

Changes in Roman Catholic Beliefs and Practices in Ireland between 1981 and 2008 and the Emergence of the Liberal- Catholic

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the changes that have occurred in the religious beliefs and practices of Roman Catholics in Ireland between 1981 and 2008 and to examine the extent to which Catholics have become liberal in their attitudes towards social issues over this period. Data were 23 religious indicators (see table I) and six social items sourced from the European Values Study (EVS). Only Roman Catholic respondents (n=3810) were included in the analysis. Data were analysed using ANOVA, t-tests, and chi-square tests. The majority of religious indicators were found to be in significant decline between 1981 and 2008. Also, Catholic attitudes towards homosexuality, euthanasia, abortion, prostitution, divorce, and the use of 'soft drugs', were found to have become significantly more liberal over this period. These findings supported not only the privatisation of religion and morality but also the emergence of a liberal ethos among a considerable proportion of Catholics in Ireland. Results were discussed in relation to secularisation, belief without belonging and the emergence of Liberal-Catholics. Suggestions for future research, such as investigating the effect of conflict between one's Catholic Identity and liberal views, were made.

Introduction

Roman Catholicism has long been the dominant religion in Ireland. It was, and for some may still be, inexorably linked to the Irish national identity. Despite dramatic declines in religious participation across Europe in the latter half of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, Ireland remained devoutly Catholic. At the same time as this dramatic decline in Europe, the Catholic Church in Ireland was establishing a religious monopoly which became highly influential in many areas within Irish society, from health to social welfare and from education to the family (Inglis, Monopoly 102-128). This position of influence went almost entirely unchallenged until the 1970s and was marked by high religiosity and strong adherence to Church teachings (Andersen & Leven 187). During the 1970s the influence of the Church on Irish society began to decline. Although Ireland remains a highly religious country when compared to others in Europe (Fahey), the period under examination (1981-2008) was one of significant economic and social upheaval in which dramatic changes occurred not only in patterns of religious belief and practice, but also in attitudes towards issues considered contrary to the traditional teachings and moral norms of the Church.

At the beginning of the 1980s Ireland was in the midst of a long recession. GDP was 71% of the European Union (EU) average and unemployment was rampant, peaking at 19.1% in 1987 (CSO/SYO 2). For many, emigration was the only solution. However, less than a decade later, Ireland was enjoying an unrivalled economic boom known as the Celtic Tiger. The reasons for the boom are complex; however increased funding from the EU and substantial increases in investment from transnational corporations in the US certainly contributed. During this period Ireland went from 'high unemployment to labour shortages, from emigration to "hosting" immigrants' (Nic Ghiolla Phádraig & Hillard, 8). In fact, between 1996 and 2002 an estimated 200,000 immigrants arrived in Ireland, equivalent to 5% of the population (ICI, 5). However, increased purchasing power coupled with historically low interest rates and increased lending from financial institutions resulted in a housing bubble which saw housing prices increase by 300% between 1992 and 2006 (Malzubris, 1). The bursting of this bubble in conjunction with the global economic downturn which began in 2007, culminated in an EU/IMF bailout for Ireland. In the space of two decades Ireland had gone from bust to boom and back again.

Ireland has long been associated with high religiosity and strong adherence to Church teachings e.g. Eurobarometer data indicates that in 1975 89.1% of Irish respondents attended religious services at least once a week and 72% indicated that religion was of great importance to them. The average for all ECC countries at the time was approximately 22% and 18% respectively (O'Connell 60-61). The economic recovery and subsequent boom may have had a considerable effect

on the religious beliefs and practices prevalent in Ireland. Modernisation, which occurred in Ireland throughout the boom years, is often associated with secularisation characterised by declines in religious attendance, vocation, and influence of the Church (Andersen and Lavan 187). Declines in these areas have been evident in Ireland (Inglis & Donnelly). The high levels of immigration during the economic boom may have also had an impact as it served to somewhat dilute the Catholic majority in Ireland (Nic Ghiolla Phádraig 1).

Modernisation and economic growth alone cannot account for the dramatic decline in religious practice and influence over this period. From the early 1990s onwards a series of scandals, including the now internationally infamous cases of child sex abuse (CSA), rocked the Catholic Church in Ireland. The high profile prosecutions and tribunals of inquiry that followed, including the Ferns (2005), Ryan (2009), and Murphy reports (2009), ensured that these issues remain salient in the public consciousness (Nic Ghiolla Phádraig 2). These scandals 'fatally undermined the trust of the Irish people in the Catholic Church' (O'Connell 65) resulting in considerable declines in the confidence in and influence of the Church. The Catholic Church could no longer occupy the position of moral authority it had grown accustomed to.

The period under examination was also one of considerable social upheaval, characterised by changing attitudes and approaches to issues considered contrary to the traditional moral norms of the Catholic Church. Data from the International Social Survey Programme showing a dramatic increase in children born outside of marriage, from 12% in 1988 to 33% in 2008, is just one example (Nic Ghiolla Phádraig 2). Others include the passing of a referendum legalising divorce in 1995. Similarly, homosexuality was decriminalised in 1993 and more recently (2010), an act was passed recognising civil partnerships for same-sex couples. Even attitudes towards abortion, a highly contentious issue which was condemned under any circumstances by 74% of Irish respondents in 1973, have softened (Nic Ghiolla Phádraig 2). The decline in the moral authority of the Church has undoubtedly contributed to the shift from Catholic moral norms towards more liberal ones. However, Inglis (*Moral* 231-238) holds that the contrasting rise in the influence of the media may also be a contributing factor, arguing that the media have usurped the Catholic Church as the dominant moral authority in Irish Society.

This study used data gathered by the European Values Study Programme (EVS) which allowed for the examination of attitudes towards a variety of social and moral issues. However, it is perhaps best suited to facilitate a detailed examination of religious beliefs and practices and has been praised for its recognition of the multidimensional nature of religion (Davie, *Patterns* 266) due to the large number of religious indicators measuring many aspects of religion. Over the course of

the four waves of the EVS (1981, 1990, 1999, & 2008) two theories have emerged to explain the changing patterns of religious belief and practice in Europe; secularisation and privatisation of religion.

At its most basic level Secularisation theory holds that as society develops the influence of, and attachment to religion declines. However, Casanova argues that the theory of secularisation is better understood as three distinct processes;

‘secularisation as differentiation of the secular spheres from religious institutions and norms, secularisation as a decline in religious beliefs and practices, and secularisation as marginalisation of religion to a privatised sphere’ (212).

Using survey data alone it is difficult to assess the extent of differentiation of the secular spheres from the influence of religious institutions. However, the initial waves of the EVS (1981 and 1990) generally supported the theory of secularisation with regard to declining religious beliefs and practices and the privatisation of religion as there was a dramatic decline in almost all religious indicators across Western Europe (Lambert 29).

Although there were dramatic declines in almost all religious indicators across Western Europe between 1981 and 1990, the decline in religious practice and institutional attachment was far greater than the decline in personal belief (Davie, *Patterns* 266-267); suggesting that for many, religion is becoming more personal and private. Davie refers to this as ‘belief without belonging’ (*Religion*), arguing that although low levels of religious practice and institutional attachment may indicate that an increasing number of people have ceased to belong to religious institutions in a meaningful way, the comparatively high levels of belief suggest that they are not becoming irreligious. In other words, they may have ceased to belong but they have not ceased to believe.

Ireland has previously been noted as an exceptional case (Cassidy 18) because of the continually high levels of religious participation throughout the Enlightenment period, levels which continued well into the 20th century. This may be due to the significant influence the Catholic Church had in many social fields, particularly in education, which allowed the Church to socialise each new generation (Donnelly & Inglis 6) and may have contributed to the exceptionally high levels of belief, practice, and adherence to Church teachings. It may also be due to the relationship that developed between nationalism and Catholicism in the late 19th century as a means of differentiating the Irish Identity in the face of British Imperialism (Martin 151; Nic Ghiolla Phádraig 1). Regardless, similar patterns of religious decline are now evident in Ireland. Declines in the influence of the Church, coupled with the large declines in levels of practice and institutional attachment in Ireland (Donnelly

& Inglis 10-13) appear to reflect the three types of secularisation introduced earlier (Casanova 212). However, similar to Davie's concept of belief without belonging, Inglis (*Catholic* 208) cites the continued high levels of belief, identification as a religious person, and importance granted to religion, suggesting that a process of institutional detachment rather than secularisation may be a more appropriate explanation.

Despite the decline in the influence of the Catholic Church and declines in religious practice, institutional attachment and (to a lesser extent) religious beliefs, Ireland remains a majority Catholic country. The extent to which Catholics still adhere to the traditional teachings and moral norms of the Church is unclear. Have they become more liberal in their attitudes on social issues and if so, how liberal have they become? Cassidy (19), in his discussion of Modernity and Religion in Ireland, states that one of the core themes of modernity is the development of a liberal culture, characterised by tolerance of divergent world views, pluralism, and a declining importance of tradition. Similarly, Inglehart and Welzel proposed a thesis of Human Development in which economic development and modernisation are positively associated with individual autonomy, freedom rights, tolerance, and acceptance of diversity e.g. towards homosexuality (Gerhards, 22) and the use of 'soft drugs' (Cao & Zhao 296). The decline of the Church from its position as the de facto social conscience of Irish society (Donnelly & Inglis) may also have significantly effected Catholic's attitudes towards a variety of social and moral issues.

The aims of the present study are to explore the changes that have occurred in the religious beliefs and practices of Catholics in Ireland between 1981 and 2008 and to examine the extent to which Catholics in Ireland have become liberal in their attitudes towards social and moral issues over this period.

Method

Data Source: The data used for this analysis were sourced from the European Values Study (EVS, 2011) through the Gesis Data Archive for the Social Sciences.

Lambert (30) identified 24 religious variables included in the EVS up to 1999. The present analysis excluded two of these variables, reincarnation and participation in voluntary work with religious organisations. Reincarnation was excluded as it is neither a Christian nor Catholic belief. The item relating to participation in voluntary work with religious organisations was excluded because although there are many charitable and voluntary organisations with a religious ethos in Ireland e.g. Concern and Trócaire, volunteering with these organisations may not necessarily reflect agreement with this religious ethos. The present analysis also included an item relating to the

frequency of prayer outside of religious services which was not used by Lambert as it was only added to the EVS in 1999. Therefore a total of 23 religious indicators were used to examine changes in religious beliefs and practices among Catholics in Ireland between 1981 and 2008.

Davie (*Patterns*, 266) identified five broad religious indicators in the EVS data: denominational allegiance, church attendance, attitudes towards the church, religious belief, and subjective religious disposition. Although information regarding denomination membership is given (see table II), for the purpose of the present analysis the religious variables were divided into four categories; Personal Religiosity (comparable to what Davie refers to as subjective religious disposition), Religious Beliefs, Religious Practices and Ceremonies (including items relating to attendance, prayer, and ceremonies), and the Authority of the Church (comparable to what Davie refers to as attitudes towards the Church; see table I for a list of items by category).

Insert table I here

In order to examine whether Catholic attitudes have become more liberal, a number of items measuring attitudes towards issues considered contrary to the teachings and moral norms of the Catholic Church, were identified. The issues chosen were homosexuality, euthanasia, abortion, prostitution, taking 'soft drugs', and divorce. Respondents were asked to indicate, on a scale of 1 (never) to 10 (always), the extent to which these could be justified.

Sample: Only respondents in Ireland who identified as Roman Catholic were included in the analyses (N=3810).

Planned Analysis: The analysis was divided into two parts. Part one focused on examining changes in the religious beliefs and practices of Roman Catholics in Ireland between 1981 and 2008. A combination of chi-squared tests of homogeneity, ANOVA, and t-tests were used to examine whether changes in the religious variables over time were significant.

Part two examined changes in Catholic attitudes towards issues considered contrary to the traditional teachings of the Church, and investigated the extent to which Catholics in Ireland have become more liberal over time. ANOVA were used to examine changes in Catholic attitudes towards homosexuality, euthanasia, abortion, prostitution, taking 'soft drugs', and divorce. These items were then combined to create a measure of conservative/liberal attitudes. An exploratory factor analysis was used to examine whether these items were measuring the same factor, and a Cronbach α test was used to assess the reliability of this measure. Participants were then divided into the following

groups based on scores on this measure; conservative, slightly conservative, slightly liberal, liberal, and very liberal.

Results

Part 1: Changes in the Religious Beliefs and Practices of Catholics in Ireland

The majority of religious indicators were found to be in decline between 1981 and 2008, however given the complex nature of the data the results are divided into four subsections; Personal Religiosity, Religious Belief, Religious Practice and Ceremony, and Authority of the Church.

Personal Religiosity

Two oneway ANOVA were conducted to examine the differences between waves in how important religion and God are in the lives of Catholics in Ireland. Results regarding the importance of religion indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the waves, $F(2, 2624) = 34.44$; $P < 0.001$. Post-hoc tests, in conjunction with an examination of the mean scores for each wave (see table II), indicate a small but steady and statistically significant decline in the importance of religion in the lives of Catholics in Ireland from 1981 onwards. Results regarding the importance of God indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between waves, $F(3, 2034.42) = 8.01$; $P < 0.001$. Post hoc tests and mean scores (see table II), indicate a small but statistically significant decline in the importance of God in the lives of Catholics in Ireland between 1990 and 2008.

A chi-squared test indicated that there was a significant difference in the proportion of Catholics who identified as a religious person between those tested in 1981 and 2008, $\chi^2(1) = 9.10$; $p < .005$. This figure rose by 6.4 percentage points over this period; however between 1999 and 2008 it fell by 4.3 percentage points from its peak of 78.5%, indicating that the number of Catholics identifying as religious has begun to decline. A chi-squared test also indicated that there was no significant difference in the proportion of Catholics who get comfort and strength from religion between 1981 and 2008, $\chi^2(1) = .65$; $p > .05$.

These results are mixed. Although there appears to be a small but statistically significant decline in the importance Catholics place on both religion and God in their lives, other indicators of personal religiosity have either risen or remained stable between 1981 and 2008.

Religious Belief

Levels of orthodox belief among Catholics, that is belief in God, life after death, heaven, hell, sin, and a personal God, have either declined or remained stable between 1981 and 2008 (see table II). Levels of belief in 1981 and 2008 were found to be significantly different with regard to God (χ^2

(1) =8.19; $p<.005$), life after death ($\chi^2(1) =9.71$; $p<.005$), heaven ($\chi^2(1) =11.79$; $p<.005$), and sin ($\chi^2(1) =23.1$; $p<.001$). Levels of belief in hell were not significantly different ($\chi^2(1) =.81$; $p>.05$).

Interestingly, levels of belief in life after death, heaven, and sin seemed stable between 1981 and 1999 however by 2008 these had fallen notably resulting in overall declines of 5.8, 5.2, and 7.4 percentage points, respectively. Belief in a personal God, a central aspect of Christian and other monotheistic faiths, was found to be significantly different, $\chi^2(1) =31.03$; $p<.001$, and fell dramatically between 1981 and 2008. Belief in a spirit or life-force was also found to be significantly different, ($\chi^2(1) =24.53$; $p<.001$), however this rose. Belief in a spirit/life-force can be considered an unorthodox belief for Catholics to maintain. Significantly, nearly one quarter of Catholic respondents in 2008 indicated belief in a spirit/life-force rather than a personal God. These respondents may be what Inglis (*Catholic* 214) described as creative Catholics, who not only choose which beliefs and practices to adhere to, but also mix Catholic and non-Catholic beliefs, creating a made to measure belief system.

Taken together, these findings suggest that levels of belief (in the orthodox at least) among Catholics in Ireland have for the most part declined. With the exception of those indicators that were stable and belief in a personal God, the majority of the decline occurred between 1999 and 2008. However, it is important to note that overall levels of religious belief among Catholics in Ireland are still relatively high (see table II).

Insert table II here

Religious Practice and Ceremony

A *oneway ANOVA* was conducted to examine the differences in levels of church attendance between Catholics tested in each wave of the EVS. Results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in levels of church attendance among Catholics between waves, $F(3, 1982.31) =101.332$; $p<0.001$. Post hoc tests and mean scores (see table II), indicate a significant decline in levels of church attendance among Catholics between 1990 and 2008. Reports of CSA by members of the clergy and other religious orders first emerged in the mid-1990s and may have had a considerable impact on attendance in subsequent years.

There was a significant difference in the proportion of Catholics in Ireland who attend religious services at least once a week, $\chi^2(1) =290.75$; $p<.001$, which fell dramatically between 1981 and 2008 (-35.5%; see table II). Perhaps even more striking than the overall decline was that two thirds of this decline occurred between 1999 and 2008 (21.5/35.5).

The item relating to the frequency with which people pray outside of religious services was only included in the EVS in 1999 and 2008. A two-tailed independent t-test indicated that a statistically significant difference was evident in levels of prayer outside of religious services among Catholics tested 1999 and 2008, $t(1649.19) = -2.49$; $p < .025$. This, coupled with the mean scores for each group ($\bar{x}_1 = 2.29$; $\bar{x}_2 = 2.51$), indicates a small but statistically significant decline in the frequency with which Catholics pray outside of religious services between 1999 and 2008. However there was no significant difference in the proportion of Catholics who 'take a moment of prayer or reflection' between 1981 and 2008, $\chi^2(1) = .06$; $p > .05$, nor was there a significant difference in the proportion who pray daily outside of service between 1999 and 2008, $\chi^2(1) = 1.82$; $p > .05$.

Religious practice in the form of attendance has declined significantly, yet levels of prayer have not. Prayer outside of religious service can be thought of as a private expression of faith, whereas attendance of religious services reflects a more public expression of faith facilitated by the institutional Church. Taken together, these findings support not only the privatisation of religion, but also detachment from institutional religion (Inglis, *Catholic* 217-218). However these findings must be interpreted with caution. A similar but not identical item from the ISSP indicated that in 1991 68.2% of Irish people prayed several times a week (O'Connell, 71) suggesting that levels of regular prayer have declined since 1991.

The importance of religious services to mark important life events was another aspect of religious practice examined. Levels of support for religious services to mark marriages fell by 2.7% between 1981 and 2008. This difference was significant, $\chi^2(1) = 6.94$; $p < .001$, however there was no significant difference in levels of support for religious services to mark births ($\chi^2(1) = .88$; $p > .05$) or deaths ($\chi^2(1) = .27$; $p > .05$) which remain high and stable (see table II).

The importance Catholics in Ireland place on religious services to mark significant life events remains extremely high. In conjunction with the other findings regarding religious practice, this may indicate an increase in what Inglis (*Catholic* 215) referred to as Cultural Catholics. These are Catholics who have distanced themselves from the Church but continue to identify as Catholic, identify with other Catholics, place great importance on the shared Catholic heritage, and like the rituals and celebrations surrounding baptisms, communions, weddings etc.

Authority of the Church

A oneway ANOVA was conducted to examine differences in levels of confidence in the Church between 1981 and 2008. Results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in levels of confidence between waves, $F(3, 3772) = 83.198$; $p < 0.001$. Post hoc tests and means

scores (see table II) indicate a significant decline in the level of confidence Catholics had in the Church between 1981 and 1990. This decline continues at an even greater rate between 1990 and 1999, which coincides with the emergence of the CSA scandals in the mid-1990s. However the rate of decline slowed between 1999 and 2008 suggesting that levels of confidence in the Church may be bottoming out.

In order to investigate trends in the authority of the Church, the opinion of Catholics in Ireland regarding Church answers to a variety of problems and the changes in these opinions over time were examined. Respondents were asked whether the Church's answers in the following areas were appropriate; Moral problems, Spiritual needs, Family problems, and Social problems. Each of these indicators declined between 1981 and 2008. The resulting differences were found to be significant in the case of moral problems ($\chi^2(1) = 28.96$; $p < .001$), spiritual needs ($\chi^2(1) = 5.99$; $p < .05$), and family problems ($\chi^2(1) = 51.34$; $p < .001$), but not with regard to social problems ($\chi^2(1) = 1.48$; $p > .05$). Support for the Church's answers to Moral and family problems fell at a far greater rate than either spiritual needs or social problems (see table II). Three of the four indicators, answers to moral, family, and social problems, reached their lowest ebb in 1999 which is hardly surprising given the loss of moral authority suffered by the Church in the wake of CSA scandals in the mid-1990s. This recovered somewhat between 1999 and 2008. Regarding the Church's answers to moral and family problems, the recovery was notable, 9.7 and 4.6 percentage points respectively. Although the decline with regard to the Church's answers to social problems was small, this item was not included in the 1981 wave of the EVS and, of the four indicators, had the lowest base level to begin with.

Taken together, these findings indicate that the decline in the authority of the Church between 1981 and 2008 was considerable, which lends support to the idea of Institutional detachment (Inglis, *Catholic* 217-218). However they also suggest that this decline may be bottoming out and in some respects (answers to moral and family problems) may be increasing.

Part 2: Changes in Catholic Attitudes towards Social Issues

In an effort to establish whether Catholics in Ireland have become more liberal over time, a series of oneway ANOVAs were conducted to examine changes in Catholic attitudes towards Euthanasia, Abortion, Divorce, Homosexuality, Prostitution, and the use of 'soft drugs'.

Results indicated that there were statistically significant differences in attitudes towards euthanasia, abortion, and divorce, between the waves; $F(3, 1875.64) = 58.29$; $p < 0.001$; $F(3, 1888.35) = 14.53$; $p < 0.001$; $F(3, 1929.28) = 79.66$; $p < 0.001$. Post hoc tests and mean scores (see table 3)

indicated a steady and significant increase in the extent to which Catholics in Ireland justify euthanasia, abortion, and divorce, from 1981 onwards.

Both divorce and abortion were a major part of the political discourse in Ireland during this period. A campaign to legalise divorce led to a referendum in 1986 which was defeated. The debate continued throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s culminating in a second referendum which was passed in 1995, legalising divorce in Ireland. Abortion has been a controversial issue in Ireland for many years. No less than five referenda relating to abortion have been held since 1983. The first had a distinctly anti-abortion result such that it introduced a constitutional ban on abortion. However, a series of high profile cases including the *x*-case in 1992 and the *c*-case in 1997 led to four subsequent referenda. Two (1992 and 2002) attempted to tighten the ban on abortion by removing the threat of suicide as grounds for a legal abortion and were rejected. The remaining two, held in 1992, established the right to information regarding abortion services legally available in other states and the right to travel to another state for an abortion. These events must be considered significant contributing factors to the attitude changes discussed above.

Results also indicated that there were statistically significant differences in attitudes towards homosexuality, prostitution, and taking 'soft drugs', between the waves; $F(3, 1861.05) = 107.36$; $p < 0.001$; $F(3, 1943.5) = 15.67$; $p < 0.001$; $F(3, 1948.33) = 50.76$; $p < 0.001$. As regards both homosexuality and prostitution, post hoc tests and mean scores (see table III) indicated a steady and significant increase in the degree to which Catholics in Ireland justify homosexuality and prostitution, from 1990 onwards. The change in attitudes towards homosexuality during the 1990s took place alongside a determined campaign for the legalisation of homosexuality in Ireland. This must be considered a contributing factor to the change. Homosexuality was decriminalised in 1993. Campaigners have continued to fight for equality of rights for homosexuals with some considerable success including an act recognising civil partnerships between same-sex couples in 2010. Similarly, the findings indicate that attitudes towards homosexuality have continued to improve up to 2008.

Finally, post hoc tests indicated that there was a sharp and significant decline in the extent to which Catholics justified taking 'soft drugs' between 1981 and 1990. This is interesting as it coincides with the heroin epidemic of the early 1980s in Ireland. This period saw a dramatic increase in the number of opiate-users mainly in Dublin. Over a period of five years the number of opiate-using clients contacting the National Drug Treatment and Advisory Centre rose from 182 in 1979 to 1028 in 1983. By the late 1980s the epidemic was seen to have plateaued and, rightly or wrongly, it all but disappeared from public debate for some years (O'Gorman 156-157). Since then there has

been a significant increase in the extent to which Catholics justify taking 'soft drugs' between 1990 and 2008.

Insert table III here

Taken together, these findings indicate that Catholics in Ireland have become significantly more liberal since the initial wave of the EVS in 1981. The emergence of a liberal ethos among Catholics in Ireland is interesting, however given the high levels of orthodoxy and adherence to Church teachings that persisted for so long, it is unlikely that all Catholics have become Liberal-Catholics. Therefore, in order to investigate the extent of this liberal ethos, the items described above were combined to create a measure of conservative/liberal attitudes. An exploratory factor analysis was conducted which suggested that all six items were measuring the same factor. The scale demonstrated high reliability with a Cronbach's α of .82.

Respondents were divided into five groups based on their scores on this scale; conservative, slightly conservative, slightly liberal, liberal, and very liberal. In order to produce a conservative estimate of the proportion of Liberal-Catholics, the mean score and standard deviation on this scale in the latest wave (2008; $M=21.52$, $SD=11.44$) were used to define the groups. Respondents who scored between 6 and 10 ($M-1SD$) were defined conservative. Respondents who scored between 11 and 22 (between $M-1SD$ and M) were defined as slightly conservative. Respondents who scored between 23 and 34 (between M and $M+1SD$) were defined as slightly liberal. Respondents who scored between 35 and 46 (between $M+1SD$ and $M+2SD$) were defined as liberal. Respondents who scored between 47 and 60 (between $M+2SD$ and 60) were defined as very liberal.

Insert table IV here

Results indicate that the proportion of Catholics who could be defined as liberal or very liberal has increased considerably between 1981 and 2008, whereas the number of Catholics who could be defined as conservative decreased considerably (see table IV). These findings suggest that 14.6% of Catholics in Ireland could be considered liberal or very liberal, despite the traditional teachings of the Church.

Discussion

The first aim of this study was to explore the changes that have occurred in the religious beliefs and practices of Roman Catholics in Ireland between 1981 and 2008. The majority of religious indicators have declined. Despite small but statistically significant declines in the importance of religion and God in the lives of Catholics in Ireland, levels of personal religiosity remain high.

Definition as a religious person had increased and those who got comfort and strength from religion remained stable. Similarly, levels of orthodox belief remain high, despite decreases in four of the six orthodox beliefs examined, three of which seemed stable until 1999. There was however a considerable decline in levels of belief in a personal God and a notable increase in the unorthodox belief in a spirit/life-force. As regards religious practice, the importance of ceremonies among Catholics remained high and stable. Attendance of religious services had declined dramatically, with less than half of Catholics reporting weekly attendance. However, the decline in the more personal form of religious practice, prayer, was insignificant. Although levels of confidence in and authority of the Catholic Church had declined, there were indications that this decline was bottoming out and in some cases recovering.

Findings were mixed with regard to Casanova's three types of secularisation (212). Using survey data alone, it was difficult to assess the extent of secularisation as differentiation of the secular spheres from the Catholic Church. However, there are practical examples of this e.g. the passing of legislation which is in direct conflict with the teachings and moral norms of the Church and the decline in the influence of the Church in fields such as education and media (Donnelly & Inglis). There was evidence to support secularisation as a decline in religious practice e.g. the dramatic decline in attendance of religious services; however findings were mixed as regards a decline in belief as levels of belief among Catholics in Ireland remain relatively high. With regard to secularisation as the privatisation of religion, the high levels of belief and identification as a religious person, coupled with the decreases in attendance and confidence in the Catholic Church indicate that for Catholics in Ireland, religion is becoming private and personal. The comparatively small decrease in prayer, a more personal form of religious practice, supports this. It is important to note that the findings were mixed with regard to secularisation. Factors such as historical context (Martin 149-153) and the complex nature of the data (Harding, Phillips, & Fogarty 31-34) make it difficult to draw definitive conclusions.

Given that the findings with regard to secularisation were mixed, perhaps the findings are more indicative of the privatisation of religion. Inglis (*Catholic*, 207-208) points to the high levels of both identification as a religious person and orthodox belief among Catholic in Ireland coupled with low levels of attendance and confidence in the Catholic Church, as indications of institutional detachment rather than secularisation. Davie (*Religion* 4-5) cites similar patterns when proposing the concept of belief without belonging. Davie suggests that this may be explained by 'Vicarious Religion' (Reed as cited in Davie, *Patterns* 271-272), whereby the devout maintain the religious institutions and culture for the majority, as they may be needed in the future. The high and stable

levels of support for religious ceremonies support this. Both institutional detachment and belief without belonging were supported by the present findings; however Inglis asks 'will a decline in belief inevitably follow a decline in practice?' (*Catholic* 208). Given that orthodox beliefs which had been stable until 1999 (life after death, heaven, and sin), declined between 1999 and 2008, this may well be the case.

The present study also aimed to examine the extent to which Catholics in Ireland have become liberal in their attitudes towards social issues between 1981 and 2008. The extent to which Catholics justified homosexuality, euthanasia, abortion, prostitution, divorce, and the use of 'soft drugs' increased significantly. This supports the emergence of a liberal ethos among Catholics, which is contrary to the teachings and moral norms of the Catholic Church. The extent of this liberal ethos was assessed and approximately 1 in 7 Catholics were found to be either liberal or very liberal.

These findings support previous research. Echoing Cassidy's (19) assertion that one of the key themes of modernity is the development of a liberal culture, research has found that human/societal development is positively associated with tolerance and acceptance of different lifestyles (Cao & Zhao 303). Similarly, the Human Development Index, produced annually by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), has been used to predict acceptance of homosexuality (Gerhards). Ireland was ranked 7th in the world on the latest Human Development Report (144), suggesting, as the findings do, that tolerance and acceptance of different lifestyles has become more prevalent in Ireland. Although religiosity has been positively associated with tradition, conformity, and conservatism (Lewis & Maltby 793) and negatively associated with Universalism e.g. understanding and tolerance, these associations were found to be less powerful in more developed countries (Saroglou, Delpierre, & Dernelle 731). This may go a way to explaining the emergence of Liberal-Catholics in Ireland.

The findings as a whole indicate not only a privatisation of religion but also a privatisation of morality. It would appear that identification as a Catholic no longer translates into adherence to either the teachings or moral norms of the Catholic Church. This may be due to institutional detachment (Inglis, *Catholics*), the development of a liberal culture (Cassidy, 34-40), human/societal development (Cao & Zhao 296), or the decline of the Catholic Church as the de facto moral conscience of Irish society (Donnelly & Inglis). Either way, these findings have serious implication at both an individual and institutional level. The potential conflict of maintaining a Catholic identity whilst holding liberal views may be a serious challenge for a growing number of Catholics. The dramatic decline in participation in institutional religion may have serious ramifications for the Catholic Church in Ireland in terms of both its influence on its members and its approach to moral

issues. Finally, the move away from Catholic moral norms and towards a more liberal morality has serious implications for the State's approach to issues such as legalisation of gay marriage, abortion, and euthanasia, all of which have been a major part of the political discourse in Ireland in recent years.

In recognition of the multidimensional nature of religion, this study used a large number of religious indicators to examine different dimensions of religion, which served not only to strengthen the study, but to provide a better understanding of the changes that have occurred in the religious beliefs and practices of Catholics in Ireland. The use of the 2008 mean and standard deviation to group Catholics provided an empirical basis for the categorisation based on their standing on social issues, as well as a conservative estimate as to what constituted a liberal. In conjunction with the high reliability of the measure used, this served to strengthen the study. Unfortunately, the scope of this article did not allow for a detailed discussion of age differences in relation to religious beliefs and practices, and the development of a liberal ethos among Catholics in Ireland. Nor did it allow for a detailed comparison with other Catholic majority countries such as Spain, Poland, etc. These limitations should be addressed by future researchers.

Future research could also examine the differences between conservative and liberal Catholics in terms of religious beliefs and practices, in an effort to examine in greater detail the ramifications of the emergence of a liberal ethos among Catholics in Ireland. An investigation of whether similar patterns are evident in other Catholic majority countries would also serve to further our understanding of this phenomenon. An examination of how individuals maintain both their Catholic identity and liberal views, the consequences of conflict between the two, and how this conflict is resolved, would also contribute significantly to our understanding of the emergence of the Liberal-Catholic.

Notes

1. All Irish respondents were included here e.g. 98.7% of Irish respondents in 1981 were members of a religious denomination. Of these 96.3% identified as Catholic.
2. In order to examine changes in levels of weekly church attendance and daily prayer the items relating to frequency of church attendance and prayer outside of service were recoded. For example with regard to 'church attendance at least weekly', the responses 'more than once a week' and 'once a week' were recoded as 1 and the remaining responses were recoded as 0.

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Appendix A: Statistical information for all ANOVA post-hoc tests.

Bonferroni post hoc tests (in order to guarantee control over the type 1 error rate) and Hochberg's GT2 post hoc tests (as the sample sizes differed notably) were carried out for each of the ANOVAs in order to compare all waves with each other.

Item relating to...	Post Hoc Results
Importance of Religion	There was a statistically significant decline in how important Catholics in Ireland perceived religion to be in their lives between all waves.
Importance of God	There was a statistically significant difference between waves 1 and 4, and 2 and 4, but not between waves 1 & 2, 1 & 3, 2 & 3, or 3 & 4.
Attendance	Statistically significant differences were evident between waves 1 & 3, 1 & 4, 2 & 3, 2 & 4, and 3 & 4, but not between waves 1 & 2.
Confidence in the Church	Statistically significant differences were evident between waves 1 & 2, 1 & 3, 1 & 4, 2 & 3, and 2 & 4, but not between waves 3 & 4.
Abortion	Statistically significant increases were evident in the amount Catholics justified abortion between all waves.
Divorce	Statistically significant increases were evident in the amount Catholics justified divorce between all waves.
Drugs	Statistically significant differences were evident between waves 1 & 2, 1 & 4, 2 & 3, 2 & 4, and 3 & 4, but not between waves 1 & 3.
Euthanasia	Statistically significant increases were evident in the amount Catholics justified euthanasia between all waves.
Homosexuality	Statistically significant differences were evident between waves 1 & 3, 1 & 4, 2 & 3, 2 & 4, and 3 & 4 but not between 1 & 2
Prostitution	Statistically significant differences were evident between waves 1 & 3, 1 & 4, 2 & 3, 2 & 4, and 3 & 4 but not between waves 1 & 2.

Appendix B: Statistical information for the Exploratory Factor Analysis.

An exploratory factor analysis was conducted on six items relating to abortion, divorce, euthanasia, homosexuality, prostitution and taking 'soft drugs'. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure verified that the sample size was adequate, KMO=.85 (great according to Field 659) and all KMO values for the individual items were $\geq .83$, which is well above the acceptable limit of .5 (Field 659). Bartlett's test of sphericity indicated that correlations between the items were sufficiently large, $\chi^2 (15) = 6005.54$, $p < .001$. One component had an eigenvalue above Kaiser's criterion of 1 and explained 52.73% of the variance. The scree plot showed an inflexion point that would justify retaining one component. Taken together, this suggests that all six items are measuring the same factor.

Table I: Religious indicators included in the analysis divided by category.

Personal Religiosity:
Are you a member of a religious denomination?*
Which religious denomination are you a member of? ***
Are you a religious person?*
Do you get comfort and strength from religion?*
How important is God in your life? ** (1-10)
How important is Religion in your life? ** (1-10)
Religious Belief:
Do you believe in God?*
...in life after death?*
...in Heaven?*
...in Hell?*
...in Sin?*
...in a personal God or a spirit/life force? ***
Religious Practice and Ceremony:
Do you take a moment of prayer/meditation?*
How often do you attend religious services? ** (1-8)
How often do you pray outside of religious services? ** (1-7)
Do you think religious services are important to mark Birth?*
...to mark Marriage?*
...to mark Death?*
Authority of the Church:
How much confidence do you have in the Church? ** (1-4)
Are the Church's answers to the moral problems and needs of the individual adequate?*
...to family problems adequate?*
...to people's spiritual needs adequate?*
...to social problems adequate?*

*These were categorical variables to which respondents answered either yes or no.

**These were scaled variables in which respondents answered on scales ranging from 1-10, 1-8, 1-7, or 1-4.

***These were categorical variables to which respondents indicated which answer was appropriate to them from a list provided.

Higher scores on the 'How important is God in your life?' item indicate higher levels of importance, whereas higher scores on the 'How important is religion in your life' item indicate lower levels of importance. Higher scores on the items relating to church attendance, prayer outside of service, and confidence in the Church indicate lower levels of attendance, prayer, and confidence respectively.

Table II: Changes in religiosity, religious beliefs and practices, and attitudes towards the Church, among Catholics in Ireland between 1981 and 2008.

	Wave 1 (%) 1981	Wave 2 (%) 1990	Wave 3 (%) 1999	Wave 4 (%) 2008	Total Change (%)
Member of a Denomination¹	98.7	96.1	93.1	88.6	-10.1 [*]
Catholic¹	96.3	96.9	95.6	94.1	-2.2 ^{****}
Religious person	67.8	75.2	78.5	74.2	6.4 ^{**}
Comfort and Strength from Religion	84.0	86.6	83.1	82.6	-1.4
Belief in...					
God	98.1	99.1	98.8	96.0	-2.1 ^{**}
Life after Death	85.1	85.2	84.4	79.3	-5.8 ^{**}
Heaven	90.8	91.7	89.9	85.6	-5.2 ^{**}
Hell	60.9	54.9	57.8	58.7	-2.2
Sin	90.9	88.7	89.0	83.5	-7.4 [*]
Personal God	77.4	69.4	69.8	65.9	-11.5 [*]
Spirit or Life force	14.8	23.7	22.3	23.7	8.9 [*]
Type of Practice:					
Take a moment of prayer/meditation	82.7	85.9	86.6	83.1	0.4
Church attendance at least weekly²	85.1	84.8	71.1	49.6	-35.5 [*]
Prayer outside of service (Daily)²	Question not asked	Question not asked	53.0	49.8	-3.2
Religious service important: Birth	Question not asked	96.3	95.2	95.4	-0.9
Religious service important: Marriage	Question not asked	96.4	96.4	93.7	-2.7 ^{***}
Religious service important: Death	Question not asked	98.8	98.2	98.5	-0.3
Appropriateness of Church answers to...					
Moral Problems	55.2	42.9	32.5	42.2	-13.0 [*]
Spiritual Needs	72.1	72.0	67.5	66.7	-5.4 ^{****}
Family Problems	51.2	36.0	29.4	34.0	-17.2 [*]
Social Problems	Question not asked	33.9	28.9	31.1	-2.8
How important is...in your life					
	Wave 1 Mean	Wave 2 Mean	Wave 3 Mean	Wave 4 Mean	Mean Difference
God	8.13	8.11	7.94	7.65	-0.48 [^]
Religion	Question not asked	1.67	1.84	2.00	0.33 ^{^^}
How often do you...					
Attend Church	2.18	2.10	2.63	3.48	1.30 [^]
Pray outside of church service³	Question not asked	Question not asked	2.29	2.51	0.32 [^]
Confidence in the Church	1.71	1.86	2.17	2.24	0.53 [^]

^{*}Chi-square finding significantly different between 1981 and 2008 at the 0.001 level.

^{**} Chi-squared finding significantly different between 1981 and 2008 at the 0.005 level.

^{***} Chi-square finding significantly different between 1981 and 2008 at the 0.01 level.

^{****} Chi-square finding significantly different between 1981 and 2008 at the 0.05 level.

[^]ANOVA finding significantly different between 1981 and 2008 at the 0.001 level.

^{^^}ANOVA findings significantly different between each wave at the 0.001level.

Table III: Changes in the traditional attitudes of Catholics in Ireland towards a variety of issues, between 1981 and 2008.

Levels of justification of...	Wave 1 Mean	Wave 2 Mean	Wave 3 Mean	Wave 4 Mean	Mean Difference
Homosexuality	2.75	3.00	4.09	5.05	2.30 [*]
Euthanasia	2.08	2.49	2.94	3.55	1.47 ^{**}
Divorce	3.21	3.99	4.52	5.14	1.93 ^{**}
Taking 'soft drugs'	1.59	1.29	1.74	2.15	0.56 [*]
Abortion	1.65	2.23	2.54	2.97	1.32 ^{**}
Prostitution	2.12	2.14	2.39	2.75	0.63 [*]
Conservative/liberal total score	13.05	15.26	18.28	21.52	8.02 ^{**}

Higher scores on the 'Do you justify...' items indicate higher levels of justification and tolerance of these issues.

* ANOVA finding significantly different between 1981 and 2008 at the 0.001 level.

**ANOVA findings significantly different between each wave at the 0.001level.

Table IV: Conservative/Liberal Groupings among Catholics in Ireland between 1981 and 2008.

Conservative/Liberal Grouping	Wave 1 (%) 1981	Wave 2 (%) 1990	Wave 3 (%) 1999	Wave 4 (%) 2008	Total Change (%)
Conservative	53.4	36.4	31.8	21.9	-31.5
Slightly Conservative	32.8	45.1	37.1	33.6	0.8
Slightly Liberal	9.9	15.7	21.8	29.9	20.0
Liberal	3.1	2.8	7.6	13.0	9.9
Very Liberal	0.7	-	1.8	1.6	0.9