

***Professor Richard Rymarz, Head of
Religious Education and Director of
Research***





Religious Attitudes and Practices of Australian Catholic School Students

Some background

Catholic schools in Australia are currently enrol around 20% of the entire student population.

In 2012 there were 735,403 students enrolled in Australian Catholic schools. By 2025 the number of students enrolled in Australian Catholic schools is projected to rise to 950,000.***



most of this growth is in non
Catholic enrolments.



Currently the national figures for non Catholic enrolment is around 30% but this is expected to rise



**In 2015 for the first time the
total number of Catholic
students in Catholic schools in
Australia fell**



Starter question.

A typical Catholic school student can be described by the following.....



Students in Catholic schools
represent an important sub group
of the population.



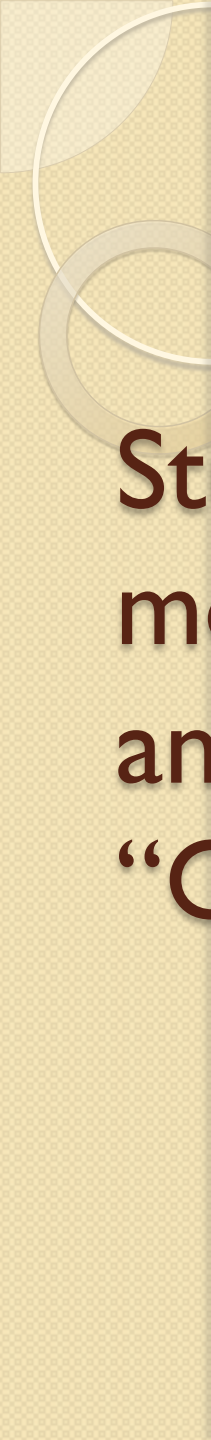
The study I will be reporting on is an ongoing one that examines responses in Sydney Catholic schools at Years 5, 7, 9 and 11/12.



There were over 14000 (2016 survey), males (48.8) and females (51.0%). Consisted of 47 questions involving Likert scale responses or asking students to rank order responses.

Other aspects

- Short answers
- Longitudinal
- Qualitative follow up to investigate school variation and other issues)



Students in Catholic schools are more religious than national norms and there is evidence for the “Catholic plateau”



Church attendance rates

	Each Sunday (%)	A Few Sundays a month or Once a Month	Only at School	Never
Year 5	22.4	33.3	22.5	1
Year 11	17.7	18.1	28.7	4.5
Entire Sample (Year 5,7,9 and 11)	19.5	17.2	26.2	2.4



Theological responses, (Catholics only)

Question	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree
I believe that Jesus is truly God and truly man Responses for Years 5, 7, 9 and 11.	83.9 (5)	11.9	3.8
	78.2 (7)	14.7	6.5
	65.6 (9)	22.5	11.2
	61.2 (11)	25.7	12.8



Frequency of prayer

	Each Day (%)	Regularly	A Few Times a Year	Never
Year 5	53.5	23.4	4.2	1.7
Year 7	39.4	26.3	7.3	4.2
Year 9	33.8	21.4	10	8.5
Year 11	28.2	19.8	13	12.1



**And some responses where
there is no plateau**

Question	Strongly Agree/ Agree (%)	Neutral	Strongly disagree/ Disagree
It's OK to pick and choose religious beliefs without having to accept all the teachings of one's religion	42.9 (5)	29.1	27.8
	41.9 (7)	31.4	25.9
	41.2 (9)	32.4	25.5
	44 (11)	31.8	23.7



**Living out your religion...what
are the most important things?**

	Least important (ranked 5 or 6)	Most important (ranked 1 or 2)
Social justice/ outreach		
Going to Mass regularly		
Following the teachings and example of Jesus		

	Least important (ranked 5 or 6)	Most important (ranked 1 or 2)
Social justice/ outreach	52.8	21.3
Going to Mass regularly	28.2	25.4
Following the teachings and example of Jesus	8.9	56.6



Interesting comparisons between Catholic and non Catholic students



Responses to statement: I believe in God (Catholic students only in brackets)

	Year 5	Year 7	Year 9	Year 11
Strongly agree/ agree (%)	83.9 (84.9)	78.2 (82)	65.6 (70.4)	61.2 (67.4)
Neutral	11.9 (11.3)	14.7 (13)	22.5 (21.4)	25.7 (32.2)
Strongly disagree/ disagree	3.8 (3.5)	6.5 (4.5)	11.2 (7.6)	12.8 (8)



**Religion influences the way I
live my life**

	Year 5	Year 7	Year 9	Year 11
Strongly agree/ agree (%)	68.9 (70.1)	55.9 (57.9)	44.9 (47.1)	47.2 (48.8)
Neutral	21.6 (21.2)	26.0 (26.3)	29.1 (29.6)	28.3 (29.5)
Strongly disagree/ disagree	8.6 (7.9)	16.5 (14.3)	24.5 (21.9)	23.3 (20.5)



Some general findings



Significant “immigrant effects”

“Eastern suburbs effect”

largely minor differences between
males and female responses



Picking up on a very significant
social trend...The rise of the
“nones”



Comparison between Catholic and those who nominate no religion



Interlude question: What do you think these will show?



Let's now look at some of this data



**Morals are a matter of
personal choice because there
are no definite rights or
wrongs**

Morals....	Strongly agree/ agree	Neutral	Strongly disagree/ agree
Catholic students	55.8	30.5	12.9
Students who nominated no religion	46.6	31.8	20.8



Perceived influences. The most important?

Family	Least important (ranked 5 or 6)	Most important (ranked 1 or 2)
Catholic students	1.3	92.6
Students who nominated no religion	1.9	92.6



Some other interesting findings

Prayer	Each day	Regularly	A few times a year	Never
Catholic students	43.4	21.4	8.8	4.7
Students who nominated no religion	11.6	8.5	16	50



What about belief in God?

I Believe in God	Strongly disagree /disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree/ agree
Catholic students			
Students who nominated no religion			

I Believe in God	Strongly disagree /disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree/ agree
Catholic students	4.6	12.7	82.5
Students who nominated no religion	46.9	33	19.8

I want to know more about religion	Yes	No
Catholic students	67.2	31.7
Students who nominated no religion	33.4	65.3



OK last one! Of those students who nominate no religion on the survey 40.5 % are in Year 11 (compare with the Year 5 figure 10.5%)



Let's take a break!

**And then discuss what you think
these results mean for your
work**

Some analytical points

- Students in Catholic schools irrespective of formal affiliation may have more religious similarities that is acknowledged. What does this say about the dominant cultural influences on them?
- There is ample evidence that students as they move across the school develop a looser religious affiliation. Does this influence our pastoral practise?

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- **What about the “nones”**



A more propositional approach

One response to these findings is to consider a propositional approach.

One of the aims here is to create a school culture where the questions of students are given a very high priority.



And some more general points



There are large numbers of students who can be considered to be religious in a traditional sense.



**And large numbers who could
be seen as neutral**



**Is this religion *al la carte*,
where individuals choose
what aspects of religion suit
them and their situation.**



**Can we talk about a common
worldview?**



Future Directions

Need to see Catholic schools and the students in them students in a more differentiated way. How do Catholic schools address the range of students



More qualitative work.....so
you pray a lot – tell me more



In 2018 we do it all over again!



**Any new thoughts on the typical
Catholic school student?**

