Spiritual vs. Religious: Perspectives from Today's Undergraduate Catholics

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Contemporary American college students simultaneously express both increased interest in spirituality and declining interest in traditional religion. Recent research recognizes the trend of young adults separating spirituality from religion, but utilizes varied definitions of each term developed by the researchers. This study asks students directly whether and how they differentiate spirituality from religion. The purpose of this article is to examine how undergraduate Catholics attending a Catholic university conceive of themselves as spiritual or religious and the differences, if any, between the two descriptors. The perspectives of 20 young adults of various programs of study and self-described degrees of spirituality and religiousness are herein explored.

The rising interest in spirituality among young adults nationwide is considered one of the more intriguing trends of the 21st century (Kuh & Gonyea, 2006). According to the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI), more than three-quarters of today's entering college students believe in God and over two-thirds say they have had a spiritual experience (Astin, Astin, Lindholm, & Bryant, 2004). Despite an attendant powerful interest exhibited by college students to integrate spirituality into their lives, studies reveal that many students disassociate organized religion from their belief in God (St. Amand, 2004). According to one Gallup poll, "Believing is becoming increasingly divorced from belonging" (Hamer, 2004, p. 5). Many young adults now refer to themselves as "spiritual, but not religious" (Cherry, De Berg, & Porterfield, 2001; Cunningham, 2002; Fuller, 2001) and often the two concepts seem to be placed in stark opposition to one another.

Despite the widespread trend of young adults separating spirituality from religion, little empirical research had been conducted on this phenomenon (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Scholars in student development have begun to make a distinction between spiritual and religious, but do not validate their initial conceptualizations of these two concepts. In other words, the trend of young adults separating being spiritual from religious has been recognized,

but the categories have been constructed more from the experience and presuppositions of the writers than the students. Of the studies that do distinguish between the two concepts, none allow for students to elucidate what the distinction means and, as a result, assumptions are made as to what constitutes and ultimately measures the spiritual and religious lives of college students. In addition, many assumptions are made about the beliefs and practices of young adult Catholics and whether or not they have lost their faith and interest in things beyond this material world. Indeed, some claim this to be the case and feel America's colleges and universities, both Catholic and non-Catholic, are to blame (Bartlett, 2003; Reilly, 2003).

Exploring how young adult Catholics conceive of spirituality and religiousness enables higher education professionals to understand more fully how these concepts are regarded and, as a result, more adequately foster their spiritual and religious development. Conclusions drawn from this study are particularly important for the over 200 Catholic colleges and universities in the United States that consider cultivating the spiritual and religious development of their undergraduate students vital to their mission and purpose as universities. The findings are relevant to professionals working at all institutions of higher education because of the high expectation incoming students have for exploring their beliefs, regardless of whether the institution has a religious affiliation (Astin et al., 2004). In addition, Catholic undergraduates comprise more than a quarter of college students nationwide and an overwhelmingly large percentage (90%) of Catholic undergraduates attend non-Catholic universities (Astin et al., 2004).

For these reasons, the current phenomenon of young adults separating spirituality from religion is examined from the student perspective in this article. The purpose of this article is to provide insight into how Catholic undergraduates attending a Catholic university make sense of the distinction between spirituality and religiousness and, as a result, the impending implications for institutions of higher education.

Literature Review

Due to a variety of definitions and overlapping use of the terms spiritual and religious, it is important to delineate the definitions according to scholars of student development and the Catholic Church. Thus, what follows are definitions in current literature and in the Catholic faith tradition on spirituality and religion. In addition, a summary of national findings regarding undergraduates' interest in spirituality and religion and statistics on the beliefs of young adult Catholics nationwide are provided.

Definitions of Terms

The majority who have researched the topic of spirituality agree that the meanings associated with this word are varied. The current use of the word spirituality is often nebulous and arbitrary, and, as a result, it is unclear what exactly the term signifies. Furthermore, the attributed relationship between spirituality and religion is often just as vague. Yob (2003) elaborates on the confusion pertaining to the definition of spirituality:

> Spirituality is a term that tends to be used indiscriminately, embodying different meanings within different contexts: Is it religion? A feature of religion? Independent of religion? Counter to religion? A human quality? An extra-human quality? Natural, or contrived? Subjective, or objective? Merely a psychological event?

A synthesis of the literature on spirituality provided some consensus. For example, there is a consensus that spirituality may or may not incorporate organized religions (Bryant, Choi, & Yasuno, 2003; Fuller, 2001; Love & Talbot, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Schneiders, 2000). Bryant et al. (2003) characterize spirituality as the following:

> Spirituality involves seeking personal authenticity, genuineness, and wholeness; transcending one's locus of centricity (i.e., recognizing concerns beyond oneself); connectedness to self and others through relationships and community; developing a sense of meaning, purpose, and direction; and openness to fostering a relationship with a higher power or center of value that transcends human existence and rational ways of knowing. (p. 724)

While Bryant et al. characterize spirituality without connecting it to religion, Cunningham (2002) points out that the word spirituality has a worthy history in the Catholic tradition. This noun, Cunningham explains, is rooted in the biblical notion of God, and comes from the Latin term *spiritus*, meaning "spirit" or "ghost." Therefore, to be spiritual is to have the spirit of God dwell within (1 Cor. 2:14-15; Romans 8:9). This spirit within us "enables us to learn how to live in community with one another and calls us to love, reconciliation, and generosity" (Cunningham, 2002, p. 26). Despite the religious context from which the word *spirituality* originates, Appleyard (1998) cited Schneiders' (1989) inclusive definition of spirituality as most useful when considering the spiritual development of today's college students. Schneiders describes spirituality as "the experience of consciously striving to integrate one's life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption but of self-transcendence toward

the ultimate value one perceives" (p. 9). When addressing the "spiritual dimension" of students' lives, Appleyard (1998) points out that "One's horizon of ultimate concern may be God revealed in Jesus Christ and experienced through the gift of the Spirit within the Church, but it may also be another system of value, religious or secular" (p. 9).

When comparing the viewpoints of the professional field of student development with the Catholic intellectual tradition, Estanek (2001) delineated significant differences in epistemology, which are imperative for understanding how spirituality is conceived between these two points of view. To begin with, the fundamental assumption in the field of student development is that knowledge is inductive as opposed to deductive. That is, it is derived from experience. This stands in contrast to the assumption within the Catholic intellectual tradition that truth is deductive. That is to say, it is derived from essential principles that interact with and interpret experience (Estanek, 2001). Second, the principal understanding in the field of student development is that the individual is primary and the community is strictly a voluntary association. In contrast, the Catholic point of view upholds that "human beings are fundamentally social beings and not isolated individuals" (p. 47). Third, what grounds "good practice" in student development is the assumption that individual choice is the primary social value whereas in the Catholic tradition, the common good, not individual choice, is the fundamental social value. Understanding these different assumptions is vital when one's profession is working with students within the context of a Catholic university. In addition, knowledge of these assumptions is helpful for assessing the definitions of spirituality and religiousness from this study's sample of undergraduate Catholics.

Religion, as opposed to spirituality, is a much easier term for most to describe. Love (2002) defines religion as "a shared system of beliefs, principles or doctrines related to a belief in and worship of a supernatural power or powers regarded as creator(s) and governor(s) of the universe" (p. 8). Religion, according to the Catholic Church, encompasses the external, social institutions in which the faith and spirituality of an individual are expressed (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1994; McBrien, 1994). The notion of community is inextricably linked to the definition of what it means to be religious or spiritual in the Catholic tradition. The word religion comes from the Latin verb *religare*: to tie or bind, and thus implies an obligation. This obligation, according to Muldoon (2003), is about "binding ourselves in relationship to others for the purpose of holding each other to our commitments" (p. 4). The significance of community within the Catholic faith tradition is stated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994):

No one can believe alone, just as no one can live alone. You have not given yourself faith as you have not given yourself life….Our love for Jesus and for our neighbor impels us to speak to others about our faith. Each believer is thus a link in the great chain of believers. (p. 46)

Regardless of the religious affiliation of young adults or the institution conducting the research, there is a tendency of the researchers to associate religiousness with behavior. For example, in the HERI's College Students' Beliefs and Values (CSBV) national survey, indicators for "religiousness" included: attend religious services, pray, discuss religion with friends and family, participate in religious clubs or groups, and follow religious teaching in everyday life (Astin et al., 2004). Bryant et al. (2003) also characterized religiousness as behavioral—the degree to which students attended religious services, discussed religion, participated in religious organizations, and prayed or meditated. Whether or not Catholic students attending a Catholic university conceive of religiousness in the same way is part of what this study uncovers and is discussed in the following section.

Undergraduates' Interest in Spirituality and Religion

Characteristics typically attributed to the spiritual and religious beliefs of the "Millennial" (Howe & Strauss, 2000) generation are not always flattering. Bartlett (2003) takes a glum perspective and says they are "souls without longing" who lack religious conviction and are involved in clubs and activities that "occupy more their time than their hearts" (p. 1). Bartlett believes universities are mainly to blame. An absence of religion on campus, Bartlett maintains, leaves students void of meaning and conviction. "The only official or overt guidance young people tend to receive in answering the question of how to live—a question that a university education should help equip them to answer—amounts to this: Be tolerant" (p. 3). Cherry et al. (2001) say they are not "religious dwellers" but rather "spiritual seekers" (p. 6) who are unembarrassed to express interest in things spiritual, but do so in ways that are more private than public. Characteristics pertaining to the Millennial generation are helpful, still, it is necessary to contextualize these assumptions with statistical data. Therefore, a review of national findings on undergraduates' interest in spirituality and religion follows. Because the focus of this study is on traditional-aged college students (ages 18 to 24), the review of literature pertains specifically to this age cohort.

Established in 1966, the HERI's Cooperative Institutional Research Project (CIRP) Freshmen Survey is the largest and oldest empirical study of

higher education in the United States (HERI, 2005). In the fall of 2004, the HERI conducted the CSBV survey—an addendum to the annual first-year CIRP survey. The CSBV survey contained 160 items pertaining to students' perspectives and practice of religion and spirituality (Astin et al., 2004). The CSBV found that college students have a high degree of interest in spirituality. For instance, 77% of students agree that "we are all spiritual beings"; 73% believe that their religious/spiritual beliefs helped them develop their identity; 75% report that "to some or even to a great extent, they are searching for meaning/purpose in life"; and, finally, 58% rated integrating spirituality into their lives as essential or very important. It is particularly helpful for the purpose of this article to look at the distinctions between religiousness and spirituality brought to light through the CSBV survey. More than three-fourths of incoming students state they believe in God, but only 4 in 10 consider it very important that they follow religious teachings in their everyday life. In addition, the majority agreed that "non-religious people can lead lives that are just as moral as those of religious believers" and that "most people can grow spiritually without being religious" (Astin et al., 2004, p. 4).

The level of importance college students place on spirituality uncovered by the CSBV survey was higher than most in higher education assumed (Astin et al., 2004). The study was undertaken with the postulation that the concern for the religious and spiritual dimension of students' lives had declined (Astin et al., 2004). The assumption stemmed from the shift in what students perceived as essential personal objectives in the CIRP Freshman Survey: "To be very well off financially" has taken first place and "developing a meaningful philosophy of life" has dropped to seventh place—the reverse of 3 decades ago. Regardless of this shift, the importance of spirituality held by college students is significant and seems to run counter to Bartlett's (2003) assertion that this generation of college students are "souls without longing." It is important to note, however, that fewer than half of students indicated that they felt "secure" in their spiritual/religious views and 1 in 4 reported being conflicted or doubting; yet, only 1 in 7 were not interested (Astin et al., 2004, p. 2). Their struggle for meaning might be misinterpreted as a lack of longing.

In order to contextualize effectively the sample of students for this study, it is helpful to look at data on young adult Catholics nationwide. D'Antonio, Davidson, Hoge, & Gautier (2005) have been tracking trends in beliefs, practices, and attitudes of American Catholics for 18 years and the most recent results were released in September 2005. D'Antonio et al.'s study shows that Catholics of all ages view the "creedal beliefs," such as Jesus' resurrection, as central to their faith and specific moral teachings as more peripheral. In addition, D'Antonio et al. point out that most Catholics, regardless of age,

consider the teachings on a celibate priesthood, the death penalty, abortion, and same-sex marriage as more optional than essential to being Catholic. "Our findings show that young and old are more alike than different on a number of critical areas of attitude and belief" (p.16). Moreover, these statistics support the assumption by many that young adults consider faith a more personal matter and separate belief with adherence to Church teachings.

D'Antonio et al. (2005) also found significant differences across the generations. According to findings from the Gallup Poll, only 4 out of 10 young adults say the Catholic Church is among the most important part of their lives, compared to 6 out of 10 pre-Vatican II Catholics (born before 1960). Interestingly, the belief that one can be a "good Catholic" without going to Mass has increased for all generations over the past 2 decades since the survey was first administered. In addition, the survey found that compared with previous generations, young Catholics look more to individuals as the locus of authority. In other words, Millennials place an emphasis on individual conscience over Church leaders in deciding moral issues.

Young adults distinguishing spirituality from religion was made evident in the findings of the first administration of the Boston College Questionnaire about the Undergraduate Experience (BCQ) in 2004, and prompted the qualitative investigation of this distinction. The BCQ is a quantitative study that analyzes the impact of the undergraduate experience on students attending Catholic colleges and universities in the United States. The study provides detailed information on the activities, practices, and attitudes that could be linked to student outcomes aligned with the mission of a Catholic university (Fleming, Overstreet, & Chappe, 2006). The BCQ has been administered every other year since 2004 to a total of 11,200 seniors at six Jesuit Catholic institutions. A noteworthy finding from the BCQ is that 81% of the study's sample identified themselves as spiritual, yet only 60% identified themselves as religious. This 21% gap reinforces the idea that students understand these two concepts to be different from each other and that more investigation in this area is necessary. What is more, students' understanding of their own spirituality and religiousness stood in contrast with how they understood their parents' religiousness and spirituality. When students were asked if they considered their parents to be spiritual and/or religious there was little difference between the two (roughly 70% considered their parents spiritual and about the same considered their parents religious). It appears that although undergraduates see their own religiousness as different from their spirituality, they see their parents' religiousness and spirituality as similar to each other.

The question arises of why this generation has adopted the phrase "spiritual, but not religious" when it was not used in earlier periods to describe

similar developmental transitions. When postulating reasons, it is helpful to note that a post-1960s drop in all forms of civic engagement in the United States impacted religious denominations as well. The attendance and involvement in religious activities over the past 3 decades has fallen between 25% to 50%, which mirrors the pattern for secular community-based organizations and political participation (Putnam, 2001). Furthermore, weekly church attendance for American Catholics dropped from 38% in 1970 to 26% in 1972 and has remained about the same ever since (American National Election Studies, 2005). Consequently, the choice not to attend Mass was primarily established by this college generation's parents, since the major decline in church attendance occurred in the early 1970s. A type of privatized religion grew in popularity with this generation's parents as large numbers of middle-class youth "defected from the churches in the late sixties and the seventies and 'dropped out' of organized religion altogether" (Putnam, 2001, p. 73). According to Roof and McKinney (as cited in Putnam, 2001),

> The consequence was a tendency toward highly individualized religious psychology without the benefits of strong supportive attachments to believing communities…It may provide meaning to the believer, but it is not a shared faith, and thus not likely to inspire strong group involvement…"Believers" perhaps, but "belongers" not. (p. 74)

Furthermore, researchers find that the American culture itself has an impact on this generation's attitudes and beliefs. Parks (1991) considers one's environment as significant to personal development and states that industrial societies' presumed needs have cast suspicion on all forms of dependence and associate reliance on others with weakness and immaturity. "Dependence is regarded as infantile," Parks avows, "particularly those forms of dependence that have religious justification" (p. 57). Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1985) offer a startling depiction of the emphasis on individualism in American culture:

> We believe in the dignity, indeed the sacredness, of the individual. Anything that would violate our right to think for ourselves, judge for ourselves, make our own decisions, live our lives as we see fit is not only morally wrong, it is sacrilegious. (p. 142)

Fowler's (1981) theory of faith development also helps to explain why young adults often disassociate themselves from the religious tradition in which they were raised. Fowler identifies six stages through which one may

progress in the evolution of faith. The progression through these six stages are characterized by increased autonomy, complexity, differentiation, humility, and activism in one's faith. To transition from stage three to four in Fowler's developmental scale means to "spring out of the fish tank and begin to reflect upon the water" (Straughn, 1999, ¶ 20). The transition to stage four often begins around age 20, the approximate age of the students in this study, and, according to Fowler (1981), "points to a more personal faith less dependent upon group expectations" (as cited in Sweeney, 2004, p. 16).

Kegan (1982) and Parks (1991) shed light on the phenomenon of young adults separating spirituality from religion when they explicate the "two greatest yearnings" (Kegan, 1982, p. 107) of all human beings: the yearning to be distinct and the yearning for connection. According to Kegan and Parks, discerning the self from the other coincides with a yearning for inclusion, belonging, and communion. "We never outgrow our need for others," Parks (1991) maintains, "but what others mean to us undergoes transformation" (p. 63).

One could point to the demise of Catholic subcultures as another cause for today's young adult Catholics disassociating from their religious tradition and losing their Catholic identity. Whitehead (2006) supports this claim:

> When U.S. Catholics were mainly a working class population of white European immigrants, socially and economically isolated from the Protestant mainstream, and committed to the institutions, teachings, and practices of the pre-Vatican II Church, being a Catholic was a distinctive identity. This identity included doctrinal beliefs and behaviors that defined one as a Catholic. (p. 5)

Thus, as European immigrants assimilated into American culture and moved to religiously diverse neighborhoods, their frame of reference changed. Their neighborhoods did not nurture a commitment to a religious community. They no longer looked at the world through the lens of religion, but looked at religion through the lens of American culture. This analysis resonates with Estanek's (2003) assertion that, "The culture of choice provides a framework and context for their Catholicism, not *vice versa*" (p. 95). Hence, Catholic college students are "typical American students who reflect American culture and American values" (p. 94). Again, this loss of Catholic identity represents a major historical shift and in these circumstances mentioned above it is then easier for young adult Catholics to talk of being spiritual than religious.

Summary

It was important for the purposes of this study not to assume one concept (spiritual or religious) was better than the other. It is common to put the two concepts in contrast to each other and consider religiousness as less than spirituality. This trend toward dichotomizing or polarizing spirituality and religion is accompanied by a tendency to characterize spirituality as "good, individualistic, liberating, and mature, while portraying religion as institutionalized, constraining, and childish" (Johnson, Kristeller, & Sheets, 2005, p. 3). Furthermore, psychologists and other academics reinforce this schism. Johnson et al. argue that such polarization both distorts and oversimplifies spirituality and religion.

The summary of research compiled by Pascarella & Terenzini (2005) points out that most studies in the past 30 years have shown significant declines in religious attitudes, values, and behaviors. However, the specific practices often addressed were church attendance, prayer, identification with a particular religious denomination, and beliefs in a supreme being (Love & Talbot, 1999). "While some of these, it may be argued, related to rejection of spirituality, most do not address issues of spirituality at all; they are merely external measures or practices associated with religion" (p. 369). This assumption on the part of researchers prompted this investigation on how students, versus the researchers, define these two concepts since the use of inappropriate measurements can result in false assessments. Finally, it is important to note that while this study inquired into students' definitions of religiousness in general, students often presumed this question to be about religiousness in terms of the Catholic religion due to the context of attending a Catholic university.

Method

Research Questions

The following questions were examined for this study: When the participants identified themselves as religious and/or spiritual, how did they understand and differentiate these two concepts? In particular, what were the attitudes and beliefs they associated with being religious or spiritual?

Instrumentation

A qualitative multi-case study design with in-depth semistructured interviews served as the primary method for data collection. The interview protocol was constructed specifically for this study and was intended to complement and expand on data previously gathered from the BCQ. Fowler's (1981) "Faith

Development Interview Guide" was also used to help develop the protocol. Three pilot interviews were conducted and transcribed to identify questions deemed irrelevant, repetitive, or confusing. Adjustments were made and the final interview protocol included 36 questions on five topics: religiousness, spirituality, religious services, prayer, and conversations about religious or spiritual beliefs. Data pertaining to students' faith practices (participation in religious services, prayer, and conversations about religious and/or spiritual beliefs) are beyond the scope of this article, and, therefore, not discussed.

The total number of interviews analyzed for this study was 20. The interviews began with the subject completing a short web-based questionnaire. On this questionnaire, participants noted whether they considered themselves to be very, somewhat, or not at all religious as well as their degree of spirituality (very, somewhat, or not at all). The interviews were tape-recorded and each of the interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes.

Participants

In order to examine the perceptions of religiousness and spirituality among a set of college students at a Catholic university, a purposive sampling technique (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002) was used. Since the study was an exploration of how the interviewee conceived of herself/himself as religious or spiritual and the differences, if any, between the two descriptors, the sample sought were students who self-identified as spiritual or religious or both. To acquire a sample of students who had shown interest in exploring their religious or spiritual beliefs, recommendations of possible interviewees were gathered from First Year Experience staff, Cornerstone and Capstone faculty, Intersections, the Volunteer and Service Learning Center, and Campus Ministry. In addition, to obtain a portion of the sample of students who could elaborate on why they chose to attend religious services, an announcement asking students to participate in the study was put in Mass bulletins. Finally, demographics, including race/ethnicity, gender, school/college, and class year were considered important variables in choosing the sample to obtain a close representation of the members of the class of 2005. The sample closely represented the gender distribution (55% female and 45% male), racial/ethnic breakdown (80% non-AHANA [Asian, Hispanic, African American, or Native American]), and percentage of students in each school/college for the class of 2005. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the participants by program of study, race/ethnicity, and degree of spirituality and religiousness. Pseudonyms are used to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of participants.

Analysis

An interpretive phenomenological analysis was used for this qualitative investigation. Transcripts were coded and compared using the constant comparative method (Bogden & Biklen, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), involving a continuous comparison of units of data (i.e., respondents' remarks within and across cases). The bits of information, or units of data, were sorted into groupings that had similarities. Additional notes were taken to identify themes, commonalities, and differences within and across respondents' answers. From these "memos" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) a list of preliminary codes were developed as the beginning phase of analyzing the data.

Initially, the proposed research questions guided the analysis. For instance, one of the research questions in this study focused on how students understand the concepts of spirituality and religiousness. Hence, the definitions of spirituality and religiousness were analyzed for similarities and differences within and across cases. Finally, inductive categories were created for the sample at large, as well as for individual cases and subgroups within the sample (for example, patterns that emerged among the "very religious, somewhat spiritual" group versus the "somewhat religious, very spiritual" group). This type of inductive analysis was appropriate for the purpose of this study because "although categories and variables initially guide the study, others are allowed and expected to emerge throughout the study" (Merriam, 1998, p. 160).

Limitations

Even though a qualitative investigation was appropriate for this study, there are some limitations. First, it is necessary to point out that a qualitative sample of this size cannot be generalized to all undergraduate Catholics. While representation in terms of school/college, year, race/ethnicity, and gender were deliberately attained, the sample was not meant to reflect the proportion of religious and/or spiritual students in the senior class at the Catholic university. Rather, a sample compiled of students who considered themselves to be either religious and/or spiritual was intentionally sought. Second, it is possible that subjects gave socially desirable responses, rather than responses that were consistent with their actual beliefs and/or behavior (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Third, even though recommendations for the sample of students were sought from departments unaffiliated with religion (Office of First Year Experience and Cornerstone and Capstone faculty), a number of students who chose to participate in the study read about the study in Mass bulletins. As a result, there was an oversampling of religious students. Finally,

Table 1

Participants by Program of Study, Race/Ethnicity, and Degree of Spirituality and Religiousness

Name	Program of Study	Race/Ethnicity	Spirituality	Religiousness
Andre	International Studies	AHANA	Somewhat spiritual	Somewhat religious
Cheryl	Communications	Non-AHANA	Very spiritual	Somewhat religious
Danielle	International Studies	Non-AHANA	Very spiritual	Very religious
Elizabeth	Finance	AHANA	Very/Somewhat spiritual	Not at all religious
Isabel	Sociology	AHANA	Very spiritual	Somewhat religious
Jim	Physics, Philosophy	Non-AHANA	Very spiritual	Somewhat religious
John	History	Non-AHANA	Very spiritual	Somewhat religious
Julie	International Studies	AHANA	Very spiritual	Very religious
Justin	Psychology, Theology	Non-AHANA	Somewhat spiritual	Somewhat religious
Kate	Political Science, Philosophy	Non-AHANA	Somewhat spiritual	Very religious
Libby	Theology	AHANA	Very spiritual	Very religious
Luke	Theology	Non-AHANA	Very spiritual	Very religious
Mark	Communications, History	Non-AHANA	Somewhat spiritual	Somewhat religious
Molly	Nursing	AHANA	Very spiritual	Very religious
Nick	English	Non-AHANA	Very/Somewhat spiritual	Not at all religious
Percy	Philosophy, Economics, Political Science	AHANA	Very spiritual	Somewhat religious
Rachel	Psychology	Non-AHANA	Very/Somewhat spiritual	Not at all religious
Sarah	Biochemistry	Non-AHANA	Very spiritual	Somewhat religious
Sean	Marketing	Non-AHANA	Very spiritual	Very religious
Tim	Philosophy	Non-AHANA	Very spiritual	Somewhat religious

Note. AHANA stands for Asian, Hispanic, African American, Native American.

when analyzing data there is an inevitable "interpretation" of meanings made by both the subject and the researcher. Despite these concerns, the interviews elicited essential and unique information on how religiousness and spirituality was conceptualized by this sample of college students.

Results and Discussion

The following themes or categories emerged when analyzing the interview data: spirituality defined as self-awareness and a quest for meaning as well as a relationship with the Devine; religiousness defined as knowledge of and adherence to Church doctrine as well as connected to particular practices of one's faith; student skepticism of religion; religiousness and the notion of

community; students' perceptions of the influence of religion on spirituality; and the impact of psychosocial development on students' understanding of spirituality and religiousness.

Definition of Spirituality: Self-Awareness and a Quest for Meaning

Similar to definitions in the literature on this topic (Bryant et al., 2003; Love & Talbot, 1999; Pasquerilla & Terenzini, 2005), students' explanations of spirituality were varied and frequently obscure. As a result, it was often unclear what exactly the term signified. For example, Libby referred to spirituality as "the feeling and being present thing." Though students' characterizations of spirituality were sometimes vague, general themes arose when analyzing their definitions. Awareness of self, others, and "something out there greater than you" (Sarah and Percy) were repeatedly mentioned in their definitions of spirituality. Awareness pertained to attentiveness to what was happening around oneself, in the lives of other people, and to a presence of the divine or transcendent. Moreover, this awareness, when associated with spirituality, called for some kind of response. The elicited response was either cultivating a relationship with a "higher being" or reaching out to help those in need.

To engage actively in a search for meaning and understanding about oneself and the world was a common thread connecting the students' definitions of spirituality. For example, Jim described being spiritual as, "Asking basic philosophical questions like, 'Who am I?' and 'Where am I going?' to 'What is the source of life?'" Being reflective was a common descriptor for being spiritual. Words such as "quest," "journey," and "process" were often employed by these students, regardless of their self-identified religiousness and spirituality, when describing spirituality. In response to what makes him spiritual, Jim asserted, "I am on this quest to find what it is that gives me life and I guess that I don't know the answers, but I am actively pursuing them." Julie also associated being proactive with her notion of what it means to be spiritual. She shares,

> With one of my roommates I have awesome conversations about social justice and things that are important to you in your life and that you want to make sure stay important and that you incorporate into your life. That's, I think, a huge role of spirituality. I don't think spirituality is just there; I feel like it's a dialogue.

The characteristics of spirituality, according to these students, resonated with Love and Talbot's (1999) definition of spirituality, who maintain that spirituality involves transcending one's locus of centricity (i.e., recognizing

concerns beyond oneself); developing a sense of meaning, purpose, and direction; and openness to fostering a relationship with "a higher power or center of value that transcends human existence" (as cited in Bryant et al., 2003, p. 724). Julie's articulation of spirituality echoes this definition. Julie contends, "I think spirituality has this socially just aspect to it, just evaluating the world around you, your greater purpose, and what you can do to work in the world around you and to alleviate what's going on."

Definition of Spirituality: A Relationship with the Divine

The students in this study, both religious and nonreligious, typically associated spirituality with a relationship to the divine. This came as no surprise since these students, while not all considered themselves still to be Catholic, were all baptized Catholic and attended a Catholic university. Multiple Judeo-Christian names were employed by the students when describing this divinity, which included "higher power," "God," and "spirit." Although Percy admittedly shied away from organized religion, he described spirituality as the "one-on-one relationship—meditation, prayer, conversation with God." Cheryl depicted being spiritual as "constantly connecting what I am experiencing, believing, and feeling with a higher being." For the nonreligious students, the belief in or acknowledgment of something beyond themselves was a mix of using both Judeo-Christian language and something not quite defined. For instance, Nick said being spiritual was "an acknowledgment that there is a God" and "having a socially conscious mind, which guides your existence." Rachel's definition of spirituality, however, was more elusive. Rachel, who described herself as very/somewhat spiritual and not at all religious said, "I think that right now in my development, my response to that would be religion is a more organized, committed type of faith and spirituality can be more of a belief system and a belief in existence, but not necessarily anything that you can point at."

Some of the students recognized how language about the divine can sometimes segregate those who identify themselves as religious from those who identify themselves as spiritual. Isabel shares this perspective:

> There are people who don't believe in religion, but believe that there's a higher power who can oversee things that are happening, so they believe that there is something greater than them in the world. Whether you're religious or not you can still believe. I call that God, but a lot of other people don't want to call that God for whatever reason.

Rachel also explained how language about religious or spiritual beliefs can serve to separate people from one another. Furthermore, her reflection portrays a notion of spirituality as common ground for people of different belief systems. She explains,

> I think it's harmful to almost, like, section off different belief systems and think, "I believe this," or "you believe that" because I think that when you talk about it on a baseline level, a lot of what we believe is very similar. We just have different phrases or terminology or analogies to describe it with. For example, I don't really consider myself really Catholic, but I have a good friend who is going to become a Jesuit next year, or is trying to, and he and I connected in a lot of different ways with our spirituality, even though we have very different religious practices.

While there was a tendency for many of the students to associate spirituality with the divine, some were careful not to use Judeo-Christian language when speaking about their spirituality. The potential to alienate others based on their choice of language was recognized among a handful of students. Still, the vast majority used God language liberally when describing spirituality. Most authorities in the field of religion and spirituality would contend that upbringing and context cause students to adopt language in accord with their specific faith tradition. The literature on this topic often defines spirituality in the Judeo-Christian perspective (Cherry et al., 2001). Other literature suggests a definition of spirituality as a universal experience of making meaning that may or may not include a relationship with the divine (Love & Talbot, 1999; Parks, 2000; Tisdell, 2003).

Definition of Religiousness: Adherence to and Knowledge of Church Doctrine

Regardless of the students' self-identified degree of religiousness and spirituality, the overriding definition of being religious, according to the students in this study, meant subscribing to a belief system and adhering to a set of standards and practices established by an institutional church. Moreover, the degree to which one adhered to institutionalized doctrines and expressions of faith determined the level of religiousness they attributed to themselves. Tim articulated this notion: "When someone says, 'very religious,' to me that says that you fully ascribe to everything the institutional church has to offer. Being a Catholic and feeling there are certain things that I don't agree with I wouldn't say that I'm *very* religious." In addition, Danielle stated, "I connect to God on my own rather than going through a standard traditional way such

as religion because there's a lot of things in Catholicism I don't agree with."
Mark elaborates more fully on his feelings of being Catholic and the connection between religiousness and adherence to Church doctrine:

> When people ask, I say I am Catholic and I'm proud to profess that. There are
> some times I will miss church on occasion, but I try to make it there once per
> week. At times, I will go multiple times per week. I would say I'm somewhat
> religious because I don't think I'm as strict to the rules that the Catholic religion
> professes and teaches. I think that's a reason a lot of people shy away from say-
> ing they are religious. I think people see religion as having so many different
> rules that they have to comply with and if they don't comply with those rules
> completely then they feel as though they are not a part of that religion; I kind of
> fit into that category. I think it's difficult to find a person who is 100% religious
> in the college atmosphere.

Possessing theological knowledge of one's religious tradition was also
mentioned by some of the students as what qualifies someone as religious.
This is perhaps best exemplified by Jim, a student who would enter the semi-
nary upon graduation. Jim identified himself in the interview as very spiritual,
but only somewhat religious. When asked what determined this description
of himself he replied,

> You talk to some people and they know which doctrine did what for the Church
> and the years that all the councils were and the whole history behind the deci-
> sion of it and the different documents that resulted from it. Neither me or my
> family know of that history; I know when some councils were, but I can't rattle
> off dates and documents that made certain decisions at certain times and, like,
> which pope did what for certain Church decisions.

Connecting religiousness with knowledge of one's religious tradition was
loosely connected to the literature in student development. For instance, indi-
cators of religiousness in the CSBV survey included: follow religious teach-
ing in everyday life (Astin et al., 2004). One could presume that knowledge of
the teachings precludes the ability to follow them. However, Jim's comments
seem to point to a deeper understanding of the tenets of his faith tradition than
what the literature defines as being religious.

Definition of Religiousness: A Certain Practice of One's Faith

Another theme that arose when analyzing the students' responses was the connection they made between religiousness and practice. Julie distinguished spirituality from religiousness based on this connection. She upholds, "I see religion more as the practice of it and spirituality as more of the personal side of it." Luke also elucidated this theory of religiousness being tied to practice. He explains,

> I'd say religious as opposed to spiritual would be the things that I actually *do*—more ritualistic things like going to Mass or reading a Bible or going to a worship service or a Bible study; I'd say prayer, but in a specific way. So, I'm distinctively religious in a Western aspect and that affects the way that I pray.

The students specifically associated being religious with specific practices, such as frequency of prayer and attending Mass. When Isabel was asked what makes her religious she replied, "Going to church every Sunday, praying every Sunday, and believing in most, if not all, of the teachings of your faith, especially the Catholic faith." She concluded with, "I think it's more the formal types of things that make you a religious person."

Cheryl's explanation of what makes her religious fits with Parks (2000) description of faith as one's actions versus a set of beliefs. She elaborates,

> I think aside from simply belief in my faith, in Christianity specifically, I think that the way that I live based on that faith, kind of in a Christ-like way by attempting to incorporate the teachings of the Church or kind of the cornerstones or principles into who I am as a person. I think I try to live a life in the image of my religion.

Cheryl's articulation of what makes her religious, though, was not typical among the students in this study. The majority of students, including the very religious, somewhat religious, and not at all religious students associated "being religious" with frequent church attendance and knowledge of and agreement with Catholic doctrine. And, even though Cheryl offered a compelling account of living in the "image of her religion" as an example for what makes her religious, in the end she categorized herself based on one criterion—church attendance. She stated, "I don't go to Mass every week, so therefore I wouldn't classify myself as *very* religious." Connecting church attendance with being religious is consistent with the literature in student development as well as the Catholic Church.

Student Skepticism of Religion

The findings of this study suggest student skepticism of institutionalized religion. Tim's response to what makes him spiritual incorporated this skepticism: "I think for me being a spiritual person involves introspection and self-knowledge. But, I think there are a lot of people who are religious who don't really take time to take stock of what's going on with them." In general, the students in this study resisted what they perceived as rigid and externally imposed doctrine and restrictive worship experiences. When Sarah was asked how she defined being religious, she declared, "I think of someone telling me how to interpret and what to believe." Spirituality, on the other hand, was defined by Libby as an "internal process that doesn't have any organization or rules to confine it." Libby further characterized spirituality as a "freer way for people to express their faith because I don't think they feel restrained to draw upon different faith backgrounds or beliefs that may not be aligned with a certain religious organization." Many of the students in this study expressed this notion of religion as restrictive and spirituality as freeing. For example, Justin proclaimed,

> I want a God on my terms. It's not God in the *Webster's* dictionary of the Catholic Church kind of idea, but you have to think about Him like an idea more than a person and if you do that you can manipulate Him any way you would like Him to be in your own mind.

When postulating reasons for this skepticism among this sample of undergraduate Catholics, one must consider the influence of American culture on this generation's attitudes and beliefs. Despite this sample being what many would consider the best possible scenario—Catholic students attending a Catholic university—many of them still perceived being spiritual as more socially desirable than being religious. The distinction between religious and spiritual might well be larger for students attending a nonreligiously affiliated university.

Religiousness and the Notion of Community

Some of the students in this study positively associated being religious with belonging to a community. Andre specifically connected religiousness with a commitment to community. He stated, "I think religion is important in two ways. One, you're part of a community. And being a religious person entails participating in that community, so going to Mass and living a life according to the teachings of that community." Julie also recognized the centrality of community in one's religious tradition. When asked what makes her religious,

Julie responded, "A strong faith, a relationship with God, and communion with others in your religion." Rachel, who identified herself as spiritual, but not at all religious, also noted the value of community, even organized religion, for having the potential to nurture people's spirituality. She explains,

> I think that having a space to share your thoughts and feelings and ideas is something that helps to nurture your ideas and kind of bring you to a new place in your thinking and belief system, so in that sense, a lot of times I almost wish that I had some sort of organized-type religion that I could find that with.

This recognition of the importance of community was universal among the students. However, Andre and Julie were the only students in the study who made an explicit connection with Catholicism and a commitment to community. While these students recognized the importance of community, the majority of somewhat religious or not at all religious students perceived organized religion as an unnecessary obligation for their faith development. Isabel articulated this notion: "A lot of people say it's the idea of having to do something that turns them off. 'I have a better relationship with God one-on-one, so why do I have to go through an institution?'" The students in this study deeply valued a sense of community, yet most of the students considered themselves as part of a *residential community* versus a faith community. In other words, students did not associate organized religion with fulfilling their need for community. For reasons mentioned earlier, not connecting religiousness with community runs counter to the Catholic Church's position on the essential role community plays in developing and passing on the Catholic faith (*Catechism of the Catholic Church,* 1994). This also runs counter to the literature on student development, as religiousness is measured by participating in religious organizations, attending religious services, and discussing religion with family and friends (Astin et al., 2004; Bryant et al., 2003).

The Influence of Religion on Spirituality

Perhaps the most notable difference between the religious, somewhat religious, and not at all religious students was the acknowledgment of how religion informs spirituality. The students who classified themselves as very religious were more prone to crediting religion for contributing to their spirituality. Molly, who identified herself as very religious and very spiritual, asserted, "I don't think you can be spiritual and not religious. I think they have to go hand in hand. The expression of my spirituality comes out of the values, the set of standards I find in my religious beliefs." Kate, the only student in the study who described herself as very religious and somewhat spiritual,

also credited her religious affiliation for contributing to her spiritual growth. She elaborates,

> I wonder if I would be a spiritual person if it wasn't for my religion. When I heard that question ["How spiritual do you consider yourself?"] I felt like it was absent of a religious connection, so I put *somewhat spiritual*…In my day-to-day life, I find that it's more my religion that's bringing me growth than my spirituality.

Some of the students described religion as providing the "groundwork," "context," or "foundation" for spirituality. Or, as Andre aptly stated, "a certain understanding of the way the world works." He went on to clarify this distinction: "What makes me spiritual, I think, would be a real desire to be in touch with what goes on around me and then I just interpret it within a particular framework." When giving his perspective on the relationship between religiousness and spirituality, he stated, "It's two different faces of the same coin. I think they're intimately related, but they're two different aspects." Andre referred to the ceremony surrounding his cousin's death to illustrate this point even further. "Seeing my cousin's casket was a spiritual experience, but it was within a very religious context with a certain tradition." Luke also identified how his spirituality is formed by his faith tradition. He asserted, "I'm very Catholic, so even if someone were to say I'm very spiritual, I'd be spiritual in a very Catholic way." Luke shared his perspective on the relationship between the two concepts:

> I guess there's that gray zone where spirituality and religion overflow. So, like a Mass is a very religious experience, but it's also very spiritual as well. I'd say there are very few things that I do that are spiritual and not religious.

This realization of the connection between religion and spirituality rarely occurred at the beginning of the interview and still some of the students made no connection or acknowledgment of the contribution of religion to one's spirituality. For most, the interviews followed a progression where students began the interview asserting an indisputable difference between spirituality and religion to recognizing the influence and overlap between the two after a number of probing questions were asked. Danielle, who identified herself as very religious and very spiritual said she connected with God on her own rather than going through "a standard traditional way such as religion because there's a lot of things in Catholicism that I don't agree with." Later in the interview, however, Danielle said she probably "taps into" spirituality through her religion. Cheryl explicitly tied religion to spirituality when she

defined spirituality as "being attentive to the way Ignatian spirituality teaches about discernment." Nonetheless, there was an overall reluctance among the somewhat and nonreligious students to recognize the role religion may have played in contributing to their spirituality.

Psychosocial Development of Young Adults

Students expressed a desire for forming their own identity separate from the expectations of others, which is a predominate developmental task for students during their college years (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Parks, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). For example, Julie's remarks reflect upon her own development:

> I feel myself understanding things more now; things are forming in me that aren't complete yet and I think it's just the transitioning into a different phase— leaving college and seeing myself as an adult now and not as dependent on college and my parents taking care of me, creating my own identity and getting myself up in the morning, taking initiative to go after a job, seeking people out to ask them things, and creating whatever my vocation is gonna be after this— creating it myself.

Consequently, the students' reflections on their religious and spiritual beliefs and practices often conveyed a longing for independence and autonomy (e.g., not going to church because your parents tell you [Molly], disagreeing with your parents so they know you have developed your own beliefs [Justin]). Nick expressed the need to create a sense of self separate from his parents while in high school: "I grew up kind of being force-fed this stuff; I was never really understanding it for myself. I hadn't come into my own yet." In addition, John's comment illustrates this developmental transition: "Spirituality is very personal for me and religion is—sometimes I push away from religion because it's the idea of someone else's thoughts and for me that is a church structure, not a belief system."

Conclusion

In general, the students in this study reflected the viewpoint of their peers at universities across the country by maintaining, "Most people can grow spiritually without being religious" (Astin et al., 2004, p. 4). For the majority of these students, particularly those who identified themselves as somewhat or not at all religious, they understood themselves as spiritual people able to stand apart from the influences of their Catholic heritage. The contribution of

their faith tradition to their spiritual life was, for the most part, not explicitly recognized. As a result, this study supports the perception that young adults are veering away from associating religion with spirituality. Interestingly, this study demonstrates this shift even though these students were all raised in a particular religious tradition: the Catholic tradition.

This study suggests the students in this study are reappropriating their religious and spiritual search by moving away from organized religion or what they perceive organized religion to be. In other words, the findings in this study support Pascarella & Terenzini's (2005) assertion that students are shifting the ways in which they think about religion and are using a different vocabulary for defining their beliefs. Parks (2000) proposes that the language of spirituality is likely to be employed by students who are in a state of transition from unexamined beliefs to making commitments. This use of language enables students to distance themselves from the requirements of institutional religion and preserve their freedom to find their own way.

In analyzing the findings of this study, one may conclude that students at one end of the college-age developmental spectrum have an understanding of religion as practices, rules, and formal requirements. Yet, they sense that this is not an adequate concept of being religious, and, therefore, desire to move away from organized religion. This may be part of the reason why these students say they are not religious. Due to their perception of what it means to be religious rather than associate themselves with organized religion, many of the students in this study are probing their own authenticity, sincerity, and what it means to "live an intentional life" (Sarah). In other words, they are discovering and exploring their own interiority. One could even claim that they are exploring what it means to be religious even though that is not their choice of language. This process does not mean young adults are simply rejecting the Catholic Church as an institution or as a tradition. Rather, they are moving from one understanding of religion and tradition to another. That is, from an understanding of religion/tradition as rules, practices, and doctrines to an understanding of religion/tradition in terms of authenticity, integrity, and living a generous life that responds to the needs of others.

Despite the assimilation of Catholics into American culture, the undergraduate Catholics in this study are not, as Bartlett (2003) labeled this generation, "souls without longing." There was a deep desire among these students, no matter what their self-understanding of being religious and/or spiritual, to search for the transcendent and live lives directed toward the common good. However, this study does support Hamer's (2004) assertion that many young adults today separate belonging (to an organized religious community) from believing. While Catholicism upholds community as central to living a

Christian life, many of the undergraduate Catholics in this study viewed participating in organized religion as an unnecessary obligation for their spiritual development. In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) it proclaims the Sunday Eucharist to be "the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice" (p. 527). And the Catholic Church espouses that participation in this communal celebration gives witness to faith and charity and thus strengthens us in our spiritual journeys. Yet, the students did not view this as necessary to living a faith-filled life and saw community most meaningfully experienced outside of institutionalized religion. While these young Catholics desire to be part of a community and lead lives in pursuit of the common good, they are not generally associating this way of life with what it means to be religious.

This study raises the question of how these students came up with their understanding of what it means to be religious, and often the case, what it means to be Catholic. Are students' understanding of religiousness as believing in and adhering to "a set of standards, definitions, or set of protocols" (Molly) how professionals in Catholic higher education want students to define what it means to be Catholic? Should their conception of what it means to be spiritual—evaluating your greater purpose and what you can do to alleviate the pain and suffering around you (Julie), finding what it is that gives one life (Jim), having a close relationship with God (Sarah), seeing the beauty in this world (Danielle), and recognizing Christ in other people (Julie) —how Church officials want this generation, and the generations to follow, to understand what it means to be religious?

Assuming established religious traditions sustain communities and have a particular ability to facilitate encounters with God implies a necessary response by those committed to the mission of Catholic higher education. In addition to fostering the intellectual development of its students, the mission of Catholic higher education includes cultivating the religious formation of its undergraduates. The apostolic constitution on Catholic higher education, *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, highlights the role of Catholic universities in strengthening the Catholic identity of its students. Therefore, institutions of Catholic higher education are charged with communicating and providing ways in which students can have authentic expressions of spirituality within Catholicism. While these students are not antireligious, the possibility exists of losing them as members of the Catholic Church if we do not help young adults express their spirituality in the context of religion.

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