



**Religion and Education:
The Voices of Young People in Ireland**

The Greer Legacy

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

Christopher Alan Lewis, Leslie J. Francis & Ursula McKenna

Abstract

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

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

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

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Abstract

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

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

Growing up Catholic in Ireland: The intersectionality of gender and nationality

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Abstract

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

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

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

Jeff Astley

Abstract

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

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