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Self-identifying as Anglican within the two political jurisdictions on the island of Ireland: A study among sixth-form students in the Greer tradition

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Abstract

This study explores what self-assigned religious identity as Church of Ireland means to sixth-form students living on the island of Ireland. Drawing on data contributed to the 2011 Greer survey on sixth-form religion by 327 self-identified Anglican students in Northern Ireland and by 288 in the Republic of Ireland, the salience of religious practices, religious beliefs, and moral values is compared between the two groups. The main conclusion drawn is that religious practice and religious belief is significantly more important to Anglican students in Northern Ireland than in the Republic of Ireland, suggesting that in the Republic of Ireland self-identification with the Church of Ireland may be of greater cultural significance (rather than religious significance) compared with Northern Ireland.

Key words: Anglican identity, Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, self-assigned religious affiliation

1. Introduction

Self-assigned religious affiliation is both a controversial and potentially misleading indicator of religiosity, as well illustrated through the debate stimulated by the introduction of the religious question into the census for England and Wales for the first time in 2001 (see Fane, 1999; Francis, 2003; Voas & Bruce, 2004; Weller, 2004).

The problem is that encased within self-assigned religious affiliation may be components of national, cultural, and ethnic identities, that contaminate the salience of the religious roots for such identification. The social scientific study of religious identity has properly grown accustomed to nuancing data regarding self-assigned religious affiliation by data concerning other areas (see Francis, 2016), including religious practice (the personal practice of prayer and the public practice of worship attendance), religious belief (focusing on areas like belief in God and belief in life after death), and on moral values as influenced by biblical teaching or church tradition (focusing on areas like abortion and use of alcohol).

1.1. Anglicanism within the British Isles

The case of Anglicanism within the British Isles (including England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales) presents an interesting narrative, concerning how self-assigned identity with the same religious group carries different connotations within geographically adjacent but politically diverse territories. The worldwide Anglican Communion, officially and formally organised and recognised by the 1867 Lambeth Conference, has its roots in the English Reformation and the identity of the Church of England as the Established Church in England and Wales (see Milton, 2017) and in the way in which the Church of England was transmitted through Empire (see Gregory, 2017) and through global expansion (see Strong, 2017). Closer to home, identifying as Anglican has carried different connotations within the diverse jurisdictions comprising the British Isles. Within Scotland, the Anglican Church has never been central to political life or identity. Scotland emerged from the Reformation with the Established Church of Scotland rooted in the Presbyterian tradition (Burleigh, 1960; Kellar, 2003). In Scotland, the Scottish Episcopal Church (formerly the Episcopal Church in Scotland) has been a minority religion (Goldie, 1951). Within Wales, the Church of England tended to be associated with the English language and with the landowning classes. Non-Conformist chapels flourished in Wales with pressures growing for disestablishment, until on 31 March 1920 the Church of England was disestablished in Wales by implementation of the 1914 Welsh Church Act. Here, the Anglican tradition was continued by the Church in Wales (Morgan, 1999).

The most interesting part of the British Isles for the narrative of Anglicanism concerns the island of Ireland (Milne, 1966). At the Reformation, the Irish Parliament accepted Henry VIII of England as head of the Church. Following legal union of Ireland and the Kingdom of Great Britain by the 1800 Act of Union, the Church of Ireland was also united with the Church of England to form the United Church of England and Ireland. This remained the Established Church in Ireland until the Gladstone 1869 Irish Church Act disestablished it with effect from 1 January 1871 (Akenson, 1971). Throughout the period of establishment, much of the island remained loyal to the Catholic Church, while in Ulster the United Church of England and Ireland was outnumbered by Presbyterians. At partition of Ireland, enacted 3 May 1921, Ireland was divided into two self-governing polities, leading to the establishment of the Republic of Ireland and to Northern Ireland remaining part of the United Kingdom. At this point, the Church of Ireland remained as

one Church operating across the two political jurisdictions (McDowell, 1975), but with the proportion of the population in the south falling by 34% between the censuses of 1911 and 1926 (Keane, 1970). Within the Republic of Ireland, the majority of people identified as Catholic, with the Church of Ireland representing a small minority of the population. Within Northern Ireland, around two-fifths of the population identified as Catholic, with the Church of Ireland coming second after the Presbyterian Church of Ireland among the Protestant denominations.

Table 1

Percentage of population self-identifying as Church of Ireland in the national censuses since 1961

	RoI %	NI %
1961	3.3	24.2
1971	3.3	22.0
1981	2.8	19.0
1991	2.3	17.7
2001/2	3.0	15.3
2011	2.9	13.7

Note: The figures for the Republic of Ireland are reported as ‘includes Protestants’

Drawing on the decadal census data reported by the two relevant agencies (The Statistics and Research Agency for Northern Ireland and the Central Statistics Office for the Republic of Ireland), table 1 presents the changing profile of Anglican self-affiliation within the two jurisdictions between 1961 and 2011, the results from the 2021/2022 census not yet being available from either jurisdiction. In the Republic of Ireland, the Anglican presence has remained stable at around 3% of the population. In Northern Ireland, over this fifty-year period the Anglican presence has dropped from 24% to 14% of the population. An assessment of changes and developments within the Church of Ireland during the period 1969 to 2019 has been provided by Milne and Harron (2019).

1.2. Research question

Against this background, the present study was designed to examine what it means for young people (sixth-form students) self-identifying as Anglicans within the two jurisdictions of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland in terms of religious identity, a question prompted by Macourt’s discussion concerning what constitutes ‘belonging’ to the Church of Ireland within the Republic of Ireland (see Macourt, 2005; 2008; 2014). The conceptual framework for addressing this question has been provided by the pioneering work of John Greer, who first undertook a well-designed survey of sixth-form religion in Northern Ireland in 1968 (Greer, 1972a, 1972b). Greer’s initial survey was inspired by Edwin Cox’s (1967) study of sixth-form religion conducted throughout 96 schools in England. The questions included in Greer’s survey were informed by Cox’s earlier work. Greer’s map of sixth-form religion included questions about religious

practice (the personal practices of prayer and Bible reading and the public practice of worship attendance), about religious belief (specifically about belief in God, belief in Jesus, belief in divine inspiration of the Bible, and belief in life after death), and about moral values as relevant to biblical teaching or church tradition (including gambling, drunkenness, smoking, lying, stealing, pre-marital sexual intercourse, capital punishment, suicide, colour prejudice, war, and use of nuclear weapons).

Cox's original study conducted in England in 1963 was replicated by Wright and Cox (1971a, 1971b) in 1970. Comparison between the two studies conducted in 1963 and 1970 found a significant downward trend in both religious belief and religious practice over the seven-year period. Again, inspired by this precedent, Greer (1980) replicated his original 1968 study a decade later in 1978. Comparison between the two studies (concluded in 1968 and 1978) found a significant decline in church attendance over the ten-year period: the proportion of male students attending church at least once a month declined from 65% to 57%; and the proportion of female students attending church at least once a month declined from 77% to 68%.

The two studies conducted by Greer in 1968 and 1978 provided a platform for further replications, conducted in 1988 (Greer, 1989), in 1998 (Francis, Robbins, Barnes, & Lewis, 2006), and in 2011 (Lewis, Francis, & McKenna, 2019). This sequence of studies demonstrated a continuing decline in church attendance over a period of more than forty years. Among male students at least monthly church attendance was reported at 65% in 1968, 57% in 1978, 52% in 1988, 48% in 1998, and 38% in 2011. Among female students at least monthly church attendance was reported at 77% in 1968, 68% in 1978, 65% in 1988, 60% in 1998, and 48% in 2011. Alongside these trends in church attendance, the Greer survey allowed trends to be mapped for the other variables operationalised in the survey concerning religious practices, religious beliefs, and moral values.

Having become well established in Northern Ireland, the Greer framework for conceptualising and assessing sixth-form religion within a predominantly Christian society, the 2011 replication of the Greer survey was extended for the first time to the Republic of Ireland. This extension allowed comparisons to be made between the religious lives of young people growing up on opposite sides of the political borders. For example, Francis, McGrady, Williams, and McKenna (2019) examined the views of young people growing up Catholic in Ireland, exploring the intersectionality of gender and nationality. In respect of church attendance, they reported a higher level of participation by Catholics in Northern Ireland than in the Republic of Ireland: while 56% of female Catholic students in Northern Ireland reported at least monthly church attendance, the proportion fell to 32% in the Republic of Ireland; and while 48% of male Catholic students in Northern Ireland reported at least monthly church attendance, the proportion fell to 34% in the Republic of Ireland.

Greer's initial study in Northern Ireland in 1968 was based entirely on students attending Protestant schools. Later as the political and religious rivalry in Northern Ireland began to soften, working with colleagues from the Catholic sector Greer began to extend his survey to Catholic schools. In his own work, however, Greer never attempted

to disaggregate the various denominational streams that generated a rich tapestry within the Protestant sector in Northern Ireland. Although himself an Anglican priest, Greer never attempted to privilege the Anglican community by focusing his research lens closely on the students who self-identified as Church of Ireland (see Francis, 1996).

The replication of Greer's study in 2011, however, offers a unique opportunity to explore the distinctive religious profile of sixth-form students who self-identify as Anglicans, living within the two distinctive political jurisdictions and the two distinctive religious cultures extant on the island of Ireland.

2. Method

2.1. Sample

A sample of 31 schools in the Republic of Ireland and 35 schools in Northern Ireland were invited to administer the research instrument to their lower and upper sixth-form students. The questionnaires were administered by teachers within the schools, according to standardised procedures, emphasising confidentiality and anonymity and with the assurance that the responses would not be inspected by school staff. Students were given the choice whether or not to participate in the research project. In the Republic of Ireland, 288 students self-identified as Anglican, compared with 3,015 who self-identified as Catholic. Of these 288 Anglican students, 275 attended a Catholic school, 5 attended a Protestant school, and 8 attended an interdenominational school. In Northern Ireland, 327 students self-identified as Anglican, compared with 1,624 who self-identified as Catholic. Of these 327 Anglican students, 267 attended what is generally known as a Protestant school, 24 attended a Catholic school, 34 attended an integrated school, and 5 attended a Quaker school. In Northern Ireland, of the 327 Anglican students, 117 were male and 210 were female. In the Republic of Ireland, of the 288 Anglican students 139 were male and 149 were female.

2.2. Instrument

The eight-page questionnaire was based on Greer's original instrument, extended to embrace a few additional issues. The majority of the questions were designed to be answered either by checking a well-defined range of responses (for example: yes, don't know, no) or by using a well-defined rating scale (for example: agree strongly, agree, not certain, disagree, disagree strongly). The questions covered the following main areas, which will be discussed in turn in the section on results: religious practice, including public church attendance, personal prayer, and personal Bible reading; religious beliefs, including beliefs about God, Jesus, the Bible, and life after death; moral values, including gambling, drunkenness, smoking, lying, stealing, sexual intercourse before marriage, capital punishment, suicide, war, use of nuclear weapons, colour prejudice, and religious discrimination; and the social role of the Church, including influence over politics, morality, and social problems.

2.3. Data analysis

The data analyses were conducted using the SPSS statistical package. Since the purpose of the analyses is to compare the two communities of self-identified Anglican students attending schools in the Republic of Ireland and attending schools in Northern Ireland, statistical significance testing will be employed throughout to compare male Anglican students attending schools in the Republic of Ireland with male Anglican students attending schools in Northern Ireland and to compare female Anglican students attending schools in the Republic of Ireland with female Anglican students attending schools in Northern Ireland. In the following analyses, the chi square test has been employed to compare two categories of response against two locations (Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland). For example, while frequency of church attendance has been recorded on a four-point scale (never, occasionally, monthly, weekly), the chi square test has been computed on the category 'weekly' compared with the combined total of the other three responses. This is made clear in the tables by the location of the notation indicating the probability level as well as within the narrative.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Religious practice

The survey included questions about three key areas of religious practice: public church attendance, personal prayer, and personal Bible reading.

Table 2
Frequency of church attendance by sex and nation

	Female		Male	
	RoI %	NI %	RoI %	NI %
Never	11	6	17	8
Occasionally	69	41	63	54
Monthly	11	16	9	14
Weekly	9	37***	10	25**

Note: ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Church attendance was assessed by the question: Do you attend a place of worship? Responses were invited on a four-point scale: weekly, monthly, occasionally (in addition to christenings, weddings, funerals), and never. The data presented in table 2 indicate that there is a significantly higher proportion of Anglican students in Northern Ireland who attend church weekly than is the case in the Republic of Ireland. While in the Republic of Ireland 9% of female Anglican students attend church weekly, the proportion rises to 37% in Northern Ireland. While in the Republic of Ireland 10% of male Anglican students attend church weekly, the proportion rises to 25% in Northern Ireland.

Table 3
Frequency of personal prayer by sex and nation

	Female		Male	
	RoI %	NI %	RoI %	NI %
Never	34	23*	43	37 ns
Sometimes	57	54	45	44
Daily	9	23	12	19

Note: * $p < .05$

Personal prayer was assessed by the question: Do you pray on your own? Responses were invited on a three-point scale: daily, sometimes, and never. The data presented in table 3 demonstrate that female Anglican students in the Republic of Ireland are significantly less likely to engage in the practice of personal prayer than female Anglican students in Northern Ireland. While 34% of female Anglican students in the Republic of Ireland never pray, the proportion drops to 23% in Northern Ireland. There is, however, no significant difference in the proportions of male Anglican students in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland who never pray.

Table 4
Frequency of personal Bible reading by sex and nation

	Female		Male	
	RoI %	NI %	RoI %	NI %
Never	84	55***	83	61***
Sometimes	16	38	12	35
Daily	0	7	6	4

Note: *** $p < .001$

Personal Bible reading was assessed by the question: Do you read the Bible on your own? Responses were invited on a three-point scale: daily, sometimes, and never. The data presented in table 4 demonstrate that Anglican students in the Republic of Ireland are significantly less likely to engage in the practice of personal Bible reading than Anglican students in Northern Ireland. While 83% of male Anglican students in the Republic of Ireland never read the Bible, the proportion drops to 61% in Northern Ireland. While 84% of female Anglican students in the Republic of Ireland never read the Bible, the proportion drops to 55% in Northern Ireland.

By way of summary, these data concerning religious practice found lower levels of church attendance, lower levels of personal prayer and lower levels of personal Bible reading among Anglican students in the Republic of Ireland compared with Anglican students in Northern Ireland. These differences suggest that public church attendance and personal religious practice may play a more visible part in forming the identity of young Anglicans in Northern Ireland than is the case for young Anglicans in the Republic of Ireland.

3.2. Religious beliefs

The survey included questions about four key areas of religious belief: beliefs about God, Jesus, the Bible, and life after death.

Table 5
Belief in God by sex and nation

	Female		Male	
	RoI %	NI %	RoI %	NI %
Complete disbelief	6	4	4	4
Partial disbelief	14	3	6	12
Agnosticism	31	28	45	24
Partial belief	31	31	28	26
Complete belief	18	33**	17	34***

Note: ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Belief in God was assessed by a five-point scale: I am completely confident that God exists (complete belief); I am fairly sure that God exists (partial belief); I am uncertain whether God exists or not (agnosticism); I am fairly sure that God does not exist (partial disbelief); and I am completely confident that God does not exist (complete disbelief). The data presented in table 5 indicate that there is a significantly lower proportion of Anglican students in the Republic of Ireland who have complete belief in the existence of God, compared with Anglican students in Northern Ireland. While 33% of female Anglican students in Northern Ireland are completely confident that God exists, the proportion falls to 18% in the Republic of Ireland. While 34% of male Catholic students in Northern Ireland are completely confident that God exists, the proportion falls to 17% in the Republic of Ireland.

Table 6
Belief in Jesus by sex and nation

	Female		Male	
	RoI %	NI %	RoI %	NI %
Complete disbelief	7	4	11	6
Partial disbelief	10	4	7	4
Agnosticism	30	20	30	25
Partial belief	30	29	33	22
Complete belief	24	44***	20	42***

Note: *** $p < .001$

Belief in Jesus was assessed by a five-point scale: I am completely confident that Jesus was the Son of God who became man (complete belief); I am fairly sure that Jesus was the Son of God who became man (partial belief); I am uncertain whether Jesus was the Son of God who became man (agnosticism); I am fairly sure that Jesus was not the Son of God who became man (partial disbelief); I am completely confident that Jesus

was not the Son of God who became man (complete disbelief). The data presented in table 6 indicate that there is a significantly lower proportion of Anglican students in the Republic of Ireland who have complete belief in the doctrine of the incarnation, compared with Anglican students in Northern Ireland. While 44% of female Anglican students in Northern Ireland are completely confident that Jesus was the Son of God who became man, the proportion fell to 24% in the Republic of Ireland. While 42% of male Anglican students in Northern Ireland are completely confident that Jesus was the Son of God who became man, the proportion fell to 20% in the Republic of Ireland.

Table 7
Old Testament inspired by God by sex and nation

	Female		Male	
	RoI %	NI %	RoI %	NI %
No	5	4	17	7
Don't know	64	34	48	34
Yes	29	62 ^{***}	35	59 ^{***}

Note: ^{***} $p < .001$

Table 8
New Testament inspired by God by sex and nation

	Female		Male	
	RoI %	NI %	RoI %	NI %
No	13	10	24	19
Don't know	63	29	49	37
Yes	24	61 ^{***}	27	44 ^{**}

Note: ^{**} $p < .01$, ^{***} $p < .001$

Belief in the Bible was assessed by two questions, distinguishing between the two testaments: Is the Old Testament inspired by God?; and is the New Testament inspired by God? Each question was rated on a three-point scale: yes, don't know, and no. The data presented in tables 7 and 8 demonstrate that Anglican students in the Republic of Ireland are significantly less likely to believe that scripture is inspired by God in comparison with Catholic students in Northern Ireland. While 62% of female Anglican students in Northern Ireland believe the Old Testament is inspired by God, the proportion falls to 29% in the Republic of Ireland. While 59% of male Anglican students in Northern Ireland believe the Old Testament is inspired by God, the proportion falls to 35% in the Republic of Ireland. While 61% of female Anglican students in Northern Ireland believe that the New Testament is inspired by God, the proportion falls to 24% in the Republic of Ireland. While 44% of male Anglican students in Northern Ireland believe that the New Testament is inspired by God, the proportion falls to 27% in the Republic of Ireland.

Table 9
Study of the Bible has been helpful in life by sex and nation

	Female		Male	
	RoI %	NI %	RoI %	NI %

No	54	20	50	37
Don't know	18	20	27	19
Yes	28	61 ^{***}	23	44 ^{***}

Note: ^{***} $p < .001$

Benefits of Bible study were assessed by the following question: Has the study of the Bible been helpful to you in your life? Responses were invited on a three-point scale: yes, don't know, and no. The data presented in table 9 demonstrate that Anglican students in the Republic of Ireland are significantly less likely to feel that the study of the Bible has been helpful in their life. A significantly lower proportion of Anglican males in the Republic of Ireland considered that the study of the Bible had been helpful to their lives (23%), compared with Anglican males in Northern Ireland (44%). A significantly lower proportion of Anglican females in the Republic of Ireland (28%) considered that the study of the Bible had been helpful to their lives, compared with Anglican females in Northern Ireland (61%).

Table 10
Views on life after death by sex and nation

	Female		Male	
	RoI %	NI %	RoI %	NI %
The question of life after death is an important issue for me	68	75 ns	70	57*
There is definitely no life after death	19	7 ^{***}	16	13 ns
The soul survives death and is reincarnated in another existence	36	19 ^{***}	38	16 ^{***}
After death those who have faith in God through Jesus will enjoy eternal life in heaven and those who have no faith will go to hell	17	45 ^{***}	21	39 ^{***}
Heaven is being with God and hell is separation from God	21	47 ^{***}	22	33 ns
After death people are rewarded for the quality of their living in this life	22	25 ns	17	23 ns

Note: ^{***} $p < .001$

Interest in life after death was assessed by the following question: Is the question of life after death an important issue for you? Responses were invited on a two-point scale: yes and no. The data presented in table 10 demonstrate that there is no significant difference between the responses of female Anglican students in the Republic of Ireland (68%) and in Northern Ireland (75%). On the other hand, there is a significantly higher level of interest in the question of life after death among male Anglican students in the Republic of Ireland (70%), compared with male Anglican students in Northern Ireland (57%).

Beliefs about life after death were assessed by a set of five belief statements: There is definitely no life after death; The soul survives death and is reincarnated in another existence; After death those who have faith in God through Jesus will enjoy eternal life in heaven and those who have no faith will go to hell; Heaven is being with God and hell is separation from God; After death people are rewarded for the quality of their living in this life. The data presented in table 10 demonstrate that there are significant

differences between the views of Anglican students in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland on the controversial theological issue of life after death. Four main features of the data are worth discussing.

First, Anglican students in the Republic of Ireland are less inclined than Anglican students in Northern Ireland to believe in a God who punishes people after death. Thus, while 17% of Anglican female students in the Republic of Ireland believe that after death those who have faith in God through Jesus will enjoy eternal life in heaven and those who have no faith will go to hell, the proportion rises to 45% in Northern Ireland. While 21% of Anglican male students take this view in the Republic of Ireland the proportion rises to 39% in Northern Ireland. However, there is no significant difference in the proportions of Anglican students who endorse the view that after death people are rewarded for the quality of this living in their life. This view is taken by 22% of Anglican female students in the Republic of Ireland and 25% in Northern Ireland; this view is taken by 17% of male Anglican students in the Republic of Ireland and 23% in Northern Ireland.

Second, female Anglican students in the Republic of Ireland are less inclined than female Anglican students in Northern Ireland to endorse the figurative view of heaven and hell in relational terms. Thus, while 21% of Anglican females in the Republic of Ireland agree that heaven is being with God and hell is separation from God, the proportion rises to 47% in Northern Ireland. On the other hand, this trend is not reflected among Anglican males: 22% of male Anglican students in the Republic of Ireland agree with this view, and so do 33% in Northern Ireland.

Third, Anglican students in the Republic of Ireland are more inclined than Anglican students in Northern Ireland to believe in reincarnation. Thus, while 36% of female Anglican students in the Republic of Ireland believe that the soul survives death and is reincarnated in another form, the proportion drops to 19% in Northern Ireland. While 38% of male Anglican students in the Republic of Ireland believe that the soul survives death and is reincarnated in another form, the proportion drops to 16% in Northern Ireland.

Fourth, there is no significant difference between the proportion of male Anglican students in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland, who are adamant that there is definitely no life after death. This view is taken by 16% of male Anglican students in the Republic of Ireland and by 13% in Northern Ireland. On the other hand, a higher proportion of female Anglican students in the Republic of Ireland (19%) are adamant that there is definitely no life after death, compared with 7% in Northern Ireland.

Table 11
Moral issues judged always wrong by sex and nation

	Female		Male	
	RoI %	NI %	RoI %	NI %
Gambling	22	22 ns	12	8 ns
Drunkenness	13	12 ns	6	9 ns
Smoking	45	40 ns	35	40 ns

Lying	42	31*	25	22 ns
Stealing	76	80 ns	69	69 ns
Sexual intercourse before marriage	6	10 ns	3	10*
Capital punishment	50	41 ns	39	33 ns
Suicide	70	40***	62	51*
War	85	50***	51	23***
Use of nuclear weapons	84	84 ns	75	68 ns
Colour prejudice	81	94***	69	86***
Religious discrimination	73	90***	67	84**

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

3.3. Moral values

Moral values were defined by Greer's earlier studies in terms of a list of 12 issues on which moral judgements could be made: gambling, drunkenness, smoking, lying, stealing, sexual intercourse before marriage, capital punishment, suicide, war, use of nuclear weapons, colour prejudice, and religious discrimination. Responses to these issues were invited on a five-point scale: always wrong, usually wrong but excusable in certain circumstances, usually excusable but sometimes wrong, never wrong, and have not made up my mind. The data presented in table 11 concentrates on the moral absolutes by presenting the proportions of young people who consider each of these activities to be always wrong.

In view of the number of significance tests being considered in table 11, differences will only be interpreted at or beyond the one percent probability level. On this criterion, three main trends emerge from this table. First, on eight of the 12 moral issues there is no significant difference in the views taken by Anglican students in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland. This is the case for gambling, drunkenness, smoking, lying, stealing, sexual intercourse before marriage, capital punishment, and use of nuclear weapons.

Second, there are two moral issues on which Anglican students take a tougher stand in Northern Ireland. While 81% of female Anglican students in the Republic of Ireland regard colour prejudice as always wrong, the proportion raises to 94% in Northern Ireland. While 69% of male Anglican students in the Republic of Ireland regard colour prejudice as always wrong, the proportion rises to 86% in Northern Ireland. While 73% of female Anglican students regard religious discrimination as always wrong, the proportion rises to 90% in Northern Ireland. While 67% of male Anglican students regard religious discrimination as always wrong in the Republic of Ireland, the proportion rises to 84% in Northern Ireland.

Third, there are two moral issues on which Anglican students take a tougher stand in the Republic of Ireland. While 50% of female Anglican students in Northern Ireland regard war as always wrong, the proportion rises to 85% in the Republic of Ireland.

While 23% of male Anglican students in Northern Ireland regard war as always wrong, the proportion rises to 51% in the Republic of Ireland. While 40% of female Anglican students in Northern Ireland regard suicide as always wrong, the proportion rises to 70% in the Republic of Ireland. While 51% of male Anglican students in Northern Ireland regard suicide as always wrong, the proportion rises to 62% in Northern Ireland ($p < .05$).

4. Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to employ the established Greer framework for conceptualising and assessing sixth-form religion within a predominantly Christian society, to compare and to contrast the religious significance for sixth-form students self-identifying as Anglican, but living within the two distinctive political jurisdictions and the two distinctive religious cultures extant on the island of Ireland. According to the census data reported earlier in this paper, Anglican students residing in the Republic of Ireland are identifying with a minority group, representing in 2011 3% of the population within a predominantly Catholic nation. The size of the minority group has, however, remained stable over the past fifty years. Anglican students residing in Northern Ireland are identifying with a more substantial group, representing in 2011 14% of the population. The size of this group has been significantly declining over the past fifty years.

Drawing on the Greer framework for conceptualising and assessing sixth-form religion, 288 students who self-identified as Anglican living within the Republic of Ireland and 377 students who self-identified as Anglican living within Northern Ireland provided data on their religious practices, religious beliefs, and moral values. The first main conclusion to be drawn from these data is that Anglican identity within Northern Ireland is more clearly rooted in Christian practices and beliefs than is the case in the Republic of Ireland. Less concerned with Christian practices and beliefs, Anglican identity in the Republic of Ireland may be more closely aligned within matters of cultural and ethnic roots that differentiate these students from the majority Irish and Catholic population among whom they live.

The data demonstrate that self-assigned Anglicans living in the Republic of Ireland were less likely than self-assigned Anglicans living in Northern Ireland to attend church services weekly, less likely to pray daily, less likely to read the Bible. Anglicans living in the Republic of Ireland were less likely to hold complete belief in God, less likely to hold complete belief in Jesus as the Son of God, and less likely to believe that either the Old Testament or the New Testament was inspired by God. Anglicans living in the Republic of Ireland were less likely to hold conventional Christian belief on life after death and more likely to believe in reincarnation.

The second main conclusion to be drawn from these data is that the small differences in moral values reported by Anglicans living in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland needs to be read against the difference reported by Francis, McGrady, Williams, and McKenna (2019) in their comparison between the responses of Catholic students

in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland. The present study among Anglican students found that there were two moral issues on which Anglican students took a tougher stand in Northern Ireland (colour prejudice and religious discrimination) and two moral issues on which Anglican students took a tougher stand in the Republic of Ireland (war and suicide). This pattern among Anglican students closely reflects the pattern among Catholic students. The core influence on shaping moral values appears to be the cultural context, rather than the distinctive denominational affiliation.

The conclusions from the present study are consistent with the conclusions formulated by Glenfield (2015) in ‘an empirical approach to nominalism among Anglicans in the Republic of Ireland’. Drawing on a quantitative survey, completed by 316 residents in the Republic of Ireland who self-assigned as Church of Ireland and who attended church less than six times a year, Glenfield (2015) concluded that ‘what is clear is that a substantial number of people consider themselves Church of Ireland but play little or no role in the life of the church’ (p. 269). Whether these participants believed or not, attended church or not, Glenfield found that ‘they were deeply aware of their membership of the Church of Ireland’ (p. 302), and he concluded that:

The belonging expressed by respondents in this study is both a religious and cultural marker. It is about the identity of a religious minority, a boundary of belonging, of who they are and who they are not. (Glenfield, 2015, p. 302)

A limitation with the present study concerns the way in which it was based on data collected in 2011. It is able to provide a snapshot of how things looked at that point in time. The findings are nonetheless intriguing. As the Church of Ireland continues to negotiate its identity as one church embracing two political jurisdictions, there may be value in the Greer study being replicated again in the near future, making the sixth in this growing series of studies initiated in 1968 by Greer, himself an Anglican priest.

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