



Institute for the Study of Social Change

ISSC DISCUSSION PAPER SERIES

CATHOLIC IDENTITY, HABITUS AND PRACTICE IN CONTEMPORARY IRELAND

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This paper is produced as part of the Identity, Diversity and Citizenship Programme at ISSC; however the views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of ISSC. All errors and omissions remain those of the author.

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Ireland*

Proposed ISSC Working Paper

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December 2004

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Despite all the changes that have taken place in Irish society in the last fifty years, the census of population in 2001 showed that the vast majority – over 90 per cent – of the people still identify themselves with the Catholic Church. This would suggest that the Church's fears concerning materialism, consumerism, liberal individualism and hedonism were unfounded. Ireland is still a very Catholic country. But then again, the vast majority of the people in France, Spain and Italy also still regard themselves as Catholics. And yet, although nominally Catholic, people in these countries would appear not only to be quite detached from the institutional Church, but from religious life in general. The Catholic Church is no longer the major institutional player in social, political and economic life that it once was. The strong ties that used to bind the Church and the state have been severed. Outside of the family and education, the influence of the Church is mainly confined to the religious field. Even within the religious field, the Church no longer has the same monopoly over spiritual and moral matters. There are numerous other sources and guides about how to connect with the supernatural and transcendental. Catholics in these seemingly very Catholic countries no longer appear to be reliant, let alone, dependent on the Church to tell them what is right and wrong, or how to live a good life.

So, then, what does it mean when the vast majority of the people in these countries willingly identify themselves as Catholics? What does it mean to be Catholic? Certainly it would seem that while Catholics still believe in the fundamental tenets of their faith, they do not participate as much in Catholic prayers and rituals as they used to. Are Catholics in France, Spain and Italy becoming more like their Protestant counterparts, combining high levels of religious belief with low levels of religious practice – what Davie (1994) has referred to as believing without belonging? Has being Catholic, and being religious in general, become less of a public manifestation and more confined to the private sphere (Casanova 1994)? And even within the home, has being Catholic become removed from the living room and more confined to the privacy of the bedroom and the private life of the individual? Or is it that being Catholic is not so much about believing – about living a godly or Christ-like life – and more about a sense of belonging to a cultural tradition and heritage, to a shared collective memory (Hervieu-Léger 2000)? In other words, to turn Davie's proposition upside down, are Catholics in Europe becoming more like Protestants in that they have a strong sense of belonging to a religious tradition without *really* believing, or at least putting their beliefs into practice (see Davie 2000).¹ There is a sense of belonging without believing or practising. It may well be that instead of analysing transformations in religion in terms of a balance between secularising tendencies – differentiation, rationalisation, industrialisation, urbanisation and so forth (see Dobbelaere 1981), and sacralising (or desecularising) tendencies – the emergence of new ways of being spiritual and moral (see Bruce 196–229), it may be more fruitful to analyse transformations in terms of levels of identification with organised religion, that is churches, denominations and sects. This would allow identification with the Catholic Church to be seen not just as a continuum between involvement and

* This paper is part of the Identity, Diversity and Citizenship Research Programme within the Institute for the Study of Social Change at University College Dublin. The comments and analyses are confined to the Republic of Ireland.

detachment, but as a process whereby depending on factors such as age, life events and circumstances, Catholics might become more involved with the Church and identify with it more strongly.²

In this paper I will begin by looking at some of the findings from the European Values Survey (1999) to see whether Irish Catholics are becoming like their counterparts in France, Spain and Italy and, more specifically, the extent to which while identifying themselves as Catholics they are identifying less with the institutional Church. In other words, to what extent can what is happening in Catholic Ireland be described as a process of de-institutionalisation in which Catholics while still seeing and understanding themselves as Catholics have become less orthodox and more detached from the institutional Church? I will then look at some of the findings which have emerged from the Contemporary Irish Identities study to see what further evidence they provide for this process.³ In particular, I examine the transformations in the way the parents, particularly mothers, have socialised their children into being Catholic. I suggest that we can categorise Irish Catholic social identity in terms of different levels and processes of identification with the institutional Church: Strong, Cultural, Creative and Alienated. I argue that the numbers of strong Catholics who identify strongly with the institutional Church and who really believe in and practise their faith is declining. At the same time, the number of Catholics who have a strong identity with being Catholic but a weaker level of identification with the Church, is growing. Furthermore, the more Catholics become detached from the Church, the more they are likely to seeking alternative forms of being spiritual and moral – creative Catholics. Finally, alienated Catholics, while still seeing themselves as Catholics, have become detached not only from the Church but from religious life in general.

Irish and European Catholics

France, Spain and Italy can be regarded as Catholic countries in that, when asked in censuses of population, the vast majority of people freely identify themselves as Roman Catholics. However, what exactly this means and, specifically, how being Catholic manifests itself in everyday social life is not clear. Certainly it means that people believe in God. In France, 87 per cent of Catholics believe in God, while in Spain and Italy the level of belief is well over 90 per cent. However, the nature of this belief is not clear. Is this belief in a personal God? Do they believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God, that the Catholic Church is the true inheritance of Christ's teachings, and that those who follow the teachings of Christ and the Catholic Church will attain eternal salvation? Certainly, the findings would suggest that for these Catholics, their belief in God is not always linked to the notion of attaining salvation and life after death. While 78 per cent of Italian Catholics believe in life after death, just over half (56 per cent) of the Catholics in France and Spain do so. The proportion of Catholics in these countries who believe in sin is quite similar (see table 1). However, what is not clear is the link between sin and salvation. One of the traditional teachings of the Church was that those who died in mortal sin would be in danger of being condemned to hell. However, although a majority of these Catholics believe in sin and life after death, only a minority in France (28 per cent) and Spain (39 per cent) believe in hell. Hell, so to speak, has gone out of fashion. In the modern age of positivism, mastery and control, far more Catholics believe in the existence of heaven – in Spain the level of belief in heaven is 20 per cent higher than the level of belief in hell.

Table 1: Religiosity of Catholics in France, Spain, Italy and Republic of Ireland 1999
(Source: European Values Survey 1999)

	France	Spain	Italy	Ireland
	%	%	%	%
<i>Belief in:</i>				
God	86.9	95.2	98.7	98.5
Life after death	56.0	56.0	78.0	82.9
Sin	56.8	59.1	80.3	88.3
Hell	28.4	39.0	57.2	55.9
Heaven	44.9	59.8	67.2	89.1
<i>Attendance at religious services:</i>				
At least once a week	11.8	29.9	48.3	65.2
About once a month	30.7	31.6	40.2	23.2
Once a year or less	16.7	18.0	5.6	6.5
Never, practically never	40.8	20.4	5.8	5.1
<i>How often pray to God outside of religious services:</i>				
Every day	13.8	25.5	44.2	49.0
Once a week or more	14.5	22.8	26.9	26.2
Less often	36.7	36.0	22.7	19.5
Never	35.0	15.7	6.2	5.3
<i>Are you a religious person?</i>				
A religious person	69.6	68.2	93.7	76.2
Not a religious person	26.9	30.4	6.2	23.0
Convinced atheist	3.4	1.4	0.1	0.8
<i>Importance of religion in your life:</i>				
Very/quite important	54.4	48.2	80.8	76.8
Not important	35.3	30.5	15.8	17.7
Not at all important	10.4	21.3	3.4	5.4
<i>Confidence in Church</i>				
Great/quite an amount	67.7	49.3	76.0	58.6
Not very much	21.9	36.5	20.9	36.3
None at all	10.4	14.3	3.1	5.1

It would seem, then, that in these countries identification with the Catholic Church is combined with a relatively high level of religious belief. Given that they are Catholics and that salvation is attained in and through the Church rather than through individual faith alone, one might expect that there would be a high level of attendance at Mass – especially since attending on Sundays has been accepted as one

of the major commandments of the Church and a major signifier of being a good Catholic. However, the proportion of Catholics who attend religious services at least once a week is far lower than the level of belief – France (12 per cent), Spain (30 per cent) and Italy (48 per cent). Although these figures are still much higher than for most Protestants in Europe, it would appear that Catholics in these countries are becoming, if not more Protestant-like in their religious behaviour, at least more detached from the institutional Church. Certainly there is a move away from the legalistic-orthodox model of Catholicism which sees attendance at weekly Mass as central to being Catholic and to an individually-principled model which sees monthly Mass as the new norm (Inglis 1998:30–8).

It could be argued that although Catholics are no longer attending Mass as much as they used to, this does not mean that they are not practising their religion. They could, for example, be leading a prayerful life. There is some evidence of this. In France, the proportion (28 per cent) who pray more than once a week is more than twice the amount who go to Mass: in Spain it is 17 per cent higher and in Italy almost 23 per cent higher.

Further evidence of detachment from the institutional Church is evident in the proportion of Catholics who, despite not attending Mass as often as required, still see themselves as a religious person. In France and Spain this is close to 70 per cent and in Italy it is as high as 94 per cent – which is 16 per cent higher than the proportion of going to Mass only rarely, is most evident in France. Nearly 70 per cent of French Catholics see themselves as religious and over half see religion as important part of their lives, yet only 12 per cent go to Mass, and only 27 per cent pray, at least once a week. It may well be that religious identity is seen less in terms of institutional affiliation and more as the way in which bring meaning and significance to rites of passage.

So how do Irish Catholics fit into this pattern? Well, on most of the variables examined, they are more religious than their European counterparts, although they are not that significantly different from their Italian counterparts. As we have seen, Italian Catholics tend to be more religious than the French or Spanish. However, Irish Catholics score higher than the Italians, although not significantly, in relation to belief in God, life after death, hell and sin. Where they differ is in relation to heaven. Almost 90 per cent of Irish Catholics believe in heaven compared to only 67 per cent of Italian Catholics.

However, where Irish Catholics differ most in terms of religiosity is in religious practice. Sixty five per cent of Irish Catholics go to Mass at least once a week compared to only 12 per cent of French Catholics, 30 per cent of Spanish, and 48 per cent of Italians. When it comes to praying, the differences are not as strong. For example, 75 per cent of Irish Catholics pray at least once a week, compared to 71 per cent of Italians. Again the French are very different from the Irish and the Italians with only 28 per cent praying at least once a week.

The Irish may attend Mass more often, but Italian Catholics are more likely to consider themselves to be religious. Ninety four per cent of Italian Catholics saw themselves as religious compared to 76 per cent of the Irish. And in terms of the importance of religion in their lives, the Irish and the Italians were the same with 80 per cent saying that it was important. As we have seen, French Catholics are much lower on most of these variables, particularly in terms of religious practice. However, although French Catholics are much less likely to pray or go to Mass, this does not prevent them from seeing themselves as religious. Almost seven in ten (69 per cent) of French Catholics see themselves as religious – compared to 79 per cent of the Irish.

This trend of people seeing themselves as Catholics, and seeing themselves as religious, but not going to Mass regularly, may be developing in Ireland.

The peculiarity of French Catholics is also marked in their trust in the Church. Two-thirds (68 per cent) of them have either a great or quite an amount of confidence in the Church. This is higher than among Irish Catholics (59 per cent). This may be explained by the lower profile of the Church in French society and a lower level of sex scandals in recent years. It would appear, then, that there is a growing number of Catholics in Ireland who, while they have become less trusting of and more detached from the Church as a social institution still have a strong identification with being Catholic. This was reflected in the Greeley and Ward's (2000) study of data from the International Social Survey Project. There may be a new type of Catholic emerging in Ireland who likes being Catholic but does not care so much for the Church as an institution – particularly the way it handles its power. But we have to look out for evidence of a new radical-type Catholic whose sees the institutional Church not as something from which they have become detached, but rather as something which, like Marxists view the state, as something about which there is a struggle to seize control (see Dillon 1999).

It is difficult to identify any consistent pattern in these figures. The differences between the four different countries are as striking as their similarities. Nevertheless, it would appear that the level of identifying with being Catholic, but not necessarily with the institutional Church, is very high. Secondly, the level of religious belief among these Catholics is also very high. Thirdly, the majority of these European Catholics see themselves as religious. Fourthly, although not as high, the majority see religion as important in their lives. Fifthly, differences emerge in relation to frequency of prayer, with the majority of the Irish and Italians praying at least once a week, but less than half of the Spaniards and less than three in ten of the French. Sixthly, the main differences occur in relation to attendance at Mass with a good majority of the Irish attending at least once a week but only a very small proportion of the French, with the Italians and the Spanish in between these two extremes.

It would appear from this analysis that there is little evidence of rampant secularisation among Catholics in these European countries. There is definite evidence of Catholics seeing themselves as belonging to a religious tradition and of the majority accepting the fundamental beliefs of their religion. There is less evidence, however, of them seeing themselves belonging to a community of believers and to the institutional Church. It could be argued that these findings indicate a pattern of Catholics belonging and believing but not coming together to practise. In this respect, it could be argued that European Catholics are becoming more like their Protestant counterparts who tend to have lower levels of belief and much lower levels of practice, but that Irish Catholics are much more likely to function as a community of believers who come together at least once a week to worship.

While the findings from the European Values Survey (1999) provide us with an overall picture of where Irish Catholics stand in relation to Catholics in other Catholic countries, they do not provide any understanding of how Catholic social identity and being Catholic operates at the level of individual involvement in everyday life. We do not get a sense of how people see and understand themselves as Catholics, how being Catholic permeates into the realms of family, community and work.⁴ Has being religious become differentiated from social, cultural, political and economic life? How does being Catholic impinge on how people see and understand themselves, others, and the world in which they live?

Survey findings do not help us understand what being Catholic and identification with the Catholic Church means to people. Do they see it as a defining or essential part of who they are? Does identification with being Catholic operate at the same level as, for example, being white, male, married, middle-class, Irish? How does it relate to personal identifications relating to occupation, fashion, sport, music, food, and lifestyle in general?

Nor do survey findings help us understand how Catholics see and understand themselves as different, particularly from Protestants. To what extent is being Catholic constituted in terms of a negative opposition – not being Protestant? Is the inherited embodied disposition of being Catholic – what Bourdieu (1977: 82–3) refers to as *habitus* – so strong that however Catholics see or come to see themselves, it is not and never will be as Protestants.⁵

We also have to try to investigate how identification with the Catholic Church and being Catholic is manifested in everyday life. Of course, the most regular form of public manifestation of Catholic identity is attendance at Mass, funerals, weddings, baptisms, First Holy Communions and Confirmations. But how, beyond these religious events, is being Catholic publicly manifested? How is it manifested in what Goffman (1969) termed the presentation of self, in the way people talk, their bodily disposition, their dress? Piety, humility and modesty are virtues which, through socialisation, have become embodied as part of being Catholic and, intentionally or not, become manifested in social behaviour.

Finally, while social surveys are very good at mapping changes in religious belief and behaviour, they are not very satisfactory when it comes to exploring the transitions in the meaning of being Catholic and in identification with the Catholic Church that have taken place over generations. How do the way people see and understand themselves as Catholic and the way the way they identify with the Catholic Church differ from Catholic *habitus* and lifestyle of their parents? ⁶

These are some of the issues and questions which need to be addressed to understand the transformations that have taken place in Catholic identity over the past fifty years. It would be naïve to think that they can be answered through the questions that we have been asking participants in our project. Detailed answers could only begin to be attained through a combination of ethnography and in-depth personal interviews concentrating solely on religious identity rather than various forms of social and personal identities.

In this paper, I refer to interviews that were conducted during 2003–4 in two urban areas in the Republic which I have renamed as Belltown and Millfield. Belltown is a large town in the East of Ireland. Millfield is a suburban area within Greater Dublin. The interviews were personal and in-depth and used a balance between open-ended and semi-structured approaches.

Transitions in ways of being Catholic

Anne is a married woman with two grown-up daughters who has lived all her life in Belltown. She has worked, mainly as a secretary, in various companies. She was brought up in an orthodox Catholic family. ‘I’ve been brought up a Catholic and my parents were very strong practising Catholics and that tradition would be distilled (sic) in me. It would have been part of me and it would be part of tradition and belief.’ However, while she is still quite orthodox in her beliefs and practices, she does not take a legalistic approach to Church teachings, especially having to attend Mass. ‘I mightn’t be practising enough as I ought, I’ll be very honest. I don’t go to Mass as

much as I should, but I would revert to prayer, you know, when I have troubles or a difficult time in my life, yes I would.’ What is important here is that while she feels a bit guilty about not going to Mass, it is not something which sees as obligatory. Her detachment from legalistic approach is reflected in the way she brought up her children. She feels that they have drifted away from the Church, partly because of the recent scandals, but that they will return to the Catholic fold eventually.

I think that when they moved away from home and that whole environment then they just, you know, move away from attending Mass and you participate in other ways of practising your faith. Most definitely. You know my children say to me, well okay I’m not practising at the moment but they always turn like myself in troubled times, and I think that when they get older they will go back. (Belltown 4)

Many respondents described the way of being Catholic and the identification which their parents had with the Catholic Church as quite different from their own. Fidelma is an articulate woman who, when asked at the beginning of the interview to describe herself, announced that she was a feminist and a republican. She has two children and is presently unemployed. She remembers the time when she confronted her mother about going to Mass.

I remember saying it to my mother one time, she was going on about, I was kicking up about going to Mass or something. Oh she was scandalised But then of course, you know the way that you have to, especially if you’re living in a country, well when I was young, when you were living in a country area you had no choice, you went to Mass.(Millfield 5)

Josephine (Belltown 33), a young woman married with three children, said much the same. ‘I was born Catholic as well but when I turned 18, I said that’s it, I can’t, I’m not going (to Mass) no more to my mother, and my mother had a fit.’ Bridget had the same row with her mother. She raised her children differently.

We used to go to Mass like when we were kids but not as much. As soon as we got to kind of teenage age my Mom stopped making us go to Mass and then it was up to us if we wanted to go. So then I just, just didn’t bother because at that age you wanted to go out with your friends you know that way. But I wouldn’t you know, if anybody asks me ‘do I believe in god’ I’d say ‘yeah’ but I wouldn’t be practising religion or anything.(Millfield 3)

It may well be that the transition in identification with the Catholic Church over the past thirty years has taken place primarily in relation to attendance at Mass. As Fidelma says, going to Mass was not just a personal identification, it was an ascribed social identity; one did not have a choice. It would also seem that identification with the Church was something that was particularly important to mothers. When their children rebelled about going to Mass on Sunday, it was a source of scandal. The identity of mothers, what it was to be a good mother, would seem to have been closely allied to identification with the Catholic Church (see Inglis, 1998: 178–200).

Although Fidelma stopped going to Mass and became detached from the Church, she obviously faced a dilemma when it came to raising her own children. Given the monopoly position that the Catholic Church had developed in Irish civil

society, and the monopoly it developed over the ways of being spiritual and moral people like Fidelma brought their children up as Catholics not only because of the potential scandal, but because, in effect, there was no other religious choice available. It would seem that, perhaps because of Ireland's colonial history and then in the last century, generations of Church symbolic domination, most Catholics never consider the possibility of becoming Protestant.

Well I was born and reared a Catholic, a Roman Catholic, but I had problems with it like from the time I was young, a young teenager. I just felt the hold that the Catholic Church had on the people was far too strong. They were all men [laughs] and they told women what to do. Now I did when my own children were born I got them baptised and christened. They made their first Holy Communion and their Confirmation and they were allowed to decide for themselves what they wanted to do and I don't believe that any of them have been to Mass or church or anything unless at a wedding or something or a funeral, for years and years and years and years. But it was the fact that the control of the Catholic Church, the Roman Catholic Church had over the people, t'was unbelievable. And now it's emerging of course that a lot of that control was abuse as well you know. But even outside the institutions.(Millfield 5)

The ambiguity about identification with the Catholic Church and the lack of alternative ways of being spiritual, is reflected in what Fidelma says. She does not see herself as a religious person but believes in God, or as she corrected herself: 'I believe in a god'. She does not go to Mass much anymore. But she likes the spiritual feeling that she gets when she visits some of her favourite churches.

But it's kind of more like a sense of peace or something. I don't know. ...if you're going to Camden street ... there's a church ... there called White Friar Street Church and I always find when you step into that church it's like stepping into another world. It's just, t'is like, t'is if something comes down behind you and shuts everything else out. The same in Mount Mellary in Waterford; it's a monastery. It's just such a peaceful feeling. It's just, I don't know what it is but it's amazing. It's a beautiful feeling, you know a lovely calm sense of feeling.(Millfield 5)

What also seems to have changed is the orthodox-legalistic, if not coercive, approach that existed in schools at the time. We have seen how Mass attendance was not something about which children had a choice, and this was something that was reinforced in schools. This is how Joan described going to Mass.

Oh yeah you had to go ever Sunday. And the school I went to had their own mass that they went to which was quarter past nine on a Sunday morning and we had this little part up the front of the church that was maybe 12 rows that was for us, it was a very small school and that was our place and the priest came in the next morning and asked were you at your school mass and if you didn't you got a slap across the face. (Belltown 13)

It is important to emphasise that while these Catholics no longer take an orthodox-legalistic approach to their religion, while they may have become less involved and

more emotionally detached from the institutional Church, and while they may be ambiguous about their religiosity, they still identify strongly with being Catholic. It is part of their cultural heritage. It still means a great deal to them. However, what did not emerge was how, outside of attending Mass, this identification with the Catholic Church is manifested in everyday life. It may be that, in comparison with previous generations, the process of Catholic identification has moved gradually from the public to private sphere. It used to be that visiting anthropologists and commentators on Irish culture and society would remark that the signs of Catholic life were to be seen everywhere. They referred to church buildings, clerical dress, public processions, crucifixes and statues of Our Lady in public places, the ringing of bells, people constantly coming and going to and from the church for Mass, devotions, novenas and so forth. They also referred to the way Catholic habitus was embodied in language, in the way people spoke of themselves, the way they invoked religious references and imagery, the way they blessed themselves frequently: literally the way they wore their religion on their sleeves. It may well be that nowadays such public manifestation of identification is more confined to lifestyle, fashion and sport.

Identification with the Catholic and with being Catholic is not just about a sense of emotional belonging and bonding which comes from what Jenkins (1996: 104–118) calls the symbolic construction of similarity, it is also has to do with the social organisation of difference. In Catholic Ireland, this has primarily revolved around the way Catholics, institutionally through the Church, collectively in families and groups, and individually, in everyday life represented and constituted members of other religions, particularly Protestants but also Jews, as different, and created and maintained physical and mental boundaries around them. Of course, this has crucial significance in Northern Ireland, but it is also significant in the Republic.

Often the constitution of Protestants as different is not something that is clearly articulated. It is at the level of feelings and emotions. Fiona is a 73 year old woman. She feels this sense of difference when she visited, as she has done on numerous occasions, a Protestant church she felt it was ‘miserable’ and ‘dreary’. (Belltown 27) Her friend Rosemary had an experience with Protestants when she was growing up which clearly made a lasting impression.

Something I will tell you: when we were children we had friends up in the (locality mentioned); they were all Protestants. Now they used to come down to us (and go into the local church) but we didn't know any difference. ... But the father was an Orangeman and he would stand outside; he wouldn't go in. We were only kids but then as we got older, say I was in my 20s mm, I remember them coming and standing and saying they couldn't come down anymore. Because they were living in the real Protestant (area), and if anybody knew they were visiting Catholics, they were afraid. So we never seen them from that. (Belltown 28)

It is through similar events and experiences – and particularly in the ongoing recounting of them – that differences and boundaries are created and maintained. Anytime Protestants were mentioned by respondents it was in terms of them being different. This was evident when Tony (Belltown 22) described a visit to Northern Ireland. He went to an Anglican service and while he laughed and joked about it, and tried to gloss over the difference, the story he told is really about the boundaries and differences that exist.

Tony: It's fairly important to me to be Catholic but I think there is very little difference between the Catholics and the Anglicans we'll say. When we went to visit our friends in Northern Ireland who are Anglicans we went to church with them, you know.

Interviewer: Did that sort of make [Tony interrupts].

Tony: No, I enjoyed it.

Interviewer: Did you feel out of place there at all?

Tony: Eh not really, but everybody knew that we were Catholics and they were, oh they did yeah.

Interviewer: Did they?

Tony: Yeah, they did and I'm sure the people that brought had kind of said 'we're here with some of the' you know now the Northern Ireland accent 'some of the Catholics are with us' [Tony says this in a thick Northern Irish brogue and laughing]. I remember the first time we went was at a wedding, you know and the minister got up and says 'we want to welcome our friends from Dublin.' Now he didn't say 'welcome our catholic friends' you know but (laughing).

However, while the difference between Protestants is very real in terms of them being constituted as different, what makes them different can often be unclear. This is how Bridget tried to announce the difference.

... I don't know the difference between a Catholic and a Protestant. I think they're all the same really. So I'd, no I'd, I'd just say I have some type of faith like that. I believe that we go somewhere afterwards but I don't know what a Protestant person would believe so I just see myself as the same really. I wouldn't ever announce that I'm Catholic.(Millfield 3)

Although it is important not to confuse the logic of sociology with the logic of Bridget's thought, there is an indication that while she sees the difference between Catholic and Protestant as real, she also sees the difference as arbitrary, something that is culturally constructed. But then she continues by announcing that she does not know what a Protestant person would believe. And, of course, this is crucial in the construction of identity and difference. She has grown up in a culture in which Protestants were seen as different, although she may not have ever understood what it was that made them different. Now she does not see the religious difference, or herself as being a Catholic, as that significant.

Forms of Catholic Identity

The majority of Irish Catholics may readily identify themselves as Catholics, may accept the beliefs and teachings of the Church, and may go to Mass regularly and receive the sacraments, but they are far from being a homogeneous group. There is a considerable variety in the way that they are Catholic. Inglis (1998) identified three dimensions to Irish Catholic habitus: magical-devotional, legalistic-orthodox, individually-principled. These were not mutually distinct. They could overlap and people could move between them depending on context and personal circumstances. The present typology has more to do with identification with the institutional Church and being Catholic. Typologies and analytic distinctions are heuristic devices to help

delineate and classify a heterogeneous category of people who, in reality, are not neatly classified and may move between the classifications.

Strong Catholics

Strong Catholics identify strongly with the institutional Church. They accept fundamental Christian beliefs and most teachings of the Church, they engage regularly in Church rituals and practices, and to adhere to its rules and regulations. They are deeply involved in the life of the Church. They are happy and proud to be Catholic. Their Catholic identity is a coat that they wearing willingly, if not passionately. Being Catholic is not something that is confined to backstage behaviour. It is manifested publicly. Being Catholic permeates every other aspect of their lives and if there was a conflict between the teachings of the Church and their family, work or social life, it is likely that the Church would come first. Strong Catholics have faith in the institutional Church. They remain loyal to it despite the recent scandals.

Louise is an 84 year-old single woman. She is deeply imbued in a Catholic habitus. When she was asked how she would describe herself, she immediately did so in terms of being Irish and a Catholic. ‘Well I suppose I would class myself as very Irish and my religion means everything to me. I’m a RC, Roman Catholic and I always had a great love for my country.’ She goes to Mass everyday. She knows the names of the churches in the surrounding area and the saints after which they are named. She has a detailed knowledge of the missions. She loves to hear stories from priests who have returned from various parts of the world. She thinks the reason why the Irish are liked is that they were never colonisers but instead brought education and Catholicism to the natives. She talked animatedly about the Pope’s visit to Ireland in 1979 and her pilgrimages to Rome and the Holy Land. What makes Louise a strong Catholic is the passion with which she talks about her religion. There is a sense that being Catholic is central to her everyday life, to how she sees and understands herself and the world.

Oh yes like when we had a visit from the pope to the Phoenix Park, that was one of the highlights I suppose of my life and then of course I went to Rome to see him. Now in the Phoenix Park you didn’t get near him but I went to Rome to see him but the real highlight of my life is because of my religion was going to Israel, going to the Holy Land as we call it to see where our lord walked and it was authentic we were told, the place where our lord walked, to see where he, to see the stations of the cross, the follow in the stations of the cross, to follow his footsteps to Calvary, to see the garden of Gethsemane and all those places, the Mount of Olives, to see Nazareth where he was born, to see where he grew up and to see part of the carpenter’s shed, and part of, they still preserve you know part of his carpentry, part of his tools that he used like and the wood there and you know all those things, that was the highlight of my life.(Millfield 11).

Michael is a 63 year old man, originally from the West of Ireland, who has been living in Belltown for the past 26 years. He sees himself as a religious person, and very much as a Catholic. ‘I would have a Catholic approach to most things in my life.’ He is a dedicated and loyal to the Church. He sees the scandals as ‘sad, but I think that in a way that’s it’s a very good cathartic operation. He sees the scandals as a

‘cleansing operation’. He says that ‘in the long term it’s a good thing, and over the centuries there’s been many scandals in the Catholic Church and somehow it has righted itself back on the right road.’ (Belltown 12)

It would appear from the present study as well as the findings from the European Values Surveys (1990 and 1999) that strong Catholics may be becoming less rigid or legalistic in their adherence to Church rules and regulations. Certainly the notion of having to attend Mass every Sunday seems to be on the decline. A comparison of the findings between the EVS studies of 1990 and 1999 indicates that the level of attendance at Mass dropped for all age groups. Although the decline in weekly attendance was greatest among 18–30 year olds (-27 per cent) it was also high among the 31–49 year olds (-17 per cent) which may be an indication that the notion of middle-age Catholics returning to orthodox practice once they marry and have children, may not be happening so often.

What needs to be investigated is to what extent strong Catholics are still prominent in everyday life in Ireland, to what extent they manifest their Catholic identity outside of the religious field. We are well used to the notion of strong Protestants in Northern Ireland, but are there any equivalents in the South? Have strong Catholics disappeared out of political life in the Republic? Are there any Catholic equivalents to Ian Paisley? Thirty years ago, strong Catholic politicians such as Oliver J. Flanagan had a high public profile. In 1974, the Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave, voted against his own government’s proposed legislation to allow chemists to sell contraceptives to married couples (Lee, 1989: 479). But the question is not just to what extent strong Catholics have disappeared from the political field in the Republic, it is also to what extent they have disappeared in the fields of education, health and social welfare. Indeed, what needs to be examined most is to what extent they have disappeared within families, communities and everyday social life.

Identity is about how individuals see and understand themselves, the people with whom they have a sense of commonality and belonging. In everyday social life, identity revolves around an ongoing ontological sense of self, the sense of being different from other individuals and the sense of being the same. For most people, seeing and understanding oneself as a Catholic is an inherited social identity. The question is to what extent this self-understanding permeates everyday social life, when, where and among whom does it manifest itself. In the open-ended approach used in this study, we have found so far very little evidence of people immediately and spontaneously describing themselves as Catholic when asked at the beginning of the interview how they would describe themselves.

Cultural Catholics

In his study of world religions, Demerath (2001) made a distinction between religious Jews (who were orthodox in their religious beliefs and practices) and cultural Jews (who were not believers but who identified with fellow Jews). He then used this distinction to differentiate Catholics in Poland. Cultural Catholics, he argued,

weren’t really believers, and while they attended church at least sporadically, they had a good deal of contempt for some of the Church officials and policies. Still Catholicism was part of their national and family cultural heritage, and they were proud of what the Church had done to help free Poland from the Communist regime (2001: 43).

Demerath went on to argue that there were cultural Catholics and cultural Protestants in Northern Ireland. He maintained that 'neither are much involved in their churches, but both are caught up in the religious legacies handed down from family to family, neighbourhood to neighbourhood, and community to community (2001: 49).

Cultural Catholics tend to identify less with the institutional Church and more with Catholic heritage and being Catholic. They are more detached from the institution. They are less rigid in adhering to the Church's teachings, rules and regulations. They are more open to debate and discussion. But they are not open to changing their religion. Being Catholic is like some indelible mark that they have accepted and have no desire to change. It is literally part of what they are in the same way that they are, for example, white, male and Irish. Cultural Catholics are not passionate about their identity. It is a coat they have always worn, they feel comfortable in it, and they not look for any other because, in their eyes, no other coat would fit or suit their needs.

For cultural Catholics being Catholic is not something which is questioned or thought about much. Some respondents had difficulty articulating what being a Catholic meant to them. It was as if they had been asked what it meant to them to be a man or a woman. This is how Mary, a fifty year old woman, married with four children, described her Catholicism.

Well, if you're brought up with it, it's always in you. I was brought up a Catholic, I would say, I wouldn't go with the teachings of the Church on an awful lot of the stuff. I would actually go with 'don't do any harm to anyone and look after yourself.' I wouldn't go to Mass and yet I would have brought up my kids like that. But when they hit a certain age it was their choice whether they wanted to go to Mass or stay home. I wouldn't have the structure of religion involved in my life, but yet I would take an awful lot of their teachings. I just wouldn't go with a lot of it, and if they'd say 'no contraception' I would say 'contraception', cause I wasn't, you know now what I mean. That's basically Irish, being Irish, I was born Irish, I'll die Irish. It's just not a big part of my life. It's just there, something that's there. (Millfield 2)

We can see this acceptance of being Catholic as a form of accepted cultural inheritance in the way Rachel tried to articulate what it was like for her to be a Catholic. When asked if being Catholic was important to her, she said 'It's just habit.' She went to Mass, but not every Sunday.

Probably go once a month or something like that you know. Ahh wouldn't be as involved because it was really shoved down our necks, do you know what I mean. So probably wouldn't be as big into but still in the back of your mind you have something that you'd . . . I don't even know if I believe, I don't know how to answer that one. I keep saying that, talking about that to my husband. He's a real you know believer in life after death and all that. I still bring the kids and all that, Christened them, they made their Communion and made their Confirmation and we still say to them every once in a while 'come on we go round to Mass' or something like that but I don't know whether that's, whether I'm that way because it was shoved down our neck and because in the back of it all it was there that if I don't do it there was a bit of guilt. I don't know (Millfield 8)

It is clear from how Rachel responded that being Catholic is not something about which she has developed a clear position. Although she is flummoxed, she seems to accept that being Catholic is simply part of what she is. If she has critically reflected about it in the past, she has not come to any definite conclusion. What comes across from this is a mixture of involvement and detachment. She says about being Catholic: 'It's just habit, yeah.' She elaborates:

so I'm not I suppose greatly religious and everything yet I'd have . . . I don't know, silly things medals and stupid things like that you know think you know but I suppose the whole church is a disaster now anyways you know. The priests they ran this country they did long before the government did you know.(Millfield 8)

Bridget is in her twenties. This is how she responded when she was asked if she was a religious person.

Bridget: . . . I was always, we were always brought up as Catholic but I never, I don't know anything about any other religions to know you know, I wouldn't like to start choosing which one is better. I just know there's something there.

Interviewer: Would you take any practices, any teachings or anything of the Catholic Church and apply them to your own life?

Bridget: [pause] Not really. Well, [pause] out of the Ten Commandments I hope I follow a lot of them. But no, there's nothing that I'd . . . I wouldn't be very religious like. But I'd like, I mean I'd if I was to have a child I'd get them baptised a Catholic, get them confirmed and stuff. I'd continue that just because it's in the fam [stops her statement] Well I suppose, [pause] I suppose I would believe like. You know but I wouldn't like to say that I believe in one particular god 'cause I don't know of any other gods, you know that way. And I wouldn't like to, I wouldn't want to, I wouldn't see like religion as a real part of my life that I'd like to read up on other gods and then decide which one's better like. I don't understand people doing that.(Millfield 3)

Cultural Catholics, then, appear happy to bring up their children as Catholics, and to have them attend Catholic schools. They may have lost some confidence in the Church because of the scandals concerning the sexual abuse of children by priests and brothers, but they like the rituals and celebrations that surround baptisms, First Holy Communion, Confirmations, weddings and funerals. Even those who rarely give much time or thought to the Church would find it difficult to forgo these events, or to celebrate them in a Protestant church. They are not in favour of radical change in their lives. In recent years, bishops have spoken out about the lax attitude of these Catholics and have said, for example, that couples in irregular unions should not present themselves for Holy Communion. The strain between the Church and cultural Catholics is exacerbated when their unorthodox lifestyle and beliefs are publicly displayed in institutional settings or when the Church's teachings are openly challenged.

And yet there is little evidence of the type of cultural Catholic that one finds in, for example, France where homosexuals can be open about their sexual orientation but also see their Catholic heritage as central to their identity and independent of

Church teaching. In an interview with *Le Figaro Magazine* (10 July 2004) the new director of Radio France spoke openly about his homosexuality and being Catholic. Both were central to his identity, his lifestyle and habitus. Being Catholic, he said, 'signifies that I accept my roots and that I claim a certain type of rapport with others and the world.' In her study of Catholics in America, Dillon (1999) revealed that there are many Catholics who go beyond seeing their Catholic identity as part of their cultural heritage and are actively engaged in challenging some of the Church's teachings. In this respect, they are perhaps closer to being creative Catholics.

Creative Catholics

The concept of the *à la carte* Catholic has been used to describe those Catholics who are no longer orthodox, who no longer adhere legalistically to the rules and regulations of the Church, but rather chose which beliefs, teachings and practices to adhere to and follow, and which to ignore. The *à la carte* Catholic could be someone who may go to Mass regularly and receive Holy Communion, but who would distance themselves from the Church when it came to issues such as using contraceptives, having sex before marriage, obtaining a divorce, going to Confession, observing days of fast and abstinence, and accepting belief in hell and the infallibility of the Pope.

However, there may be a new type of Catholic emerging in Ireland who not only chooses between different beliefs, teachings and practices, but mixes these with non-Catholic beliefs and practices. In other words, these Catholics no longer, so to speak, confine themselves to the Catholic menu as to how to live a spiritual and moral life, but look at other religious menus and mix and match according to their tastes and preferences. There is an increasing number of guides on how to be spiritual and live a good life. These range from new ageism to yoga. What is of interest is how these beliefs and practices become assimilated with Catholicism. What ends up on the religious plate of Irish Catholics could then be a selection of beliefs and practices that have their origins in Buddhism, Taoism, Paganism, and so forth. Take, for example, the recent growth in the cult of angels. The belief in angels may have existed in paganism and Judaism, but was mainly developed within Christianity. However, reference to archangels and guardian angels seems to have declined within institutional discourse and popular Catholicism over the last fifty years. But it would appear that it is emerging in a different guise. There are now angel therapists and workshops. These have been described as 'a colourful mishmash of often contradictory religious and secular ideas' which 'borrow freely from Christianity, Buddhism, the Japanese reiki tradition and self-empowerment' (*The Irish Times* 23 October 2004).

It may well be that in an increasingly globalised culture, people are developing eclectic tastes not just in music and food, but also in religion. Not only is religion becoming increasingly privatised, but people are being exposed to different beliefs and practices which offer a wide range of possibilities of mixing and matching to suit specific needs and interests (see Bayer 1990). It may well be that in a global religious culture, not only will religion become more privatised but individually designed and packaged. What needs to be investigated is to what extent there is among creative Catholics a greater affinity with some world religions more than others, for example, with Buddhist beliefs and practices rather than Muslim.

What distinguishes creative Catholics from cultural Catholics is their interest and involvement in religious life without being orthodox or legalistic. Miriam is a 48 year old woman born who grew up in a very traditional Catholic home. She tries to go

to Mass everyday: 'I would go to Mass, I would go to daily Mass, not every day but I would.' She likes to go to different churches, not necessarily for Mass, but to have 'more time out for me to be in a spiritual place.' But Mass for Miriam is not a strictly orthodox affair. 'Sometimes I am at Mass and I am, you know, it's more eh spiritual thing trying to connect with the universal god. When she was young she always had a problem about people either going to heaven or hell. She was about 9 or 10 years old when she first heard the notion of reincarnation. 'I heard that theory and that hit me, not here [points to her head] but here [points to her heart]. I said that is absolutely true. And it explained to me life's inner qualities very clearly.' Miriam continued:

I think I am very spiritual, I think there is a Celtic spirituality there and I do believe it, but that is probably a bit new-agey and maybe I wasn't always aware of it. But mm I do think this whole tradition of banshees and ghosts like, eh, I was kind of probably afraid growing up now of ghosts and that kind of thing, but it confirmed in me a deep belief in the other world which I do believe in, you know reincarnation and souls. So I think that is probably Celtic and Irish, you know.(Belltown 19)

Creative Catholics have a strong identification with being Catholic. What differentiates them from cultural Catholics is that they are more religiously adventurous. They are anxious and willing to explore alternative ways of being spiritual and moral. They are willing to take religious risks, to mix and match Catholic beliefs and practices with those derived from other religions and philosophies. It used to be that Catholics would have a personal religious identity which would mark out them out as different – it could be a devotion to a particular saint, place of pilgrimage, church or religious order. It would appear that this devotional religious behaviour is decline. However, in their desire to be spiritual and moral, Irish Catholics may be exploring new forms of meditation, alternative ways of transcendence, and different ways of caring for themselves.

Outside of the religious field and engagement in specifically religious behaviour, creative Catholics are also more willing and able to blend their Catholicism with what may appear to be sometimes incompatible or contradictory philosophies and fields of knowledge. The best example of this in recent years has perhaps the marriage of feminism and Catholicism (see Condrón 1989).

Alienated Catholics

In the 2002 Census of Population, there were 146, 258 (5.5 per cent) people returned as having no religion or not stating their religion. There were only 1,528 who said that they were either agnostics or atheists. As previous censuses have shown over 90 per cent of the population to be Catholic, it is probably safe to assume that most of these are alienated Catholics. This corresponds roughly with the 7 per cent of respondents in the European Values Survey who said that religion was not important in their lives. Although

When Joe was asked if religion was important to him, he was quite categorical. 'No it's not, no. Definitely not.' When he was probed as to whether he identified with any religion, he remained definite.

Joe: Ah, well, not really no. No. No. I really don't, well it never really comes up. It's like, I wouldn't put anyone else down because they're a different religion or anything like that and [pause] I wouldn't expect them to do the same to me. Then again, I wouldn't tell them what religion I am because it doesn't, it's not a major factor in my life religion?

Interviewer: And why is that would you say? [short pause] Just doesn't appeal to you or?

Joe: It doesn't appeal to me and I just really think organised religion is wrong but then again I don't force my beliefs onto anybody else and they seem to be doing that all the time so. (Millfield 4)

Many of the respondents in the study made reference to the recent scandals in the Catholic Church, particularly in relation to child sexual abuse. However, most of them said that it had not affected their faith. It would appear that those who no longer identified themselves with the Catholic Church or with being a Catholic, had become alienated before the scandals.

Mothers played a key role in passing on the faith and keeping Ireland so Catholic for so long. However, it would appear that the decline in the number of strong Catholics and the rise in the number who have become alienated from the institutional Church, can be linked to women who abandoned the traditional image of the Irish Catholic mother. Hilliard (2003) found that the Church's teaching on fertility control was a crucial factor in this process. For Fidelma, this was the more important scandal in Irish society. She was asked if a lot of people felt like she did about the Church.

They do now yes and I think that they were so upset and like there's still more and more and more. It's not finished; there's still more and more coming out and I'm, not saying all the priests are bad – they're not. I'm not saying all the nuns are bad – they're not. A lot of them I'd say were unhappy themselves and they took it out on other people but the control that, not individual – well they had it, individual priests had that control as well but the Church itself, they handed down these edicts or whatever they called them and you know you couldn't take contraceptives. They weren't the ones having thirteen and fourteen and fifteen children. They weren't the ones that buried maybe ten and twelve children and buried the mother of ten and twelve children. They weren't the ones who had to put up with the abuse of alcoholic husbands either, you know 'offer it up to god.' (Millfield 5)

Conclusion

Any changes in the way Irish people see and understand themselves as Catholics – the ways in which they identify with each other and with the institutional Church – have to put within the context of long-term processes of change. Throughout the long nineteenth century of Irish Catholicism – which effectively lasted up to the 1970s – Irish Catholics developed a very strong identification with the institutional Church. This was linked in with an interest in becoming part of an economically developed, nationally independent, modern, civilised society. It was also linked to a more specific religious interest in becoming as spiritual and moral as their Protestant colonial oppressors who during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had tried to symbolically dominate them. Irish Catholicism was an equal and opposite reaction to

English Protestantism. Whatever else Irish Catholics were or became, they did not become Protestants. During the twentieth century, particularly with the establishment of Catholic civil society, the tables were turned and it was Catholics who symbolically dominated Protestants. At the same time, there was a decline in the importance of Catholic cultural capital in social, political and economic life (Inglis 2003). It was no longer necessary to identify strongly with the Catholic Church to be successful. It was no longer necessary to be an orthodox Catholic. However, although the influence of the institutional Church on the Irish Catholic habitus may have declined, Catholicism as a way of life, as a way of being in the world, did not decline. As the respondents in the CII study indicate, Irish Catholics still like the feeling of being spiritual and moral, they like being recognised and accepted as part of a community and the feeling of belonging and bonding. Being Catholic is part of their cultural heritage. It is not something that will disappear quickly.

One of the tasks of the CII project was to go beyond the type of understanding that is generated from survey data, where deliberate prompting though precoded questions often leads respondents to make artificial choices. We wanted to discover how identity works, how people see and understand themselves. How do they talk about themselves. When asked at the beginning of the interview to talk about themselves, most people gave a brief autobiographical statement. Michael, for example, gave his name, his age (63 years), and his occupation (community work) (Belltown12) Eileen gave her name, her age (27 years) her occupation (bank teller) and described the degree course she was doing in university (Millfield 10). This is how Joan described herself:

Well my name is and I am 59 years of age and I am separated for the past 26 years. I have 3 children and I have one granddaughter and I am here on a community employment scheme. I worked all my life, well from when I was separated I went back to work and worked all my life up until 2 years ago. And 2 years ago I packed it in because my mother wasn't well and my little granddaughter had cancer.(Belltown 13)

Most people described themselves in terms of their age, their family, children, work and how long they had lived in Belltown or Millfield. One of the tasks of the process was to try and allow issues of identity to emerge in conversation rather than having to prompt the participant. Most respondents started by referring to their age, where they live, where they grew up, their marital status, number of children (if any), occupation. With the exception of Louise, the elderly single woman from Millfield, few respondents described themselves first and foremost as a Catholic. When it comes to religious identity, she is almost at the opposite end of the continuum compared to someone like Joe. When he was asked to describe himself he responded: 'Very kind, generous and out-going.' He sees himself as an ethical human being above all else.

What we are seeing here perhaps is the demise of the influence of grand, ascribed social identities in the way contemporary Irish people see and understand themselves. Churches and nations are constructed rather than imagined communities. They are dependent on getting people to think of themselves as Catholic and Irish. This study would suggest that people still do think of themselves in these terms, but it is not part of their everyday image of themselves. It operates within specific contexts such as encountering people from other religions, going to Mass, going abroad or watching the national team in sports. It may well be that it is only when culture becomes unsettled, when the routine and ordinariness of everyday life is threatened,

that ascribed social identities come to the fore. Otherwise they remain hidden beneath the surface of social life, only coming to mind and finding expression, in response to specific prompts.

Notes

1. The issue here is the strength of belief. If Catholics fully believe in salvation, life after death and heaven, it is a sin to disobey Church teachings, and that people who die in mortal sin will go to hell, then one would expect that they would put their belief into practice by adhering to Church teachings. However, the proportion of what can be termed *strong* Catholics would appear to be declining, not just in Europe but in Catholic Ireland. Davie (2000) argues that in analysing transformations in European religion, the task is to examine the connections between unusually low levels of active religiousness and relatively high levels of nominal belief.
2. In some respects, the concept of institutional involvement and detachment links into Elias's general theory of involvement and detachment, particularly if we see institutional involvement as associated with higher fantasy, magical-mythical thinking and institutional detachment as associated with more objective, scientific, reality-testing thinking (see Elias 1956; Mennell 159–80).
3. The aim of this study is to identify, describe and analyse how individuals in contemporary Ireland understand and construct their identities, particularly their national and ethno-national identities, in a context of large-scale demographic, economic, social and political change. The study involves field-based interviews, mostly selected on a randomised basis, but stratified to be broadly representative of key social categories. These interviews use a mixture of open-ended and semi-structured questions. The research will be conducted in four geographical areas of Ireland, North and South. The present paper is based on interviews conducted in the two southern geographical areas.
4. Irish Catholics in everyday life participate in 'multiple, more or less discrepant, universes of discourses.' As they move in and out of these universes or social fields, we need to discover how a sense of being Catholic, of Catholic social identity, is announced and represented (see Barth 1983: 81–93). People may have been born and raised a Catholic, they may have an ascribed Catholic social identity, they may have inherited a Catholic habitus, but the question is how this identity is actively negotiated by individuals, how it is presented with other social and personal identities, as they move in and out of different social fields and universes of discourses in the course of everyday life (see Jenkins 1996: 102)
5. What is of issue here is the way in which Catholics become symbolically constituted and imagined as a community and how this sense of belonging is constituted through see and understanding themselves as different from other religious groups, particularly Protestants – and, of course, the way Protestants see and understand them as different (see Cohen, 1985).
6. For an insight into the habitus of young Irish Catholics and how they see and understand the world, themselves and being Catholic, see Brennan (1991) and Dowling (2000).

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