Catholic disaffiliation in Britain: a quantitative overview

Abstract

This article presents a quantitative assessment of Catholic *disaffiliates* - i.e., those who were brought up Catholic, but who now no longer identify as such - in contemporary Britain. Using British Social Attitudes data, it seeks to i) gauge the overall extent of Catholic disaffiliation, and its significance relative to the retention/disaffiliation rates of other major Christian groupings; ii) identify patterns in the changing rates of Catholic retention/disaffiliation over the course of the twentieth century; iii) analyses Catholic disaffiliation in terms of key demographic variables (sex and age); and iv) compares the current religious beliefs and prayer practices of different groups of Catholic disaffiliates and retainees. As will be argued throughout this article, in-depth study of Catholic disaffiliates sheds important new light on the sociology of Catholicism in modern Britain. Furthermore, it contributes to ongoing discussions of secularization, precisely as a case-study of change over time within a significant religious minority.

Introduction

This article presents a quantitative assessment of Catholic *disaffiliates* - i.e., those who were brought up Catholic, but who now no longer identify as such - in contemporary Britain. This description applies to two in five of all those raised Catholic, according to pooled 2007-11 data from the British Social Attitudes survey. The purpose of the present study is to map the main contours of the phenomenon. It will do this in four main ways. i) By gauging the overall extent of Catholic disaffiliation, and its significance relative to the retention/disaffiliation rates of other major Christian groupings. ii) By identifying patterns in the changing rates of Catholic retention/disaffiliation over the course of the twentieth century (principally using decadal birth cohorts), as a contribution to wider debates concerning the dating and timing of secularization. iii) By *beginning* the task of analysing Catholic disaffiliation in terms of key demographic variables (in this case, sex and age[i]), as a prelude to future quantitative and qualitative research looking at the causes of, and influences upon, disaffiliation. And iv) by comparing the current religious beliefs and prayer practices of different groups of Catholic disaffiliates and retainees. As will be argued throughout this article, in-depth study of Catholic disaffiliates sheds important new light on the sociology of Catholicism in modern Britain. Furthermore, it contributes to ongoing discussions of secularization, precisely as a case-study of change over time within a significant religious minority - and one in which, as numerous studies have noted, 'tribal' feelings of belonging have traditionally been strong (see Hornsby-Smith).

Religious affiliation, and its steadily increasing unpopularity over the last fifty or sixty years, is among the primary indicators of British secularization (alongside falling patterns of religious belief and religious practice). According to the 2011 British Social Attitudes survey, slightly over 50% of Britons now claim to have 'no religion'. Two-thirds of

these were, however, brought up within a religious - and in the vast majority of cases, Christian - tradition. This traffic is, moreover, almost all one way: only one in every fifty people brought up *without* a religious affiliation now identify as having one. Accordingly, the driving force of secularization in Britain (and presumably elsewhere) is chiefly to be found in the phenomenon variously described in recent literature as 'disaffiliation', 'deconversion', or - now less common - 'apostasy' (see Cragun and Hammer).

Especially when compared to religious conversion, the dynamics of deconversion or disaffiliation have received little sociological attention. Notable exceptions here, however, are several qualitative studies of disaffiliates (e.g., Francis and Richter; Zuckerman), and - most germane to the present study - recent quantitative work disentangling period and cohort effects, and gauging the influence of parental religiosity on intergenerational religious transmission (Crockett and Voas; Bruce and Glendinning ; Schwadel; Voas and Storm). Also relevant is the growing body of research, both qualitative and quantitative, which directly focuses on the self-ascribing nonreligious, especially in Britain and USA (Kosmin et al.; Voas and McAndrew; Lee). Whereas earlier scholarship tended to dismiss *none*, *no religion*, and *nonreligious* as merely residual 'catch all' labels, artificially created by survey researchers (see Vernon; Hout and Fischer; Pasquale), newer studies have emphasized that these are often meaningful self-descriptions which are adopted 'proactively' (Lee; see also Bullivant, 'Indifferent'). Also noteworthy is the evidence from American datasets that the nones constitute a fluid and heterogeneous population, comprising multiple subgroups. Plausibly, at least some of this diversity may be ascribed to the differing religious backgrounds towards which many nones still retain at least some attachment (see Baker and Smith; Lim et al.). Thus in a new twist to the old joke about Northern Irish atheists, it seems that it might make sense, in generalized demographic and attitudinal terms, to speak of '(formerly) Jewish nones', '(formerly) Evangelical Protestant nones', or '(formerly) Catholic nones'.

It is the latter group, across Britain as a whole, who form a primary focus of the present article. For over a quarter of a century, sociological studies of Catholicism in Britain have found that significant numbers of those brought up Catholic come, as adults, no longer to identify as such (Hornsby-Smith 50-1). Such disaffiliation may be viewed as the extreme case of the far broader and well-documented phenomenon of lapsation: that is, 'cradle Catholics' in later life falling away (or 'lapsing') from normative levels of Catholic practice or belief, while - in most cases - retaining some sense of 'belonging'.[ii] In Britain, as in many other western nations, lapsation is recognized as a dominant feature of the Catholic landscape. Official Church materials, for example, speak of there being 'approximately four million' lapsed Catholics in England and Wales alone (Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales).[iii] What proportion of them no longer even identify as Catholics is neither stated nor asked, however: in Britain disaffiliation has not yet received special attention in its own right. In America, the situation is slightly different. Perhaps stirred by statistical evidence suggesting that 'former Catholics' account for a high proportion of the rapidly growing 'none' population (Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate; Kosmin et al.), a number of historians and theologians have begun investigating disaffiliation specifically as 'one of the most theologically significant phenomena in contemporary American Roman Catholic life' (Hornbeck 1; see also Beaudoin). These American pioneers, moreover, can claim to have sympathizers in high places. As Pope Francis noted recently: 'It is undeniable that many people feel disillusioned and no longer identify with the Catholic tradition' (art. 70).

Data and methods

Each year the British Social Attitudes survey, administered by NatCen Social Research, conducts face-to-face interviews with over 3000 British adults, selected by random

probability sampling. Waves have run each year since 1983, except in 1988 and 1992. Among a wide range of demographic and attitudinal questions, the survey includes a select number of items relating to religious identity, belief, and practice. In certain years, a more detailed religion module has been administered to a subset of the respondents. The most recent of these was in 2008, which incorporated the International Social Survey Programme 'Religion III' module.

Since 1991, the BSA has asked respondents both **(i)** 'In what religion, if any, were you brought up?' and **(ii)** 'Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion?'. (The latter question has been a feature of the survey since 1983.) The main analyses in this article are based upon a cross-tabulation of these two variables. It thus becomes possible to track the proportion of 'cradle' affiliates that each denomination[iv] retains into adulthood (i.e., those who were brought up as X, and still identify as X), as well as the current (non)religious affiliations of those who have disaffiliated from their religion of upbringing (i.e., those who brought up as X, but now identify as Y or Z). It is equally possible, of course, to identify the proportions of 'converts' (i.e., all those *not* raised as X, who now identify as X) that each denomination has attracted. The data do not, however, reveal 'multiple switchers': those who have changed religious affiliation more than once, or those who, having left their religious of upbringing for a period of time, have now returned (though see Eccles).

For the purposes of the present study, therefore, a *Catholic retainee* is any respondent who answers 'Catholic' to question **(i)** on upbringing, and 'Catholic' to question **(ii)** on current affiliation. Conversely, a *Catholic disaffiliate* (our main focus here) is any respondent who answers 'Catholic' to question **(i)**, and something else to question **(ii)**. In some of the later analyses, the disaffiliates are further divided into two distinct subgroups: those who have switched to a different religious affiliation [*Switchers*], and those who now identify as having no religion [*Leavers*]. More will be said about these designations below.) A *Catholic convert*,

meanwhile, is any respondent who answers 'Catholic' to question **(ii)** on current affiliation, and something else to question **(i)** on upbringing. On occasion, these labels will be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to disaffiliates and converts of other denominations also.

Most analyses presented in this paper rely on data from five recent waves of the BSA: 2007 to 2011 (inclusive). These waves were pooled in order to produce a decent sample size (e.g., including c. 2500 cradle Catholics). As background information, the 2007-11 dataset as a whole yielded 18 639 subjects; 45.6% male to 54.4% female; mean age 48.7, with a standard deviation of 17.8. The cradle Catholic subsample, our primary focus for analysis, make up 13.4% of this total. This comprises 2486 subjects; 42.2% male to 57.8% female; mean age 46.7, with a standard deviation of 16.8.

Significantly, the 2007-11 dataset includes the more detailed religion-related items administered to a subset of respondents in the 2008 wave (these form the basis of the below analysis of religious beliefs and prayer practices). In order to measure historical rates of retention and disaffiliation over time, however, data were used from twenty waves (1991-2011, excluding 1992). This is because the relevant question regarding upbringing was only asked from 1991 onwards.

Results and discussion

1. Contemporary Catholic disaffiliation in context

[Table I here]

Table I presents the retention rates of mainstream British Christian denominations, alongside the proportions, and 'destinations', of those who have disaffiliated away from them. The table's penultimate column compares each denomination's total numbers of disaffiliates, with the total numbers of 'converts' or new affiliates (i.e., all those *not* raised as X, who now identify as X) in the dataset. The figure given represents the numbers of new affiliates a

denomination has attracted, for every one it has failed to retain. For comparative purposes, the equivalent figures are given for the 'No religion' category at the foot of the table (though this should not be taken to imply that 'No religion' is being conceived here as being itself a kind of religion or religious denomination, to which new affiliates have 'converted', etc.).

In general terms, and not surprisingly, the data support the overwhelming testimony of other studies: that large numbers of British Christians leave the denominations they were brought up in; that only relatively few of these disaffiliates switch to other religious affiliations, whether Christian or otherwise; and that, therefore, the 'No religion' category continues to grow apace (Brown; Voas and Crockett; Crocket and Voas; Bruce, *Secularization*). The inclusion of the 'No religion' category alongside the major denominations illustrates this very clearly. In stark contrast to British Christians, the vast majority of born-and-raised nones remain such. Furthermore, the numbers of 'new nones' - one is tempted to call them *nonverts* - outstrip the few cradle nones who do find religion by around 25 to 1.

However, the data clearly show that, within the general trend of high levels of Christian disaffiliation, there is a marked degree of denominational variation. On this measure at least, 'Anglican secularization' has a noticeably different texture to 'Catholic secularization', and both differ markedly from Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, or 'non-denominational' varieties.

At 62%, the Catholic Church's retention rate is the strongest of the main British denominations. Nearly three out of every five cradle Catholics retain their affiliation, compared to roughly one in two of those raised Anglican, Presbyterian, or 'non-denom', and only one in three raised Baptist or Methodist. This fact alone might justify a more detailed investigation of Catholic retention: why is Catholic identity transmitted more reliably than that of any other British denomination? While the bulk of that subject is outside the proper

scope of the present study, a more detailed, decade-by-decade breakdown of Catholic retention will be presented and discussed in the following section.

It would, however, almost certainly be a mistake to dwell exclusively on the relative *strength* of Catholic retention. After all, a retention rate of 62% equals a disaffiliation rate of 38%. Furthermore, we will later see that a large proportion of those who *do* retain a Catholic identity rarely or never practise their faith, and that a significant minority are atheists or agnostics. The Catholic birthrate would need to be vastly higher than the national average - which it is not - to approach the rate of replacement. The slight decline in the proportion of Catholics within the British population over the last quarter-century (10.5% in the pooled 1983-7 BSA dataset; 9.0% in 2007-11) would, therefore, be much larger if not for immigration.

Especially in England, the idea of the 'Catholic convert' holds a strong resonance (Hornsby-Smith 23-4). From the nineteenth century onwards, many of the Church's most prominent members have been converts: Newman and Manning, Chesterton and Greene, Widdecombe and Blair. In addition, much media attention has been given to disaffected Anglicans joining the Church over the past two decades (following the General Synod's decision to ordain women in 1993, and in light of Pope Benedict XVI's creation of the 'Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham' in 2011). Despite this, Table I shows that conversions *to* Catholicism are dwarfed, by a ratio of one to ten, by disaffiliations away from it (either to another religious tradition, or - in most cases - to no religion). This ratio is about equal to that found in the Anglican, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches.

[Table II here]

A breakdown of conversion rates among the major Christian groups is given in Table II, with 'No religion' again included for comparison. Once again, there are striking denominational differences: less than 1 in 10 Catholics, Anglicans, or Presbyterians are

converts, compared to 2 in 10 Methodists, and over 3 in 10 Baptists or non-denoms. Notably, former nones compose only around 1% to 6% of *any* denomination's current affiliates, and no Christian group attracts more than a handful of those brought up in non-Christian religions. That is to say, the overwhelming majority of converts to a given Christian group are *already* brought up within a (different) Christian group. The Catholic Church is a case in point. While 7.2% of currently affiliating Catholics in the 2007-11 data are converts, only 1 in 10 of these (i.e., 0.8% of all Catholics) were brought up as nones, and not a single one was raised in a non-Christian religion. It is perhaps worth noting that, theoretically, it is possible for every Christian group to report high rates of conversion (due to a significant minority switching between denominations), while overall Christian numbers continue to decline (due to large numbers of born-and-raised Christians becoming nones, and only small numbers of people converting from a non-Christian background). Feasibly, this kind of model would allow localized instances of 'church growth' (see Goodhew) to be comprehended within, and not as a challenge to, the secularization paradigm.

2. Catholic disaffiliation through the decades

[Table III here]

Table III breaks down Catholic retention and disaffiliation by birth decade throughout most of the twentieth century, based on pooled data collected between 1991 and 2011. In order to allow fair comparisons between decades, only responses from those aged 30+ at the time they were surveyed have been included. This is based on the assumption that most people who leave the religious affiliation of their upbringing do so in their late-teens or twenties (Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate 6-7). If so, then the retention rates of later decadal cohorts, which include larger proportions of respondents under 30, would be inflated by the inclusion of significant numbers who perhaps have *not yet* disaffiliated.

In broad terms, the data show stronger rates of retention within earlier cohorts than in later ones. The four pre-1945 cohorts, for example, have a mean retention rate of 74.8%, compared to 59.8% for the four post-1945 cohorts - a fall of 15 percentage points. The proportion of born-and-raised Catholics adopting another religious affiliation has remained relatively steady throughout the whole period (mean = 5.9%; standard deviation = 0.9). As such, the falling retention rate is due overwhelmingly to the growing popularity of 'no religion'. However, while previous studies of British denominations have suggested a steady decline in retention from the earliest to the most recent cohorts (King-Hele 184), the Catholic data show a somewhat different pattern, with particular 'lows' in the 1955-64 and 1965-74 brackets, followed by an apparent recovery (though still far below pre-war levels) in the next decade

Three things, in particular, are noteworthy here.

First of all, disaffiliation is by no means a new, or even post-war, phenomenon in British Catholicism (see Hornsby-Smith 63-4; Wadsworth and Freeman). Even at the 'high point' of Catholic retention - i.e., the 1915-24 cohort - over one in five of those raised Catholics came no longer to identify as such (although the data do not tell us *when*), and only a quarter of *those* adopted a different religious affiliation. Within two decades - the 1935-44 cohort - the disaffiliation rate had risen to three in ten, with all but a sixth of those identifying as having no religion.

Secondly, there is a clear watershed between cohorts born pre- and post-1945, with the former having retention rates in the 70s, and the latter in the low 60s or high 50s. The largest decade-by-decade change occurs, moreover, between the 1935-44 and 1945-54 cohorts, with a fall of 9 percentage points. The 1945-54 cohort then sets a new pattern followed (albeit with some noteworthy variations) by subsequent decadal cohorts. This post-1945 shift can be seen more clearly in Chart I, which further breaks down the retention rate

by birth year. Even accounting for a considerable degree of yearly fluctuation, the years 1945 and 1946 appear to mark a genuine transition.

[Chart I here]

In the wider context of British secularization, much has been written about this immediate post-war 'Baby Boomer' generation, which came of age between the mid-1960s and early-1970s. According to several scholars, primarily social historians, it is the latter fact that is most significant. Most famously, Callum Brown has argued that the sixties' sexual revolution, leading to a radical redefinition of traditional British gender roles and attitudes, 'entirely destroyed [British Christianity's] house of cards' (180). Alternatively, Hugh McLeod, incorporating Brown's and others' arguments into a more wide-ranging analysis, contends that the religious ferment of the late-sixties 'may come to be seen as marking a rupture as profound as that brought by the Reformation' (1). Recently, Steve Bruce has challenged this kind of approach, arguing that the Baby Boomers' low levels of religiosity compared to previous generations are due instead to their parents' (and especially their mothers') experiences during World War Two: it is not that they *became* less religious in the sixties, but that they had been *brought up* less religiously in the forties and fifties (*Secularization*; see also Bruce and Glendinning).

As it stands, the data here offer no adjudication on these matters: they simply add (even more) confirmation that 'something happened' in connection with the 1945-54 cohort, expressed here in terms of Catholic retention and disaffiliation specifically. (This may simply have been an intensification of the same processes leading to disaffiliation within the pre-1945 cohorts, which was, as we have seen, already significant.) That said, in a study concentrating on the Catholic Church, some attention must be given to the Second Vatican Council (1962-5) and its aftermath - including, for example, the wide-ranging liturgical changes, and Pope Paul VI's reaffirmation of the traditional teaching on sexual ethics in

1968's *Humanae Vitae*. These events fall squarely in the periods covered by Brown and McLeod (the latter especially gives them considerable attention), and there is a growing body of literature recounting both the hopes and anxieties with which they were met on the ground in Britain and elsewhere (e.g., Massa; Harris; Corrin; McDannell). Vatican II has been described as the 'biggest meeting in the history of the world' (O'Malley 10), and given the extent of its liturgical, pastoral, and doctrinal reforms, it seems unlikely that it would have no effect whatsoever on the retention (or not) of those Catholics who came of age either during or after it. Even *if* the relatively high level of disaffiliation within the 1945-54 cohort had already largely been 'set' by earlier (perhaps parental) factors, one might expect subsequent birth cohorts, brought up wholly or in part in the postconciliar Catholic world, to have been affected in some significant way. This too, however, cannot be established from the present data.

3. Sex and Age

[Table IV here]

To aid the analysis in this and the following sections, the contemporary sample (i.e., all those giving Catholic as their religion of upbringing in the pooled 2007-11 dataset) has been divided into four categories, on the assumption that these represent distinctive subgroups. (Please see Table IV.) Most obviously, the disaffiliates have been divided into 'Leavers' (i.e., those who now claim no religious affiliation) and 'Switchers' (i.e., those who have adopted a non-Catholic religious identification). Due to the small percentages involved - see Table I - the Switchers category combines both members of (non-Catholic) Christian denominations and non-Christian religions. Meanwhile, those *retaining* their Catholic affiliation have been divided by frequency of religious practice: 'Regular practisers' who attend church once a month or more, and 'Low/non-practisers' who attend less than monthly.

This division, which splits the Catholic retainees more or less in half (see Table IV), is based on two theoretical and empirical assumptions: i) that *practice* is the most significant indicator of religiosity (cf. Voas and Crockett, 14; Bruce, *Modern World*, 34), thus one might expect to see notable differences between Catholics who are or are not regular practisers; and ii) that low/non-practising affiliates (sometimes described to as 'nominal' adherents or the 'fuzzy faithful') are a transitional group between practising affiliates and Leavers (cf. Voas and Crockett; Voas; Lim et al.). There is, of course, a slight caveat to be raised here, since these differing levels of practice are based on *self-reports* in the BSA dataset. (The same is true for the data on prayer, discussed in section 4 below.) As is well-known, there exists a formidable body of research questioning the reliability of such measures, based on comparisons with both actual attendence counts and evidence from time-use surveys (Hadaway et al.; Presser and Stinson; Brenner, 'Exceptional Behavior'), some of it Catholic-specific (Chaves and Cavendish). Substantial over-reporting has, however, been most clearly demonstrated in the USA; evidence for the effect in Britain and the rest of Europe is substantially weaker (see Brenner, 'Exceptional Behavior'; Brenner, 'Investgating the Effect'). Hence these concerns, while important to bear in mind, are not considered to undermine the use of self-reports herein.

It should be noted that the boundary between 'regular' and less/non' practice here is somewhat arbitrary, albeit one that is commonly used within the sociology of religion. Needless to say, each category masks a good degree of internal difference. 66.3% of Regular practisers, for instance, attend church once a week or more: this equates to 18.2% of all those raised Catholic, and 29.4% of retainees as a whole. These proportions are noteworthy, since weekly attendance (at Sunday Mass) is the Catholic Church's own formal measure of a 'practising Catholic'. Likewise, whereas 54.7% of Low/non-practisers attend church 'never or practically never' (equal to 30.5% of all retainees), 24.7% of them attend 'less often than

monthly, but at least twice a year'. Incidentally, 2.7% of Leavers, and fully 45.4% of Switchers, would also count as regular practisers on the above criteria.[v]

[Table V here]

Table V and Chart II show the relationships between sex and our four categories. In general terms, these confirm the overwhelming testimony of other studies regarding the positive correlation between women and religiosity (e.g., Trzebiatowska and Bruce 1-23), and - more particularly - of the preponderance of men among religious nones (Kosmin et al.; PEW Forum). Beyond these, a number of specific points in the data are worthy of brief comment.

Firstly, if we compare Table V's Total row with the sex breakdown of the 2007-11 dataset as a whole (i.e., 45.6% male to 54.4% female; see 'Data and Methods' section above), it would appear that women are more likely than men to report having been brought up as a Catholic in the first place. This curious fact, which occurs in other Christian denominations also, admits of several possible explanations. It may be that girls are more likely to be raised religiously than are boys (cf. Voas and McAndrew). Conversely, women may be more inclined than men to interpret an ambiguous upbringing (i.e., one that was neither particularly religious, nor conspicuously nonreligious) as having been 'religious' rather than not.

Secondly, men are one and a half times as likely as women to become disaffiliates of either kind: 46.9% of men raised Catholic now no longer identify as such, compared to 31.8% of women. While only a minority of disaffiliates from both sexes have adopted a different religious affiliation, there is an evident gender difference here also. 23.2% of female disaffiliates, but only 12.3% of male disaffiliates, now affirm another (i.e., non-Catholic) religious identity, meaning that women are almost twice as likely to do so. The greatest divergence between the sexes thus occurs in the 'no religion' category, which accounts for two-fifths of all men, but a quarter of all women (see Chart II).

[Chart II here]

Thirdly, among those who have retained a Catholic identity, regular practice is markedly more prevalent among women. As is displayed in Chart II, just under a third of born-and-raised Catholic women attend church monthly or more, compared to around a fifth of men. This effect, amplified by the fact that more women identify as having been raised Catholic in the first place, can be most clearly seen in Table V: over two-thirds of Regular practisers are female. This disparity is much less evident among the Low/non-practisers, who account for roughly a third of men and women alike.

[Chart III here]

Chart III breaks down our four categories by age group. As one would expect from the earlier cohort analysis (see Chart I), disaffiliates are most prevalent among respondents in their forties (with corresponding birth years from the late 1950s to the early 1970s). Interestingly, we see that the proportions of Low/non-practisers are fairly consistently across this and all older age groups (all within a couple of percent in the low 30s). The real differences come in the proportion of Regular practisers: 37.3% of the over 70s, 34% of the 60-69s, 28.1% of 50-59s, and just 23.3% of the 40-49s. This lower proportion then holds fairly consistently among the 30-39s (24.7%) and the under 30s (23.8%). The recovery in Catholic retention evident among the younger age groups - also noted in the above cohort analysis - is thus almost wholly composed of higher numbers of Low/non-practisers.

It is of course possible that this 'recovery' is only apparent, and is the result of the under-40s cohorts *not yet* having had time to reach their full 'disaffiliation potential'. Based on previous studies, one might reasonably expect a sizable number of those surveyed in their late-teens and early twenties to become Leavers or Switchers at a later time (see Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate 6-7). That said, previous British research offers strong arguments against the existence of notable age or period effects on religious identification, at

least among the over-30s. Crockett and Voas' much-cited analysis of both British Household Panel Survey and BSA data, for instance, found 'an absence of any period or age effects over and above the generational differences' (571; cf. Schwadel for an analysis of US data).

Irrespective of the permanence of the effect, it is worth underlining the fact that it is *not* those in their late-teens, 20s and 30s, but is instead those in and around their 40s, who are most alienated, in terms of both affiliation and practice, from their cradle Catholicism. This finding runs counter to a great deal of received wisdom within Catholic pastoral circles.

4. Religious beliefs and prayer

The wisdom of dividing Catholic disaffiliates into two separate groups, however cumbersome in other respects, becomes clear as we turn now to religious beliefs and opinions, and frequency of prayer. Those who leave Catholicism in order to join another denomination or religious tradition are a distinct type of disaffiliate from those who now claim no religious affiliation whatsoever. As we shall see, in this area, Switchers have more in common with Regular practisers than they do with either Leavers or Low/non-practisers.

[Table VI here]

Unsurprisingly, Leavers score relatively low on God belief, with over half giving a fairly straightforwardly atheistic ('don't believe in God') or agnostic ('don't know') response (although note that almost one-fifth of Low/non-practisers did likewise). Nevertheless, over a fifth of Leavers affirm one of the two strongest theistic categories. This is not necessarily surprising since, as sociologists have been pointing out for almost fifty years, being religiously unaffiliated is not the same thing as being an atheist or agnostic (e.g., Vernon; Bullivant, 'Sociology'; Kosmin et al.). However on this point, former Catholic nones differ

from British nones-in-general - only around 10% of whom either 'know God really exists' or 'feel that [they] do believe in God'.

Almost three quarters of Switchers affirmed one of the two strongest theistic categories - a proportion closer to the Regular practisers' four-fifths than it is to the Low/non-practisers' half. Also like the Regulars, none of the Switchers claimed not to believe in God, and only around one in twenty expressed agnosticism (again, much nearer to the Regulars' none, than to the Low/non-practisers' one in five). Switchers do differ from Regular practisers, however, in the proportion of those affirming a 'Higher power of some kind' but not a 'personal God': 13.6% compared to the Regulars' 3.6%, a proportion much closer to both the Low/non-practisers (10.8%) and the Leavers (16.3%).

[Table VII here]

Table VII summarizes responses given to a range of basic theological questions, showing the proportion of each category who affirmed them (regardless of the 'strength' of affirmation). It is not necessary to discuss each item in detail, but similar patterns to the ones identified above emerged here also. That is to say, Leavers are not uniformly atheists or metaphysical naturalists: over two-fifths affirm some manner of life after death, almost a third believe in a heaven, and just under a fifth believe in hell, religious miracles, and that God is personally concerned with every human being. Likewise, Switchers appear largely to have done so from religious conviction: as a group, they are notably more affirming of fairly classic Christian ideas than are Low/non-practising Catholics, and - albeit with some notable variation - tend to be nearer to the Regular practisers (e.g., regarding life after death, miracles, God's concern for humans, and life being meaningful only if God exists).

[Table VIII here]

Prayer frequency (see Table VIII) is an especially interesting measure, since it captures practice - time spent actually *doing* something - instead of simply gauging opinions, which may or may not have any significance in the lives of respondents. As expected, Leavers tend to pray little, with two-thirds never doing it. Even so, slightly over one in ten prays on a monthly or more basis. Arguably the *most* prayerful group, at least in terms of praying once a week or more, are the Switchers, two-thirds of whom fit this category, slightly ahead of Regular practisers (albeit based on a relatively small sample size). This is over three times the proportion of Low/non-practisers who do so. Again, the implication is clear: those who disaffiliate in order to adopt another religious identity do not typically seem to do so out of indifference, or by default.

Conclusion

The above analysis is intended to shed *initial* light on arguably the single most striking social trend within British Catholicism over the past century: an unprecedented 'Mass exodus', in more than one sense of the phrase. Moreover, this paper has foregrounded *disaffiliation* as a discrete topic in its own right, properly distinct from the related, though much broader (and also under-researched, if less so), phenomenon of lapsation or non-practice. The main, quantitative contours of contemporary Catholic disaffiliation in Britain have been sketched: its extent both in absolute terms, and relative to other mainstream Christian denominations, as well as to earlier decades of Catholic history; notable differences according to key demographic variables of sex and age; and more tentatively, the continuing connections, or not, of disaffiliates to certain religious beliefs and practices. Where relevant, these findings have been linked to three lively though largely (and regrettably) independent sets of research literature: that charting the changing (mis)fortunes of the Catholic Church within the West, especially in the wake of Vatican II; that debating the meaning, nature,

extent and timing of secularization-in-general; and that focusing on the large and growing numbers of 'nones', especially in Britain and the USA.

To strike the traditional final note of exploratory articles such as these: there is a great deal more work to be done in this area. Hitherto much of the research into the waning of religious belief, practice, and affiliation has focused either on the very large, macro level (e.g., broad societal trends, typically collapsing 'mainline denominations' into a single graph line), or on the very small, micro (e.g., individual deconversion narratives, or the psychological characteristics of religious deconverts). While both are important and necessary, largely missing has been sustained sociological attention on how both play out, concretely, within the specific histories of individual religious denominations and communities. The data presented above - not least the notable differences in disaffiliation and conversion rates among the denominations - make a *prima facie* case for exploring further how largescale secularizing trends have been (and are being) mediated differently within different British Christian groupings. Accordingly, the bulk of this paper is intended as a first step towards doing just that for one of them.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Dr Siobhan McAndrew (University of Bristol), Dr Sarah King-Hele (University of Manchester), and Prof. David Voas (University of Essex) for their generous and patient advice and assistance. This work was supported by the British Academy under grant SQ120041.

References

Baker, Joseph and Buster Smith. 2009. "The Nones: Social Characteristics of the Religiously Unaffiliated." *Social Forces* 87.3 (2009): 1251-65.

Beaudoin, Tom. "Secular Catholicism and Practical Theology." *International Journal of Practical Theology* 15 (2011): 22-37.

Brenner, Philip S. "Exceptional Behavior or Exceptional Identity? Overreporting of Church Attendance in the U.S." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 75.1 (2011): 19-41.

Brenner, Philip S. "Investigating the Effect of Bias in Survey Measureds of Church Attendance." *Sociology of Religion* 73.4 (2012): 361-83.

Brown, Callum. *Religion and the Demographic Revolution: Women and Secularisation in Canada, Ireland, UK and USA since the 1960s*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012.

Bruce, Steve. *Religion in the Modern World: From Cathedrals to Cults*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996.

Bruce, Steve. *Secularization: In Defense of an Unfashionable Theory*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013.

Bruce, Steve, and Glendinning, Tony. "When was secularization?: Dating the decline of the British churches and locating its cause." *British Journal of Sociology* 61.1 (2010): 107-26.

Bullivant, Stephen. "Research Note: Sociology and the Study of Atheism." *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 23.3 (2008): 363-8.

Bullivant, Stephen. "Not so Indifferent After All? Self-conscious Atheism and the Secularisation Thesis." *Approaching Religion* 2.1 (2012): 100-6.

Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. "Crossing the Threshold." Accessed 24 April 2015. < http://www.cbcew.org.uk/CBCEW-Home/Departments/Evangelisation-and-Catechesis/Crossing-the-Threshold-Non-Churchgoing-Catholics/%28language%29/eng-GB>

Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate. "The Impact of Religious Switching and Secularization on the Estimated Size of the U.S. Adult Catholic Population." 2008. Accessed 24 April 2015. <http://cara.georgetown.edu/CARAServices/FRStats/Winter2008.pdf>

Chaves, Mark, and James C. Cavendish. "More Evidence on U.S. Catholic Church Attendance." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 33.4 (1994): 376-81.

Corrin, Jay P. *Catholic Progressives in England after Vatican II*. South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013.

Cragun, Ryan, and Joseph Hammer. "'One person's apostate is another person's convert': What terminology tells us about pro-religious hegemony in the sociology of religion." *Humanity and Society* 35: 159-75.

Crockett, Alasdair, and David Voas. "Generations of decline: Religious change in twentieth-century Britain." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 45.4 (2006): 567-84.

Eccles, Janet. "Rehabilitated Returners: Why Some Older Women Re-affiliate to the Christian Church." *Temenos* 47.1 (2011): 7-30.

Francis, Pope. *Evangelii Gaudium*. London: Catholic Truth Society, 2013.

Francis, Leslie J., and Philip Richter. *Gone for Good? Church-leaving and Returning in the 21st Century*. Peterborough: Epworth, 2007.

Goodhew, David, ed. *Church Growth in Britain: 1980 to the Present*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012.

Hadaway, C. Kirk, Penny Long Marler, and Mark Chaves. "What the Polls Don't Show: A Closer Look at U.S. Church Attendance." American Sociological Review 58.6 (1993): 741-52.

Harris, Alana. *Faith in the Family: A Lived Religious History of English Catholicism, 1945-82*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2013.

Hornbeck, Patrick J. "Deconversion from Roman Catholicism: Mapping a Fertile Field." *American Catholic Studies* 122.2 (2011): 1-29.

Hornsby-Smith, Michael P. *Roman Catholics Beliefs in England: Studies in Social Structure since the Second World War*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987.

Hout, Michael, and Claude S. Fischer. 2002. "Why More Americans Have No Religious Preference." *American Sociological Review* 67.2 (2002): 165-90.

King-Hele, Sarah A. "The Dynamics of Religious Change: A Comparative Study of Five Western Countries." PhD Thesis, Manchester U, 2010.

Kosmin, Barry A., Ariela Keysar, Ryan Cragun, and Juhem Navarro-Rivera. *American Nones: The Profile of the No Religion Population: A Report Based on the American Religious Identification Survey 2008*. Hartford, CT: Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society.

Lee, Lois. *Recognizing the Non-religion: Reimagining the Secular*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015.

Lim, C., C. A. MacGregor, and R. D. Putnam. "Secular and Liminal: Discovering Heterogeneity among Religious Nones." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 49.4 (2010): 596-618.

Massa, Mark S. *The American Catholic Revolution: How the Sixties Changed the Church Forever*. New York: Oxford UP, 2010.

McDannell, Colleen. *The Spirit of Vatican II: A History of Catholic Reform in America*. New York: Basic Books, 2011.

McLeod, Hugh. *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007.

Pasquale, Frank L. "Unbelief and Irreligion, Empirical Study and Neglect of." Ed. Tom Flynn. *The New Encyclopedia of Unbelief*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2007. 760-6

PEW Forum. *'Nones' on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults have no Religious Affiliation*. 2012. Accessed 24 April 2015. <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2012/10/NonesOnTheRise-full.pdf>

Presser, Stanley, and and Linda Stinson. "Data Collection Mode and Social Desirability Bias in Self-Reported Religious Attendance." *American Sociological Review* 63.1 (1998): 137-45.

Schwadel, P. "Period and Cohort Effects on Religious Nonaffiliation and Religious Disaffiliation: A Research Note." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 49.2 (2010): 311-19.

Trzebiatowska, Marta, and Steve Bruce. *Why are Women More Religious than Men?* Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012.

Vernon, Glenn M. "The Religious 'Nones': A Neglected Category." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 7.2 (1968): 219-29.

Voas, David, and Alasdair Crockett. "Religion in Britain: Neither Believing nor Belonging." *Sociology* 39.1 (2005): 11-28.

Voas, David, and Siobhan McAndrew. "Three Puzzles of Non-Religion in Britain." *Journal of Contemporary Religion*: 27.1 (2012): 29-48.

Voas, David. "The rise and fall of fuzzy fidelity in Europe." *European Sociological Review* 25.2 (2009): 155-68.

Voas, David, and Ingrid Storm. "The Intergenerational Transmission of Churchgoing in England and Australia." *Review of Religious Research* 53.4 (2012) : 377-95.

Wadsworth, M. E. J., and S. R. Freeman. "Generation Differences in Beliefs: A Cohort Study of Stability and Change in Religious Beliefs." *British Journal of Sociology* 34.3 (1983): 416-37.

Zuckerman, Phil. *Faith No More: Why People Reject Religion*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011.

[i] This choice has been made on the basis of these two variables being the most widely discussed within both scholarly treatments of secularization (relevant aspects of which will be referred to in the course of the 'Results and discussion' section), as well as in more popular treatments of Catholic decline in particular. Alongside these two, and for similar reasons, I would ideally like to have explored the influence of immigration on British Catholic affiliation and practice, with specific breakdowns of both *origin* (Ireland, Poland, Philippines, etc.) and *generational status* ('first,' 'second', and 'third generation' etc.) . Unfortunately, however, the BSA does not ask the necessary questions. Naturally, there are other, potentially significant demographic issues to be explored in connection with this overall topic (class, education, etc.). These will have to wait for future studies.

[ii] 'Lapsed' and its cognates are sometimes criticized or avoided for their allegedly pejorative overtones (see Hornbeck 8-9). Apparently less judgmental-sounding terms, such as 'non-practising', 'non-churchgoing',

'inactive', or even 'resting' have been suggested as replacements, though none has yet been widely adopted. Since lapsation is the traditional phraseology within the sociology of religion, I retain it here with the disclaimer that no pejorative sense is intended.

[iii] For interesting but irrelevant reasons, the Catholic Church in Britain is divided administratively between 'England and Wales' and 'Scotland' (Northern Ireland, meanwhile, comes under 'Ireland'). The data presented in this paper, however, relate to Britain as a whole.

[iv] 'Denomination' is used here in a non-technical sense, as a short-hand for as a common, generic grouping of Christians (e.g., Roman Catholic, Church of England/Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, etc.). Obviously, the inclusion of 'Christian - no denomination' as a denomination even in this sense is problematic. This is especially so since those selecting this category likely include representatives from a very large and varied collection of Christian groups. However, given the significant size of the grouping (it was the third most popular affiliation in the BSA 2007-11 data, after 'No religion' and 'Church of England/Anglican'), along with US research suggesting that 'non-denom' is often a meaningful self-description, it is included here as a category in its own right.

[v] Due to the precise wording of the BSA question ('Apart from such special occasions as weddings, funerals and baptisms, how often nowadays do you attend services or meetings connected with your religion?') we may assume here that the practising Leavers are attending Catholic services, while the Switchers are attending meetings or services connected with their new denomination/religion.

Table I: Retention and disaffiliation rates of major British Christian groupings, and 'No religion', 2007-11

	Current affiliation...					
Raised as...	**Same as raised in (%)**	**(Other) Christian group (%)**	**Non-Christian religion (%)**	**No religion (%)**	***Number of 'converts' per disaffiliate***	***N***
Roman Catholic	62.0	6.0	0.6	31.4	***0.1***	*2484*
Church of England/Anglican	52.1	6.8	0.6	40.5	***0.1***	*7267*
Presbyterian/Church of Scotland	51.5	9.6	0.4	38.5	***0.1***	*908*
Christian - no denomination	48.3	3.6	1.3	46.8	***0.5***	*2453*
Baptist	36.4	28.8	0.1	34.7	***0.3***	*216*
Methodist	33.7	26.2	0.8	39.3	***0.1***	*723*
No religion*	92.4	6.8	0.8	92.4	***25.7***	*2980*

Data source: BSA 2007-2011. Weighted data ('GenWt'), based on 18 512 valid cases. Only selected categories shown. *Row does not equal 100% due to 'Same as as raised in' and 'No religion' being equivalents.

.

Table II: Conversion rates of major British Christian groupings, and 'No religion', 2007-11

	Raised as...				
Current affiliation...	**Same as current (%)**	**(Other) Christian group (%)**	**Non-Christian religion (%)**	**No religion (%)**	***N***
Roman Catholic	92.8	6.4	0.0	0.8	*1659*
Church of England/Anglican	91.5	6.6	0.1	1.8	*4139*
Presbyterian/Church of Scotland	93.0	5.6	0.0	1.4	*503*
Christian - no denomination	66.4	29.1	0.2	4.3	*1785*
Baptist	62.7	31.7	0.0	5.6	*126*
Methodist	80.3	18.7	0.0	1.0	*304*
No religion*	32.1	66.6	1.3	32.1	*8586*

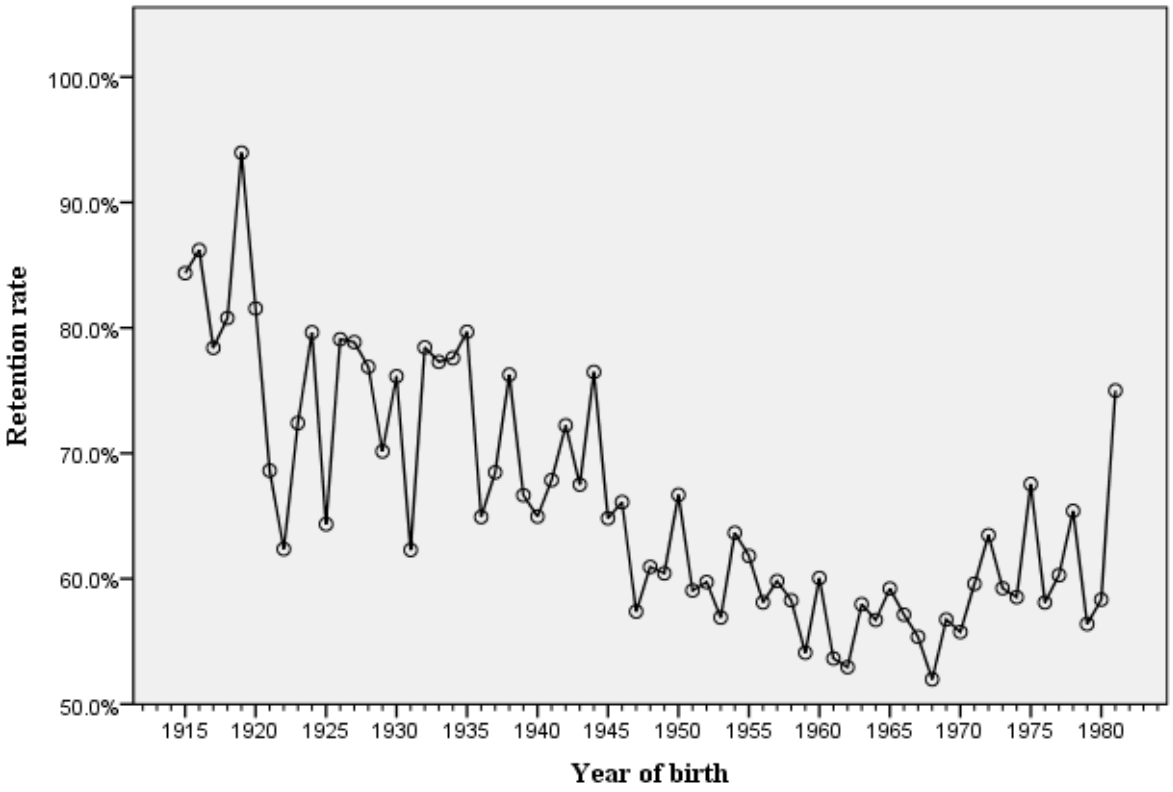
Data source: BSA 2007-2011. Weighted data ('GenWt'), based on 18 512 valid cases. Only selected categories shown. *Row does not equal 100% due to 'Same as current' and 'No religion' being equivalents.

Table III: Retention and disaffiliation rates of those raised Catholic by decade of birth, 1991-2011

	Current religious affiliation (time of survey)...					
Decade of birth	**Catholic (%)**	**Other Christian group (%)**	**Non-Christian religion (%)**	**No religion (%)**	***No. of converts per disaffiliate***	***N***
1905-14	76.2	6.0	1.2	16.7	***0.5***	*84*
1915-24	78.3	5.6	0.0	16.0	***0.5***	*374*
1925-34	74.2	5.0	0.2	20.6	***0.4***	*863*
1935-44	70.3	5.4	0.3	24.0	***0.3***	*1173*
1945-54	61.3	6.3	0.9	31.4	***0.2***	*1692*
1955-64	57.3	5.7	0.5	36.4	***0.1***	*2055*
1965-74	57.5	5.7	1.0	35.8	***0.1***	*1233*
1975-84	62.9	3.5	0.0	33.6	***0.1***	*259*
MEAN	**67.3**	**5.4**	**0.5**	**26.8**	**0.3**	**-**

Data source: BSA 1991-2011. Weighted data ('GenWt') based on 7 733 valid cases. Only respondents aged 30 or over at time of survey included. 1885-1904 birth cohort removed due to very low number of cases. Decade boundaries selected for ease of identifying post-WW2 (i.e., 1945-1954) cohort.

Chart I: Retention rate of those brought up Catholic, by respondent's year of birth (BSA 1991-2011)



Data source: BSA 1991-2011. Weighted data ('GenWt') based on 7 733 valid cases. Only respondents aged 30 or over at time of survey included. 1885-1904 birth cohort removed due to very low number of cases. Number of respondents per year ranges from 17 (1981) to 241 (1964).

Table IV: Fourfold categorization of those brought up Catholic based on current affiliation and/or religious practice, 2007-11

		N
RETAINEES (= raised Catholic, still identify as such)	***Regular practisers*** (= attend church monthly or more)	*679* (27.4%)
	Low/non-practisers (= attend church less than monthly)	*852* (34.4%)
DISAFFILIATES (= raised Catholic, no longer identify as such)	***Leavers*** (= no religion)	*350* (31.5%)
	Switchers (= other religious identification)	*106* (6.7%)
		2476 (100%)

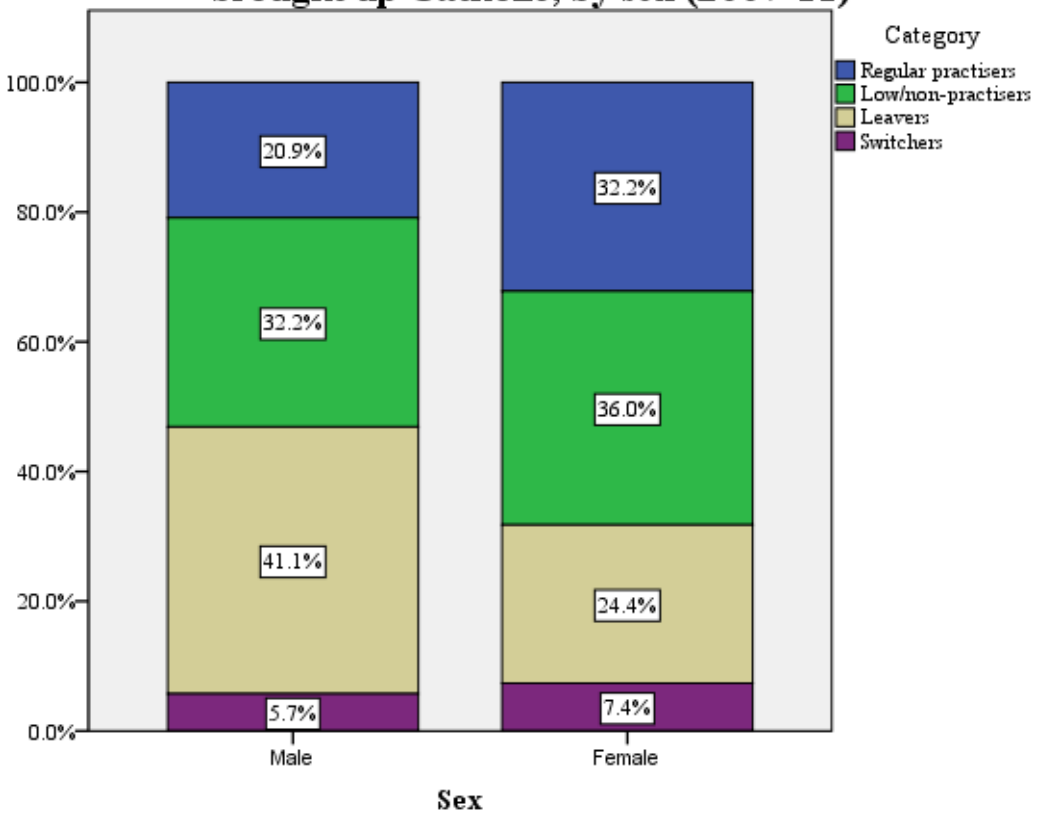
Data source: BSA 2007-2011. Weighted data ('GenWt'), based on 2476 valid cases.

Table V: Sex of those brought up Catholic, by current religious affiliation and/or practice, 2007-11

	Category	Male (%)	Female (%)	*N*
RETAINEES	Regular practisers	218 (32.1)	461 (67.9)	*679*
	Low/non-practisers	336 (39.4)	516 (60.6)	*852*
DISAFFILIATES	Leavers	429 (55.1)	350 (44.9)	*779*
	Switchers	60 (36.1)	106 (63.9)	*166*
	TOTAL	1043 (42.1)	1433 (57.9)	*2476*

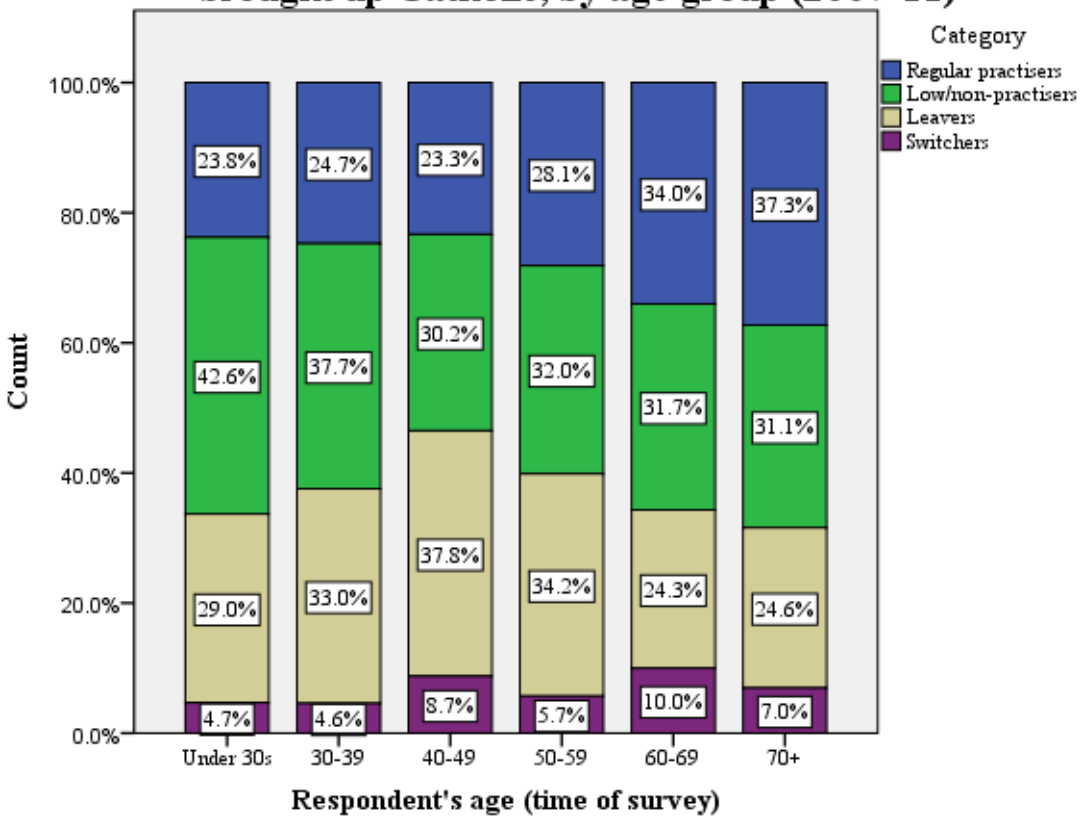
Data source: BSA 2007-2011. Weighted data ('GenWt'), based on 2476 valid cases. Regular practice = attends church once a month or more; low/no practice = attends church less than once a month (including 'never or practically never').

Chart II: Current religious affiliation and/or practice of those brought up Catholic, by sex (2007-11)



Data source: BSA 2007-2011. Weighted data ('GenWt'), based on 2476 valid cases. Regular practice = attends church once a month or more; low/no practice = attends church less than once a month (including 'never or practically never').

Chart III: Current religious affiliation and/or practice of those brought up Catholic, by age group (2007-11)



Data source: BSA 2007-11. Wieghted data ('GenWt'), based on 2474 valid cases. Regular practice = attends church once a month or more; low/no practice = attends church less than once a month (including 'never or practically never').

Table VI: Levels of belief in God of those brought up Catholic, by current religious affiliation and/or practice (2008)

	Don't believe in God	*Don't know whether there is, and don't believe any way to find out*	*Don't believe in a personal God, but believe in Higher power of some kind*	*Find myself believing in God some of the time, but not at others*	*While have doubts, feel that I do believe in God*	*Know God really exists and have no doubts about it*
Regular practisers	0.0%	0.0%	3.6%	14.5%	32.7%	49.1%
Low/non-practisers	1.1%	17.2%	10.8%	19.4%	32.3%	19.4%
Leavers	26.7%	30.2%	16.3%	4.7%	16.3%	5.8%
Switchers	0.0%	4.5%	13.6%	9.1%	27.3%	45.5%
Mean Response	9.4%	16.8%	11.3%	12.5%	26.6%	23.4%

Data source: BSA 2008. Weighted data ('GenWt') based on 255 valid cases. Question only asked to A and B groups of respondents.

Table VII: Selected religious opinions of those brought up Catholic, by current religious affiliation and/or practice (2008)

	Belief in/that...					
	*Life after Death?**	*Heaven?**	*Hell?**	*Religious miracles?**	*God personally concerns self with every human?^*	*Life only meaningful because God exists?^*
Regular practisers	74.5%	86.5%	63.7%	86.0%	76.3%	42.0%
Low/non-practisers	61.2%	59.1%	49.5%	52.2%	36.3%	14.9%
Leavers	43.6%	29.1%	18.9%	19.3%	17.7%	4.8%
Switchers	72.7%	66.6%	35.0%	75.0%	61.9%	52.0%
Mean Response	58.6%	55.8%	40.4%	49.8%	41.0%	20.3%

Data source: BSA 2008. Weighted data ('NewWt') based on 240-250 valid cases, depending on which question asked. Questions only asked to A and B groups of respondents. * Those answering either 'Yes, definitely' or 'Yes, probably'. ^ Those answering either 'Strongly agree' or 'Agree'.

Table VIII: Prayer frequency of those brought up Catholic, by current religious affiliation and/or practice (2008)

	Once a week or more	*At least monthly, but less than weekly*	*Less than monthly, but at least once a year*	*Sometimes, but less than yearly*	*Never*
Regular practisers	64.2%	17.0%	13.2%	0.0%	5.7%
Low/non-practisers	21.1%	18.9%	26.6%	12.2%	22.2%
Leavers	4.8%	8.3%	11.9%	8.3%	66.7%
Switchers	66.7%	14.3%	9.5%	0.0%	9.5%
Mean Response	28.6%	14.5%	16.9%	7.3%	32.7%

Data source: BSA 2008. Weighted data ('NewWt') based on 251 valid cases. Question only asked to A and B groups of respondents.