



Pointers

Inside this issue:

Religion and Youth: World Perspectives	1
Chairman's Report	9
Annual Staff Report 2010-2011	10
Who's Coming to School Today?	14
The Functions of Religion in Australian Society	16

Christian Research Association
Charting the faith of Australians



Photo from Beacon Radio's
Photostream

Religion and Youth: World Perspectives

The riots in London have raised the issue again as to what is happening in Western culture. Many people have been asking what has gone wrong. There will be no simple answer. The structures of contemporary society need to be re-examined. One may also ask if such events demonstrate a rootlessness, a lack of purpose and altruism which religious faith would normally be addressing.

In 2010, two major books were released on the study of religion and youth. Both books spell out clearly the decline of religion among young people and the decline of religious influence on behaviour.

One was a collection of essays edited by Sylvia Collins-Mayo and Pink Dandelion, and simply titled, *Religion and Youth*. It covers the general perspectives provided by large surveys such as our own Spirit of Gen Y study, Christian Smith's survey in the USA of young people's religious faith, and the study of teenage religion and values in England and Wales by Mandy Robbins and Leslie Francis. It also contains short essays on specific groups such as shamans in the Brazilian Amazon, teenage witches in England, and volunteers in Lourdes. Several essays on the issues that emerge in researching youth and religion bring the book to a close.

The second book, edited by the Italian sociologist, Giuseppe Giordan,

Christian Research Association

PO Box 206
Nunawading LPO
VIC 3131

T: 61 3 9878 3477
F: 61 3 9878 2677
E: admin@cra.org.au

www.cra.org.au

ABN: 49 124 169 966
Registered association: A7123

was the first in a series of annual reviews of the sociology of religion and was entitled *Youth and Religion*. Most of the essays describe the patterns of youth and religion in a particular country, mostly describing the decline in formal religious practice. However, many of these overviews contain caveats.

Widespread Decline in the Religiosity of Young People

The picture in northern and western Europe is very largely of a loss of interest in institutional forms of religion. In France, there is a widespread lack of interest in institutionalised religion, except among religious minority groups such as the Muslims. Nevertheless, there are many who still maintain some sort of belief. For example 36 per cent of young people agree that 'there is a God', and another 29 per cent affirm 'there is some sort of spirit or life force'. While 35 per cent of French young people reject both God and a higher power (Giordan, p.181), most French young people are not strongly antagonistic to religion and many still come back to religion for some personal *rites of passage*.

Kati Niemelä notes that two out of three Finns consider themselves religious, but public practice is low (Giordan, p.192). Almost 90 per cent of young Finns have been confirmed by the age of 15 years and there is little evidence of decline in private religious activity. However, younger people are more likely to describe themselves as 'spiritual' than 'religious'. They see the church as having little meaning for them, and are less likely than their parents to see being Lutheran as associated with their national identity (Giordan, p.205).

In England and Scotland, the majority of young people are not hostile to the Church, but are largely indifferent to it and disengaged (Giordan, p.245). They see authenticity residing in the individual making their own choices, and consciously living out the consequences of those. Committed Christian young people, they note, often attend multiple churches and cross denominational boundaries, working out their own sense of being Christian. They note that parents, teachers, and youth workers in youth clubs are all wary of imposing religious ideas and identities and, thus, the authors conclude, disengagement is inevitable.

Robbins and Francis report in *Religion and Youth* on the basis their large-scale surveys among young

people throughout England and Wales that 41 per cent of young people believed in God. They note that people from broken homes and those who watch more than four hours of television a day are less likely to believe (Collins-Mayo et al., p.51). Approximately half of all young people never attend a church or other place of worship.

In Germany, youth are no longer religious, concludes Gert Pickel (Giordan, p.280). Christian religiosity, he says, is seen as old-fashioned and irrelevant. There has been little tradition of religious faith in East Germany for a generation or more. Some hoped that the unification would lead to a reinvigoration of the church in the East. Instead, Western Germany is approaching the East in its patterns. On the other hand, Pickel notes that people do fall back on 'culturally acquired habits' in times of personal crisis, and large numbers can turn up to mega-events such as World Youth Day (Giordan, p.284). But Pickel cannot currently see a return to religion among the German youth.

Michael Mason wrote a chapter on the Spirit of Gen Y project in Australia for the Collins-Mayo volume. It is a succinct summary of the findings of that project. Mason notes that 'the level of interest in and involvement with religion or spirituality of any kind among Gen Y was generally low ...; only 27 per cent of the age group were actively practising any traditional or alternative form of spirituality'.

- 17 per cent were engaged with Christianity,
- 6 per cent with another world religion, and
- 4 per cent with an alternative spirituality (Collins-Mayo et al., p.57).

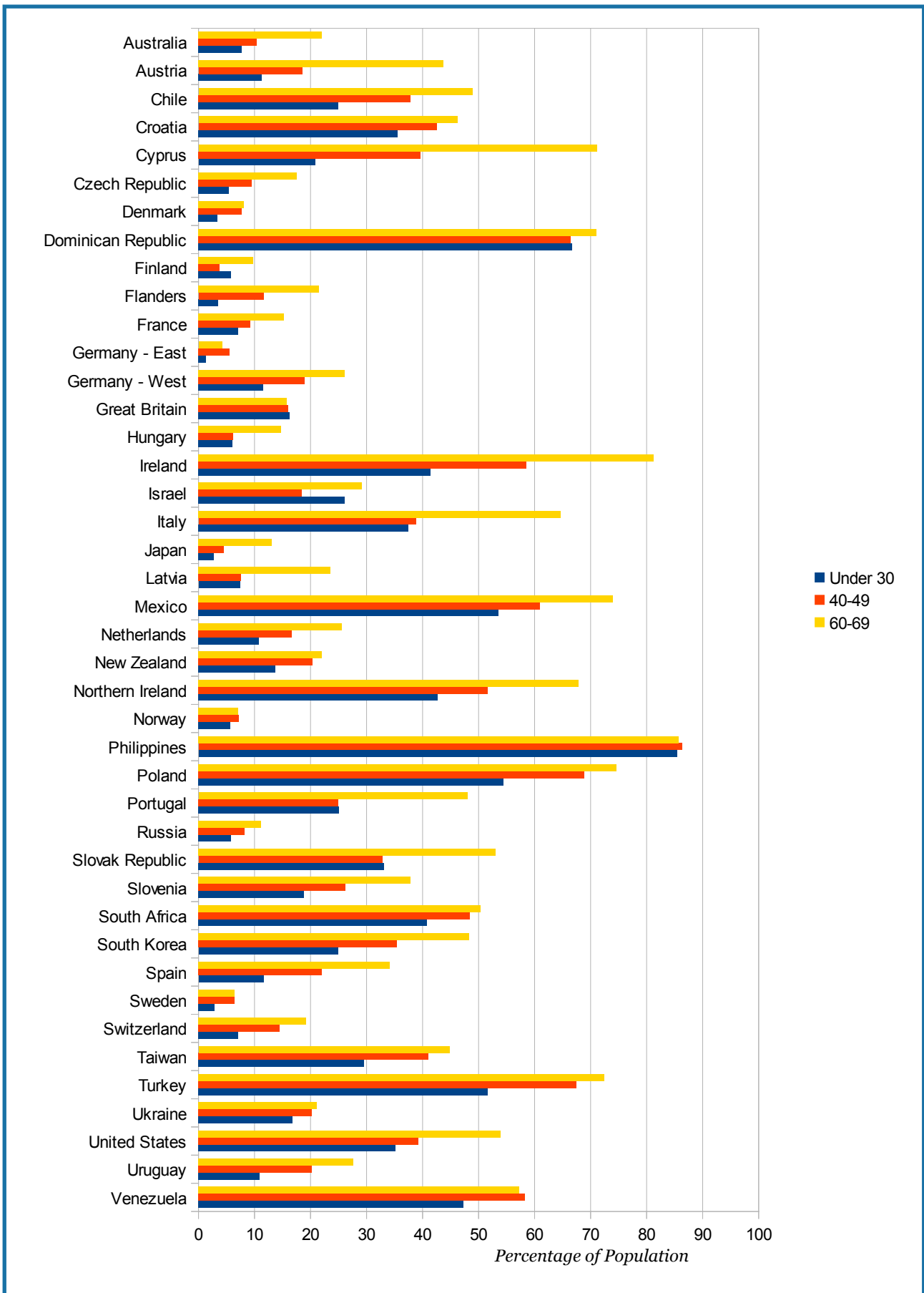
Mason comments:

Most [young people] had no overarching vision, whether religious or secular, inspiring them and shaping their lives, but seemed content to pursue short-term goals like passing exams, getting a job, finding a relationship. On a more general level, their view of the world seemed to consist of a collection of fragmentary ideas and values from a wide variety of sources, tentatively held, not necessarily consistent with each other nor put into practice in any planned or regular way. (Collins-Mayo et al., p.57).

A few years ago, we were reporting that Croatia had seen an increase in religious belief and public practice (Hughes 2008). The latest essay in *Youth and Religion* confirms that young people in Croatia today report significantly higher levels of religiosity

Note that in Table 1, the blue bars are shorter in almost every country than the red and yellow bars. This represents clearly the smaller proportions of young people attending churches and other religious services than older people. The extent of the difference between younger and older people is suggestive of the rate of decline in attendance. The only exception to this pattern is the Philippines where young people attend church services as frequently as older people. There are several countries where there has been a decline, but but where the situation has stabilised, such as Finland, Great Britain, Israel, Portugal, and the Slovak Republic.

Table 1. Proportion of the Population Attending Religious Services Monthly or More Often in Various Countries by Age Group
 Source: International Social Survey Program (2008-2009)



than twenty years ago (Giordan, p.322). With the breakdown of Communism, national-religious identification offered the best and most coherent value base for the evolving society. However, there has been a 'stabilisation' of religiosity with the levels among young people now little different from those in the adult population. There are also signs of young people not fully accepting the authority of the church, particularly in regards to sexuality, suggesting that greater individualisation and privatisation of religion may be expected in Croatia.

The data on religiosity in Italy is informed largely by a study of students in secondary schools in the Valley of Aosta. Almost 80 per cent of the young people in this region continue to identify themselves as Catholic. However, almost half say they have distanced themselves from religion, and more than 60 per cent of those 20 years old say they never attend Mass (Giordan, p.357). On the other hand, religion still constitutes a cultural factor which has some social influence. There remains a substantial level of trust in the church as an institution and a sense that the community would be worse off without the parish. Around 60 per cent of these young people said they believed in the immortality of the soul, Jesus' resurrection and that Jesus is God's son (Giordan, p.360). Giordan suggests that the young people may not be going through the main gate of the church in terms of holding to correct belief, constant rituality and respect for moral indications, but they are going through one of the side doors searching for meaning and identification and sitting in the back to determine whether it is worth staying or going (Giordan, p.379).

In the USA, Christian Smith sees more of a transformation of religion than a simple decline. Smith summarises the major theme of his book *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, suggesting that 'the de facto dominant religion among contemporary teenagers in the USA is 'Moral Therapeutic Deism' (MTD)' (Collins-Mayo et al., p.41). The essence of this perspective is that God watches over people and wants people to be good, nice and fair to each other. God only gets involved when needed to resolve a problem. Religious faith is about maintaining one's inner wellbeing: helping people to feel happy. Like a Divine Butler or Cosmic Therapist, God is on call to take care of problems that may arise (Collins-Mayo et al., p.42).

In other parts of the world, there has also been a decline in religiosity. In Brazil, there remains a repertoire of religious beliefs, not only Christian, but also drawing on spiritism, Afro-Brazilian religions and Eastern religions, although involvement in

religious institutions has declined. Ari Pedro Oro and Mauro Meirelles suggest that, like many young people in Europe and North America, the religiosity of Brazilian university students has become 'privatized, individualized, pragmatic and immediacy-driven' (Giordan, p.85).

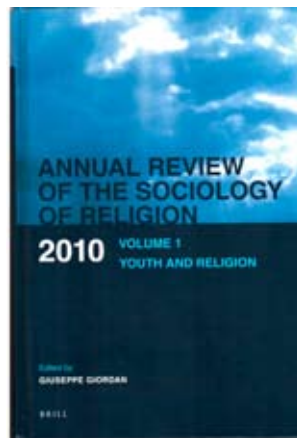
My own contribution to Giordan's volume compared the religiosity of youth in Australia and Thailand. In Thailand, Buddhism, and to some extent, religion *per se* is an important part of the national identity. In our surveys of 3000 Thai young people, 99.5 per cent identified with a major religion. Yet, there was widespread doubt, particularly among the Thai Buddhist young people, about the fundamental concepts of their religion. Just 40 per cent of the Buddhists confidently affirmed belief in karma and reincarnation and only 30 per cent in nirvana. There was also widespread doubt about the folk religious beliefs in the house spirits and in amulets. In the month prior to the survey, among the Buddhist young people,

- 21 per cent had made merit in one way or another (such as giving rice to monks),
- 18 per cent had practised meditation, and
- 10 per cent had attended a service in a temple (Giordan, p.129).

However, many had performed a religious ritual in the past year, often on a special personal occasion, such as birthday, when a common practice is to walk around the Buddhist stupa (or chedi) of a temple meditating on the Buddhist faith. Thai Christian and Muslim young people had much higher levels of both belief and practice in their faith. Thai Buddhism, however, is definitely weakening. Many Thai young people explain that they do not have time for religion because of the demands of work and study, but behind that statement is the fact that the successful completion of studies and finding a good job are seen as the major ways to a good life, much as they are in most Western countries, and certainly in Australia. In an unstable social environment, the Thai cosmology itself has become unstable (Giordan, p.144).

Reasons for the Decline

The reasons for the decline are explored in greater depth in the book *Religion and Youth*. Richard Flory and Donald Miller begin the book by noting that those who were born after 1975 have grown up at the forefront of the digital revolution. They suggest that this revolution has placed multiple options in front of young people. They note that religion has become a choice in which denominational labels are relatively unimportant. Religious authority is



internal rather than external, as in the hierarchy of a church. They value religious experiences more than religious beliefs and have the sense of being on a journey rather than in a static community (Collins-Mayo et al., p.10). They distrust institutions of many kinds, including both political and religious, and distrust their leaders (Collins-Mayo et al., p.11), although they do participate in some institutions, usually focussing on the relationships they find within. They live with residual fear, of economic collapse, environmental disaster or terrorist attack (Collins-Mayo et al., p.12).

Sylvia Collins and Tom Beaudoin argue that the boomer generation was disillusioned with the church. They placed more importance on personal authenticity in their spiritual lives and were disinclined to socialise their children into a religious tradition (Collins-Mayo et al., p.19). The church tried to make itself more attractive to Gen X, but generally failed to connect with a generation that inherited a suspicion of institutions.

Beaudoin has developed the notion of 'virtual faith' to express the relationship young people have with religion. He notes that there is an interest in sacred themes in music and many young people wear religious symbols as fashion items. Like Flory and Miller, he notes the suspicion of institutional religion and the importance of experience. However, he adds that there is a preoccupation with suffering which is expressed in a fascination with Jesus and the cross in pop culture. He notes there is also an ambiguity in the ways pop culture juxtaposes the sacred and profane, drawing attention to the ambiguities and uncertainties of life. Gen Y sees popular culture as giving them a glimpse of what an ideal life might be: a happy, socially-connected and authentic existence (Collins-Mayo et al., p.23), but any religious awareness Gen X had has faded.

David Voas, however, suggests that parents must take the major responsibility for the decline in faith and asks why parents have failed to pass on their faith to their children in recent decades. He suggests that parents have sought to give their children more control over their own lives. He also suggests that there are other factors including changes in the nature of education, the worldviews promoted by media or opinion leaders, and the social norms associated with the place of women in society and in the work-force (Collins-Mayo et al., p.31).

Stephen Warner and Rhys H. Williams argue that successful transmission of faith from one generation to the next involves a lot of hard work. They look at factors which have led to the successful transmission among various religious groups in the United States. One of the ways this occurs is through a

're-extension' of the nuclear family with others who hold the faith, so contributing to the community which reaffirms the faith. In general, too, religious observances in the home have an important place (Collins-Mayo et al., p.162). In such contexts, there are intergenerational experiences in which the transmission of religion is affirmed. They note that 'some of the most enthusiastic embrace of the family's religious tradition and institution was expressed by those *youth who took leadership roles*' (p.164 emphasis in the original). In these roles they were taking public and honoured roles in adult-dominated religious institutions while still dependent minors. Adults provided models, coaches, and an appreciative audience.

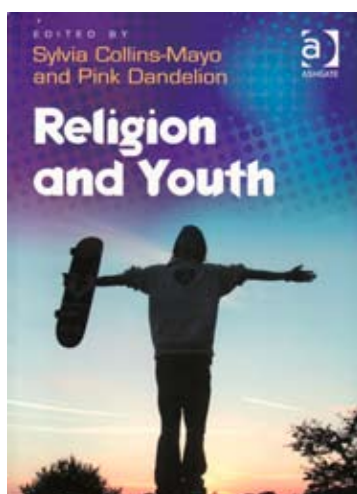
Religion involves a 'chain of memory', to use Hervieu-Léger's metaphor. Elisabeth Arweck and Eleanor Nesbitt note that without several generations present in the transmission of faith, it is more difficult to forge it. Mixed marriages, or marriages in which one partner is not overtly religious, also make it more difficult to forge that chain (p.172).

Clergy families are not always successful in transmitting faith. One of the factors that contributes to the failure, Matthew Guest suggests, are negative experiences of the church in childhood. Among these are the fact that the 'clerical home' is 'frequently compromised by its use by non-family members, be they parishioners, other clergy or church

officials, as if it were a public space' (Collins-Mayo et al., p.179). As well as being a home, it is also a work-space, and a context for pastoral care and spiritual guidance. Guest suggests that some clergy children separate the 'professional pressures' of clergy life from the Christian faith itself, which continues to be seen as a positive spiritual resource. Other clergy children reject the church, but re-express the values of their parents in their own spheres of life, such as in teaching, nursing or social work, or in dedicating themselves to 'good causes'. Thus, in fact, Guest argues that there is not simply an erosion of Christian values, but a transformation of them.

Mason notes that the biggest decline in identity, belief and practice was between the Boomers and their parents. However, the decline is continuing and provides evidence for secularisation. Mason suggests that there is a wide range of factors influencing this change including:

- *demographic* in that the Boomer generation swamped previous attitudes, particularly in terms of locating authority in personal experience rather than in parents, the state, the church or tradition;



- *political* in that the Vietnam war divided youth from their elders;
- *technological* in that the communications network decreased the incentive for young people to gather in groups;
- *cultural* in that science and individualism hastened the privatisation of religion; and
- *socio-cultural* in that mediating structures between the individual and the State, such as family and church became less relevant in a globalised but socially differentiated world (Collins-Mayo et al., pp.60-61).

Mason concludes by suggesting that these changes have come at a high price:

young people's personal identity now rests on the fragile foundations of family of origin, friendship networks and unstable sexual partnerships no longer sustained by the massive support of church, neighbourhood and voluntary associations (Collins-Mayo et al., p.61).

Francis and Robbins also contend that the decline in belief has consequences. Those young people who do believe and those who attend a church have a stronger sense of purpose, are much more concerned about poverty in the Third World, are more likely to consider it wrong to have sexual intercourse under the legal age and wrong to become drunk (Collins-Mayo et al., p.52). They are also less likely to consider suicide. Religious belief and practice have important social consequences (Collins-Mayo et al., p.54).

However, Elizabeth Cooksey and Tessa Dooms remind us that higher adherence to religion does not necessarily protect young people from those behaviours condemned by religion. They note that in both the USA and South Africa, to some extent even among those youth who are religious, marriage is seen as a 'white thing' (Collins-Mayo et al., p.110). The message for youth from the churches, they say, is often simply one of prohibition, rather than dealing with the issues of sexuality more broadly. Without a strong support system to reinforce its perspectives, it is relatively ineffective (Collins-Mayo et al., p.111).

A Different Picture: China

There is one very different story told in *Youth and Religion*. Its author, Fenggang Yang, describes youth and religion in modern China. Yang notes how Chinese youth have pioneered 'multiple turns in regard to religion, from the radical anti-religious campaigns in the first quarter of the century to the zealous worship of the Chinese Communist Party of Chairman Mao in the third quarter of the century, from championing liberal democracy in the 1980s to "jumping into the ocean of commerce" in the emerging market economy' (Giordan, p.147). However,

Yang argues that since the 1980s, and particularly since 1989, there has been a 'spiritual awakening' with many people turning to Christianity. In the cities, there are 'over-crowded buildings filled with enthusiastic congregations' (Giordan, p.156). House churches that are not approved by the government have grown even faster, Yang reports. Buddhist and Confucian religious communities also have been increasing their involvement with young people.

A survey of college students in Beijing in 1998 found that 13.4 per cent were religious believers. In a survey in 2009 among college students in Shanghai, 19 per cent said they were religious believers, of whom:

- 4.9% were Protestant Christian,
- 0.6% Catholic,
- 0.8% Muslim,
- 4.6% Buddhist,
- 0.8% Daoist, and
- 7.3% believed in folk religious gods.

The survey also reported that among those who had no religious identity, 67.5 per cent expressed interest in religion, especially Christianity and Buddhism (Giordan, p.157). Official attitudes and the fact that the primary motivation for conducting this survey was to control and contain religion, probably means that some respondents would have been reluctant to indicate their religious interests. Religion has become uncontrollable in China, Yang concludes (Giordan, p.159).

Minority Groups

While there has been general decline in religious involvement, there remain many small groups within European and other societies with high levels of belief and practice. A group of scholars from the Netherlands argue that, in their country, 'the Christian churches have lost even more of their former appeal and legitimacy than almost anywhere else in the Western world' (Giordan, p.289). The one type of Christian expression which arouses enthusiasm among young Dutch people is evangelicalism. The other major strains of religion are New Age and Islam. In evangelicalism, New Age and Islamic Salafism, the researchers see some Dutch young people seeking a 'religious purity' which surpasses the existing range of religious traditions and institutions which are seen as 'implausible' and 'inauthentic'. This particular aspect of youth spirituality, they note, does not fit easily with either Berger's transition to secularism, nor Luckmann's expectation of privatized, ephemeral, uncommitted and superficial religiosities (Giordan, p.303).

In Thailand, the Christians and Muslims exhibit high levels of belief and practice compared with the Buddhists. Among Muslim young people, within the

past month,

- 56% said they had read the Koran,
- 44% had fasted, and
- 31% had prayed in a mosque.

Among Thai Christian young people,

- 67% had attended a service in a church,
- 65% had prayed by themselves, and
- 57% had read the Bible (Giordan, p.130).

In the USA, Flory and Miller identify three different religious responses among the post-boomers:

1. *Appropriators* who embrace the latest cultural fad in the style of worship and programming;
2. *Reclaimers* who seek to resurrect various liturgical forms and practices from the past, often seeing the church as a mystical refuge from the commercial world; and
3. *Innovators* who focus on building community and emphasise belonging and service (Collins-Mayo et al., pp.13-14).

Flory and Miller suggest that all three have a desire for religious expression and spiritual experience. All three want to belong and value service to a community, balancing the extreme individualism of the post-Boomer world.

David Tacey agrees with Michael Mason that there is a spiritual wilderness in the secular modernity of Australia. However, unlike Mason, he feels that younger generations are aware of this spiritual emptiness in the heart of society (Collins-Mayo et al., p.67) and sees this as apparent, for example, in widespread mental health issues. He says that many young people are looking for healing in spirituality which then leads them to embark on a spiritual journey. He says that 'spirituality has become an idealised myth or construct which compensates for what is absent - namely, happiness, fulfilment and satisfaction with life' (Collins-Mayo et al., p.70). He suggests that this amounts to a spiritual revolution which he compares with the revolutions of feminism and the radical social movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

An example of this search for spirituality is seen in the increased numbers turning to witchcraft and Paganism. Denise Cush discusses the studies in the USA, Australia and the UK which have noted that witchcraft has been seen by some young women, in particular, as offering self-esteem and increased confidence in 'harmony with nature' (Collins-Mayo et al., p.85). While the number who would call themselves 'witches' is small, Cush argues that these represent 'acute cases' of some of the themes in youth spirituality. These themes include: a commitment to the right to individual beliefs, tolerance and respect for the beliefs of others, self-chosen ethics, an interest in the mysteries of life and death, concern

for others and a desire to improve the world and the self (Collins-Mayo et al., p.86).

In contrast to witchcraft, Jeannine Heynes notes that traditional religion is seen by many young Western women as 'unfair and sexist'. Despite the development of feminist theology, stories and discussions in religious education in schools still mostly revolve around 'masculinised interpretation of religion, ethics and values' (Collins-Mayo et al., p.127). God is still seen as 'He' (Collins-Mayo et al., p.128). The continuation of these stereotypes, she argues, continues to contribute to a view of religion as historical and irrelevant to contemporary, personal life.

Karenza Moore suggests that electronic dance music club cultures offer emotional and spiritual significance in alternative forms to religion for some of those young people. These cultures provide 'community, belonging, self-realisation and self-expression', she says (Collins-Mayo et al., p.96).

Abby Day, who conducted semi-structured interviews with 68 young people, rejects the conclusions of researchers such as Smith and Mason who are quite negative about young people living in a 'morally insignificant universe'. She argues that young people derive meaning, happiness and moral frameworks from social relationships, not religion. She says belief has been 'relocated ... from the transcendent and spatial to the mundane and temporal'. She says that young people are guided by social authority that transcends religious authority, and that beliefs are more rooted in concepts such as authenticity and legitimacy (Collins-Mayo et al., p.103).

Immigrant Young People

One of the themes in both books is immigrant young people. The common theme is that, in various ways, immigrant young people must negotiate between the heritage of their families and the social context in which they now find themselves. Such negotiations are not always easy and the outcomes vary from one situation to another.

Pia Karlsson Minganti, for example, examines young Muslim women in Sweden. She sees them actively re-negotiating their faith. She says that they draw on a range of religious leaders simultaneously which enables them to side-step some traditional authorities. While not breaking with their parents, they were making independent selves and establishing alternative 'Islamic' communities outside their families and ethnic networks (Collins-Mayo et al., p.121).

Jasjit Singh notes the varying responses to negotiating Sikh identity in Britain as shown in the variety of attitudes to the turban and the prohibition of hair-cutting. Some young Sikhs have cut their hair and removed their turbans. Other young Sikhs have

retained important symbols of their identity and commitment to Sikhism. Some had gone further in seeking to present the turban as 'fashionable and appealing' (Collins-Mayo et al., p.136).

In *Youth and Religion*, Peter Beyer reports a study of Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist second generation young people in Canada. He notes that the religion itself has a large impact on the way it is transmitted. Muslims, he suggests, have a clear idea of what Islam involves, whereas Hindus and Buddhists do not have a dominant model on which they can draw (Giordan, p.24). Muslims tended to use the distinction of 'religion' and 'culture' to help them identify what is core and what is not. Islam is seen not as something which sets the community apart from other Canadians, but as a way of being religiously Canadian (Giordan, p.26). On the other hand, Hindus and Buddhists could not make the distinction between religion and culture easily and this led more quickly to a weakening of the tradition. Beyer also notes that in all three groups, religion had become privatised and that all the young people were tolerant of religious pluralism.

Conclusions

Together, these books present a broad overview of what is happening in the studies of youth and religion across the Western world and some of the issues in conducting such studies. It is a pity that there is nothing from Africa, except some small references to South Africa. Apart from my own material on Thailand and the essay on religion in China, Asia is not mentioned. The only coverage of South America is the one essay on Brazilian university students. There is nothing from the Middle East. Some studies there would have been interesting in the light of the present political upheaval. The picture in these other parts of the world is very different from that in Europe, Australia and USA.

While much is said in general terms about the context of decline in religious interest and practice, there is little detail or evidence on the processes through which it has occurred. Several essays explore the problems in transmission within families. But, as many of the essays recognise, there are many other major structural factors in contemporary society, such as individualisation of aspects of life which have a significant impact. The themes of the individualisation, privatisation and the decline in confidence in institutions are frequently mentioned, but there is little explanation of how world-views are differently constructed in different social contexts, as explored, for example, in the works of Mary Douglas. While some essays deal with the young immigrant and second-generation young people, most do so in terms of the re-negotiation of their identities. These essays do not account for the fact that in many of these countries there are minority groups of highly committed religious young people.

As the essay on Dutch evangelicals and New Agers notes, the major theories of Luckmann and Berger of privatisation and secularisation do not explain these developments.

The transformations taking place in the nature of religion are explored most thoroughly by Christian Smith in his essay on US teenagers and 'Moral Therapeutic Deism'. There is comparatively little material on such transformations in other places. The interest in 'spirituality' is noted in many essays. However, apart from David Tacey's chapter in the Collins-Mayo volume, there is little indication of what this amounts to, the extent of it, and the ways it is and is not replacing religiosity.

Another weakness of these books is that there is little material on what people and societies can do to effectively engage young people in faith. A few essays suggest that parents need to work very hard at the transmission of their faith for it to be successful. But they do not indicate why it is necessary to work so hard. Other values and behaviours are much more easily transmitted, and does the 'hard work' actually imply some restrictions on the autonomy of the child?

Nicholas Shepherd notes that many young Christians find the (government) school environment not conducive to the expression of their faith (Collins-Mayo et al., p.154). Christian youth groups have an important role for young Christians in that they provide places in which young Christians can express and develop their identity.

One of the most hopeful stories in these books is by Alana Harris. She notes how some young Christians expressed their faith through pilgrimage to Lourdes and through volunteering to help disabled and sick people in that context. Harris notes that for many young people

a pilgrimage to Lourdes allowed the exploration of a personal, embodied spirituality, exposure to collective religious experiences and the formation of an intense relationship with God and with fellow believers. To this could be added the expression of altruistic impulses and the enjoyment of travelling and leisure time (Collins-Mayo et al., p.148).

Perhaps there are some lessons in this story about the practical, experiential and altruistic expression of faith that work for some young people, that can be applied elsewhere.

Philip Hughes

References:

- Collins-Mayo, Sylvia and Pink Dandelion (editors), 2010, *Religion and Youth*, Ashgate, Farnham, England.
- Giordan, Giuseppe, (editor), 2010, *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion, Volume 1. Youth and Religion*, Brill, Leiden.
- Hughes, P., 2008, Is Decline in Religion Inevitable? Religion and Youth - A Global Perspective, *Pointers*, Vol.18, no. 2. June.

Chairman's Report

2010 - 2011

One of the major achievements of the Christian Research Association this last twelve months has been to survive financially during the global financial meltdown. The nervousness created by this world event has caused organisations in Australia to be much more conservative in how they spend their money. We thank Philip Hughes and Ken Bartel, our treasurer, for their wise management during this challenging period.



It is sad thing to say, but with the continuing decline in church attendance, CRA's reason for being is as strong as ever. It is even more important now that church leaders are given information that can help them make good decisions in addressing this decline. CRA is a unique provider of customised research that provides data and analysis that helps organisations in their decision making and learning.

One of the challenges for CRA is the need to find ways to sell the importance of research and its services to church leadership. Much promotion occurs at events like the *Shaping Australia's Spirituality Roundtable*, attendance by staff at other conferences, mail outs, *Pointers*, our website and visits by Philip to denominational leaders. However, it seems to me that there is still a lack of awareness and valuing of research by many Christian leaders.

Over the last decade attempts have been made by the board to increase CRA's staff. Unfortunately, this year we have seen some losses because of resignations and also financial pressures. I believe it is important that recruitment of staff be done in a way that considers the long term needs of the Association.

It has been encouraging in recent months to see a growing interest by Christian schools in utilising CRA services in looking at spirituality and wellbeing. It is important that CRA is involved in this growing area of the church's mission. As some have said, this is the new church for many young people and families today.

I want to thank members of the Association for their support and the members of our board for their faithful efforts in maintaining this important ministry to God's church in Australia.

Pastor Rob Steed
Chairman, CRA

National Church Life Survey

Towards the end of 2011, churches around Australia will be completing the National Church Life survey. NCLS Research has asked us to remind you to order your survey forms and encourage everyone associated with your church to take part.

Annual Report 2010-2011

Major Issues for Christian Ministry

The CRA has passed a number of important milestones in the past 12 months and, in so doing, has reaffirmed its maturity as an interpreter of Australian culture and commentator on the implications for church life and faith. The major milestone was our twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations at the end of August 2010. We celebrated with a four-day 'Roundtable' on 'shaping Australia's spirituality'.

The aim of the event was to review Christian ministry in Australia as a whole and to reflect on what should be future emphases for that ministry. We noted the fact that, for many Australians, spirituality is on the periphery of life, if it is present at all. On the other hand, there is not generally the level of antagonism to religious faith that has been present in past decades. We noted that while many Australians are living comfortably, there is considerable anxiety about the future.

There are two major issues looming on the world's horizon. The first is the future nature of the economy. We are well aware that we are not living in an economically sustainable way, yet our economic structures are predicated on continued growth. At the same time, our economic structures have contributed to the huge divisions between the rich and the poor of the world. Billions of the world's population live in poverty, while others live in luxury.

The second major issue is the environment. Again, Australians are not living in a way which is sustainable. Over the life-time of our children, our way of living will have disastrous consequences, and over the life-time of our grandchildren, it will have catastrophic consequences. Indeed, there are already disastrous consequences for some Australians through floods, fires and drought; and more disastrous consequences for others in Africa, in Pakistan and in other places around the world.

Are there resources within the traditions of our faith

which will help to meet these challenges? Can the principles of our faith, the principles of social justice and the principles of care for the environment, provide some solutions to these looming problems? Is there a possibility that the Christian faith might be shown to be relevant once more to the national story as it seeks to contribute to these national and international challenges?

As we reflected on these issues, we noted that our ways of engaging young people need to change. They are taking ownership of any religious decisions they make. They are certainly not adopting the traditions of their parents. Helping them to make wise decisions about faith and spirituality is a major challenge for the Church, particularly through its schools.

We also reflected that the current structures of our churches are appealing to few people in our communities. Most people are nurturing their spirituality in diverse ways, using a range of resources from the 'spiritual supermarket', which, at times, is not easily distinguishable from the 'secular supermarket'. Again, the challenge for the church is to find ways in which it can provide an interface with this spiritual supermarket, while not losing its essential nature.

Other Conferences

Lausanne Congress

I was hopeful that some of these big questions about the future of faith in our contemporary world would be tackled at the Lausanne Congress in October 2010. I was invited to attend the congress because I was chairing the Lausanne Researchers International Network. Certainly, there was some discussion of economic and environmental matters in the small groups that met during the afternoons of the conference.

Yet, these world issues were largely absent from the plenary sessions. Issues which loomed large in these sessions included condemnation of the 'prosperity Gospel', and affirmation of the equal place of women in ministry. The importance of emphasising the 'truth' of the Gospel was reasserted, although with little acknowledgement of contemporary discussions about the diverse nature of 'truths'. Some issues, such as slavery, were widely canvassed, although the discussion of it focussed on the problem as it exists in India. While it was acknowledged that the centre of the Christian faith now existed in the global south, in Africa and South America, and was rapidly growing in parts of Asia, particularly China, there was little in the conference that challenged the comfort and the failures of the Western world that are currently threatening global



Rev Prof James Haire from the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture addressing participants in the CRA's Roundtable, 'Shaping Australian Spirituality', September 2010

humanity. Even the issue of poverty, so widespread in Africa, hardly got a mention. (My reflections on the Lausanne Congress have been published in the June 2011 edition of *Australian Mission Studies*.)

Lausanne Researchers International Network Conference

In April 2011, Stephen Reid and I attended the Lausanne Researchers International Network Conference in Sao Paulo, Brazil. The CRA played a major role in organising the conference. We collected the registrations from outside Brazil and organised the program. The role the CRA plays here is a small demonstration of our international significance. Despite our small staff and limited resources, we were privileged to play a significant role in bringing together mission and church researchers from around the globe. We were also able to contribute significantly to the content of the conference. Stephen Reid gave a paper on 'Australian Family Life' which has been discussed in Peter Brierley's bulletin, *Quadrant*. I gave a paper on the movement from religion to spirituality which is taking place in many parts of the world.

The conference did look at some significant global trends, including the movement of the centre of the Christian faith from Europe and North America to the 'global south', to South America and Africa. It looked at the increasing secularity of the West, offset a little in some parts, by the rising affirmation of spirituality outside the religious context. It considered the increasing diversity of the forms of Christian faith, even within evangelicalism. There were also a number of papers on quite specific issues, from how we make sense of disasters to surveys of church vitality in Kazakhstan to using detailed community data to assist church development in Germany. The conference provided an excellent opportunity to share our research and to network with many others doing similar research around the world. However, once again, many of the major trends of our time were not considered. (For a more detailed review, see *Pointers* Vol.21, no.2.)

International Society for the Sociology of Religion

In June 2011, I attended the conference of the International Society of the Sociology of Religion in Aix-En-Provence, France. The theme of the conference was 'Religion in the Global Economy'. As an academic conference, rather than a church-related conference, its scope was much larger than the Lausanne conferences. Approximately three hundred people participated and there were papers on a great variety of topics.

Some of the plenary lectures were stimulating, especially a lecture on the 'growth churches' by Marion Maddox, which argued that these churches had adopted the assumptions and 'faith' of global capitalism. However, most of the plenary presentations

were disappointing, often narrow in scope and without a broad grasp of global trends. Hundreds of papers were offered through the conference and up to 10 papers were offered simultaneously. Hence, it was possible only to attend a small proportion of the offerings. Some of these papers were excellent. However, as is so often the case with academia, most of them focussed on very specific and narrow contexts and issues. Again, the conference proved a good place for networking. As a result, I was invited to submit articles to a couple of international journals.

Education for a Purposeful Life Conference

The Christian Research Association also played a major role in organising another conference in August 2010: *Educating for a Purposeful Life*. We brought together the whole staff of Kingswood

About CRA

The Christian Research Association was formed in 1985 to serve the churches of Australia. Its task is to provide up-to-date and reliable information about religious faith and church life in Australia.

Our Supporters

The CRA is directly supported by the following organisations which have members on its board:

ACCESS Ministries
Anglican Diocese of Brisbane
Anglican Diocese of Melbourne
Australian Catholic Bishops Conference
Baptist Union of Victoria
Converge International
Lutheran Church of Australia
Pahran Mission
The Salvation Army (Southern Territory)
Seventh-day Adventist Church
Uniting Church, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania

About 400 organisations, churches, schools and individuals are Associate Members of the CRA. Individual Associate Members pay \$120 and Institutional Members pay \$150 per year. They receive *Pointers* and all other publications of the Christian Research Association. Subscription to *Pointers* alone is \$30 per annum within Australia.

Pointers

Contributing editor: Philip Hughes. Each edition is reviewed by a committee of the CRA board prior to publication.

Acceptance of copy does not indicate editorial endorsement. Material from *Pointers* may be quoted provided appropriate acknowledgement and citation of the source are given. Whole articles, charts, tables and graphs may not be reproduced without written permission.

College, another 120 educators from schools around Australia, and a variety of highly skilled educationalists to discuss how schools could educate young people for a purposeful life.

The conference program was founded on the research the Christian Research Association had carried out on the sense of personal fulfilment, meaning in life and happiness which showed that major contributing factors included:

- positive mental health,
- having special interests and passions,
- belief in a spiritual dimension to life, and
- altruism - the desire to help others.

These four factors became the focus of four streams through the conference. Hence, contributing to the conference were people such as Dr June De Vaus (currently writing a book on positive mental health from a cross-cultural perspective) and Dr Helen McGrath (Deakin University) on positive mental health, Peter Cooper (Xavier College) and Di Fleming (Accelerated Knowledge Technologies) on passions, Graham Rossiter (ACU, Sydney) and Tim Sprod (The Friends' School, Tasmania) on philosophy and the critique of society as a path to thinking through the big questions of life, and Peter Kaldor (New River Leadership) and Chris Middleton (Principal of Aloysius College, Sydney) on leadership development and school retreats. Recognising that schools are about the holistic development of young people, the conference discussed many practical ways in which schools could contribute to the holistic development of young people and contribute to their personal fulfilment and sense of purpose. In many ways, this conference took the work that began in 2002 with the Spirit of Gen Y project to a new level.

These conferences have provided some excellent opportunities for extending the discussion of faith and culture into the global environment. They have considered the practical issues of what it means for educating young people in school and addressing the spirituality of Australians through the churches and beyond them.

Products

Shaping Australia's Spirituality

The release of the data from the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2009) in June 2010 allowed us to do some important work on the trends in Australian society. One of the most significant of these is that this survey, for the first time, showed more Australians describing themselves as 'spiritual' than the proportion describing themselves as 'religious':

- 47% described themselves as spiritual persons;
- 39% as following a religion; and
- 35% as neither.

Note 18 per cent saw themselves as both following a religion and as spiritual people.

Similar data for 40 other countries around the world was released in February 2011. It showed that only in three other countries did higher proportions describe themselves as spiritual: New Zealand, Japan and Uruguay. However, it also showed that 'spirituality' is more popular among younger people in twenty or more countries around the world.

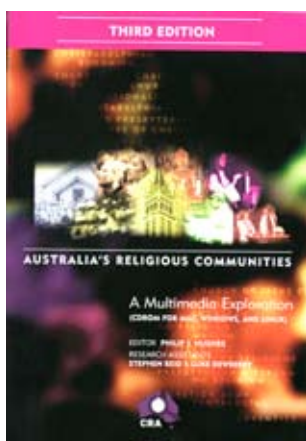
The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes was the first survey to show the proportion of Australians identifying with a specific Christian denomination was only 50 per cent. Asking the question a different way, the 2006 Census showed it to be 64 per cent. About 36 per cent of Australians who grew up within a Christian denomination now see themselves as having 'no religion'. It also provided us with a new figure of church attendance, suggesting that the proportion of Australians attending a church monthly or more often was now just 15 per cent, compared with 20 per cent a decade ago (Australian Community Survey, 1998).

Data from the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes was substantially used in the book *Shaping Australia's Spirituality*, which was released for the 'Shaping Australia's Spirituality' conference in August 2010. However, the work on analysing and thinking through the implications of the data of the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes is continuing.

At the same time, other religions in Australia are growing, although the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2009) showed that they too were 'leaking', losing about 26 per cent of the children who have grown up in them to 'no religion' (*Shaping Australia's Spirituality*, p.49).

Australia's Religious Communities 3rd Edition

A lot of work has been done on re-working the Australia's Religious Communities CD-Rom over the past two years. The work was finally completed with the release of the third edition in December 2010. The CD-Rom continues to be widely used by schools and universities across the country.



Commissioned Research

Bible Engagement

The Christian Research Association has continued its focus on young people in its research. In 2010

and early 2011, the staff of the Christian Research Association visited close to 60 youth groups around the country, talking with some 260 young people and 70 youth leaders about how young people engaged with the Bible. The data gathered from this project was presented to a consortium of organisations, headed by the Bible Society, in a report in March 2011. We are hoping that the data may be used for a book in the near future.

We found the group context very important for the ways in which young people were engaging with the Bible. In many places, the engagement is superficial. Many young people who do try reading the Bible start at the beginning and soon give up. Others have favourite passages they turn to for comfort and to remind them of the basics of faith. But others are reading the Bible regularly, are learning what it has to say, and are truly seeking to put it into practice in their lives. While many youth groups do not get beyond a casual conversation of life with occasional references to the Bible, the most effective means of engagement are short-term, well-structured courses.

The research on Bible engagement has given us significant insight into the ways youth groups function. We are hoping that there will be opportunities to extend that research in the near future to enable us to make a more substantial contribution into what makes a good youth group.

Resourcing Religious Education Coordinators

The Christian Research Association also conducted interviews and surveys among religious educators in Catholic schools around Australia in 2010 for John Garratt Publishers. The research gave us some insights into the changing nature of education in Australia as laptops and tablets become more common in the schools. Increasingly education focusses not so much on learning the content, but on learning ways to access, evaluate and analyse information. The child in Grade 7 can now carry around access to more information than exists in the largest library in the world! A tablet can now hold some thousands of books within its memory. Religious educators are only just beginning to consider what this means for the ways they teach and the resources they need.

Putting Life Together 2011, School Surveys

Since the latter part of 2010, the CRA has been developing another round of youth spirituality surveys. The aim of this round of surveys was to repeat some of the questions asked in 2004 and 2005, in order to identify trends among young people. It was also a chance to explore some issues in greater depth. In June 2011, the first schools began completing the surveys. We are expecting other schools to be doing them through to April 2012. About 40 Catholic schools across several dioceses will be doing the surveys as will many Anglican

schools. We are continuing to discuss the project with schools of other denominations.

Other Projects

The CRA has also been involved in several other small projects, including a survey of TEAR fund supporters, a survey of teachers in South Australian Catholic schools regarding their spiritual formation, and interviews with students in two Catholic schools who went to the canonisation of Mary MacKillop in October 2010 in Rome. The CRA has also been participating in the project of the Catholic Research Office on the vitality of Catholic parishes.

Administration

While the CRA has achieved much over the past year, it has struggled financially. The Roundtable on *Shaping Australia's Spirituality* and the associated 25th anniversary dinner did not cover their expenses. Substantial resources have been put into the production of the *Australian Religious Communities CD-Rom* and the book *Shaping Australia's Spirituality* which has yet to be recouped.

Several research projects that the CRA was expecting to undertake did not eventuate or were postponed. The substantial work that went into preparing the round of youth spirituality surveys in schools did not contribute to any financial income in the 2010-2011 financial year, although it will bring in substantial funding in this financial year.

One of our research staff, Audra Kunciunas, left the CRA in June 2010 and has not been replaced. Luke Dewberry, our administrative officer, left the CRA in December 2010, and has not been replaced. We are hoping that additional staff members will be recruited soon as the number of on-going projects has rapidly increased over the past few months.

The support of the Board and the Executive has been greatly valued over the past year. They were very involved in the *Shaping Australia's Spirituality* conference and have assisted greatly with thinking about marketing, research, and financial matters. The board has also been involved in thinking about the future directions of CRA.

The CRA has also continued to explore possible associations with other organisations over the past year. While there is nothing definite to report at this stage, we are continuing to explore several interesting options which could open the engagement of the CRA with those who teach people to participate in various kinds of ministries and extend the engagement with others involved in research. We hope to be able to report more on these possibilities soon.

Philip Hughes

8th August 2011

Who's Coming to School Today?

In March 2009, Brisbane Catholic Education began the largest single data collection ever undertaken in Australian Catholic schools. Over 27 000 surveys were returned from students in years 3,6,9 and 12, their parents and all staff in Catholic schools as well as a significant number of parish priests.

Of those surveys distributed,

- 86% of students,
- 67% of staff,
- 44% of parents, and
- 39% of parish priests returned them.

The research found significant alignment among students, staff and parents in the ways they perceive their Catholic school and what they think is important about their school.

Although designed by Brisbane Catholic Education, the logistics of the research project were supplied by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) without whose clerical and analytical support the project could never have been completed.

Makeup of school communities

The vast majority of students come from homes in which at least one parent identifies as Catholic. The parent respondents identified as 63 per cent Catholic (with a predominance of mothers filling out the survey) while 52 per cent of the “other” parent or guardians were also Catholic. This can be compared with the student population at the time which was 68 per cent Catholic, serviced by a staff of whom 82 per cent identify as Catholic.

Social awareness and care for others

The clear perception of students from years 3-12 is that their school makes a concerted effort to look after them and cares about their welfare. The questionnaires were designed to reveal the core strengths of these Catholic schools by asking respondents to rate various items that they felt the school does best. For instance, for Years 9 and 12, their parents and the staff, the choices provided 15 options ranging from “providing high quality facilities” to “relating to students as individuals”, “encouraging respect for authority” and “managing bullying successfully”. There were fewer and more

simplified options for Year 6 and Year 3 students. Respondents were then asked to select one item only from their list and were thus forced to choose an item that was the most important to them among the various options they had considered. The significant recurrence of “caring for me” or “providing a caring community” emphasises the major pastoral care thrust of Catholic schools.

Table 1. Majority Responses to what the school does best

Response	Percentage Share
Year 3.	
Caring for me	22.7
Providing nice buildings, grounds, sporting facilities, tuckshop, etc.	17.6
Year 6.	
Having good buildings, grounds, etc.	16.7
Making me feel welcome	13.4
Caring for me	13.0
Year 9.	
Providing high quality facilities	17.0
Providing good academic results	11.4
Offering extra-curricula options	11.1
Providing a caring community	10.9
Year 12	
Providing a caring community	15.6
Providing high quality facilities	13.1
Offering extra-curricula options	12.8
Parents	
Providing a caring community	27.6
Staff	
Providing a caring community	32.3
Parish Priests	
Practising Christian values	35.1

Only parish priests made the direct link between being a caring community and expressing Christian values.

The faith dimension of the parents did, to a large extent, mirror that of the staff. Responses to the survey were analysed using factor analysis which facilitated the development of a number of scales: faith, social (awareness) and a scale unique to the students which we termed “struggle and doubt”.

The faith scales for parents and staff included 7 questions on belief, prayer and personal relationship with God. The responses showed a strong level of positive response to the questions on the scale.

While the response of the year 12 students was more mixed than that of parents and staff, it is significant that, of the questions making up the faith scale, 83 per cent of year 12 students responded positively to at least one of the faith scale questions.

There was significant agreement among all respondents about social justice values. The two questions on this scale were “I am concerned about justice to the poor and disadvantaged” and “I care about the natural environment.”

The “struggle and doubt” scale for years 9 and 12 students included questions on personal belief and the importance of religious belief. They included responses to five statements on personal beliefs and values for example: “God loves me very much” and “On some issues I would follow my conscience rather than church teaching”.

The fact that Year 12 students are not united in their responses to these questions is hardly surprising. The New South Wales Bishops (2007) in their pastoral letter *Catholic Schools at a Crossroads* recognised that

society-wide trends such as secularisation, consumerism, family dysfunction and values disorientation also impact upon young people. The schools often have to pick up the pieces in the face of competing pressures from many directions.

That our Year 12 students are in fact struggling with their values rather than simply succumbing to those of a secular society is surely positive news.

It was significant that the academic prowess of schools was also ranked very highly and is probably a major motivating factor in families continuing to seek enrolment in Brisbane Catholic schools.

The importance parents have placed on academic success was determined to some extent by their own educational background. Parents with university and post graduate qualifications tended to place a much higher importance on religious education while those with only some secondary school or having completed only secondary school placed a higher importance on the school providing a pathway for future employment.

Although the enrolment of students from a non-Catholic or other church background has increased over time, this did not appear to be a factor in the responses. There was little difference between Catholic and non-Catholic parents on most measures. Enrolments of non-Catholic students are accepted across the archdiocese in most schools where there are vacancies. Parents must be willing to support the Catholic values in philosophy of the school. It could be that the similarity is a social phenomenon and that there is broad agreement on most values in the wider community. However, perhaps the success of principals across 133 schools in explaining the ethos of the school to potential

students and their parents and seeking their commitment to it has also contributed significantly to this homogeneity of attitudes among Catholic and non-Catholic parents.

Conclusion

In 1998 the Queensland Bishops had commissioned a report on the “Defining Features of Catholic Schools” (unpublished) that identified five desirable features of Catholic schooling across the state:

- having a strong Catholic identity and bearing witness to Christian values;
- being open and accessible to those who seek its values;
- offering a holistic curriculum;
- being a community of care and right relationships;
- being staffed by qualified, competent people who give witness to gospel values.

The level of care and witness to the Christian values of justice in Brisbane Catholic Schools is strong. The quality of curriculum leading to good academic performance is also clear as is the strong faith of both staff and parents.

Although the composition of the Catholic school community has changed significantly over the years, it does seem that the change has been endorsed enthusiastically by parents, staff and students who continue to choose these schools.

The challenge for the future will be to maintain the “strong Catholic identity” of these schools. Schools are often the only point of contact for many with the Catholic Church and there is significant loyalty to the Catholic “brand”, with over 60 per cent of the year 12 students stating they would send their own children to a Catholic school. On the other hand this does not translate into regular church attendance either by parents or students.

The future challenge for Catholic schools is to maintain the strong level of faith among their staff in this challenging environment.

*Paul McQuillan
Coordinator of Research,
Brisbane Catholic Education Centre,
and honorary fellow,
Australian Catholic University*

References:

Bishops of New South Wales and the ACT, (2007) *Catholic Schools at a Crossroads: Pastoral Letter of the Bishops of NSW and the ACT*. [Accessible: [http://www.mn.Catholic.edu.au/index/index.cfm?menukey=373.](http://www.mn.Catholic.edu.au/index/index.cfm?menukey=373)]

Access and Values: Functions of Religion in Australian Society

Religious faith has many functions within people's lives and within society. For example, it can give hope and comfort, promote social justice and equity, encourage compassion and trust. Most of these functions can be summarised under two headings. On the one hand, most religions encourage belief in a power beyond ourselves, and provide **access** to that power. Thus, religious faith is about worship and prayer. On the other hand, religions provide guidance on social and personal behaviour: they point to certain **values**. Thus, religious faith is about how we live. It may be noted that there are additional functions which cannot be subsumed easily under these headings. For example, religious organisations develop communities in which people find identity and belonging.

In 1989, the Christian Research Association ran a series of questions in the Australian version of the International Social Survey Program questionnaire in which a sample of Australian adults was asked about the importance of these functions. In 2009, a similar (but not identical) series of questions was asked of a sample of Australian adults.

There is little change over the 20 year period. Approximately 35 per cent of the population indicated that religion was of high importance in both 1989 and in 2009. The group who said that religion was of moderate importance has shrunk slightly from 27 per cent to 24 per cent of the population. However, during this period, belief in God (including those who doubt and those who believe sometimes) has fallen from 65 per cent of the population to 47 per cent.

The figure below shows that religion has remained important in giving values to live by. In 1989, 59 per cent of the population saw religion as important

in providing values, and in 2009, 57 per cent did so. (Add high and moderate 'values' and high and moderate 'both' sectors in the figure.)

These different functions are important in understanding people's religious practice. The differences in rates of attendance at religious services by the affirmed functions of religion for 1989 and 2009 is shown in the table below. (Note the references to 'access' and 'values' in the table below refer to those who say that particular function of religion has 'high' importance.)

Attendance Monthly or More by Function of Religion

Religious Function	1989	2009
Both access and values	64%	48%
Access not values	36%	39%
Values not access	26%	17%
Neither highly important	9%	3%

In other words, belief that religious faith encourages good values will not itself lead to frequent church attendance. People are much more likely to attend church if access to God is seen as important.

The continued importance of religion in providing values is one of the reasons why so many Australians support Christian schools and chaplaincy in schools. They continue to believe that it is important for their children to pick up the right values in the school or in church youth activities. On the other hand, these people do not see frequent church attendance as necessary. Many Australians feel that they can be 'good people' without going to church.

The data also reminds those who lead religious services, however, that most of those who attend do not simply want a reiteration of values. They are there to meet with God.

Philip Hughes

