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**JOURNEYING WITH GOD:  
Spirituality and participation in faith related activities  
among Catholic youth in Whangarei**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Philosophy in Social Work

in the Social Policy and Social Work Programme, School of Health and  
Social Services at  
Massey University

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**2008**

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines the spirituality and participation in faith-based activities of young Catholics in Whangarei, New Zealand. Six youth aged 16-17 years have shared their experiences in several areas of Catholicism such as religious attendance, Catholic identity and Catholic faith, morals and values, peer group socialisation and religious commitment. Using a qualitative mixed-methodological approach with the underlying philosophical stance of interpretivism, the intent of the study is to discover ways in which these young Catholics integrate their faith into their daily lives and make meaning out of it. It also compares the religious beliefs and values of Catholic youth in Whangarei to those reported worldwide.

The findings reveal many similar themes to those from international studies. Although all of the participants in this study possessed a distinct sense of ‘spirituality’ and being ‘Catholic’ was a very important part of their identity, not all of them seemed to consider it practical to live out their Catholic beliefs. Similarly, although they did not face any insurmountable challenges in practicing their faith in daily life, only a few of them had strong convictions about their faith and, like their peers in other countries, only a few could concretely list the core Catholic beliefs. Concepts of moralistic therapeutic deism were found to affect half the participants while nuances of moralistic relativism were also prevalent. Results also showed a growing disinterest in attending Mass, participating in the sacrament of Confession, leading an active prayer life, being a part of church youth activities and some difficulty in finding similar peer group support. Overall, the findings presented in this thesis suggested that the participants involved in the study could be separated into two groups on the basis of their differing spiritual levels and commitment to the Catholic faith

The findings suggest a need for Catholic youth in Whangarei to be supported in their spiritual development in order to help them grow in their Catholic faith. Accordingly, the main recommendations are for community-based services such as providing a variety of youth programmes/groups to engage young people and finding ways to facilitate the secure engagement of youth in a dialogue about their faith and religion, in order to spiritually encourage, nourish and sustain them at whatever stage they might be at.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This work would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of my supervisors, Tracie Mafileo and Andrew Trlin, under whose guidance I began this thesis. I thank them for their expert advice all throughout and their patience and perseverance in helping me complete it.

I would also like to thank all the youth who willingly gave their time and efforts to be a part of this study and shared their personal experiences with me. Many thanks also to Fr. Tom O'Connor- the parish priest of Whangarei, Mrs. Madeleine Armstrong- the principal of Pompallier Catholic College and Andrea Cook for their invaluable assistance in conducting the research for this project.

I cannot end without thanking Alwyn, my husband, and my family, on whose constant encouragement and love I have relied on during the course of this thesis. I could not have done it without them.

I dedicate this thesis to all young people on their spiritual journey as they seek for truth. I sincerely hope that they will find the answers they are looking for.

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The concept of spirituality has long been accepted as a component of regular social work practice. Authors such as Sermabeikian (1994), Carroll (1998) and Canda & Furman (1999) among others have stressed the utmost importance of the spiritual dimension and its inclusion in the holistic healing of clients. However, given the diversity of religious beliefs and spiritual practices existing in society today, this proves to be a difficult task. It is therefore highly essential for social workers to have a good understanding of their own spiritual beliefs as well as other relevant religious traditions, beliefs and experiences (Crompton, 1998; Svare, Jay, Bruce, & Owens-Kane, 2003)

As a person matures, his or her spiritual beliefs continue to change and evolve. This research project focuses on the spirituality of Catholic youth aged 16-17 years. The spirituality of a young person during this stage is in its developing phase and concrete beliefs are not yet formed (Fowler, 1981). Scott (2003) believes that the high intensity and focus in life experience that accompanies a coming of age passage is an opportune moment to study spiritual development, perception and values. In New Zealand, various attempts have been made by the government in recent years, to understand young people and develop schemes and programmes to help them more effectively (Barwick, 2006). Previous research has demonstrated the correlation between spirituality, or spiritual wellbeing, and coping mechanisms and resilience in young people in areas such as substance abuse, mental health, physical health, and general life satisfaction (for example Wallace and Foreman, 1998; Cotton, Larkin, Hoopes, Cromer & Rosenthal, 2005; Nagel & Sgoutas-Emch, 2007). However, while other countries like the U.S. and Australia have widely researched youth spirituality, in New Zealand there exists a distinct lack of literature on the subject. With an aim of attempting to bridge this gap, this research project looks at the spirituality of six Catholic young people in Whangarei, New Zealand.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

Many authors express the viewpoint that Christianity, in particular Catholicism, has become too structured for this day and age and does not relate to young people (see, for example, Duthie-Jung, 2002; Tacey, 2004). They advocate a change from old rigid traditions to an acceptance of newer forms of practicing faith. The lack of available literature on youth spirituality in New Zealand however makes it difficult to apply these theories here. This led me to formulate certain questions for this research project. The purpose of this study is therefore threefold:

- To explore the spirituality of Catholic youth in Whangarei aged 16-20.
- To discover ways in which a young Catholic integrates the Catholic faith into his/her daily life and makes meaning out of it.
- To compare the religious beliefs and values of Catholic youth in Whangarei to those reported in the literature for other Catholic youth around the world.

In order to achieve this purpose, this study begins by examining the literature available on the conceptualization of spirituality and on youth spirituality. As well, significant research done in recent times exploring the spiritual dimension of youth has also been studied. These studies informed the design of the framework for this research.

Drawing upon these investigations, this qualitative study has examined the experiences of Catholic youth, including their participation in faith related activities and the integration of their spiritual worldview. It has sought to find out how Catholic youth view Catholic spirituality from a contemporary stance and how it helps them progress in the modern world. Emphasis was placed on different ways in which each individual participates in various religious activities and finds a spiritual connectedness that makes meaning for their lives.

Participants for this research were drawn from a range of youth groups and activities currently operating within the Catholic parish of Whangarei. It is hoped that their experiences may shed light on their spiritual beliefs and practices. Also, by comparing these findings with the experiences of other Catholic youth worldwide, as reported in the

literature, the similarities and/or differences noted will add to the current information available on young people's spirituality in New Zealand.

## **RATIONALE FOR UNDERTAKING THIS PROJECT**

Youth work has always been a passion of mine. I hail from Bombay in India, and ever since my involvement with various youth groups within the Catholic Church at a young age, I have grown up leading other young people. I immigrated to New Zealand in 2002, where my job as a youth coordinator for a social service organization, gave me a chance to inspire and mentor young people towards working positively for a better society. In doing so, I developed a relationship with many youth and began to learn about their lives and experiences - a process which I found very interesting.

My current studies have given me tremendous insight into the situation of youth and youth work in New Zealand in a detailed manner. I realised that this is an area that is still in its developmental phase. While countries such as the UK (Gilchrist, 2001) and Australia (Irving, 1995) have long since worked out strategies for their young people, New Zealand has only very recently begun to realise the vast potential that lies in fostering the growth of this significant section of the society (Martin, 2002).

Given the diversity of young people's faith and belief patterns that exist in today's day and age, an exploration of the spiritual lives of Catholic youth is important, even though they may all profess to have similar religious values (Nesbitt, 2001). The research findings will have implications for social work practitioners, assisting them to relate to Catholic youth with greater understanding. Although these results will be specific to current participants and will reflect their personal faith journeys, it will, in a small way, help bridge the gap in the lack of literature currently available in the field of young people's spirituality in New Zealand.

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

Given the vast area that this topic could cover, it becomes necessary to give a clear definition of the terms used.

- ***‘Spirituality’*** here is defined according to Pellebon & Anderson (1999) as being ‘a set of personal beliefs derived from the individual’s perception of self and his or her relationship to both the natural world and some metaphysical realm.’ This definition of spirituality seems appropriate since it subsumes a definition of Religion in it (p. 230). A similar approach therefore has been taken for this project, conceptualizing spirituality as that which would include some aspect of Religious Consciousness.
- ***‘Youth’*** (or young people) described in this study are defined as being people aged 16-20. This age group was chosen since during this stage of older adolescence, the development of interpretive capacities and understanding of abstract spiritual concepts begin to increase (Walker, 2005). Also, as Fowler (1981) notes, most young people in adolescence, progress from having a tacit commitment to the views of important reference groups around them, to possessing a more ‘owned’ and personalised faith, one that arises from critical introspection of one’s own belief’s and values. This makes it easier to study perceptions and attitudes regarding spirituality and spiritual practices.
- The term ***‘Catholic Youth’*** is operationally defined as youth who have been active participants in the Catholic faith for two years or more. This involves those who have been attending Mass and participating in other Catholic rituals and practices.

## THE ORGANISATION OF THIS THESIS

This chapter presents the background and purpose of this study. Chapter Two presents literature available on youth spirituality. This includes the conceptual understanding of

'youth spirituality' and the examination of several developmental theories. As well, some of the pertinent research on the spirituality of young people is studied. This has largely emanated from outside New Zealand and has been the work of scholars from Britain, the United States of America and Australia. Several common themes drawn from this research have informed the nature of this study and have influenced the designs and methods used for this thesis.

Chapter Three outlines the theoretical perspectives and methodology for this qualitative research. This chapter also details the working design of this study, describing the invitation to youth to participate and procedures for selecting the final six participants. The interview process has been explained as have methods for processing the data and analysing the results of the study. Finally, a discussion follows on the limitations of the study and the ethical issues that arose during the course of the thesis.

Chapters Four, Five and Six present and discuss the data collected during the fieldwork component of the research. Each of these chapters has been further sub - divided into themes, using the processes described in the data analysis section of the Methodology chapter, in order to provide a comprehensive discussion of all the issues studied in this project.

Chapter Four starts off with a brief introduction of each of the participants who were studied. Each of the six participants is identified collectively in terms of their age and background. The pseudonyms chosen by them ensure their confidentiality and make it possible to follow their views throughout these chapters. Following this, it presents a discussion of and reflection upon 'spirituality' as experienced by the youth involved in this study. As well, it centres on their identities as Catholic youth and their attitudes, beliefs and perceptions about spirituality, the Catholic faith and God.

Chapter Five examines the participants' religious attendance and participation in faith-related activities. It also reviews their perceptions of their future religious commitment.

Chapter Six explores how the participants apply their Catholic beliefs to their daily life. It studies their morals and values and discusses the influence of their Catholic beliefs on the moral code that they live by. The second section of the chapter examines the role played

by the participants' peer groups in shaping their Catholic beliefs and practices, as well as the challenges faced by the participants in daily living their Catholic faith.

Chapter Seven is the final chapter which begins by drawing together and briefly summarizing the main findings of the spiritual perspectives of the youth. It then proceeds to compare the findings to the literature sources for results and conclusions. To my knowledge there has been no previous study which has included qualitative information specific to and about Catholic youth in New Zealand and their spiritual experiences.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter reviews the research literature available on youth spirituality and highlights the practice of Catholic spirituality by young people in the modern world. Research on youth spirituality is relatively sparse both within New Zealand and overseas. The Society for Research on Adolescent's Study Group on 'Adolescence in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' concluded that spiritual and religious values and experiences were among the neglected areas of research (Larson, Wilson & Mortimer, 2002). From whatever literature is available, a significant amount of it is outdated and bears little relevance to current trends.

Much of the research done on the spirituality of adolescents is derived from datasets constructed for other purposes, for example, health, behavioural patterns, and so on. In these studies, the aspect of individual spirituality is briefly referred to. Other research material available is usually data obtained from national government surveys, for example censuses, where the religious beliefs of youth are identified. In-depth studies on an individual's spirituality have only begun emerging in recent years and are considered to be of prime importance in an attempt to comprehend the richness in this field (Benson, 2004). By marrying the available research with literature on different aspects of youth spirituality, one is able to contextualise the phenomenon.

With a view to explore youth spirituality, the chapter begins by an attempt at first understanding the concept of 'spirituality' in the Catholic religion. This is followed by a discussion of the various theories regarding the faith development of young people, giving us insight into the fragile, vulnerable spiritual world of an adolescent. Following this, research done on the spiritual experiences of young people is examined. This is divided into two sections: (a) research done in countries such as the US and UK; and (b) research done in Australia and New Zealand. The main issues that emerge from the research on youth spirituality are highlighted and discussed in the concluding section.

## **CONCEPTUALIZING SPIRITUALITY:**

A vast amount of literature can be found which discusses the nature of spirituality and the critical part it plays in shaping the holistic personality of an individual. A key debate however has arisen over the definition of the term 'spirituality'. Some authors consider it to be one aspect of an individual's persona (Siporin, 1986, Bullis, 1996, Canda 1988a) while others believe it to be the fundamental and central aspect of any person (Sermabeikian, 1994, Cowley & Derezotes, 1994). Carroll (1998) terms these two views as 'Spirituality-as-One-Dimension' and 'Spirituality-as-Essence' and recommends the use of both in conceptualizing the meaning of spirituality. This viewpoint is also supported by Canda & Furman (1999) who advocate the use of a '*transemic approach*', that is, one which incorporates all the particular perspectives brought into interaction with each other.

In spite of these differences that exist among several authors over the exact definition of spirituality, a general trend that emerges from several works is that spirituality involves a human being's search for meaning in life (Joseph, 1988; Siporin, 1985; Titone, 1991; Canda, 1988a & 1990; Sermabeikian, 1994). It is generally a developmental process (Bullis, 1996; Carroll, 1998), which may include a relationship with God or a transcendent being or something greater than oneself (Canda, 1988a, Carroll, 1994, Derezotes 1995) and at times may be associated with an organised religion (Canda, 1989).

### **Catholic Spirituality:**

Some contemporary perspectives maintain that spirituality is often confused with religiosity (e.g. Sermabeikian, 1994; Cascio, 1998) and various authors such as Burke et al. (1999), Derezotes (1995), Pellebon & Anderson (1999) and Titone (1991) have clearly differentiated between the two. Canda and Furman (1999, p. 37) in particular, define spirituality as 'a universal and fundamental aspect of what it is to be human – search for a sense of meaning, purpose and moral frameworks for relating with self, others and the ultimate reality'. As compared to that, they define 'religion' as 'an institutionalised pattern of beliefs, behaviours and experiences oriented towards spiritual concerns and



shared by a community and transmitted over time in traditions'. However this dissection of 'religion' from 'spirituality' is not compatible with a Catholic or even Christian spirituality since it requires a blend of the two (Thomas, 2000, Eastham, 2002)

Christian spirituality has long since been associated with churchgoing and other religious traditions and customs, although it has undergone a number of changes through the ages. As Rossiter (2005) explains, if one discussed 'spirituality' in the 1960s, it would be commonly understood that one was talking about traditional Christian religious practice. Similarly, if one spoke of 'Catholic Spirituality', it would invariably be linked to the spiritual life of religious orders - being strongly theological and scriptural, psychological and reflective, involving prayer and spiritual input of some sort. Rossiter's views correspond with research findings from an inter-generational study in the U.S. done by Williams & Davidson (1996).

In an attempt to study how Catholics of different generations viewed their faith, Williams & Davidson studied three age cohorts; the first who grew up in the 1930s-40s, the second in the 1950s-60s and the third who came of age in the 1970s-80s. The results showed stark differences in attitudes and opinions of the Catholic faith. Those who grew up before Vatican II i.e. in the 1930-40s viewed their faith principally in institutional terms. They indicated that a Catholic identity, participation in the sacraments, and overall commitment to the church were essential to relating with God. They saw little difference between involvement with the church and relating to God because for them, the two were deeply interconnected. The next group described their faith as being less institutionally based than those who came of age before them although some reflected institutional notions of faith that were similar to the views of pre-Vatican II Catholics. The post-Vatican II generation possessed the most individualistic views of their faith. They were more concerned with whether an individual was a 'good person' and had a 'personal relationship with God' and did not describe the church as an essential component of their faith. Results from the study led the authors to report that differences between young and old Catholics were due, in part, to a 'cohort effect,' and not just an 'age effect'. The religious upbringing of the youngest cohort of Catholics differed greatly to that of the pre-Vatican II and Vatican II Catholics thus resulting in alternative opinions and ways of relating to the faith.

These views of the third cohort would best correspond to young people in the current generation who have grown up with post-Vatican II values of freedom, individuality and open-mindedness. Often these principles are undervalued by today's youth, without realising the dramatic changes made by Vatican II to church life and teachings. For example, as Bono (2005, p. 15) notes:

[These students] never experienced the pre-conciliar world of Mass in Latin with the priest's back to the people or the lack of widespread lay participation in the administration of parish life. The students[s] live in a world where dialogue rather than suspicion marks relations with other religions.

These changes among others have made a profound difference in the ways in which today's generation relates to the Catholic faith. Furthermore, contemporary secular views existing today have isolated spirituality from its religious containers, and these influences have crept into Christian spirituality as well. As a result, spirituality has been sharply distinguished from religion as something superior to and more important than religion, and that which is essentially a matter of the inner or interior life (as compared to religion being a matter of the outer life), and that therefore spirituality is essentially concerned with private life rather than public life (Thomas, 2000). And while this phenomenon may be prevalent among other Christian denominations as well, it has sharply affected the spiritual lives of many within the Catholic faith.

Rolheiser (1998) disagrees with the concept of spirituality as being exotic and esoteric. He views spirituality to be something more primitive. In attempting to explain a Christian spirituality, he defines it as something which is about how we channel our Eros- the fire within us; or what we do with our spirit or soul. Rolheiser (1998, p. 53) proposes four nonnegotiable 'pillars' which form the essentials of Christian spirituality. These are: 'a) Private prayer and private morality; b) social justice; c) mellowness of heart and spirit and d) community as a constitutive element of true worship.' These four principles when present in an individual constitute a healthy, balanced Christian life. However, this balance cannot be the ultimate goal of spirituality. Rolheiser indicates that for a Christian, belief in the incarnation of Christ (God becoming man) is of paramount importance. 'Christian spirituality is not as much about admiring God, or even trying to imitate God, as it is about undergoing God and participating, through taking part in the

ordinary give and take of relationships, in the flow of God's life' (Rolheiser, 1998, p. 101).

Additionally, the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994, p. 8) lists four main points which form the basis of Catholic teaching. These distinguish Catholicism from basic Christian values in a few specific ways. They are as follows:

- The profession of faith (The Creed) which is a summary of all the gifts that God gives man.
- The sacraments of faith which explain how God's salvation was accomplished once and for all through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit and is made present in the sacred actions of the Church's liturgy;
- The life of faith (the Commandments) which deals with the final end of man created in the image of God; beatitude and ways of reaching it – through freely chosen right conduct and the help of God's law and grace and through conduct that fulfils the twofold commandment of charity, specified in the Ten Commandments; and
- Prayer in the life of faith – this explains the meaning and importance of prayer in the life of the believer and focuses on the seven petitions of the Lord's Prayer.

Catholic spirituality does not have one sole definition. The spiritual life of a lay person calls for 'a continuous exercise of faith, hope and charity' (Flannery, 1975, p.770). Aumann (1985) defines it broadly as 'Conversion to God through faith and baptism in the Holy Spirit, and love of God and neighbour in the fellowship of Jesus Christ.' Living out the Catholic faith in daily life is what Catholic spirituality is all about. This can be done in various ways as several movements exist within the Catholic Church, each having their own unique spirituality. Many have been long associated with religious orders, for example, Benedictine spirituality (based on the Rule of St. Benedict), Franciscan spirituality (based on the life and experiences of St. Francis), Ignatian spirituality (based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola), etc. However, the post Vatican II days have also seen the rise of lay movements such as the Focolare, Opus Dei, The Catholic Charismatic Renewal, etc.(see Appendix 'G')

In an attempt to explain these varied spiritualities existing within the Catholic tradition, Guinan (n.d.) states that the answer lies in the 'broad diversity of human experience'.

Since no individual lives Christian spirituality in the abstract and all live at specific and particular moments of space and time, this shapes our response to the Spirit's call. Thus every person seeks different models of spiritual life that respond to new questions and challenges posed by differing times and places. Ultimately, these are said to be 'different responses to the one common Christian call to holiness.' Guinan (n.d)

Thus Catholic spirituality encompasses various themes and is unique to each individual. This perhaps is the singular reason which distinguishes Catholic spirituality from other spiritualities. As Guinan (n.d., para 22) notes:

Each one of us is an individual and unique person and represents a unique embodiment of Christian spirituality. There has never been before, nor will there ever be again, a spirituality exactly like mine, exactly like yours. No one else has the constellation of heredity, experiences, talents, values, hopes and dreams which characterise you or me as individuals.

It is also this quality of Catholic spirituality which brings out the individuality of every person and authenticates the unique spiritual journey that each person undertakes in their lifetime.

### **A Catholic Maori Spirituality**

Catholic Spirituality in New Zealand cannot be discussed without considering the spirituality of the Maori people. The Catholic Church in New Zealand has strongly acknowledged Maori as the 'indigenous people of our country' and the 'first occupants' of the land', and through the Treaty, Maori 'have the right to land, and political organisation which would allow them to preserve their cultural identity' (Tate, n.d). The bicultural commitment made by the New Zealand Catholic Bishops' Conference in 1989 (Tate, n.d), requires that all Church agencies engage in partnership with Maori and fully support them in their right to cultural identity in the Church.

As indigenous people, Maori have had their own spirituality for centuries which was primarily linked to land and place. Like Aboriginal and native North Americans, the spirituality of Maori people are woven into the very fabric of the existence of those people

groups (Green, 2006). Green states that since their spirituality is not confined to a set time, place or event, it is as much a part of daily life as breathing. Eastham (2005) believes that over time, things are changing and the strong, confident Maori voice is slowly bringing about a shift in consciousness in Christian spirituality and cross-cultural anthropology in New Zealand today. She attributes this change to the fact that many Pakeha have come to realise that Maori spirituality contains philosophical resources sorely needed in modern thinking in the current time. While this study does not explicitly explore Maori Catholic spirituality, it is acknowledged that threads of indigenous spirituality are sometimes woven through aspects of Catholic spirituality in the New Zealand context.

## **THEORISING YOUTH SPIRITUALITY**

The spiritual life of young people today is a complex phenomenon. Youth spirituality has been described as being '*experiential*' (McQuillon, 2004, 'Youth spirituality', para 1), '*engaged*' (Tacey, 2004, p. 66) and '*a movement towards Ultimate Unity*' (de Souza, 2003, p. 8). Tacey (2004, p. 51) likens it to a flowing stream.

Youth spirituality is like an underground stream beneath our ordinary world, and yet this stream is rarely noticed. It keeps on flowing, but the life giving waters are not utilised, tapped or directed into the dry places of our culture.

As a person matures, his or her spiritual beliefs continue to change and evolve. For those in the earlier stages of adolescence, the ability to grasp more complex theories and abstract concepts develops (Walker, 2005). However for older adolescents, this alone does not suffice. They are at a stage when juvenile concepts of God and spirituality seem inadequate as their rational thinking, interpretive capacities and understanding of abstract concepts begin to increase. Scott (2003) believes that it is critical to bear in mind these cognitive, emotional and social developmental factors in understanding the workings and development of spiritual awareness and capacity among youth. This is especially important in the transitory phase from childhood to adult life which is a time of considerable openness and sensitivity to spiritual awareness as matters of identity, value, meaning and vocation come into focus.

## **Theories on Faith Development**

Several theories abound with regard to the spiritual development of a young person. The three theories of Erik Erikson (1968, 1982), James Fowler (1981, 1984) and Ken Wilber (1995, 1996) relate spiritual development to the stages of the life cycle. A brief description of how adolescent spirituality is viewed by each theory follows.

### **Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory**

Erikson's theory is based on an 'epigenetic perspective'. This means that there are particular tasks, opportunities and challenges that each life stage presents. Successful accomplishment of these challenges and tasks leads to the development of coping skills, ego strengths and social resources while failure leads to a deficiency in management skills and a burden of unresolved issues.

An adolescent therefore might be faced with predictable age-related challenges which may affect their spiritual emergence. Thus while dealing with the challenges of forming a clearly defined personal identity, exploring a developing sexuality and increasing ties with peers outside the family, many youth may also have to deal with a reevaluation of traditional family-held beliefs and customs. Lack of guidance at this point from spiritual support systems could lead to difficulty in coping with spiritual crises.

### **James Fowler's Faith Development Theory**

Fowler is a Christian theologian and a developmental theorist who further developed the structural – cognitive perspectives of Piaget and Kohlberg, as well as psychosocial theory. His stages of development represented levels of complex cognitive achievement rather than age – determined tasks. Thus, according to him, faith development was a progression from childhood to adulthood, from a juvenile conformity to an adult mature faith stance where one could uphold one's own beliefs and empathise with another's faith as well.

Fowler (1981) in his 'Stages of Faith Development' terms adolescence as the 'Synthetic-Conventional Faith' stage. With their increased capacity to think abstractly, the young person's principal task is to relate his or her own religious views with the incompatible

views of others. Adolescents may conceive of God as a personal adviser and guide, but in a less personalised fashion than previously. Fowler (1981, p. 172) states that while young people conform to the expectations and judgments of significant others, they have not yet formed their own identity and constructed and maintained an independent perspective. Adolescent spirituality could thus be a time of questioning and formation of a personal faith.

### **Wilber's Spectrum Model of Development**

Wilber's cognitive –structural theory was influenced by Vedantic Hinduism and Buddhism rather than Christianity. According to him, human development was an evolutionary process where the end goal for a person was attaining unitary consciousness. At each stage, the person's consciousness was able to incorporate more aspects of reality and more modes of functioning than the previous stage. Spiritual development included developing increasingly complex, comprehensive and inclusive modes of spirituality thus growing from a pre-egoic orientation to an egoic and further still to a trans-egoic orientation. Adolescence is seen as a typical egoic orientation stage.

Taking into consideration the difficulty that previous developmental theorists experienced in explaining the multilayered faith patterns prevalent today, Streib (2001) presents a modified version of the structural–developmental theory which he calls the 'Religious Styles Perspective'. According to him, this new model is aimed at 'accounting more fully for the life-history and life-world-relatedness of religion, at its principal interactive, interpersonal origin and shape' (Streib, 2001, p. 143). He is one among many who are critical about the stage theories as they present an oversimplified version of development and cannot account for individual and cultural diversity of developmental experiences. Roehlkepartain et al. (2006), state that in recent years increasing attention has been given to understanding the role of context in spiritual development. Developmental systems theories now shift the focus to the ongoing transactions between individuals and their various embedded multi-layered contexts.

Adolescent spirituality consists of struggle, exploration, discoveries and new beginnings. Canda and Furman (1999, pp. 231,233), however, caution us against boxing a person into a category based on the stage of life. They argue that taking a stage theory too seriously

could risk being closed to the unique developmental story of each individual which is fraught with phases and punctuations along the path of emergence. We ought not to judge a person's spiritual maturity based on their age. Rather each young person needs to be treated as someone with a distinct sacred story. Their views are supported by Eade (2001, p. 229) who believe that a spiritual experience is more than 'the idea of a progression from seed to fruition with the present state of growth being always related to some ideal end-point'. He recommends use of the term 'spiritual journey' to be more appropriate.

## **STUDIES ON YOUTH SPIRITUALITY**

Studies on the spirituality of youth, irrespective of religion, have been conducted in various countries around the world, particularly Australia and the USA. An increasing global trend is the decline in religiosity, alongside a strong awareness of spirituality that is also prevalent. Voas and Crockett (2005) analysed data from the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) which was conducted every year from 1991 to 2000. The survey began in 1991 with 10,264 individuals in 5,538 households and these individual were wherever possible surveyed every subsequent year, even if they had left the original household. Results showed that religious belief had declined at the same rate as religious affiliation and attendance and it was concluded that the decline was generational. Religious affiliation among young adults continued to fall, reaching a low in the late 1990s of one-third of those aged 18–24.

David Tacey's survey in 2002 of 125 undergraduate students in an Australian university revealed that, while only 8 per cent were following formal religions, over 90 per cent expressed a significant degree of personal concern for spirituality (Tacey, 2004, p. 14). Similarly, another Australian study of 13-29 year old youth showed that 44 per cent reported often occurring spiritual experiences as compared to 19 percent who reported often occurring religious experiences (Mason, 2004). These resonate with various other studies which show a decline in religiosity but a definite interest in spirituality. (See McQuillon, 2004; Fuller, 2001; Bibby, 2001; Hughes, 1997; Wuthnow, 1998; Bond & Hughes, n. d; de Souza, 2001). It emphasises the new, emerging movement of a 'personalised spirituality' (Lindsay, 2002, p. 24).



In direct contrast however, to all other studies showing a decline in religiosity, are the results of a survey done in the U.S. in 2000 (Cnaan, Gelles, and Sinha, 2004) by the University of Pennsylvania Center for the Study of Youth Policy, on a nationally representative sample of 2004 youth aged 11 to 18 residing at home. These largely consisted of Protestant Christians (48.2%) followed by Roman Catholics (26.7%). When asked how important religion was in their life, the majority of youth reported that it was important (83.7%). Of this percentage, about one-fifth rated religion as extremely important in their lives (18.7%), while about one-third rated religion as either very important or fairly important (31.8% and 33.2%, respectively). Only a very small group (3.8%) reported religion as not important at all, and the rest (12.6%) reported religion as not very important. A reason for the direct contrast in results could be associated with the differences in the ages of the subjects sampled. The previous studies usually dealt with older teens and young adults while in the study done by Cnaan, et al, (2004), the majority of the youth interviewed were in grades 5 to 12. Also, in comparison to in-depth interviews used by most of the previous studies, Cnaan's study focused solely on surveying their teen participants about the single aspect of their perceived importance of religion.

## **Overseas Research**

Research done on youth spirituality overseas has been relatively scarce. Studies particularly related to Catholic youth spirituality are largely uncommon. In recent years there appear to have been a few studies done in countries like the US and UK among others on spirituality and religious attitudes among young people in general. Some of these are discussed here.

Benson et al. (2003) used data on the responses of U.S. senior students obtained from the 'Monitoring the Future' study done in 2000 and compared it with those who completed the 'Search Institute Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviours' survey to reveal trends in adolescent religious and spiritual behaviour. Results from the 'Monitoring the Future' study showed that in the senior high class of the year 2000, 83.7 per cent of the young people reported affiliation with a religious denomination or tradition. The Search

Institute survey, which was done in the 1999-2000 school year, included urban, suburban and rural schools and was weighted to reflect the 1990 census data for community size and race/ethnicity. Results from both studies were similar in terms of the frequency of religious participation which was around 50 percent and both found that self reporting of religion/spirituality was quite important or very important to young people, the frequency again being above 50 percent.

In addition, the results showed that both religious participation and religious importance among senior students declined with age. 70 percent of 6th-grade students reported 1 hour or more per week of participation, falling to 54 percent among 12th graders, with a linear downward trend. However, the percentage of students who reported that religion or spirituality was 'quite' or 'very' important to them remained more stable across grades, averaging about 54.7 percent.

In a later U.S. study, 'The National Study of Youth and Religion' funded by the Lilly Endowment, the trends continued to be the same. This study, conducted by Smith and Denton (2005), consisted of a survey of 3,290 teenagers (ages 13-17) and parents, and 267 personal interviews, conducted across four years (2001-2005). The research project was designed to accomplish three major tasks.

- One, to collect quantitative data on a macro scale, in order to be able to make convincing representative claims about youth and religion on a national level.
- Two, to collect in-depth, qualitative data in order to better understand the lived experiences of youth, to sensitively interpret the quantitative data, and to generate "grounded" theories about the influences of religion in young people's lives.
- Three, to maintain contact with the youth that were sampled, to track changes in their lives over time, in order to be able to make claims through longitudinal analysis about the causal effects of religion in youth's lives.

After surveying the students from 2002 to 2003, personal in- depth interviews were conducted in 2003 - 2005. This was followed by another survey in 2005 of the students previously surveyed 3 years earlier. The results showed the following.

Religious affiliation - One-third of teens surveyed were religiously involved. One-third were sporadically involved or loosely connected, and one-third were disconnected from religion.

Spirituality versus Religion - The vast majority of the young people identified themselves as Christians; however the non-religious category was seen to be the area that had grown the most. In spite of that, very few teens appeared to be exposed to, interested in or actively pursuing 'spiritual-but-not-religious' personal quests or eclectic spiritual seeking. Only 2 -3 percent of the total number of youths surveyed were spiritual seekers. The vast majority (two-thirds) of young people were conventional i.e. those who simply followed their family traditions, while a minority existed who were extremely religious.

Lack of understanding of religious tradition - Although the majority of the teens claimed some form of Christianity as their religion, very few could describe the tenets of their religion and what it meant. The most typical response to what their religion required was "To be a good person" or simply "I don't know." There seemed to be a predominant lack of understanding and personal commitment.

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism - A startling revelation in the survey was the fact that a large number of U.S. teenagers subscribed to what the authors called 'Moralistic Therapeutic Deism'. This was a concept wherein one had to be a good and fair minded person who was happy and content with oneself and God was thought of as a benign entity who existed and watched over the world but did not need to be involved unless needed to resolve problems.

This religious-minded yet comfortably uninvolved, unconcerned attitude of teenagers was perhaps the singular surprising discovery of the study. The authors attributed this to 'Therapeutic Individualism' that seemed to have affected the religious and spiritual practices and experiences of American youth.

'Therapeutic individualism defines the individual, self as the source and standard of authentic moral knowledge and authority, and individual self-fulfillment as the preoccupying purpose of life. Subjective, personal experience is the touchstone of all that is authentic, right and true. By contrast, this ethos

views all “external” traditions, obligations, and institutions of society as inauthentic and often illegitimate constraints on morality and behaviour from which individuals must be emancipated.’ (Smith & Denton, 2005, p. 173)

Therapeutic individualism also affected the young person’s moral decision making processes. The authors noted that teens had a problem explaining why something was right or wrong, good or bad. They were content with being predominantly morally relativistic. Rather than judging by external moralities derived from religious teachings, natural law, cultural tradition or the collective social functioning, teens chose to depend on their individual subjective reasoning.

The attitudes of youth in this national survey in the U.S. were reflected by youth in the U.K as well. Voas and Crockett (2005) used data from the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) conducted every year from 1991 to 2000 to investigate the impact of parental practice, affiliation and belief on the religiosity of their children. Starting from the full BHPS, they selected 1,500 young adults aged 16–29 for whom they had data on both natural parents and compared religious characteristics of parents and children at BHPS wave 9 (1999-2000). All were residents of Great Britain (England, Scotland or Wales, but not Northern Ireland). Their key findings regarding religious attendance were as follows.

- If neither parent attended at least once a month, the chances of the child doing so were negligible: less than 3 percent.
- If both parents attended at least monthly, there was a 46 percent chance that the child would do so.
- Where just one parent attended, the likelihood that the child would do so was halved to 23 percent.

The results suggested that in Britain, institutional religion had halved. The generation now in middle age produced children who were half as likely to attend church, and the trend did not depend on marriage patterns. The net effect was the same whether people married inside or outside their faith.

Religiosity results showed that if neither parent was religiously affiliated, 91 percent of the children likewise described themselves as having no religion. At the opposite

extreme, where both parents belonged to the same denomination, the proportion of children maintaining that allegiance was equal to those who listed their religion as 'none' (i.e. 46 percent each). For both active participation and potentially passive affiliation, the results were the same: young British adults were half as religious as their parents. Also, the conclusion for belief was similar to that of attendance and affiliation. Two non-religious parents successfully transmitted their lack of religion. Two religious parents had approximately a 50/50 chance of passing on the faith. One religious parent did only half as well as two together.

Similar trends of a deteriorating religiosity and religious participation were prevalent in studies conducted in various other countries in the western world. Bibby (2001) studied 3,500 Canadians aged 15-19 in high schools and post-secondary institutions in his 'Project Teen Canada'. His extensive polls showed that a strong majority of young Canadians believe in God, life after death and the divinity of Jesus. However, although three-quarters of young Canadians identified with a religious group (76 percent) only one in five (22 percent) were involved on a weekly basis.

Vermeer & Van Der Ven (2004) reported on a large scale inquiry in Holland, which studied the religious and moral orientations of Dutch students. A survey questionnaire was administered to a sample of 974 students attending Catholic schools between December 1997 and January 1998 in one of their classes on world view/social studies. Results showed that out of the 974 students, only 20 percent (195) defined themselves as Catholic. Of the 195 pupils who indicated that they were Catholic, 57 percent indicated that they seldom or never attended church. A majority of the young people surveyed favoured a 'pluralistic model' in terms of religion, which meant that they were comfortable with the fact that various religions existed and that all of them were equally valid and valuable. They tended to adopt a non-committal attitude toward religion. While they were inclined to believe in the existence of God or a transcendent reality, they did not consider themselves as members of a church or as part of a larger religious community.

## Australian and New Zealand Research

Closer to home, Australia has a large volume of research on the religious and spiritual perspectives of its population. The National Church Life Survey in 2001 showed that while the Catholic Church was the largest denomination represented in terms of church attendance, the attendance at weekly masses had dropped by 7 percent from 1996 to 2001 (Bellamy & Castle, 2004). Among these, the percentage of youth attending between the ages of 15-19 accounted for only 6 percent (NCLS, 2001). Apart from that, the 2001 National Church Life Survey and the count of the number of people attending Mass showed that just over 5 percent of Catholics in their 20s attended Mass regularly (Gilchrist, 2006). These results have led to an increase in the number of studies being done on youth spirituality in recent years. The Spirit of Generation Y was one such study which examined the spirituality of Australian Youth and Young People aged 13-29 (Mason, 2006). This project, which consisted of three phases from 2003-2006, began with a pilot study, consisting of 20 lengthy interviews. This was followed by Phase 1 which consisted of in-depth, face-to-face interviews with 64 teenagers and young adults from widely varying backgrounds. Phase 2 comprised a telephone survey of a national random sample of about 1,619 teenagers and young adults, while in Phase 3 another 26 qualitative interviews were conducted – all of them overlapping the same subjects who were interviewed in Phase 1 or surveyed in Phase 2. The aim of the research was to explore in depth a selection of cases chosen to reveal the range and variations of spirituality. The results showed that 43 percent of those surveyed had a ‘Christian’ spirituality, of which 17.9 percent identified as Catholics. However, as compared to the 2001 Australian National Census, there appeared to be an 8 or 9 percent drop in the number of people identifying with the Catholic religion. More specific results from the interviews showed that Generation Y Catholics were:

- More likely to affirm that God relates to us as a person;
- Less likely to find it ‘okay to pick and choose one’s beliefs’; but
- More likely to agree that ‘morals are relative’; and
- Less likely to claim that faith was important or very important in shaping their lives.

Again, of those Catholics studied, 15 percent were 'Committed', 14 percent 'Active', 23 percent 'Marginal', 30 percent 'Nominal' and 17 percent 'Eclectic'. Catholics were significantly more likely than Anglicans and Other Christians to be Eclectic.

The decline in active participation among Catholic youth was also noted by Rymarz and Graham (2006) in their study of core Catholic youth in Australia. This research differed from Mason's research in the sample of youth under study. All young people involved in this study had to fulfil the criteria of being 'core Catholics'. This concept was first developed by Fulton et al. (2000) and was defined by the following.

- Regular church attendance
- Regular church attendance and involvement in the parish by parent(s)
- Involvement in something *extra*, as a result of faith commitment, such as being a part of a prayer group in school or in another setting.

The research was conducted on 58 students aged 14-15 years using semi-structured interviews. Results obtained by Rymarz and Graham (2006) showed that:

- While most youth were happy with being described as 'Catholics', they were not personally committed to the faith. Apart from attending weekly Mass, their involvement in other practices such as fasting, holy days, family prayer, Confession etc. was extremely low.
- Although family seemed very important to them, spiritual and religious discussions with family members and family prayer was uncommon.
- When asked to explain their beliefs, most of these young people found it extremely difficult. Their answers were 'diffuse and reflective of a general desire to do the best that you can and to avoid harming or imposing your views on others.' (Rymarz and Graham, 2006, p.377)
- Their religious beliefs lacked a 'metaphysical focus' and were largely family oriented.
- Most core Catholic youth were not part of any organised parish or school youth group. There seemed to be a distinct lack of peer group or support systems available where they could socialise with other like-minded youth.

Speaking from a Catholic perspective and mostly from experience, Duthie-Jung (2002) found a similar divide existing between spiritual and religious youth in the Catholic Church in New Zealand. On a national scale, however, a huge gap in literature is apparent in terms of the spirituality of young people (Duthie-Jung, 2002). A parallel gap is also seen in literature on Catholic spirituality of young Maori in New Zealand. There exists a large volume of literature related to the spirituality of New Zealanders in a modern society (e.g. Stenhouse, 2005; Bluck, 1998) but little or none of it relates to young people specifically. One of the exceptions was a national secondary school health survey carried out in 2000 which showed that 27.9 percent of the males and 38.6 percent of the females felt the importance of spiritual beliefs while 30.2 percent of the males and 33.9 percent of the females sometimes or often attended a religious service (Watson, n.d.). These statistics, however, do not clearly differentiate between spirituality and religion.

In his article 'Is New Zealand's future churchless?' Kevin Ward (2004) compared data from the New Zealand census to that obtained from other countries like Australia and the US. He stated that comparable trends of a decline in religiousness were evident. In New Zealand the number of people who indicated 'no religion' or 'object to state' rose from 9 percent in 1961 to 24 percent in 1996. In 2001 61 percent of the population identified as Christian, however although this finding and others available from the International Social Science Surveys carried out in 1991 and 1998 show a relatively high percentage of believers, Ward thought that the number of those attending church or another formalised religious institution had dropped considerably. Statistics from the 2001 census showed that 36.5 percent of the population stated their religion as 'no religion' or 'object to state'. This is a rise of 12.5 percent from the 1996 census. Bruce et al. (2006) discuss findings from the Church Life Survey carried out in New Zealand in 2001. Completed survey forms were received from 58,872 church attendees in 931 congregations, somewhat fewer than 250,000 attendees nationwide in 10 denominations. Results showed that out of all church attendees, only 8 percent were in the 15-24 age group. New Zealand's trends therefore appear to show similar patterns to those in Australia, the USA and the UK.



## **ISSUES ARISING FROM RESEARCH**

The personal experiences of Catholic youth highlight a number of common issues. Among the main issues that concern young Catholics today are the lack of a strong Catholic identity; a growing trend of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism and Moralistic Relativism; an unwillingness to participate actively in faith practices; a deteriorating commitment to the faith and the inability to find peer group support with similar belief patterns. These issues are discussed in detail below and have formed the foundations for this research.

### **A confused Catholic identity:**

In most of the research carried out, the wavering identity of young Catholics was apparent. For many, the fact that it was a family tradition seemed quite enough. They did not feel the need to justify or explain it nor to have a personal conviction for their beliefs. Most Catholic youth's personal beliefs were vaguely explained and not characterised by strongly religious responses. This led to the conclusion that many Catholic youth were not easily distinguished from the general student population by either their articulated beliefs or by their personally chosen practices. This uncertainty was also noted by Smith and Denton (2005) in their study of American teens in general. They found that in their face-to-face interviews, many teenagers' religious knowledge was inadequate, vague and often erroneous, and discussion about the substance of their traditions resulted in remarkably shallow talk. Most of the Catholic youth seemed to find it extremely difficult to express their beliefs. Rymarz and Graham (2006) noted that many respondents in their survey did not report being picked on or victimised for their association with the Catholic belief and practice. However there were a few young people who did report being singled out by other students for their beliefs and practices by some form of derogatory comments being made. These Rymarz and Graham (2006) noted were those who had identifiable Catholic positions or were strongly identified with the church.

Much of this confusion could be attributed to the fact that adolescence is a time of change when young people begin to try to make sense of their lives by adjusting, altering or transforming themselves and their actions. Very often this confusion gives a wrong signal of being fickle or disinterested to adults. In reality however, this is the stage when young people question their faith and spirituality and try to find ways to make meaning out of it and incorporate it in their own lives. This fact is reinforced by Pellebon and Anderson (1999) who state that youths often realise that their experiences of society and the world at large differ from those of their parents. This could lead to a divergence from the spiritual beliefs held by their family.

Pellebon and Anderson (1999, p. 234) give us two factors namely, the increased flow of worldly information and the peer group that could contribute to this breakaway.

One factor is that information from the secular world is less monitored and controlled by the parents. This directly interferes with the parent's attempt to maintain a unified spiritual perception within the family. Also interfering with that unity is the adolescent's desire for experiences prohibited by the [spiritual] worldview. A second contributing factor is the teenager's peer environment. The influence of this peer group will depend upon the adolescent's desire to identify with what these peers represent.

This period of trying to develop one's own spiritual worldview could well have serious implications for a young person's life. Conflicts arising from differences in other social, personal and cultural situations could further compound the problem. Fowler (1981, p. 173) points to two dangers or deficiencies that could arise during the adolescent stage.

The expectations and evaluations of others can be so compellingly internalised that later autonomy of judgement and action can be jeopardised; or interpersonal betrayals can give rise either to nihilistic despair about a personal principle or ultimate being or to a compensatory intimacy with God unrelated to mundane relations

Thus an adolescent may develop a substandard or abnormal spiritual outlook based on their experiences.

Although this problem of not having a strong Catholic identity could be explained by the ‘adolescent’ phase which they are in, other possibilities could also stem from the following: lack of available information regarding Catholic spiritual values, beliefs and practices; lack of role-models who model an appropriate Catholic way of life and whom they might identify with; and disillusionment with the Catholic faith itself that proves to be inadequate in relation to the dilemmas that plague today’s youth.

Smith (2007) attributes this lack of a strong Catholic identity among young people to religious educators and parents failing to engage teenagers to talk about their faith. In a speech on ‘Youth & Religion: Reporting on Issues and Trends’, Smith stressed the utmost importance of youth being able to articulate their faith and beliefs. “Things can only be so real if you can’t articulate them. To be able to talk about something helps make something real.” (Smith, 2007, ‘I don’t know’, Para 8)

The search for one’s own identity changes the course of a youth’s spiritual journey. McQuillon (2004) believes that youths find the institutional church a problem when finding ways to express the reality of their spiritual search and experience. Quoting Rolheiser (1998), he points out the divorce of spiritual practices (spirituality) from the whole experience of church (ecclesiology). According to Rolheiser (1998), this ecclesiology or the practice of regular churchgoing and abiding all the church laws has been the essence of the Roman Catholic faith for many centuries. Spiritual practices on the other hand were seen as nourishing and nurturing faith but not necessarily essential. McQuillon (2004) also believes that the conflicts that arise between the approach of Catholicism towards sexual morality and young peoples’ experience of sexuality and relationships leave them feeling disillusioned.

### **Moralistic Therapeutic Deism and Moralistic Relativism**

The lack of understanding of beliefs and faith practices has led some young people to have a very slanted view of God and what it means to be a believer. Moralistic therapeutic deism views emerged in Smith and Denton’s (2005) study. According to them, for most youth religion could be summed up in the following way (Smith & Denton, 2005, p.162):

1. "A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth."
2. "God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions."
3. "The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself."
4. "God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem."
5. "Good people go to heaven when they die."

The researchers indicated that American teenagers were heavily influenced by the ideology of individualism that has so profoundly shaped the larger culture. This also led to a reflexive non-judgmentalism among youth and reluctance to suggest that anyone might actually be wrong in matters of faith and belief. Rymarz and Graham's (2006) study of core Catholic youth also had similar outcomes. Many young people had a laid back attitude of doing the best they could without imposing their views on others.

Moralistic relativism was another issue that is very prevalent in the spirituality of today's youth. Apart from Smith and Denton's (2005) study, it was also apparent in Vermeer and Van Der Ven's (2004) study of Dutch youth and Mason's (2006) study of Generation Y Catholics. The general trend that emerged was that views about one's morals were relative and what may have seemed 'bad' in one situation could be viewed as 'good' in another.

In the battle between good and evil, Tacey (2004) states that religion is so alert to this conflict that it can become unduly pessimistic and burdened by the awareness of the reality of evil and therefore fail to be receptive to the immediacy of the divine and the presence of good. On the other hand he says that the spirituality of youth is so receptive to this immediacy that it fails to appreciate the obstacles that separate us from the divine and also the immediacy of evil with its wily ways and capacity to infiltrate society. He concludes that both sides need to learn from the other in order to arrive at a 'deeper understanding of sacred reality' (Tacey, 2004, p. 86).

## **Unwillingness to participate actively in faith practices**

The decline in active participation in faith practices has been increasing at an alarming rate. Results from almost all research done on Catholic youth show a growing disinterest in attending Mass, participating in the sacrament of Confession, leading an active prayer life and being a part of church youth activities. Tacey (2000) argues that in spite of its efforts to control spirituality, institutional Christianity is no longer able to contain it and many people today are searching for and giving expression to their spirituality outside of the formal system of values and beliefs.

McQuillon's (2004) study of Year 12 Australian Catholic youth from some Queensland schools showed that only 13.1 percent attended church. Their values and attitudes towards formal religion were similar to a comparable survey carried out in a New South Wales public school in 2003. The majority did not feel that religion and faith were very personal and that one did need to be actively involved, nor did it matter what one believed in order to lead a good life. This attitude was also reflected in their approach to belonging to a particular church; the popular belief was that they could express their spirituality without belonging to a religious organisation. Quoting Radcliffe (2002), McQuillon believed that the reason for this is largely due to the fact that the teachings of the church do not reflect the real experiences of everyday life for young people. This view was also shared by Tacey (2004). A result of this is the large number of youth drifting away from the time-honoured rituals and practices of the Catholic Church.

## **Deteriorating commitment to the faith**

Accompanied by the decline in participation in faith practices, a common trend throughout the research literature was the deteriorating affinity towards religion and religiousness. Spirituality however still continued to remain high in the list. Rymarz and Graham (2006) asked Catholic students in their research study how they saw their future involvement with the church. Many students expressed the view that in the future their level of church commitment and involvement would be less. Some students saw this

lower level of commitment and involvement as an outcome of their decreasing interaction with family members (especially parents), a decrease that meant that they would be somewhat freer of parental expectation and influence.

Benson et al. (2003) reported similar results. There appeared to be a downward trend in church participation as the ages of students increased. As Voas and Crockett (2005) also noted, the religious beliefs of the parents did not have a significant influence on their children's participation in religious activities. Whether people married inside or outside the faith, the net result of a diminishing church involvement was the same. One reason for the change could be the fact that religion in all its current forms seems out of touch with real spirituality. As Hay (1996, p. 19) points out,

Religion tends to be associated with what is publicly available, churches, bibles, prayer books, religious officials ... , Spirituality is almost always seen as much warmer, associated with love, inspiration, wholeness, depth, mystery ...

Tacey (2001) states that some young people turn to Eastern religions to find meaning or enchantment. This was especially the case with Western youth in the 1960s and 1970s. However, he declares that today many seem to have found new forms of religion in the West itself. These new forms are often not noticed or respected by the old religious culture (Tacey, 2001, p. 91). He goes on to describe the reason for this innovative spirituality as follows (Tacey, 2001, p. 92):

This new "outbreak" of spirituality is a desperate attempt by youth to counter the advances of the profane and secular society, with its appalling materialism, disillusionment and absence of hope. The widespread and almost incantatory use of the word 'spirituality' could well be an urgent measure against the nihilism that has swept through the post-modern generations that have been brought up on television, junk food and pornography.

This defence against the modern, technological era is also supported by Ho (2001) who states that in a world complicated by globalisation and hi-tech communication, a balance in tradition and innovation is needed in the spiritual field.

Tacey (2001) also notes a new perspective emerging in today's religious fervour amongst youth – the concept of God being inside oneself. Rather than being 'out there' God is 'in here'. This experience of God being within the true self of a person has led to a lot of soul searching among youth in order to make sense of their existence in the world today. Tacey describes the new contemporary spirituality emerging among today's youth as: 'A spontaneous movement in society, a new interest in the reality of spirit and its healing effects on life, health, community and well-being.' (Tacey, 2004, p. 1)

### **Inability to find similar peer group support**

Apart from attending Mass, Rymarz and Graham (2006) noted that most Catholic youth were not involved in any school or church youth group. Some felt they had grown out of such groups and their activities while others were following the example of older siblings. Speaking from a Christian perspective, Hamill and Stewart (1997) believed that the need for a community and anchorage for a young person in and through membership of a community are important aspects to consider with regard to spiritual growth. However, in comparison with the world in which people live, Christianity seems sad and mournful, lacking the spontaneous joy and vitality of a true community (Casey, 1997). As Loranger (1997, p. 17) points out,

Youth learn the spiritual freedom they need to make choices within their first experiences of belonging - the family. A teen's second 'family' is the [peer] group, their intimate circle of friends that acts as a transitional experience of belonging during the journey through the liminal zone between dependence and independence.

She states that one's willingness to move from place to place and the search for a compassionate God and the way of justice is dependent on a sense of belonging and an experience of rootedness. Therefore, in the case of young people searching for their 'roots', a critical question of concern for them is where they might belong and what might fill the spiritual void left by the absence of formalised religion. On the other hand, youth in a social environment with other spirituality – identified peers are less likely to have such an identity crisis because they are able to express, interact and have a sense of belonging (Pellebon & Anderson, 1999).

## CONCLUSION

The task in this chapter was to review the literature available on youth spirituality and previous research done in the field in order to highlight the main issues that young Catholic youth face in today's world. The chapter began with a discussion on the concept of spirituality and in particular, spirituality within the Catholic tradition. It was noted that Catholic spirituality did not have a sole definition since it encompassed various themes and was unique to each individual.

Next, the various theories on youth spirituality and faith development were reviewed which showed that adolescence was a time when a young person's spirituality was constantly evolving. And while once again, while it would seem easier to categorise the spirituality of young people into different compartments, the uniqueness of each person's individual journey could not be discounted.

Following this, research done on the spiritual experiences of young people was examined. This is divided into two sections: (a) research done in countries such as the US and UK; and (b) research done in Australia and New Zealand. The worldwide studies on the spirituality of youth showed that, irrespective of religion, there was a strong awareness of spirituality with a decline in religiosity. Correspondingly, research done specifically on Catholic youth showed a widespread abandonment of traditional religious forms. In particular, among the main issues which arose from the research were the lack of a strong Catholic identity; a growing trend of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism and Moralistic Relativism; an unwillingness to participate actively in faith practices; a deteriorating commitment to the faith and the inability to find peer group support with similar belief patterns. Each of these issues was further studied in detail in order to understand them better.

In an attempt to understand the spirituality of Catholic youth in Whangarei, these issues have played a large role in shaping the purpose and design of this research. In the concluding section of this project, they have also served as a point of reference for comparing them with data obtained from this research. The next chapter provides further insight into the research process.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

While the focus of this thesis is upon the spiritual experiences and views of New Zealand Catholic youth, the international research has been drawn on to inform the research design of the study. This chapter outlines the research design that was developed and describes how the research was conducted. It begins by stating the objectives of the thesis and then details and justifies the nature of the qualitative research design chosen and the reasons for not limiting the study to a single theoretical perspective. The methods of participant selection and data collection are discussed and ethical concerns regarding the research process are also reviewed. Finally, the analytical frameworks used to organise and interpret the data collected are examined.

#### **THESIS OBJECTIVES**

The main objectives of this thesis are as follows:

1. To explore the spirituality of today's Catholic youth in Whangarei.
2. To identify the ways in which a young Catholic integrates the Catholic faith into his/her daily life and makes meaning out of it.

In addition, this thesis seeks to compare the nature and patterns of religious beliefs and practices of Catholic youth in Whangarei with those reported in the literature of other Catholic youth around the world. Overall the thesis seeks to allow Catholic youth to tell their stories about their contemporary experiences in the Catholic faith and the significance it has for them in their lives.

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Qualitative Research

Denton and Smith (2001, p. 2) believe that young people are very difficult to study, especially when dealing with issues of religion and spirituality:

...research involving youth requires an awareness of certain concerns related to study design, sampling procedures, human subject's approval, parental consent, and many other issues that arise when studying this unique population. Furthermore, interest in studying the religious and spiritual lives of youth in particular creates added challenges, requiring sensitivity not only to issues in religious measurement generally, but also to the particularities of the categories and texture of religion and spirituality in the lives of youth today.

While admitting that there are multiple potential approaches to studying youth and religion, these are mainly determined primarily by the researcher's interest and the particular issues one desires to study. Accordingly, issues such as the general research design and the sampling method to be used will follow suit.

In order to be consistent with the overall aim of the thesis, the research method chosen for this project was a qualitative strategy using a holistic inductive design of naturalistic inquiry. Qualitative research is deemed useful when answering questions of 'why' and 'how' as well as those about processes such as 'what is happening' (Spicker, 1995). Similarly, Patton (1990) describes this method as useful because 'genuine openness flows naturally from an inductive approach to analysis, particularly an analysis grounded in the immediacy of direct fieldwork and sensitised to the desirability of holistic understanding of unique human settings' (p.193). For this study, the holistic understanding of the spirituality of these Catholic young people was of prime importance. Patton (1990) emphasises the need for neutrality and empathetic personal contact in order to create a more holistic and natural inquiry for the researcher. Empathy is important if the researcher is to communicate interest and understanding while neutrality encourages acceptance of what people say and do during data collection. Together these qualities

facilitate a rapport during research and discipline the researcher to be non-judgmental and open (Patton, 1990, p. 58).

Similar points are made by Lofland and Lofland (1984) who detail four important skills that are essential in obtaining and presenting qualitative data. First, the researcher has to be close to the participants and their situation in order to understand their experiences in depth. Second, the researcher needs to capture the perceived fact of what the participants have actually said or done. Third, descriptions of the participants' activities, interactions and settings have to be obtained. And finally, direct quotations from the participants have to be used in the research in order to incorporate the participants into the study. Beginning with my previous work as a youth coordinator, which enabled me to gain a level of interaction with and an understanding of Catholic young people, these four skills have been instrumental in informing the qualitative design of this research.

To sum up, qualitative research involves attempting to interpret the actions or experiences of subjects by finding out how they themselves perceive them. It enables the researcher to represent the participants in their own terms rather than by imposing 'a preconceived or outsider's scheme of what they are about' (Lofland, 1971, p. 4). Moreover, considering the lack of previous New Zealand research on the subject of this thesis, this qualitative method may also highlight areas for further study. Babbie (1992) identifies this aspect as one of the advantages of this type of research method.

### **The search for a theoretical perspective**

Finding a single theoretical framework that could incorporate the desired aims of this research proved to be a difficult task. This was largely due to the ambiguous nature of the concept of spirituality. Spirituality is a 'complex, multifaceted construct that entails (amongst other elements) beliefs and attitudes, behaviours and rituals, personal experiences, and varying levels of consciousness and awareness' (King & Boyatzis, 2004, p. 2). Hill et al. (2000) note that spirituality involves developmental and social-psychological phenomena, cognitive phenomena, affective and emotional phenomena and personality.

Previous research in the fields of education and health has largely used the concepts of grounded theory and phenomenology to study spirituality and spiritual experiences (e.g. Hyde, 2005; Walton, 1999 & 2004). While searching for theoretical insights into understanding spirituality, culture, worldviews and meaning systems, Clark (2006) realised that it was not important *what* social work practitioners needed to understand but rather *how* they went about understanding it.

In what is variously called an ethnographic or phenomenological approach, the primary emphasis is on the need for practitioners to position themselves as learners, not as experts, and to dialogically explore and understand the client's worldview and meanings through phenomenological, inductive, collaborative, and reflective inquiry. The focus is on a process of open exploration of meaning and negotiated understandings, rather than the acquisition of specific expert knowledge. (Clark, 2006, p. 3)

Clark's views are corroborated by Scott (2006) who believes that spiritual research requires a necessary respect for the complexity and vulnerability of the topic and an awareness of one's own vulnerability and risk in taking it up. The resulting research-based integrative practice model that developed out of Clark's (2006) research was one that created space for understanding and focused on the meanings, and source of meanings, embedded in lived experience. It consists of four key practice processes: (a) reflexive, humble inquiring, (b) inductive, collaborative interpreting, (c) implementing dialogue-enhancing practices, and (d) creative, adaptive improvising. Rather than being just a series of sequential steps or discrete practice elements, these four processes are inextricably linked and interwoven into a web of interconnected processes. Clark's model emphasises the mutual exploration of the worldviews and meaning systems that shape one's interpretive frame of reference. It acknowledges the impossibility of completely understanding another person's experiential reality, and aims for an understanding that honours the mystery and otherness of a person's interpretations of the world and their place in it.

Using these four key practices for this research therefore, a qualitative study incorporating a variety of skills inherent in different methodologies was chosen. Chenail (2005) terms this as a 'generic approach' and credits the flexibility it offers as one of its strengths.

However, he cautions that it could also turn into a weakness if a project is not produced that is internally coherent and externally recognizable to reviewers. Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 4) describe qualitative research using multiple methodologies as a 'bricolage' and the researcher as a 'bricoleur' or 'quilt maker'.

In this study, the broad philosophical stance lying behind the methodology is that of interpretivism. This approach 'looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world' (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). The interpretive methodology has been used widely in recent studies of child and youth spirituality (e.g. Hay & Nye, 1998; Singleton, et al, 2004). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) describe the complex, bricolage of an interpretive bricoleur as one which is 'a pieced-together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p.4). In this study, this approach allowed room for making meaning of the varied spiritual experiences of the Catholic youth who participated.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

Patton (1990, p. 189) states that the 'ideal-typical qualitative method's strategy is made up of three parts: (1) qualitative data, (2) a holistic-inductive design of naturalistic inquiry, and (3) content or case analysis'. The research design for this thesis attempts to maintain this strategy in order to produce the best results.

### **Participant selection and recruitment**

Participant selection was carried out using a method of purposeful sampling, the power of which lies in selecting information-rich cases for study (Patton, 1990). Three criteria were applied to the selection of participants: (a) to ensure that participants were familiar with Catholic spiritual concepts, they needed to self-identify as being 'Active Catholics' (as defined in Chapter One) for at least 2 years prior to research participation.; (b) all participants had to be 16 – 20 years of age, a time when a young person's ideas and beliefs about spirituality have already been formed to some extent (by passing the early

stages of identity formation) and when they are able to give their own consent to participate in the research; and (c) the participants had to be resident in and youth group members of the Catholic parish of Whangarei (St. Francis Xavier Parish) which provided a common cultural frame for participant experiences.

Information sheets (Appendix 'A') were distributed by church youth leaders to all Catholic youth from the Whangarei parish fitting the above criteria. The recipients of the information sheets were asked to consider voluntary participation in the project and to contact the researcher if they were interested in participating. However it soon became apparent that not all the Catholic youth were involved in parish based groups. Consequently, groups operating within the Catholic High school were also targeted and information sheets distributed to potential participants there. The reason for this was so that the maximum number of youth could be informed about the research taking place and could choose to volunteer if they desired. The review of research literature indicated that the participation and experience of young Catholics varied according to sex, age and ethnicity. Hence, from the list of those who volunteered, six youths were purposefully chosen with the intention of representing the variety of spiritual experiences. Although the desired age group was 16-20, almost all the youth over 18 had left the town in order to pursue higher studies in universities. The participants that were chosen therefore comprised of three males and three females, aged 16-17 years of age.

The number of participants was limited primarily to ensure the manageability of the processes of data collection and analysis in the time available for the project and the nature of the research. Furthermore, a small scale study using information-rich cases was better suited to the in-depth, exploratory character of the research.

### **Access to participants**

Access to the participants was obtained through the Catholic parish of Whangarei. The oral consent of the parish priest was first sought and obtained to establish the feasibility of the study and was followed by a letter seeking written confirmation of the same (Appendix 'B'). The leaders of the youth groups operating in the parish and high school were then approached in order to gain access to potential participants. Information sheets

(Appendix 'A') on the nature of the research were sent to these leaders (as well as the parish priest and the school principal) to ensure that all who were in charge of or responsible for youth group members in the parish and school were aware of the research and able to make an informed decision as to whether or not they would assist the researcher in contacting and recruiting participants.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

### **The Interview**

Data collection for this project was accomplished via one or more face-to-face in-depth interviews with each participant. Denton and Smith (2001) believe that in-depth interviews provide the researcher a forum for hearing youth express in their own words their experiences and thoughts and feelings about various concerns. In addition they state that many researchers have also found that youth themselves enjoy one-on-one interviews, as they give them an opportunity to talk about things that are important to them and to have their voices heard by others. According to Sproull (1988, p. 161), the advantages of the in-depth personal interview are that it:

- a) elicits information directly from people;
- b) allows an opportunity for probing; finding out why people feel or respond the way they do;
- c) allows an opportunity to clarify information as it is given;
- d) allows an opportunity to explain complex information; and
- e) allows an opportunity to clarify previously collected data.

The duration of the interview was one to one and a half hours, and was conducted at a time and place convenient to the participant.

The duration of the interview gave participants enough time to tell their story and to describe their experiences – thereby providing the information rich data needed for the study. This verbalization of experiences is considered to be most important when discussing spiritual issues with young people (Wright, 1999 and Erricker 2000). Scott

(2001, p. 127), quoting Heshusius (1994), believes that in order to approach a spiritual experience, researchers must:

...be willing to suspend subject–object dualism, listen for multiplicity, accept ambiguity and uncertainty in order to participate with narrators in engaging the experience and its implications, entering into a form of participatory consciousness that acknowledges the need for understanding that is “mutually evolving”, that does not, in its demands for academic rigor, “override the kinship of and the centrality of tacit and somatic ways of knowing”.

Listening skills are of prime importance in qualitative interview techniques. Wengraf (2001, p.194) even speaks of ‘double attention’, which means;

...that you must be both listening to the informant's responses to understand what he or she is trying to get at and, at the same time, you must be bearing in mind your needs to ensure that all your questions are liable to get answered within the fixed time at the level of depth and detail that you need.

McCracken (1988) cautions against the commonly used practice of ‘active listening’, i.e. the process of reading hidden meaning of speech and gesture and playing it back to the respondent. This destroys good data while capturing only the investigators own logic and categories. Instead, McCracken (1988, p. 39) encourages listening for many things including ‘impression management, topic avoidance, deliberate distortion, minor misunderstanding and outright incomprehension’, and dealing with each problem as it arises.

In the interviews, participants were encouraged to ‘tell their own stories’ since any aspects that I considered significant would not necessarily have had the same meaning for them (Borland, 2004). I wished to provide them with a listening space that was ‘open, flexible, non-judgmental – one which accepted intuitions, feelings and mystical experiences as normative’ (Scott, 2001, p. 122), while attempting to address three methodological issues. These three issues were those of ethnographic sensitivity, verbalization and reflexivity, all of which are deemed important by Nesbitt (2001) in the study of spirituality with young people. Finally, as suggested by Wengraf (2001), the interviews were terminated by thanking the interviewee for their cooperation and asking him or her if there were any further remarks that might be



relevant to the topic or the interview process. This led to the emergence of new areas of information which provided additional insights into the experiences of the young people.

## **The Interview Guide**

The interview guide or questionnaire (Appendix 'C') addressed several aspects of a young person's spirituality. Its scope and content was influenced by the literature review and it was planned in such a way as to obtain information about individual beliefs and practices as well as community participation. Topics covered included the following:

- Religious attendance
- Catholic identity and Catholic faith
- Moralistic therapeutic deism/moralistic relativity
- Peer group socialisation
- Religious commitment

The interview guide, which included closed as well as open-ended questions, directed the dialogue while allowing for spontaneous questions, explorations and the development of responses (Reinharz, 1992). This mix of questioning is generally seen as the best to overcome the disadvantages of both structured and unstructured questionnaires (Kahn & Cannell, 1957; Gallup, 1947).

Foddy (1993) highlights one common problem associated with open questions – that of obtaining inadequate answers. He suggests using non-directive 'probes' to overcome the tendency of respondents to stray from the topic and to reduce the number of incomplete answers. A 'probe' is a gentle request for more information on something that has not been mentioned directly but which the researcher deems to be important (Lofland and Lofland, 1984). These can play an important role in interviewing young people as it has been noted that youth can tend to be inarticulate and unreflective in interviews, thus causing problems when they are unable to provide clear or thoughtful answers to the questions asked of them (Denton and Smith, 2001). Accordingly, these probes were used in the interviews to obtain complete answers. In addition, McCracken (1988, pp. 34-35) advocates the use of 'floating prompts' and 'planned prompts' to elicit important

information. Floating prompts are used unobtrusively while the respondents are stating their views in order to prompt them to return to a particular utterance and expand on it; while planned prompts are built into the questionnaire itself and give respondents the opportunity to consider and discuss certain phenomena that do not come to mind or speech readily. For this study, two types of planned prompts – ‘category’ and ‘special incident’ prompts – were used. As described by McCracken (1988, p. 36), ‘category’ prompts allow the investigator to account for all of the formal characteristics of the topic under discussion, while ‘special incident’ prompts ask respondents to recall exceptional incidents of interest to the researcher in which the research topic is implanted.

### **Data processing**

The interviews with the participants were voice recorded and then transcribed by the researcher. While voice recordings capture what was said, certain features such as emotions, gestures and other non-verbal forms of communication could not be accounted for (Tierney, 2000). However, this deficit was overcome to a large extent as the transcription included ‘word-for-word quotations of the participant’s responses as well as the interviewer’s descriptions of [a] participant’s characteristics, enthusiasm, body language, and overall mood during the interview’ (Mahoney, 1997, p. 3-8).

The participants were provided with the transcriptions of their individual interviews so that they could provide feedback, ensure the authenticity and accuracy of the written data and lessen interviewer bias in the interpretation of their experiences.

### **Limitations**

There is an obvious problem of generalisation which is inevitable in the utilisation of a data collection method which relies on six young people located in one town. To some degree this was lessened by the diversity that existed among the chosen participants. The common characteristics of many of the themes that emerged gave some reassurance that the study tapped issues which might be similar in nature to those of other Catholic young

people across the country. The main gain, however, was that the issue of Catholic youth spirituality was seen in the context of the overall experiences of each of the six young people. For an initial, exploratory study which aimed to obtain a broad overview of the main issues that affect New Zealand Catholic youth spirituality; this procedure seemed not only appropriate, but essential.

## **ETHICAL ISSUES**

Several ethical issues arose in the design of this study and are detailed below. An application to the Massey University Human Ethics Committee was made and the approval process (Appendix 'D') was fundamental in my efforts to ensure that participants were treated ethically. The approval of the Ethics Committee was made known to the participants in the information sheet to ensure that they felt secure about their decision to take part in the study and the confidentiality of the information they provided.

### **Informed consent**

This issue was attended to by providing the participants with information about the process at different stages of the research as well as providing them with the opportunity to withdraw at these stages. At the recruitment stage they were provided with an information sheet (Appendix 'B') detailing the nature of the research, the aims and methods used in the research process and details of their role in it. Prior to the interviews, a consent form (Appendix 'E') was provided to them, outlining the commitment involved, their right to withdraw at any stage and my obligation to ensure their confidentiality. This was also discussed with them to make sure that they understood all aspects of the research clearly. Written consent was obtained from each participant before the interview proceeded. Special care was taken to ensure that each participant was aware of his/her rights during the course of the interview. This included their right to turn off the voice recording at any point during the interview and the right to decline to answer any of the questions. Participants were also informed about the treatment of the data obtained from

the research. Written consent forms for the release of the transcriptions and the use of research findings for publication were obtained from them (Appendix 'F').

### **Maintenance of Confidentiality**

Since the Catholic community of Whangarei is small, it was possible that one or more participants could be recognised by the information they gave. To ensure that confidentiality was maintained, any distinct identifying features that could affect individual participants were removed from the transcribed interviews. The participants were encouraged to use pseudonyms for the research and these were used on transcribed interview sheets and for the data analysis. Participants were made aware of the fact that their identities would not be revealed to anyone or used in connection with the research and/or research findings in the future. Special care was taken to ensure that the transcribed interviews and voice recordings were secure and not available to anyone else. The participants were given the option to keep the recordings and transcriptions if they wished to or have them destroyed upon the completion of the research. Arrangements were made for the safe storage of the consent forms and transcript release forms for a period of five years.

### **Researcher bias**

It is recognised that my research could be affected by my gender, culture, beliefs and experience. I have therefore located myself as a female, Indian, Catholic immigrant in New Zealand (see Chapter One). I realised that this 'frame' or 'perspective' from which I viewed this topic would affect the questions I asked and the categories used to provide order and give meaning to reality (Rein, 1983). Much care was taken therefore at all stages of the research to minimise this bias as far as possible. Youth's perceptions of what researchers are looking for can significantly influence their responses (Denton and Smith, 2001). As suggested by the authors therefore, in order to maintain consistency and reduce the potential bias that could be introduced by discrepancies, all the interviews were

conducted by me and all the participants were given the same initial information about the study.

As explained above, participants were free to explain themselves in any way they wished and the transcribed interviews were sent back to them for proof reading to ensure that their answers and experiences were accurately presented. Denton and Smith (2001) believe that this procedure is extremely important when dealing with the interpretation and coding the data in research with youth as their lives and language can be quite dissimilar to that of the adult world.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

Content analysis was the method used to make meaning of the data collected from the interviews. Holsti (1969, p. 14) defines content analysis as ‘any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages’. Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1991) explain it as a process wherein the analyst picks out relevant material for analysis and puts it together to create patterns, sequences, tendencies and orders. This method was used in this study to identify common patterns or themes that might be contained within the transcripts of the participants’ interviews. Themes were identified by ‘bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which often are meaningless when viewed alone’ (Leininger, 1985, p. 60). These components or fragments were then expounded on and pieced together to form a comprehensive view of the shared experiences of the participants as the basis for the development of theme statements. May (1993) notes that the flexibility of the content analysis method is its greatest advantage since it enables the researcher to not only consider the ways in which meaning is constructed but also the ways in which new meanings are developed and employed. In the process, ‘theory is generated, modified and tested from the particulars of the document to a general understanding of its context and ways of representing the social world’ (May, 1993, p. 147).

A cross-case analysis technique was applied in this study for the purpose of content analysis. It meant grouping together common responses to the interview questions as

well as analyzing different perspectives on central issues (Patton 1990). This method, also known as the 'constant-comparative method' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), requires the grouping or clustering of the data into categories which become the basis for data organization and conceptualisation. According to Patton, 'the qualitative analyst's effort at uncovering patterns, themes, and categories is a creative process that requires making carefully considered judgments about what is really significant and meaningful in the data' (Patton, 1990, p. 406). Dey notes several resources that are particularly useful to the process of category generation. These are 'inferences from the data, initial or emergent research questions, substantive, policy and theoretical issues, and imagination, intuition and previous knowledge' (Dey, 1993, p. 100). He cautions that in order to utilise those resources optimally, the researcher should become thoroughly familiar with the data, be sensitive to the context of the data, be prepared to extend, change and discard categories, consider connections and avoid needless overlaps, record the criteria on which category decisions are to be taken, and consider alternative ways of categorizing and interpreting data (Dey, 1993, p. 100). These views were taken into consideration when developing the categories for the research findings.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter has described the research process for this study. A qualitative research method was chosen bearing in mind the aims and purposes of this study. The usefulness of qualities and skills associated with this method was also explained. This was followed by a discussion on the reasons for the selection of a mixed methodology. It was noted that since spirituality was a complex, multifaceted concept, careful attention needed to be given to the method of research to allow room for studying its various aspects. In order to overcome this, a study incorporating a variety of skills inherent in different methodologies was chosen with the broad philosophical stance lying behind the methodology being that of interpretivism.

Following this, a report on how the research was implemented was described. Participant selection was carried out using a method of purposeful sampling and three criteria that were applied to the selection of participants, based on their age, location and familiarity

with Catholic concepts. Access to the participants was obtained through the Catholic parish of Whangarei.

Data collection for this study was accomplished using face-to-face in-depth interviews with each participant. Verbalisation of experiences is considered to be most important when discussing spiritual issues with young people and this technique was used since it best suited the aims of this study. The interview guide created for this study addressed several aspects of a young person's spirituality. Its scope and content was influenced by the literature review and prompts and probes were used in order to elicit the required information. The interviews with the participants were voice recorded and then transcribed by the researcher and participants were provided with copies of the transcriptions to make sure they were accurate.

The limitations of this study have been explained followed by a review of the ethical issues that arose during the course of the research. In particular, the three issues of Informed Consent, Maintenance of Confidentiality and Researcher bias were discussed and how these were overcome. The data analysis of this study was done using Content Analysis with a cross-case analysis technique applied for interpreting the data obtained during the interviews.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **CATHOLIC SPIRITUALITY AND BELIEFS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents a discussion of and reflection upon ‘spirituality’ as experienced by the youth involved in this study. It starts off with a brief introduction to each of the participants involved in this study. Following this, the chapter centres on their identities as Catholic youth and their attitudes, beliefs and perceptions about spirituality, the Catholic faith and God. It concludes with a discussion of the experiences and responses of the participants.

#### **PARTICIPANT INTRODUCTION**

From the initial number of 16 young people who volunteered, the following six participants were chosen to ensure maximum diversity for the project wherein a range of views could be obtained. These participants comprised of three boys and three girls. With a view to getting to know them better, the initial section of the interview consisted of a few background details where information about their schooling was obtained. The participants were also asked to rate the catholic commitment of each of their parents.

SARAH is a 17 year old New Zealand European whose parents are highly committed Catholics. Having studied in a Catholic school all her life, Sarah is currently in Year 13.

ANNA is a 16 year old New Zealand European. Like Sarah she studied in a Catholic school all her life and is currently in Year 12. She rates the Catholic commitment of her mum to be ‘medium’ while that of her dad as ‘low’.

REBECCA is a 16 year old Indian immigrant whose family migrated to New Zealand five years ago. She studied in a Catholic primary and secondary school in India but



currently studies in Year 12 in a Non Catholic school in New Zealand. Her parents are highly committed Indian Catholics.

JOHN is a 17 year old New Zealand European whose father is a highly committed Catholic while his mother's commitment is medium. Having studied in a Catholic primary school, John did three years of schooling in a Non - Catholic High school and is currently in Year 13 in a Catholic high school.

MOKO is a 16 year old New Zealand Maori who studied in a Catholic school all his life and is currently in Year 12. Moko rates his parent's Catholic commitment as low even though the extended family is strongly Catholic.

SIMON is a 16 year old British native whose family immigrated to New Zealand four years ago. His mum is a strong Catholic while his Dad was a Non- Catholic. Simon has undergone Catholic schooling all his life and currently studies in Year 11 in the Catholic High School.

## **SPIRITUALITY**

As explained in Chapter Two, any attempt to succinctly define Catholic spirituality is futile since it incorporates so many aspects of a person's life. Similarly, the spirituality of young people is ambiguous and constantly changing. In blending the two, one could expect to get a range of concepts; however among all the descriptions there appeared to be some commonalities and connections.

The task of voicing their views on spirituality proved to be challenging to all of the participants. While most had an idea of what they wanted to say, they found it difficult to put into words. However all of them generally defined spirituality as something that a person believed in. For some, it meant believing in a religion and following it, while for others it meant believing in a god or someone higher than oneself.

*[Spirituality] is believing in something that's...greater than what's here on earth...and...a need for something more...and the fact that everything on earth can't fulfill you. (Sarah)*

*I think it's your belief in God. It's... when you sit down and you either need Him... or you want something so you just sit down by yourself and you pray. (Rebecca)*

*Yeah I think it's having a belief and following that. (John)*

*Spirituality is like your religious belief...what faith you have. I'd tie spirituality to religion. (Anna)*

Youth spirituality is often thought of as being 'experiential' and 'engaged' (see Chapter Two). In further discussions with the participants about what it meant to be spiritual, these characteristics were revealed in many of their descriptions.

*To [be spiritual is] to...well to pray. But also it's...it's just a lifestyle...the way you treat other people. (Sarah)*

*It's what you believe and how it affects you in your daily life. (Simon)*

*It's just... the simplicity of it all. Even if you sometimes just wanna stop during the day and ... that feeling that you know that you can do that and you believe in it. As [for] being Catholic, we believe in it and so at any given time, ... its just a feeling of safety for me, I know that, if everything goes wrong, I can sit down and say, you know, "God help me" and pray to Him... I think that's spirituality. (Rebecca)*

*I think spirituality is something that really makes you [what] you [are]. It affects your personality and your whole aspect on life. Like...being a Maori, we are brought up spiritually, like, everything is customs and...that will have spiritual meanings and significance...and being a Catholic has so much*

*significance, so they are kind of interleaved with each other. And so, I guess... that spirituality is what makes us us. (Moko)*

For these youth, spirituality meant living and experiencing the spiritual in everyday life. It was something tangible, something that they could incorporate in the ways in which they lived their lives. It seemed to be ‘internal and external, personal and public, at the same time’ (Tacey, 2004, p. 67). In reading their interview transcriptions, it was also interesting to perceive the synchronisation between youth spirituality and Catholic spirituality. Rolheiser (1998) perceives the core of Christian spirituality to be the fact that the body of believers is the body of Christ in an organic way. It is not a mystical reality but a physical one in that the believers become God’s physical hands, feet, mouthpiece, and heart in this world. Thus the body of believers is not something that represents Christ but something that is Him. Therefore, although the above descriptions of the participants did not seem terribly ‘churchy’ or ‘religious’, their experiences nevertheless seemed to evoke some characteristics of a ‘lived’ Christian spirituality. For them, being spiritual meant living it in day - to day life, in their behaviours and actions, in their relationships with others and in their attitudes towards life itself. This point serves to remind us of the fact that one cannot assume that the spirituality of youth can only be recognised in the use of a specialised religious language (Hay & Nye, 1998).

When asked to give examples of doing spiritual things, almost all of the participants unanimously chose prayer as the first idea that came to mind. John and Simon also chose going to church and attending Mass. For Rebecca it also meant taking time out to read the Bible as well and understand it more. Apart from that, other examples of doing spiritual things differed enormously. These included:

*Taking time to appreciate everything around me and knowing it’s been given to me by God. (Sarah)*

*Taking time to myself to think about different [religious] aspects...(John)*

*Praying with other people who have the same thoughts as you, who also believe in what you believe...respecting and adhering to customs and respecting the beliefs of others, also, having a relationship with God. (Moko)*

The examples provided all echoed a spirituality that was deep and desirous of the manifestation of the spirit in life and the things they felt connected with. For Sarah, it was her world and everything she cherished. For Moko, it was God and other people around him and for John, it meant his religion. Tacey (2004, p.86) calls this the ‘spirit of the time’, a spirituality that pushes towards a more incarnational and creation-friendly religion; one that fully understands the meaning of the sacred in creation, and the way in which the awareness of this presence dramatically affects one’s relationships with the world, the body, other people and the physical environment.

## **CATHOLIC IDENTITY AND CATHOLIC FAITH**

The conversation on Catholic identity proved to be an interesting one with most of the participants. While all agreed (albeit to different extents) that they were proud to be Catholics, only a few could readily answer why they said that. It would seem that though most of them accepted being Catholic as part of their identity and did not feel uncomfortable with it, they had never consciously reflected on it before. Fowler (1986) believes this to be a typical characteristic of the stage of faith that young people are at. He notes that while beliefs and values are deeply felt, they typically are tacitly held and young people have not yet had the ability to step outside them to reflect on or examine them explicitly or systematically. For those participants who responded spontaneously, a major role was played by the family and many mentioned their Catholic upbringing as being a reason for why they were proud to belong to the Catholic faith.

*I say that because I’ve been brought up as a Catholic, and so... it’s not like, “O yeah, I am a Catholic.” It’s like “Yes, I AM a Catholic!” (Moko)*

*...because of Catholic values...I’m proud that like...I come from a Catholic family. (Anna)*

*I guess because it’s been drilled into me...since I was young. That’s how I’ve been brought up...so that’s how I know really. And I like the values and morals that it teaches me. (Sarah)*

Catholic identity was also seen as important because it gave the person a sense of belonging to a wider group. The participants tended to focus on the dynamic yet caring nature of the Catholic faith itself, which they felt proud to be a part of.

*...because it's a very, very vibrant faith ...it's a wonderful faith to be a part of. It's a very warm faith....it's a very open faith and I...really enjoy it.  
(Simon)*

*Because I think it's something that... we have that a lot of people don't have... it's that feeling of belonging and comfort and we may be a minority but... yeah... I just think that if all else fails, we still have something.  
(Rebecca)*

In an attempt at understanding the heart of their attitudes towards Catholicism, the participants were probed to identify some characteristics of the Catholic faith that were especially important for them. For most, the unique relationship with God was uppermost on their list. While some felt this bonding through believing in and receiving the Eucharist, others felt the importance of having God actively present and participating in their lives.

Two other aspects of Catholicism that really appealed to the majority of these young people were the Catholic teachings or beliefs, and the sense of belonging to a community that shared the same faith and values. The clarity of these values and beliefs and the boundaries they provided seemed appealing to the participants as did the support that they provided. Some of the responses that revealed these aspects were as follows:

*The Catholic faith is important to me because it says things straight. Like, if you question something then it has an answer to it. And that's what I like about it. Also I like our religion because of its traditions and beliefs that we all believe in together. I think it's the whole family thing that is just so important to me because I am all about my family and my friends, and like that sort of things. (Moko)*

*It [The Catholic faith] gives me a sense of... belonging but also like sense of stability ....that I know its always going to be there...and also that if I start with my Catholic faith, then everything else sprouts from that. Also, I like knowing that it's a universal religion...that we aren't the only people who believe this... we have years and years of tradition and belief. I like knowing that I have a constant...and that I'll always have faith and the Catholic support from family and friends. (Sarah)*

*The fact that I have a means of support that even through the darkest times of my life, there is something to get me through. (Simon)*

*Just the Catholic way of life...love your neighbour...and knowing that Jesus loves us all and He died for us...I like the messages...the readings...the teachings. (Anna)*

*...sharing your beliefs in front of people,...attending masses and everything and being active in the Church. I think following your beliefs and... I guess... teaching...the word. (John)*

Incidentally, although many espoused the beliefs of the Catholic faith to be important, very few of them could actually specify the main beliefs. Responses tended to be diffuse and reflective of a general desire to avoid hurting or imposing your views on others. The importance of being tolerant pervaded many of the answers as illustrated by the excerpts below.

*...belief...as in...all of the beliefs of the apostles in Nicene Creed, ...the belief that you should always give someone a second chance, that you should forgive everyone, that you should love everyone, that you should be tolerant and accepting of every person and that at the end of it, it's what you do in your life that shows what sort of person you are and that's how you're judged...(Simon)*

*I believe that there is a God of some sorts... [be]cause there's some unexplained things in the world... and I believe that...everyone has their own*

*opinion ...on God or Jesus, and things. ...you should be able to express your faith without anyone stopping you. (John)*

*... The ten commandments...definitely ...I think Catholic's have sort of been brought up to ...always see the good in things...and I think that... forgiveness is quite a big part of it and ...just to always see the good in people and forgive and... love...respect...I think that's how I interpret the question. (Rebecca)*

Robert Wuthnow, an American sociologist, describes how grappling with particular questions and issues is one way in which people make their faith personal. Many young people tailor the traditions they had formally accepted to create their own sense of identity and ownership of the beliefs (Wuthnow, 1990). While Simon and Rebecca did mention the Nicene Creed (which is composed of the main beliefs of the Catholic Church) and the Ten Commandments respectively, Sarah and Moko were the only ones who were able to briefly list some of the core beliefs. Their responses were as follows:

*The main ones...That the Eucharist is Jesus' body and blood. That He died for us and rose. ....that He sent the Holy Spirit to be with us when He left. That we have the power of free will...that's probably it. (Sarah)*

*I think the main belief of my Catholic faith is... just believing that God is a person and that we are all interconnected with Him. And... that Jesus was a person, and He was the Son of God, and He did sacrifice Himself for us. And to believe in Saints and Martyrs who had total faith in the Lord. (Moko)*

Overall, some of the participants were able to articulate the main Catholic beliefs while the others generally believed that it meant being a good person and their replies described several aspects of just that. The lack of clear responses of the participants was not surprising. They reflected a growing culture that was prevalent world wide. As reported in the literature review, similar tendencies were shown by Catholic youth in countries like the U.S. (Smith and Denton, 2005) and Australia (Rymarz & Graham, 2006). Also, as noted earlier, Williams & Davidson (1996) shows this to be a trend among the postmodern generation of youth. Their study on the spirituality of Catholics of different

generations showed that young people born in the post Vatican II period possessed the most individualistic views of their faith. They were more concerned with whether an individual was a ‘good person’ and had a ‘personal relationship with God’ and did not describe the church as an essential component of their faith

When it came to describing their faith to another person, they were generally clueless. Their descriptions seemed vague and abstracted, lacking any meaningful insights apart from the statement that it entailed believing in a god, a fact which all of them consistently mentioned.

*I would say we have...a god...who...has a son...and...his son died for us so our sins could be forgiven. And...we pray to...God’s son Jesus and... That’s all I can think of. (Anna)*

*It’s about knowing God and loving God and feeling Him in your life and knowing...where your life is going and having...having ways to live it. (Simon)*

*... I’ve no idea how I would explain it...belief in...an all-loving God, that He gave himself for us. That... we base our lives on that...(Sarah)*

*I would say that we believe in God who created the universe... who is still there for us...although people see Him in different ways...the ideas are mostly the same. It’s in faith that you’re able to ask for help or forgiveness... Yeah...I think everyone’s faith is important to them on some scale. (John)*

Moko and Rebecca were the only two participants who included a few more details in their explanations. For Moko being Catholic was equated to being ‘Marist’. This idea probably developed from the fact that his school was run by the Marist [the order of Mary] community who uphold the seven virtues of being merciful, attentive, respectful, etc. Rebecca on the other hand, believed that the Catholic faith needed to be taken seriously and was not for those lacking commitment.



*(Moko) I would say that it's about believing the same things. So like ...believing in God and Jesus and Mary. And... I would say that it's about ...being able to... be spiritual in the sense where...you can pray... to God, and you get the response... that you... kind of need. And I guess that being Catholic is like being Marist you know, merciful, attentive and ...that's what being Catholic is, and it's about... just you.*

*(Researcher) And being a 'Marist', does it for you define Catholicism?*

*(Moko) I think it does...merciful, attentive, respectful, initiator, sensitive to all, and tolerant. And...I think it's just like every time I do something, I think... "OK! ...instead of being nasty about it...So if someone is annoying me... be tolerant, you know.*

*...I'd definitely say commitment...because it takes a lot of commitment... I'd say you'd need to be guided into it... you couldn't just go into it and ...and I'd say that you'd need to...to believe... in a power that's greater than you...believe in something that you wouldn't otherwise ordinarily believe in... because asking a non-Catholic to believe in God is...far-fetched ... and the ...attitude...so you're not going to hear about a Bible story and ... just [say]...you know ... "that's rubbish...I don't believe in that"...but to see the deeper meaning in it...not just the story... (Rebecca)*

## **CATHOLIC SPIRITUAL PRACTICES**

Rossiter (2005, p. 19) proposes that a healthy spirituality cannot be static and merely 'implied' in the way people live their lives. It needs to be sustained and developed by reflection, education (in the broadest sense) and habits of spiritual activity. It is not enough to merely claim to have beliefs and values, believe in God or lead a spiritually implied lifestyle. Rather, an authentic spirituality is one that is 'cultivated' i.e. one that motivates behaviour and leads to personal/social action and continually challenges the individual to practice, extend and deepen spiritual insights.

With Rossiter's point in mind, it was interesting to note that though all of the participants claimed to believe in God and lead a spiritual life, only half of them were actively involved in developing their personal faith. When given the opportunity to be responsible for their beliefs and integrate them into their lives, some youth express a limited commitment or even dismiss or ignore this aspect of their lives (Wuthnow, 1990; Fowler, 1986). This seemed to be true for John, Anna and Rebecca who did not find it necessary to be involved in activities like personal prayer, reading the Bible, spiritual journaling, etc. For John, the most he did was pray if a family member died or if there happened to be a calamity overseas such as a war or something similar. Anna did not give any reasons for her inactivity. Rebecca felt that she had her priorities set out for her and didn't think that God was currently one of them. She did indicate though that it might change in the future:

*But ... I think that as I grow up and I find the need for God...as my problems increase and I need Him more ...I'll probably pray more... that's when I'll turn to Him ...that day will come...(Rebecca)*

Simon, Sarah and Moko, on the other hand, admitted to actively trying to develop their faith. All of them prayed frequently, usually every day. Moko revealed that he usually prayed many times during the day and also was actively involved in his family prayers. Simon and Moko also read the Bible on occasions; Simon when he read in Church and Moko when he was by himself. Both stated that they found this activity extremely reflective and meaningful:

*Well, I feel good after I have read the Bible... I like reading Psalm 23... that's cos we've ...always read it. And just... you know... excerpts... like I've just opened it up... and I'll find something and I'll read that and sometimes it can be boring ...like someone begot someone and you think 'Oh what? What are they talking about?' ...but then you see it's genealogy, and because that's an important part of being Maori is knowing who you are from and so you can connect to it...how they know who they came from and how they descended through that. (Moko)*

*...I read it and I think ...well here's what is said, how do I interpret it...what does it mean for my life...how can I put it into practice...things like that. Do I agree and that sort of thing. (Simon)*

Finally, Sarah's participation in youth group sessions and youth leader meetings were ways for her to develop her faith. She attended these weekly and also participated in retreats which were held once a month. Sarah found that taking an active part in the discussions and conversations she had with her youth group coordinator and her religious education teacher at school made a big impact for her life. Sarah, like Moko and Simon, admitted the positive influence these activities had had on her life. Each of these three young people saw distinct changes in their spirituality as they had grown over the years:

*I find it useful because it centers myself like where I am, what I am doing, how am I going to be better...and by just repetition...then you can... see the changes. (Moko)*

*As you can tell when you have... the truths of what you want to do with your life I think ...if you have a very strong faith background it helps you when you think this is what I want to be... this is the person I want to be and this is how I'm going to be it. (Simon)*

*We used to go to church and I didn't really understand it. I used to go just because my parents went. And, now I know more what it's about. And I want to know more of it so that I can...get better at it... And it's enjoyable... [it] makes things more meaningful. It's a social thing as well. (Sarah)*

## **PERSPECTIVES ON GOD**

The literature on the spirituality of Catholic youth around the world revealed a general tendency for youth to have a comfortable image of God - one where God existed but did not play a major part in their daily lives. In order to see if this was true for participants in

this study as well, questions on their image and perceptions of God were included in the interview.

When asked about their image of God, the majority of the participants said that they perceived Him as a friend who is loving and caring. However, this image of a friend differed somewhat from one person to another. Simon's idea of God as a friend was very close and loving. For him God meant "something to appreciate and something to understand".

*I see Him...as someone... I consider like a friend ...[friends are] always looking after you and...when you get down...you talk to them...and they make you feel better...they understand what you're going through and what was there really to understand. And when you're happy, they're there...to look over you...they think "Yessss!" They really give you that little bit of encouragement. (Simon)*

Rebecca's idea of God was more amiable and chummy. She explained her idea of God by referring to a TV advertisement where God was seen as a friendly big spirit.

*Yeah...that's the image I have of Him. Like a powerful spirit but a friend...how that [TV] ad comes across as He's like a 'big fella'... kinda like that... because that's what I feel more comfortable with... I don't think I've ever been the type of person to... be charismatic about it... like I wouldn't say "O God."...I'd talk to Him like I was talking to a friend... like He's my confidant kind of... someone who knows what He's talking about... (Rebecca)*

Rebecca also explained that for her, God was someone you could always rely on; if family, friends and relationships failed; God would always be there to solve problems that no one else could.

John couldn't personify God completely although he did state that for him God was someone you could talk to or ask guidance from:

*To me, I don't really... see a God, I see someone who's loving, caring – all of those sweet things. ...friend, caring, but I don't have a set image sort of thing of Him. (John)*

Anna and Sarah both saw God as a loving Father and the creator of the universe. For Anna it was just that, while Sarah was able to flesh out her image a bit more:

*...He is there all the time, He always has been, always will be. He is there as someone to guide, but someone who doesn't force himself... if you want Him then He will come, but if not, He doesn't force himself onto you. He's someone who is everything you want to be really... perfect. (Sarah)*

Finally, Moko's image of God was completely different from that of the other participants. For him, God was the main reason for his existence and that of everything else in the world. And therefore he described how he pictured different sides of God at different times:

*I guess I see God as different things all the time. Like whenever I pray to Him, He's my friend, and I tell Him everything. You know, when I'm driving and I look around and there's like trees and birds flying around, I see Him as the Creator. And then... when I'm like at home with my family, I see Him like our protector. So, I see Him as different things all the time. (Moko)*

Moko's unique image of God could be associated to his Maori upbringing. When probed about this fact, he explained the link between the two and how interrelated they were.

*They [being Maori and Catholic] are pretty close together and I mean, when we talk about the Maori gods, I guess, I see it as there is only one God. I guess, I see [it as] they are kind of symbols of God but in different aspects of nature and the world. So when we talk of the Maori god of the forest. I guess I see it as being like metaphorical, [God] symbolised as the creator of the forest. The Maori gods are just those elemental natures personified. We call them 'kaitiaki', caretakers. So in a way they are God in different forms. (Moko)*

Differences also emerged between the participants when they were asked about their relationship with God. Anna denied having any relationship at all. For her God was “pretty distant” because he seemed really far away. John wasn’t quite sure; he admitted that in some ways he did have a relationship which was reasonably close but not entirely:

*For me... God is not someone that I would turn to every spare moment or so. I ...sort of talk to Him... as it’s necessary... and attending Church and stuff like that. But it’s not something that I.....pray every morning and night sort of thing. (John)*

Rebecca, Sarah, Moko and Simon all agreed that they had a relationship with God but the levels of proximity differed. In Rebecca’s case, God still seemed “relatively distant” mainly because of the way she prioritised everything in her life:

*...again the priority thing...If I felt like I needed Him...my relationship with Him would grow but right now, my priorities are sort of studying and getting into Uni [university] and friends and boyfriend and things like that...I think...you have to go through something big in your life to... build that relationship or to start that relationship ...and I don’t think that’s happened so much yet for me...but it will because it happens for everyone and when it does happen...when I do need Him really He’ll be there. Right now I’m comfortable with the fact that He’s there...if I need Him. And that’s one thing that’s really nice that they always say in the church that God will be there no matter what...which is something I identify with. (Rebecca)*

On the other hand, Sarah’s relationship with God was relatively “close”. The reason for this was that although she was working on it, she still felt there was a long way to go before she had a more intimate relationship:

*... It could be more and there are more things I could do but, like, I don’t know... well, I obviously don’t know everything but there is so much more. When I talk to other people they know so much more than I do. So obviously they are deeper... (Sarah)*

Finally, Simon and Moko both acknowledged an “intimate” relationship with God. They both strongly felt God’s presence everyday in their lives and had built a rapport with Him:

*I talk to Him and share all my deepest darkest secrets and...He talks back and...it’s very, very close. The first person but it’s very, very close...and I can pray and that sort of thing. (Simon)*

*...I mean I finally see God like He is right here...next to me everyday and when I’m... just doing my school work... You know...say I was going to do something, I will just remember like... God is here with us... especially when stressed out, [be] cause its school and [be] cause you got to go to work and stuff like that. (Moko)*

The views that these young people had on God can be divided into two categories. For Simon, Moko and Sarah, it seemed that they had a very close bonding with God and the God they related to took an active role in their lives. In comparison, the views of Anna, John and Rebecca conformed to the concept of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. As described in Chapter Two, this is when people like these participants have an idea of a benign God who exists and watches over the world but does not need to be involved unless there are problems to be resolved. In other words, Anna, John and Rebecca turned to God only when they felt it was necessary to do so. In effect, they believed in God, but did not take their belief too seriously and had adopted a spirituality which they felt comfortable with.

## **CONCLUSION**

The young people in this study definitely possessed a distinct sense of ‘spirituality’. Their views spoke of a spirituality that was experienced and put into action in day to day life. However, when it came to living out their Catholic beliefs, not all of them seemed to get the point. They all accepted the fact that being Catholic was part of their identity, they were proud of their Catholic background and upbringing, seemed to enjoy being part of the Catholic community and the teachings and messages of the faith appealed to them.

However, only a few could concretely list the core Catholic beliefs and most were unsure as to how they would describe their faith to another person.

When it came to practicing and developing their faith, only half of the participants acknowledged doing it. Those who did practice their faith seemed to have a very close relationship with God and had seen a distinct growth in their spirituality over the years. For those who did nothing to develop their faith, God seemed distant yet conveniently reachable when needed. On studying these different aspects of spirituality, it became obvious that the participants could be divided into two distinct groups that could be distinguished by the ways in which they related to the Catholic faith. While one group seemed to take their faith seriously, the other seemed to have adopted only those beliefs and practices that they felt comfortable with. Over the next two chapters, this trend is further explored and studied as the rest of the findings of the study are reported and discussed.



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **RELIGIOUS ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION IN FAITH RELATED ACTIVITIES**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter examined the participants' beliefs and perceptions about spirituality, the Catholic faith and God. Two distinct groups were identified among the participants on the basis of their spiritual lives and the ways in which they related to the Catholic faith. Accordingly this chapter now examines the participants' religious attendance and participation in faith-related activities. It also reviews their perceptions of their future religious commitment. As part of the concluding section which focuses on key findings with regard to the participant's religious beliefs and practices, an attempt has been made to investigate differences and similarities between the two groups identified in the previous chapter.

#### **ATTENDING MASS**

With a view towards learning about the participants' attendance and participation in Catholic and faith-based activities, they were questioned about different events. When asked about their attendance at Mass, all of them answered affirmatively. However, the rate of attending differed: John and Anna usually attended once a month, for Moko it was once or twice a month, while Rebecca, Simon and Sarah attended weekly.

Their reasons for attending Mass varied, although the influence of family members appeared to be the main common factor among them. Family members and/or close friends are often the first people that youth turn to for guidance and are generally the most significant influence in their life, contributing to their framework of beliefs and values (Fowler, 1986). Indeed, attending Mass with family seemed to be the sole reason why

John and Anna went, although John did mention that he also felt that it was a part of his Catholic belief.

*Well...my mother's been taking me and my sister to church ever since we were little, it's just... kind of like expected of us and so we go... (Anna)*

*...Part of it could be because I have been attending this for ages with my family and also just beliefs really, our belief. That's pretty much [it]. Just family, culture of my family... (John)*

Both John and Anna seemed duty-bound to go even though they attended only once a month. The same reason was stated by Rebecca, who attended weekly, although she did believe that it was important as well.

*... just because I have been brought up that way. [I've] grown up going to church every Sunday or a Saturday. My parents go to church and at this point in time I don't really have a choice so much, so its kind of an obligation ... as I have grown up I don't see it so much as an obligation... it's important also... I'd say 50-50. (Rebecca)*

In comparison with John, Anna and Rebecca, the other three participants – Sarah, Simon and Moko – also had more meaningful reasons for attending Mass. Although he attended with family, Moko explained that he enjoyed the experience of a sense of purification that he felt. It seemed to be a significant incentive for him to go.

*I think it's nice to be spiritually cleansed... I feel a lot better after the Mass. Also it's something I have grown up with. My grandparents are especially very religious and inspiring. (Moko)*

Both Sarah and Simon felt that Mass was important and stated that that was their motive for attending. But they also felt it had a special meaning attached to it. While Sarah did not clarify this point, Simon explained it as follows:

*I enjoy it. It's important for me as a sort of outward sign of my faith. I go with my mum. She's Catholic and my sister as well. I only go with them because I'm Catholic and that's a way to express our religion. (Simon)*

The Mass is highly important for Catholics to attend since it is the celebration of the Eucharist, a rite which is at the heart of the Catholic faith (Paul VI, 1963). The Catholic Code of Canon Law (1983, #1246) proscribes that:

Sunday is the day on which the paschal mystery is celebrated in light of the apostolic tradition and is to be observed as the foremost holy day of obligation in the universal Church.

Moreover, 'On Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the faithful are bound to participate in the Mass' (Can, 1983, #1247). It is described by the Second Vatican Council as being the source and summit of Christian life (Flannery, 1984), and participation in the Mass is seen as one of the strongest indicators of objective religious commitment (Stark & Finke, 2000). However, recent studies (for example, Brierley, 2000; Bibby, 2001; Vermeer & Van Der Ven, 2004; Kaldor, Bellamy, Powell, Castle & Hughes, 1999) have shown an overall decline in Mass attendance rates among youth in countries worldwide. Reasons for this decline are many, though one of the main ones cited is the apparent transformation that churches in the West seem to be undergoing as new forms of Christian community and new ways of expressing the faith begin to emerge (Tacey, 2004; Hughes, 2000). The lack of interest in attending Mass expressed by some of the participants in this study corresponds with the views of young Australians (Hughes, 2006; McQuillon, 2004, Rymarz and Graham, 2006), many of whom did not feel the need to attend Mass regularly.

Nevertheless, even though not all of the participants in this study enjoyed going to Mass every week, when it came to attending Mass on festive occasions, all of them wholeheartedly participated. Every one of them stated that they attended all the major festive days such as Easter, Annunciation, Ash Wednesday, Christmas, etc. Their reasons for participating were generally similar in nature. Some mentioned once again the influence of family members or their Catholic upbringing. However, all of them recognised and appreciated the importance and special meaning of these festive days.

*My parents were brought up as devoted Catholics. So I was as well. So it has become traditional for us to participate. My parent's upbringing has greatly influenced this. I think it's important... you can see the difference between people who are raised and brought up like that ...like who they are... so I want to be raised like that and then raise my own children like that as well... I think it's important. (Moko)*

*Yeah... I participate in them because they are important events in the church and celebrating these days is a symbol of the Catholic faith. (Anna)*

*Because... Christmas to me is not just Santa Claus and presents, I know the meaning of Christmas and I go to church because...[of] what it means... that is more important and that is why we have Christmas so if you ...know that then you know that there is nothing else. I know the true meaning of whatever those festive days are. (Rebecca)*

*Probably both, because it has a special meaning and also because I enjoy it (Sarah)*

*Just because of my faith again and...yeah...it's just...what I believe in so I would go to it. (John)*

*...because they're important and because they all have a special meaning... (Simon)*

As indicated above, attendance at these special occasions seemed to be important for all the participants as they saw in these events a particular meaning or significance which enticed them to attend and participate. Hughes (2006) surmises that for young people, weekly Mass usually appears to be boring and uninteresting. He believes that youth want experiences that are new and different, that capture their attention and absorb them. Many young people find it hard to concentrate on words at Mass as they have been born into a world full of moving images and short bites of information. Given Hughes' views then, it could be argued that perhaps the novelty of celebrating feast days and important

occasions at church is what attracted the participants in this study as these events were different and perhaps more meaningful and enjoyable than the routine weekly Mass.

## **ATTENDING AND PARTICIPATING IN THE SACRAMENTS**

The call to live as a Catholic in daily life involves regular participation in the Sacraments. The seven sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance, the Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders and Matrimony touch all the stages and important moments of Christian life as they 'give birth and increase, healing and mission to the Christian's life of faith' (CCC, 1993, #1210). In particular, the Sacrament of Penance (i.e. Confession or Reconciliation) is important as it 'consecrates the Christian sinner's personal and ecclesial steps of conversion, penance, and satisfaction' (CCC, 1993, #1423).

When it came to participating in the Sacraments, mainly in the Sacrament of Confession, the questions were met with mainly unenthusiastic responses from the participants. Most of them engaged in this activity only two or three times a year while Moko and Anna admitted that they had only done so when they were younger. Moko, in fact, had participated in it only once during his Confirmation which was many years ago. Anna was made to go at her primary school and after leaving there she said she had only been once or twice.

When asked to explain why they participated in Confession, the prevailing view was that they felt good after the experience. For example:

*Yeah...just feel good and fresh start (John)*

*I think it's just a feeling of something that you can't describe. It's like a relief you feel at the end of it after you've confessed. It's like that freedom ... so I've confessed my sins now so its almost like go sin again kind of thing, but not. I'd say a feeling of cleansing. (Rebecca)*

*It's important. It's part of the faith. It comes along with the [fact that] if you make a mistake you go for Confession so I do it. I do it because afterwards I feel better about that. (Simon)*

It was also interesting to note the different reactions to the Sacrament of Confession. While Sarah and Simon participated because it was a significant aspect of their belief, and the whole process of being cleansed appealed to Rebecca, the others didn't really feel the need for it. Nevertheless, Anna believed in the Sacrament because she felt that '*telling your sins to God makes you understand your mistakes more*', while John – claiming that it didn't make a difference to him whether Confession was there or not – still went once every three months. Moko was the only person who neither believed nor participated in Confession. His reasons were as follows:

*Confession? No ... I just don't really know about it. I just think that I don't need to talk to the priest about it and I can just pray about it myself. In that way I have a special connection to the Lord. (Moko)*

Moko's reasons are characteristic of a 'therapeutic individualism' as explained by Smith and Denton (2005). As discussed in Chapter two, therapeutically individualistic young people view subjective, personal experience as that which is authentic, right and true, while all external traditions, obligations and institutions of society are invalidated.

## **PARTICIPATION IN FAITH-RELATED ACTIVITIES**

Participation in faith-related activities is one way in which youth connect with their faith. Being a part of a group where everyone has similar beliefs and values also helps young people to feel a sense of belonging and stability. When the participants in this study were asked if they belonged to any such church-based or religious group, only John, Sarah and Simon replied affirmatively. The others – Moko, Anna and Rebecca – did not currently participate in any such activities.

Anna explained that she helped out with babysitting for the Dove Northland Group, and she sometimes also did the offertory at Mass. Although these were not particular groups that she was part of, she acknowledged that just contributing in these ways was of benefit to her:

*I like doing the offertory. Yeah definitely [be]cause it makes me feel more involved...makes it more meaningful. Even in the offertory it makes you feel like... I am part of this...even like I do... babysitting for Dove Northland and... it makes me feel involved like just its helping out the church. Makes me feel good...(Anna)*

When asked if there was any group they would have liked to be a part of, Moko and Anna both replied that they were keen to join the Eucharistic Ministry in the church, a group of people who distributed the bread and wine at Mass. Anna in fact, had already put down her name for training to be one. Anna also said she would have liked to be a part of the Reader's Ministry because she loved reading in public, and when she was older (i.e. 'when I have retired') she would like to join the Catholic Women's League. Finally, both Moko and Anna declared that they would like to join the church Youth Group. Their reasons for wanting to do so were very similar and underscore the attraction and influence of friends.

*...quite a few of my friends go and yeah it would be good to talk about ...I mean go into a Catholic environment where there's like younger people [be]cause usually I just go to church and there's ...older people. Yeah...I think it would deepen my faith as well...( Anna)*

*...some of my friends here are part of it, and it's great to see them [being] able to interact and be[ing] able to connect with and share something with other students here at Pompallier who are also in the youth group. Also it's great to see the inter-year level interaction. (Moko)*

Rebecca was the other one who did not currently belong to any church-based or religious group. However, she had, until quite recently, been a part of the church Youth Group for a year and a half. Her reasons for joining this group were as follows:

*I think I just wanted to make friends, I think I just ended up for a long time coming to church ...and I didn't really have anything and I saw all the other youth and they had their little groups and I thought, you know, when am I going to fit into that because I need to, because in India I would have probably joined a youth group, yeah. I ended up making quite a few new friends so I pretty much know all the youth at church now. It's a good feeling, it's like a feeling of belonging, so that you are not left out and, you're not [just] someone that goes to church every Sunday, that's a part of the group but not really. (Rebecca)*

Rebecca had become a leader when she left the group, because there was too much of a commitment involved as well as other demands on her time and energy.

*... there were quite a few people that left at that time. Quite a few leaders left at that time and so the commitment that fell on the ones that were remaining was too much and ... it was just really hard. I had to keep cancelling because of school stuff. I just realised that I wouldn't end up having any time for me. (Rebecca)*

Although she did not belong to any group at the time of the interview, Rebecca felt that if a youth music group had been started she might have joined providing she had the time for it.

*Yeah...quite possibly a music group... I probably would have been interested if I had the time to maybe play the piano or sing or something like that. But, yeah that's something I would have liked to do. I just enjoy listening to it ...and it just sounds good when everyone's together and you're doing it with everybody. (Rebecca)*



Of the three participants who were involved in various faith-related groups when interviewed, John and Sarah were in the Eucharistic Ministry together. John participated when asked to do so (approximately twice a month when he attended Mass) but his reasons for participating seemed pretty apathetic.

*John: I don't know...everyone having the same sort of belief and... everyone's there for the same reason.*

*Researcher: Do you feel a sense of belonging because you are a part of it?*

*John: Hmm... you are a part of the group but ... no, not really.*

And when asked if there was any group he might have liked to participate in, John mentioned the Youth Group for reasons similar to those of Anna and Moko.

*...when I was younger, maybe the Youth Group more...but our weekends are usually chocker, so I never got around to it, so yeah Youth Group maybe. Just for more friends and more people my age, all there for the same reason.*  
(John)

Sarah's reasons for being a Eucharistic minister were quite different and she was also actively involved in the church Youth Group as a leader. She explained that she was initially a reader as well in church but was then asked to decide between that and the Eucharistic Ministry, so she chose the latter. Sarah participated in both groups regularly, attending the Youth Group meeting every week, because she enjoyed the activity, enjoyed being with friends and also felt a feeling of belonging.

Simon initially said that he did not belong to any group but later mentioned that he was a reader in church and did that quite frequently. He did go to the church Youth Group once but said '*I didn't particularly enjoy it...I didn't feel very comfortable there so I didn't go back*'. When asked what group he might like to participate in, Simon mentioned the church Choir but pointed out that he was '*very, very busy [and didn't] have time to go to things and turn up for the Sunday masses*'.

Overall, only half of the participants were involved in any organised parish-based or school youth group or activity. Although there appeared to be quite a few activities that they and others could be a part of, the choices available were somewhat limited which could be one reason for this outcome. Also, half of them (Simon, Rebecca and John) noted that school and other priorities took up much of their time leaving them with no time to attend youth group activities. Similar results were noted in Rymarz and Graham's (2006) study of Catholic youth where a slightly higher percentage of the youth studied were not involved. It was, however, interesting to note the number of participants in the present study who mentioned the parish Youth Group as the activity they liked to be part of or wanted to join in order to engage in faith-related activities with peers of a similar age. The Youth Group is currently the only Whangarei Catholic parish group solely for young people of this age range.

Adolescence is a time when peer groups play an active role in a young person's identity formation. As Loranger (1997, p. 15) points out:

Young people often spend a considerable amount of time in search of community and a certain transcendence beyond themselves. Their questions, doubts and critical scrutiny of an established group or authority may be a healthy way to 'test' whether they want freely to belong to this group while maintaining their own individuality.

For Catholic youth, the parish Youth Group is the opportune place where they can connect with each other and attempt to grow in faith together. Hence it was not surprising to note the participants' interest in and/or attachment felt towards this group.

## **RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT**

When asked if they would still be members of the Catholic faith in five years time, all of the participants replied in the affirmative. However, there were large differences between them with regard to their expected commitment levels and the way they thought they might relate to the Catholic Church. While Anna and Rebecca were quite certain that their commitment levels would decrease, Simon thought it would remain the same as it was

currently and Moko, John and Sarah surmised that their commitment levels would increase.

Rebecca and Anna's expected decrease in commitment to the Catholic faith was largely due to the fact that they supposed their lives were going to get busier and they would not have time for attending Mass and other faith-related activities.

*Well right now I go to church every Sunday because I live at home and Mum and Dad go to church. But when I go to uni[versity], there's gonna be other things that will seem more attractive on a Sunday or a Saturday night... but at the same time I won't lose the values that I have. And I won't stray away from it so far that I think, you know, going back to church after ten years 'O my God I haven't been here' kind of thing. But... its all about your priorities and where you choose to fit God into your life and I would like to say that I would like to go to church when I end up going to uni[versity] and stuff but I know...that's probably not going to happen...(Rebecca)*

*How old would I be...I'd be 21 so I'd probably be in tertiary education so...I don't know how often I'd go to church...I think it would decrease because I'll just be real busy but I think...I would always make an effort on the feast days. Yeah, I would always go to church on Christmas and Easter wherever I am in the world, yeah. And like on Ash Wednesday I would always go... (Anna)*

Anna also explained that her Mass attendance would depend on where she lived and whom she was living with in the future.

*Anna: Yeah...I probably wouldn't go to Masses often...because I probably would be on my own like...I wouldn't have my mum...[be]cause I probably would have moved away from home...so it depends whether I...would be living with...other Catholics...*

*Researcher: Yeah, so if you had somebody of your own peer group who'd be there to go to Mass [with you] you'd probably go with them..?*

*Anna: Hmm...or I'd be in a city with family ...all my mum's side is Catholic so yeah. I don't imagine there would be any changes in my personal*

*faith. Hmm ... [it] might decrease a little bit, yeah, [be]cause getting older your ...whole perspective on life changes...*

Like Anna, Rebecca too gave other reasons for her predicted decline in commitment levels. Apart from the reshuffling of priorities, she felt that it would also be due to the fact that:

*...I would like to explore other religions...Like Catholicism will always be like the first one that I've grown up with and the one that I will come back to eventually, but to see ...what the difference is ...because I don't think that they are all very different. ...a lot of people say that the Catholic faith is quite strict and stuff and I don't feel that but, yeah, just to see what other religions are like. But at the same time, I want to learn about them. (Rebecca)*

As implied above, both Anna and Rebecca seemed to have already made up their minds about how life after school would alter them. Although they wanted to be affiliated to the faith, they foresaw that the more appealing things in life would probably shift their focus away from regular involvement. Indeed, Rebecca predicted that she would most probably be a 'non-participating' member of the church.

Simon, by comparison, expected no change in his level of commitment in the near future. Although he did expect some changes in the future he was not sure how he might react to them but he knew that he would turn to his religion for strength.

*Simon: I think...As I am now, is pretty much how I'll be for life. If it works for me, it's in my inner thought and I can cope with it.*

*Researcher: Ok. Would there be any difference? Would your faith increase or would it decrease?*

*Simon: It depends on what my experiences are in life ...basically what I go through, what challenges life comes up with and how I draw my strength. My faith is strength. I'm not sure... time will tell...*

Moko, Sarah and John all envisaged higher levels of commitment even though they knew that life ahead would be challenging. They all spoke (in different ways) of difficulties they would have to overcome, but they all admitted that they would try their hardest to remain in the faith.

*Moko: I guess it's hard to say because I don't know where I see myself in 5 years, but I do still see myself having a relationship with God... I don't think I could ever lose that.*

*Researcher: Do you see that it could grow in future?*

*Moko: I think so. I guess, because I will be finished with school and there are different people [around me], so it would be harder to stay in that same mind set when you are around different people with different thoughts about religion, so I guess it would be hard. But I would try my best to participate regularly.*

*I think [my] commitment levels would be higher because now I am still at school and still living at home... It's easy for me to go to church. Whereas next year when I leave and for all of the years later, it's completely up to me. So if I'm still with the church – which I intend to be – then they'll [the commitment levels] be a lot deeper than... now. [Be]cause some of it sometimes is ...just because this is how it has always been and my parents are always like 'Have you gone to mass this weekend?' But if it's me making that decision then it will be deeper, more of a self-commitment instead of a forced one. Also, I think I'd understand more with 5 years experience and being older, yeah. And also, I'd probably be able to appreciate it more [be]cause I'm going out on my own. Like out into the world sort of and seeing a lot of different things that I haven't encountered yet. (Sarah)*

*John: No, I mean unless there was something in a couple of years that would change your perspective on it all, but other than that, no. Err...I suppose I'd be employed and everything and so... maybe the commitment to Church might be a little bit more. I'd have a bit more time on the weekends so yeah...*

*Researcher: So, would you still make it a point to go to the Church?*

*John: Yeah.*

The expected decrease in the commitment levels of some of the participants was similar to the general trend of other Catholic youth as noted by Rymarz and Graham (2006). However, it was interesting to note that just over half the participants predicted similar or increasing levels of commitment with most expressing a personal desire and intention to strive to remain faithful to their Catholic traditions.

## **CONCLUSION**

In the previous chapter two groups were identified among the study's participants – one group was highly committed to the faith and members of the other group seemed to have a casual attitude about their beliefs. It was no surprise then that members in both these groups remained the same when it came to attending Mass. While those in the group committed to the faith participated regularly for meaningful reasons, the other group's members felt obligated to do so. However, all of the participants admitted to attending Mass on festive days and other important occasions, and the majority attended the Sacrament of Confession a few times during the year.

When asked about their participation in faith-based groups or activities, once again the participants were split into two, with one group participating fairly regularly while those in the other did not attend at all. However, the membership of each group differed in comparison to the groups previously identified. An interesting point noted here, was how almost all of the participants seemed drawn to the parish Youth Group. While some were currently members, others felt a need or desire to belong to that particular group.

In response to questions concerning their future levels of involvement in and commitment to the Catholic faith, a majority of the participants expected that their commitment levels would be similar or higher. Only two participants anticipated decreasing levels of commitment.

To sum up, a pattern that seemed to develop in the overall responses of the participants was that while more than half of them seemed to show medium to high levels of religious

attendance and participation in faith related activities (i.e. Sarah, John, Simon and Moko), the two remaining participants (i.e. Rebecca and Anna) seemed rather distant and indifferent. The latter were also among those identified in the previous chapter as having more informal and laid-back beliefs.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CATHOLIC PRACTICE IN DAILY LIFE**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter examined the participants' religious attendance and participation in faith-related activities as well as their perceptions of their future religious commitment. Two groups were identified based on their spirituality and religiousness. This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section, explores how the participants apply their Catholic beliefs to their daily life. It studies their morals and values and discusses the influence of their Catholic beliefs on the moral code that they live by. The second section of the chapter examines the role played by the participants' peer groups in shaping their Catholic beliefs and practices. It also discusses the challenges faced by the participants in daily living their Catholic faith. In the concluding section, the two groups are analysed for similarities and/or differences.

#### **LIVING THE FAITH**

When asked how much difference their Catholic beliefs made to their lives, the participants were asked to choose from one of the following: a little difference, some difference, a great difference or no difference at all. Once again, they had a range of answers. For Moko, Simon and Sarah, their beliefs made a great difference in their lives. Rebecca felt that her beliefs made only some difference while John and Anna replied that their beliefs made barely any difference at all.

Moko, Sarah and Simon's answers to this question came as no surprise. Their previous answers had indicated that they took their faith seriously and strived to live it out in daily life. All of them explained (in different ways) how the morals and values that their faith taught them served as a foundation on which they based their lives. For example, Simon and Sarah said:



*Because they're... a guideline. They say 'Well here's life, here's what you're going to do, here's how you can do it, ...this is what you can do but if you do that, it's not going to be good for you or have a good effect in general. And if you do this...someone's always there for you and...if you ...[follow] this path of your life...it'll make you a better person, it'll make you feel better about yourself and it'll make others respect you a great deal.' You have a strong set of morals that help you identify who you are. (Simon)*

*Because I compare my life to people whom I know who don't believe, and just everything is so completely different—the way they do everything. Well, say they go out on the weekend and...just kiss lots of girls and stuff like that and ...yeah, I don't do that. And the disrespect for their bodies and other people's as well...it's... things like that. It's the way they see things...it's their life and they just do what they like. Like smoking and taking drugs. (Sarah)*

For Rebecca who thought that her Catholic beliefs made only some difference, the greatest challenge was the contrary information that she received from people and the world around her which made her unsure about all the values and morals that the Catholic Church preached. She explained that although she tried to be a good person, she never really did everything she was expected to do.

*... I think right now, this age is [when] you're very influenced, you're very impressionable so to speak and I definitely feel that...sometimes I feel like I want to rebel...I don't feel that I need to do everything by the book to be a good person. So my beliefs will probably stray a little bit from what the real thing is but I don't think I'm going straight to hell for it or anything. That's why it makes [only]...some difference. So in the back of my mind when I'm doing something that I know will probably go against Mum or Dad or the faith...I'll think about it, I'll take kind of like a half and half of it... and [while] most of it would be Catholic because that's how I've been brought up... [the other part] will be my own understanding of it.*

John and Anna felt that their Catholic beliefs made only a little difference, if any, to their lives. In Anna's case, for example, her Catholic beliefs only served to create a heightened awareness at times, of their actions in daily life.

*Well if I was ... hypothetically...going to do something wrong, I would stop and think 'O this is against my religion, against my beliefs. I shouldn't be doing this.' ...[It] just makes you [a little] more conscious. (Anna)*

Both Anna and John seemed to have drawn a distinct line between religious/spiritual matters and other affairs of their lives and consequently never really integrated the two. Their attitudes are representative of a growing number of Catholic youth worldwide who feel that their Catholic faith is not important in shaping their lives. Mason, Webber, Singleton & Hughes (2006) noted that this attitude was generally characteristic of the Australian Catholic youth they studied. However, the overall results of this study prove to be dissimilar, with a greater percentage of participants (as a group) claiming that their Catholic beliefs and values did make a difference to their lives. Nevertheless, these results corresponded with similar results of a study done by Cnaan, Gelles and Sinha (2004) on the religiousness of American teenagers where the overwhelming majority of the youth interviewed assessed religion as important in their lives. However, the differences in sample sizes and methods of the two studies prevent any further detailed conclusions from being drawn.

## **MORALS AND VALUES**

With a view to understanding what morals and values appealed to them, the participants were questioned on two levels. First, they were asked to name five examples of good morals and/or values. Chiefly among their replies were ideals such as following the Ten Commandments and values of love and respect (see Fig 1.1), as indicated by some of their responses below:

*... Things like loving your neighbors... Loving people, friends... being there for friends... and helping out when needed... I think treating everyone*

*fairly...trying to create peace for others who've anger or [are] upset sort of thing. And I suppose caring for environment... (John)*

*... Loyalty, forgiveness...self respect, respect for others...and love. (Sarah)*

*... putting what's important first and foremost, like your family and your friends. So that would be a definite. I guess, respecting the other people and ... cultures... I guess another thing would be ...to try and teach people so that they [understand you] like... "Why am I not allowed to sit on the desk?" ...it's because it's against... the Maori [culture]. So... it's one thing to say, "Can you not sit on the desk", but it's another thing to tell them why... so then they have an understanding. Then they can decide whether or not to [sit]. They could be less ignorant. Another important thing I guess is The Commandments and adhering to those...(Moko)*

In essence, the participants appeared to be grappling with the issue of what it meant to be a good person. This topic was articulated most clearly by Rebecca and Simon, both of whom felt that being a person with good values was very important and each attempted to describe their version of such a person.

*...it's a bit hard to say because humans are not perfect...but [to] just try... and be conscious of what you're doing as you do it... try and be a good person...[that is, a person who is] understanding, a good listener, someone who... would bring a special quality to a situation... things like that...(Rebecca)*

*...you should always be accepting of other people, you should never get very, very angry unless it's absolutely necessary, you should always try and give people a second chance ... You should always respect everyone else and... be as understanding as possible even if people don't talk to you or respect you ... think about them and give them some space. (Simon)*

<u>GOOD MORALS</u>	<u>BAD MORALS</u>
1. Following the Ten commandments	1. Disrespect for people/environment
2. Loving people	2. Intolerance
3. Respect for people/environment	3. Violence
4. Being Understanding	4. Stealing

Fig 1.1 – Top four Good Morals and Bad Morals

Having dealt with their examples of good morals and values, the participants were then asked to name five examples of bad morals and values. As expected and illustrated below, values such as disrespect and not caring for others– the polar opposites to their examples of good morals and values – ranked high on the list.

*...thinking people are below you...not respecting people, not respecting the environment...(Anna)*

*...getting your way all the time... putting yourself first ...not thinking about other people when you make your decisions in life...totally disregarding any thought or consequences for your actions. I also believe that... you should try to understand other people and, as an extension of that, if you are put in a position that shocks you, you should think about them and what it's like for them... For an example, if someone tells you they love you and you don't reciprocate the feeling, you shouldn't ignore them and hope it will go away... That destroys people, which is an awful thing to happen and shows bad values, if indirectly. (Simon)*

*... [being] intolerant and ... not caring for your family ... some people go like – "I hate my mum and I hate my dad!" Without them, you wouldn't be here and without them you wouldn't be how you are... (Moko)*

*... I feel that running down other people's faith only highlights the fact that you have absolutely nothing to speak for yourself... Criticism of other's religion is something that is bad... (Rebecca)*

Some other bad values and morals that were expressed by the participants were violence (Anna and John), stealing (Anna, John, Rebecca), laziness (Anna), adultery (Rebecca), cheating and lying (Rebecca), committing murder (John), bad manners (Simon), lust, greed, disobedience and injustice (Sarah), and an unwillingness to change (Moko).

Finally, the participants were further asked if they agreed with ALL of the morals and values that the Catholic Church preached. Four out of six replied negatively, although the reasons for not agreeing varied widely as each had a different issue that they were not in agreement with. However, the majority declared that they agreed with MOST of the values and morals with just a single or a few exceptions.

For example, John mentioned that he found some of the teachings hard to accept, but when pressed to identify the teachings concerned he said:

*I can't think of them off [the top of] my head...I really don't know...Just that sometimes I wonder about some of the Bible stories and things. But I suppose it's all how you interpret it all... You wonder how some of those things could have just happened...miracles... but it's all part of your faith.*

Similarly, while Anna, Rebecca and Simon (like John) agreed with the Catholic moral of loving others, there were a number of different things they didn't agree with. Anna in particular made a point about civil unions and the Church's teaching on Creation.

*Anna:... they [the Catholic Church] are conservative about some things...like ...civil unions.*

*Researcher: Anything about civil unions specially that you don't agree with?*

*Anna: I didn't like the fact that the Church opposed civil unions... I didn't like [that] they were all against [it]...*

*Researcher: ... Anything else...?*

*Anna: ...coming back to that creation one...I don't know about that one...it's quite hard to believe, but then I suppose...if your faith is strong you'll have faith that what the Bible says is true...*

Rebecca had issues with the Catholic Church's stand on homosexuals and premarital sexual activity:

*I don't agree with ... the homosexual aspect of it because I don't feel that they [homosexuals] are bad people. I've known a couple and ... they have never come across to me like the devil incarnate. They are just people that are different and as a Catholic person ... you have an obligation to accept everyone and I think that by condemning them you are going against your faith sort of... At the same time, I accept that there are dangers but... I think everyone needs to use their personal judgment, but as a rule...I don't think we should condemn homosexual people.*

*... I think the no sex before marriage thing is...very controversial...I tend to get that 'Oh Catholics can't have sex before they are married so are you going to be a virgin ... until you get married? What if you never get married, what happens then?'... I just believe that it's a personal choice that if you wanted to save yourself then go for it... but at the same time, I don't think that it's bad...that if you've committed to that person and in the future you know that you are going to be with that person and marry that person then ...as long as you both have the knowledge that this is something sacred and ... its not to be taken lightly then its fine because that commitment ... will always be there. But... at the same time, don't play around with it. So you really need to use your judgement... instead of saying you know 'I thought it was love and we did it ... but it turned out that it wasn't love...' (Rebecca)*

Simon questioned some of the attitudes of Catholics towards certain sections of society. Also, he had doubts about some of the Church's doctrines.

*I agree with...love God, love your neighbour. Try and live an honest life...the Decalogue...the Ten Commandments...and that sort of thing. I don't agree with everything the Catholic church says...because my mother was divorced*

*and I came from that background and I know a lot of the people at her church originally were very, very shunning towards her and very, very cold and the priests were as well ... I think...God loves you and he's accepting and he's there for you and I don't agree that someone else should tell you everything about how you should live. Their [The Church's] attitudes towards divorcees, gay people and unmarried mothers, which are still quite judgmental and prejudiced, aren't particularly Christian and should be revised... [also] I didn't agree... with the belief that when a child was un-baptised and it died, it went straight to hell...but that's going to change now... And I don't really believe in papal infallibility myself ...(Simon)*

The responses given by the participants above who disagreed with various aspects of the Catholic Church's morals, values and teachings, bears a striking resemblance to similar responses given by Australian Christian youth in Hughes' (2006) study. Some of the young people in that study indicated that they found it impossible to accept the Church's teachings on issues such as abortion, homosexuality and premarital sexual activity, while others pointed to the human failures within the Church, of paedophilia and other forms of abuse. Hughes believes that in their own way they were putting together beliefs that made sense to themselves. Similarly, while some might perceive the views of some of the participants in this study as being disagreeable, it is worth noting that these young people are at an age where their belief and values systems are still in the process of being formed.

Moko and Sarah – unlike Simon, Anna, Rebecca and John – agreed to all the morals and values that the Catholic Church preached. Moko admitted finding some general Church teachings difficult but his reasons for total conformity were as follows:

*I guess I do [agree] ... because the Catholic [Church's] morals are morals that everyone should adhere to anyway, I mean there's like the Beatitudes and the Commandments... like no one should steal...it's not just for Catholics. I do find some of them hard to understand, but I do accept them.*

When asked to give examples of some morals and values that they accepted Sarah and Moko answered as follows:

*... No sex out of marriage... Forgiving seven times seven times seven ... Obviously all the commandments.... (Sarah)*

*...I agree with not murdering people, not stealing from people .... I agree with being a 'Marist'. (Moko)*

A point that was noted in the responses of the participant's was that some of them (for example John, Moko and to some extent, Anna) got confused between Catholic morals and Catholic teachings in general. Catholic morals can be explained as the Church's teachings pertaining to right and wrong behaviour. This is distinct from other subjects such as creation theories and biblical accounts which comprise of teachings of a non-ethical nature. Likewise, Simon grappled a bit with theological issues such as papal authority and the relevance of certain Sacraments. As a result, these participants voiced their difficulties in not understanding or agreeing with different Church teachings or Catholic doctrines rather than Catholic values and morals.

## **MORAL DECISIONS**

The participants were questioned on their moral decision making on two levels: firstly, they were asked about how they judged their own actions; and second, how they judged the actions of others in everyday life. With respect to their own actions and making choices between good and bad, the participants fell into two categories. While Moko, Sarah and Simon made their decisions on the basis of the Catholic values that they had been brought up with, Ben, Rebecca and Anna preferred to rely on their own personal judgment.

Moko, Sarah and Simon explained their positions as follows:

*...if I was angry and upset with someone then ... I wouldn't just go off and ...have a shouting match with them. I would explain it to them...I guess I would think what would Jesus do? Say someone says, 'Do you want to smoke?' I would [say] ... 'No because it's bad for you..., because it's harmful for your body and because it's just not good'. (Moko)*



*...I think from the environment that I have always been in...it's always been a Christian one. And so I've learnt all the morals and values that the Church teaches and I take them away knowing that anything that's not like that is usually bad. My soul is a temple for the Holy Spirit and I like to respect my body. I don't like feeling out of control and I also feel really guilty when I go against my instincts in regards to things like that. I imagine God sitting up there shaking his head. (Sarah)*

*I think ...it [Catholic values] gives you a sort of moral code to work on and basic guidelines to say 'Oh! You know taking drugs is not such a good idea, it could be bad for you or...don't do this, not because it's a bad thing but because it's not sensible...Yes. I live by the guidelines [of] the church and Bible...(Simon)*

Anna, John and Rebecca, on the other hand, all believed that making a personal choice based on their own judgement was the way to deal with moral dilemmas. They admitted that their Catholic values and morals did not really help them much as they did not consider them to be that important. Rebecca, for example, said:

*I usually tend to do that [make decisions] by weighing out the pro's and con's... I think a lot of it is personal choice. Because...it's hard...like if you're in a situation with your friends and you know someone's doing [something that goes against your personal values and those of the Church] I won't say that goes against my religion. I'll say that goes against what I believe in... so...personal choice takes over. (Rebecca)*

When it came to judging others, most of the participants formed an opinion based on the person's actions and behaviours around other people; was the person harming others or being cruel to others? However, many of the participants also spoke of trying to identify or understand the real reason behind a person's actions. Chief among them were Moko, Rebecca and Simon. As Simon put it:

*I try not to judge other people as much as possible because... there could be another situation in their life which is why they're acting like this. They could be going through a difficult problem, a difficult patch something like that and I don't want to be too judgemental' ... I want to be, 'Well, that wasn't very nice but still maybe it's not the way they usually are' (Simon)*

When some of the participants were asked whether they felt that the Catholic Church's values ought to be applicable to everyone, Moko strongly agreed but most of them didn't approve or, like Simon, had different views.

*I think everyone has a different religion so it's entirely up to them how they would like to live their life. I think everyone should basically try to be civil to each other and have respect for each other ...I think that's basic. That's the only way to get on in life. And I think you should have an open mind to everyone else's religions or their beliefs or whatever's going on with them. (Simon)*

Francis' (2002) studies on the morals and values of pupils in Catholic schools showed that Catholic schools are not communities of practicing Catholics, but communities in which practicing Catholics are educated alongside sliding Catholics, lapsed Catholics and non-Catholics. Each of these four groups of pupils constitutes a distinctive community characterised by a distinctive values system. Among the participants too, it was evident that each had different principles and ethics and different ways of making moral choices. While some of them strongly relied on their Catholic values to guide their decisions, others mainly relied on their personal ideas of good and bad. Again, not all those who had strong Catholic morals believed that the same morals ought to be applicable for everyone else.

Moralistic relativity is a trend emerging among young people around the world as shown by various studies (for example Smith and Denton 2005). Mason's (2006) study of Generation Y Catholics showed similar inclinations where youth believed that what might be bad for one person may be good for another. While not all the participants in the

present study appeared to have such strong views on the issue, still nuances of this trend could be detected in their answers.

## PEER GROUP SOCIALISATION

When asked whether they found it difficult to find other young people with the same faith and values as them, the participants were again divided on the issue. Simon, John and Rebecca faced challenges, unlike Sarah, Moko and Anna who had no problem at all.

Not finding peers of the same faith and values bothered Simon who admitted that coming from a different country; he found the situation in New Zealand quite unbearable at times.

*It does get to me ...I mean coming to this school, people aren't very respectful to the teachers ...the difference there [in my home country] was that ... there was a greater concern, ... a greater thought of consideration for the teachers unlike here... [Here] they run around and shout and throw things and it's not all of them of course, it's just a small group but it's that ... school of thought that "Oh we're only doing RE [Religious education] because we have to!" Whereas if it's that sort of thing, why are you going to a catholic school? If your faith means that little to you, why come here?... [But] I wouldn't really know where to begin so no, [I don't do anything about it]. (Simon)*

However, unlike Simon, John and Rebecca were not affected by the fact that they did not have many peers with the same faith and values since they had learned to treat it as a personal issue and deal with it likewise. As Rebecca explained:

*... I try not to get into situations where... [my beliefs and values] will matter...If I don't believe in something they [my friends] do, I usually just stay quiet about it or not participate. I think I've learnt to accept the situation. I think it never bothered me to a point where I thought 'Oh! I only want catholic friends' sort of. But I think when you're in high school especially at this stage and probably at Uni[versity], ...you're at that thing like I want to go and do this but ...it goes against my catholic faith, it goes against what my*

*parents have taught me. But at the same time, I sort of feel that control I have over myself, that ... I know what crosses the line; I know when to stop kind of thing. So I have that faith in myself ...that I'll be able to judge right from wrong. So I don't fear that by having friends who aren't catholic that I'll stray away from my faith. (Rebecca)*

Sarah, Moko and Anna had no problem in finding peers with the same faith and values, their Catholic school being the main source of them. Sarah also referred the church and the youth group that she attended. Moko noted that outside school he too met similar people by observing their attitudes. As he explained:

*... it's easy to see people who are like you, who have the same sort of values and morals like you ... because you can see how they are. Everywhere I go, when I meet someone, I can kind of...tell how they have been brought up and so through that, you can find them. (Moko)*

When asked whether they found any challenges or difficulties in practicing their Catholic faith in day to day life, all the participants apart from Rebecca replied negatively. Some of them like John and Anna explained that this was because nothing stopped them practicing their faith. For others like Moko, Sarah and Simon, they had grown to accept their identity as Catholics and so they felt comfortable with it. For example Sarah explained as follows:

*I used to [face challenges] when I was younger and [when] what other people said, meant more...you got hurt easier, whereas now... I know who I am... and I am proud of that...and people respect me for who I am...and I know that. (Sarah)*

Rebecca was the only participant whose experience was completely different from the rest of the group. It was interesting to note that she was the only one who was not currently in a Catholic school. Her reply therefore, came as no surprise when she admitted to facing challenges in practicing her faith in daily life.

*... I get frustrated in trying to prove what I believe in. Like again, take for example the fact that I've been with Michael for a while and a lot of my friends...think its nice but at the same time they think... 'How can you be with someone for that long and not be bored?' and ...I get that all the time but ...I just don't see the point in sleeping with a million people and not having a connection with either of them and for me that's probably the biggest thing that I've had to battle. (Rebecca)*

Rebecca also explained that she found these challenges hard to overcome.

*I tend to... console myself with the thought sometimes I believe it's true that a lot of them admire me because they know that I have a friend in a boyfriend so it's not just ... something like ... I hold hands with him and go giggly and everything. That's something that secretly all of them want to do, to have not just a boyfriend, but a friend...that's just an example. (Rebecca)*

Rebecca also faced a lot of difficulties in the attitudes of those around her. Once again given the fact that she did not belong to a Catholic school, this seemed likely to happen. She appeared to have found this situation too overwhelming to continue to strive to change it.

*A lot of them [my peers] are scornful about it [my religion]. I think I tend to either change the subject or feel like I am one against how many and even though it's probably the right thing to advocate my faith and be proud of it at school, it's too hard a thing...in trying to make them understand that this is what I've grown up with ...I'd rather just go with the flow...I have tried to back it up and given them reasoning... but ...you can either choose to see it or choose to ignore it and most of them choose to ignore it so... [I go along with them].(Rebecca)*

Apart from Rebecca, Moko also faced a few challenges in the attitudes of people around him. These were mainly in his school where other non-Catholic students found the Catholic faith hard to understand. As Moko explained:

*...for some people, it's just like, "Oh! This is so stupid. Sacramental learning about Jesus"... it's harder for them to understand, so it's hard for you to understand why they can't understand it when you do... [Usually] I don't take a side that I don't believe in- so say someone's like, 'Well! Jesus was just stupid or something.' ... I'll go, 'Well no, he wasn't', and I wouldn't go ...all [defensive] ...because I would ... try to understand why they think like that. (Moko)*

Apart from Moko and Rebecca, none of the other participants acknowledged facing any challenges in the attitudes of those around them. When asked to explain why, some of them did talk about a few confrontations they had with people at some stage but they seemed to have learnt different ways of dealing with such situations.

Anna for one had learnt to dismiss people who had fixed views on Catholics and their behaviour. Sarah on the other hand, weighed the situation before reacting to it, as she explained below:

*... even if people don't like who I am...that's ok. Even if they are not Catholic and they think I am stupid for being [one]... it doesn't matter what they think because it's my life. If it was just that they didn't understand, [that is,] if they ask me more about it then I try and teach them so that they know. But if they didn't say anything then I'd just leave it and hope that they realise... [Also], if it was in relation to me being a person who is unkind or selfish then I would definitely try to change their perception because I don't believe I am and naturally, I wouldn't want people thinking of me in that way.*

As in Rymarz and Graham's (2006) study of Catholic youth, most participants in this study too did not report being picked on or victimised for their association with Catholic belief and practice. All of these belonged to a Catholic school which ensured a general tolerance and feeling of safety that they felt they had. If they did face difficulties in the attitudes of others, the participants generally had learnt to deal with these in an efficient manner so that it did not really bother them. The only exception was Rebecca who belonged to a non-Catholic school and thus faced challenges all the time.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter examined how the participants practiced their Catholic faith in daily life. When asked if their Catholic beliefs made any difference to their lives, Moko, Simon and Sarah admitted that their beliefs made a great difference. Rebecca felt that her beliefs made only some difference while John and Anna replied that they made barely any difference at all.

Speaking on the issue of Catholic morals and values, Sarah and Moko agreed with all the values the Catholic Church preached, while the rest of the participants (i.e. John, Anna, Rebecca and Simon) disagreed with different aspects. Similarly, Sarah and Moko along with Simon, made moral choices based on their Catholic beliefs while the others preferred making their decision solely on personal concepts of good and bad. However apart from Moko, many of the other participants were not convinced that Catholic values ought to be practiced by everyone. Moralistic relativity was somewhat evident in their answers.

When it came to peer group socialization, Simon, John and Rebecca found it difficult to find peers with the same faith and values while Sarah, Moko and Anna did not. However, apart from Rebecca who belonged to a non- catholic school, most participants did not face any insurmountable challenges in practicing their faith in daily life.

The previous chapter identified two groups of participants- one with medium to high levels of Catholic spirituality and religiousness (i.e. Simon, Sarah, John and Moko) and the other with low levels of the same (i.e. Rebecca and Anna). On reviewing the answers of the participants in this chapter, it was clear that these groups remained the same with a few changes. Simon, Sarah and Moko remained in Group One demonstrating high levels of commitment to the Catholic faith. Among them, only Simon admitted facing some challenges in accepting all the beliefs that the Catholic Church preached. John joined Rebecca and Anna in Group Two. These three participants had a strong Catholic background yet it seemed that they were not entirely convinced about their Catholic faith as it was not evident in their daily lifestyles. A further analysis of these two groups is offered in the next chapter which sums up the findings of this research.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **CONCLUSION**

The chapter begins with a restatement of the research objectives posed at the beginning of this thesis. This restatement is followed by a review and discussion of the key findings presented in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 concerning: a) Catholic spirituality and beliefs; b) participation in faith-related activities; and c) Catholic practice in daily life. A model or framework is then provided which captures an understanding of Catholic youth spirituality as revealed by the findings. This brings us to the implications of the findings, the apparent needs of Catholic youth and possible recommendations for action. The chapter concludes with a section that briefly specifies the limitation of the study and indicates possible avenues for further research.

### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

This study has examined the spirituality of Catholic youth in Whangarei and their participation in faith-related activities. More specifically, the research objectives in this study were:

1. To explore the spirituality of Catholic youth in Whangarei between the ages of 16 and 20.
2. To identify the ways in which a young Catholic integrates the Catholic faith into his/her daily life and makes meaning out of it.
3. To compare the nature and patterns of religious beliefs and practices of Catholic youth in Whangarei with those reported in the research literature for other Catholic youth around the world.

In order to achieve these objectives, a qualitative study using a holistic inductive design of naturalistic inquiry, and incorporating a variety of skills inherent in different methodologies was chosen. The scope and content of the interview guide which addressed several aspects of a young person's spirituality, was influenced by the literature



review. The data collected from these interviews was analysed using an approach of thematic content analysis.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **Catholic Spirituality - Beliefs and Practices**

All of the participants in this study possessed a distinct sense of 'spirituality'. To them, 'spirituality' meant living and experiencing the spiritual in everyday life, in their behaviours and actions, their relationships with others and in their attitudes towards life itself.

When it came to living out their Catholic beliefs, however, not all of the participants seemed to consider it practical. Being 'Catholic' was certainly a very important part of their identity: all of them were proud of their Catholic background and upbringing; they all enjoyed being a part of the Catholic community and participating in various activities; and the Catholic teachings and messages also appealed to them. However, only a few could concretely list the core Catholic beliefs and most were unsure as to how they would describe their faith to another person. Similarly, when it came to practicing and developing their faith, only half of the participants acknowledged doing so consistently. Those who did practice their faith acknowledged having a very close relationship with God and seeing a distinct growth in their spirituality over the years. For the others, God seemed distant yet conveniently reachable when needed. The participants were thus divided with regard to the ways in which they related to the Catholic faith. While one group took their faith seriously, the other had a casual attitude, adopting only those beliefs and practices that they felt comfortable with.

In response to questions concerning their future levels of involvement in and commitment to the Catholic faith, a majority of the participants expected that their commitment levels would be similar or higher. Only two participants anticipated decreasing levels of commitment.

## **Participation in Catholic Activities**

Attending the Mass is one of the main activities Catholics are invited and expected to participate in. While those in the study who were committed to the faith participated regularly for meaningful reasons, the others felt obligated to do so. However, all of the participants admitted to attending Mass on festive days and other important occasions, and the majority attended the Sacrament of Confession a few times during the year.

A similar pattern occurred in their participation in faith-based groups or activities, with some of them participating fairly regularly while the others did not attend at all. However, the membership of each group here differed in comparison to the participant groups previously identified. Also, almost all of the participants seemed drawn to the parish Youth Group. While some were currently members, others felt a need or desire to belong to that particular group.

## **Integrating the Catholic faith in daily life**

When asked about the difference that their Catholic beliefs made to their lives, only half of the participants admitted that their beliefs made a great difference. While one third of them agreed with all the values the Catholic Church preached, the rest disagreed with different aspects. A similar result was found in relation to making moral choices. Half of the participants made moral choices based on their Catholic beliefs while the others preferred making their choices solely on personal concepts of good and bad. However, a majority of the participants were not convinced that Catholic values ought to be practiced by everyone, indicating the influence of moralistic relativity in their answers.

When asked about their peer group social interaction, half of the participants admitted to finding it difficult to find peers with the same faith and values. However, the majority of them did not face any insurmountable challenges in practicing their faith in daily life.

## **COMPARISON OF FINDINGS TO STUDIES WORLDWIDE**

The literature review highlighted a number of common issues evident in world-wide research on the spirituality of Catholic youth. These issues were as follows:

1. A confusing Catholic identity
2. Moralistic therapeutic deism and moralistic relativism
3. Unwillingness to participate actively in faith practices
4. Deteriorating commitment to the faith
5. Inability to find similar peer group support

On comparing the findings of this study to those reported in the literature, one observes many similarities and a few differences as indicated below.

### **A confusing Catholic identity**

International research on Catholic youth has shown that most did not have a strong Catholic identity (for example Rymarz and Graham, 2006, Smith and Denton, 2005). While the majority described themselves as 'Catholic', very few could justify their faith or had strong religious convictions and most seemed to find it extremely difficult to express their beliefs. Thus, Catholic youth were not easily distinguished from youth in general by either their articulated beliefs or by their personally chosen practices. A majority also reported that they could practice their faith easily without being picked on or victimised for their association with Catholic belief and practice.

Similar patterns were identified in this study. As reported earlier, all of the participants were proud of their Catholic background and upbringing and enjoyed being a part of the Catholic community and participating in various activities. However, only a few of them had strong convictions about their faith and, like their peers in other countries, only a few could concretely list the core Catholic beliefs. Indeed, most were unsure as to how they would describe their faith to another person. Finally, the majority of the participants in this study did not face any insurmountable challenges in practicing their faith in daily life;

with one exception (i.e. Rebecca, who faced a number of challenges in the non-Catholic school that she attended), most found it relatively easy to do so.

### **Moralistic Therapeutic Deism and Moralistic Relativism**

The presence of moralistic therapeutic deism was clearly evident in the results of various overseas studies, indicating that many youth had a very slanted view of God and what it meant to be a believer. God to them meant someone who was loving and caring, and on hand to help when needed. At other times, God was conveniently kept out of their everyday affairs. Young people were also found to believe in the laid-back attitude of doing the best they could without imposing their views on others.

Results from this study in Whangarei show that the majority of the participants perceived God as a friend who was loving and caring. However, they differed individually in their views on what God really meant to them. Half the participants had a very close bonding with God and the God they related to took an active role in their lives. In comparison, the views of the remainder conformed to the concept of moralistic therapeutic deism. Participants in this latter group turned to God only when they felt it was necessary to do so. Although they believed in Him, they did not take their belief too seriously and chose to adopt spiritual concepts which they felt comfortable with.

Moralistic relativism was another feature that was reported to be prevalent in the spirituality of young people worldwide, including Catholic youth. The general trend that emerged was that views about one's morals were relative, so that what may have seemed 'bad' in one situation could be viewed as 'good' in another.

Half the participants in the present study made moral choices based on their Catholic beliefs while the other half preferred to make their choices solely on personal concepts of good and bad. Also, among the latter, a majority were not convinced that Catholic values ought to be practiced by everyone. While not all the participants in this study appeared to have such strong views on the issue, nuances of moralistic relativism could still be detected in their answers.

## **Unwillingness to participate actively in faith practices**

The decline in active participation in faith practices has been seen to be increasing at a rapid rate. Results from almost all overseas research on Catholic youth, show a growing disinterest in attending Mass, participating in the sacrament of Confession, leading an active prayer life and being a part of church youth activities.

Results from the present study revealed similar patterns. Only half of the young Catholic participants in Whangarei attended weekly Mass while the other half attended monthly. However, all of them attended Mass on festive days and other important occasions, and the majority attended the sacrament of Confession a few times during the year. With regard to participation in faith-based groups or activities, only half of the participants were actively involved while the rest did not attend at all. Finally, to strengthen their spiritual life and/or develop their personal faith, only half of them were involved in activities like personal prayer, reading the Bible, etc.

## **Deteriorating commitment to the faith**

Another common trend throughout the overseas research literature was the deteriorating affinity towards religion and religiousness. Many young Catholics expressed the view that in the future their level of church commitment and involvement would be less. Some saw this as an outcome of their decreasing interaction with family members (especially parents), a decrease that meant that they would be somewhat freer of parental expectations and influence.

This trend of deteriorating commitment was evident among the participants in the present study, but not to the same extent. While one-third thought that their level of commitment would be less, the remaining two-thirds expected that their commitment levels to the Catholic faith would be similar or higher in future years.

### **Inability to find similar peer group support**

Another point emerging from international research on Catholic youth was that most were not involved in any school or church youth group. Some felt that they had grown out of such groups and their activities, while others were following the example of older siblings. As a result, they found it difficult to find peers with the same faith and values.

Once again a similar pattern was identified among participants in the present study. Half of them admitted to experiencing difficulty in finding similar peer group support. For those who did not find it difficult, the Catholic school was cited as the main source of like-minded peers, apart from the church and the youth group. Indeed, the church youth group appealed to all of the participants whether they were actively involved in it or not. This could be an impact of the recruitment method of this study which recruited participants from various youth groups operating within the Catholic church in Whangarei and the Catholic High School.

Overall, it may be concluded that many of the attitudes and views voiced by the participants in this study are similar to those of their peers world-wide. This point should be acknowledged by those working with and/or seeking to understand the position, attitudes and behaviour of Catholic youth in Whangarei.

### **TWO CONTRASTING GROUPS**

The findings presented in this thesis and summarised above suggest that the participants involved in the study can be separated into two groups on the basis of their spiritual levels and commitment to the Catholic faith. Group 1 consists of those participants who had medium to high levels of Catholic spirituality and religiousness and demonstrated high levels of commitment to the Catholic faith. Group 2, on the other hand, consists of those participants who (despite their strong Catholic background) had casual or 'laid-back' attitudes to Catholic beliefs, seemed indifferent to their faith and did not relate it to their daily lifestyles. Further details concerning the composition and characteristics of these two groups are presented below.

## **Group 1**

Participants in Group 1 (Simon, Moko and Sarah) generally related to a God who took an active role in their lives. All of them took their faith seriously and actively tried to develop it through regular prayer and other spiritual practices. As a result they had a very close relationship with God and had seen a distinct growth in their spirituality over the years. They regularly participated in the Catholic Mass for meaningful reasons and two of them (Simon and Sarah ) were involved in some Catholic parish-based or school youth group or similar activity. All of them admitted that their religious beliefs made a great difference in their lives and they made moral choices based on their Catholic beliefs, although only Sarah and Moko agreed with all the values the Catholic Church preached. Finally, all of them expected that in the future their commitment levels to the Catholic faith would be similar or higher.

## **Group 2**

Participants in Group 2 (John, Rebecca and Anna) exhibited a casual attitude towards Catholic spirituality and religiousness and had lower levels of commitment to the Catholic faith. In general, their views on God were moralistically therapeutic and their relationship with Him was distant and often non-existent. They did not find it necessary to be involved in activities like personal prayer, reading the Bible, spiritual journaling, etc., nor did they feel the need to connect more deeply with the Catholic faith. Their participation in Mass was usually for obligatory reasons only. They noted that their Catholic beliefs made little or no difference to their lives, had various disagreements with different aspects of Church morals and values, and preferred to make their moral choices solely on the basis of personal concepts of good and bad. Finally, two of them (Rebecca and Anna) anticipated decreasing levels of personal commitment to the Catholic faith in the future.

The composition and characteristics of the two groups identified above, however, cannot be said to be permanent or unchanging. While they may seem to be at opposite ends of a continuum ranging from high to low levels of spiritual belief, commitment and practice, it

must be noted that the individuals in each group are growing, developing and perhaps changing in the course of their personal spiritual journey as one dimension of their normal ageing and transition through successive life stages.

A person's spiritual journey typically follows a pattern of peaks, troughs and plateaus throughout their life. While some may find meaning and strength in their faith during their early adult years, thus reaching more mature levels of spirituality and religious belief, others may still struggle with relatively basic faith concepts. Some might continue to grow and develop in their faith while others make early advances and then remain on the same level throughout their lives or experience periods of retreat and recovery in association with particular life events. Therefore, although the traits and behaviours of each individual in this study have aided in categorising them, one cannot predict all their actions and spiritual tendencies on the basis of the category they belong to during their adolescent years. Even during their adolescent years a person in one group at a particular time may suddenly exhibit the characteristics of the other group in certain areas of their faith.

To illustrate the potential for change, and the individuality of each person's spiritual journey, consider the two following examples. In Group 1, Moko rated high in several areas of Catholic spirituality and practices yet he was not involved in any school or church youth group. Should he continue to lack voluntary faith-based group participation, then he may (according to the research literature) have difficulty finding like-minded peers with similar beliefs and values, which in turn could lead to deterioration in his religious beliefs and practices. Similarly, John's beliefs and practices at the time of the interview placed him in Group 2, yet his participation in faith related activities was high and he expected his commitment to the Catholic faith in future years to be on the rise. Does this suggest that John's views, beliefs and practices when interviewed simply (and consciously) reflected aspects of the 'carefree', possibly anti-establishment life stage of adolescence? Only time will tell.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that the findings of this study have also revealed several characteristics common to participants in both of the groups identified and described above. These characteristics are noted below.



1. All the participants took pride in their Catholic background and upbringing. Whether they individually practiced the faith or not, they were attracted to Catholic teachings and beliefs, and enjoyed belonging to a vibrant church community that shared the same faith and values. Feast days such as Easter, Annunciation, Ash Wednesday, Christmas, etc. held a special appeal to them.
2. While only a few could list the core Catholic beliefs they professed, almost all of them were unsure as to how they would describe their faith to another person. This feature may perhaps reflect the limited knowledge and experience of youth, but one suspects that many adults would be equally uncertain for the simple reason that the matter is not one that demands priority in their everyday life in a modern, 'western' society.
3. A majority of the participants were not convinced that Catholic values ought to be practiced by everyone. Moralistic relativity was evident to some degree in most of their answers, as could be expected in a liberal, secular society such as that of New Zealand.
4. Most participants found it relatively easy to practice their faith in daily life without facing any major difficulties. However, finding peers with the same faith and values depended on the social circles or networks that each participant was part of – a feature perhaps of the relative freedom of association in New Zealand's liberal, secular society.

In summary, the findings reveal that the spiritual lives of the participating Catholic youth in Whangarei are in a process of continuous change. Partly due to their changeable age of adolescence and partly due to the ambiguous nature of spirituality, effective measurement and prediction of their beliefs and practices is difficult.

While there seem to be some young people with mature levels of faith and others with vague concepts, one cannot categorise them definitively or permanently as each person is still on their own individual journey. This is true for several reasons. First, a young person with mature beliefs about the Catholic faith may not practice those beliefs in daily life. Such a person's way of life will be quite different to what they profess to believe in. Second, a person with strong convictions or beliefs may still be struggling in certain areas of their faith and might always have areas in which they are found to be lacking. Third, a

person who is not a practicing Catholic might certainly have some very Catholic beliefs. Fourth, a person who calls himself or herself ‘a Catholic’ may erroneously believe in ideas or viewpoints that are not those of a Catholic at all.

## **IMPLICATIONS, NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The implications of this evolving spirituality suggest that there is a need for Catholic youth in Whangarei to be supported in their spiritual development; that initiatives be taken to spiritually encourage, nourish and sustain them at whatever stage they might be at, in order to help them grow in their Catholic faith. While not all the youth concerned may actively profess a need for this support, their views express or suggest a sense of vulnerability and the influence of erroneous beliefs in many areas of their faith.

As perceived from the findings, the actual and/or potential needs of these young Catholics can be divided into four areas as follows:

a) The need for a fuller and deeper understanding of the Catholic faith and beliefs.

Young people need to be convinced about what they believe in if they are to be strong in their faith. They need to be well informed and encouraged to learn about the various aspects of their faith. However, I agree with McQuillon (2006) in asserting that these aspects must be presented in ways that can direct and touch their lives and provide them with an expression for the reality of their spiritual experience.

b) The need for a deeper understanding of Catholic traditions and practices such as the Mass, the Sacrament of Confession, etc.

If young people are to be drawn to these great traditions and practices of the Catholic Church, they must be able to experience their beauty and importance in the fullest sense possible. Merely knowing and understanding what it is all about is not enough. A young person must be able to live through the richness, the profundity and authenticity of these practices in order to be able to wholly appreciate them for what they are.

- c) The need to be able to freely express their beliefs and discuss issues (for example, Catholic morality) which seem to be debatable areas of the faith.

In New Zealand's contemporary secular society various beliefs, practices or rituals of the Catholic faith seem to be irrelevant, arguable or obsolete altogether. In their spiritual journey, therefore, a young person must have the opportunity to voice their opinions and find the answers to their questions if they are to be fully committed to what they believe in. This in turn, will give them the freedom for further spiritual growth and development.

- d) The need for like-minded companions to share their faith with, support one another, and journey along with them.

While support from adults is important, a young person needs a community of like-minded peers to be able to flourish spiritually. An absence of such peers can severely limit a young person's spiritual growth by restricting their ability: to express their views, beliefs, concerns and questions; to interact with others at a similar stage in their development; and to sustain or develop a sense of belonging.

## **Recommendations**

In order to meet the above needs, appropriate interventions from the Catholic Church and/or the Catholic community in Whangarei will be required. It is therefore recommended that these interventions be as follows:

1. Providing a variety of youth programmes/groups to engage young people.

The development of a variety of youth groups and programmes would not only cater for the diverse interests of young people but provide them with opportunities for fellowship and interaction with like-minded individuals. Examples of these special groups could be a youth prayer group, a youth Bible study group, a youth choir, a youth service ministry, etc. In essence, such groups could support them as they explore their own spirituality and develop in their spiritual journey.

2. Finding ways to facilitate the secure engagement of youth in a dialogue about their faith and religion.

For example, initiatives should be taken to provide them with opportunities for discussion. Having vibrant youth groups with quality leaders would obviously be a great advantage, but making available professionally trained spiritual counsellors and guides, crisis helplines and other spiritual resources could also prove to be highly beneficial.

3. Finding ways of making the Mass and other practices more meaningful.

The Mass and other liturgical celebrations have always been at the centre of a Catholic's life, so finding ways of engaging young people more fully in these occasions will help them to understand and appreciate their significance and importance.

## **FURTHER RESEARCH**

The scope of this research has been limited by confining the data collection, analysis and interpretation to the attitudes and experiences of six young people from the Catholic parish of Whangarei. Further research into the spirituality of Catholic youth could include one or more of the following:

1. A larger scale project to explore the attitudes and experiences of youth from different areas in order to generalise the findings to Catholic youth or Catholic communities in New Zealand as a whole.
2. The topics of moralistic relativity, moralistic therapeutic deism, etc. could be further investigated to validate their prevalence among and their significance in the lives of other Catholic and non-Catholic youth in secular New Zealand society.

This study reiterates the importance of studying the spiritual lives of young people in order to better understand their needs, welfare and wellbeing in contemporary society. This will enable social workers and/or counselors to improve their practice of social work in New Zealand.

## **APPENDIX 'A'**

### **Journeying with God: Spirituality and participation in faith related activities among Catholic youth in Whangarei.**

#### **INFORMATION SHEET**

**Researcher Name - Ms Trudy Dantis**

**Telephone - #####**

**Email - #####**

**Supervisor Name - Dr Tracie Mafle'o, Lecturer**

**Telephone - #####**

**Email - #####**

**Supervisor Name - Dr Andrew Trlin, Associate Professor**

**Telephone - #####**

**Email - #####**

You are invited to participate in this project.

My name is Trudy Dantis and I am a student in the School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work at Massey University, conducting a research project for my Master of Philosophy in Social Work thesis.

My research is on spirituality and participation in faith related activities among Catholic youth in Whangarei. I am interested in exploring how Catholic youth view and experience their religion. Emphasis will be placed on different ways in which each individual participates in various religious activities and finds a spiritual connectedness that makes meaning for their lives.

I would like to interview six Catholic young people aged 16-20 for this research project. These participants (three females and three males), would be young people who have been actively involved in the Catholic faith for the past two years. This means attendance at Masses, involvement in catholic youth groups or any other ministry in the parish, etc. These participants will be selected on the basis of sex, age and ethnicity from the pool of those who choose to participate in the project. The selected participants will be individually invited to discuss and sign a consent form to conduct their interviews. The total time commitment required for this research is approximately three hours. This will consist of at least one and a half hours for an interview and at least one and a half hours for data validation i.e. checking and approval of the interview transcript.

The interview will be voice recorded and transcribed by myself for further analysis. The time and location of these interviews will be determined to suit you. The location could be the parish buildings, at your home or at a neutral location chosen by you. Topics covered will be a discussion on your individual Catholic identity, religious beliefs and practices, spirituality and experiences within the Catholic faith.

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- Ask any questions about the study at any time during participation
- Decline to answer any particular question
- Choose to withdraw from the study at any time
- Be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.
- Request to have the voice recorder turned off at any time during the interview
- Preserve your confidentiality with respect to participation in this project

The voice recordings will only be accessed by myself. They will be securely stored for a period of 5 years from completion of the research after which they will be destroyed. The transcript of your interview will be given to you for checking and approval prior to it being used for the research. On completion of the research you will have the option of keeping your individual interview transcript or having it destroyed. There will be no individual names on these voice recordings, the transcripts, or in the final document to ensure confidentiality. A summary of the key research findings will be provided to you prior to the completion of the project

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, Application 07/22. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor John O'Neill, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, telephone 06 350 5799 x 8771, email [humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz).

If you agree to become involved with this research it will be under the conditions set out in this information sheet. Should you have any queries, you may contact me or my supervisor. **If you wish to participate in this project, please contact me (Trudy Dantis) at the telephone number or email address provided at the beginning of this Information Sheet.**

Thank you,

Trudy Dantis



**APPENDIX 'B'****LETTER TO THE PARISH PRIEST OF THE CATHOLIC PARISH  
OF WHANGAREI**

Fr. Tom O'Connor  
St. Francis Xavier Catholic Parish of Whangarei  
Cnr of Park Ave and Kamo Road  
Kensington  
Whangarei

Dear Fr. Tom,

My name is Trudy Dantis and I am a student of the Department of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work at Massey University conducting a research project for my Master of Philosophy in Social Work thesis. My research is on spirituality and participation in faith related activities among Catholic youth in Whangarei. Please find attached the Information Sheet describing the details of this project.

Further to our initial conversation in March, I am writing to you to confirm that I still have your permission to conduct my research in your parish. This would involve me approaching the youth group leaders of the parish in order to help with the distribution of information sheets to potential participants. I would like to interview six young people aged 16-20 for this research project.

It is proposed that this research be conducted during the months of June and July 2007. Appropriate consent forms have been designed for the young people who voluntarily decide to participate in the project. At no time will they be identified by name. Confidentiality will be maintained at all times. Although interviews will be digitally

recorded, any recordings will only be accessed by myself, and will be securely stored. A transcript of each interview will be made available to the person concerned to check, amend and verify, and upon completion of the project will either be destroyed or returned to the person if they so wish. The digital files will be destroyed five years after the completion of the project. A summary of the key findings will be made available to each participant at the appropriate time, and once the formal examination of the full thesis has been completed you will be provided with a copy and a request that it be drawn to the attention of the parish council.

My research will be carried out under the supervision of Drs. Tracie Mafile'o and Andrew Trlin from Massey University. This project has also been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee.

Your consent in allowing me to conduct this research would be greatly appreciated. I would be pleased to clarify any aspects of the research if requested to do so. Any queries or questions can be directed to me via mail, telephone or email as follows:

Trudy Dantis  
74 Silverstream Road  
Maunu  
Whangarei - 0110

Ph: #####

Email: #####

Yours sincerely,

Trudy Dantis

## APPENDIX 'C'

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

### CATHOLIC YOUTH RESEARCH PROJECT

Interview Code #: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Section A: Background Details

- a) Age: \_\_\_\_\_ years
- b) Gender:     Male    Female
- c) Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_
- d) Education:
- Primary School -  Catholic  Non-Catholic
- Secondary School -  Catholic  Non-Catholic
- Current year - \_\_\_\_\_
- Year completed (school leavers only) - \_\_\_\_\_
- Current work/study - \_\_\_\_\_
- e) Catholic commitment/practice of parents/caregivers:
- Father -  High  Medium  Low  N/A
- Mother -  High  Medium  Low  N/A
- f) What proportion of your closest friends (outside family) are Catholics?
- All    More than half    About half    Less than half    Nil

#### Section B: Religious Attendance

I am interested in learning about your attendance and participation in Catholic and faith-based activities.

1. Do you attend or participate in Catholic Masses?  Yes  No
- a) IF YES, how often do you attend?

- b) Could you please tell me why you attend masses?  
(Prompts: e.g. special meaning/importance, enjoyment, feeling of belonging)
- c) IF NO, could you please tell me why don't you attend?
2. Do you attend or participate in the Sacrament of Confession?  Yes  No
- a) IF YES, how often do you participate?
- b) Could you please tell me why you participate in this activity?  
(Prompts: e.g. special meaning/importance, enjoyment, feeling of belonging)
- c) IF NO, could you please tell me why don't you participate?
3. Do you attend or participate in special festive days like Easter, Annunciation, Ash Wednesday, etc.?  Yes  No
- a) IF YES, how often do you attend or participate?
- b) Could you please tell me why do you attend or participate in such festive days?  
(Prompts: e.g. special meaning/importance, enjoyment)
- c) IF NO, could you please tell me why don't you attend or participate?
4. Are you a member of any other church based or religious groups? E.g. a youth group, music group or choir, a prayer group or religious study group, a social or sports club, a social work group, etc.
- a) IF YES, which ones are you a member of and how often do you attend?
- b) What appeals to you about this/these group/s?  
(Prompts: e.g. enjoy activity, being with friends, feeling of belonging)
5. Is there any group that you would like OR would have liked to participate in?  Yes  No
- a) IF YES, could you describe what it is and tell me why you would like or would have liked to participate in it?  
(Prompts: e.g. chance to be with friends, chance to learn or do something useful, missed out/missing out on something good)

### Section C: Catholic Identity and Catholic Faith

6. Different people have different views of the word 'spirituality'.
  - a) What is your definition or understanding of spirituality?
  - b) Could you illustrate this with one or two examples?
  
7. How do you see yourself?
  - a) Are you proud to be a Catholic?
  - b) Could you tell me why you say that?
  
8. Different peoples have different ideas about the importance of their faith.
  - a) What is it about your Catholic faith that is important to you?
  - b) Could you tell me (and give me one or two examples to show me) what is **most** important to you about your Catholic faith?
  
9. Different people have different ideas about their Catholic faith.
  - a) What do you think are the main beliefs of your Catholic faith?
  - b) How would you describe your Catholic faith to another person?
  
10. Do you try to actively develop your personal faith e.g. by prayer, reading the Bible, spiritual journaling, etc.?  Yes  No
  - a) IF YES, What do you do?
  - b) How often do you do this?
  - c) Could you tell me how or why you find this activity/these activities useful? Has it/have they brought about any change in your spiritual life?

### Section D: Moralistic Therapeutic Deism/ Moralistic Relativity:

11. How much difference would you say your Catholic beliefs make to your life?
  - a) Would you say they make a little difference, some difference, a great difference or no difference at all?
  - b) Could you tell why do you say that?

12. Different people have different ideas about God.

- a) What is your image of God? (E.g. do you see God as a loving person? Taskmaster? Creator? Powerful spiritual entity? Friend? Carer? Father? etc.?)
- b) What does God mean to you?

13. Do you have a relationship with God?  Yes  No

- a) How close would you say that relationship is? Is it  
 Intimate  Reasonably close  Relatively distant  Extremely remote
- b) Could you tell me why you say that?

14. Different people have different ideas about what is good or bad?

- a) Could you give me five examples of good morals/values?
- b) Could you give me five examples of bad morals/values?

15. Do you agree with ALL of the morals and values that the Catholic Church preaches?

- a) IF YES, could you give me some examples of those morals/values that you agree with?
- b) IF NO, could you give me some examples of:
  - (i) Those morals/values that you DO agree with?
  - (ii) Those morals/values that you DON'T agree with?

16. How do you judge your actions and those of others in day to day life? For example, whether you or other people are caring and loving, whether you or they treat everyone fairly, whether you or they have good values, etc.?

(Prompts: e.g. make sacrifices for others, help or harm others, whether or not your parents would approve of certain things, whether or not actions fit with what you have been taught)

### **Section E: Peer Group Socialisation**

17. Do you find it difficult to find other young people who think like you in terms of the same faith and values?  Yes  No

- a) IF YES (you find it difficult), does it bother you?  Yes  No

If it does bother you, could you please tell me why it bothers you?

- b) IF NO (you don't find it difficult) where do you find them?

18. Do you find any challenges or difficulties in practicing your Catholic faith in day to day life?  Yes  No

- a) IF YES, could you please tell me about the challenges/difficulties you face?

- b) How do you deal with these challenges/difficulties? Could you give me an example?

- c) IF NO, why do you think you face no challenges/difficulties?

19. Do you face any challenges in the attitudes of those around you?  Yes  No

- a) IF YES, could you please tell me about these challenges in attitudes?

- b) How do you deal with these challenges in attitudes? Could you give me an example?

### **Section F: Religious Commitment**

20. Do you think you will still be a member of the Catholic faith in five years time?

- Yes  No  Not sure

- a) IF NO/NOT SURE, could you please tell me why you think that?

- b) IF YES (you would still be a member), do you think there would there be any difference in your commitment levels or the way you relate to your Catholic faith?  Yes  No

- c) IF YES (there would be a difference) could you please tell me why you think there would be a difference and what that difference might be?

19. Is there anything else you would like to say about the matters I have been asking you about?

**THANK YOU FOR TIME AND COOPERATION IN DOING THIS INTERVIEW**

APPENDIX 'D'

## MUHEC APPROVAL LETTER



# Massey University

29 June 2007

Ms Trudy Dantis  
74 Silverstream Road  
Maunu  
WHANGAREI 0110

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT  
TO THE VICE-CHANCELLOR  
(Ethics & Equity)  
Private Bag 11 222  
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New Zealand  
T 64 6 350 5573/350 5575  
F 64 6 350 5622  
humanethics@massey.ac.nz  
animaethics@massey.ac.nz  
gtc@massey.ac.nz  
www.massey.ac.nz

Dear Trudy

**Re: HEC: Southern A Application – 07/22**  
**Journeying with God: Spirituality and participation in faith related activities**  
**among Catholic youth in Whangarei**

Thank you for your letter dated 27 June 2007.

On behalf of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, I am pleased to advise you that the ethics of your application are now approved. Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Professor John O'Neill, Chair  
**Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A**

cc Dr Tracie Mafile'o & A/Prof Andrew Trlin  
School of Sociology, Social Policy & Social Work  
PN371

Prof Paul Spoonley, HoS  
School of Sociology, Social Policy & Social Work  
PN371



## APPENDIX 'E'

### Journeying with God: Spirituality and participation in faith related activities among Catholic youth in Whangarei.

#### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

**This consent form will be destroyed after 5 years.**

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer any particular questions.

I agree to provide information to the researcher in the understanding that my name will not be used without my permission. The information will be used only for this research and publications arising from this research project.

- I agree/do not agree to the interview being voice recorded.
- I have the right to ask for the voice recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.
- I wish/do not wish to have my interview transcripts returned to me.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX 'F'****Journeying with God: Spirituality and participation in faith related activities among Catholic youth in Whangarei.****AUTHORITY FOR THE USE OF TAPE TRANSCRIPTS**

**This form will be held for a period of five (5) years**

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to check and amend the transcript of the interview/s conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript may be used for analytical purposes and that extracts from this transcript may be used by the researcher, Trudy Dantis in reports and publications arising from the research.

SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 'G'

### NOTES ON CATHOLIC LAY MOVEMENTS FOLLOWING VATICAN II

#### The Focolare

Founded by Chiara Lubich in 1944, the term "focolare" (which means fireplace) was applied to the Movement, since its beginnings, by the people of Trent because of the "fire" of Gospel love which animated Chiara and her first companions. John Paul II denoted the charism of Chiara Lubich as "*a radicalism of love*" and saw in the Movement the lineaments of the Church of the Council, open to the various dialogues (19.8.1984).

*The charism of unity which the Holy Spirit entrusted to the Focolare is a gift of light and love. Wherever it is received, it promotes a new lifestyle, the spirituality of unity, which brings about unity and universal brotherhood in the world. It is focused on a Gospel-based love which, when put into practice, revives individuals and communities, bringing a new spirit to every expression of life. — Chiara Lubich upon receiving the honorary citizenship of Milan, March 2004.*

The Movement has grown and developed through the 'spirituality of unity' which over time has become the lifestyle of people of all ages, backgrounds, vocations and cultures. At its heart are the Focolare Centres, small communities of men or women, single and married.

*More information can be found at The Focolare Website: <http://www.focolare.org/>*

## **The Opus Dei**

Opus Dei is a Catholic institution founded by Saint Josemaría Escrivá in 1928. “Opus Dei” means “Work of God.” The complete name is Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei. It is also more briefly called the Opus Dei Prelature or simply Opus Dei.

The aim of this institution is to contribute to that evangelizing mission of the Church, by promoting among Christians of all social classes a life fully consistent with their faith, in the middle of the ordinary circumstances of their lives, especially through the sanctification of their work and their family and social duties. In order to achieve this aim, the prelature offers to its faithful and many other people the sort of spiritual formation that will inspire them to live according to the teachings of the Gospel, through exercising the Christian virtues and sanctifying their work

Opus Dei was given final approval in 1950 by Pope Pius XII. In 1982, the Catholic Church made it into a personal prelature — its bishop's jurisdiction covers the persons in Opus Dei, wherever they are

*More information can be found at The Opus Dei Website: <http://www.opusdei.org/>*

## **The Catholic Charismatic Renewal**

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) is a spiritual movement within the Catholic Church that emphasises the availability of the power and the many gifts of the Holy Spirit in the life of every believer, and the need for a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ in order to live life to the fullest.

It began at a retreat for college students at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania in February 1967 when the students had a powerful and transforming experience of God, which came to be known as '*baptism in the Spirit*'. The charismatic experience soon moved beyond colleges and began to have an impact on regular parishes and other Catholic institutions. Loose organisations and networks were formed.

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal is not a single, unified worldwide movement. It does not have a single founder or group of founders as many other movements do. It is a highly diverse collection of individuals, groups and activities - covenant communities, prayer groups, small faith sharing groups, renewed parishes, conferences, retreats, etc.,- often quite independent of one another, in different stages and modes of development and with different emphases, that nevertheless share the same fundamental experience and espouse the same general goals.

*More information can be found at The International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Website: <http://www.iccrs.org/>*

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