

An Ethnographic Study of Generational Differences in Religious Beliefs and Values



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Introduction

For this project, I chose to investigate the (possibly differential) influence of one prominent contemporary religious institution—the Catholic Church—on the values and evaluations of the Church's moral credibility held by members of distinct generations.

-Josiah

For our own personal questions that we wished to investigate, I chose to delve into the topic of how older generations might have swayed younger ones in terms of religious beliefs and values.

- Jeremiah

Image Acknowledgements (from right to left):

- MatthewDonovan. "The Catholic Church and Child Sexual Abuse." Independent Australia, 31 July 2013, <https://independentaustralia.net/life/life-display/the-catholic-church-and-child-sexual-abuse,5575>.
- Ragai, John. "Holy Week 2017: Holy Thursday - Washing of Feet." Flickr, Yahoo!, 15 Apr. 2017, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/johnragai/33236316543>.

Methodology

It was through engaging in participant observation and conducting formal interviews that I gathered the bulk of my data. In addition to these, I held informal conversations with people exhibiting varying degrees of personal alignment with Catholic values; these conversations provided me with data that was qualitatively different from that gathered using the other two methods. While using participant observation to discover people's attitudes toward the issues I raised, I found that I had to adjust my initial head-on approach in favor of a more organic one in order to set things in motion.

-Josiah

Much of my data was gathered by conducting formal interviews and having informal conversations while talking to friends. The data collected by the two types of methods gave similar results. Still, the informal conversation provided much more context to the persons beliefs and how they stumbled into their beliefs. I believe that the methods of a formal interview allow a complex topic such as religion to be approached in a manner that makes others comfortable. It makes it much easier to broach the subject informally; this allows for more personal thoughts to be provided.

-Jeremiah



Conclusion:

These were my findings:

- The older individuals I spoke with tended to have more positive evaluations of the Church's moral credibility despite generally sharing the same stances on religiously charged topics as the younger research participants.
- The younger individuals I spoke with, if they had been raised in the Church but were not currently practicing, tended to nonetheless report that their religious upbringing had played an important role in developing their conscience, even if they sometimes disagreed with the Church's moral teachings.

-Josiah.

This is what I gathered from my research.

- Older generations did influence younger people's religion.
- Many young people are steadfast in their faith but not happy with religious institutions.
- Young people will not force their children toward one religion but guide them toward a religious lifestyle.

- Jeremiah