (2013, p. 283) concedes that Ireland is becoming closer to the European norm than it used to be. The European Value System data used by Davie makes no distinctions between Irish Catholics and Protestants, a weakness when trying to isolate Irish Anglican belonging and belief. O'Donnell's (2002, pp. 73-74)

research was helpful in this regard as it gave an indication of belonging and belief among young educated Catholics which could be used as a benchmark in this study. O'Donnell concluded that unlike their European counterparts, most of his 20 to 35 year old cohort believed they had an experience and relationship with God expressed through prayer. His survey did not detect an 'emergence of post-modern meaningless nor a post-Christian mentality in young adult Ireland' at the time (O'Donnell, 2002, p. 74).

In comparison to Davie's (2013) and O'Donnell's (2002) work, Kennerley's (1998) research, which examined the participation of younger men in a country parish of the Church of Ireland, was on a micro scale. Nonetheless Kennerley's findings were revealing. What did she discover? First there was an admission of a decline in church attendance since the 1970s. The obligation of weekly attendance then had switched to choice in the late 1990s which acceded with Davie's (2013, p. 283) concept, a shift from duty to a culture of consumption or choice. In the second place Kennerley (1998) found that the men in her parish expressed both a diminution of belief and a persistence of belief. Some saw their position as a case of belonging without believing, whereas others insisted their faith was still important, with prayer particularly meaningful along with a strong idea of God. Retaining a degree of faith and holding onto church-going habits appeared to be two very different things. Kennerley also detected that whether young men went to church or not, whether they believed or not, they remained very aware of their membership of the Church of Ireland; they belonged. This stands in contrast to O'Donnell's (2002, p. 16) findings that for young Catholic men, intrinsic reasons for church attendance were far more significant than the extrinsic reasons, notably identification with a community.

How much weight can be placed upon Kennerley's (1998) micro study in the context of understanding belonging, belief and practice among Irish Anglicans? On the debit side, Kennerley's study is very small and restricted to the church membership of four rural parishes. It also excluded those in the parish areas who lay outside church membership but who self-affiliated as Church of Ireland in the national census. On the plus side, Kennerley's findings bear some correspondence to that of MacGreil (1991) and Whelan (1994) and their estimation of weekly church attendance in the Protestant churches of the Irish Republic. More importantly, Kennerley's (1998) conclusion that men in her study increasingly regarded church as more part of their allegiance to community and tradition rather than a source of spirituality, coincides with other findings in the field.

Commentators such as Mitchell (2006) and Elliott (2009) agree that in Ireland, religion plays a crucial role in identity. Being a Protestant in an overwhelmingly Catholic country marks a boundary of belonging and gives expression to it. Nic Ghiolla Phadraig (1986) drew the connection between the proportion of people attending church and whether or not the group is a religious minority as in the case of Protestants in the Republic and Catholics in parts of Northern Ireland. It is about keeping your side up. Considere-Charon (1995) too, discovered that Church of Ireland people considered 'Protestant values' as making them distinct from their Catholic neighbours. In Whyte's (1980, p. 4) view the peculiar history of Ireland on leaving the United Kingdom, forced the Protestant minority in Ireland to defend its religious tradition and distinct identity in relation to Irish Catholicism.

Rather than being seen as a poor predictor of belief and practice the evidence presented in this chapter with regard to religious affiliation in Ireland, would seem to

indicate otherwise. Hickey (1984), along with Francis, Robbins, Barnes and Lewis (2006), concurs. When allied to a strong sense of religious belonging, belief is a powerful predictor of a worldview, shaping social attitudes and actions. Of course the issue of nominalism is not unique to Ireland. The chapter widened the frame by reviewing the work of Bibby (1985) and O'Toole (1996) in Canada and Bouma (1992) in Australia, in seeking further understanding of religious belonging in an Irish Anglican setting. Fane's (1999, p. 119) reading of Bibby's (1985) and Bouma's (1992) work was useful in understanding Irish Anglican belonging. For Fane, it informs attitudes and behaviour. These in turn define who people are, or equally who they are not, in the Irish context: not Catholic, not 'no religion' but Church of Ireland. The complex relationship between belonging, belief and practice, was central to the discussion in this chapter. Irish Anglicans by way of census affiliation, regard themselves as belonging to the Church of Ireland, that is their identity. For commentators such as Bibby (1985), Bouma (1992), Fane (1999) and Francis (2008), religious affiliation is theoretically coherent and a socially significant indicator. For them, belonging has more to do with notions of identity than with views of belief and impressions of participation.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

Chapter Three set out to establish the methods, the techniques and procedures used in the process of data gathering. The aim of the methodology was to gain understanding into the central research question at the core of this study. The challenge to locate a sufficiently large and representative sample of nominal Irish Anglicans was apparent in the chapter. By its very nature nominalism is a difficult and sensitive topic to investigate, particularly in Ireland, where the privacy and

quietude of Protestants is a given. Getting to these people and obtaining a sufficient response from them was, as the chapter reveals, difficult.

In the first place, establishing the size of the population was difficult. How large was the nominal Irish Anglican population? Of the three benchmarks used: the 2002 national census, Brierley's (1995) calculation of Church of Ireland membership and the 2000 diocesan returns for membership; only the national census was really reliable. The other two were by their very nature, estimates. Therefore the target population of between 21,000 and 63,000 may well have been an underestimation of the number of nominal Irish Anglicans.

In the second place locating a sufficient number of nominal Irish Anglicans by the use of gatekeeper clergy was problematic. In theory, clergy working on the ground in parishes and chaplaincies across the Republic had a unique access to church-going and non-church-going Anglicans. In practice the response of the gatekeeper clergy was disappointing. Despite good practice, using good quality stationery, a letter of introduction and instruction stressing the confidentiality and anonymity of the survey, co-operation from gatekeeper clergy only initiated a 21% response, even after a follow-up telephone conversation.

In the third place the attempt to widen the sample to potential young respondents in the age group 17 to 25 years, through schools and third level colleges was more helpful. Although it skewed the age profile of the sample, there was a sufficient response from the two sources: gate-keeper clergy and young people, to make the sample large enough to be representative of the target population.

In view of the research subject and the desire to undertake an extensive enquiry. The methodology chosen for the investigation was primarily quantitative

and the instrument a questionnaire. Considerable quantitative work in the socio-religious field using questionnaires had been used to good effect both in Ireland and Britain. O'Donnell (2002) and MacGreil (2009) had targeted young educated Catholics and an Irish Catholic constituency respectively. Richter and Francis (1998), Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005) and Francis and Richter (2007) were likewise pertinent studies with regard to this research into Irish Anglicanism. Richter and Francis (1998) and Francis and Richter (2007) attempted to assess and throw light on the implications of church-leaving for the vitality of churches in England and Wales. Francis, Robbins and Astley's (2005, p. 9) study on the other hand, sought to provide a comprehensive picture of committed Anglicans, in terms of who they are and what they believe.

Taken together the methodology applied in these three studies and in particular, Richter and Francis (1998) and Francis and Richter (2007), provided the template for the approach in this research. The advantages of adapting these studies were considerable. In the first instance, although two of the survey projects were aimed at church-leavers, there is reasonable overlap with nominal affiliates. Moreover some of the vocabulary used in the church-leaving literature is appropriate in the context of nominalism as follows: distancing, disengaged, drifting and dropping out. In the second instance, Francis, Robbins and Astley's work (2005) is located within the Church of England, a sister church of the Church of Ireland. Although focusing on committed Anglicans in an English context, their work was a useful tool in examining uncommitted Anglicans in an Irish milieu. Lastly, by using these three studies as a template gave the Irish research context and enabled comparisons to be drawn.

Adapting the above mentioned studies as the instrument of investigation for this study was demanding. Great care was taken on the design and construction of the questionnaire which followed best practice guidelines advocated by Wilson and McLean (1994). In practice the preliminary sections of the questionnaire with standard questions about the demographic characteristics of the respondents and their past in terms of religious practice were generally well answered. The section which enquired about the church attendances of respondents was less well answered and probably reflects the complex nature of changing church attendance present in the literature, for example Voas and Crockett (2005), Francis and Richter (2007) and Davie (2013).

The middle section of the questionnaire consisted of two sections of closed questions. The first of these sought to ascertain the core beliefs and truth claims from respondents using a five-fold Likert Scale. The response to this shorter section was excellent, a clear indication that the questions were applicable to the respondents and that the use of the Likert Scale was effective. The second section of the mid-part of the questionnaire of 67 closed questions, again using a five-fold Likert Scale, sought to locate the reasons why the respondents had reduced their church attendance. In contrast to the questions on belief and truth claims, the overall response to this section was mixed. Why was this? The range of possible reasons was lengthy and the reasons for reducing church attendance by respondents may have been few. Again the number of the questions may have been a disincentive for completing the task. Clearly some of the questions had little relevance to the respondents and they remained blank. For presentation purposes, the data was broken down into smaller working blocks which formed the basis of eight analysis chapters. This facilitated a

detailed analysis combined with external comparisons to the work undertaken by Richter and Francis (1998) and Francis and Richter (2007).

The final untitled section of the questionnaire consisted of three open-ended questions and was an attempt to provide a qualitative dimension to the survey. The purpose of their inclusion was to give participants an opportunity to yield more nuanced data and to avoid imposing preconceived categories on the material.

The exercise worked insofar that it brought colour and subtlety to the quantitative data by allowing respondents to open up unexplored territory not covered in the quantitative questions. As a whole it gave credence and corroboration to the quantitative findings, especially in the case of the first open question which sought to isolate the primary cause that nominal Irish Anglicans give for not attending church. The response to the second open question was telling. The question enquired: 'What action could the church take to encourage your attendance at Sunday service?' and the response was marked by indifference. Only two out of three of the sample answered the question; furthermore, one third of those gave the distinct impression that the church could do little to persuade them to return to worship. By far the most numerous response to the third of the open-ended questions: 'If you had to choose the reason for retaining your identification with the Church of Ireland, what would it be?' was clustered around the theme of belonging. Respondents expressed their sense of belonging synonymously in terms of baptism, community, culture, family, heritage, Protestantism, tradition and upbringing.

The data obtained from the quantitative sections of the questionnaire was loaded on to the Statistical Package for Social Science (Version 16), the standard statistical package tool for social sciences and was cleaned for analysis under the

guidance of the supervisor's colleague, Dr. M. Robbins. In addition, a number of personal variables from the data were selected for cross-tabulation, whereby one variable is presented in relation to another. Richter and Francis (1998), Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005) and Francis and Richter (2007) had made great use of combining categories by way of cross-tabulation in their respective research. In all, five variables were selected for cross-tabulation: Gender, Age, Occupational Status, Church Attendance and Religious Inheritance. With the possible exception of Occupational Status, the selection of these personal variables was justified in light of the insights gained from the analysis as can be seen in the review of the succeeding chapters.

In their work on *Gone but not Forgotten*, Richter and Francis (1998, p. 170-172) too, conceded 'by definition, church-leavers are not the easiest people to contact'. They considered a number of possible ways of contacting church-leavers, but settled in the end for contact via clergy, as the basis of conducting a small series of interviews for qualitative analysis. For their quantitative element, they adopted a postal survey of church-leavers in the general population sourced by a random telephone survey, focused on the London area. Such an approach was impractical in Ireland given the context and religious composition of the population.

Francis and Richter (2007, p. 32) in their work *Gone for Good? Church-leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* contacted church-leavers using the following channels: gate-keeper clergy in various contexts and youth groups to conduct a series of in-depth interviews of around 75 individuals. The quantitative data was obtained by way of an initial random telephone survey focusing on three areas: to identify church-leavers who were willing to receive a postal questionnaire and who met their criteria.

Richter and Francis (1998) in their work *Gone but not Forgotten* and Francis and Richter's (2007) pursuit in *Gone for Good? Church-leaving and Returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, the methodology in this study had strengths and weaknesses. One of its strengths was the combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods. Whilst primarily quantitative, this research did not rely solely on the interpretation of statistical data. Following good practice, the adopted quantitative approach was rigorous and scientific, another strength.

The weakness of the research methodology was evident in the low response rate. This would suggest that the questionnaire was too long, over-complicated and possibly over-whelming to prospective respondents, notably the younger cohort. The choice of a postal questionnaire was necessary in the context but the role of gate-keepers, clergy in this instance, was flawed. This could have been overcome by selecting a smaller number of gate-keeper clergy who would have been briefed in person about the research requirements. It may even have been possible to obtain from a small group of informed and willing clergy, contact with nominal Church of Ireland people. This in turn may have facilitated a higher response and more completed questionnaires or even interviews with prospective respondents. The constraints of time may have worked against such proposals. Nonetheless, there was a sufficient representative response to provide an analysis of the belonging, beliefs and practice of the nominal Irish Anglicans who were identified and questioned.

#### **Chapter Four: Credo**

Chapter Four set out to find the beliefs of those who consider themselves Anglican in Ireland but who do not necessarily participate in the life of the church as expressed in regular church-attendance. What did the chapter find? Belief or faith

can be understood in a number of ways. It can refer to assent: it implies trust, commitment, a sense of belonging, a relationship with God. Religious belief is widely affirmed and recognised as a definition of religion (Francis and Richter, 2007, p. 23). It was assumed that the respondents to the questions on belief analysed in this chapter, responded in the light of the established beliefs of the Church of Ireland as expressed in the Book of Common Prayer (Church of Ireland, 2004). These are the ‘title deeds’ of the church (Homfray, 2002, p. 87).

In particular the chapter focused on three doctrinal areas against which to assess the orthodoxy of Anglican belief: beliefs about God, beliefs about Jesus Christ and beliefs about life after death. In this regard there was symmetry with major cross-national surveys, for example the European Value System and the General Social Survey in the United States of America. In the same way creedal questions were a feature of the work of Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005) in England and that of O’Donnell (2002) and MacGreil (2009) in Ireland.

A majority of the nominal Irish Anglicans questioned had little difficulty in affirming their belief in the existence of God. Two-thirds of them were theists. In comparison, 97% of the committed Anglicans questioned by Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005, p. 31) had no hesitation in affirming their belief in the existence of God. However almost a quarter of the nominal Irish Anglicans questioned were unsure about their belief in God and one in ten did not believe in God. By comparison, 7% of MacGreil’s (2009, p. 70) Catholic respondents were unsure about their belief in God and only 4% did not believe in God. While two-thirds of nominal Irish Anglicans have little difficulty in affirming belief in the existence of God, the God in whom they believe may not necessarily reflect the historic vision of the creeds. Just under half believe in a personal God, a third are agnostic on the question

and a fifth do not believe in a personal God. As Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005, p. 31) point out, ‘belief that God is an impersonal power is far removed from belief that God is the loving Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’.

If the thinking about God as received in the historic creeds is beyond many nominal Irish Anglicans, what of their beliefs about Jesus Christ, the touchstone of Christian belief? Nominal Irish Anglicans made virtually identical negative responses, 22%, regarding the divinity of Jesus Christ and his physical resurrection, again 22%. Likewise, the agnostic response to the divinity and resurrection of Christ paralleled each other at 39% and 37% respectively. Only just under 4 out of 10 nominal Irish Anglicans believe that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man and that he rose again from the dead. This contrasts to over three quarters of the Irish population, presumably Catholic, who believe in these three tenets of Christian belief (McGarry, 2012a).

Belief in life after death is a core component of faith in the historic creeds, yet just under half of nominal Irish Anglicans find belief in the afterlife remains central to their faith. The analysis found that just over a third are agnostic about the afterlife and a fifth reject such belief altogether. With regard to heaven and hell, just fewer than four out of ten nominal Irish Anglicans believe heaven exists, with almost three out of ten who hold that hell exists. Belief in heaven has survived more strongly than belief in hell, a consistent trait in cross-national surveys, national surveys and Francis, Robbins and Astley’s (2005) work among committed English Anglicans.

Women in the survey were firmer in their creedal beliefs than men. This stands in contrast to Francis, Robbins and Astley’s (2005, p. 64) findings that male

and female committed Anglicans in England were united rather than divided by their core religious beliefs. Belief in these three creedal areas was strongest among the young, unbelief increased with age. This is an asymmetrical finding because it is widely held that decline in belief is generational, the old are more believing than the young (Voas and Crockett, 2005, p. 11). The more robust faith of manual workers, as opposed to professional workers who were less credulous, was a feature of the findings. Those who attended church occasionally have firmer beliefs than those who rarely or never attend church. The retention of belief is prolonged in those who had an important religious background, compared to those whose religious heritage was unimportant.

Beliefs matter because they shape the lives of those who are committed to them. Belief persists among nominal Irish Anglicans but is patchy. Orthodox belief in an Anglican understanding, is held only by a minority of those questioned. It is more evident among women and the young. It remains firmer through contact, even of a minimal nature, with the church and is prolonged by childhood influences. Why do nominal Irish Anglicans maintain their connection with the Church of Ireland? The findings in this chapter do not indicate that it is because of belief. This builds on the findings of Kennerley (1998) in Chapter Two, whose male parishioners expressed both a diminution and persistence of belief. For them, being aware of their membership of the Church of Ireland mattered, whether they believed or not. Nominal Irish Anglicans may be believers as evidenced in this chapter and from the anecdotal contributions in Chapter Fourteen. For Hickey (1994), the content of beliefs is what really matters. What is clear in this chapter is that the content of beliefs among nominal Irish Anglicans is unorthodox and cannot be the sole reason why they retain their identity as Church of Ireland.

## **Chapter Five: Fides**

One of the earlier premises adopted in this study of nominal Anglicanism in Ireland is that belief can be a powerful predictor of a person's worldview which in turn shapes social attitudes and actions, especially if it is coupled with a strong sense of religious belonging. It is clear that this study has established a strong sense of belonging to the Church of Ireland. On the other hand, a minority of those questioned in the study holds orthodox Christian belief; belief persists but is patchy. This chapter sought to find out how the faith of nominal Anglicans is expressed in real life and to what extent belief and behaviour is related among nominal Irish Anglicans.

In the Paths of Truth section of the chapter, a number of things became apparent. In the first instance, residual Biblicism and creationism emerged from the findings. Up to half of those questioned agreed that the character of God was revealed in the Bible. Likewise one in three of those questioned held that the world was created according to the Genesis account. What does this residual Biblicism and creationism represent? It stands in contrast to the findings Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005, p. 65) obtained among committed English Anglicans. They found that committed lay Anglicans espoused a liberal understanding of scripture. They also discovered that the creationist view of the earth's origins was very much a minority view.

It could be that the surprising strength of Biblical belief among Irish Anglicans is a case of 'fragmented' commitment to traditional Christian beliefs identified by Bibby's (1985) theory of religious encasement. In the same way Rogerson's (2009, p. 89) work may be helpful in explaining the trace of creationism

among nominal Irish Anglicans. In Rogerson's view, to be faithful to the Biblical witness is not necessarily to read it literally as in six days of creation; how one reads and understands Biblical material is a complex issue.

In the second instance, the majority of the nominal Irish Anglicans questioned in this study rejected the exclusive position with regard to the Christian faith. Such rejection of exclusivism by nominal Irish Anglicans is at odds with their orthodoxy about Biblical revelation and their tenacity towards creationism. Why is this? A number of factors may be at play. Pluralism as Hilliard (2011, p. 5) suggests is often understood in the cultural context as tolerance. Irish Anglicanism on the whole, is noted for an ethos of tolerance and the findings with regard to pluralism may be an expression of the ethos. As one of a number of minorities in a multi-ethnic and culturally diverse Ireland, the identity of Irish Anglicans is probably not well served by exclusivism, nor threatened by pluralism.

In the Paths of Spirituality section of the chapter, a number of things emerged. Firstly, prayer was recognised by half of those questioned as a vital element of living. O'Donnell (2002, p.11) observed that because it is a moment of personal choice, prayer is a good measure of faith. Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005, p. 33) found that the committed Anglicans they questioned were well grounded in the traditional practice of personal prayer. MacGreil (2009, p. 56) discovered that among Catholics there was a moderately high level of personal prayer; three quarters of those he questioned prayed weekly or more often. What is clear in the findings in this study is that prayer, one of the clearest signs of faith, remains, while belonging in terms of church attendance, fades away.

Secondly only a third of those questioned regarded themselves as religious, whereas up to a half of the respondents considered themselves as spiritual people. Does that mean that because a majority of nominal Irish Anglicans do not see themselves as religious, it undermines their sense of religious belonging? Religion does not simply refer to belief but to a broader cultural framework that shapes life and enables people to construct identity (Lindbeck & Buckley, 2002). The evidence from Kennerley's (1998) findings in Chapter Two and the anecdotal evidence in Chapter Fourteen, places thinking of oneself as being religious or not in the broader framework of cultural identity.

When it came to the personal variables, there was sufficient evidence in the findings that age, church attendance and religious inheritance played an important role in the truth and spiritual claims examined in the analysis. Younger nominal Irish Anglicans were amenable to the truth and spirituality claims attested in this chapter, more so than their elders. This is at odds with the general consensus that younger people growing up in western societies tend to be less religious than older people. There is something unique in Ireland among the religious disposition of the young which requires further investigation. Similarly those who attend church, however infrequently, and those for whom religion was important in childhood, are also more open to the truth and spirituality claims examined in the chapter.

This chapter sought to find out how the faith of nominal Irish Anglicans is expressed in real life and to what extent their belief and behaviour is related. Given that only a minority of nominal Irish Anglicans believe in an orthodox fashion, it is intriguing that Biblicism, creationism, prayer and being spiritual have residual meaning, whereas exclusivism and being religious does not to some extent. The residualism can in part be explained in social and cultural terms. Day (2011, p. 179)

observes to ‘understand more about “why” people self-identify with Christianity, we should start with the social context, “when”, “where” and “how” they do that’. The evidence from this chapter would in Day’s terms happen in childhood in school and college days and by contact, however occasional, with church. It is also influenced by being part of a minority religious community with shared beliefs and values that are held and in some way ‘encased’ in individuals, even though they distance themselves in time with involvement in the life of the church. To equate religious identification with orthodox Christian belief is in Bouma’s (1992, p. 110) thinking, not especially helpful. Instead Bouma defines religious identification as a ‘useful social category giving some identification of the cultural background and general orientating values of a person. In that sense identifying with the Church of Ireland was expressed by respondents as being tolerant of other faiths and worldviews, of holding counter-cultural views about the Bible and creation and regarding themselves as not necessarily religious but spiritual. Although ‘encased’ in a religious tradition, individual choice is in Finnegan’s (2010, p. 37) view the ‘ultimate arbiter in matters religious and spiritual’ and seems to be the axis around which belief and behaviour rotate in this analysis.

## **Chapter Six: The Changing Scenes of Life**

This chapter set out to test the premise that as life changes church attendance may also change. Of all the changes that can happen during the course of a person’s lifetime, the chapter isolated two categories of change: the more predictable changes involving moving home and some unpredictable changes such as family responsibility, work patterns, illness and death. What was found? The evidence in the findings showed that two changes from each category had an impact on church attendance.

In the predictable category, moving away to school or college, followed by movement to a new area, affected church attendance for three out of ten and two out of ten nominal Irish Anglicans respectively. Moving to school or college disrupted regular church attendance among females, those under 25 years of age and professionals. The disruption to home life and church-going begins earlier for young Irish Anglicans than their English or American counterparts and is due to the peculiarities of Protestant secondary school provision in Ireland. Again the impact of moving to a new area on church attendance was most keen among females, Generation X, Baby Boomers and professionals, the more mobile sectors of the population.

In the unpredictable category, church attendance was affected by Sunday working and increased family commitments. In a global economy, Sunday is being squeezed. The emergence of Sunday trading and the preoccupation with team sport on Sundays have impacted church attendance; a trend which was broadly in line with Francis and Richter's (2007, p. 142) analysis. This factor was particularly strong for the younger cohort and students. Time in a modern society like Ireland is in demand and people have to jostle increased family commitments into crowded weekends; regular church-going is subsequently affected as this chapter found. This factor was most at play among females, Baby Boomers and manual workers.

Life in Ireland, like many developed economies, has become more changeable. The findings of this chapter indicate that some of the changes in people's lives are more disruptive to regular church attendance. However church attendance may also be more fluid. Davie (1994, p. 27) adds a cautionary caveat, regarding the use of statistics as 'stable concepts' to measure something which is

inherently mobile. This should be borne in mind in this consideration of change and church attendance.

### **Chapter Seven: Day by Day**

This chapter set out to establish the extent to which nominal Irish Anglicans explain their distance from church in terms of growing up and changing. The chapter began with a consideration of faith development and in particular the model developed by Fowler (1981, p. 14) on how faith develops. For Fowler, faith is a means by which people experience self, others and the world in a way that shapes loyalties and commitments. This was an especially useful concept in relating faith to belonging. Moreover as Richter and Francis (1998, p. 55) point out, if Fowler is not interpreted too rigidly, it is a useful tool in understanding how faith develops and the stages at which people are more susceptible to reducing church attendance.

The analysis in the chapter was focused on four themes set out by Richter and Francis (1998) and Francis and Richter (2007). What did the analysis bring to light? Two of the themes: growing up and time demands, found more traction with respondents than the other two: the lives of others and costs and benefits. The data made it clear that the process of growing up was implicated in disengagement from church for two out of every three nominal Anglicans. Another insight from the data is that half of the respondents accept responsibility themselves for disengagement from church, rather than holding the church responsible for the disengagement. The exercise of autonomy by nominal Irish Anglicans was more noticeable than among Francis and Richter's (2007, p. 118) respondents. The assertion of self-autonomy among nominal Irish Anglicans is evidence of the strength of individual choice recognised by Finnegan (2010) in an Irish context and Davie (2013) in a European

setting. Davie (2013, p. 280) detected that there has been an observable change in church-going in Europe, which operates increasing on the model of choice, rather than the model of obligation or duty.

Time demands too, played an important part in distancing nominal Irish Anglicans from church attendance. The data made it clear that one out of two nominal Irish Anglicans found other interests which replaced church attendance. Likewise, two out of three respondents conceded that they got out of the habit of church-going. The tensions generated between commitment to church and other demands which are made on time, were recognised by Francis and Richter (2007, p. 144) as contributing to church-leaving. People, they found, were far too busy to find time for church. The evidence from the data in this chapter, allied to anecdotal expressions in Chapter Fourteen, confirms the potency of tensions with time on church attendance.

The nuances of the personal variables were commented upon in detail in the chapter, however the twin themes of growing up and growing out of the habit due to time demands recurred across the sample categories. The notion that church is something you grow out of as you grow up, was more evident in the two youngest age cohorts. Data from the church attendance section of the questionnaire confirmed that two out of three of these age cohorts reduced their church attendance before they were 20 years of age and that their dropping off from church attendance was gradual rather than sudden. The findings in this chapter are dissimilar to that of MacGreil (2009, p. 17) who found that two-thirds of Irish Catholics who did not go to church once a week 'just did not bother'. In Irish Protestantism a heavy emphasis is placed on the autonomy of the individual (Mennell, 1997, p. 20). It is this factor which

seems to be at work in the data pertaining to growing up and changing, rather than indifference.

### **Chapter Eight: Faltering Faith**

The aim of this chapter sought to reveal to what extent loss of faith plays a part in the distancing from church of nominal Irish Anglicans. The chapter began by reviewing the religious landscape of Ireland with regard to belief. As Chapter Four, Credo, confirms, belief persists among nominal Irish Anglicans but it is a weaker factor compared to belonging as measured by religious affiliation. On the other hand, the chapter settled that church attendance was robust among the committed core of Anglicans but much reduced in the wider nominal fringe. To what extent is loss of faith responsible for the decline in church attendance among nominal Irish Anglicans?

Loss of faith, the chapter affirmed, is a nuanced concept. The complexities of belief and unbelief and their relationship with church attendance, remains unclear. A distinction was made between those who leave church because of issues with God and those who disengage because of issues with the church. What did the data discern in relation to these two distinctives? Two out of three of those questioned insisted that loss of faith was not responsible for their reduced attendance. Only one in ten believed that God had let them down. One in three nominal Irish Anglicans conceded that doubt was a factor in their disengagement from church; whereas four out of ten of the respondents agreed that they reduced their church-going because they became aware of alternative ways of thinking and living. The Irish response to a loss of faith and doubt in God was around less than half of the English response

established by Richter and Francis (1998) and Francis and Richter (2007). Clearly God was not the issue why nominal Irish Anglicans had reduced their church-going.

The data on church issues was revealing. The two highest scores in the area of the church were those relating to the exclusive claims of Christianity and the role religion plays in conflict, as opposed to issues directly related to church, expressed in the rationality of its teaching. It would appear that those questioned in this section had little issue with the church per se but wider concerns about Christianity as a whole, expressed in issues of exclusivity and conflict. Chapter five, *Fides*, already as established that exclusivity sits uneasily in an increasingly plural Ireland. Mennell (2002) too, identified the reach of the 'Ulster Troubles' on the psyche of Southern Protestants which may have sharpened their response to the issue of conflict and religion.

As for personal variables, gender and occupation had little impact on the findings. The strongest indicator was religious upbringing which had the most profound influence on the two categories of loss of faith in God and in the church. Those with an unimportant religious childhood had consistently higher score in both categories than those who had an upbringing in which religion was important. The generational inversion of the findings, where the older age groups had higher levels of loss of faith in God and in the church, was again conspicuous in the data. Young Irish Anglicans may not attend church on a regular basis but they do not attribute this to a loss of faith in God or because they have serious issues with the church. For that matter, there is little evidence in the data that the nominal Irish Anglicans questioned in this study have fallen out with God or the church. Loss of faith is not a reason for their disengagement from church. In general, nominal Irish Anglicans still believe

and belong but in a manner which Kirby (1984) both describes and cautions against, as shallow faith and passive belonging.

### **Chapter Nine: Disconnect**

This chapter considered the complexion of disconnection and examined the disconnect between nominal Irish Anglicans and their church in order to ascertain the reasons for their reduced attendance. Two disconnection themes were explored in depth: the growing self-awareness of individuals and the relevance or otherwise of the church to the lives of those who identify with it.

The contemporary world is marked by a preoccupation with self which traces its roots in the profound cultural changes of the 1960s that for Brown (2001) changed the way people believed and behaved. In Ireland the strength of the Catholic Church delayed this cultural sea change until the mid-nineties (Donnelly, 2000). The questions asked in the sub-section on growing self-awareness probed the disconnection between the individual and their participation in church in the light of the aforementioned cultural shift. What emerged from the responses was intriguing.

In the first place the response to three of the questions, pertaining to a disconnect between personal values, life-styles and hypocrisy with regard to church attendance were consistently lower than those obtained by Francis and Richter (2007). Perhaps this may reflect the time lag between earlier cultural change in England as opposed to Ireland. In the second place, the desire for respondents to follow their own spiritual quest apart from the church was reflected in this data and that of Francis and Richter (2007). The most important finding in this part of the study was that four out of five respondents agreed that you do not need to go to church to be a Christian. Indeed this response elicited the highest ranked score in the

entire study. An appeal to disinstitutionalised Christianity found a common resonance in this study and the work of Francis and Richter (2007). A number of factors lie behind this. First of all it was an expression of individualism which according to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) is the most powerful current in modern societies. For Ammerman (1987) it is also part of the complexity of modern living which means that some contradictions between beliefs and practices are to be expected. In the Irish Anglican setting, it may well be as a result of the Protestant emphasis on an individual's relationship with God which may downgrade the need for church attendance.

There were also some subtle differences in the data when it came to examining the personal variables. Self-awareness issues played a larger role in the disconnection of women from church life than men. This was the reverse of what Francis and Richter (2007) found in the United Kingdom. There is little evidence in the data that the generational principle identified by Richter and Francis (1998) and Voas and Crockett (2005) was at work in the Irish context. The findings suggest that disconnection expressed by hypocrisy and disinstitutionalised faith, increased with age. Not unexpectedly those who never attend church had a stronger sense of disconnection, compared to occasional church attenders, as measured in the data on self-awareness.

The notion of the relevance or the irrelevance of the church, was the second theme examined in the chapter. The findings pointed to the role of irrelevance as key to understanding the disconnect. Half of those questioned felt that: sermons were irrelevant, they were bored with the church, they had lost interest in what the church had to offer and simply found that the church failed to connect with their lives. Apart from the irrelevance of sermons, the Irish data was much stronger than the findings

presented by Richter and Francis (1998) and Francis and Richter (2007).

Surprisingly, the lowest score in the data for this chapter related to the distrust nominal Irish Anglicans felt towards the church. In comparison to the Catholic Church, the Church of Ireland is still held in high regard by the majority of its nominal members. What is intriguing in this respect is that a majority of those questioned who had a disinstitutionalised view of the Christian life, also held the institution of the church in good light. The data revealed that relevance mattered more to men than women. It was operative across the generational and occupational categories; it was acutely felt by those who never or rarely attended church. In spite of their childhood experience, relevance was pivotal in explaining their disconnection from the church.

This chapter set out to consider the role that disconnection plays in distancing nominal Irish Anglicans from their church, through the human dimensions of self-awareness and relevance. The evidence from the data gives good grounds for linking reduced church attendance to disconnection. The vast majority of nominal Irish Anglicans questioned in this study have a disinstitutionalised faith. The church is generally irrelevant to their lives, which to some extent, diverge from the values and practice of the church. They belong but are disconnected.

### **Chapter Ten: Not Belonging**

This chapter sought to discover if and in what way the nominal Irish Anglicans feel at odds with the local church in a relational sense. The evidence would suggest that up to half of those questioned admitted that they did not feel part of the church and that church-going was a chore. A feeling of social exclusion was very much in evidence in the data; people did not feel part of the church, they did not

fit in. What was less evident in the data was a sense of personal marginalisation, whereby individuals felt that they were not at the centre of church life. Richter and Francis (1998) found that up to half of their respondents felt a sense of personal marginalisation. The Irish respondents were largely unfazed by personal visibility issues of there not being enough people in church, or not enough people of their own age. Likewise there was little evidence that tensions in the relationships within the local church were a contributing factor towards reduced church attendance.

In most respects, issues relating to belonging, functioned at similar levels among men and women. The same was the case among the three occupational categories under question. On the other hand there were nuanced differences relating to belonging according to age. The older age groups felt more socially excluded and were more aware of tensions in the local church. Whereas for the young, the absence of peers was the chief influence in their not fitting in, which corresponded to the findings on the role of peers in Chapter Seven. Church attendance also had a bearing on the findings. Those who rarely or if ever attended church blamed social exclusion and soured relationships for their reduced church-going.

This chapter unearthed a paradox when it comes to belonging. Nominal Irish Anglicans belong, they identify with the Church of Ireland, but a significant proportion of them do not feel part of the church. What lies behind this paradox? Voas and Crockett (2005) argue that the essence of nominalism is passivity. Therefore it is one thing to belong to the Church of Ireland in an abstract sense; it is altogether different to belonging in the context of a local church. It is also not surprising that some people struggle to fit in to the local church. Francis, Robbins, Williams and Williams (2007) have shown that a few personality types tend to be over-represented in church and that there is a corresponding under-representation of

other personality types. This dynamic may be at work within the paradox but there is no way of substantiating this because of the absence of a psychological profile of the Irish respondents in this study.

### **Chapter Eleven: Disillusionment**

This chapter set out to explore the role disillusionment plays in distancing people from the life of the church. Francis and Richter (2007) contend that one of the key reasons people leave voluntary bodies like the church is because it fails to live up to its ideals and their expectations. Thus people become disillusioned with the church and move away from its communal life. Was this the case among those questioned in this study?

From the data it is clear that non-church-going Irish Anglicans were disillusioned with the church in a few ways. One in three of respondents identified a lack of purpose and vision as a factor in their disengagement from church. This was true for men more so than for women as it was for the older generation groups, those who never attend church and those with a meagre religious upbringing. Sectarianism too raised its head in the findings. The professional classes alongside Generation X, the Boomers and Builders, were aware of the role that sectarianism played in their distancing from church.

Interestingly the local church did not seem to stand in the frontline as far as disillusionment was concerned. This finding stands in contrast to Francis and Richter's (2007, p. 204) conclusions. Issues such as the church's maintenance mindset, its preoccupation with money, local factionalism and even the vexed area of mixed marriages had limited traction for the respondents. Given the Irish context, where there is a high degree of disillusionment with the Catholic Church, the

findings in this chapter are revealing. The level of disillusionment among nominal Irish Anglicans is moderate and does not appear to be responsible for their distance from the life of the local church.

## **Chapter Twelve: Being Let Down by the Church**

In exploring the theme of being let down by the church, the chapter began by drawing on two themes identified by Francis and Richter (2007): first the lack of care and support that people experienced from church and clergy; secondly, the disappointment expressed by people when it came to worship. What did the findings show? With regard to pastoral care, the findings highlighted deficiencies. One in four of those questioned felt the church was uncaring and unsupportive. A fifth agreed that they had been let down by clergy who were uncaring towards them. Moreover the Irish findings in this area were higher than those obtained in the United Kingdom by Francis and Richter (2007). The findings would seem to suggest that the parish has failed a significant minority of non-church-going Irish Anglicans and distanced them from church. Likewise the findings with regard to uncaring clergy, makes difficult reading for a church that places high value on pastoral care.

As far as worship was concerned these data show that around one in four non-church-goers have concerns with styles of worship and their perception that the experience of worship is devoid of God. The data made it clear that men voiced more disappointment with the church than women across the whole range of questions asked. Likewise the older age cohorts were more disappointed with church than the younger cohorts. In terms of church attendance, those who attended occasionally found fault more than those who rarely or ever attended. The findings make it clear that those with an immaterial religious inheritance were critical of any care they

received but were indifferent to the worship issues raised. The opposite was the case for those with a more meaningful religious heritage.

Taken together with the findings from earlier chapters the conclusions drawn from this chapter build up a picture of how non-church-going Irish Anglicans view their church. Despite their disconnect from church, in terms of attendance, a majority regard the institutionalised church in good light. Even though the church seemed to lack vision and purpose, most were neither deeply disillusioned nor disappointed with their parish church. The weight of evidence from these chapters would suggest that the individual rather than the church is more culpable in this regard. The strength of individual choice recognised by Finnegan (2010) and Davie (2013) seems to be at play in locating why nominal Irish Anglicans belong to the church but tend not to participate in its life.

### **Chapter Thirteen: Qualms, Theological and Moral**

This chapter explored the role theology and morality play in the disengagement of nominal Irish Anglicans from church. The data makes it clear that between a quarter and a third of those questioned attribute their distancing from the church to a frustration with the theological teaching and moral stance of the church. In essence they were put out at being told what to believe and how to behave by the church. Men were more troubled by this resentment than women. Moral issues carried more weight among the young, especially students than older generations. Not unexpectedly those who rarely if ever attend church and those for whom religion in childhood was unimportant had the greatest difficulties with the church's theological and moral teachings. What lies behind these findings?

In the first place Inglis's (2007) insight was very helpful. He sees a convergence of Catholic and Protestant thinking on theology and morality in recent times, especially to those on the periphery of church. He argues that an increasing number of those on the margins of the institutional churches see themselves belonging to a religious heritage without embodying its beliefs and practices. The evidence from this chapter would seem to indicate that this is the case for a body of nominal Irish Anglicans who have issues with the church's theological teachings and moral stance. In the second place this study has ascertained that a large majority of non-church-going Anglicans in Ireland have a disinstitutionalised faith. An appeal to disinstitutionalised Christianity found a resonance in those questioned in this study and the data in this chapter provides a theological and moral basis for the appeal.

Lastly the Irish findings in this chapter by and large echoed those discovered by Francis and Richter (2007). The Irish findings illustrate the tension between Protestant individualism and an in-built conservatism of Irish Christianity, identified by Ganiel (2012).

Chapters six to thirteen set out to ascertain what reasons nominal Irish Anglicans give for reducing their church attendance. A pattern emerged in the findings. The most significant reasons given for disengagement clustered around growing up and changing and a sense of disconnection. People changed, they found other interests and got out of the habit of going to church. In many cases they were not interested in the activities the church was offering. Church was largely irrelevant to their lives, it was boring and they didn't feel part of it. Above all those on the margins of the church held that it was not necessary to attend church to be a Christian. The thread that holds these related reasons together is personal autonomy. People have a choice to make and they choose not to go to church for the

aforementioned reasons. Commentators such as Voas and Crockett (2005), Francis and Richter (2007), Day (2011), Mouzelis (2012) and Davie (2013) locate choice as the key element in understanding the present religious landscape. After all as Mouzelis (2012, p. 220) observes, ‘choice, real or imagined, is what modernity is all about.

Ultimately there is no reason to go to church in the first place, so why go? Ireland once an exception in religious terms is, according to Davie (2013), falling into line with the rest of Europe when it comes to practice.

What the findings also show is themes such as life’s changes, not belonging, disillusionment, disappointment and theology and morality were not particularly uppermost as reasons that nominal Irish Anglicans gave for not attending church on a regular basis. Instead they offered context and comparison, particularly with Richter and Francis’s (1998) and Francis and Richter’s (2007) work in the United Kingdom. In some instances these themes offered a degree of detail into the mind-set of non-church-going Anglicans in Ireland. For example, the role that religion is perceived to play in conflict had resonance among many of the respondents but even this reason was not of first importance when it came to reduced church attendance.

#### **Chapter Fourteen: Talkback**

This chapter closed the analysis part of the research. It set out to allow respondents voice their own views in their own words about some key questions raised in the study. What did it find? The first question asked of respondents sought to isolate the primary cause that nominal Irish Anglicans give for not attending church. Four out of every five of the sample gave a written response. To that end the most frequent written responses had to do with growing up, finding other interests

and activities, getting out of the habit of going to church and having to work on Sundays. Likewise issues relating to: boredom, irrelevance, not fitting in and not being interested; were also prominently expressed by the respondents. The recurring refrain of not having to attend church to be a Christian was also conspicuous in the written responses.

In contrast the least frequent written responses had to do with themes such as: relocation, being disillusioned or disappointed with church and differences with the church on theological or moral grounds. In addition a number of reasons cited in the quantitative section for reduced attendance did not feature in the written responses, most notably distrusting the church as an institution. The exercise also raised reasons for not attending church which did not appear in the quantitative section of the survey. Among these were issues regarding: equality, human and animal rights and economic and ecological concerns. Above all, the written response to the first question gave credence and corroboration to the quantitative findings. The frequencies of responses were broadly in line with the range of scores obtained in the quantitative findings. The symmetry of the qualitative and quantitative findings gives strength to the analysis.

The second open-ended question enquired as to what action the church could take to encourage more frequent attendance on Sundays. Two-thirds of respondents replied in writing, the lowest response to the three questions asked. This could be interpreted as indifference to the church by those questioned in the survey. Indeed up to a third of those who did make a written response gave the distinct impression that the church could do little to persuade them to return to worship. For those who were prepared to return to church more regularly, worship was key and to a lesser extent, belonging. Those who were inclined to consider a return to church were seeking

more informality, a greater degree of vitality, participation, friendliness and family involvement.

The final open-ended question sought to verify why nominal Irish Anglicans continued to identify with the Church of Ireland. Seven out of ten respondents made a written reply which affirmed the strength of their identification with the church. Identification was primarily a case of family heritage and cultural attachment. It had to do with belief; faith persists in these disinstitutionalised Anglicans. It also involved an outlook, an openness of liberality and spirit. It was also expressed as passing on something of value to the next generation which coincided with the emphasis on family heritage. There was no single reason why those questioned continued to identify with the Church of Ireland; their sense of belonging was multi-faceted.

The inclusion of a qualitative element in the analysis sought to do justice to the complexity of people's attitudes and behaviour with regard to belonging, belief and practice. It brought colour, depth and nuance to the quantitative analysis. It also opened up some unexplored territory ignored in the quantitative questions. Above all it corroborated the quantitative findings as to why people reduced their church attendance. The value of the qualitative findings was lessened by the lower response to the written questions, compared to the closed quantitative questions. This may have been due to questionnaire fatigue or indifference on behalf of respondents to the questions asked. However people were given the opportunity to express their views which many respondents choose to do, which was insightful to the study as a whole.

## **Reviewing Belonging and Believing**

This study set in Ireland focused on church-going among Anglicans in the Church of Ireland. It sought to discover why many Irish Anglicans identify with the Church of Ireland but do not participate in the life of the church. What is clear is that the respondents in this study consider themselves to be Church of Ireland. They belong; their belonging has been consistently verified by self-affiliation in the national census stretching back 140 years. Self-assigned religiosity has meaning, demonstrated in the work of Fane (1999), Francis and Robbins (2004) and Day (2011). Together their work offers sociological grounds for accepting self-assigned religiosity as carrying religious significance. Whether respondents believed or not, attended church or not, they were deeply aware of their membership of the Church of Ireland. The study has also demonstrated that the contributions of Mennell (1997), Mitchell (2006), Inglis (2007) and Elliot (2009) were substantiated in the written response to the question: Why do you retain your identification with the Church of Ireland? The belonging expressed by respondents in this study is both a religious and cultural marker. It is about the identity of a religious minority, a boundary of belonging, of who they are and who they are not.

Davie's (1994) classic study on religion in Britain coined the concept of 'believing without belonging'. The idea was redefined by Francis and Robbins (2004) as belonging without believing, and by Day (2011) as believing in belonging. The evidence provided by this study would suggest that belief persists among those questioned, though it is not a necessarily orthodoxly Anglican. It is worth remembering that there is no such thing as Anglican faith. There is only the Christian faith as understood, received and practised by Anglicans. However the reason why people retain their identity with the Church of Ireland was not primarily because of

their beliefs. To equate religious identification with orthodox faith is in Bouma's (1992) thinking not especially helpful. Instead he defines religious identification as a useful social category which gives some indication of cultural background and outlook of a person. The desire to belong, rather than to believe, may well explain why Irish Anglicans retain their identity with the Church of Ireland. Day's (2011) notion of 'believing in belonging' is pertinent in this regard.

### **Reviewing Practice**

As to practice it is clear that respondents in the study did not attend church on a regular basis. In fact two-thirds of them were on the fringe of marginal adherence, attending church less than once a year or never at all. The study established that church-going in Ireland has been on the decline from very high levels of attendance and is less regular than once was the case. Moreover the analysis identified the reasons that Irish Anglicans gave for reducing their church attendance. Allowing for Davie's (1994) caution in using stable concepts as statistics to measure something evidently fluid like church attendance, what were the findings? The evidence points to a disinstitutionalised mind-set among Irish Anglicans. The majority of those questioned do not believe that it is necessary to attend church to be a Christian. Therefore they choose not to attend; they have moved on, they are too busy, they have found other interests and in any case, they are not interested in what the church offers; it is irrelevant to their everyday lives.

Commentators such as Voas and Crockett (2005), Francis and Richter (2007) and Davie (2013) locate choice as the key element in understanding the present religious landscape and that, this study shows, applies to Ireland. Day (2011) argues that what is often described as nominal, fuzzy or marginal adherence is far from

empty but loaded with significance. Bailey's (1997) discussion of implicit religion offers a sociological account of the persistence of Christianity beyond church-going. He advocates taking seriously the religious experience of those in this study who believe that they can be Christian without going to church.

### **Do Data Matter?**

Do data matter? Bibby (2008) asks this question when attempting to understand religion and religious trends. This study was largely quantitative and analytical in character. In particular a cross-tabulation was used in the analysis applied to five variables. How helpful was this exercise in relation to the key research question? The answer is mixed.

The gender analysis confirmed the generalisation that women are more receptive to religion in terms of more women attending church than men and that women are more amenable to faith than men. There was little evidence that gender played a significant role in the reasons as to why those questioned had reduced their church attendance.

Age was probably the most significant variable with regard to the key research question. In this study the young were more believing than the old which is an inversion of the principle enunciated by Voas and Crockett (2005) that older generations are more religious than younger generations.

The role that occupational status played in understanding the beliefs and attitudes of Irish Anglicans was limited. The symmetry between the findings according to age for Generation Y and those for students based on occupation was perhaps the most useful aspect that occupational status provided.

The church attendance and religious inheritance variables were profitable in gaining an understanding of the key research question. Brierley (2007) asks why do people become less religious. Is it because they are less involved in church or is it due to a loss of faith? Is it because it is seen more as a matter of choice or is it to do with upbringing? The evidence provided by church attendance and religious inheritance in this study would suggest that contact with church life, however minimal and family upbringing, is key in the transmission and retention of religious belonging. Do data matter when it is applied to religion and religious trends? Bibby (2008) takes the view that data is important in this regard but only insofar as it is used as part of constructing social reality. This study has attempted to use data in conjunction with the historical and cultural context of Ireland and combining it with the written responses from those concerned. Indeed the symmetry between the qualitative and quantitative findings gives strength to the analysis and approach.

### **Shortcomings**

In completing a study like this, a researcher becomes aware of shortcomings. In this instance at least three areas of weakness need to be acknowledged and addressed. The first has to do with methodology. There were methodological gaps in the approach used in this study. These were conspicuous for example in establishing the size of the sample, in locating a sufficient number of nominal Irish Anglicans, in the use of gatekeeper clergy, in the skewed age profile of the sample and in the low and incomplete response to the questionnaire. The constraints of time and the limit on resources played their part in this regard. Nonetheless, despite the limitations presented in the methodology, there are sufficient grounds to assert that it has been possible to generalise with some degree of certainty from the findings of the research.

The second shortcoming pertains to belief. The survey was heavily weighted towards establishing the reasons why nominal Irish Anglicans do not attend church on a regular basis to the detriment of belief. The majority of those questioned held that they had no need to go to church to be a Christian but what does it mean to be a Christian in an unchurched setting? Aisthorpe's (2014) approach in examining churchless Christians in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland could have been helpful in establishing the beliefs and values of Ireland's churchless Anglicans. Aisthorpe utilised Hoge's (1972) Intrusive Religious Scale to measure the extent to which a person's faith is integrated with the rest of their life and the extent to which the person is determined that their faith governs and guides their choices and behaviour. By using Hoge's Intrusive Religious Scale, Aisthorpe (2014) was able to establish what kind of beliefs and values his churchless Christians held. They were disillusioned, disappointed and frustrated with local congregational life and had opted out. Nonetheless they continued to believe and exercise their faith outside the confines of the local church. This study found a strong disinstitutionalism among nominal Anglicans which was not due to disillusionment and disappointment with the local church. What the study did not discover was if Ireland's churchless Anglicans were exhibiting and exercising faith outside the context of their local parishes; which was a shortcoming.

Thirdly, on one hand, the focus of this study was on church-going among Ireland's nominal Anglicans. On the other hand, the emphasis in the study was on church-leaving. Richter and Francis's (1998) and Francis and Richter's (2007) analysis on church-leaving was the template used in the study. However, Ireland's churchless Anglicans have not left the Church of Ireland. In their view they belong, even though they tend not to attend church. This study assumed that there was an

overlap between church-leaving and in the United Kingdom and non-attendance in Ireland. However there was little or no discussion on the relationship between church-leaving and non-attendance; another shortcoming.

### **Further Research**

If to be a Christian can be accepted as not attending church, this study has raised a number of issues which require further research. Among these is the beliefs and belonging of the young. Contrary to the generally accepted view authenticated by commentators such as Voas and Crockett (2005) and Voas and Day (2007) that religiosity declines in succeeding generations, this study discovered otherwise, religiosity declines with age. Thus Generation Y, the youngest age cohort who among other things grew up with information technology, were more religious than the older age cohorts. The reasons for this were beyond the immediate scope of this study. Further work needs to be undertaken to test this finding and to detail the reasons lying behind the renaissance of religion among young Anglicans in Ireland.

Commentators such as Francis (2002), Lankshear (2004) and Halsall (2004) have done research among the young and adults which probed the links between attitudes to various social issues and denominational affiliation. Likewise commentators such as Greer and Francis (1990), Fahey, Hayes and Sinnott (2004) and MacGreil (2009) have undertaken similar research in an Irish context relating attitudes to social issues with denominational affiliation. This study focused on Irish Anglicanism and raised questions which need further investigation. For example, what is it about Anglicanism in general or with particular reference to Ireland that lends itself toward nominal adherence?

## **Application**

Finally this study has unearthed issues that have a direct application to the Church of Ireland. The most obvious relates to the notion of nominalism. According to Brierley (2007) nominalism is the term used in the sense of difference between a stated adherence to a faith and a committed application of that faith. This study has confirmed that the majority of Irish Anglicans are nominal: they belong to the Church of Ireland but rarely if ever attend worship. The challenge to the Church of Ireland is how it views this ‘fuzzy fidelity’ as Voas (2009) describes the nominal fringe. Is it a threat or an opportunity? There is ample evidence in this study that nominal members of the Church of Ireland hold it in good light. Moreover a number of them expressed that they would return to church on a more regular basis if the church addressed their concerns about worship, welcome and being worthwhile. There is an opportunity for the Church of Ireland to turn ‘fuzzy fidelity’ into commitment. This will require radical change in the worship experience on Sundays or other days. Above all this will involve a paradigm shift on how the Church of Ireland regards nominalism.

Walker’s (2006 & 2013) thinking in this regard may be helpful. His work among rural Anglicans (2006) and cathedral carol services (2013) draw heavily on the notion of belonging. Belonging for Walker (2006, p. 90-96) is primarily theological rather than sociological. Christians belong to God and from this mutual belonging, other belongings arise: belonging with activities, belonging with people, belonging with events and belonging with places. Those who identify with the Church of Ireland have a deep sense of belonging. Belonging is mutual, a two-way relationship between people and church and church and people. The Church of

Ireland should recognise different understandings of belonging and channel its energies and resources to all those who belong, irrespective of their participation.

This is none other than the Gospel invitation expressed by Jesus in John 6:37: ‘All that the Father gives to me, will come to me; and the one who comes to me, I will not cast out’. In the fourth verse of *Church Going* Larkin (1955) asserts that ‘belief must die’. To avoid this tragedy, the onus is on the church to recognise the validity of belonging and strengthen the things that remain, however tenuous, in order that belief may flourish.

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## APPENDIX A: STATISTICAL APPENDIX

### Chapter 1: Ireland, an Exceptional Case.

Table 1:1

*Population Classified as Church of Ireland for Relevant Censuses from 1861 to 1911 in the Twenty-Six Counties which became the Republic of Ireland.*

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Year	Church of Ireland Population	Change %
1861	372,723	
1871	338,719	-9.1
1881	317,576	-6.2
1891	286,804	-9.7
1901	264,264	-7.9
1911	249,535	-5.6

---

Source: Central Statistics Office, 2004a.

Table 1:2

*Population Classified by Religion for the Church of Ireland, No Religion and Not-  
Stated Religion from 1926 to 2002,*

Year	Total Persons	Church of Ireland	No Religion	Not Stated
1926	2,971,992	164,215		
1936	2,968,420	145,030		
1946	2,955,107	124,829		
1961	2,818,341	104,016	1,107	5,625
1971	2,978,248	97,739	7,616	45,648
1981	3,443,405	95,366	39,572	70,976
1991	3,525,719	89,187	66,270	83,375
2002	3,917,203	115,611	138,264	79,084

Source: Central Statistics Office, 2004a.

Table 1:3

*Comparison of State and Church Enumerated Populations*

Diocese	State 1981	Church 1979	% Variation
Cashel, Ferns & Ossory	12,321	14,400	+14.4
Cork, Cloyne & Ross	10,468	8,500	-23.2
Dublin & Glendalough	39,201	36,000	-8.9
Limerick, Killaloe & Ardfert	6,509	4,800	-35.6
Meath & Kildare	6,667	6,000	-11.1
Tuam, Killala & Achonry	2,768	2,200	-25.8

Source: Deane, 1986.

Table 1:4

*Church of Ireland Census Returns: 2013*

Diocese	Vestry Persons	Average Sunday Attendance	Christmas Day Attendance
Cashel, Ferns & Ossory	5,900	2,000	7,100
Cork, Cloyne & Ross	3,600	2,200	6,500
Dublin & Glendalough	11,000	7,300	18,200
Limerick, Killaloe & Ardfert	1,800	1,200	2,200
Meath & Kildare	2,800	1,500	4,100
Tuam, Killala & Achonry	860	610	1,600

Source: Church of Ireland, 2014.

## Chapter 2: A Sense of Belonging

Table 2:1

*Religious Belief in Western Europe, Republic of Ireland & Northern Ireland 1990 & 2000*

---

Year	Western Europe %	Republic of Ireland %	Northern Ireland %
<b>Belief in God</b>			
1990	70	96	95
2000	77	96	95
<b>Life After Death</b>			
1990	43	77	70
2000	53	79	75
<b>Heaven</b>			
1990	41	85	86
2000	46	85	87
<b>Hell</b>			
1990	23	50	68
2000	34	53	74
<b>Sin</b>			
1990	57	84	89
2000	62	86	90

---

Source: Halman, Luijkx, & Van Zundert, 2005.

Table 2:2

*Frequency of Church Attendance in Western Europe, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland 1990 & 2000*

Year	Once a Week %	Once a Month %	Special Occasions %	Never %
Western Europe				
1990	29	10	21	40
2000	21	11	39	29
Republic of Ireland				
1990	81	7	7	5
2000	57	10	23	10
Northern Ireland				
1990	49	18	15	18
2000	48	15	17	20

Source: Halman, Luijkx, & Van Zundert, 2005.

Table 2:3

*Percentage Church Attendance by Young Catholics According to Gender*

Church Attendance	Male %	Female %	Total %
Weekly	41	58	52
Monthly	13	15	14
Not Often	14	8	10
Never	14	5	8
Christmas	8	4	6
Only when at home	2	6	5
No reply	8	4	5

Source: O'Donnell, 2002.

Table 2:4

*Reasons for Church Attendance by Young Catholics According to Gender*

Church Attendance	Male %	Female %	Total %
From a sense of obligation	32	46	41
To thank, praise, petition and ask for forgiveness	29	38	35
Wanting to enjoy and feeling good	21	31	27
Established habit	17	15	19
Desire of parents	10	15	13
Time for reflection	9	13	11
Tranquil atmosphere	4	5	4
Being part of a community	11	12	12
In choir or reading	4	5	4
Help by homily	3	4	3
For baptism, wedding or funeral	2	2	2

Source: O'Donnell, 2002.

Table 2:5

*Church Attendance and Male Population According to Age for Parish A & Parish B*

Age Structure	Number	Regular Church Attendance
Parish A		
Men 24 – 45 years	13	7
Men 46 -65	8	6
Men over 65 years	6	3
Parish B		
Men 24 – 45 years	8	1
Men 46 -65	12	3
Men over 65 years	3	1

Source: Kennerley, 1998.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

Table 3:1

*The Church of Ireland Population According to County 2002*

County	Population	County	Population
Carlow	1,977	Longford	966
Cavan	3,767	Louth	1,590
Clare	1,825	Mayo	2,072
Cork	12,699	Meath	3,100
Donegal	6,308	Monaghan	1,703
Dublin	33,857	Offaly	1,900
Galway	3,535	Roscommon	842
Kerry	2,931	Sligo	2,358
Kildare	4,859	Tipperary	3,431
Kilkenny	2,384	Waterford	2,459
Laois	2,661	Westmeath	1,689
Leitrim	966	Wexford	4,727
Limerick	2,838	Wicklow	8,167

Source: Central Statistics Office, 2004.

Table 3:2

*Questionnaire Allocation to Schools and Colleges*

---

Educational Establishment	Number
Church of Ireland College of Education, Dublin	90
Dundalk Grammar School, Dundalk	40
Kilkenny College, Kilkenny	60
Newpark School, Dublin	40
Royal School, Cavan	40
Sligo Grammar, Sligo	20
Trinity College, Dublin	25
University College, Dublin	25
Villiers School, Limerick	40
Wesley College, Dublin	60
Wilson's Hospital School, Mullingar	40
Total sent	500

---

## Chapter 4: Credo

Table 4:1

### *Chapter 4: Credo: Overview*

---

I believe that	Agree %	? %	Disagree %
God exists	66	26	8
God is a personal being	46	36	18
Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man	39	39	22
Jesus' birth was a virgin birth	35	32	33
Jesus rose physically from the dead	41	37	22
There is life after death	54	35	11
Heaven is a real place	45	34	21
Hell is a real place	28	35	37

---

Table 4:2

*Chapter 4: Pathways of Truth: Belief & Gender*

I believe that	Male Agree %	Female Agree %
God exists	62	69
God is a personal being	43	46
Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man	37	39
Jesus' birth was a virgin birth	34	38
Jesus rose physically from the dead	39	42
There is life after death	34	41
Heaven is a real place	40	47
Hell is a real place	28	28

These percentages are based on the actual returns of Males (139) and Females (177).

Table 4:3

*Chapter 4: Pathways of Truth: Belief & Age*

I believe that	Under 25 Agree %	26-45 Agree %	46-60 Agree %	61+ Agree %
God exists	70	66	62	52
God is a personal being	49	48	42	31
Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man	43	40	32	35
Jesus' birth was a virgin birth	42	38	22	34
Jesus rose physically from the dead	49	40	30	34
There is life after death	62	56	42	39
Heaven is a real place	59	42	27	23
Hell is a real place	36	31	15	12

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Under-25 Year Olds (95), 26-45 Year Olds (88), 46-60 Year Olds (63) and 61+ Year Olds (28).

Table 4:4

*Chapter 4: Pathways of Truth: Belief & Occupational Status*

I believe that	Students	Professionals	Manual Workers
	Agree %	Agree %	Agree %
God exists	65	66	75
God is a personal being	49	40	50
Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man	45	32	37
Jesus' birth was a virgin birth	38	29	50
Jesus rose physically from the dead	49	34	50
There is life after death	47	27	44
Heaven is a real place	59	30	49
Hell is a real place	35	24	39

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Students (95), Professionals (112) and Manual Workers (29).

Table 4:5

*Chapter 4: Pathways of Truth: Belief & Church Attendance*

I believe that	Six or Fewer Annually Agree %	Once Annually Agree %	Never Agree %
God exists	76	68	37
God is a personal being	54	48	24
Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man	49	41	14
Jesus' birth was a virgin birth	53	34	9
Jesus rose physically from the dead	57	38	17
There is life after death	55	30	15
Heaven is a real place	62	39	18
Hell is a real place	47	19	12

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Six or Fewer Annually (99), Once Annually (124) and Never (68).

Table 4:6

*Chapter 4: Pathways of Truth: Belief & Religious Inheritance*

I believe that	Important Agree %	Unimportant Agree %
God exists	79	52
God is a personal being	59	37
Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man	54	33
Jesus' birth was a virgin birth	37	28
Jesus rose physically from the dead	50	34
There is life after death	51	29
Heaven is a real place	54	36
Hell is a real place	46	23

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Important (146) and Unimportant (95).

## Chapter 5: Fides

Table 5:1

### *Chapter 5: Fides: Overview*

---

I believe that	Agree %	? %	Disagree %
The character of God is revealed in the Bible	47	40	13
God created the earth in six days and rested on the seventh	28	31	41
Christianity is the only true religion	15	20	65
Prayer is a vital element of living	47	25	28
I am a religious person	29	26	45
I am a spiritual person	56	24	20

---

Table 5:2

*Chapter 5: Fides: Gender*

I believe that	Male Agree %	Female Agree %
The character of God is revealed in the Bible	47	47
God created the earth in six days and rested on the seventh	22	33
Christianity is the only true religion	16	15
Prayer is a vital element of living	44	49
I am a religious person	29	27
I am a spiritual person	53	58

These percentages are based on the actual returns of Males (139) and Females (177).

Table 5:3

*Chapter 5: Fides: Age*

I believe that	Under 25 Agree %	26 – 4 Agree %	46 – 60 Agree %	61+ Agree %
The character of God is revealed in the Bible	49	46	22	34
God created the earth in six days and rested on the seventh	41	21	20	18
Christianity is the only true religion	15	18	15	16
Prayer is a vital element of living	41	48	44	37
I am a religious person	28	31	22	21
I am a spiritual person	48	64	56	53

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Under-25 Year Olds (98), 26-45 Year Olds (91), 46-60 Year Olds (65) and 61+ Year Olds (30).

Table 5:4

*Chapter 5: Fides: Occupation*

I believe that	Students Agree %	Professionals Agree %	Manual Workers Agree %
The character of God is revealed in the Bible	51	48	51
God created the earth in six days and rested on the seventh	39	11	39
Christianity is the only true religion	16	9	74
Prayer is a vital element of living	33	49	76
I am a religious person	21	26	42
I am a spiritual person	41	67	43

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Students (58), Professionals (108) and Manual Workers (27).

Table 5:5

*Chapter 5: Fides: Church Attendance*

I believe that	Six or Fewer Annually Agree %	Once Annually Agree %	Never Agree %
The character of God is revealed in the Bible	59	49	21
God created the earth in six days and rested on the seventh	40	41	11
Christianity is the only true religion	23	14	3
Prayer is a vital element of living	62	22	21
I am a religious person	42	5	5
I am a spiritual person	63	46	46

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Six or Fewer Annually (99), Once Annually (126) and Never (70).

Table 5:6

*Chapter 5: Fides: Religious Inheritance*

I believe that	Important Agree %	Unimportant Agree %
The character of God is revealed in the Bible	46	35
God created the earth in six days and rested on the seventh	28	21
Christianity is the only true religion	17	13
Prayer is a vital element of living	66	34
I am a religious person	34	17
I am a spiritual person	73	41

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Important (139) and Unimportant (101).

## Chapter 6: The Changing Scenes of Life

Table 6:1

### *Chapter 6: The Changing Scenes of Life: Overview*

---

I have reduced my church going because	Agree %	? %	Disagree %
I moved to a new area	23	4	73
I went away to school, college or university	29	4	67
I moved home and could not find a church I liked in the new area	11	6	83
I had no transport to get to church	6	3	91
I had to work on Sundays	30	10	60
I had increased family commitments	21	7	72
My marriage broke up	5	3	92
I became ill	3	3	94
I was bereaved	10	3	87

---

Table 6:2

*Chapter 6: The Changing Scenes of Life: Gender*

I have reduced my church going because	Male Agree %	Female Agree %
I moved to a new area	21	25
I went away to school, college or university	25	33
I moved home and could not find a church I liked in the new area	12	10
I had no transport to get to church	6	5
I had to work on Sundays	18	40
I had increased family commitments	15	26
My marriage broke up	5	6
I became ill	3	4
I was bereaved	7	13

These percentages are based on the actual returns of Males (139) and Females (177).

Table 6:3

*Chapter 6: The Changing Scenes of Life: Age*

I have reduced my church going because	Under 25 Agree %	26 – 45 Agree %	46 – 60 Agree %	61+ Agree %
I moved to a new area	13	27	29	31
I went away to school, college or university	36	32	28	16
I moved home and could not find a church I liked in the new area	5	9	12	22
I had no transport to get to church	11	3	2	2
I had to work on Sundays	41	32	24	18
I had increased family commitments	12	27	31	19
My marriage broke up	1	2	4	13
I became ill	5	4	3	2
I was bereaved	10	9	10	11

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Under-25 Year Olds (117), 26-45 Year Olds (95), 46-60 Year Olds (63) and 61+ Year Olds (30).

Table 6:4

*Chapter 6: The Changing Scenes of Life: Occupational Status*

I have reduced my church going because	Students Agree %	Professionals Agree %	Manual Workers Agree %
I moved to a new area	13	34	17
I went away to school, college or university	38	36	28
I moved home and could not find a church I liked in the new area	4	18	14
I had no transport to get to church	10	0	1
I had to work on Sundays	39	12	37
I had increased family commitments	14	17	30
My marriage broke up	0	8	2
I became ill	1	4	4
I was bereaved	10	7	2

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Students (60), Professionals (108) and Manual Workers (29).

Table 6:5

*Chapter 6: The Changing Scenes of Life: Church Attendance*

I have reduced my church going because	Six or Fewer Annually Agree %	Once Annually Agree %	Never Agree %
I moved to a new area	26	19	13
I went away to school, college or university	36	28	16
I moved home and could not find a church I liked in the new area	13	9	5
I had no transport to get to church	4	7	0
I had to work on Sundays	38	27	26
I had increased family commitments	26	25	8
My marriage broke up	6	8	1
I became ill	1	3	2
I was bereaved	9	10	7

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Six or Fewer Annually (97), Once Annually (120) and Never (72).

Table 6:6

*Chapter 6: The Changing Scenes of Life: Religious Inheritance*

I have reduced my church going because	Important Agree %	Unimportant Agree %
I moved to a new area	26	15
I went away to school, college or university	36	16
I moved home and could not find a church I liked in the new area	16	8
I had no transport to get to church	2	12
I had to work on Sundays	29	20
I had increased family commitments	17	33
My marriage broke up	5	4
I became ill	3	4
I was bereaved	9	4

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Important (137) and Unimportant (107).

## Chapter 7: Day by Day

Table 7:1

### *Chapter 7: Day by Day: Overview*

---

I have reduced my church going because	Agree %	? %	Disagree %
I grew up and started making my own decisions	65	8	27
I changed: it wasn't the church's fault that I dropped off	52	19	29
The church was no longer helping me to grow	36	30	34
I got out of the habit	61	12	27
I found other interests and activities	54	16	30
Most of my friends were not church goers	32	18	50
I was made to go to church by my parents and it put me off	24	14	62
My partner was not attending church	24	13	63
The church was not meeting my needs	42	23	35
The church was not meeting my spiritual needs	38	25	37
The church was not meeting my children's needs	15	26	59

---

Table 7:2

*Chapter 7: Day by Day: Gender*

I have reduced my church going because	Male Agree %	Female Agree %
I grew up and started making my own decisions	67	63
I changed: it wasn't the church's fault that I dropped off	55	48
The church was no longer helping me to grow	41	33
I got out of the habit	61	62
I found other interests and activities	54	54
Most of my friends were not church goers	29	35
I was made to go to church by my parents and it put me off	28	21
My partner was not attending church	18	30
The church was not meeting my needs	42	42
The church was not meeting my spiritual needs	37	38
The church was not meeting my children's needs	15	15

These percentages are based on the actual returns of Males (139) and Females (177).

Table 7:3

*Chapter 7: Day by Day: Age*

I have reduced my church going because	Under 25 Agree %	25 – 45 Agree %	46 -60 Agree %	61+ Agree %
I grew up and started making my own decisions	64	70	63	57
I changed: it wasn't the church's fault that I dropped off	47	55	60	61
The church was no longer helping me to grow	23	47	46	48
I got out of the habit	54	68	64	62
I found other interests and activities	56	61	58	39
Most of my friends were not church goers	23	46	60	19
I was made to go to church by my parents and it put me off	27	22	25	21
My partner was not attending church	9	38	35	48
The church was not meeting my needs	25	54	59	53
The church was not meeting my spiritual needs	23	44	52	50
The church was not meeting my children's needs	5	21	23	27

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Under-25 Year Olds (115), 26-45 Year Olds (93), 46-60 Year Olds (62) and 61+ Year Olds (28).

Table 7:4

*Chapter 7: Day by Day: Occupational Status*

I have reduced my church going because	Students	Professionals	Manual Workers
	Agree %	Agree %	Agree %
I grew up and started making my own decisions	69	68	50
I changed: it wasn't the church's fault that I dropped off	45	56	38
The church was no longer helping me to grow	22	44	11
I got out of the habit	55	66	56
I found other interests and activities	49	59	33
Most of my friends were not church goers	18	37	13
I was made to go to church by my parents and it put me off	29	23	22
My partner was not attending church	15	30	25
The church was not meeting my needs	18	57	25
The church was not meeting my spiritual needs	18	48	8
The church was not meeting my children's needs	5	17	5

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Students (63), Professionals (105) and Manual Workers (30).

Table 7:5

*Chapter 7: Day by Day: Church Attendance*

I have reduced my church going because	Six or Fewer Annually Agree %	Once Annually Agree %	Never Agree %
I grew up and started making my own decisions	53	64	77
I changed: it wasn't the church's fault that I dropped off	44	56	58
The church was no longer helping me to grow	29	34	49
I got out of the habit	68	65	46
I found other interests and activities	49	55	60
Most of my friends were not church goers	33	29	33
I was made to go to church by my parents and it put me off	18	25	35
My partner was not attending church	21	25	26
The church was not meeting my needs	32	43	52
The church was not meeting my spiritual needs	32	36	48
The church was not meeting my children's needs	8	17	17

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Six or Fewer Annually (96), Once Annually (124) and Never (68).

Table 7:6

*Chapter 7: Day by Day: Religious Inheritance*

I have reduced my church going because	Important Agree %	Unimportant Agree %
I grew up and started making my own decisions	58	70
I changed: it wasn't the church's fault that I dropped off	54	48
The church was no longer helping me to grow	34	36
I got out of the habit	62	35
I found other interests and activities	55	55
Most of my friends were not church goers	34	35
I was made to go to church by my parents and it put me off	29	29
My partner was not attending church	20	26
The church was not meeting my needs	43	40
The church was not meeting my spiritual needs	38	41
The church was not meeting my children's needs	14	11

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Important (138) and Unimportant (75).

## Chapter 8: Faltering Faith

Table 8:1

### *Chapter 8: Faltering Faith: Overview*

---

I have reduced my church going because	Agree %	? %	Disagree %
I lost my faith	17	23	60
I doubted or questioned my faith	36	15	49
I felt God let me down	10	13	77
I became aware of alternative ways of thinking or living	43	19	38
Many of the church teachings were illogical or nonsensical	36	25	39
The church's teachings were difficult to reconcile with modern science	41	22	37
It was increasingly difficult to believe Christianity as the only true faith	46	24	30
So many people fight each other in the name of religion	55	14	31

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Table 8:2

*Chapter 8: Faltering Faith: Gender*

I have reduced my church going because	Men Agree %	Women Agree %
I lost my faith	24	12
I doubted or questioned my faith	36	35
I felt God let me down	10	10
I became aware of alternative ways of thinking or living	44	41
Many of the church teachings were illogical or nonsensical	36	36
The church's teachings were difficult to reconcile with modern science	41	37
It was increasingly difficult to believe Christianity as the only true faith	46	48
So many people fight each other in the name of religion	51	58

These percentages are based on the actual returns of Males (139) and Females (177).

Table 8:3

*Chapter 8: Faltering Faith: Age*

I have reduced my church going because	Under 25 Agree %	26 - 45 Agree %	46 -60 Agree %	61+ Agree %
I lost my faith	16	16	22	25
I doubted or questioned my faith	38	34	35	34
I felt God let me down	10	10	8	9
I became aware of alternative ways of thinking or living	40	43	47	49
Many of the church teachings were illogical or nonsensical	31	38	42	45
The church's teachings were difficult to reconcile with modern science	36	41	47	51
It was increasingly difficult to believe Christianity as the only true faith	38	52	53	55
So many people fight each other in the name of religion	49	59	57	56

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Under-25 Year Olds (117), 26-45 Year Olds (90), 46-60 Year Olds (59) and 61+ Year Olds (32).

Table 8:4

*Chapter 8: Faltering Faith: Occupational Status*

I have reduced my church going because	Students Agree %	Professionals Agree %	Manual Workers Agree %
I lost my faith	16	15	22
I doubted or questioned my faith	41	33	22
I felt God let me down	11	7	22
I became aware of alternative ways of thinking or living	47	50	29
Many of the church teachings were illogical or nonsensical	39	36	29
The church's teachings were difficult to reconcile with modern science	43	44	33
It was increasingly difficult to believe Christianity as the only true faith	44	54	38
So many people fight each other in the name of religion	47	53	56

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Students (56), Professionals (107) and Manual Workers (31).

Table 8:5

*Chapter 8: Faltering Faith: Church Attendance*

I have reduced my church going because	Six or Fewer Annually Agree %	Once Annually Agree %	Never Agree %
I lost my faith	10	12	33
I doubted or questioned my faith	26	27	57
I felt God let me down	10	9	12
I became aware of alternative ways of thinking or living	24	23	66
Many of the church teachings were illogical or nonsensical	19	30	64
The church's teachings were difficult to reconcile with modern science	29	32	65
It was increasingly difficult to believe Christianity as the only true faith	30	42	75
So many people fight each other in the name of religion	41	56	69

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Six or Fewer Annually (99), Once Annually (128) and Never (71).

Table 8:6

*Chapter 8: Faltering Faith: Religious Inheritance*

I have reduced my church going because	Important Agree %	Unimportant Agree %
I lost my faith	20	33
I doubted or questioned my faith	41	43
I felt God let me down	11	10
I became aware of alternative ways of thinking or living	41	68
Many of the church teachings were illogical or nonsensical	37	52
The church's teachings were difficult to reconcile with modern science	44	43
It was increasingly difficult to believe Christianity as the only true faith	47	52
So many people fight each other in the name of religion	54	65

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Important (142) and Unimportant (110).

## Chapter 9: Disconnect

Table 9:1

### *Chapter 9: Disconnect: Overview*

---

I have reduced my church going because	Agree %	? %	Disagree %
I felt my values were not compatible with church participation	26	23	51
I felt my lifestyle was not compatible with church participation	31	23	46
I was going to church for the wrong reasons	27	27	46
I wanted to follow my own spiritual quest	34	18	48
I believe you do not need to go to church to be a Christian	80	11	9
The church failed to connect with the rest of my life	49	21	30
Sermons were irrelevant to my everyday life	47	17	36
I was bored	50	18	32
I was not interested in the activities on offer	57	14	29
I distrusted most institutions including the church	21	20	59

---

Table 9:2

*Chapter 9: Disconnect: Gender*

I have reduced my church going because	Men Agree %	Women Agree %
I felt my values were not compatible with church participation	26	26
I felt my lifestyle was not compatible with church participation	25	36
I was going to church for the wrong reasons	25	28
I wanted to follow my own spiritual quest	33	34
I believe you do not need to go to church to be a Christian	78	82
The church failed to connect with the rest of my life	50	48
Sermons were irrelevant to my everyday life	50	45
I was bored	52	48
I was not interested in the activities on offer	61	53
I distrusted most institutions including the church	24	18

These percentages are based on the actual returns of Males (139) and Females (177).

Table 9:3

*Chapter 9: Disconnect: Age*

I have reduced my church going because	Under 25 Agree %	26-45 Agree %	46-60 Agree %	61 + Agree %
I felt my values were not compatible with church participation	25	26	27	28
I felt my lifestyle was not compatible with church participation	33	32	33	20
I was going to church for the wrong reasons	22	27	27	28
I wanted to follow my own spiritual quest	25	40	42	35
I believe you do not need to go to church to be a Christian	70	83	86	87
The church failed to connect with the rest of my life	41	51	56	54
Sermons were irrelevant to my everyday life	46	47	48	49
I was bored	50	50	49	51
I was not interested in the activities on offer	52	58	60	59
I distrusted most institutions including the church	12	25	26	30

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Under-25 Year Olds (112), 26-45 Year Olds (93), 46-60 Year Olds (62) and 61+ Year Olds (29).

Table 9:4

*Chapter 9: Disconnect: Occupational Status*

I have reduced my church going because	Students Agree %	Professionals Agree %	Manual Workers Agree %
I felt my values were not compatible with church participation	24	29	11
I felt my lifestyle was not compatible with church participation	37	29	22
I was going to church for the wrong reasons	20	30	13
I wanted to follow my own spiritual quest	29	36	12
I believe you do not need to go to church to be a Christian	72	81	75
The church failed to connect with the rest of my life	46	57	25
Sermons were irrelevant to my everyday life	51	49	50
I was bored	48	50	38
I was not interested in the activities on offer	57	62	63
I distrusted most institutions including the church	12	26	13

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Students (54), Professionals (102) and Manual Workers (27).

Table 9:5

*Chapter 9: Disconnect: Church Attendance*

I have reduced my church going because	Six or Fewer Annually Agree %	Once Annually Agree %	Never Agree %
I felt my values were not compatible with church participation	18	22	49
I felt my lifestyle was not compatible with church participation	22	24	51
I was going to church for the wrong reasons	18	26	42
I wanted to follow my own spiritual quest	24	34	43
I believe you do not need to go to church to be a Christian	85	84	78
The church failed to connect with the rest of my life	38	45	76
Sermons were irrelevant to my everyday life	38	46	59
I was bored	38	50	66
I was not interested in the activities on offer	47	56	73
I distrusted most institutions including the church	10	20	45

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Six or Fewer Annually (94), Once Annually (130) and Never (65).

Table 9:6

*Chapter 9: Disconnect: Religious Inheritance*

I have reduced my church going because	Important Agree %	Unimportant Agree %
I felt my values were not compatible with church participation	28	38
I felt my lifestyle was not compatible with church participation	33	32
I was going to church for the wrong reasons	28	24
I wanted to follow my own spiritual quest	32	48
I believe you do not need to go to church to be a Christian	80	63
The church failed to connect with the rest of my life	49	40
Sermons were irrelevant to my everyday life	46	55
I was bored	45	43
I was not interested in the activities on offer	57	55
I distrusted most institutions including the church	28	35

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Important (135) and Unimportant (74).

## Chapter 10: Not Belonging

Table 10:1

*Chapter 10: Not Belonging: Overview*

---

I have reduced my church going because	Agree %	? %	Disagree %
I did not feel part of the church	47	23	30
I was not allowed to play an active part in the church	12	17	71
My participation in the church had become a chore	44	22	34
I felt powerless to bring about change within the church	30	22	48
I felt there were not enough people in the congregation	17	17	66
There were not enough people of my age	34	16	50
Relationships within the church had become soured	19	16	65

---

Table 10:2

*Chapter 10: Not Belonging: Gender*

I have reduced my church going because	Male Agree %	Female Agree %
I did not feel part of the church	49	45
I was not allowed to play an active part in the church	12	13
My participation in the church had become a chore	44	44
I felt powerless to bring about change within the church	29	31
I felt there were not enough people in the congregation	15	18
There were not enough people of my age	25	41
Relationships within the church had become soured	16	22

These percentages are based on the actual returns of Males (139) and Females (177).

Table 10:3

*Chapter 10: Not Belonging: Age*

I have reduced my church going because	Under 25 Agree %	25-45 Agree %	46-60 Agree %	61+ Agree %
I did not feel part of the church	40	43	53	51
I was not allowed to play an active part in the church	15	14	13	6
My participation in the church had become a chore	41	45	46	45
I felt powerless to bring about change within the church	29	31	34	24
I felt there were not enough people in the congregation	18	17	16	16
There were not enough people of my age	46	40	34	8
Relationships within the church had become soured	16	17	19	30

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Under-25 Year Olds (118), 26-45 Year Olds (97), 46-60 Year Olds (63) and 61+ Year Olds (31).

Table 10:4

*Chapter 10: Not Belonging: Occupational Status*

I have reduced my church going because	Students Agree %	Professionals Agree %	Manual Workers Agree %
I did not feel part of the church	40	57	40
I was not allowed to play an active part in the church	11	14	26
My participation in the church had become a chore	40	47	38
I felt powerless to bring about change within the church	26	32	37
I felt there were not enough people in the congregation	15	11	38
There were not enough people of my age	41	28	50
Relationships within the church had become soured	16	19	5

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Students (60), Professionals (107) and Manual Workers (31).

Table 10:5

*Chapter 10: Not Belonging: Church Attendance*

I have reduced my church going because	Six or Fewer Annually Agree %	Once Annually Agree %	Never Agree %
I did not feel part of the church	48	42	66
I was not allowed to play an active part in the church	14	8	7
My participation in the church had become a chore	47	56	73
I felt powerless to bring about change within the church	35	27	29
I felt there were not enough people in the congregation	20	16	7
There were not enough people of my age	47	22	31
Relationships within the church had become soured	13	23	19

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Six or Fewer Annually (97), Once Annually (128) and Never (67).

Table 10:6

*Chapter 6: Not Belonging: Religious Inheritance*

I have reduced my church going because	Important Agree %	Unimportant Agree %
I did not feel part of the church	46	55
I was not allowed to play an active part in the church	14	5
My participation in the church had become a chore	46	38
I felt powerless to bring about change within the church	25	26
I felt there were not enough people in the congregation	16	5
There were not enough people of my age	34	25
Relationships within the church had become soured	17	17

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Important (140) and Unimportant (98).

## Chapter 11: Disillusionment

Table 11:1

### *Chapter 11: Disillusionment: Overview*

---

I have reduced my church going because	Agree %	? %	Disagree %
I was disillusioned by the church's failure to live up to its ideals	24	22	54
The church lacked a sense of purpose and vision	33	25	42
The church was too preoccupied with maintaining buildings	25	22	53
The church was too preoccupied with money	28	21	51
I was disillusioned by local factions within the church	25	20	55
I was disillusioned by the church's attitude to mixed marriage	24	19	57
I was disillusioned by church-goers' sectarianism	32	20	48

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Table 11:2

*Chapter 11: Disillusionment: Gender*

I have reduced my church going because	Male Agree %	Female Agree %
I was disillusioned by the church's failure to live up to its ideals	27	22
The church lacked a sense of purpose and vision	40	28
The church was too preoccupied with maintaining buildings	22	27
The church was too preoccupied with money	28	27
I was disillusioned by local factions within the church	27	23
I was disillusioned by the church's attitude to mixed marriage	21	27
I was disillusioned by church-goers' sectarianism	32	31

These percentages are based on the actual returns of Males (139) and Females (177).

Table 11:3

*Chapter 11: Disillusionment: Age*

I have reduced my church going because	Under 25 Agree %	26-45 Agree %	46-60 Agree %	61+ Agree %
I was disillusioned by the church's failure to live up to its ideals	13	22	31	37
The church lacked a sense of purpose and vision	26	32	36	46
The church was too preoccupied with maintaining buildings	24	27	29	31
The church was too preoccupied with money	25	28	40	39
I was disillusioned by local factions within the church	14	27	31	36
I was disillusioned by the church's attitude to mixed marriage	24	23	28	26
I was disillusioned by church-goers' sectarianism	18	38	42	38

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Under-25 Year Olds (114), 26-45 Year Olds (93), 46-60 Year Olds (62) and 61+ Year Olds (27).

Table 11:4

*Chapter 11: Disillusionment: Occupation*

I have reduced my church going because	Students Agree %	Professionals Agree %	Manual Workers Agree %
I was disillusioned by the church's failure to live up to its ideals	16	27	13
The church lacked a sense of purpose and vision	28	35	25
The church was too preoccupied with maintaining buildings	25	25	25
The church was too preoccupied with money	29	28	10
I was disillusioned by local factions within the church	14	40	25
I was disillusioned by the church's attitude to mixed marriage	25	29	13
I was disillusioned by church-goers' sectarianism	23	43	25

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Students (60), Professionals (98) and Manual Workers (26).

Table 11:5

*Chapter 11: Disillusionment: Church Attendance*

I have reduced my church going because	Six or Fewer Annually Agree %	Once Annually Agree %	Never Agree %
I was disillusioned by the church's failure to live up to its ideals	18	23	39
The church lacked a sense of purpose and vision	25	28	47
The church was too preoccupied with maintaining buildings	25	22	22
The church was too preoccupied with money	28	21	33
I was disillusioned by local factions within the church	21	23	33
I was disillusioned by the church's attitude to mixed marriage	18	21	34
I was disillusioned by church-goers' sectarianism	17	23	33

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Six or Fewer Annually (95), Once Annually (127) and Never (60).

Table 11:6

*Chapter 11: Disillusionment: Religious Inheritance*

I have reduced my church going because	Important Agree %	Unimportant Agree %
I was disillusioned by the church's failure to live up to its ideals	24	25
The church lacked a sense of purpose and vision	36	50
The church was too preoccupied with maintaining buildings	26	30
The church was too preoccupied with money	32	30
I was disillusioned by local factions within the church	29	16
I was disillusioned by the church's attitude to mixed marriage	25	33
I was disillusioned by church-goers' sectarianism	35	30

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Important (149) and Unimportant (123).

## Chapter 12: Being Let Down by the Church

Table 12:1

### *Chapter 12: Being Let Down by Church: Overview*

---

I have reduced my church going because	Agree %	? %	Disagree %
I did not find the church to be caring and supportive	26	22	52
The clergy did not provide sufficient care for me	20	21	59
The church's pastoral care was abusive to me	7	13	80
I found it hard to adjust to the new clergy person	15	16	69
I disliked the church's style of worship	27	21	52
I felt there was too little sense of the presence of God in worship	23	25	52
I disliked the new service book	16	21	63
I disliked the new hymns	14	20	66

---

Table 12:2

*Chapter 12: Being Let Down by Church: Gender*

I have reduced my church going because	Male Agree %	Female Agree %
I did not find the church to be caring and supportive	27	25
The clergy did not provide sufficient care for me	17	22
The church's pastoral care was abusive to me	12	4
I found it hard to adjust to the new clergy person	18	12
I disliked the church's style of worship	27	24
I felt there was too little sense of the presence of God in worship	28	19
I disliked the new service book	21	12
I disliked the new hymns	18	12

These percentages are based on the actual returns of Males (139) and Females (177).

Table 12:3

*Chapter 12: Being Let Down by Church: Age*

I have reduced my church going because	Under 25 Agree %	26-45 Agree %	46-60 Agree %	61+ Agree %
I did not find the church to be caring and supportive	25	24	28	31
The clergy did not provide sufficient care for me	19	19	20	23
The church's pastoral care was abusive to me	7	8	8	6
I found it hard to adjust to the new clergy person	13	16	17	23
I disliked the church's style of worship	23	25	28	18
I felt there was too little sense of the presence of God in worship	19	22	26	33
I disliked the new service book	12	13	24	35
I disliked the new hymns	14	16	20	27

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Under-25 Year Olds (112), 26-45 Year Olds (85), 46-60 Year Olds (63) and 61+ Year Olds (26).

Table 12:4

*Chapter 12: Being Let Down by Church: Occupation*

I have reduced my church going because	Students Agree %	Professionals Agree %	Manual Workers Agree %
I did not find the church to be caring and supportive	25	27	24
The clergy did not provide sufficient care for me	17	24	26
The church's pastoral care was abusive to me	6	8	0
I found it hard to adjust to the new clergy person	12	17	20
I disliked the church's style of worship	19	26	11
I felt there was too little sense of the presence of God in worship	18	24	14
I disliked the new service book	13	13	15
I disliked the new hymns	12	14	17

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Students (62), Professionals (96) and Manual Workers (27).

Table 12:5

*Chapter 12: Being Let Down by Church: Church Attendance*

I have reduced my church going because	Six or Fewer Annually Agree %	Once Annually Agree %	Never Agree %
I did not find the church to be caring and supportive	28	17	35
The clergy did not provide sufficient care for me	19	17	26
The church's pastoral care was abusive to me	4	11	9
I found it hard to adjust to the new clergy person	11	14	14
I disliked the church's style of worship	19	22	36
I felt there was too little sense of the presence of God in worship	20	19	26
I disliked the new service book	9	15	26
I disliked the new hymns	9	14	23

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Six or Fewer Annually (95), Once Annually (120) and Never (68).

Table 12:6

*Chapter 12: Being Let Down by Church: Religious Inheritance*

I have reduced my church going because	Important Agree %	Unimportant Agree %
I did not find the church to be caring and supportive	25	30
The clergy did not provide sufficient care for me	20	26
The church's pastoral care was abusive to me	6	15
I found it hard to adjust to the new clergy person	16	11
I disliked the church's style of worship	29	26
I felt there was too little sense of the presence of God in worship	24	12
I disliked the new service book	21	11
I disliked the new hymns	20	5

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Important (140) and Unimportant (103).

## Chapter 13: Qualms, Theological and Moral

Table 13:1

*Chapter 13: Qualms, theological and moral: Overview*

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I have reduced my church going because	Agree %	? %	Disagree %
I disagreed with the church's theological teachings	20	28	52
I was tired of being told what to believe by the church	33	16	51
The church's teaching was too simplified and unchallenging	24	24	52
The church was too negative towards the outside world	20	24	56
It was unclear what commitment to the church involved	25	28	47
I disagreed with the church's stance on key moral issues	25	24	51
I was tired of being told how to behave by the church	26	21	53

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Table 13:2

*Chapter 13: Qualms, theological and moral: Gender*

I have reduced my church going because	Male Agree %	Female Agree %
I disagreed with the church's theological teachings	22	19
I was tired of being told what to believe by the church	33	34
The church's teaching was too simplified and unchallenging	26	22
The church was too negative towards the outside world	22	18
It was unclear what commitment to the church involved	26	22
I disagreed with the church's stance on key moral issues	29	21
I was tired of being told how to behave by the church	25	26

These percentages are based on the actual returns of Males (139) and Females (177).

Table 13:3

*Chapter 13: Qualms, theological and moral: Age*

I have reduced my church going because	Under 25 Agree %	26-45 Agree %	46-60 Agree %	61+ Agree %
I disagreed with the church's theological teachings	19	21	19	27
I was tired of being told what to believe by the church	33	34	33	31
The church's teaching was too simplified and unchallenging	15	17	33	29
The church was too negative towards the outside world	20	25	17	26
It was unclear what commitment to the church involved	27	30	18	29
I disagreed with the church's stance on key moral issues	27	28	23	25
I was tired of being told how to behave by the church	27	30	25	23

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Under-25 Year Olds (109), 26-45 Year Olds (89), 46-60 Year Olds (64) and 61+ Year Olds (25).

Table 13:4

*Chapter 13: Qualms, theological and moral: Occupation*

I have reduced my church going because	Students Agree %	Professionals Agree %	Manual Workers Agree %
I disagreed with the church's theological teachings	25	20	13
I was tired of being told what to believe by the church	35	28	25
The church's teaching was too simplified and unchallenging	19	29	13
The church was too negative towards the outside world	22	23	15
It was unclear what commitment to the church involved	22	22	25
I disagreed with the church's stance on key moral issues	33	24	12
I was tired of being told how to behave by the church	35	20	25

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Students (50), Professionals (95) and Manual Workers (24).

Table 13:5

*Chapter 13: Qualms, theological and moral: Church Attendance*

I have reduced my church going because	Six or Fewer Annually Agree %	Once Annually Agree %	Never Agree %
I disagreed with the church's theological teachings	13	16	36
I was tired of being told what to believe by the church	21	27	52
The church's teaching was too simplified and unchallenging	16	18	39
The church was too negative towards the outside world	16	13	28
It was unclear what commitment to the church involved	21	23	25
I disagreed with the church's stance on key moral issues	21	24	32
I was tired of being told how to behave by the church	17	22	41

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Six or Fewer Annually (94), Once Annually (128) and Never (63).

Table 13:6

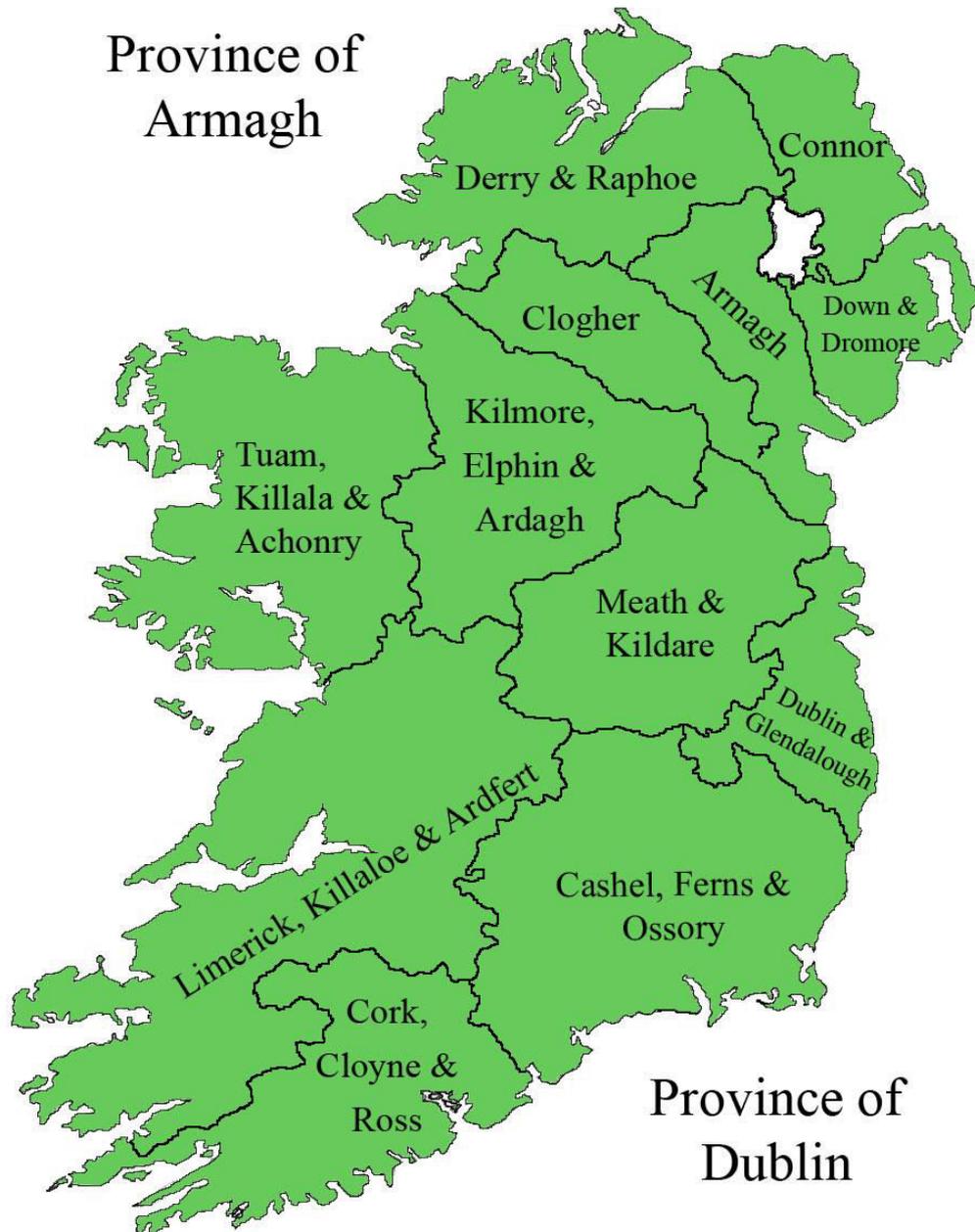
*Chapter 13: Qualms, theological and moral: Religious Inheritance*

I have reduced my church going because	Important Agree %	Unimportant Agree %
I disagreed with the church's theological teachings	19	37
I was tired of being told what to believe by the church	33	52
The church's teaching was too simplified and unchallenging	30	32
The church was too negative towards the outside world	20	26
It was unclear what commitment to the church involved	23	20
I disagreed with the church's stance on key moral issues	27	42
I was tired of being told how to behave by the church	27	45

These percentages are based on the actual returns as follows: Important (143) and Unimportant (107).

**APPENDIX B: MAP, QUESTIONNAIRE AND LETTERS**

**Appendix B, 1:1: The Dioceses of the Church of Ireland 2006**



## Appendix B, 3:1: Questionnaire

### ABOUT YOU

#### **In the religious question in the national census did you identify yourself as:**

Church of Ireland  1.      Presbyterian  2.      Methodist  3.  
Roman Catholic  4.      Other Christian Religion 5. (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_  
No Religion  6.      Did Not State  7.

**Are you:**      Male  1.      Female  2.

**How old were you on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2006?** \_\_\_\_\_

#### **What is your marital status?**

Single  1.      Married  2.      Separated or Divorced  3.  
Divorced & Remarried  4.      Widowed  5.      Living with a Partner  6.

#### **Which of these best describes the area where you live?**

Urban  1.      Rural  2.

**In which county do you live?** \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Are you:**

In Full Time Work  1.      In Part Time Work  2.      A Homemaker/Carer  3.  
Unemployed  4.      A Student  5.      Retired  6.

#### **If you are in work do you regard yourself as:**

Professional  1.      Semi-Professional  2.      Non-Manual Worker  3.  
Skilled Manual Worker  4.      Semi-Skilled Manual Worker  5.  
Unskilled Manual Worker  6.      Student  7.      Other 8. (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

#### **What examinations have you passed?**

Junior/Inter Cert.  1.      Leaving Cert.  2.      Vocational Qualification  3.  
Primary Degree  4.      Higher Degree  5.      Other 6. (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

#### **What nationality are you?**

Irish  1.      British  2.      Other E.U.  3.      Non E.U.  4.

**How many times have you moved in the last ten years?** (state number) \_\_\_\_\_

**In how many non-church group or organisations have you participated during the past year (e.g. Sports, Social, Educational, Cultural, Political, Community)**

None  1. 1-2  2. 3-5  3. 6-10  4. 10+  5.

### **YOUR PAST**

**When you were ten, how often did your mother attend religious services (apart from baptisms, weddings and funerals)?**

Never  1. At least once a year  2. At least six times a year  3.  
Once a month  4. Twice a month  5. Weekly  6. Don't know  7.

**What type of church did your mother attend, if any?**

Church of Ireland  1. Presbyterian  2. Methodist  3.  
Roman Catholic  4. Other Christian Religion 5. (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_ None  6.

**When you were ten, how often did your father attend religious services (apart from baptisms, weddings and funerals)?**

Never  1. At least once a year  2. At least six times a year  3.  
Once a month  4. Twice a month  5. Weekly  6. Don't know  7.

**What type of church did your father attend, if any?**

Church of Ireland  1. Presbyterian  2. Methodist  3.  
Roman Catholic  4. Other Christian Religion 5. (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_ None  6.

**When you were ten how important was religion to you?**

Not very important  1. Fairly important  2. Can't say  3.  
Important  4. Very important  5.

### **ABOUT CHURCH ATTENDANCE**

**Nowadays how often do you attend church (apart from weddings, baptisms and funerals)?**

Never  1. At least once a year  2. At least six times a year  3.  
Once a month  4. Twice a month  5. Weekly  6.

**What type of church do you normally attend?**

Church of Ireland  1. Presbyterian  2. Methodist  3.  
Roman Catholic  4. Other Christian Religion 5. (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_ None  6.

**In which church were you baptised?**

Church of Ireland  1. Presbyterian  2. Methodist  3.  
Roman Catholic  4. Other Christian Religion 5. (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_ None  6.

**In which church were you confirmed?**

Church of Ireland  1. Presbyterian  2. Methodist  3.  
Roman Catholic  4. Other Christian Religion 5. (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_ None  6.

**Have there been times in your life when you have reduced your church-going to less than six times a year?**

No  1. Yes, once  2. Yes, twice  3. Yes, more than twice  4.

**How old were you when you last reduced your church-going to less than 6 times a year?**

Less than 20  1. 20-29  2. 30-39  3. 40-49  4.  
50-59  5. 60-69  6. 70+  7.

**Would you describe your dropping off from church attendance as gradual or sudden?**

Very Gradual  1. Fairly gradual  2. Can't say either way  3.  
Fairly sudden  4. Very sudden  5.

**Did anyone from the church talk with you about why you were attending church less frequently during the first two months after your church-going dropped off?**

No  1. Yes  2.

**Do you feel better for having reduced your church-going or having left church altogether?**

A lot worse  1. A little worse  2. No feeling either way  3.  
A little better  4. A lot better  5.

**Would you describe yourself as belonging to a church now?**

No  1. Don't know  2. Yes  3.

**Are you likely to become actively involved in the church in the future?**

No  1. Don't know  2. Yes  3.

**If you have young children or grandchildren, is it likely that you will encourage them to attend church or Sunday School?**

No  1. Don't know  2. Yes  3.

## YOUR VIEWS

Please read the sentence carefully and think, *Do I Agree?* Then tick the appropriate box.

	AS	A	NC	D	DS
If you <b>Agree Strongly</b> please tick the box marked <b>AS</b> .	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If you <b>Agree</b> please tick the box marked <b>A</b> .	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If you are <b>Not Certain</b> please tick the box marked <b>NC</b> .	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If you <b>Disagree</b> please tick the box marked <b>D</b> .	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If you <b>Disagree Strongly</b> please tick the box marked <b>DS</b> .	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

**I believe that:**

	AS	A	NC	D	DS
God exists	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
God is a personal being	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
God created the earth in 6 days and rested on the 7 <sup>th</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Jesus' birth was a virgin birth	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Jesus rose physically from the dead	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
There is life after death	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
	AS	A	NC	D	DS
Heaven is a real place	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Hell is a real place	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Christianity is the only true religion	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
The character of God is revealed in the Bible	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Prayer is a vital element of living	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
I am a religious person	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
I am a spiritual person	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1

**YOUR REASONS FOR REDUCED CHURCH-GOING**

**I have reduced my church-going because:**

	<b>AS</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>NC</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>DS</b>
I moved to a new area	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
My marriage broke up	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
I became ill	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
I was bereaved	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
I went away to school, college or university	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
I moved home and could not find a church I liked in the new area	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
	<b>AS</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>NC</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>DS</b>
I had no transport to get to church	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
I had increased family commitments	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
I grew up and started making my own decisions	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
I was made to go to church by my parents and it put me off	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
I changed - it wasn't the church's fault that I dropped off	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
I got out of the habit	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
	<b>AS</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>NC</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>DS</b>
The church was no longer helping me to grow	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
The church was not meeting my spiritual needs	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
The church was not meeting my child(ren)'s needs	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Most of my friends were not church-goers	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
My partner was not attending church	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
I found other interests and activities	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
	<b>AS</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>NC</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>DS</b>
The church did not meet my needs	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
I had to work on Sundays	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
I was going to church for the wrong reasons	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
I felt my lifestyle was not compatible with church participation	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
I felt my values were not compatible with church participation	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1

I lost my faith	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
	<b>AS</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>NC</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>DS</b>
I doubted or questioned my faith	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
I felt God let me down	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
So many people fight each other in the name of religion	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
I became aware of alternative ways of thinking or living	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Many of the church's teachings were illogical or nonsensical	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
The church's teachings were difficult to reconcile with modern science	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
	<b>AS</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>NC</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>DS</b>
It was increasingly difficult to believe Christianity as the only true faith	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
The church failed to connect with the rest of my life	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Sermons were irrelevant to my everyday life	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
I was bored	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
I was not interested in the activities on offer	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
My participation in church had become a chore	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
	<b>AS</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>NC</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>DS</b>
I wanted to follow my own spiritual quest without religious institutions	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
I distrusted most institutions including the church	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
I believe you do not need to go to church to be a Christian	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
I did not feel part of the church	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
There were not enough people of my age	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
I was not allowed to play an active part in the church	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1

	<b>AS</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>NC</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>DS</b>
I felt there were not enough people in the congregation	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>
I felt powerless to bring about change within the church	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>
Relationships within the church had become soured	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>
I was disillusioned by the church's failure to live up to its ideals	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>
I was disillusioned by the church's attitude to mixed marriage	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>
I was disillusioned by church-goer's(s') sectarianism	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>
	<b>AS</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>NC</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>DS</b>
I was disillusioned by local factions within the church	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>
The church was too much preoccupied with maintaining buildings	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>
The church lacked a sense of purpose and vision	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>
The church was too preoccupied with money	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>
I did not find the church to be caring and supportive	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>
The clergy did not provide sufficient care for me	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>
	<b>AS</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>NC</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>DS</b>
The church's pastoral care was abusive to me	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>
I did not like the new hymns	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>
I did not like the new service book	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>
I found it hard to adjust to a new clergyperson	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>
I disliked the church's style of worship	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>
I felt that there was too little sense of the present of God in worship	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>
	<b>AS</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>NC</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>DS</b>
It was unclear what commitment to church involved	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>
The church was too negative towards the 'outside world'	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>
I disagreed with the church's theological teachings	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>
I disagreed with the church's stance on key moral issues	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>
I was tired of being told how to behave by the church	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>
I was tired of being told what to believe by the church	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>
The church's teaching was too simplified and unchallenging.	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub>	<input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub>

**If you had to choose just one main reason for reducing your church attendance, what would it be? (Please state in box below.)**

**What action could the church take to encourage your attendance at Sunday services? (Please state in box below.)**

**If you had to choose the reason for retaining your identification with the Church of Ireland, what would it be? (Please state in box below.)**

**Thank you for completing this questionnaire.**

## **Appendix B, 3:2: Letter to Clergy**

Dear

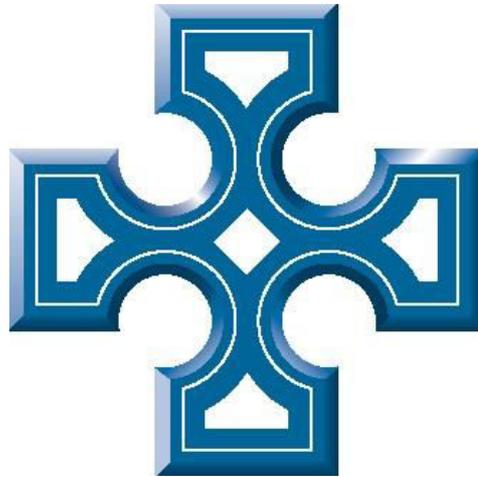
I would be grateful if you could distribute the enclosed envelopes to Church of Ireland people in your area who attend church fewer than six times a year or who do not attend church at all. The envelopes contain a covering letter, questionnaire and a stamped envelope addressed to me. The questionnaire is entirely confidential; there is no need to inform me of the names of those to whom you will give the envelopes. I have enclosed a copy of the letter and questionnaire for your consideration along with stamps for your use, should you wish to post the enclosed envelopes to those concerned.

Although of academic interest, the questionnaire has implications for the mission and ministry of the Church of Ireland and I am most grateful for your assistance in this matter. Should you have any queries, please feel free to contact me at the following telephone numbers:

Yours sincerely,

Ferran Glenfield

### **Appendix B, 3:3: Letter to Respondents (Attached to the Questionnaire)**



#### **The Church of Ireland Participation Research Project**

According to the 2002 national census, there are 116,000 people who identified themselves as Church of Ireland living in the Republic of Ireland. However, according to the Church of Ireland census taken at Diocesan level, there are around 70,000 members of the church. The purpose of this survey is to understand why people identify themselves as Church of Ireland in the national census, yet do not necessarily participate in the life of the church.

By completing this questionnaire you will contribute to an understanding of the issue. You may find that not all the questions apply to you but please answer as many questions as do apply. All replies will be completely confidential. The survey data will be processed and analysed by Ferran Glenfield, a Church of Ireland Rector in Dublin and Professor Leslie Francis of the University of Warwick.

If you have any queries please contact:

Thank you in anticipation for your assistance in this research.

## **Appendix B, 3:4: Letter to Participating Schools & Colleges**

Dear

I would be grateful if you could approach the (fifth and sixth year / undergraduate / post-graduate) students in your college and ask them to complete the enclosed questionnaires.

The questionnaire is entirely confidential with no names required and is designed to understand why people identify themselves as Church of Ireland in the national census, yet do not necessarily participate in the life of the church. A covering letter attached to each questionnaire explains this. Although the findings will have implications for the ministry and mission of the Church of Ireland, the questionnaires are primarily of academic interest.

I would be grateful if, once the completed questionnaires are collected, you could notify me. I will collect them personally from the college. Should you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me at:

Thank you in anticipation for your invaluable help in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Ferran Glenfield