

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW: PASSING ON FAITH TO A NEW GENERATION

The impact of Catholic disaffiliation and the broad, sweeping meaning to the institutional church is a concern that has been the subject of research for decades now.¹ One of the practical implications for Catholic families is this: *How do we pass on the faith to the next generation that does not want it? What are the implications for families, parishes, and the church as a whole?*

All the Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, stress the importance of intergenerational faith transmission for centuries as a duty of faith of families and their local faith communities. The family is ideally the first community where Catholics first experience the joy Christ brings to the world ideally. His love surrounds children through the love, care, and affection parents lavish on their sons and daughters. Yet, for generations now, the experiences of disaffiliation have brought a sense of confusion to families and religious education teachers and youth and young adult ministry. CCD programming and Catholic education no longer assure children will remain Catholic and active members of their parish communities. What was influential in the past is no longer is for many.

Necessary disaffiliation research has provided substantial support as we continue to deepen our understanding and its pastoral implications in the church. I hope to offer a small contribution to the hiatus of studies with Catholic family research and its pastoral implications. In this chapter, I review some of this research on the characteristics of younger generations that impact religious affiliation and how this study reflects this. But first, I begin with a description of *post-secular Catholicism* by Dr. Michelle Dillon, a term I use throughout this project.

Postsecular Catholicism

Understanding the American context can help us see the complex social and cultural patterns shaping our ministries and our families. The first area is the process of *secularization* and its impact in the United States and Europe, and other parts of the world. Dr. Michele Dillon writes: “The forces of change unleashed by modernity were supposed to bring about the public retreat, if not the disappearance, of religion. Instead, modernity’s emphasis on reason opened the door to scientific thinking, which was

¹ Such studies include: Bryan T. Froehle and Mary L. Gautier, *Catholicism USA: A Portrait of the Catholic Church in the United States*, Maryknoll, N.Y. (Orbis) 2000; William D. Dinges, Mary Johnson, Juan L. Gonzales, Jr., and Dean R. Hoge, *Young Adult Catholics: Religion in the Culture of Choice*, Notre Dame, Ind. (University of Notre Dame Press) 2001; Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, New York (Oxford University Press) 2005; William V. D’Antonio, James D. Davidson, Dean R. Hoge, and Mary L. Gautier, *American Catholics Today: New Realities of Their Faith and Their Church*, New York (Rowman and Littlefield) 2007; Jerome P. Baggett, *Sense of the Faithful: How American Catholics Live Their Faith*, New York (Oxford University Press) 2009; Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, <http://religions.pewforum.org>.

expected to displace religious beliefs and deference to religious authority.” She goes on to say, “It followed that if all individuals are created equal and endowed with reason, they should be able to reason about all things, including religion, and should be free to govern themselves in all things.”² This secular idea became a bedrock for the democratization of political, economic, and social life and how many people understand religion.³

The reality today is that America is secular. Secular principles undergird our legal, economic, political, and social institutions. Yet religiosity is also quite alive as well. So, secularization is uneven in its reach and its consequences. Like religion, secularity takes many forms, and it varies in intensity along the trajectories of belonging, belief, and behavior. ⁴ Secularity is one option among many, as is belief in God.

In a time when many tend to moralize, in an unqualified way, about how secularized the church has become, we need to remind ourselves that secularization is not primarily regarded as an outside threat—secularization also comes from within the Christian faith itself; it is a legitimate consequence of the Christian tradition. To be more precise, secularization is a child of the Christian tradition, even though many people would indeed like to regard it as an “unwanted” one.

To understand how religion and secularization have become intertwined within Christianity—an entanglement that becomes increasingly complicated—we must remind ourselves of the distinction between the religious and the secular. William Cavanaugh has argued that the religious-secular importance is not a description of historical reality, but an invention accompanied by differences like private-public, religion-politics, and church-state, to legitimize the liberal nation-state. Following Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Cavanaugh also observes that before the Enlightenment, religion included the public values that secularism later claimed. Likewise, Mark C. Taylor has stated: “religion and secularity are not opposites; to the contrary, Western secularity is a religious phenomenon.”⁵ Yet this dualism has to hold on to pastoral practice at the heart of the culture wars in America.

In my interviews with those who disaffiliated from the church, “secular” thinking, and speaking were expressed in many ways. One interviewee spoke of being quite close to the local parish in his teen years up to college. After that, his drifting away from church practice coincided with the subject of conversations and the language he used that had no relation to religion with college friends. It was not drifting away from belief in God and an implicit acknowledgment of the relevancy of spiritual practice for others. It just was not part of his world anymore as his friends were quite diverse religiously. So, he lives in

² Michele Dillon. *Postsecular Catholicism: Relevance and Renewal*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018) Kindle location 129 of 5448.

³ See Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).

⁴ Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, eds. *Secularism & Secularity: Contemporary International Perspectives*. (Hartford: Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture, 2007), 7-9.

⁵ Bengt Krstensson Uggla. “Secularization and Religion in a Post-secular Age.” *Parse Journal*. Issue 6: Secularity, Autumn 2017. <http://parsejournal.com/article/secularisation-and-religion-in-a-post-secular-age/#note-3891-15> (Accessed May 14, 2019) Some would say that secularity is a product of the failure of institutional religions in some ways.

Chudy, Carl, D.Min. *Postsecular Catholicism: Toward a Renewed Understanding and Pastoral Praxis in Catholic Families with Disaffiliated Children in the Archdiocese of Boston*. Hartford International University for Religion and Peace. May 2021. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.26787.58409.

a more “nonreligious” or secular ambient but sees no contradiction with his religious background.

In light of this, Jurgen Habermas, a secular sociologist, argues that the realities of western modernity require a change in the public consciousness and an *appreciation of religion* in the secular culture, what he calls a *post-secular consciousness*.⁶ Dr. Dillon writes: “A post-secular consciousness recognizes that while secularization is the settled reality, religion has public relevance and culturally useful resources for addressing contemporary societal ills.”⁷ Postsecularity supposes here a mutuality of the religious and the secular. This project assumes that this mutuality entails ongoing dialogue, tolerance, and active engagement between religious and non-religious individuals.⁸

Postsecular Catholicism, or any religious tradition, navigates with the tensions of the traditions of faith in the context of secular realities. Catholic lived realities are most often secular realities, infused with sacred presence. This encounter requires an ongoing interchange between religious ideas and secular practicalities. As Michele Dillon asks: “Can the Church give a new voice to its firmly embedded commitment to the common good? And can it forge new directions in language, doctrinal thinking, and institutional practices that find greater resonance with the lived experiences of increasingly secularized Catholics and other citizens?”⁹ As the culture continues to change, traditional religions are struggling to adapt.

Families of Faith in Postsecularity

The effects of post-secularity on families cannot be underestimated. Sociologist Nancy Ammerman poses questions that many religious parents and grandparents throughout this study are wrestling with:

Will our children have faith to guide them? Will they be able to leave behind the chains and fears and dysfunctionalities of some religious traditions without losing their sacred and moral grounding? Will they forgive the bad religious behavior of some and find common cause with others who are more admirable spiritual exemplars? Will our doubts breed religious indifference in the next generation? Will this generation of independent individualists be willing and able to make real commitments to religious ideas and ways of life that may make demands on them?¹⁰

She suggests that instead of responding to religious/secular pluralism as an accommodation to the culture (relativization), a strategy of *cultural bilingualism* is

⁶ Habermas, “Notes,” 3– 4. On the tensions and complexities in Habermas’s use of postsecularity, see Michele Dillon, “Jurgen Habermas and the Post-Secular Appropriation of Religion: A Sociological Critique,” in Philip Gorski, David Kim, John Torpey, and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, eds., *Probing the Post-Secular* (New York: New York University Press/ Social Science Research Council, 2012), 249– 278; and other essays in that volume. See also William Barbieri, ed., *At the Limits of the Secular* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014).

⁷ Dillon, Kindle Location 173-5448.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Dillon, Kindle Edition location 67 of 5448.

¹⁰ James L. Heft, SM, ed. *Passing on the Faith: Transforming Traditions for the Next Generation of Jews, Christians, and Muslims*. The Abrahamic Dialogues Series, No. 6. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 7.

needed. She means that solid faith communities contribute to the country's common good when they are skilled in building diverse communities of faith and communities of tolerance. For Ammerman, our growing religious and nonreligious pluralism is our friend! Ecumenical and interfaith efforts are essential places to foster familiarity with the sacred/secular culture in our communities shaping us. Yet, this is easier for those who are disaffiliated than those affiliated with the institutional church.

I encounter many parents, grandparents, and friends who share stories of the departure of loved ones, and the common good is far from their minds. Instead, it may be judged as a “failure” on parents or scapegoating to other influences like liberal education in the university. It is also hard for those who disengage from church and religion to explain why they leave their families, and it is hard for their families to hear it. It is often a taboo subject for discussion, and the religious/nonreligious divide seems insurmountable. However distorted this thinking can become, it does underline the internal familial challenges.

The impact on Catholic families who value the belief and practice of their faith for their children and grandchildren can be both troubling and disturbing. Traditionally children, initiated in the sacraments and reared in mass attendance and sacramental immersion, would continue to do so for their children as well, a catechesis combined with church practice. “Raise a child in the faith, and they will not depart from it,” Proverbs 22:6 reminds us. Home devotions were also encouraged. Historically, the sacramental initiation program, or religious education, began with a post-reformation program for parishes that started in the seventeenth century to train children in the faith and provide the opportunity for the next generation to do the same.¹¹ Unfortunately, this tradition, which worked well for hundreds of years, experienced cracks in the system from the early 1960s on.

The rise of the “nones,” “somes,” and “dones” have radically affected the realignment of family and religion. In the United States, religion and family have long been viewed as working together in an unbroken. It was through families that the faith continued.¹² I contend that the changes in the family are a source of the seismic shifts of the Catholic religious landscape. I turn now to two necessary studies that help us understand profiles of the disaffiliated in the Catholic context and a more recent study whose qualitative approach is exceptionally informative, a research method I employed in this study.

¹¹ Horton Davies, Ian Green. *The Christian's ABC: Catechisms and Catechizing in England c. 1530–1740*. (New York: Clarendon Press of Oxford University Press. 1996), 16-18. Before the Protestant Reformation, Christian catechesis took the form of instruction in and memorization of the Apostles' Creed, Lord's Prayer, and basic knowledge of the sacraments. The word "catechism" for a manual for this instruction appeared in the Late Middle Ages. The use of a question-and-answer format was popularized by Martin Luther's Small Catechism in 1529. He wanted the catechumen to understand what he was learning, so the Decalogue, Lord's Prayer, and Apostles' Creed were broken up into small sections, with the question "What does this mean" following each portion.

¹² Robert Wuthnow, *Growing Up Religious: Christians and Jews and Their Journeys of Faith*. (Boston, Beacon Press, 1999), 217.

Catholics in a Culture of Choice

The Jesuit, Thomas P. Rausch draws on several surveys, but much of his research comes from Dean R. Hoge and his associates, *Young Adult Catholics: Religion in the Culture of Choice*.¹³ The approach of this study looks through the lens of *Catholic identity* and raises questions about how the church hands on its tradition and incorporates young people into its life.

In one of the studies the author cites, 3,680 undergraduates were surveyed from forty-six colleges and universities with optimistic findings. As shown later, the data set of disaffiliated of this project spans two generations, from 22 to 55 years of age. Thus, this study is worthwhile despite very similar characteristics extending beyond the emerging adult years into mid-adult years.

It reported a prominent level of spiritual engagement and commitment among college students. Here are some indications:

- 77% say they are spiritual beings
- 71% trust in a “higher power.”
- 1/3 33% of the respondents said they prayed, discussed religion and spirituality with friends
- 30% The ultimate spiritual quest is to be a better person
- 14% To know what God requires of me
- 13% To know my purpose in life.¹⁴

One may glean from this that while there is a higher interest in spirituality and religion in general, fewer people engage in religious practice. On the organizational/institutional side, engagement and membership in a Catholic Church diminished much more dramatically. Pausch wonders if the discrepancy between spirituality and religious practice is partly about researchers who define spirituality too broadly, even uncritically. If religion is narrowly described as formal and institutional, while spirituality is personal and experiential, are social scientists creating this binary as mutually exclusive?¹⁵ However, since this study, there is a much more nuanced understanding of the spiritual but not religious with more diversity than merely emphasizing nontraditional spirituality over institutional commitment.¹⁶

Considering this, Pausch focuses his analysis instead of on *Catholic identity*. Young adult Catholics (Ages 20-39) share many of the same features as non-Catholics in these studies on disaffiliating. However, the bonds that tied them to the institutional

¹³ 'Dean R. Hoge, William D. Dinges, Mary Johnson, and Juan L. Gonzales, Jr., *Young Adult Catholics: Religion in the Culture of Choice* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), ix of 123.

¹⁴ Thomas P. Pausch, S.J. *Being Catholic in a Culture of Choice* (Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota), 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 2.

¹⁶ Yunping Tong and Fenggang Yang. Internal Diversity Among “Spiritual But Not Religious” Adolescents in the United States: A Person-Centered Examination Using Latent Class Analysis. *Review of Religious Research* (2018) 60:435-453. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13644-018-0350-9>.

church diminished considerably. As a result, two issues come to the fore in the Catholic Church: a) Large numbers of young Catholics have a very “thin” sense of their identity as distinct from other religious identities; b) A small but significant group who come across very conservative seek to define their Catholic identity in ways that re-live much more traditional practices and theology.

Catholic teenagers were behind Protestant peers by as much as twenty-five percentage points in such standards as religious belief, practice, experiences, and commitments. This sense of diminished Catholic identity lies in the gap between what the Church teaches and what Catholics understand and do. It seems that Catholicism is more incidental to their relationship with Christ. The uniqueness of their Catholic faith is perceived no different than any other form of Christianity, and the authority of what is said and taught is less credible.¹⁷

Some contributing factors for a weakened Catholic identity that Pausch draws from the Hoge study and other findings have exciting connections to those persons interviewed in this project, who often exhibited one or more of these qualities in varying degrees:

- a) *Religious individualism*: Pervasive religious individualism of postmodern America has been well noted by Robert Bellah.¹⁸ Individual conscience becomes absolute. The influence of Protestantism in Calvin’s suspicion, for example, of the Catholic sense of sacred in the world led to an emphasis on the “radical transcendence of God,” pushing him out of the world and emphasizing the autonomous self.
- b) *A Culture of Voluntarism*: Religious identity is more about personal choice and much less about a core identity that has a history and wisdom beyond personal experience. Self-constructed identities draw from the free market religious economy where many options are available, much more so for this generation than any other generation.
- c) *Loss of a Catholic subculture*: Like those of Protestant congregations, demographic changes have contributed to a breakdown in a local religious subculture. In the Catholic community, this change was dramatic, particularly in urban centers where Catholicism thrives most.
- d) *A Crisis of Credibility*: There is a gap between the authority of bishops, priests, and others in several areas such as sexual ethics, the insistence on “culture wars” and the rifts between the right and left, the role of women, and same-sex marriage, among other issues.
- e) *Theological illiteracy*: The Notre Dame study points to young Catholics seeking common ground in a pluralistic world and a religious education that engaged the emotions but did not challenge the intellect. The lack of grounding in their faith sees no way to dialogue with other religions and give a coherent grounding for what they believe.¹⁹

Each of these characteristics outlined by Pausch resonates meaningfully with the conversations I had with those who severed their formal relationship with the institutional church in this study but does not necessarily encompass/describe their entire relationship. For example, this lack of solid Catholic identity did not wholly undo

¹⁷ Ibid, 6.

¹⁸ Robert Bellah lecture: *Individualism and Commitment in America*. [Individualism and Commitment: "America's Cultural Conversation" by Robert Bellah \(hartfordinstitute.org\)](https://www.hartfordinstitute.org/individualism-and-commitment-america)

¹⁹ Pausch, pp. 9-18.

Chudy, Carl, D.Min. Postsecular Catholicism: Toward a Renewed Understanding and Pastoral Praxis in Catholic Families with Disaffiliated Children in the Archdiocese of Boston. Hartford International University for Religion and Peace. May 2021. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.26787.58409.

that relationship for one fundamental reason: their family. On the contrary, it is their families that keep them tethered to some degree to Catholic identity. Thus, their Catholicity maintains some hold through holidays, family deaths and celebrations, prayer concerns, and their interaction with their parent's faith practice.

Going, Going, Gone: Catholic Disaffiliation in America

I was invited, along with about sixty-five other Catholic leaders, in diocesan structures across the country, to look over findings of a new study concerning Catholic disaffiliation in 2018, *Going, Going, Gone: Catholic Disaffiliation in America*.²⁰ It was an opportunity to discern some pastoral implications for diocesan structures, although not specifically on the family. I was the only one not representing any diocese, but my approach then was through the lens of a dialogical model of pastoral outreach. This study underscored critical qualitative analysis, which “yielded textured and nuanced personal narratives that more fully revealed the dynamics of disaffiliation.” The interviews with disaffiliated young Catholics revealed profound struggles within the numbers.²¹

First, this study focused on young people who previously self-identified as Catholic but longer do so. Several issues fell beyond the scope of this study and my analysis as well. They included the impact of the Hispanic reality as a multigenerational immigrant experience and the “Sorta-Catholics” of those not disaffiliated “yet,” describing themselves on the margin of the Church. Second, the “almost-done Catholics” is a new typology in the research of Josh Packard and Ashleigh Hope that identifies a significant percentage of people who remain affiliated with their church but are on the brink of being “done” (*hence the typologies of none and done*).²² Third, the “engaged Catholics” maintain their Catholic Christian identity, and knowing why this is the case would also be instrumental. Finally, this study did not include the more extensive social, cultural, and historical settings that influence their lives, which I attempt to do.²³ Given the limits of the study, which are helpful indications for further research, the results resonate with my own and help confirm my conclusions.

Based on the studies I examined, there is no single reason many young people (and not so young) raised as Catholics no longer identify with the Church. Further, no one profile describes those who have left the Church. The diversity of reasons demands that a pastoral response needs to be informed by identifying contributing factors, both *ecclesial and social*. The St. Mary's study delineates three disaffiliated types: *The injured, the drifter, and the dissenter*. I include some quotes from the interviewees of this Dmin project to show the lines of intersection between our studies.²⁴

²⁰ *Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics*. A Study by Saint Mary's Press of Minnesota, in collaboration with the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA). Released September 2017, 7. The interviews of five young adults that were summarized and videotaped are quite marvelous and worth listening to. You can see some of them here: <https://catholicresearch.smp.org/my-story/>

²¹ Ibid.

²² Josh Packard, PH.D., Ashleigh Hope. *Church Refugees: Sociologists Reveal Why People are DONE with church but not their Faith*. (Loveland, Colorado: Group Publications, 2015), 13-29.

²³ *Going, Going, Gone*, 9-10.

²⁴ Ibid, 13.

A powerful dynamic that can lead to disaffiliation is the negative experiences associated with faith and religious practice, both in the family and church. Current research highlights the significant role that family plays in the transmission of faith to young people, so it is not surprising that disruptions in the family can negatively impact one's faith. Moreover, these disruptions contributed to or even caused the final severing of ties to the Church in many cases. One subtle dynamic, for example, were those categorized as *injured*.²⁵

“I was not wholly familiar with Catholic practices, but I had gone to mass in the college I attended. While coming up to communion, the priest indicated I was not holding my hands correctly, so he did not give me communion and insisted I hold my hands a certain way. I did not quite understand and a second time he did the same thing. Eventually, he would not give me communion and I walked back to my seat very embarrassed. (Katelyn, G2-2, 6)

“So what? What difference does faith make anyway?” For some people, the dynamics of disaffiliation seem to stem from uncertain faith and lack of engagement with a faith community. This is the *Drifter*. The connection between religious belief and practice and the relationship between lived experience and dedication slowly fades until, at some point, these young people question why they are affiliated with the church in the first place. Their church experience exemplifies rules and rituals without any connection to their ‘real world.’ Here many feel like they are on their own to navigate their lives with their faith. Without peer or adult support, this journey becomes tiresome and lonely. A practical, new study from the Springtide Institute touches upon this by looking at the need for *relational authority*.²⁶

“In college were my friends church goers? One or two of them in my freshman year, but you know, we weren't getting up every Sunday going to church. We were all good friends, but religion was never really on the forefront of things we discussed.” (John, Individual interview, 2).

Dissenters reflect more intentional disaffiliation. Though this group shares a common starting point, their endpoint seems to vary significantly. Dissenting young people who actively leave the church express disagreement with church teaching on social issues, particularly same-sex marriage, abortion, birth control, all couched in an individual's right to choose. Others take issue with their perception of church teaching regarding the Bible, salvation, heaven, hell, purgatory, and life after death. Though many in this group participated in Catholic education, religious education, and youth ministry, there is disillusionment because of questions that were never answered.²⁷

“It is incredibly disheartening to me to see pastors and churches support family separations at the border or oppose police reform and support the Muslim ban and so on and so forth. You know, it's just morally wrong.” (Peter, individual interview, 8)

²⁵ Ibid, 14-16.

²⁶ Springtide Research Institute. The State of Religion and Young People: Relational Authority. (2020), 52.

²⁷ Ibid, 21-22.

Family Disruptions & Disaffiliation

In the St. Mary's Press study, respondents cited the religiosity of their parent(s), their interfaith or mixed marriage, the perceived "hypocrisy" in the lives of family members, or resentments to being compelled to attend mass or other services.²⁸ Others connect their childhood and teen experiences of religion in a pluralistic culture with a plethora of choices and find they can live good and happy lives without formal religious practice.

There are multiple paths by which younger people may disaffiliate from the church, and the family dynamics involved in these are complex. Often these may include negative experiences associated with faith and religious practice, both familial and ecclesial. Current research highlights the role family plays in the transmission of faith to young people. Disruptions in the family can have a negative impact on a young person's faith, which can include divorce, illness, death of family members, frequent moving, and other issues.²⁹

Interruptions in the family can also be viewed as instability which may affect the learning of religious identity. For example, children raised by divorced parents are more likely to be religiously unaffiliated than children whose parents were married during most of their formative years. (35% vs. 23% respectively) The PRRI study, *Exodus: Why Americans are leaving Religion – and Why They're Unlikely to Come Back*, states: "Roughly three in ten (31%) religious Americans who divorced parents brought up say they attend religious services at least once a week, compared to 43% of religious Americans who were raised by married parents."³⁰

Interfaith marriages or religiously mixed households also play a role in disaffiliation. For example, among those raised Catholic, there is a strong correlation between those whose parents were both Catholic and those who had one parent with a different religious or nonreligious identity; about four in ten remain Catholic as adults. In contrast, two-thirds of those raised in Catholic households by Catholic parents remain Catholic as adults. It carries over to the likelihood of religiously unaffiliated people to marry like-minded partners, about 54%, a shift from previous generations³¹.

"We went through a terrible divorce, and this had a very difficult impact on our daughter when she was young. She would love to attend church activities and was quite active. Eventually my ex-husband moved and remarked to my daughter that she never wanted to see her again. Father images of God certainly did not go over well with her afterward. Today she is an atheist." (Laura, G1-6, 12)

In conclusion, this literature review looks at some important research done in Catholic disaffiliation as those who remain affiliated. These dynamics of "deconversion" are apparent in the realities of post-secular Catholicism and its effects on families of faith.

²⁸ Going, Going, Gone, 11-12.

²⁹ Ibid, 14-15.

³⁰ Robert P. Jones, Daniel Cox, Betsey Cooper, and Rachel Lienesch. *Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion – and Why They're Unlikely to Come Back*. Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI). Released on September 22, 2016. 8-9.

³¹ PRRI, *Exodus*, 9.

Chudy, Carl, D.Min. Postsecular Catholicism: Toward a Renewed Understanding and Pastoral Praxis in Catholic Families with Disaffiliated Children in the Archdiocese of Boston. Hartford International University for Religion and Peace. May 2021. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.26787.58409.

The two principal studies I focus on here are *Catholics in a Culture of Choice* and *Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics*. They both provide insights into three realities that affect disaffiliation in Catholic families: the fluidity and flagging sense of Catholic identity. Second, from this, an increasing obscured relationship with the institutional church. The third element is family dynamics that may play a role as the second generation navigates their lives with or without their Catholic faith.