



**Number 9**

***Catholicism on Campus:  
Stability and change in Catholic  
student faith by college type***



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—The Second Vatican Council Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*)

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**Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA)  
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*Catholicism on Campus:  
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Are Catholic colleges and universities failing in their mission of educating their Catholic students in the faith? Many believe these institutions are in one key way. A 2003 study commissioned by the Cardinal Newman Society concluded that, “A survey of students at 38 Catholic colleges...reveals that graduating seniors are predominantly pro-abortion, approve of homosexual ‘marriage,’ and only occasionally pray or attend religious services” (Reilly, 2003, p. 38).

As disturbing as this profile may be to many Catholic Church leaders it is a profile of attitudes and behavior that is not all that different from adult self-identified Catholics in the United States in general (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2007, 2009, Gray and Bendyna 2008).<sup>1</sup>

To truly understand if Catholic higher education is failing one must isolate changes that are occurring to students’ attitudes and behaviors *on campus*. Here we agree with the author summarizing the Cardinal Newman Society study who notes, “Regardless of where students begin their college journey, Catholic colleges should be helping students *move closer* [emphasis added] to Christ, and certainly doing a better job of moving students toward the Catholic faith than secular colleges do” (Reilly, 2003, p. 43). This represents a measurable outcome.

We, like the Cardinal Newman Society, rely on data from the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). The Cardinal Newman Society study was based on a survey of college freshman in 1997 and a follow-up survey with students in their senior year in 2001. We rely on a more recent HERI longitudinal survey, which included a new addendum, the College Student Beliefs and Values (CSBV) survey. Available data from this survey includes 14,527 students at 148 U.S. colleges and universities. This survey was administered to freshman respondents in 2004 and again to these students as juniors in spring 2007.

Our analyses of these data are inspired by the quote above from the Cardinal Newman Study author regarding the ability of Catholic colleges and universities to help Catholic students “move closer” to the Church and their faith. We measure whether students, regardless of their incoming attitudes and behavior, move closer, stay the same, or move or further away from the Church while in college.

## **Background and Literature**

The topic of Catholicism on U.S. college campuses has importance in its sheer size. In terms of the population, Catholics make up the single largest faith group in the United States, with approximately 23 percent of adults self-identifying as such; more U.S. colleges and universities are affiliated with the Catholic Church than any other faith (245 institutions of higher learning).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thus, one could conclude that Catholic higher education is just one of many Catholic educational institutions, including Catholic parishes and schools, that reach a broader Catholic population in the United States and are potentially having difficulties instilling the Catholic faith.

<sup>2</sup> This issue also moved to the national news forefront with the debate regarding President Obama’s visit and speech at Notre Dame in May 2009.

*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, the Apostolic constitution written by Pope John Paul II in 1990, requires colleges and universities that seek to identify themselves as a Catholic institution to seek the affirmation of Church authorities. This document suggests that “Every Catholic University is to maintain communion with the universal Church and the Holy See; it is to be in close communion with the local Church and in particular with the diocesan bishops of the region or the nation in which it is located” (John Paul II, 1990).

Further, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* identifies essential aspects for Catholic identity:

1. Christian inspiration in individuals and the university community
2. Reflection and research on human knowledge in the light of the Catholic faith
3. Fidelity to the Christian message in conformity with the magisterium of the Church
4. Institutional commitment to the service of others

The results of the Cardinal Newman Society’s study question the ability of many Catholic colleges to fulfill this mission—especially in fulfilling the obligation of fidelity to the Christian message.

Other recent publications suggest that colleges and universities generally, and Catholic colleges and universities specifically, are “secularizing” their students. Some point to the lack of priests, religious brothers and sisters present on campus leading to a diminishing of “Catholic identity” (Burtchaell, 1998). Others argue that it is the Catholic higher education system’s attempt at appealing to a wider audience that has caused their decline in Catholicity (Morey and Piderit, 2006; Hendershott, 2009).

Because of the diversity of Catholic higher education institutions, common measures of identity are nearly impossible to apply to all institutions even though they are recognized by the Catholic Church as being Catholic institutions. In fact, Arthur (2008, p. 199) cites a lack of a “baseline of value priorities in Catholic institutions” as being a barrier to consistency in Catholic higher education. The result is “multiple and complex identities [that] result in varying degrees of intensity of religious affiliation” (p. 199).

Generally, research supports the notion that college students may change the way they express faith and spirituality over the course of their academic careers, but are not likely to abandon it altogether. Comparing two samples of freshmen at two different universities with their corresponding responses on a follow up survey in their senior year (3 years later), Hunsberger (1978) found that as seniors, students reported attending church services less frequently than as freshmen, but otherwise found little support for the theory that students “liberalize,” or become less religious, over their time in college. Clydesdale (2007) argues that a decline in religious participation must not be confused with decline in commitment; in this argument, college students put their religious identities in an “identity lockbox” to be developed after graduation because religious identity is not “relevant to [students’] college education and campus experience” (p. 2).

This ‘difference’ in religious expression is probably more pervasive than the literature suggests. Dalton, et al, (2006) argue that it may be that studies are only asking conventional questions, and are not looking at signs of independent religious thinking. While students may be participating less in the organized structures of religion, “student interest and involvement in spirituality remain high” (p. 3). In fact, when other measures of spirituality and faith are used, it is those without a college education that are more ‘secularized.’ Using data from multiple rounds of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) Uecker, et al, (2007) found that while religious decline “does indeed vary by education level,” it is a (perhaps) counter-intuitive decline. Researchers found that “it is the respondents who *did not go to college* who exhibit the highest rates of diminished religiosity” (p. 1677). Indeed, those with the highest level of education “are the least likely to curtail their church attendance.” The authors suggest that the decline in attendance, which is evident in all young adults regardless of education, but lowest for those with the highest levels of education, may have more to do with the increase in “responsibilities” and “opportunities” that take precedence over religious engagement and less to do with secularization caused by attendance at university.

But what of Catholic colleges and universities specifically? Bryant and Astin (2008) used the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) and CSBV survey data to look at a number of correlates to “spiritual struggling” of college students. Of note, the authors found that those students attending a Christian church-affiliated institution (including Catholic colleges) were more likely to struggle spiritually than their peers at public institutions. The authors posit that this may be due to students being “encouraged to deal with difficult spiritual issues and claims” (p. 13 – 14) at religiously affiliated colleges. A second potential source of this struggle may be that the students do not agree with the doctrinal convictions of the institution.

Similarly, Leo Fay (1968) argues that regardless of the “traditional” means of transmitting Catholicity, students believe that “there is still enough traditionalism—or what is interpreted by the student as traditionalism—in the way Christianity is presented to minimize the fostering of religion among Catholic college students,” (p. 143) suggesting that the lack of religious impact of Catholic colleges and universities may be more a result of students’ perceptions of religion on campus than of the actual “Catholic identity” of the college.

Around the same time, Wagner and Brown (1965) found that Catholic students at non-Catholic colleges not involved in Newman Clubs are more influenced in choosing a non-Catholic college by “academic considerations,” but still more “by the desire to come personally closer to young people who essentially belong to the Protestant middle-class majority” (p. 87). Some were pushed to non-Catholic schools by the “‘narrowness’ of the Catholic educational system” (p. 87). On the other hand, Catholic students at non-Catholic colleges who are involved in Newman Clubs were more likely to point to “financial limitations” as their primary reason for choosing a non-Catholic college. Self-selection is contributing to the kind of students found on Catholic campuses, which is also leading to the perceptions of the Catholic identities of these campuses.

## Methods, Data, and Hypotheses

Our research focuses on a breadth of potential outcomes that are classified into two groups including:

1. Beliefs and attitudes about social and political issues (e.g., abortion, death penalty, same-sex marriage, reducing pain and suffering in the world)
2. Religious behavior (e.g., frequency of attendance at religious services, prayer, reading of religious texts and publications)

With this analysis we seek to find how Catholic students' religious practice and beliefs and attitudes regarding social and political issues that are important to their faith change over the course of their college education. We expect that the college experience in and of itself, often with dislocation from family and childhood peers and exposure to many new ideas, will lead to changes in all Catholic students (as well as non-Catholic students) regardless of the sponsorship of the college or university they attend. However, we are primarily interested in any differences in the *magnitude* of change that may occur among Catholic students enrolled at a Catholic college or university and a campus that is not affiliated with the Catholic Church (controlling for factors of self-selection of college type).

We look at a broad set of indicators on which the Church has clear teachings or where Church leaders have made clear statements. Variables from the CSBV were selected on the basis of their ability to comparatively measure attitudes and behavior with the teachings and statements of the Pope and the U.S. Bishops regarding key Catholic teachings and behavioral expectations. For reference to religious practice we utilize the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994). For reference to social and political issue stances we use *Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States* (USCCB, 2007), a document produced by Bishops in the United States prior to each presidential election. The scope of the research is limited to teachings that have some sort of measurement capacity in the CSBV.

Our analysis is based simply on the measured differences between the freshman and junior year surveys on the relevant CSBV questions:

1. Those responding in the same manner in the junior and freshman years have been "unchanged" by their college experience for any given issue or behavior.
2. Any other response is one where they have moved either closer to or further away from the Church on any given issue or behavior.

These methods allow us to isolate the *changes* occurring during college. However, they are less useful in understanding the students' attitudes and behaviors in

absolute terms.<sup>3</sup> Yet in understanding the impact of Catholic colleges and universities we are less concerned with how many Catholics at Catholic colleges are in agreement or disagreement with the Church on any particular issue upon leaving. They could have already had these attitudes upon entering college. In order to isolate the effects of the Catholic college environment and experience we are only concerned about how students' attitudes, beliefs, and behavior became more or less consistent (or unchanged) with Church teachings and norms while they are in college.

This again speaks to one of the key conclusions of the Cardinal Newman Society's study: "Catholic colleges should be helping students move *closer* to Christ, and certainly doing a better job of moving students toward the Catholic faith than secular colleges do" (Reilly, 2003, p. 43).

Although our research is by no means a natural experiment we are comparing samples of Catholic students who are or are not exposed to Catholic higher education and asking how they are changed by this at two points in time. Of course no one is randomly assigned their college and self-selection prevents us from being able to generalize in the manner a natural experiment would.

However, we do note that the typical Catholic student at a Catholic college or university is in many ways similar to a Catholic student attending the most popular college of choice—a public or state college or university.<sup>4</sup> As for the few differences, Catholics who choose a Catholic college over a public college are:

- Slightly more likely to be female (61 percent compared to 55 percent)
- More likely to have attended a private religious high school (43 percent compared to 29 percent)
- To be age 18 or younger (71 percent compared to 60 percent)
- To have had "A" average grades in high school (32 percent compared to 22 percent)
- Have annual parental income of \$100,000 or more (44 percent compared to 30 percent)
- To be using loans to finance their college education (71 percent compared to 55 percent)

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<sup>3</sup> Thus someone moving from "agree strongly" as a freshman with the statement "abortion should be legal" to "agree somewhat" as a junior has moved closer to the Church but is indeed still in disagreement with the Church on this issue.

<sup>4</sup> This analysis includes only students who identified as Catholic upon entering college as a freshman and who identify as the same faith in their junior year. As described in the results section, a small number of respondents self-identify as Catholic in the first survey but not the second. These respondents are unlikely to be involved in their faith and are also unlikely to note in the second survey that they "converted to another religion" since entering college.

Yet there are no significant differences in attendance at one's first choice college, race and ethnicity, frequency of attendance at religious services, frequency of religious discussions with parents or peers, political views, or overall religiousness.<sup>5</sup>

Ninety-nine percent of the Catholic students surveyed are of what is commonly referred to as the Millennial Generation (born 1982 or later). The differences in the faith lives exhibited by these students (Catholic and non-Catholic) and the students of the generation that immediately preceded them (Generation-X; born 1961 to 1981) have been characterized to be more nostalgic and yearning for tradition (Carroll 2004).

Yet, as Inglehart (1990, 1997, 2005) has shown, the culture—beliefs and practices—of individuals is strongly affected by the level of security (economic, physical, social, etc.) that exists in their environment at the time they come of age (i.e., in high school and college). In comparison to the generations of their parents and grandparents or even their elder siblings, the Millennials are expected to be profoundly post-material and thus more tolerant of beliefs and practices that depart from tradition. Members of this generation came of age during an era of remarkable security and prosperity and therefore may be more interested in cultural issues and social movements that are not tied to economic concerns and to generally be very pluralistic in their outlook on life.<sup>6</sup>

In this regard, we have a general expectation that members of the Millennial Catholics, *regardless of their choice of college*, will generally hold attitudes that are in opposition to Catholic Church teachings on several important issues (e.g., regarding abortion, same-sex unions, etc.) and will exhibit religious practice that is lower in frequency (primarily Mass attendance) than what is expected by the Catholic Church. We expect that college life and much of what goes with it—distance from parents and childhood peers and exposure to many new ideas in their college education—will generally also lead to a widening of these gaps.

Consistent with the Cardinal Newman Society findings, we hypothesize that the college experience will lead to beliefs and practices diverging further from Catholic Church teachings and norms from the baseline freshman survey to the junior-year survey. In comparison to Catholics attending lower-cost public colleges and universities, we also expect Catholic students at Catholic colleges and universities may be moved slightly *further* away from the Church than toward it.

As private institutions without public subsidies, the average tuitions of Catholic colleges or universities are comparatively expensive, compared to the in-state cost of attending a public college or university. Thus, it is not surprising that some of the key

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<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that the freshman survey occurs after the college decision has been made. Students may not be entirely accurate or honest in describing their reasons for making their choice after the fact. Some rationalizing behavior is expected.

<sup>6</sup> As of 2004, or the spring of 2007, when the surveys were conducted, the U.S. economy had yet to experience the severe recession that would begin in December 2007 according to the National Bureau of Economic Research (this recession arguably would not be fully recognized by the public until mid- to late-2008). It may be that this generation will be less post-material in coming years as a result of having experienced this economic decline. However, this was not a factor at the time of the surveys.

differences between Catholics who choose a Catholic college over those who choose a public college or university (i.e., self-selection) are related to income and finances. Catholic students who are able to afford the costs of attending a Catholic college or university are likely to be, on average, better-off socio-economically than Catholic students attending a public college or university. The more financially capable a student may be, again on average, the more post-materialist that student's orientations should be in comparison to a student who cannot afford a Catholic college or university.

Thus, the Catholic student attending a Catholic college or university may be even *more* inclined to diverge from Church teachings and norms than a Catholic student of lower socioeconomic status attending a public institution who may be more inclined to embrace traditional beliefs and practice.<sup>7</sup>

The dependent variables of our study are related to the issues and behaviors listed below. For each of these, we provide examples of related Church teachings and expectations:

### ***Anti-Abortion***

“There are some things that we must never do, as individuals or as a society, because they are always incompatible with love of God and neighbor. Such actions are so deeply flawed that they are always opposed to the authentic good of persons. These are called ‘intrinsically evil’ actions. They must always be rejected and opposed and must never be supported or condoned. A prime example is the intentional taking of an innocent human life, as in abortion and euthanasia” (USCCB, 2007, p. 8).

“Abortion, the deliberate killing of a human being before birth, is never morally acceptable and must always be opposed” (p.19).

### ***Anti-War; Pro-Arms Reduction***

“We are called to be peacemakers in a nation at war” (p. 1).

“Catholics must also work to avoid war and to promote peace. ... The Church has raised fundamental moral concerns about preventive use of military force. ... Even when military force can be justified as a last resort, it should not be indiscriminate or disproportionate. ... The United States has a responsibility ... to reduce its own reliance on weapons of mass destruction by pursuing progressive nuclear disarmament. It also must end its use of anti-personnel landmines and reduce its predominant role in the global arms trade” (p. 20-21).

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<sup>7</sup> The changes in belief and practice among Catholic college students in general will also likely mirror those of non-Catholic students—whether they attend Catholic or non-Catholic colleges themselves. Too often the Catholic Church has focused on changes in belief and practice among its members in isolation from wider social forces. For example, many today still debate whether the decline in Mass attendance (as measured in Gallup surveys since the 1950s) is due to the changes of the Second Vatican Council, Church teachings on birth control, or clergy sex abuse scandals. Many of these commentators fail to observe or note that religious service attendance has declined among non-Catholics during this same period.

***Anti-Death Penalty***

“Society has a duty to defend life against violence and to reach out to victims of crime. Yet our nation’s continued reliance on the death penalty cannot be justified. ... The USCCB supports efforts to end the use of the death penalty” (p. 21).

***Anti-Discrimination; Pro-Affirmative Action***

“We are too often divided across lines of race, ethnicity, and economic inequality” (p. 1).

“It is important for our society to continue to combat discrimination based on race, religion, sex, ethnicity, disabling condition, or age, as these are grave injustices and affronts to human dignity. Where the effects of past discrimination persist, society has an obligation to take positive steps to overcome the legacy of injustice, including vigorous action to remove barriers to education and equal employment for women and minorities” (p. 25).

“Continue to oppose policies that reflect prejudice, hostility toward immigrants, religious bigotry, and other forms of discrimination” (p. 30).

***Pro-Gun Control***

“Supporting reasonable restrictions on access to assault weapons and handguns ... are particularly important in light of a growing ‘culture of violence’” (p. 25)

***Anti-Same-Sex Marriage***

“We are a society built on the strength of families, called to defend marriage” (p. 1).

“Marriage must be defined, recognized, and protected as a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman” (p. 21).

***Pro-Social Welfare; Pro-Progressive Taxation***

“While the common good embraces all, those who are weak, vulnerable, and most in need deserve preferential concern. ... In a society marred by deepening disparities between rich and poor, Scripture gives us the story of the Last Judgment (see Mt 25:31-46) and reminds us that we will be judged by our response to the ‘least among us’” (p. 14-15).

“Policies on taxes, work, divorce, immigration, and welfare should help families stay together and should reward responsibility and sacrifice for children” (p. 21).

“Economic decisions and institutions should be assessed according to whether they protect or undermine the dignity of the human person. ... Workers, owners, employers, and unions should work together to create decent jobs, build a more just economy, and advance the common good” (p. 22-23).

“Welfare policy should reduce poverty. ... Improving the Earned Income Tax Credit and child tax credits, available as refunds to families in greatest need, will help lift low-income families out of poverty” (p. 23).

“The United States should take a leading role in helping alleviate global poverty” (p. 26).

### ***Church Attendance***

“The Sunday Celebration of the Lord’s Day and his Eucharist is at the heart of Church life. ... On Sundays and other holy days of obligation the faithful are bound to participate in the Mass” (*Catechism*, p. 582-583).

### ***Prayer***

“It is always possible to pray. ... Prayer is a vital necessity. ... Prayer and Christian life are inseparable” (p. 722-723).

### ***Reading Sacred Texts***

“The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures as she venerated the Body of the Lord: both nourish and govern the whole Christian life” (p. 44).

“The Church forcefully and specially exhorts all the Christian faithful ... to learn ‘the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ’ by frequent reading of the divine scriptures” (p. 699).

The following CSBV questions/variables (2009) have been selected as key outcomes based on the standards outlined above.

### ***Social and Political Issues***

*Mark one for each item: Disagree strongly, disagree somewhat, agree somewhat, agree strongly*

1. Abortion should be legal
2. The death penalty should be abolished
3. Wealthy people should pay a larger share of taxes than they do now
4. Same sex couples should have the right to legal marital status
5. Affirmative action in college admissions should be abolished
6. Federal Military spending should be increased
7. The federal government should do more to control the sale of handguns

*Please indicate the importance to you personally of each of the following: Not important, somewhat important, very important, essential*

8. Reducing pain and suffering in the world
9. Improving the human condition

### ***Religious Behavior***

*For the activities below, indicate which ones you did during the past year: Frequently, occasionally, not at all*

1. Attended a religious service

*How often do you engage in the following activities: Not at all, less than monthly, monthly, once/week, several times/week, daily*

2. Prayer

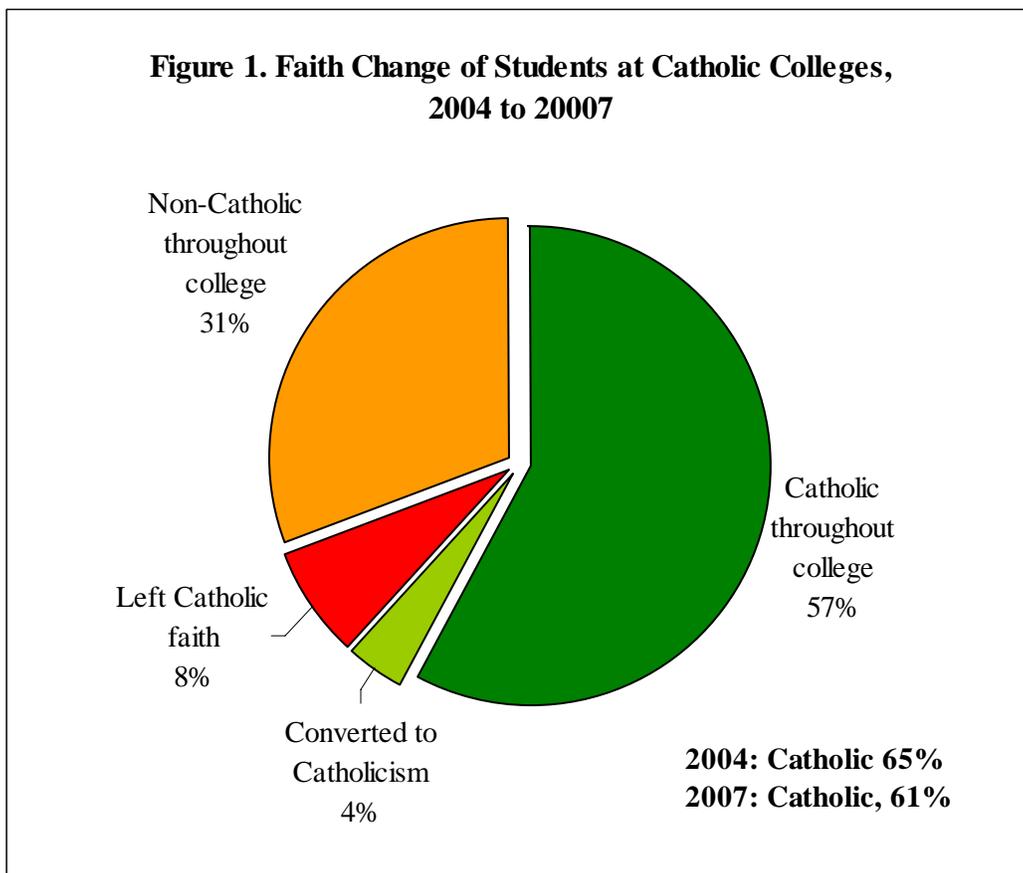
3. Reading sacred texts
4. Other reading on religion/spirituality

**Results**

Before addressing the changes in any of the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors listed above, it is important to note that one central element of faith that may also change during college is religious identity itself.

***Catholic Identification***

Eight percent of students attending a Catholic college entered self-identifying their faith as Catholic but then leave the faith for another or no religion at all at the time of the second survey.



The students who leave the Catholic faith at that point are less likely to have done the following in the twelve months *prior* to being surveyed the first time in their freshman year:

- Attend religious services “frequently” (33 percent compared to 62 percent of those who will remain Catholic throughout college)
- To indicate the religious affiliation of the college they are attending was “very important” to them when deciding where to go to college (13 percent compared to 28 percent).

- To indicate a belief in God (81 percent compared to 94 percent)

Thus, the students who leave the Catholic faith were already weak in practice or belief upon entering college. There are no significant differences between those who stay Catholic and those who leave the Church during college in terms of gender, race and ethnicity, income, area of study (major), or their college faculty's mean scores for political, religious, or spiritual views. However, those Catholics who leave the faith in college are among the *most* likely students in the second survey to say their faith has been weakened in college by the death of a close friend or family member, natural disaster, or the War in Iraq. They are also among the *most* likely to indicate they have “frequently” struggled to understand pain, suffering and death, have felt distant from God, and have disagreed with family members about religion. They are also among the *least* likely to indicate having taken religion classes in college.

Only 13 percent of those at Catholic colleges who entered self-identifying as Catholic and who did not self-identify as such in their junior year indicated in the survey that they had “converted to another religion” during college. The most common religious identification for students who no longer self-identify as Catholic as juniors is “none.”

It is also the case that 4 percent of students begin college on a Catholic campus and do not self-identify as Catholic as freshman but do identify as Catholic on the junior-year survey. This pattern of religious change and conversion mirrors changes more broadly identified in the U.S. Catholic population (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008).<sup>8</sup>

The remaining analysis focuses only on those students who self-identify as Catholic throughout college.

### ***Pro-life Issues***

As shown in Table 1, Catholic students at Catholic colleges and universities are slightly less likely than Catholics at other types of colleges and universities to move away from the Church's stance on abortion. However, there is a net loss of 15 percentage points on this issue, with 31 percent of students changing their attitude about abortion and moving away from the Church and 16 percent moving toward the Church's position.

A majority, 53 percent, of Catholic students at Catholic colleges and universities have the same opinion on abortion in their junior year that they had as entering freshman. Overall, 56 percent of Catholic students at Catholic colleges say they disagree “strongly” or “somewhat” that “abortion should be legal” in their junior year.<sup>9</sup> This level of disagreement is higher than that of Catholics in any other type of college.

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<sup>8</sup> Catholicism general attracts fewer adult converts than other faiths, as one cannot simply sign up or join the Catholic Church easily. Instead, one must go through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (often abbreviated RCIA) which typically entails nine to twelve months of study in the faith, guided by a sponsor and regularly scheduled religious education.

<sup>9</sup> In the Cardinal Newman Society's study a minority of Catholics were consistent with the Church on this issue. Thus, the results of this more recent survey show a cohort of Catholic college students more consistent with Church teachings on the issue of abortion.

The pattern for attitudes regarding the death penalty is slightly different. First, there is a net gain of 10 percentage points on this issue, with 21 percent of students changing their attitude and moving away from the Church and 31 percent moving toward the Church’s position. Forty-seven percent do not change their attitude while in college.

Yet, just under half, 49 percent, of Catholic students at Catholic colleges say they agree “strongly” or “somewhat” that “the death penalty should be abolished” in their junior year. This level of agreement is higher among those Catholics in any other type of college.

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**Table 1. Attitudinal Changes of Catholic Students on Life Issues by Type of College**

	<b>Away from the Church</b>	<b>Unchanged</b>	<b>Toward the Church</b>	<b>Net Change</b>
<b>Abortion</b>				
Catholic	31%	53%	16%	-15
Public	36	47	17	-19
Private-Religious non-Catholic	33	53	14	-19
Private-Nonsectarian	35	47	18	-17
<b>Death penalty</b>				
Catholic	21%	47%	31%	+10
Public	20	53	27	+7
Private-Religious non-Catholic	27	45	28	+1
Private-Nonsectarian	31	41	28	-3

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Thus, on pro-life issues the results indicate a mixed pattern for Catholic colleges and universities. A majority of Catholic students leave college disagreeing with the legal status of abortion. However, these students number fewer than those who entered with this attitude. In comparison to the shifts among students at other types of colleges, this shift away from the Church is weakest on Catholic campuses.

Although Catholic students on Catholic campuses move closer to the Church in their agreement about the abolition of the death penalty, a minority of Catholic students take this position in the junior year survey. Again, the Catholic campus environment appears to provide the most favorable results overall for the Church.

***Social Justice Issues***

Catholic students at Catholic colleges and universities are more likely than Catholics at other types of colleges and universities to move toward the Church’s teachings on general statements of social justice—reducing pain and suffering in the world and improving the human condition. About one in five or more Catholics

attending Catholic colleges and universities move closer in agreement with the Church during college on these two statements.

As juniors, 75 percent of Catholic students at Catholic colleges agree that reducing pain and suffering in the world is either “very important” or “essential.” Seventy-two percent respond similarly to the goal of improving the human condition.

**Table 2. Attitudinal Changes of Catholic Students on Social Justice Issues by Type of College**

	<b>Away from the Church</b>	<b>Unchanged</b>	<b>Toward the Church</b>	<b>Net Change</b>
<b>Reducing pain and suffering</b>				
Catholic	15%	47%	38%	+23
Public	18	42	40	+22
Private-Religious non-Catholic	18	48	35	+17
Private-Nonsectarian	21	38	41	+20
<b>Improving the human condition</b>				
Catholic	19%	44%	37%	+18
Public	22	39	39	+17
Private-Religious non-Catholic	26	4	27	+1
Private-Nonsectarian	29	44	27	-2
<b>Increasing taxes for the wealthy</b>				
Catholic	22%	47%	30%	+8
Public	24	46	31	+7
Private-Religious non-Catholic	23	49	28	+5
Private-Nonsectarian	20	46	34	+14
<b>Affirmative Action</b>				
Catholic	29%	46%	25%	-4
Public	29	50	21	-8
Private-Religious non-Catholic	32	43	26	-6
Private-Nonsectarian	24	49	27	+3

Although Catholic students at Catholic colleges and universities move closer to the Church on tax policy—specifically wealthy people paying a larger share than they do now—the percentage point increase for these students lags behind Catholics attending private nonsectarian colleges (net change of 8 percentage points compared to 14 percentage points). In the junior year survey 58 percent of Catholics attending Catholic colleges agree “somewhat” or “strongly” that the wealthy should pay higher taxes. More Catholics on each other type of campus are more likely to agree with this policy statement than those attending Catholic colleges. This may be related to the overall

higher income levels of the families of students at Catholic colleges and universities. Agreement with this statement, in many cases, may be acceptance of one’s family paying more in taxes.

Catholics move away from the Church on the issue of Affirmative Action in college. However, the question is specific to the abolition of this policy for college admissions. The shift among those at Catholic colleges is similar to those attending at public and private religious non-Catholic campuses. Only 43 percent of Catholic students at Catholic colleges and universities disagree “somewhat” or “strongly” that Affirmative Action in college admissions should be abolished.

***Weapons and War Issues***

Catholics at Catholic colleges and universities—like Catholics on most other types of campuses—move toward the Church’s teachings and positions on reducing the availability of weapons on a small and large scale. Most leave college agreeing with the Church on these issues.

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**Table 3. Attitudinal Changes of Catholic Students on Weapons and War Issues by Type of College**

	<b>Away from the Church</b>	<b>Unchanged</b>	<b>Toward the Church</b>	<b>Net Change</b>
<b>Military spending</b>				
Catholic	17%	46%	37%	+20
Public	23	45	32	+9
Private-Religious non-Catholic	18	45	37	+19
Private-Nonsectarian	12	45	43	+31
<b>Gun control</b>				
Catholic	20%	55%	25%	+5
Public	20	50	30	+10
Private-Religious non-Catholic	20	53	27	+7
Private-Nonsectarian	26	53	21	-5

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Thirty-seven percent of Catholics on Catholic campuses move closer to the Church in disagreeing that federal military spending should be increased. This represents a 20 percentage point positive shift after accounting for the 17 percent who move away from the Church on this issue. In their junior year, 72 percent of Catholics at Catholic colleges and universities disagreed “somewhat” or “strongly” that military spending should increase.

Twenty-five percent of Catholics on Catholic campuses move closer to the Church in agreeing that the federal government should do more to control the sale of handguns. This represents a 5 percentage point positive shift after accounting for the 20

percent who move away from the Church on this issue. In their junior year, 88 percent of Catholics at Catholic colleges and universities agreed “somewhat” or “strongly” that the government should do more on this issue.

***Same Sex Marriage***

On no other issue do Catholics move further from the Church—regardless of the type of college they attend—than on same sex marriage. Only 16 percent of Catholics on Catholic campuses move closer to the Church in disagreeing “somewhat” or “strongly” that same sex couples should have the right to legal marital status. Accounting for the 39 percent who move away from the Church on this issue, there is a net shift of 23 percentage points away from the Church teaching.

**Table 4. Attitudinal Changes of Catholic Students on Same Sex Marriage by Type of College**

	Away from the Church	Unchanged	Toward the Church	Net Change
Catholic	39%	45%	16%	-23
Public	42	43	15	-27
Private-Religious non-Catholic	36	50	14	-22
Private-Nonsectarian	42	44	14	-28

In their junior year, only one in three Catholics (32 percent) at Catholic colleges and universities disagree “somewhat” or “strongly” that same sex couples should have the right to marry. Catholics are slightly less likely on other types of campuses to disagree with this. This issue, more than any other, may be strongly affected by the Millennial Generation’s post-materialist point of view regarding marriage and sexuality.

***Religious Behavior***

Catholics are significantly *less* likely to regularly attend religious services in college (as reported in the junior-year survey) than in the twelve months prior to when they initially took the survey as freshman. This shift likely represents their departure from their parents’ level of Mass attendance.<sup>10</sup>

Thirty-two percent of Catholics at Catholic colleges and universities decrease their frequency of Mass attendance while in college, whereas 61 percent attend as frequently as they did before college and only 7 percent increase their attendance. This represents a net shift of 25 percentage points away from pre-college attendance levels.

As juniors, 42 percent of Catholics at Catholic colleges and universities say they attended religious services frequently while in college. This attendance rate is higher than

<sup>10</sup> Indeed, a decrease in frequency of Mass attendance is least likely among Catholics attending a Catholic college or university if they indicated that they were living with family during the fall semester of their freshman year.

Catholics at any other type of campus by more than 10 percentage points. It is also the case that fewer Catholics report a decline in their attendance on Catholic campuses while in college than Catholics at any other type of college.

Changes in Catholic students' prayer activity and reading of sacred texts or about religion or spirituality are not as negatively affected. Although 29 percent of Catholic students at Catholic colleges say they pray less often as juniors than they did as freshman, 26 percent report an increase in prayer frequency (45 percent are unchanged).

**Table 5. Religious Behavior Changes of Catholic Students by Type of College**

	Less Active	Unchanged	More Active	Net Change
<b>Mass attendance</b>				
Catholic	32%	61%	7%	-25
Public	42	50	8	-34
Private-Religious non-Catholic	51	44	4	-47
Private-Nonsectarian	49	45	7	-42
<b>Prayer</b>				
Catholic	29%	45%	26%	-3
Public	34	42	23	-11
Private-Religious non-Catholic	31	45	23	-8
Private-Nonsectarian	40	38	21	-19
<b>Reading sacred texts</b>				
Catholic	28%	42%	30%	+2
Public	33	49	18	-15
Private-Religious non-Catholic	32	39	29	-3
Private-Nonsectarian	32	44	24	-8
<b>Reading religion &amp; spirituality</b>				
Catholic	29%	40%	21%	-8
Public	34	47	19	-15
Private-Religious non-Catholic	39	38	23	-16
Private-Nonsectarian	30	49	21	-9

In their junior year 31 percent of those on Catholic campuses pray daily and 48 percent pray less than daily but at least once a week. More Catholic students at all other types of college have a less active prayer life as juniors than as freshman and are less likely than Catholics on Catholic campuses to pray at least once a week.

Catholics at Catholic colleges and universities are less likely than Catholics at other types of colleges to decrease their reading of sacred texts or other reading about religion and spirituality in college. As juniors, 38 percent of Catholics on Catholic campuses read sacred texts at least once a month and 31 percent read other material on religion or spirituality with this frequency. This frequency of reading is higher than that of Catholics at any other type of college—including private religious non-Catholic colleges.

### ***Multivariate Multilevel Regressions***

The preceding analysis has not controlled for differences among College students at each type of campus. In order to account for these differences (i.e., factors that may be related to the selection of a type of college) we estimated multivariate regressions using Mixed Models in SPSS. These procedures were used due to the multilevel nature of the data (i.e., student respondents nested within different colleges).

Each of these regression models tests for the impact of college type with a specific focus on the estimated fixed effects of a Catholic student attending a Catholic college or university. The excluded reference category is enrollment at a public college—the most frequently attended school as well as an option that is most likely to be economically and geographically accessible to any student.

Table 5 presents the coefficient estimates from 26 regression models for the effect of enrollment at a Catholic college. Each row in the table represents a different dependent variable. The first column includes the Catholic college coefficients for the baseline results. These estimations included only the variables for college type (e.g., Catholic, private nonsectarian, and private religious non-Catholic with public used as the excluded reference category). The second column includes results for estimations with a full set of control variables including: sex, high school type, choice rank of college, attraction to college due to its religious affiliation/orientation, high school GPA, and parental income. Estimates for control variables have been omitted due to space limitations. A positive coefficient represents movement toward the Church's position or norm and a negative coefficient represents movement away from the Church.

In the baseline models, the positive and statistically significant coefficients for Mass attendance, reading about religion and spirituality, and the importance of improving the human condition are all indicative of a potential positive Catholic college effect. Each is statistically significant at the .05 level and their direction represents the fact that Catholic students at Catholic colleges and universities are more likely to move toward the Church in college than are Catholics who are attending a public university or college. The coefficient for Affirmative Action in college admissions is also statistically significant, yet in a direction indicating movement away from the Church's position. This is the only issue or behavior in any of the regression models for which a negative and statistically significant effect was identified.

**Table 6. The Estimated Effects of Catholic College Enrollment on Catholic Students**

	College Type Only	College Type with Individual-level Control Variables
<i>Frequency of Religious Behaviors</i> (+ more frequent, - less frequent)		
Mass attendance	.143**	.102
Prayer	.168*	-.038
Reading sacred texts	.139*	.141
Reading about religion & spirituality	.179**	.097
<i>Social and Political Issue Attitudes</i> (+ closer to Church, - away from Church)		
Oppose abortion	.107	.111
Oppose death penalty	-.004	.008
Important to reduce pain and suffering	.066	.131
Important to improve human condition	.149**	.075
Support more taxes for wealthy	.028	.109
Support Affirmative Action in college admissions	-.147**	-.158*
Support gun control	-.018	-.035
Oppose increase in military spending	-.055	-.144
Oppose same sex marriage	-.001	.046

\*p<.10, \*\*p<.05. Table entries are coefficient estimates of the fixed effect of attendance at a Catholic college or university. Estimation methods are SPSS mixed-level models; control variables include: sex, age, high school type, choice rank of college, attraction to college due to its religious affiliation/orientation, high school GPA, use of college loans and parental income. Estimates for control variables are not shown (available upon request). Excluded category for college type (reference) is public college/university. Model includes only those who self-identify as Catholic.

If we consider statistical significance at the .10 level, Catholic colleges and universities also emerge as being influential, *ceteris paribus*, in promoting increased frequency of prayer and of reading sacred texts.

The second model includes results for models including the control variables, which in part provide adjustment for self-selection—that students do not randomly select their colleges and those Catholics who end up enrolling at a Catholic college are different than those who choose to enroll in another type of college or university. These control

variables render the Catholic college effect neutral in all cases with the exception of Affirmative Action, where the result remains negative yet only marginally significant.

## **Conclusion**

By broadening the set of outcomes measured and providing for more rigorous analyses of HERI data, our results question the Cardinal Newman Society's conclusion regarding the *negative* impact of Catholic colleges. These negative effects have been overstated. Catholic colleges and universities appear to be doing no harm—certainly in comparison to other types of higher education institutions—and at a more subtle level may be *increasing* their student's Catholicity. However, it is not possible to disentangle these positive effects from potential self-selection issues.

It may be possible in future research to isolate the statistically robust effects of Catholic higher education by using a broader sample of Catholic colleges and universities. Like the Cardinal Newman Society study, this research has been based on surveys of students at less than one in seven Catholic colleges and universities. Due to confidentiality guarantees made by HERI we are also unable to know which Catholic colleges and universities were included. It is possible that there may be differences between different sub-groups of Catholic colleges and universities as well.

Yet even with the data limitations of this study we can conclude that we have not found any evidence, short of movement away from the Church teachings regarding Affirmative Action in college admissions, that Catholic colleges and universities are systematically making students “less Catholic.” More often than not, Catholic students at Catholic colleges are slightly *less* likely to shift away from Church teachings than Catholic students attending other types of colleges and universities.

More so, the survey results indicate more broadly that students self-identifying as Catholic at Catholic colleges and universities remain profoundly connected to their faith in their junior year. For example, at this time:

- 93 percent believe in God while 6 percent express some doubt (i.e., “not sure”). Only 10 percent say their current views about religious matters include “doubting.”
- 87 percent say that seeking to follow religious teachings in everyday life is at least “somewhat important” to them (50 percent say this is either “very important” or “essential”).
- 82 percent discuss religion and spirituality with their friends “occasionally” or “frequently.”
- 63 percent discuss religion and spirituality “occasionally” or “frequently” with their college professors. Only 6 percent indicate that they have “frequently” experienced conflict between their college coursework and their religious beliefs (30 percent say this has occurred “occasionally”).
- 46 percent say their “religiousness” became “stronger” or “much stronger” during college and 39 percent stated there was “no change” in this (thus, only 14 percent indicate this became “weaker” or “much weaker”).

- 42 percent rate their religiousness as “above average” or among the “highest 10 percent” and 39 percent say this is “average” (thus, only 18 percent say their religiousness is “below average” or among the “lowest 10 percent”).

In sum, the results do not indicate any significant secularizing trend among Catholic students attending Catholic colleges as is often expressed in the criticism of these institutions.

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## Appendix: Comparison of Cardinal Newman Society and CARA Results

The table below shows the most direct comparison possible between the results of the HERI survey used by CARA and the results of the HERI survey used by the Cardinal Newman Society.

**Appendix Table 1. Comparing the Attitudes and Behavior of Senior-year Catholics Attending Catholic Colleges and Universities, 2001 and 2007**

	<u>Cardinal Newman Soc.</u>		<u>CARA</u>	
	Junior/2001 (CNS)	Change in college	Junior/2007 (CARA)	Change in college
<b>Agree ‘somewhat’ or ‘strongly’:</b>				
Abortion should be legal	51.7%	+13.8	47.4%	+8.5
The death penalty should be abolished	49.5	+14.0	48.7	+7.3
Same-sex couples should have the right to legal marital status	69.5	+17.1	68.7	+13.1
If two people really like each other, it’s all right for them to have sex even if they’ve known each other for only a very short time	48.0	+20.5	46.4	+8.5
<b>Religious preference</b>				
Roman Catholic	91.0%	-9.0	88.4%	-11.6
None	5.5	+5.5	5.3	+5.3
<b>Mass Attendance</b>				
Not at all	12.8%	+10.0	17.2%	+10.0
Occasionally	44.7	+15.7	43.9	+9.5
Frequently	42.6	-25.7	38.9	-19.5
<b>Hours per week spent in prayer/meditations</b>				
None	25.9%	+11.5	21.3%	+1.8
<1	32.6	-7.2	36.1	-4.3
1-2	29.9	-5.3	30.7	+1.2
3-5	7.9	-0.3	7.2	-0.7
6-10	2.2	+0.7	3.6	+2.0
11-15	0.7	+0.3	0.6	0.0
16-20	0.3	+0.1	0.2	-0.1
>20	0.5	+0.2	0.3	+0.1

Data source: Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) surveys 1997, 2001, 2004, and 2007. Change in college represents the difference between the survey taken at the end of the junior year and the survey taken at the beginning of the freshman year. Percentages include those who identified as Catholic as freshman but no longer identify as such at the end of their junior year. Thus, the sample includes non-Catholics in the second survey who identified as Catholic upon entering college.