And Then There Were "Nones"

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Abstract

Fifty percent of Catholic-raised individuals under the age of 30 identify as former Catholics (Manhlos-Weber & Smith, 2018). Therefore, understanding the rationale of former Catholics leaving the faith is of the utmost importance to retention and ministry efforts. In this study, twelve participants, all identifying as former Catholics, were interviewed about their experience growing up Catholic and what led them to their current religious identity. Using the disaffiliation themes: "dissenter", "injured", and "drifters" (McCarty & Vitek, 2018) the interviews were coded and examined to determine if these three disaffiliation themes encompassed the narratives of the participants. The results from our qualitative analysis and implications will be discussed.

Participant Demographics

		n	%
Gender Identity	Female	8	66.7
	Male	3	25
	Other	1	8.3
Religious Identity	Agnostic	3	25
	Atheist	3	25
	Christian	1	8.3
	Not Religious	2	16.7
	Spiritual	2	16.7
	Unsure	1	8.3
Racial Identity	White	6	50
	Latinx	3	25
	Multi-racial	2	16.7
	Black	1	8.3
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexual	8	66.7
	Gay	2	16.7
	Bisexual	1	8.3
	Other	1	8.3
	M (range)	**SD**	
Age	21.166 (19-25)	1.69	
Years in Current Religious Identity	5.21	2.189	

Dissenter

Social/Moral Teachings

- Judgmental church beliefs
- LGBTQ teachings
- Reproductive Rights (birth control and abortion)
- Sexual morals
- Religion is not the only way to be moral

"I've always just seen or heard stories about like gay people being kicked out of their Church…and I never really agreed with that…why are you denying someone their relationship with God if that's what you're trying to force onto everyone else?"

Dogmas Teachings

- Nature of God (is God real/good/a man?)
- Nature of Sin (original sin, what is sinful)
- Who goes to Heaven/Hell?
- Priests are not better than us/good by default
- Are mediums real?
- Science and Religion are opposites

"he's not white, he could be anything, he could be a woman or he could be black, it doesn't matter. Like, we don't know what he looks like and why does he have to be, um male or female? So like, yeah."

Dislike of "organized" Religion

- Organized religion sets unrealistic expectations
- Organized religion is like a cult
- Indulgences

"But I remember him my boyfriend joking, well after the mass that like, it was so culty…and I was like, um ya I agree"

Injured

Fear of God

- Being damned to hell
- Taking without giving
- Absence of God's presence (why would god make me feel this way?)

"My first kind of realizing that I didn't really like this Catholicism, not questioning too much because I still believed in God so I didn't want to like burn in hell"

"'kay God will provide, yes I always believed that [God] would bring my dad back, but…what if he didn't? Like what if…he came back in a box?...if God is real, and if God is like merciful, why am I wondering?"

Bad Teaching

- Forced participation
- Redefining reality (Adam and Eve: fact or metaphor)
- Over emphasis by adults on damnation and Hell
- Pray as a fix-all (prayers unanswered: Father goes back to war)

"I felt like when I was going to Church every week that was kind of forced upon me and I didn't want to have that relationship."

"I remember him telling us that Adam- the story of Adam and Eve isn't true, and our whole class being shocked. Like, we were all so pissed, we were like, are you kidding me?... I felt like quite betrayed."

Death of Someone close

- Parent
- Faith mentor (Priest)

"My mom did everything right; she worked for local charities…helped with the church...was a good mother…she got so sick and passed away really challenged… [the idea of God] for me. If she was a good person bad things shouldn't have happened to her."

Bad Catholics

- Identifies bad things church has done (Crusades, Inquisition, Sex abuse)
- Family criticizes church/ made fun of faith (Father makes fun of mass)
- Church is hypocritical (judgmental nuns and Laity, family actions, Gossip)
- Questioning faith lead to family/friends turning away from them

"I would say that I have a fear of what organized religion can do…because of course historically we've seen what or – organized can do like the Crusades – Hello!...I mean kind of a genocide"

"The fact that… [Catholics] had horrible opinions about gay people…shocked me at the time…the fact that a lot of them would like get together after the Mass… [and] gossip about one another...that really discouraged me from like going to Mass."

"I remember one time at [CCD]…I told one of my friends…I don't believe in God . And he got like, so upset [with me]."

Drifter

Lack of Community

- Didn't feel like they had a place in church
- Faith lost after leaving a faith setting
- Lack of faith role modeling
- Felt uncomfortable at church or around faith presence
- A Strong faith presence left church (death or moved)
- Changing parishes
- Siblings left faith

"My dad would like purposely wake up late…my mom would still be like, "we're still going, like this is gonna happen." … [but if] we didn't find a good Church to my mom…we didn't go to Mass at all.

Lack of Faith being Prioritized (By self/home)

- Life prioritizes time over religious practices
- No strong habits of pray
- No guidance to faith (parental)
- Only attended church when convenient
- Lack of parental enforcement
- No regular mass attendance
- Lack of parental modeling (rare moments of showing faith)

"my mom would go through like…wanting us to go to Church so we would go to Church every Sunday for a couple weeks until everyone got tired of it. Cause… we're busy… so…. It was hard to always go. So it was kind of like on and off."

Faith didn't feel right/Lack of Connection to the "So what" of faith

- Faith was poorly taught (no passion in teaching, no explanations)
- Culture and past keeps a connection to a religion
- Was a default catholic, no real connection
- No real reason to stay in faith other than obligation
- Doesn't care about faith
- Didn't want to go to church (tedious, lack of enjoyment, inconvenient)
- Parents are bad at explaining (no in depth conversation)

"But do I really completely trust? Do I have like full faith?...I just didn't really care. It was just something that I had to do but like now that I'm confirming it, like do I really want to confirm it?"

Discussion

- Most participants do not fit under just one category, rather each have multiple qualities of each disaffiliation theme
- Those who mentioned dissenter themes more often brought up disagreement with the churches teachings/beliefs than organized religion
- Themes of injury were often tied to traumatic experiences (not all exclusively religious in origin) but can be linked to affecting their faith in a negative way
- Participants with drifter tendencies can relate their disaffiliation of the faith to personal and environmental factors that never created a bond strong enough to keep a connection to faith

Implication

- Being able to understand the motivations behind peoples disaffiliation with Catholicism can help those in the faith improve long term retention rates among young Catholics
- While not all injuries are directly related to the faith, they all in someway affect faith, therefore being able to respond correctly and create healthy attribution habits to ones injury could benefit long term faith connection
- Creating a healthy connection to ones faith early could improve retention rates

Future Direction

- A study looking at how current identifying Catholics respond to these three themes of disaffiliation could shed light on healthy coping habits
- A study looking for these themes in former non-catholic identifying