

YOUTH, THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, AND OUR FUTURE

A REPORT AND REFLECTIONS FROM THE UNITED STATES



**A Study by the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies
at the University of Southern California**

The Catholic Church in the United States: Seven Facts

1. Catholics are more than 50 million of the US population, but have declined from 24% in 2007 to 21% in 2014.



2. Catholicism has experienced a greater net loss than any other religious tradition in the U.S. There are 6.5% former Catholics for every convert.

3. Catholics are Racially and Ethnically diverse: 6 in 10 adults are white and 1/3 Latino. The Catholic Latino population has been growing.



4. Catholics are evenly spread throughout the country. Catholics in the Midwest and Northeast have decreased 5% between 2007 and 2014.

5. Many Catholics want significant change: e.g., allowing priests to marry, women to be ordained, and nearly half want gay marriage recognized.



6. Catholics are split evenly between Democrats and Republicans.



7. A large majority of Catholics admire Pope Francis, but recently have some discontent.

See David Masci and Gregory Smith, Sept. 4th, 2018, based mainly on the Religious Landscape study conducted by the PEW Research Center 2014.

Most of Those Who Leave are not “Gone”: Findings From the Institute’s The Unchurched of America.



Institute Scholars who studied the growing number of disaffiliated young adults.

1. About 1 in 10 Americans are former Catholics. Among young adults, half have left the Church; only about 10% return. Most who leave the Church do so during adolescence and young adulthood.

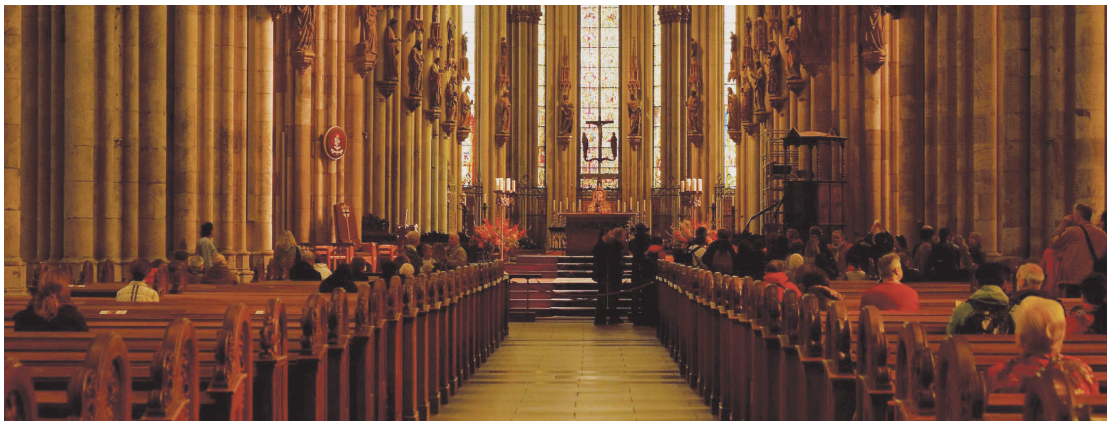


2. Except for atheists, most unaffiliated Catholics continue to believe in God and pray.
3. Disaffiliated Catholics often live on the West Coast, are not married, and if married, are not to another Catholic. The majority of millennials (born between 1981-1996) raised Catholic typically report now that they are unaffiliated.

4. Most unaffiliated Catholics agree that Churches bring people together, strengthen community, and play an important role in helping the poor and the needy.
5. Most unaffiliated Catholics think that the Church is too involved in politics, focused on rules, and concerned about money and power.

6. Most unaffiliated Catholics accept homosexuals and favor gay marriage.

7. Weekly Sunday attendance has dropped significantly. In 1955, 75% of Catholics attended weekly Mass; today less than 40%. Only 25% of those between 21-29 years of age attend weekly today.



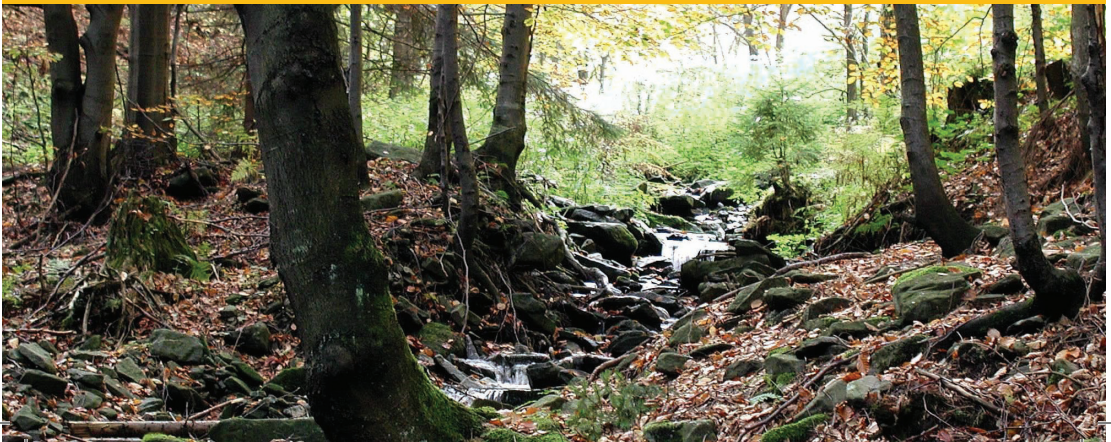
Contrasting Interpretations of Disaffiliation:



1. Many academics stress the causes of disaffiliation as rigidity of Church teachings (especially on sexuality), role of women, and homosexuals.

2. Many religious leaders believe disaffiliation is caused mainly by the culture: (relativism, commercialism, and science), and by poor teaching of the faith.

3. Still others believe that we are passing through a major change on a global scale, a second “axial age,” when religions will become more personal, more hospitable to the earth, and find more common ground.



The Impact of Vatican II: Good

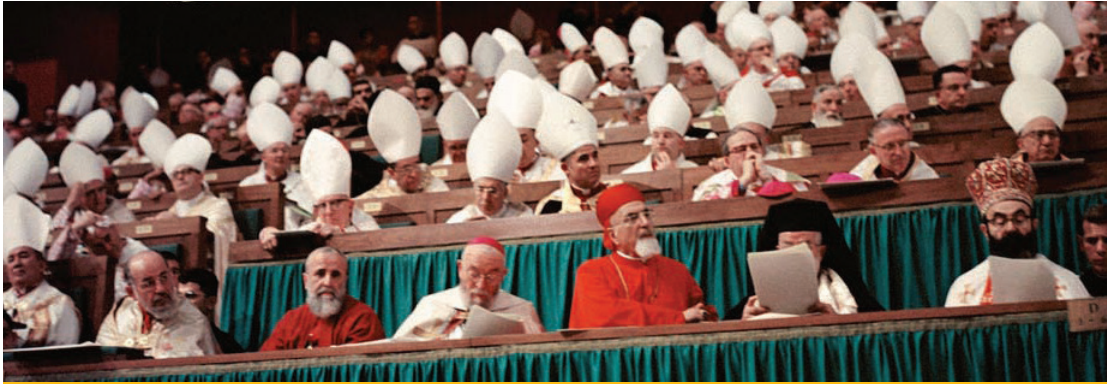
1. Calling the Church to ecumenical and inter-faith dialogue has fostered greater Christian unity and more respect between different religions.
2. The universal call to holiness affirmed the dignity of every Catholic and their responsibility for witness in the world.
3. In affirming religious freedom, the Church recognized the importance of conscience and the value of religious pluralism.
4. The universality of God's grace and mercy was clearly affirmed by teaching that all who inform and follow their consciences, even if they know nothing of the Gospel, may be saved.



Blessed J.H. Newman
"Conscience First"

Common Misunderstandings of Vatican II

1. By encouraging ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue, the distinctiveness of the special character of Catholicism is weakened.



2. By calling everyone to holiness, religions and priests have lost status—along with their important roles.

3. By affirming religious freedom and the separation of Church and state, some Catholics value less the public witness to their faith.

4. In teaching that those who may not know Christ or His Gospel may be saved, some wonder why the Church is necessary for salvation.

What Needs to be Done for Youth Now?

- 1.** Research shows that parents whose faith and practice is weak produce children who, in our culture, rapidly disaffiliate. The family needs immediate and extensive pastoral care, especially by educated lay ministers.



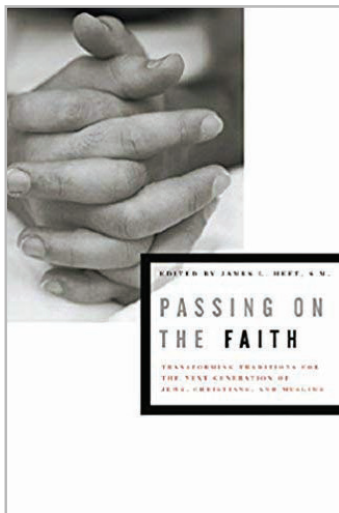
- 2.** Vocations to the priesthood and religious life depend considerably on families, parishes, and Catholic educational institutions. Colleges and universities are an especially fruitful time and place for the accompaniment of young adults.
- 3.** Catholics need to find public ways to demonstrate their faith, to remain Catholic while respecting and appreciating others who believe differently or not at all.

4. One of the greatest needs of the Church today are competent teachers who are able to explain and witness to the faith.

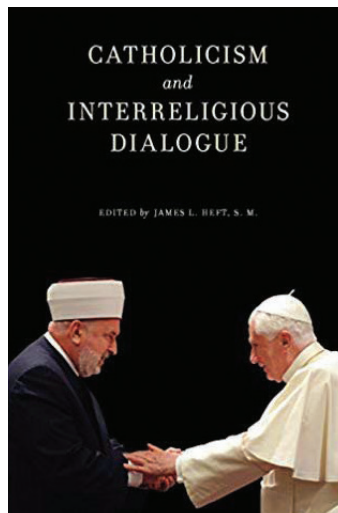


5. Educating college students and young adults in forms of leadership as Catholics will do more to strengthen the life of the Church than stressing rules.
6. The impact of social media and the internet, for good and for evil, cannot be underestimated. Pre-teens and young adults need to be educated how and when to use it. At its best, social media is no substitute for face-to-face communication.

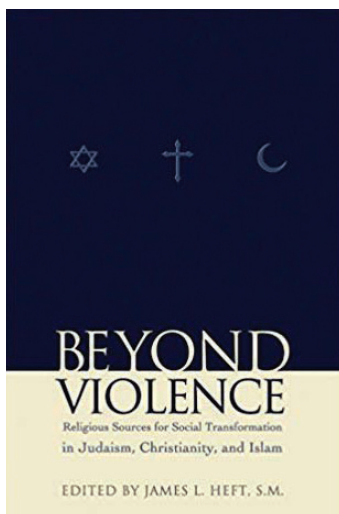
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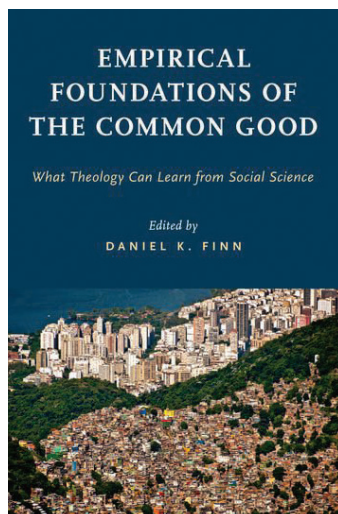
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**The Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies at the
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