

THE ESSEX HALL LECTURE 1994

**Believing
without
belonging:
*the
teenage
experience***

Leslie J. Francis

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SUMMARY

This paper reports interim findings from the Young People, Religion and Values Today research project. Drawing on detailed information provided by nearly five thousand thirteen to fifteen year olds, clear profiles are produced of three distinct groups of teenagers. The central group consists of those who believe in God, but neither claim denominational affiliation nor attend church services. These young people are then contrasted with those who stand completely outside the churches, by neither believing in God, claiming denominational affiliation nor attending church services, and with those who both believe in God and who practise their faith by regularly attending church services. The findings from this survey both clearly demonstrate the continued importance of religion in shaping young people's social and personal values and illustrate the different personal and social correlates of explicit religious practice and of implicit religious belief without belonging.

INTRODUCTION

Many research studies have pointed to the significant decline in church attendance¹ and to the dramatic decline in infant baptisms² as evidence for the waning significance of institutionalised religion. Studies specifically concerned with young people have illustrated the rate of teenage lapsation from church attendance³ and the progressive hardening of teenage attitudes away from Christianity and the churches throughout the 1970s and the 1980s.⁴ Other strands of research, however, continue to point to the persistence of believing⁵, the strength of implicit religion⁶ and the vitality of religious experience⁷ within contemporary British society. Social surveys consistently report that a considerably higher proportion of people believe in God than attend church.⁸

Because of the taken for granted assumption that religion now counts for little in contemporary society, religious variables are often largely ignored within social survey research, or inadequately exploited in the analysis of survey data. As a consequence of this, comparatively little is known about the current influence of religion on shaping basic attitudes, values and behaviours. This is particularly the case among young people.

The aim of the Young People, Religion and Values Today project is to address this issue by facilitating a detailed examination of the relationship between different styles of believing and the whole spectrum of social and personal attitudes and values. A comprehensive database is being assembled on over twenty thousand thirteen to fifteen year olds throughout England and Wales. At present an interim analysis is possible on the basis of nearly five thousand detailed questionnaires which have already been entered into the computer. This analysis profiles and compares the responses of three specific groups of young

people: those who believe in God, belong to a church and attend services regularly; those who believe in God, but feel they belong to no specific church and never attend services; those who neither believe in God, belong to a church, nor attend services. The results from this analysis demonstrate the importance both of religious practice and also of belief without belonging in shaping the attitudes and values of young people today.

1. L.J. Francis, *Rural Anglicanism*, London, Collins, 1985

2. L.J. Francis, Fenced fonts and straw polls, *Modern Churchman*, (in press).

3. L.J. Francis, *Teenagers and the Church*, London, Collins, 1984.

4. L.J. Francis, Drift from the churches: secondary school pupils' attitudes towards Christianity, *British Journal of Religious Education*, 11, 76-86, 1989

5. J. Habgood, *Church and Nation in a Secular Age*, London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1983.

6. E. Bailey (ed.), *A Workbook in Popular Religion*, Dorchester, Partners Publications, 1986.

7. D. Hay, *Religious Experience Today: studying the facts*, London, Mowbray, 1990.

8. S. Harding, D. Phillips and M. Fogarty, *Contrasting Values in Western Europe*, London, Macmillan, 1986.

COLLECTING INFORMATION

The *Young People, Religion and Values Today* project employs a self-completion questionnaire containing both multiple choice questions and Likert type statements.⁹ These are short well-focused statements of attitudes, values and beliefs to which the respondents express levels of acceptance on a five point scale, ranging from 'agree strongly', through 'uncertain', to 'disagree strongly'. The questionnaire is a modified form of the Centymca Attitude Inventory, developed originally in a series of studies among adults¹⁰ and previously employed in a study of *Teenagers and the Church*.¹¹

The questionnaire contains three main sections. Part one organises background information about the respondents' home and life-style. Part two organises attitudinal information about sixteen key areas of life and experience. These enable the following attitudinal areas to be profiled: life satisfaction, anxiety, counselling, sexual morality, drugs, law and order, Christian belief, religion in society, supernatural, school, neighbourhood, work, leisure, social concern, politics and personal image. Part three is designed for the young people who identify with a church and examines in details their experience of and attitude towards church membership. The questionnaire also includes a personality inventory.¹²

A representative sample of schools throughout England and Wales is being invited to assist with the *Young People, Religion and Values Today* project by administering the questionnaire throughout their entire third and fourth year classes. Although the project is still less than half way from completion, certain trend analyses can already be undertaken with confidence. The establishment of population norms needs to wait for the completion of the project.

9. R.A. Likert, A technique for the measurement of attitudes, *Archives of Psychology*, 140, 1-55, 1932.

10. L.J. Francis, *Youth in Transit*, Aldershot, Gower, 1982; *Experience of Adulthood*, Aldershot, Gower, 1982; *Young and Unemployed*, Tonbridge, Costello, 1984.

11. L.J. Francis, *Teenagers and the Church*, London, Collins, 1984.

12. L.J. Francis and P.R. Pearson, The development of a short form of the JEPQ (JEPQ-S): its use in measuring personality and religion, *Personality and Individual Differences*, 9, 911-916, 1988.

BELONGING, BELIEVING AND PRACTISING

Recognising the complexity of the religious variable in social research, the *Young People, Religion and Values Today* project incorporated a wide range of markers concerned with different aspects of religious belonging, believing and practising. Three of these markers play a central role in the present analysis.

The first marker posed the question, 'Do you belong to a church or other religious group?' In response to this question, 43% of the respondents checked the category 'none', 54% checked a Christian denomination and 3% checked another major world faith. Of the 54% who checked a Christian denomination, 39% described themselves as Church of England, 7% as Roman Catholic and 3% as Methodist. These statistics confirm the view that it is becoming increasingly acceptable for young people to check the 'none' category within social surveys on religion, although the established church continues to attract a considerably higher proportion of nominal adherents than of practising members. The present analysis distinguishes simply between two groups, those who claim to belong to a Christian denomination and those who stand outside the churches. The sample size needs to be increased before it is sensible to explore differences between the denominational groups or to include a review of other world faiths.

The second marker asked the teenagers to respond to the simple statement, 'I believe in God' on the five point Likert scale. The present analysis distinguishes between three groups on the basis of their responses to this question. Just over two-fifths (44%) defined themselves as believers by checking the 'agree' or 'agree strongly' categories. A third (33%) defined themselves as agnostics by checking the 'not certain' category. Just under a quarter (23%) defined themselves as atheists by checking the 'disagree' or 'disagree strongly' categories. Again the sample size needs to be increased before it is sensible to explore the additional influence of strength of acceptance or rejection of belief.

The third marker asked the teenagers to signify the frequency with which they attended 'church or other place of worship' on a five point scale, ranging from 'weekly' to 'never'. The present analysis distinguishes between three groups on the basis of their responses to this question: 16% defined themselves as regular churchgoers on the basis of attending services at least once a month; 38% defined themselves as occasional churchgoers on the basis of attending services less frequently than once

a month; 46% defined themselves as unchurched on the basis of never attending services.

Combined these three markers permit a clear distinction to be made between eight groups of young people who can be conveniently described as follows: unaffiliated atheists, who neither claim denominational identity, nor believe in God; affiliated atheists, who claim denominational identity, but disclaim belief in God; unaffiliated agnostics, who claim no denominational identity and neither accept nor reject belief in God; affiliated agnostics, who claim denominational identity, but neither accept nor reject belief in God; unaffiliated believers non-attending, who neither claim denominational identity, nor attend church, but believe in God; affiliated believers non-attending, who believe in God and claim denominational identity, but do not attend church; believers attending occasionally, who believe in God, attend church from time to time, and may or may not claim denominational identity; believers attending regularly, who believe in God, attend church most weeks, and may or may not claim denominational identity.

While there is considerable value in profiling and comparing the personal and social attitudes of all eight of these groups, the present analysis proposes to concentrate on just three of them as indicating highly distinctive belief positions. These three groups are the unaffiliated atheists, the unaffiliated believers non-attending and the believers attending regularly. For the sake of brevity in the following discussion, these three groups will be re-styled 'unbelievers', 'believers-without-belonging' and 'practising believers'.

In the analysis which follows, the trends which emerge from the data in relationship to different attitudinal issues covered by the questionnaire will be illustrated by reference to only a sample of the items included within each area, since space does not permit discussion of them all. For the same reason, two of the areas covered by the survey, namely personal image and attitudes towards the local neighbourhood will not be covered.

RELIGIOUS BEHAVIOUR

As well as assessing frequency of church attendance, the first section of the questionnaire also included questions on the practice of personal prayer, bible reading and saying grace before meals. The responses to these questions demonstrate the extent to which young people who believe in God but never attend church also generally fail to engage in other forms of religious behaviour. They also confirm that it can be taken for granted neither that regular churchgoers pray and read the bible at home, nor that atheists totally eschew prayer and bible reading.

More than two-fifths (44%) of the believers-without-belonging report that they never pray. More than two-thirds (69%) report that they never read the bible. More than nine-tenths (92%) report that they never say grace before meals. Believing-without-belonging seems, therefore, to imply the acceptance of the existence of God, without developing a personal response to that God.

Although the majority of practising believers engage in personal prayer, at least from time to time, 5% of them claim never to pray. Although the majority of practising believers read the bible at least from time to time, as many as 17% of them claim never to read the bible. More than half (52%) of practising believers never say grace before meals.

Although the majority of unbelievers never pray, nearly one in ten of them (9%) turns to prayer from time to time. Although the majority of unbelievers never read the bible, nearly one in ten of them (8%) claims to do so from time to time. These figures demonstrate that even people who reject belief in God, never attend church and feel no ties to a denominational group may sometimes feel moved to engage in religious behaviour.

CHRISTIAN BELIEF

The items in the questionnaire concerned with Christian belief included statements about the person of Jesus, the resurrection, life after death, and creation. These items reveal the ways in which the belief patterns of teenagers who believe in God but do not attend church differ from those of churchgoing teenagers. Believers who do not belong sit more lightly towards traditional Christian beliefs. These items also reveal the areas of uncertainty shared by the regular churchgoers.

A considerable proportion of the young people who believe in God but do not attend church are not consciously associating their belief with the Christian tradition. While seven in every ten (70%) of the believers-without-belonging accept that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, three in every ten (30%) do not share this belief. While half (51%) of the believers-without-belonging believe that Jesus really rose from the dead, the other half (49%) do not share this belief. While half (52%) believe in life after death, the other half (48%) do not believe in life after death. Clearly the faith being expressed by this group of young people is something rather different from the faith proclaimed by the Christian churches.

While the majority of practising believers appear comfortable with the traditional central tenet of Christian belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, 6% do not feel able to ascribe to this formula. A larger proportion of practising believers feel unable to ascribe to the resurrection, with 15% of them being unable to agree with the view that Jesus really rose from the dead. An even larger proportion of practising believers feel uncertain about the after-life, with 39% of them dissenting from belief in life after death. Clearly the faith being expressed by this group of young people is also something rather different from the traditional image of Christian believing.

Practising believers and believers-without-belonging also differ considerably in their views on the Genesis narrative of creation. Practising believers are much more likely to adopt a literalistic or fundamentalist position. Thus, two-fifths (42%) of the practising believers accept the view that God made the world in six days and rested on the seventh, compared with one-fifth (22%) of the believers-without-belonging.

RELIGION IN SOCIETY

The set of issues concerned with religion in society explored the young person's attitude towards areas like the place of religious education and worship in school, the role of the church in rites of passage and the work of the clergy. These items reveal important differences in the perceptions of regular churchgoers and believers who do not attend church. They also reveal the extent to which unbelievers still value certain roles performed by the church in society, although there are clearly other areas in which they would prefer the churches to wield less influence.

Although believers-without-belonging hold a more positive attitude towards religious education being taught in schools than unbelievers, they still hold a much less positive attitude than practising believers. This point is illustrated by the statistics which show that 38% of believers-without-belonging feel that religious education should be taught in schools, compared with 13% of unbelievers and 71% of practising believers. Similarly, 6% of believers-without-belonging agree that schools should hold a religious assembly everyday, compared with 2% of unbelievers and 27% of practising believers.

Although believers-without-belonging hold a more positive attitude to the role performed by clergy than unbelievers, they still hold a much less positive attitude than practising believers. This point is illustrated by the statistics which show that 45% of believers-without-belonging agree that Christian ministers do a good job, compared with 16% of unbelievers and 77% of practising believers.

While unbelievers hold these very negative views on the place of religion in schools and the function of the clergy, they still value the social role of the churches in major rites of passage. More than half (55%) of unbelievers still want to get married in church. More than a quarter (27%) of unbelievers still want to have their children baptised in church. Since among this group of young people these requests can be motivated neither by personal belief in God, nor by residual attachment to denominational roots, they appear to reflect a clear example of the recognition of the secular role of religion within society.

The majority of practising believers clearly feel that they want to celebrate the major rites of passage within their churches. Thus, 93% of them are clear that they will want to get married in church and 89% of

them are clear that they will want to have their children baptised in church.

The young people who believe in God but do not belong to a church are somewhat less certain about the role which they will want the church to play in the major rites of passage. Nevertheless, as many as 85% of believers-without-belonging are clear that they will want to get married in church and 60% of them are clear that they will want to have their children baptised in church.

These statistics clearly highlight the major opportunities which the churches still possess through the rites of passage to make contact, not only with those who share implicit religious beliefs, but even with those who consciously reject belief and who wish to appear to stand wholly outside the churches.

SUPERNATURAL BELIEF

Belief in aspects of the supernatural was assessed in the survey through items concerned with such issues as horoscopes, ghosts, contact with the dead, fortune-telling and black magic. These items reveal that young people who do not believe in God are just as likely to hold beliefs in other aspects of the supernatural as regular churchgoers, and sometimes they are more likely to hold beliefs in the supernatural than regular churchgoers. These items also reveal that it is the young people who believe in God but who do not have contact with a church who are most likely to hold a wide range of supernatural beliefs.

Among practising believers, 29% believe in ghosts, 22% believe in their horoscope, 20% believe that it is possible to contact the spirits of the dead, 11% believe that fortune tellers can tell the future, 10% believe in black magic. A significant proportion of teenage churchgoers are apparently able to combine their Christian beliefs with a range of other beliefs.

Among unbelievers, there is a slightly higher tendency than among practising believers to believe in ghosts (31% compared with 29%), to believe in horoscopes (26% compared with 22%) or to believe that fortune-tellers can tell the future (13% compared with 11%). Of greater contrast, 25% of unbelievers believe that it is possible to contact the spirits of the dead, compared with 20% of practising believers; 17% of unbelievers believe in black magic, compared with 10% of practising believers. A significant proportion of teenagers who reject God and the Christian churches are apparently open to inhabiting a world which cannot be fully explained in terms of natural phenomena.

The tendency to hold supernatural beliefs expands considerably among young people who believe in God but do not belong to a church. This tendency is illustrated by the statistics that 43% of believers-without-belonging believe in their horoscope, 40% believe in ghosts, 36% believe it is possible to contact the spirits of the dead, 24% believe that fortune-tellers can tell the future, and 19% believe in black magic. A significant proportion of teenagers who believe in God but do not benefit from contact with the churches are apparently open to the acceptance of a wide variety of potentially unhelpful as well as potentially helpful beliefs.

SEXUAL MORALITY

The items concerned with sexual morality in the survey explored the young person's attitudes towards issues like extramarital sex, homosexuality, abortion, contraception and divorce. These items reveal some very clear differences between believers and unbelievers. They also indicate that, while religion has a strong influence over some areas of sexual morality, it has little influence over others.

Churchgoing young people hold a considerably more conservative attitude towards heterosexual relationships than believers who do not attend church. In turn believers who do not attend church hold a more conservative attitude than unbelievers. Thus, 30% of practising believers claim that it is wrong to have sexual intercourse outside marriage, compared with 15% of believers-without-belonging and 10% of unbelievers. Similarly, 46% of practising believers claim that it is wrong to have sexual intercourse under the legal age, compared with 30% of believers-without-belonging and 15% of unbelievers.

A similar trend is also found in attitude towards divorce, with 30% of practising believers claiming that divorce is wrong, compared with 23% of believers-without-belonging and 20% of unbelievers.

On the other hand, religion appears to make no significant difference in attitude towards homosexuality. On this issue, believers are neither more nor less conservative than unbelievers. Homosexuality is judged to be wrong by 44% of unbelievers, 44% of believers-without-belonging and 42% of practising believers.

Very few young people, between 6 and 7% now believe contraception to be wrong, and religion, as defined in the present study, appears to make no significant difference to their views on this issue.

Views on abortion, however, are significantly influenced by religion. Both churchgoers and believers outside the churches are more likely to judge abortion to be wrong than unbelievers. Indeed, churchgoers appear to hold a slightly more liberal view than believers who do not attend church. Thus, abortion is judged to be wrong by 45% of believers-without-belonging, compared with 41% of practising believers and 27% of unbelievers.

DRUGS

The questions on attitude towards drug use set out to assess and to compare the young person's views on alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, heroin, glue and butane gas. These items reveal the importance both of religious belief and of church membership in promoting a negative attitude towards drug use.

Overall, the data demonstrate that young people hold a much more liberal attitude towards alcohol than towards other forms of drugs. Moreover, believers-without-belonging are not more likely to be critical of alcohol abuse than unbelievers. It is churchgoers who are more inclined to adopt a stricter view on this issue. Thus, 34% of practising believers judge it wrong to become drunk, compared with 23% of believers-without-belonging and 22% of unbelievers.

Overall, nearly twice as many young people reject the use of tobacco as reject drunkenness. Once again it is church membership which makes the real difference, although this time believers who do not belong to a church hold a slightly stricter attitude than unbelievers. Thus, 56% of practising believers judge it wrong to smoke cigarettes, compared with 45% of believers-without-belonging and 41% of unbelievers.

Attitudes towards the use of marijuana and heroin are very much influenced by religious belief. Here belief appears to be more important than church membership. The use of marijuana is judged to be wrong by 69% of practising believers and 64% of believers-without-belonging, compared with 52% of unbelievers. The use of heroin is judged to be wrong by 88% of practising believers and 82% of believers-without-belonging, compared with 74% of unbelievers.

Overall, there is less variation in teenagers' attitudes towards sniffing glue or butane gas. Once again, however, both belief and church membership contribute to promoting a negative attitude towards these substances. Sniffing butane gas is judged to be wrong by 83% of practising believers and 79% of believers-without-belonging, compared with 76% of unbelievers. Sniffing glue is judged to be wrong by 86% of practising believers and 83% of believers-without-belonging, compared with 78% of unbelievers.

LAW AND ORDER

The questions on law and order explored attitudes towards a range of offences which young people are known to commit, including travelling without a ticket, buying alcohol or cigarettes under the legal age, playing truant and writing graffiti. These items reveal that both religious belief and church membership exert a strong influence on promoting respect for law and order.

Churchgoers are much less likely to condone the purchase of alcohol or tobacco under the legal age than believers who do not attend church. In turn believers who do not attend church are much less likely to condone such behaviour than unbelievers. Thus, 23% of practising believers hold that there is nothing wrong in buying alcoholic drinks under the legal age, compared with 37% of believers-without-belonging and 46% of unbelievers. Similarly, 14% of practising believers hold that there is nothing wrong in buying cigarettes under the legal age, compared with 23% of believers-without-belonging and 33% of unbelievers.

Similar patterns are found in relationship to other items in this section. It is argued that there is nothing wrong in playing truant from school by 8% of practising believers, 18% of believers-without-belonging and 26% of unbelievers. It is argued that there is nothing wrong in writing graffiti by 9% of practising believers, 17% of believers-without-belonging and 26% of unbelievers. It is argued that there is nothing wrong in travelling without a ticket by 8% of practising believers, 16% of believers-without-belonging and 25% of unbelievers.

Religion is also associated with a more positive attitude towards the police. Four-fifths (80%) of practising believers feel that the police do a good job, compared with two-thirds (68%) of believers-without-belonging. The proportion falls to three-fifths (58%) among unbelievers.

SCHOOL

Aspects of school covered by the survey included an assessment of the young person's happiness in school, perceptions of the value of school and attitude towards teachers. These items reveal that both religious belief and religious belonging are associated with more positive school-related attitudes.

The young people who believe but do not belong to a church hold a significantly more positive attitude towards school than the young people who neither believe nor belong. Thus, 35% of believers-without-belonging complain that school is boring, compared with 43% of unbelievers; 68% of believers-without-belonging are happy in their school, compared with 59% of unbelievers; 71% of believers-without-belonging feel that their school is helping to prepare them for life, compared with 60% of unbelievers; 43% of believers-without-belonging agree that teachers do a good job, compared with 38% of unbelievers.

At the same time, the young people who not only believe but also attend church regularly hold a significantly more positive attitude towards school than the young people who believe but do not belong to a church. Thus, only 16% of practising believers complain that school is boring, compared with 35% of believers-without-belonging; 83% of practising believers are happy in their school, compared with 68% of believers-without-belonging; 75% of practising believers feel that their school is helping to prepare them for life, compared with 71% of believers-without-belonging; 63% of practising believers agree that teachers do a good job, compared with 43% of believers-without-belonging.

These findings clearly indicate both that religion is associated with a more positive attitude towards school and that explicit religiosity is associated with a more positive attitude than implicit religiosity.

WORK

The questions concerned with work in the survey explored the young person's attitude towards life after leaving school, including issues like ambition, the work ethic, and the prospect of unemployment. These items reveal that religion is not only associated with a more positive attitude towards school, but also with a more positive view of working life after leaving school.

Overall, the majority of young people hold a positive attitude towards their future working lives. Overall, 93% think it is important to work hard when they get a job, 84% want to get to the top in their work when they get a job, and 75% feel that a job gives you a sense of purpose. In spite of this generally high level of consensus, the religious factor still makes a significant difference.

While 89% of unbelievers think it is important to work hard when they get a job, the proportions rise to 94% among believers-without-belonging and 97% among practising believers. While 79% of unbelievers want to get to the top in their work when they get a job, the proportions rise to 84% among believers-without-belonging and 86% among practising believers. While 69% of unbelievers feel that a job gives you a sense of purpose, the proportions rise to 75% among believers-without-belonging and 79% among practising believers.

These trends are also reflected in the young person's attitudes towards unemployment. While 81% of the unbelievers argue that they would not like to be unemployed, the proportions rise to 85% among believers-without-belonging and 90% among practising believers.

These findings clearly indicate both that religion is associated with a more positive attitude towards work and that explicit religiosity is associated with a more positive attitude than implicit religiosity.

LEISURE

In addition to a set of detailed questions designed to construct a profile of the ways in which young people spend their leisure time, the survey explored their attitudes towards their leisure time in more general terms. These items reveal that churchgoing young people are generally more satisfied with the way in which they occupy their leisure time than young people who neither believe in God nor attend church. At the same time these items reveal that it is those young people who profess belief in God outside the churches who express least satisfaction with their leisure time.

This point is illustrated clearly by the proportion of young people who wish that they had more things to do with their leisure time. Although nearly half (47%) of the practising believers give voice to this complaint, the proportions rise to 56% among the unbelievers and 61% among the believers-without-belonging.

The point is also made by the proportions of young people who report that they often hang about with their friends doing nothing in particular. Although half (50%) of the practising believers feel that this is true for them, the proportions rise to 64% among the unbelievers and 71% among the believers-without-belonging.

These figures confirm that there are many young churchgoers who could still benefit from opportunities to develop their leisure time in church-related activities. The figures also suggest that, with appropriate facilities and resources, the churches should be able to reach out to the wider community of young teenagers who are still seeking ways of occupying their leisure.

SOCIAL CONCERN

A number of issues of social concern were raised in the questionnaire. These are illustrated by topics like war, pollution, poverty, pornography and race relations. The items reveal that the young people who stand outside the churches adopt a much more toughminded approach to social issues than those who profess implicit or explicit religious belief. The items also reveal that practising believers adopt a more tenderminded approach to social issues than believers-without-belonging.

This point is most clearly illustrated by the proportions of young people who profess concern about the poverty of the Third World. This concern is shared by 44% of unbelievers, 54% of believers-without-belonging and 82% of practising believers. While 45% of unbelievers profess concern about the risk of pollution to the environment, the proportion rises to 53% among believers-without-belonging and 65% among practising believers. While 54% of unbelievers profess concern about the risk of nuclear war, the proportion rises to 64% among believers-without-belonging and 65% of practising believers.

Religious teenagers are more critical of society's attitude towards pornography. Thus, 42% of regular churchgoers and 34% of believers-without-belonging believe that pornography is too readily available, compared with 25% of unbelievers.

Religious teenagers are more accepting of multiculturalism. While 37% of unbelievers adopt the view that there are too many black people living in this country, the proportions fall to 28% among believers-without-belonging and 14% among practising believers. While 46% of unbelievers argue that immigration into Britain should be restricted, the proportions fall to 37% among believers-without-belonging and 31% among practising believers.

Finally, practising believers are much less cynical about their personal influence and individual responsibility for world issues. While 39% of unbelievers and 36% of believers-without-belonging adopt the view that there is nothing they can do to help solve the world's problems, the proportion falls to 16% among practising believers.

POLITICS

Two kinds of political perspectives were explored through the survey. The first perspective assessed the confidence expressed by young people in the party political system. The second perspective assessed their views on specific issues which have traditionally helped to distinguish between conservative and socialist policies, like health care, education and trade unions. These items reveal that unbelievers are more likely to be cynical about politics and more likely to adopt left wing views.

Just as unbelievers are more cynical about their personal responsibility for world problems, so they are more cynical about politics in general. While 14% of practising believers and 18% of believers-without-belonging conclude that it makes no difference which political party is in power, the proportion rises to 23% among unbelievers.

As far as support given to actual political parties is concerned, the real difference comes between churchgoers and non-churchgoers. There is a considerably higher level of support for the Conservative party among churchgoers. Confidence is expressed in the Conservative party by 28% of practising believers, compared with 19% of believers-without-belonging and 17% of unbelievers. This trend is mirrored by the fact that confidence is expressed in the Labour party by 10% of churchgoers, compared with 18% of believers-without-belonging and 16% of unbelievers.

Attitudes towards specific political issues confirm this picture. The view that private medicine should be abolished is supported by 11% of practising believers, 17% of believers-without-belonging and 20% of unbelievers. The view that private schools should be abolished is supported by 12% of practising believers, 26% of believers-without-belonging and 32% of unbelievers.

These findings clearly support the view that religion remains a significant predictor of political attitudes among teenagers in today's society.

LIFE SATISFACTION

The items concerned with life satisfaction in the survey set out to assess the young person's overall feelings of wellbeing and satisfaction with life. They ranged from very positive items like 'I find life really worth living', to very negative items like 'I have sometimes considered taking my own life'. These items reveal a very clear increase in life satisfaction accompanying religious belief.

Four-fifths (80%) of practising believers report that they find life really worth living, compared with three-quarters (74%) of believers-without-belonging and two-thirds (67%) of unbelievers. Of even greater contrast, three-quarters (74%) of practising believers agree that their life has a sense of purpose, compared with three-fifths (59%) of believers-without-belonging and two-fifths (41%) of unbelievers. These figures indicate that, while belief itself tends to promote a greater sense of purpose in living and satisfaction from life, when this belief is translated into active church membership both purpose and satisfaction are augmented further.

At the other end of the spectrum, however, there is no difference in the proportions of unbelievers and believers-without-belonging who claim that they have sometimes considered taking their own life. Thus, 30% of unbelievers and 31% of believers-without-belonging say that there have been times when this thought has occurred to them. By way of comparison, 18% of practising believers report that they have sometimes considered taking their own life. While an extensive international literature has well documented the inverse relationship between religiosity and suicide, attempted suicide and suicidal thoughts, the present figures indicate that it is the institutional practice of belief rather than the belief outside belonging which acts as an inhibitor to suicidal thoughts. It is explicit religiosity rather than implicit religiosity which seems to make the crucial difference in this area.

ANXIETY

The items in the questionnaire concerned with anxiety covered a range of issues which are known to generate varying degrees of worry among young people, including relationships, school and sex. These items reveal that, although religion is clearly associated with greater life satisfaction, it is also associated with higher levels of anxiety.

Three-quarters (77%) of practising believers and three-quarters (75%) of believers-without-belonging claim to be worried about their exams at school, compared with three-fifths (61%) of unbelievers. A quarter of practising believers (25%) and a quarter of believers-without-belonging (25%) claim to be worried about being bullied at school, compared with a fifth (20%) of unbelievers. Clearly believers show more anxiety about life at school, irrespective of whether they practice their faith or not.

Half (52%) of practising believers report that they are worried about how they get on with other people, compared with 45% of believers-without-belonging and 39% of unbelievers. Similarly, 36% of practising believers report that they are worried about their attractiveness to the opposite sex, compared with 30% of believers-without-belonging and 27% of unbelievers. Clearly churchgoers are more anxious about personal relationships than those who believe but do not attend church.

On the other hand, it is practising believers who demonstrate less anxiety about AIDS. Thus, 52% of practising believers say that they are worried about getting AIDS, compared with 65% of believers-without-belonging and 62% of unbelievers. These figures suggest that churchgoing young people are less likely to perceive themselves within 'at risk' categories.

COUNSELLING

The items within the questionnaire concerned with counselling explored three main issues, namely the level of need experienced by young people for advice, the support they perceive themselves receiving from friends and family, and their perceptions of the helpfulness of professionals to whom they could turn for advice. These items reveal that churchgoing teenagers appear both to need and to receive greater levels of support than teenagers who stand firmly outside the churches.

Just as religion is associated with generally higher levels of anxiety among this age group, so it is also associated with a greater recognition of need for advice and support. Thus, 38% of practising believers and 38% of believers-without-belonging report that they often long for someone to turn to for advice, compared with 31% of unbelievers. At the same time, 67% of practising believers and 66% of believers-without-belonging report that they find it helpful to talk about their problems with close friends, compared with 55% of unbelievers. These figures suggest that greater need is also met by greater support among believers.

Churchgoing young people appear to have a closer relationship with their parents than young people who believe but do not practice their faith. In turn, young people who believe but do not practice their faith appear to have a closer relationship with their parents than young people who stand completely outside the faith. Thus, 63% of practising believers find it helpful to talk about their problems with their mother, compared with 56% of believers-without-belonging and 43% of unbelievers. Similarly, 41% of practising believers find it helpful to talk about their problems with their father, compared with 33% of believers-without-belonging and 31% of unbelievers.

Within the sample as a whole, young people are more likely to turn to a Christian minister for help than to teachers, social workers or youth club leaders. Overall, a smaller proportion of the sample say they would be reluctant to discuss their problems with a Christian minister (40%), compared with a social worker (44%), teacher (48%) or youth club leader (51%). By way of comparison, 34% would be reluctant to discuss their problems with a doctor.

Religion does not appear to significantly influence the proportion of young people who are likely to turn to doctors, teachers, social workers or youth club leaders. Religion does, however, significantly influence the proportion of young people who are willing to turn to Christian

ministers. Thus, half (51%) of unbelievers would be reluctant to discuss their problems with a Christian minister, compared with a third (33%) of practising believers. The young people most likely to trust the clergy, however, are those who believe but do not belong to a church. The proportion falls to 28% among believers-without-belonging who would be reluctant to discuss their problems with a Christian minister.

POSTSCRIPT

The results from the foregoing analyses demonstrate the importance both of religious practice and also of religious belief without belonging in shaping the attitudes and values of young people today. When the other fifteen thousand or so cases have been prepared for computer analysis and added to the database, it will become possible to undertake more detailed and more sophisticated analyses, and to speak with greater confidence about the place of religion in teenage lives today. Such further analyses will be able to take into account such factors as age, sex and social class differences. They will include an account of the influences of different denominational allegiance and membership of different types of churches on young peoples' attitudes and values, and a close look at the experiences of those young people who regularly attend church.

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Great scope still exists to extend this project further. For this reason I continue to welcome offers of help from schools which have not as yet participated in the survey.



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