

An exploration of current attitudes towards the Catholic Church in Ireland and the tendency towards secularisation within Irish Society

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Abstract

The objective of this research is to investigate people's views, perceptions and attitudes towards Catholicism and the Catholic Church. This research will explore the views of carefully selected members of Irish society and analyse their opinions concerning Ireland and secularisation. The design of the research invoked a qualitative approach using a semi-structured interview utilising questions which allowed participants the freedom to speak on issues they felt important. The research found that the majority of the sample was in agreement that the Catholic Church along with Catholicism has become secularised in Ireland. There was agreement also that the media and the declining influence of women has played a significant role in this development. It may be concluded that in order for the Church to survive and regain the influence and power it once held, an internal reformation in certain principles must be a top priority.

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Introduction

Inglis (2007) believed that the Catholic Church was once the backbone of strong cohesive family networks and community structures that created a sense of belonging and identity. It provided the Irish people with a certain comfort and solace and its teachings were central to the way Irish people thought. Irish Catholics were deeply spiritual people who once devoted their lives to the Church. Irish society identified itself with the belief and principles of the Catholic Church and learned to adhere to them. Today, however, spirituality no longer fills the lives of Irish people. Inglis (2007) believes that they have become emotionally detached, inner worldly, rational and materialistic. He goes on to explain that Catholics are choosing the teachings to which they will adhere and are now bypassing the Church to develop their own relationships with God. The individualisation of society is ever present and growing. With this, the idea that the relationship between Irish society and the Catholic Church has somewhat decreased and Ireland has indeed become secularised. Has religion become less important within modern Ireland? Has the role of religion become less significant? Is there a decline in the practices and beliefs of Irish people within Irish society where traditionally and devotionally they abided by the ethos of the Catholic Church? These are some of the questions the researcher will pose throughout this project.

The purpose of this research project is to understand the views, perceptions and attitudes of a carefully selected sample regarding the Catholic Church in Ireland

Literature review

The Church has for centuries been intimately bound up with nearly every phase of Irish life according to (Larkin, 1964). The Church and clergy provided the people of Ireland with food, education and tended to the sick and needy. This service was provided free of charge. (White, 2007) believes that Irish people are believed to be one of the most religious societies in Europe. Practice was second nature to the Irish. Mass, confession and prayers were all part of the habitus of the Irish people. According to (Inglis, 2007) during the nineteenth century, there was a dramatic change in the practice of Irish Catholicism. Weekly Mass attendance jumped from 30-40% in the early decades of the century to over 90% by the end of the century (Carroll, 1995). Irish Catholics not only attended Mass, but also embraced the whole range of devotions such as the Rosary, the Forty Hours devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Conception of Mary (Carroll, 1995). Larkin (1972) explains that the Roman Hierarchy then promoted Ireland as a way of standardising the way Catholicism is practiced throughout the world. These changes according to Larkin (1972) were referred to as “devotional revolution”. He believed that it was a revolution that ensured that Catholic Ireland would become, and still is, the most thoroughly “Romanised” of all Catholic countries.

The Catholic Church remains the single largest Church in Ireland with identification and attendance rates relatively high in comparison to other developed countries Gallagher (2009). Traditionally, Ireland has been a country dominated by the influence, practice and teachings of the Catholic Church. The majority of Irish Catholics are born into the Church, baptised and socialised into its beliefs and practices according to Inglis (2007). He also highlights in the same study that over the last 30 years, religious practice has steadily declined. A national survey in 1973-74 found that 91% of Catholics in the Republic of Ireland went to Mass at

least once a week. The European Values Study (EVS) indicated that this fell by 25% in 25 years. Has Ireland become secularised and if so, what are the reasons behind it? The study by Gallagher (2009) consisted of sixteen interviewees ranging in age, eighteen to eighty and using both genders. The particular sample was chosen because of its affiliation to this parish in Letterkenny. As this was a study regarding the religious institution in rural Ireland, three priests were chosen to participate. The researcher aimed to have a full representation of the community in gender, age and affiliation, if any, to the Catholic Church. Frequent themes presented themselves throughout the interviews. One particular theme that emerged was that of socialisation. Gallagher (2009) explains that thirteen of the sixteen interviewees stated that at least one member of their family was involved in socialising them into the Catholic way of thinking; while six interviewees highlighted the significant role played by their parents in the process. The study highlighted the family's role in the socialisation process and shows that those whose parents had a role in this process have kept their faith and practice in their daily lives to this day.

A recent study by Breen and Reynolds (2011) offers a descriptive account of some of the changes relating to religious and social values of Ireland. The data used for this study was obtained from the European Values Study Group and the World Survey Association respectively. Following this, the paper will provide a brief discussion of some key propositions in theories of secularisation and modernisation, both of which are relevant to the current study. The study outlines the decreasing numbers of Irish people who believe in God. Not only is there a decline in the belief in God, but also a decline in other Christian beliefs such as Heaven, Hell, Afterlife and Sin. The overall picture portrayed in this study is a decline of beliefs among practising Catholics. However, despite declines in church religiosity, the study states that Ireland remains a predominantly religious country. It does however pose the question of whether this represents something unusual about Ireland in

particular, or whether Irish society is in the process of catching up with the rest of Europe. Inglis (2007) believes that there is a detachment of religious practice in Europe, in particular among French and Spanish Catholics. He argues that while many European Catholics see themselves as belonging to a religious tradition, they are less willing to engage in rituals and practices.

A qualitative study by Hilliard (2003) highlighted the perspective of a sample of 101 working class women from Cork city during the 1970s. The data on which this article is based refers specifically to the participants' perception of the social change in family life since 1975. The survey, originally intended to comprise data of urban families comparable to rural families based on kinship and gender roles. Hilliard noticed recurring themes emerging from the study. These themes illustrate that a dominant set of beliefs and ideas shaped the habitus of working class women. Themes generated from their interviews highlight how women felt controlled by the Church. Their lives centred around enforced domesticity and rearing of family by both the Church and the State. A central issue in these women's lives was their belief that avoidance of pregnancy was viewed by the Catholic Church as not only sinful but that women would be refused absolution in confession. (Hilliard, 2003) approaches the study in a way, which illustrates the personal trauma and dilemma inflicted by an institution and supported by a state that allowed these teachings and practices to exist. This argument is supported by Tom Inglis (1998) where he describes the relationship between the State and Church as a "peaceful coexistence". However peaceful their existence was, the women of Ireland may have a different opinion.

In a study, (Inglis, 2007) argues that the religious transformation Ireland is going through is best understood as a process of de-institutionalisation. The data derived from a group of 120 participants based on their willingness and availability to participate. This study used open-ended and semi-structured interviews, so the researcher could explore the way Irish people

understand themselves. The initial interviews were used to understand how people describe themselves. Once this was identified, Inglis (2007) then asked questions that are more specific about their personal and social identities, including religion. This article confines the analysis to interviews with Catholic respondents and women in particular as Inglis believes that traditionally women are more religious than men and as women played a crucial role in the socialising process of children to the teachings, practices and beliefs of the Catholic Church. He argues that the majority of Irish Catholics still see and understand themselves as Catholics, and accept most of the Church's key teachings and beliefs. However, increasing numbers of Irish Catholics are becoming spiritually and morally detached from the Church.

The media must not be underestimated in investigating whether or not Catholicism has become secularised. It acts as a public watchdog and social conscience for Irish society. A recent study by (Donnelly & Inglis, 2010) argues how the relationship between the media and the Catholic Church can be linked to the secularisation of Catholic Ireland both on the macro-level in terms of institutional power and on the micro-level regarding the decline of institutional participation and trust. The research describes how media propaganda influences public opinions of the church. This research is important in portraying an understanding of peoples' opinions and how they can be manipulated and shaped into believing what is reported. It focuses in particular on the influence of the media in reporting clerical child sex abuse and the impact it had on the Irish public. This study is key to this project as it highlights the shift in the balance of power. Clerical child sex abuse went from a story that could not be told to a story that had to be reported and therefore the Catholic Church as a whole has suffered in a way that may be irreparable.

Another useful finding regarding an understanding of the secularisation of Catholicism in Ireland is shown by Hirschle (2010). In this, the author uses Ireland as a case study to investigate if there is a negative association between economic growth and religious practice.

The researcher examines the correlation between economic development and societal and religious change. Hirschle (2010) believes in the concept that religious decline accompanies modernisation. Accompanied by economic growth, the need for religion decreases as people face lower levels of existential insecurity. The researcher provides an explanation for the correlation between economic growth and religious decline. (Hirschle, 2010, p. 674) argues, “that for many individuals consumption-related routine activities supplant the social aspects of religious attendance”. Ireland is used as a test case to explore which theory (secularisation or consumption) the author feels explains religious change during the course of economic development. The sample used for this study ranged between people born between 1934 and 1973. The author concludes that economic growth was significantly negatively associated with religious practice.

(Hogan, 2011) provides an interesting insight into clerical and child abuse in Ireland. Her account looks at the extent of the crises, insights from the Ryan and Murphy Reports, the relationship between the Church and sexuality and the patriarchal abuse of power. Her report draws from a wide range of research and writings all relating to the topic providing insights and evaluations that have proved significant to the current study.

Another important report critical to the research project is The Ryan Report (2009). It provides evidence from alleged victims who suffered abuse in childhood and in institutions. It reported details and accounts of abuse of all types – physical, sexual, neglect and emotional. The report found that the religious orders were fully aware of it but failed to act or moved the perpetrator to other institutions. (Hogan, 2011, p. 175) outlines that “the findings of the report run to 5 volumes and provide a window on the cultural and religious values that shaped the institutions in which the abuse happened”.

Finally, a study that is of great relevance to this research project is the Murphy Report (2009). The report was established to investigate the handling of the Church and State regarding allegations of sexual abuse against clerics working in the Archdiocese of Dublin over the period 1974 to 2004. The report is highly significant to this research as it has been the most comprehensive report into the Catholic Church. This research project is about gathering information regarding people's opinions towards the Catholic Church and Catholicism in Ireland. The researcher would like to investigate whether or not it has become secularised. The Murphy Report (2009) will inevitably bring out reactions from the public. The researcher feels it is an appropriate and beneficial report to include in this research project.

Methodology

Catholicism and Ireland have traditionally always been closely connected. Ireland has traditionally been a Catholic dominated country with little room to manoeuvre. However, in recent times, the Catholic Church may no longer be seen as the dominant institution it once was and the number of those practising their faith has declined, Ingles (1998).

There is no correct way of choosing the right method. Silverman (2005) believes, there are only methods appropriate to the research topic being studied. The research is a qualitative, data-led study aimed at understanding people's perceptions of the Catholic Church and Catholicism in Ireland and has it become secularised. The qualitative approach was deemed most suitable for this research project as the researcher is seeking to uncover rich data. The sample chosen provided a deep insight into a myriad of themes found within the secularisation of Ireland. While a quantitative approach would cover a larger sample size but would pose a major limitation as it would be missing the crucial ingredient of the rationale behind the answers. It is for this reason that the researcher adopted a qualitative approach. The qualitative method utilising semi-structured interview methodology provides a rich understanding of people's attitudes and opinions towards the Catholic Church in Ireland.

Materials

All interviews were recorded by a HP Platinum laptop and Sony ICDBX112 Dictaphone machine. This ensured all information gained was appropriately backed up in case of any unforeseen circumstances that may jeopardise the data obtained. Interviews for this research project were conducted at the interviewees' convenience.

Participants & sampling method

With any research project the sampling method is vital. All researchers aspire to gain access to the most appropriate and suitable participants for their study. This approach strove to select the most relevant sample to gather rich data. There was a significant amount of time and careful consideration taken in the participant selection process for this research project. The participants must match a certain criteria that are relevant for this study. Criterion sampling was most significant to this research as the participants were chosen based on ability or characteristics which will enable the exploration of the research question Ritchie & Lewis (2003).

There were a total of nine participants selected for this study. Each person was contacted through phone initially. The researcher preferred this method of communication as it seemed more personal. Also taken into consideration is the sensitive nature of this research project and the researcher felt that a more personal approach to contact was the only viable choice.

The first two participants chosen are representatives of God, the first a parish priest aged 70 and the second a lay Brother aged 65. Their knowledge and contribution is essential to this study as they are still representatives of God. The following participants, both female and aged in their sixties were chosen because of their relationship with the Church. The first,

who has travelled extensively around the world, is a devout Catholic. Her belief and practice of the faith allow the researcher to gain entry into the mind of a rural woman. The other is a rural born housewife who moved to Dublin and works for the Council of Catechetics. The researcher felt that both women's input into this research project would prove valuable.

The following two participants were chosen on account of their somewhat controversial attitudes towards the Catholic Church. The first is a 58 year old Dublin born male, who moved to a very rural and remote part of Ireland forty years ago who was educated in a Church-run school. The second of these participants, aged 36, also went to a Church-run school, and again has strong opinions about the Catholic Church and Catholicism.

The next participant chosen for this study is an 18 year student from a rural town in Ireland. The researcher felt that her inclusion in this project was invaluable as it offered an insight from a generation where religion may not be as prioritised as it once was. Another contributing factor was the fact that she is Religion student attending Mater Dei in Drumcondra, Dublin. After this participant, a 33 year old recently married woman was chosen. The reason for this is because she was recently married into the Catholic Church. The researcher felt this was important for the reason that even though she is not a practising Catholic, her choice of marrying in a Church may not have been hers, but that of her parents.

The final participant chosen for this research project was a 57 old IT expert. The reason for his choice is that his rational thinking allows him to take an objective view of the Church. His knowledge base regarding the Church is comprehensive and he has read many books to facilitate a well-informed opinion. His faith as a Catholic does not alter his logical thinking.

Procedure

An interview schedule was created deriving from previous literature and the aims of this research. Each semi-structured interview lasted between 40 minutes and an hour. This method was time-consuming. The researcher travelled to various parts of the country in order to gain access to the selected participants. This was necessary as the researcher felt that they were suitable candidates for the project. The Dublin-based researcher visited the Counties of Armagh, Donegal, Kerry and Mayo in order to gain the access required.

Two pilot interviews were conducted before the actual interviews took place. This was undertaken to ensure that the interviews were not too academic and intrusive on the participants. It was noticed that this was, in fact, the case and certain changes were made to the interview schedule to ensure that this wouldn't happen again. Some of the questions that were asked turned out to be questions with yes/no answers. These are unsuitable for this type of research. Before each interview was conducted, the researcher ensured the participant felt relaxed and it was more of a conversation than an interview. This put the participants' minds at ease, thus allowing them to speak more freely.

Interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis that was most suitable for them and in a place where they felt at ease. This was to ensure that they were comfortable throughout the interview. The interviews were semi-structured, open-ended questions which allowed the participants to speak more openly and freely. The goal of the interview is to explore each participant's ideas, views, understandings, experiences and beliefs surrounding the theme of Catholicism in Ireland in all its complexity. The researcher felt that this was the most appropriate method as there are many different variables that can arise from such a sensitive subject. Throughout the conversation there was an effortless transition between the questions

which allowed for a steady flow and eliminated the need for any re-direction of the interview.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was the method chosen for this research project as ‘it identifies, analyses and reports patterns within data’ as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006). First, the researcher familiarised himself with the data. Each interview was transcribed, read and re-read a number of times while composing a list of relevant and interesting topics. The transcripts were then transferred into computer software Nvivo 9 to allow for analysis of the data gained. After this a process of coding was undertaken, ‘Codes identify a feature of the data that appears interesting to the analyst, and refer to the most basic segment, or element of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p 88). The researcher immersed himself in the data transcripts which were coded in a systematic fashion. Once coding was complete, the researcher was left with a long list of different codes that were identified across the data set. The researcher began analysing the data, grouping common codes together, creating themes. As a result of this, sub themes began to emerge. This allowed the researcher to group frequent themes together, creating a chart. The chart consisted of recurring themes, giving the researcher an overall view of familiar themes emerging from the samples interviews.

Ethical considerations

The sample group individually consented prior to the interviews taking place as well as signing a consent form. Each participant was sent an information sheet highlighting the criteria of the interviews. When speaking about somebody's faith, it is very important not to cause offence. This was at the forefront of the researcher's mind and each participant was informed that they could end the interview at any time. Participants were under no obligation to answer questions that made them feel uncomfortable. Participant's anonymity was protected at all times and each participant was treated with dignity and respect throughout. Names used in this study are fictional in order to protect the identity of the participants. It was explained that the USB on which recordings and transcripts were stored was password protected while a destruction date of each recording and transcript was clarified.

Results

The main goal of this research project is to understand people's perception of Catholicism in Ireland and investigate whether or not it has become secularised. This was achieved by interviewing a carefully selected sample of participants on their attitudes, opinions and thoughts towards Catholicism. Following the interviews a method of thematic analysis was conducted with the subsequent themes emerging.

The influence of the media regarding the Church, scandals and controversies.

Media, sex scandals and controversies were further familiar themes that presented themselves throughout each interview. The Church has gone through a turbulent time over the last thirty years. The media has proved to be one of the influential factors in contributing to the problems facing the Catholic Church. Participants were asked if their views of the Church have been influenced in any way by the media. The highly publicised controversies have been well documented and available for all to see. This resulted in a mixed reaction within the sample. Some believe that the media's coverage of the Church is an act of vengeance as Paul (36) explains

'I think the media is out to bring down the Catholic Church and they're out looking for an excuse'

Even though his views on the Church are negative, he believes that the media is out to maybe not destroy the Church, but to *'wound an already hurt institution'*. Another participant, Sarah (61) explains that

'They haven't really been fair towards the Catholic Church'

Sarah (61) was referring to the negative press the Church has received, most notably the

sexual and paedophile controversies that have engulfed the Church like a plague. Sarah understands that this type of behaviour is completely unacceptable, however she does bring to light that *'it is a small percentage of the Church that are guilty'*. However, this reflects on the Church as a whole. Brian (58) is in full support of the media's coverage of the Church. He believes that the role of the media is positive. He explains

'The media have got stuck in and rooted them out; the media has done a really good job in exposing the abuse. They have educated me a lot more towards the clergy'

However, Brother John (65) believes that

'all the ills of society have been left at the door of the Church, 'they have gone way over the top, forgetting about the good that the Church has done in society, Journalists and media were trying to outdo each other trying to get the knife in that was of huge importance'.

Stephen (57) has become somewhat cynical of the media. Stephen is a man who is able to step back from the situation and think rationally. His thoughts are well informed and he is able to form a well-rounded view. His explanation for this lies within the coverage of the Fr. Reynolds scandal. He goes on to explain

'That scandal about Fr. Reynolds who was accused of fathering a child in Africa showed an enthusiasm on the part of the media to expose a scandal without taking the time to verify the facts. The horrific thing about that scandal is that if there wasn't a child born, and the priest had simply been accused of raping the girl he would have no way of defending himself'

Although his views and opinions of the Church have never being influenced by the Media, the enthusiasm on the part of the media to expose members of the clergy, without knowing the full extent of the facts, in his view is *'unethical and wrong'*.

All participants are in agreement that the sex and paedophile controversies have had a huge effect on the Church; the media has played an instrumental part in this process. Another respondent who believes that the media can have a big influence on people, particularly her own age, Aisling (18) explains

'It does have a negative impact, especially towards Catholicism. I have judged the Church based on media rather than research. But even in Catholicism, it would make you think a bit more against the Church, rather than for it'.

Even though she has judged the Church based on media, her faith still stays the same. She believes that the media has a huge impression on people her own age

'I think it would affect people my age, because they are only getting to grips with who they are and what they believe'

All participants are in agreement that the Church has been severely damaged due to the controversies that have been publicised in the media and the way the Church has dealt with them. However they do believe that the Church can recover from this. Brother John (65) states that

'the Church will come out of it a lot stronger and in a better position to preach the gospel'.

While Mary's (65) firm belief lies within

'the hardcore believers who will continually stand strong, as long as we have the hardcore believers, Catholicism will always have a place here'.

Women's oppression within a hierarchical Church

Participants have agreed that women have been the backbone of the Church for decades. However, they have always been treated as second class citizens in the eyes of the Church.

One participant, Stephen (57) explains

'I was always very conscious, even when I was young of women being in a secondary role in the eyes of the church'

Paul (36) was of a similar thinking. He agrees and states that

'The Church was absolutely horrible towards women. You know women were treated as 2nd, 3rd and 4th class citizens in Ireland'. He goes on to explain that 'women were controlled by the Church and had no other choice than to obey'. 'Their power was limited, and because the Church were considered the pillars of society and involved in everyone's business, it was hard for them to refuse well anything from the Church'.

The majority of participants were in general agreement that women were in fact oppressed by the Church and feel that this may have contributed to the demise of the Church. Sarah (61) would absolutely agree that women suffered in an oppressive manner at the hands of the Church. In response to the question, her answer was

'I would absolutely agree with that women were. Our role was to help the priest in preparation and other minimal jobs. Our inability to move up the hierarchal ladder is a mistake as I think that women have so much that we can offer'

Aisling (18) recalls conversations with her mother where she explained

'That her grandmother was fully responsible for instilling religious beliefs into the children because that's the way God wanted it'

Aisling (18) is not so sure if her mother still believes in that. When asked if she felt the same, she replies

'No way, children are the jobs of both parents and both should take on the responsibility of raising children'.

The opinion of Aisling (18) compared to her mother is a far cry from traditional thoughts and illustrates the difference between two eras. Participants were adamant that the role of women in the Church was very significant, while their position was not.

Morals, values and the family – the expected that was accepted

Participants spoke quite frequently and sometimes angrily about morals and values within society. Katy (33), Stephen (57), Brian (58), Mary (65), Sarah (61) and Brother John (65) believe that families and younger children lack the integrity that was instilled in them. They felt that the Church provided much of this framework to live a good life. Some suggested that standards have slipped over the last twenty years. As Brother John (65) points out

'I think the values of society have changed so much. Kids have their own sets of values. But, occasionally I find myself nearly trying to impose my values but that doesn't work, it is a different culture, it's foreign. It is a personal choice now. People can choose what is most suited to them'.

The same participants believe that the ethical guidelines are lost and invested elsewhere. No longer is there a sense of community and putting others before ourselves. Some believe that society has moved towards a more capitalist and materialistic way where there is no room for morals or values. Mary (65) outlines her thoughts

'What are we living for? We shouldn't be living to have a huge bank account for when we die. I think the more money you get the less you need God. I think that they're too lazy to practice making up excuses that they don't have time'.

Another participant Katy (33) illustrates her belief

'I think that people had different agendas back then. It was all about the family, community, the Church and the school. Then as time went on now it's more about what people can get and I think that the Church doesn't really fit into that because people aren't getting anything from the Church so they don't really bother at all. I think it has changed hugely; the whole family focus has gone off the family and community to basically commercial stuff. Kids wanting what other kids have. It is completely different from when I was growing up'.

Brian (58) is adamant that the lack of morals and values in the younger generations is down to the parents. Even though his views are somewhat mixed towards the Church, he believes that it was his parents and the Church who instilled morals and values in people. He explains

'The lack of morals is all down to the parents. I have lived here for the past 30 years, I've worked as a barman, and I have witnessed parents getting drunk at the bar, and just giving their children money to go away.....don't be annoying me.... They need quality time with their parents. The kids are on holiday too. But the young parents today are not giving that time'.

However, he firmly believes that the *'Church did it all wrong, the complete wrong way'* explaining that fear was the way they instilled morals and values. Mary echoes Brian's view and adds a more insightful approach. While discussing morals and values in society, she brought up the topic of bringing children into an environment that is unable to support them sufficiently. She explains

'I think that children are born into misery and poverty to die of starvation because of the needs, desires and wants of half the community'.

She went on to explain that this is done to get *'more out of the system'*. Her tone suggested that this infuriated her and she couldn't understand how people had the conscience to do such a thing. Although most of the participants believe that the breakdown of the family has more

to do with a lack of morals. Another interviewee Fr. Ultan (70) who believes prayers play a positive role in a person's life, especially if it begins at an early stage in life

'The grandparents are actually playing a bigger part in educating children on their prayers. It was traditionally the parents but now it is left to the grandparents. They are reminding the children far more than ever and one of the things they do is teach prayers and good manners'

All of the participants agreed that values, morals and the breakdown of the family are clearly evident in Irish society. They also concede that this is partly due to the fact that the Church is no longer as influential in society and plays a much lesser role than it once did. The difference between generations regarding this matter is huge. Young or old, each participant was clearly able to see this.

Outdated or over-rated?

Is the Church outdated? Does it need to progress and evolve with society? In relation to questions such as these, there seemed to be a mixed response. A common recurring theme presenting itself in this was that of women and that the Church should allow them to play a more important role. Brother John (65) points out

'Another belief that is outdated is the involvement of women becoming priests and the idea of limiting the involvement of what women can do in Mass'

As already discussed, women's role within the Church was limited. However there are four participants who believe that women should be able to progress and become ordained and take on the role of the priest. Aisling (18) believes that

'They should allow nuns and other females to become ordained; they would have a lot to offer not only the Church but also the people'

Allowing priests to marry might entice more men into the profession. All participants are aware that the number of men entering the priesthood is in fast decline and a way of addressing this problem is allowing priests to marry. Others believe that the issue of celibacy is something that the Church needs to review. This makes the position much more appealing to any potential candidate. Brother John (65) has found the vow of celibacy quite difficult

'I think the Church will have to lighten up on the celibacy thing. That is a must in my eyes. Young men don't want to be put in vulnerable positions and being a member of the clergy that is a vulnerable position. But celibacy is the most important in my eyes'.

Another participant Brian (58) who agreed that celibacy is outdated and believes that allowing priests to have relations of a sexual nature would definitely increase the vocations and allow a different kind of happiness into the lives of priests. He states

'Priests should be allowed marry and have children. End of story. Let's face it. They are all only human beings just like ourselves and make them better for it'

Mary (65) argues the point further that men should be allowed to marry

'I think they could introduce women and married men although it would bring its own issues with it. Priests should be allowed to marry. They are allowed to marry in the Anglican Church. It would certainly keep the ministry alive'.

This comment was interesting as another participant Stephen (57) highlights more about the Church being outdated and relating it to the Anglican Church

'Apparently people are leaving the Anglican Church because it is becoming modernised too quickly to join the Catholic Church. There are clergymen who are leaving because of the female and gay clergy in the Anglican Church. The clergy and ushers are so uncomfortable by that that they are leaving which would suggest what they are looking for is a fundamental

church rather than a modern church, what the Anglican Church is trying to become. That is a roundabout way of saying that the church is old fashioned and in some ways has to stay old fashioned to adhere to its original values and beliefs’.

Paul (36) agrees that women should be allowed to be more involved but adds that

‘I think the entire set up of Mass is outdated. I think everybody going in and sitting in a Church to be preached by someone on a pulpit on the same repetitive thing has the tendency to bring you down after a while’. ‘Maybe if they preached something a bit more modern, something a bit more in tune with what children want. That would build the belief within the kids, allow them to have better faith and pass that faith on’

This is a belief that Fr. Ultan (70) would agree with. His belief regarding the language used in the church that it is completely out-dated and does not appeal to anyone, even him

‘It’s the language of the second reformation period. Its English was spoken possibly in the 17th/18th centuries. It is not the language of the people today’.

Instilling fear into the minds of the follower

It is no secret that large proportions of society feared members of the clergy. They commanded respect and authority. Their teachings may have been forced upon Irish society. Fear, coupled with the strict authoritative teachings of the Church, appeared frequently throughout all of the interviews. Paul (36), Stephen (57) and Brian (58) illustrated that the Church’s stronghold was manifested in their ability to control Irish society. As Brian (58) explains

‘I will tell you a story. When I was making my confirmation, in Blackrock Church, and we had to learn Catechism, we had to know it off by heart, and Archbishop McQuaid, he passed by me and asked the next fella and this boy had his hands joined and he was petrified, he pissed himself. Actually

urinated over the Church floor. He was then taken out and treated like a leper'.

He continues to explain that he was

'Scared shitless of the lay teachers, they instilled fear into me. I used to look forward to Christmas holidays, midterm break and summer holidays. I would feel sick at the thought of going back to the people who educated me'

Another participant, John (65), a Brother for over forty years whose opinion was not so different, believed that the Church did teach through fear

'That whole fear thing was terrible and thank God we don't have that with the children of today. People went through hell in my time and before. Priests instilled fear'

He believed that this method of teaching was far from the Christian way. In fact, he condemned it. All participants condemned it. Another participant explained how the Catholic Church's negative picture has been painted by itself. Stephen (57) explains

'The problem for the Church is that their image seems to be negative. I think that it has a more negative image than almost any other Church and I think this is due to the fact that it has been forced on people and is oppressive. A lot of people have a bit of resentment of that and I think that is part of the reason why parents are not teaching it to their children. It is a reaction to how they were taught it, through fear. It was taught the wrong way'

This is a thought that was reiterated by one participant, a devout female Catholic, Sarah (61), who explains that

'At a time growing up in Ireland in the '50/ '60s, you learned what you were given was a God of fear. It wasn't a God of love.'

Power and fear, were two major instruments used in the monopoly of Catholicism in Ireland, according to most of the participants. Regardless of age and gender, the sample iterated their understanding that the Church's hold over society was due to these 'weapons'. This authority influenced the way Irish people viewed their faith.

Overall, the results were conclusive. Participants agreed that the Church is somewhat in decline, compared to its position forty years ago. They agree that the Church no longer holds the significant position in society and that is down to a number of contributing factors. Although the sample feel the Church limited role has had an effect on society, they are in agreement that it still has a place in Irish society, although some changes must be made in order for this to happen.

Discussion

Irish society identified itself with the beliefs and principles of the Catholic Church and learned to adhere to them. The Church's monopoly was evident in the influence the Church held over the State and the Irish people. There is much evidence to suggest that this hold is deteriorating and religion is slowly being displaced. The aim of this research project is to investigate whether or not Catholicism in Ireland has become secularised. This data-led qualitative study took nine participants from different walks of life and interviewed them on their attitudes, thoughts and perceptions of the Church and its role in Irish society.

The influence of the media regarding the Church, scandals and controversies.

The first theme to emerge was based on the relationship between the media and the Catholic Church which has created quite a bit of animosity between the two. Inglis (1998), highlights the influence the Catholic Church had in relation to issues of censorship. The Church was able to dictate what could and could not be published or played through other media outlets. According to (Tovey & Share, 2000) the Church's main concern lied within the question of cultural imperialism, which came with the introduction of the television. Laffan and O'Donnell believe "the media have been part of the modernisation of Irish society and culture, in particular a shift away from the homogeneous, closed Catholic culture to a more open, pluralist culture that we see today (as cited in Tovey & Share, 2000, p. 368). This is based on a multiplicity of identities rather than one fixed identity. The introduction of televisions in Ireland has had a huge impact on the habitus of the Irish people. Inglis (1998, p. 93) states 'that the television was instrumental in adding to the decline of the Church's monopoly of the Irish people'. He explains 'the social process where moral discourse was limited to what was taught in the school, read in the occasional newspaper, heard on the radio and preached from

the pulpit every Sunday, was changed by the little box which appeared in the corner of Irish homes'. His views on the influence of the television were linked to the study by a number of participants. Fr. Ultan (70), Bro John (65) and Mary (65) agreed that the television became the focal point in the house, everything centred on it. According to them it marked the beginning of the end for the art of conversation and the institution of the family. It is the first step in the technology revolution that has plagued not only Irish society, but also wider societies. Now, families, who would once sit together for dinner, and talk, organised their meal times around the television, according to the sample.

Secondly, participants discussed the influence of the media and the impact the Church sex scandals have had on both them and society in general. (Hogan, 2011) describes that during the 1990s Catholics worldwide had come to the realisation that sexual abuse of minors by priests was systematic and widespread. A view that disgusted all participants in this study. It is no surprise that the data gained suggested that all participants agreed that the sex scandals have played an enormous role in the decline of the Church and that the media has had a negative effect also on the Church. Aisling (18) concedes that her views of the Church along with others of her age would have been influenced with the coverage it received.

The abuse and exploitation of thousands of Irish children in state funded institutions as described in both The Ryan Report (2009) and The Murphy Report (2009) emphasise the malicious nature of the symbiotic relationship of the Church and state that allowed the abuse to go unchecked according to (Hogan, 2011, p. 175).

The media unearthed a cover up of shameful and inexcusable scandals not to mention the Murphy Report (2009, p. 1), whose purpose was;

'The Dublin Archdiocese Commission of Investigation was established to report on the handling by Church and State authorities of a representative sample of allegations and suspicions of child sexual abuse against clerics

operating under the aegis of the Archdiocese of Dublin over the period 1975 to 2004’.

Needless to say, this report coupled with The Ryan Report (2009) has caused catastrophic damage to the Church. Nobody can argue what the reports have proven. Gerry O’ Hanlon points to “the problematic nexus around sexuality, power and the relationship at the core of the crisis” (as cited in Hogan, 2011). A view that is relayed by Brother John (65) who believes the sex abuse crises highlight the limitations of the Church’s approach to the body and sexuality. However, the small minority within the Church who have committed these crimes have inevitably tarred the reputations of the other members of the clergy who are innocent according to Stephen (57). Stephen (57), Mary (65), Sarah (43) and Paul (36) recognise how society can view the Catholic Church as an institution of evil. This, they believe is attributable to the coverage the Church has received in recent decades by the media. Donnelly and Inglis (2010) highlight the relationship between the media and the Church in which they describe the dramatic shift in the balance of power between the two. Their study describes the negative influence the media has on society. The investigative style of journalism of trying to outdo each other has played a significant part in educating people on the immoral practices by members of the Church. One participant, Stephen (57) brought this to light when discussing the accusations towards Fr. Reynolds, who was accused by RTE of fathering a child. This story was published and broadcast without any hard facts backing it. As it turned out, these allegations were proven to be false, but it highlighted an eagerness on behalf of the media to implicate members of the clergy’ involvement in immoral and sinful activities. This was reflected in this study where all of the participants admitted how the media could have such an impact. Three participants, Bro John (65), Fr. Ultan (70) and Mary (65) are under the impression that the media is using their previous controversial relationship with the Church as a justification of their negative documentation regarding the

Church. The study also finds that all of the participants believe the media has also forgotten the decent and honest members of the clergy and the good work the vast majority of the Church has achieved. Regarding the association the media has with the Church, the results suggest that media coverage of the Church over the last thirty years has fuelled the downfall of a declining institution, creating a reality that the Church now plays a more diminished role within society. However true this is, the actions of a minority of clergymen are not the only members of society to engage in such acts. This type of behaviour is endemic in the greater society, however, the media seem to invest more time and energy into investigations of members of the Church. This creates an imbalance in which the Church, already hurt, will find it very difficult to maintain and retain their position within society.

Women's oppression within a hierarchical Church

Women were the crucial link between the institutional structure and the religious devotion of each new generation of Irish Catholics according to Inglis (1998). The traditional Irish mother selflessly devoted her time to her family and the Church. Inglis (1998) also believes that the decline in religious belief and practice can be directly linked to Irish women abandoning the traditional role of the mother as constructed by the Church. This research concurs with the beliefs of Inglis. Paul (36), Mary (65), Sarah (61), Bro John (65), Stephen (57) and Katy (33) all agreed that women suffered at the hands of the Church. The research found that the participants' views were that women seemed to be the driving force of the church but were treated as *'second class citizens'*. (Hilliard, 2003) outlines that traditionally, women were financially dependent on men, which put them in a vulnerable position. Tina Beattie believes "the control of females sexuality has been and continues to be a major preoccupation which leads to the accumulation of power over other peoples bodies, it allows men to believe that their primary spiritual responsibility lies in the area of sexual discipline and the use of power becomes a means to inhibit and punish sexual desire" (as cited in

Hogan, 2011). They were trapped with a personal moral dilemma in which the Church reigned supreme for so long. (Hilliard, 2003) outlines the views of the female participants who clearly state their opinions of the Church and the influence it held over them. They felt betrayed and let down by the very institution they worshipped. A definite trend is evident in this study as all but one participants agreed. There was one participant who was reluctant to comment on this sensitive issue. Fr. Ultan conceded the work of women in the Church was exceptional. However, his unwillingness to speak about whether or not he believed women were oppressed by the Church was evident in his responses. (The Ryan Report, 2009) suggests that a different perspective to the issue of gender is needed, a belief that all participants agree should be implemented.

Previous research suggests that parents play a crucial role in the socialisation process of their children. (Gallagher, 2009) believed that the process of socialisation was so strong regarding religious beliefs. This was due to the fact that the influence of the Church over society was so dominant. All of the participants believe that their parents (mainly their mothers) played a huge part in accounting for their religious affiliation. These findings allowed the researcher to understand how significant parental teaching was. In particular, mothers were instilling the beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church into their children. The matriarchal role of the passing down of traditions, values and beliefs that were related to the Church were now gone. Inglis (1998) explains that women started to question the role laid out for them by the Church and spoke to their daughters advising them not to make the same choices that they did. They advised their daughters not to get tied down with running a house and rearing children. They insisted that they get educated and work (outside the home). The heartbeat of the Church began to beat a lot slower once the women of Ireland decided that they had had enough. The price which the Church has paid regarding the construction of the role for women has been enormous. The linchpin of any organisation should be treated with dignity

and respect and should not be subject to oppression and limited role-playing as outlined by three members of the sample group. Sarah, (61) believes the link between the Church and individual Catholics has been broken beyond repair. Society was always going to evolve past the realms of the Church. It became survival of the fittest in which the Church lacked the knowledge and anticipation of this; or it was too arrogant and refused to believe that Irish society would move on without it. An additional price is to be paid by society in the lack of morals and values that people acquire nowadays.

Morals, values and the family – the expected that was accepted

Morals and values are something that unfortunately not everyone possesses. We acquire these traits in different ways. Family, schools and the Church would be the most notable influences. While conducting the interviews, morals and values coupled with the family were a poignant topic discussed. Where have the morals and values of society gone? Sarah (61) asks. Her belief is that certain standards have fallen over the last 50 years. She goes on to explain that the Church's guidance in matters relating to morals and values were widespread throughout the country. This view can be linked to (Breen & Reynolds, 2011) who believe religion is no longer the sole source of values in society and religion has become increasingly privatised and people are now guided by their own autonomous morals and values. Society has become too materialistic and people are lacking in the fundamentals of what we should possess. People are too engrossed in their own personal worlds. Has consumerism replaced the traditional values that society once held? Two participants Mary (65) and Sarah (61) believe that Ireland has turned from being a religious orientated society to one based on consumerism, capitalism and materialism. These findings correlate with a study by Hirsche (2010) who illustrates the negative relationship between religious affiliation and economic growth. People no longer require the guidance and solace that religion once provided. They now have a different type of comfort, which one participant believes offers an empty source

of security. People put their needs first, where traditionally the needs of others were put before their own. (Breen & Reynolds, 2011, p. 206) believe “the decline in practice, confidence and adequacy of the Church in terms of moral, social and family problems, that there would be a shift away from the social teachings of the Church”. This view is echoed by the sample, which feels that morals and values have been lost by the Irish people and placed elsewhere. (Breen & Reynolds, 2011) also suggest that social control and moral suasion has shifted away from the Church and lies in the power of preserved laws and constitutions which are controlled by the state. They go on to explain that post modernisation entails a decreasing confidence in the more authoritarian and hierarchical institutions in society. A belief that Katy (33), Stephen (57) and Paul (36) share. Their belief emphasises this study.

Religion binds people together into a common community. Members share a set of values and beliefs that unite them. Religious practice has declined dramatically over the last sixty years as outlined by Inglis (2007). People no longer use the Church as a means of socialising as they traditionally did as Bro John (65) points out. Mass attendance was seen as a necessity. It was considered a family gathering where all members would come together and go to Mass. As two participants, Fr. Ultan (70) and Brother John (65) outlined the social and family aspects of going to Church; it wasn't just about going and praying to God. It reinforced the family as an institution, something that is drastically missing in today's society. It also provided people with a social outlet, the meeting point of the community where they could meet and interact free of any self-consciousness. The family as an institution has suffered because of the loss of this. The moral framework provided by the Church has become obsolete. According to this research, people don't listen to what the church has to offer; they make up their own minds and have their own consciences. People rationalise their decisions based on a personal moral framework that is suited to their own lifestyle choices and not with what the Church provides.

Outdated or over-rated?

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was that the Church, its teachings and practices are outdated. This drew a mixed response from the participants. Paul (36), Bro John (65), Katy (33), Aisling (18) believe that in order for the Church to maintain its large following, the ethos of the Church must modernise and evolve. One common idea surfacing from the interviews was that of allowing women to develop into more prominent roles. The idea that women are still not allowed to hold such positions is '*way back in the ice age*' as Bro John (65) puts it. In addition, participants' views of celibacy were one directional. All participants agreed that priests should be allowed marry and engage in relations of a sexual nature. After all it is human instinct. The sample feels that if the sexual morality in which priests have sworn were somewhat open and relaxed, this would entice younger men into the priesthood, fixing the problem of the limited number of men entering the priesthood.

Fr. Ultan looks at the language the Church uses, particularly in Mass. His opinion is that it is completely outdated and must reform. People of today do not speak the language of the 17th and 18th centuries. This language has absolutely no relation to the 21st century and the language that is spoken now. Paul (36) agrees and suggests they change not only the language of the Mass but also the layout. He believes that these changes would make it more appealing to younger generations and show the people that the Church is willing to evolve and change. Is it not the fundamental aspects of the Church that has offered Irish people an honest and morally sound way of living their lives? On the other side of this argument, Stephen (57) points out that many people are leaving the Anglican Church as it is becoming too modern, too quickly. Clergymen and members are looking for a fundamental Church rather than a modern Church suggesting that the people are not ready for too much of a transformation. This shows what could happen if the church was to 'radically' change its

ethos. Is this why the Church is reluctant to change? If it does, would it lose its hardcore line of believers? The Church needs to prioritise what is most important to it: the older generations whose devotion is a given, or the future generations whose involvement is paramount to the survival of the Catholic Church in Ireland. Instead of having a god of fear as one participant described what it was like forty years ago, the Church could adopt a different approach towards the younger generations.

It is a tough decision for the Church. If its ethos changes it runs the risk of losing the more traditional members while if it doesn't change its ethos then it runs an even bigger risk of losing potential members. No matter which way the situation presents itself, it will not be an easy choice for anyone. It will make it much more difficult to re integrate the Church into the aspects of everyday life.

Instilling fear into the minds of the follower

The final theme to arise out of the interviews was that of fear. The relationship between the Irish people and the Catholic Church was created on a foundation of fear of the Catholic Church. The data resulting from the research suggests that this is indeed the case. Throughout the interviews, Paul (36), Brian (58), Bro John (65) and Stephen (57) highlighted their beliefs, which they feel reflected wider society, that the Church was an institution to be feared. According to analysis of The Ryan Report (2009), (Hogan, 2011, p. 176) explains the Report "reveals the devastating contradiction at the heart of post-independent Ireland, namely, within the state, the Catholic Church presided over a secret, enclosed world, run on fear" A theory reflected in a study by (Hilliard, 2003). Her study outlines the dominance the Church held over the women explaining that control was achieved through active strategies of socialisation, which included the instilling of fear, a fear which acted as a powerful control in that it inhibited questioning, let alone dissent. This fear did not rest at the feet of the

women; fear was a way of life in the Catholic-run education system. Questioning of such inappropriate practice was deemed untenable and unacceptable. It was an automatic assumption that the Church teachings and belief were right regardless.

Brian (58) and Stephen (57) admitted to being fearful while attending school. They believed the clergy abused their power while in a position of prestige and responsibility. Their hardline approach to teaching methods may have had a catastrophic effect on the future of the Catholic Church in Ireland. One participant Stephen (57) believes that because the way people were traditionally taught, they now have turned their backs on the Church and that we are now seeing the direct result of this. Younger generations are only educated about religion in schools and not at home where it was traditionally done.

This researcher would never support any teachings through fear. However, if you look at the other side of the Church's teachings through fear, maybe then it could be rationalised. Fear of a greater being other than ourselves may have a positive effect on the way we live our lives. It gives people that push to live by the moral framework the Church provided. Fear can teach us patience. People feared the Church and feared the repercussions of living a life of sin. Mary (65) describes Saturday evenings in rural Ireland. She remembers lines of people outside Church queuing up for their weekly confessions and to receive their penance, a practice that seems to have been lost to the pages of the history books. Saturday nights in Ireland are somewhat different in today's society. Would you see scores of people lining up outside Churches where they could confess their sins? This dramatic change illustrates the habitus change and possible revolution of the Irish people against the Church. The fear that was instilled into the Irish people has gone. However, the fear which the Church instilled must not be underestimated either. It brought people together; it gave them a united front. It was something that the vast majority of Ireland shared.

Limitations & Future Research

Although this exploratory study offers an insight into the relationship between the Catholic Church and the people of Ireland, its limitations should be noted. The structured format of this research project and the limited space provided, restricted the quantity of information that could be published. Also the researcher found that there were a limited number of publications in certain areas regarding the themes of fear and the Church being outdated. It is recommended that future research be conducted in the fields regarding fear of the Catholic Church. This would explain the mindset of a generation who feel strongly towards this. Retrieving information from younger generations could have added a valuable insight from their minds regarding topics of religion. A more detailed study into this would generate a view from the younger generation, who are the future of the Catholic Church. In addition, a longitudinal study would be useful to measure any changes of opinion towards the Catholic Church and its role in Irish society over a longer timeframe.

Additional future research could look at areas regarding morals and values within Irish Society in connection with the Catholic Church. This would provide readers with more of an insight into the themes that emerged from this research project.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to gain an understanding of people's perceptions, attitudes and understanding of the Catholic Church in Ireland. It investigated whether or not Catholicism and the Church have become secularised in Irish society. Conducting this research was both fascinating and intriguing as the researcher was allowed permission to enter a place that for many is sacred and personal. A person's religious faith, belief and affiliation is theirs and theirs alone.

Much of the findings correlated with the literature reviewed for this project. All of the participants conceived that the negative press the Catholic Church has received has had a big impression on how the Church is seen. The Church no longer stands as one of the moral pillars of our society; it has taken somewhat of a reduced role. The sex abuse scandals that have infested the Church have led people to question the moral authority of the Church, which may also lead them to question their faith in the Catholic Church.

The influence of women has changed the way religion is taught to younger generations. Women, who were once the heartbeat of the Church, have now gained full control of their bodies, alleviating them of the ties that bound them to the home and rearing of children, where the Church believed was the best place for them. This has affected the Church on an immense scale. Losing the women of Ireland in such a way demonstrates the change in Irish habitus. The sample all agreed that women were instrumental in the socialising of younger generations regarding their faith, beliefs and practices. In addition, they agreed that the way women are treated by the Church is outdated and wrong. The sample's belief is that women's role within the Church should be far greater. Allowing women to become ordained is at the forefront of the findings. They believe the Church is wildly outdated in this sense. The Church must also review the language used. Participants found this a far cry from the language of today and unappealing to younger generations. Furseth & Repstad (2006)

believes that the Church must adapt in accordance to the modernisation of Irish society if it is to survive, a view which most participants agreed with. The research also produced findings relating to morals and values within Irish society which they believe can be linked to the breakdown of the family. If there was one stand-out trait of the Church, it was that it offered a moral framework in which we could live our lives.

There were however, findings that could not be related to the literature reviewed for this project. Participants spoke about the Church's teachings through fear and how society viewed the institution of one that was to be feared. All participants agreed that the Church's approach was morally and ethically wrong. However, older participants agreed that the fear that they held affected the choices they made and the life they lived.

The data gained from this research suggests that the Catholic Church has indeed become less important and secularised in the eyes of Irish society. Catholicism is no longer practised in the same vigorous way it once was. Society seems to have evolved leaving many of the Catholic Church's beliefs and practices in its wake. Priorities are not what they once were. The sample believes that this is down to a variety of reasons, including the aforementioned.

Some of the participants, in the light of all this, argue that Irish people owe the Church a debt of gratitude for all they have done. The Church preaches a message of humility and hope, a message that offers us a belief and faith in something greater than mankind. It provided Ireland with an exceptional education system, hospitals and social services at a fraction of the cost. Its history seems to have vanished within the material, individualistic world in which it finds itself. The Church has always urged us to be better people; to follow the rainbow in the mist. While some still have faith in God, their faith in the Catholic Church as an institution is drifting. It is losing the fight with this generation. If it loses the fight with the next generation, it may well itself be lost forever.

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Appendix 1



An exploration of current attitudes towards the Catholic Church in Ireland and the tendency towards secularisation within Irish Society

My name is Tom Clyne and I am conducting research that explores people's opinions towards Catholicism in Ireland.

You are invited to take part in this study and participation involves an interview that will take roughly 40 minutes.

Participation is completely voluntary and so you are not obliged to take part. If you do take part and any of the questions do raise difficult feelings, you do not have to answer that question, and/or continue with the interview.

Participation is confidential. If, after the interview has been completed, you wish to have your interview removed from the study this can be accommodated up until the research study is published.

The interview, and all associated documentation, will be securely stored and stored on a password protected computer.

It is important that you understand that by completing and submitting the interview that you are consenting to participate in the study.

Should you require any further information about the research, please contact

Tom Clyne (tommyc357@hotmail.com) Vanessa Long (Vanessa.long@dbs.ie)

Thank you for participating in this study.

Participant Signature: _____ Date: ____

Appendix 2 Interview schedule

According to each participant, questions applied to the interviews were adjusted to suit the diversity shown by each interviewee. Here is a list below of the core questions asked which in turn were a sounding board for each interview.

1. Could you tell me a bit about yourself, in particular your association with the Catholic Church?
2. Has Religion played a big part in your life?
3. How important do you think the role of women was in Irish society?
4. What are your thoughts towards the Catholic Church in Ireland?
5. Do you feel Catholicism has become less important in your life and in the lives of Irish society?
6. Do you think morals and values have declined over recent years and if so why?
7. Do you feel family values have changed over the last 60 years?
8. Do you feel the Catholic Church still has a place in Irish society?
9. Do you think the Church has evolved with Irish society?
10. What is your attitude towards teaching of religion in schools?
11. Do you think the Catholic Church is outdated in any of their practices and beliefs? If so please elaborate.
12. What is your attitude towards priests being allowed to marry?
13. Have you ever found the Catholic Church to be oppressive?
14. What role do the media play regarding your opinion of the Catholic Church and do you feel it has an effect on the rest of Irish society?
15. Given the recent scandals, how do you feel the Church will cope with these controversies?
16. What does the future hold for the Catholic Church in Irish society?