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# CARA, Going, Going, Gone! The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics

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*GOING, GOING, GONE. THE DYNAMICS OF DISAFFILIATION IN YOUNG CATHOLICS.* SAINT MARY'S PRESS IN COLLABORATION WITH THE CENTER FOR APPLIED RESEARCH IN THE APOSTOLATE (CARA). WINONA: ST. MARY'S PRESS, SEPTEMBER 2017.

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The study studies why millennials (ages 18-25) leave the Catholic Church. A total of 3,450 of them were sampled, and 1,435 completed the screening process. 1,071 adult parents were sampled, with 479 completing the screening process.

The term “disaffiliation” includes the range of “sorta Catholic,” “almost-done,” “done,” and “none” (no religious affiliation), atheist, and “anti-theist.” The median age at disaffiliation is 13 years old. “Of those who have left, 35 per cent no longer belong to any religion, while 46 percent have joined another religion. An additional 14 percent report being atheists or agnostics” (page 6).

Three categories of disaffiliation were studied. First, *the injured*. The trigger could be the death of an uncle at 40, family disruptions, and particularly a judgmental and holier-than-thou attitude that excludes people, for example, the LGBT, and denies them their rights. Or, that despite prayers, people died, parents divorced and the sick did not heal. Some felt forced to participate in the church.

Second, *the drifters*. What difference does the faith make? The church seems to emphasize meaningless rules and rituals encased in confusing structures without any connection to their real world. Some stopped identifying when no longer forced to go to Mass. And in the anchorless period, they lacked companions on the spiritual journey. One notices a growing culture of personal autonomy and “choice.” Faith practice or identification is no longer considered essential to happiness or to provide a sense of meaning and purpose in life.

Then, *the dissenters*. These disagreed with the church, particularly on same-sex marriage, abortion and birth control. In fact, some may oppose abortion, but support an individual's right to choose that option. The problem may stem from teachings about the Bible, salvation, heaven, and life after death. Many felt their questions were not being answered or even countenanced. One read the Bible cover to cover only to find the pastor belittling his questions. The discrepancy between science and religion troubled quite a few.

Pastors and pastoral workers need ask themselves: do we know who these people are—the depth of their life stories—do we know them by name? Do we miss these individuals? (page 8). What does it say that many report feeling happier, freer, and more moral without the baggage and burden of a religious practice they believe has been forced on them? (page 12). Thirteen percent said certain things would make them consider returning to the Catholic faith in the future. Pastors may well reflect on how to provide religious formation that takes personal autonomy seriously while addressing youth's important issues and questions. Increasingly what it means to be “Catholic” surfaces – does belonging entail assent to all teachings, including on socio-political and cultural issues?

*James Chukwuma Okoye, C.S.Sp.*