



**Religion and Education:**

**The Voices of Young People in Ireland**

**Religious Education and Religious Diversity**

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

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

**Abstract**

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

*Keywords:* community cohesion, social integration, Religious Education, Republic of Ireland, religious diversity.

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

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

### **Abstract**

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

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

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

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

**Abstract**

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

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

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

*Sandra Cullen*

**Abstract**

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

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