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Negating the Francis Effect?

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NEGATING THE FRANCIS EFFECT?:
THE EFFECT OF THE ABUSE CRISIS IN IRELAND¹

Gladys Ganiel

The Catholic Church in Ireland has been rocked by abuse scandals. Mass attendance – once around 90 percent – has fallen to around 36 percent. On 25 and 26 August 2018, Pope Francis visited Ireland as part of the World Meeting of Families (WMOF). But as his visit approached, the national conversation became dominated by the issue of abuse – so much so that the visit seemed to have become an unofficial referendum on the papal response to abuse. An *Irish Times* poll after the event confirmed that a majority of Irish people believed Francis had not done “enough” on abuse during his visit (Leahy 2018a). But Ireland’s ‘practising’ Catholics had very different opinions about the visit than their fellow citizens. A survey conducted a few weeks after the visit revealed that 50 percent of practising Catholics, defined as those who attend religious services at least once a month, thought Francis *had* done enough to address abuse.

Francis’ visit was only the second time a pope had visited Ireland. In 1979, John Paul II came to mark the centenary of the apparitions at the Shrine of Knock, in the rural west of Ireland. John Paul II’s visit is one of the most significant events in Irish popular memory and social history. At that time, 93 percent of the population of the Republic of Ireland identified as Catholic. Around 2.7 million people saw John Paul II in events in seven locations. It is estimated 1.25 million attended mass in the Phoenix Park. That was then a third of the population of the Republic, and a quarter of the population of the whole island.² On the one

¹ The Amarach survey was funded by Queen’s University Belfast. I wish to thank Pat Leahy from the *Irish Times* and Jody Corcoran from the *Irish/Sunday Independent* for sharing full results of polls their newspapers conducted around Francis’ visit. John Brewer and Vincent O’Sullivan supported the development of the survey.

² The island of Ireland contains two political jurisdictions: the Republic of Ireland, which has had a large Catholic majority since the establishment of the state in 1921; and Northern Ireland, which is part of the United

hand, John Paul II's visit affirmed the place of Catholicism in Irish identity – his enthusiastic reception seemed to set Ireland apart as a truly Catholic country in a secularizing Europe. On the other hand, some commentators now point to this period as the beginning of the end of traditional Irish Catholicism (Maher and O'Brien 2017). Within a few short years, two of the clerics who had prominent roles in the celebrations would be exposed as having fathered children: Eamonn Casey, the Bishop of Galway; and Michael Cleary, a popular broadcaster known as “the singing priest.” By the late 1990s and 2000s, the horror and scale of clerical child sexual abuse in Ireland had become widely known, in large part due to a series of State inquiries. John Paul II's visit may have prompted a type of euphoria in the Church, but it was not clear at the time that the enthusiasm would be short-lived. In my own work, I have described contemporary Ireland as a “post-Catholic” religious landscape (Ganiel 2016). Others have written books with titles like *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland* (Kenny 2000) and *The End of Irish Catholicism?* (Twomey 2002).

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the Francis Effect in Ireland, defined as “the presumed positive impact of Pope Francis on Catholicism” (Zylstra 2018). The research is framed around Francis' visit, because it provided an opportunity to explore if or to what extent Francis' pontificate and his visit have changed perceptions of the Catholic Church and religious practice in Ireland. First, it describes secularization in Ireland, exploring how religious practice has declined so dramatically between the visits of John Paul II and Francis. It argues that even though Ireland has been secularizing rapidly, it still remains one of the most religious countries in Europe – making it potentially fertile ground for the Francis Effect. Second, it outlines the methods of the study, including narrative analysis of how Ireland's “newspaper of record”, the *Irish Times*, covered the build-up and the events of

Kingdom. About 45 percent of Northern Ireland's population identifies as Catholic. Despite the two political jurisdictions, all the churches on the island are organized on an all-island basis.

Francis' visit; and a nationally-representative poll commissioned by the author after the visit. In the month of August, 46 percent of articles in the *Irish Times* about the pope engaged with the abuse crisis in some way, reflecting public indignation about how the Catholic Church and Francis himself had handled abuse. The survey revealed that the most popular view among Irish people was that Francis had not done enough to address abuse, and that the visit had not been a healing time for victims and survivors. At the same time, it found significant differences in the opinions of practising Catholics and everyone else, pointing to evidence of a Francis Effect among Ireland's most devout. The chapter concludes by arguing that even though the Francis Effect has had some impact on practising Catholics, it has had a more limited impact on the structures of the Catholic Church. Francis' ability to revive Catholicism in Ireland is limited by the Church itself, and especially by its failures to create robust structures for dealing with abuse.

Secularization in Ireland

When John Paul II visited Ireland, there was still some justification for the well-known moniker "holy, Catholic Ireland." More than 90 percent of the population of the Republic identified as Catholic, and weekly mass attendance was somewhere between 91 and 87 percent.³ Tom Inglis (1998) argued that the Catholic Church had established a "moral monopoly", with the Church shaping an all-encompassing Catholic *habitus* that disciplined people's actions and behaviours. The State also had handed much of the responsibility for running hospitals and schools over to the Church. Catholic social teaching was reflected in bans on contraception, divorce, and abortion in all but the most restrictive of circumstances. In Northern Ireland, Catholics were a minority and the Church could not be expected to influence the Protestant, unionist-dominated Government that held sway until it was brought

³ Weekly attendance in 1972 was 91 percent. The next available year is 1984, where the figure is 87 percent. See: <https://faithsurvey.co.uk/irish-census.html>, accessed 30 July 2018.

down by the Troubles in 1972. Yet even in Northern Ireland the Church secured control over the education of people from Catholic backgrounds, and Catholics maintained similarly high levels of weekly mass attendance.

This was not the Ireland that greeted Francis. In the Republic, the percentage of those identifying as Catholic is now 78 percent, according to the 2016 Census. Mass attendance has declined to 36 percent (Quinn 2017). More people than ever are choosing to identify as “no religion” or “not stated.” In the 2016 Census, this was 12 percent in the Republic, up from eight percent in 2011 and six percent in 2006.⁴ Contraception was legalized in 1980, and restrictive laws on divorce and abortion were overturned in referendums in 1995 and 2018. In 2015, Ireland became the first country in the world to approve same-sex marriage in a referendum. The Church’s remaining influence in health and education is expected to be dismantled in the coming years. In Northern Ireland, mass attendance declined from 95 percent in 1968 to 39 percent in 2012 (Hayes and Dowds 2010: 3). Religious identification in Northern Ireland remained stable among Catholics, even increasing from 41 to 43 percent between 1968 and 2012. This is probably primarily due to demographics: the percentage of the overall population from Catholic backgrounds is growing, and the Protestant-background population is declining due to lower birth and higher emigration rates. The “no religion” Census figure in Northern Ireland is 17 percent, up from 13 percent in 2008 and nine percent in 1998.

Secularization in other parts of Western Europe began earlier, and was linked to wider processes of modernization that gathered pace in the 1960s. Ireland also exhibited some signs of secularization in the 1960s (Inglis 1998; Foster 2007; Fuller 2004). But secularization did not really take off in Ireland until the 1990s. In the Republic, weekly attendance dropped

⁴ The Census includes categories of lapsed Catholic, atheist, agnostic, and lapsed Church of Ireland, which I added to ‘no religion’ and ‘not stated.’ If only ‘no religion’ and ‘not stated’ are calculated, the figure is just under 10 percent.

from 79 percent in 1991 to 60 percent in 1998, then further to 48 percent in 2002.⁵ The 1990s was the decade in which the horror and extent of clerical abuse began to be revealed; it was also when the Republic's economic miracle, the "Celtic Tiger", began to transform the country from one of the poorest in Europe to one of the wealthiest. A few studies have evaluated the impact of the abuse scandals on religious identification, belief and practice – with a cautious consensus emerging that the scandals have been much more damaging to the "institutional" Catholic Church, than to people's belief in God (Goode et al 2003; Iona Institute 2011). In Northern Ireland, the most notable drop in religious attendance came after 1998. This was the year in which the Good Friday Agreement was signed, signalling the end of the Troubles. This decline seemed to confirm, in part, the long-held hypotheses that the violence of the Troubles had inflated religious practice in Northern Ireland, because people had used religion as a proxy to identify with their ethno-political group (Nic Ghiolla Phadraig 2009).

These trends seem to indicate that the "holy, Catholic Ireland" that hosted John Paul II has secularized, similar to other European countries. But these trends also may indicate that Irish Catholicism is liberalizing, with practising Catholics more likely to listen to their own consciences rather than rely on Church teachings, to challenge Church teachings they disagree with, or to believe that Church teachings need not be reflected in the laws of the State.

Previously, I have gone so far as to argue that Ireland is now "post-Catholic" (Ganiel 2016). While my use of this term indicates an acceptance that Ireland is secularizing, it does not mean that Ireland was once Catholic, and now it is not. Rather, I use the term post-Catholic to indicate that a *particular form of Irish Catholicism* has been displaced. This was a

⁵ See: <https://faithsurvey.co.uk/irish-census.html>, accessed 30 July 2018.

Catholicism that had a monopoly on religious life, was a defining characteristic of national identity, had a strong relationship with state power (in the Republic), elevated the status of priests to exceptionally high levels, and emphasized the evils of sexual sin (Inglis, 2014, 1998; Fuller, 2004). My use of the term post-Catholic signals *a shift in consciousness* in which the institutional Catholic Church is no longer held in high esteem by many, including practising Catholics. This is akin to how Jurgen Habermas (2008) used the term “post-secular” when he wrote about Europe. Habermas asserted that the post-secular is characterized by a shift in consciousness in the way Europeans think about the public role of religion. It is not that Europe was once secular and now it is not; rather, Europeans have recognized that religion is not going away, and it will continue to influence society and politics.

Similarly, Catholicism in Ireland has not gone away. Pew’s (2018: 95) report on “Being Christian in Western Europe” revealed that the Republic is Western Europe’s third most “religiously observant” country, with 24 percent showing “high levels of religious commitment.” Pew’s religiously observant index included “frequency of attendance at religious services, frequency of prayer, degree of importance of religion in the respondent’s life and belief in God.” Only Portugal (37 percent) and Italy (27 percent) scored higher than Ireland. And although religious practice is declining most rapidly among young people, this generation is also more religious than their European peers. A study found that Irish people between 16 and 29 are among the most religious in Europe, alongside the Polish, Portuguese and Lithuanians (Bullivant 2018). About 54 percent of the Irish in this cohort identify as Catholic, alongside 39 percent who say they have no religion. The “no religion” figure seems high, especially when compared with the Republic’s overall “no religion” figure of 12 percent. But the study also found that 24 percent who identify as Catholic attend church weekly, with 43 percent praying weekly – both higher than in other parts of Europe

(Bullivant 2018). These findings are in line with Kristen Andersen's (2010) conclusions, based on her analysis of the Irish data in the 2006 Church and Religion in an Enlarged Europe survey. She noted that while young people did not exhibit the same levels of attachment to religious practice through the *institution* of the Catholic Church, they remained more committed to Catholicism than might be expected. She described this as "a new Catholic habitus ... where being Catholic entails exercising individual choice and being critical and selective, rather than unquestioningly obeying Catholic teachings" (Andersen 2010: 37). I found this same tendency in my own research across all age groups in Ireland, describing it as the practice of "extra-institutional" religion; that is, religion practiced *outside or in addition to* the Catholic Church (Ganiel 2016).

So Ireland remains one of the most religious parts of Europe. It follows that proportionally, there may be more people in Ireland than elsewhere who are open to listening to Francis. Further, the Irish have a high regard for Francis himself: a 2017 poll found that Pope Francis is Ireland's "favourite world leader" (O'Regan 2017). It would appear that Ireland is potentially fertile ground for the Francis Effect.

Methods

This research investigated the Francis Effect in Ireland through the lens of the 2018 papal visit. I adopted two methods. First, I conducted a narrative analysis of media coverage of the build-up and events of Francis' visit in the *Irish Times*. The *Irish Times* has a circulation of nearly 78,000 between its print and digital editions, the second-largest in Ireland (Slattery 2018). There were other media sources that could have been analysed, including the national broadcaster RTE; the *Irish Independent*, the most-widely read national newspaper; and popular online news sources like thejournal.ie. I chose a print publication because I thought it

would offer greater depth for narrative analysis. The *Irish Independent* has a larger circulation than the *Irish Times* – nearly 93,000 (Slattery 2018). Its larger circulation is likely due to the *Irish Independent's* greater popularity outside the Dublin metropolitan area. This can be traced in part to the *Irish Times's* historical roots as the newspaper of the (Protestant) Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, even though this is an association that has since passed. Ultimately, I selected the *Irish Times* due to its acknowledged status as the Republic's "newspaper of record".

I was interested in how the *Irish Times* reported on the build-up to the visit and the event itself. I began my analysis on 1 May 2018, and concluded with the weekend edition on 1 September 2018. This fell exactly one week after Francis' visit. This time-frame was sufficient to track the frequency of stories mentioning Francis, to identify any issues brought up by his visit, and to analyse the stories. I accessed the *Irish Times* through a searchable database in my university's library, which featured online images of the print edition of the newspaper. I used the search term "Pope Francis". This turned up stories apart from those specifically about the visit, although these were a minority. Over the four-month period, there were 314 stories that mentioned Francis (21 in May, 21 in June, 16 in July, and 256 in August and on 1 September). I included contributions from readers on the letters page in this count. I identified six main themes in the stories: the abuse crisis (in Ireland and internationally), the role of women in the Catholic Church, the role of LGBTQI people in the Catholic Church, the logistics of the visit (what the pope was doing, how people could get to events, road closures, etc.), citizens' personal perspectives on the pope and his visit, and the pope's personality.

As the visit drew closer, it became clear that abuse had become the dominant theme. In the month of August, 46 percent of articles (including readers' letters to the editor) featured the abuse crisis in some way, overshadowing stories dealing with the other five

themes.⁶ As befits the topic of abuse, the tone of most of these stories was highly critical. There were some stories and letters expressing hope that Francis' visit would renew the Church, including one that quoted the parish priest at Knock (Kelly 2018). This priest's perspective could be interpreted as hope for a Francis Effect; but it was a perspective that was dwarfed by stories about abuse. Therefore, in the analysis that follows, I focus on the *Irish Times*' coverage of abuse before, during and after Francis' visit.

Second, I commissioned a nationally-representative survey designed to explore a potential Francis Effect. I regarded the Francis Effect as "measurable" in terms of changes in people's perspectives on the Catholic Church or changes in their religious practice since Francis became pope; and in the Irish case, since Francis' visit. People were asked a series of questions about changes in their perspectives on the Catholic Church and about specific religious practices. My questions were included in a regular, monthly omnibus survey conducted by an Irish company, Amarach, which was carried out mid-to-late September 2018.

Irish Times Analysis

In the days and weeks before Francis' visit, *Irish Times* coverage reflected what had become a groundswell of public opinion: the Irish wanted Francis to address abuse during his visit. Coverage during Francis' visit (the edition published the day after Francis departed), presented a rounded picture of Francis' activities. But it was still critical of Francis' and the Church's handling of the abuse crisis. Coverage after the visit was more critical still. The *Irish Times* commissioned a national opinion poll by Ipsos MRBI, and published the results

⁶ Most stories engaged with multiple themes.

two days after Francis' visit. It revealed that a majority of people thought Francis had not done enough to address abuse during his visit.

Before the Visit

Less than two weeks before Francis was due to arrive, a report on abuse and cover-up in the Catholic Church by a Pennsylvania, USA, grand jury was published. This was an international event of such gravity that Francis responded with a pastoral letter on 20 August, *Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the People of God*. On 21 August, the *Irish Times* printed the full text of Francis' letter and published four articles which analysed it. While one story repeated Francis' words that "the Catholic Church had shown 'no care for the little ones' and that 'no effort to beg pardon and to seek repair the harm done will ever be sufficient'" (McGarry 2018a); analyses of the letter were largely critical. The *Irish Times* stories quoted reactions from multiple survivors and victims' campaigners, including a tweet from prominent survivor Marie Collins: "Statements from Vatican or pope should stop telling us how terrible abuse is and how all must be held accountable. Tell us instead what you are doing to hold them accountable. ... 'Working on it' is not an acceptable explanation for decades of 'delay'" (Hilliard 2018). Religion correspondent Patsy McGarry assumed a mocking tone (McGarry 2018b):

In his letter Pope Francis has not advanced church handling of the clerical child sex abuse issue one inch beyond where it was when Pope Benedict sent his letter to the Catholics of Ireland eight years ago. Yes, he talks the talk, but what has changed since? Didn't the Vatican set up the Commission for the Protection of Minors in 2014? And it's as idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean. Ask Marie Collins, the

Irish abuse survivor who resigned from the commission amid frustration with some officials in the Roman Curia. That commission is a toothless pussycat.

The *Irish Times* also reported the results of a survey conducted by the Association of Catholic Priests (ACP). The ACP is associated with liberal expressions of Catholicism; one of its founders, Redemptorist Tony Flannery, has been censored by the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The headline read: "Catholics Want Pope to Respond to Abuse Issue in Ireland"; and the story said: "It would be 'negligent and unacceptable' for Pope Francis not to respond to the abuse issue while in Ireland, a survey of Irish Catholics has found" (McGarry 2018c). Another story covered a speech by Minister for Health Simon Harris, who called the papal visit " 'a once-in-a-generation chance' for the Vatican to accept its role in the cover-up of clerical child sex abuse and the pain it caused by denial and rejection of those who suffered." It also quoted Harris as saying it was "really important that the pope meet victims of abuse on his visit and he hear first hand what they endured and to offer them that commitment in terms of clear actions" (McGarry 2018d). Yet another story reviewed an interview on RTÉ radio with Ross Hamilton, the son of the late Michael Cleary, the "singing priest" mentioned above. Hamilton was homeless at the time of the interview, during which he said "he would like Pope Francis to apologise to the 'whole country' as well as victims of clerical abuse and the children of priests" (Clarke 2018a). The *Irish Times* also reported on groups that were to hold protests during the pope's visit, including at the site of the Bon Secours mother-and-baby home in Tuam. The home, which operated between 1925-1961, separated single mothers from their children and put them up for illegal adoptions in the USA. A local historian has found evidence that around 800 neglected babies and toddlers were buried in an unmarked mass grave in a septic tank adjacent to the home. The Vatican only confirmed that Francis would meet with victims four days before he was due to arrive.

Reporting on the Vatican announcement, the *Irish Times* rather understatedly said: “The topic [abuse] has dominated much of the discussion ahead of his visit following the unexpected release of a letter from Francis just days after fresh revelations of abuse cover-ups by the church emerged in the US” (Clarke 2018b).

During the Visit

The WMOF was 21-26 August. Francis’ visit encompassed the final two days, Saturday and Sunday. On Saturday, he attended the President’s residence, a civic reception with the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) and other dignitaries, Dublin’s Catholic Cathedral, the Capuchin Fathers’ Day Centre for the homeless, and met privately with eight survivors of abuse. He also rode through Dublin in the popemobile and made a speech at the WMOF’s Festival of Families in Croke Park, a large sports stadium. On Sunday morning, he flew to Knock to visit the shrine. He flew back to Dublin for mass in the Phoenix Park, in the same location as John Paul II.

The *Irish Times* does not publish a Sunday edition, so all the events of Saturday and Sunday were covered on Monday 27 August. The front page was given over to two main stories about the visit, headlined: “Pontiff Delivers Good Show in Different Times”, a general overview of his visit (Lord 2018a); and “Pope to Study Memo on Tuam Home”, with a sub-headline of “Estimate puts attendance at Phoenix Park Mass at 130,000, Far Less than Expected” (McGarry 2018e). This story focused on Francis’ reaction to a memo about mother-and-baby homes he received from Minister for Children Katherine Zappone, and revelations from a mother-and-baby home survivor during their private meeting. Inside the paper, pages two to six were devoted to the visit. This included coverage of protests in Dublin and at the mother-and-baby home in Tuam. There was also a 23-page pull-out supplement

with 122 photographs. Two of the photographs were two-page spreads: one of Francis cruising through Dublin in the popemobile; the other of the Phoenix Park mass. In total, there were 49 stories about the visit. I have included in this count 22 short stories based on interviews with 22 people who attended the events. These 22 short stories were all presented on the same page, so could be considered one story. If they are considered one story, the figure would be 28 stories about the visit rather than 49.

The three main ways Francis addressed abuse during his visit were in his private meeting with survivors; when he asked for forgiveness during the penitential rite at the Phoenix Park mass; and in his speech at the civic reception. Francis' pleas for forgiveness at the mass were shaped by his meeting with survivors the previous day. His words were widely regarded as significant, even unprecedented – yet the *Irish Times* coverage insisted that his pleas would not be enough if action did not follow. The headline of one story put it bluntly: “Pope Begs for Forgiveness but Years of Inaction Beg the Question: Why should We?” (Lord 2018b). Some of the survivors who met Francis spoke with the media and revealed that Francis had told them that this was the first time he had ever heard of the mother-and-baby homes, or the Magdalen Laundries, as they are often called in Ireland. They also said Francis referred to those who abused children as “*caca*”, which the translator told them meant “filth you would see in the toilet.” Further, they “asked the pope to use his influence to get the religious orders who ran the mother-and-baby homes to ‘acknowledge their actions and issue an open and unqualified apology’ to mothers and their children”; and to perform an act of healing (McGreevy and Burns 2018).

A story on page two included almost the full text of Francis' pleas for forgiveness at the mass, which was remarkably specific to the Irish context (Power and Carswell 2018):

We ask for forgiveness for those places of exploitation of manual work, that so many young women and men were subjected to... In a special way we ask pardon for all the

abuses committed in various types of institutions run by male or female religious, and by other members of the church. ... We ask forgiveness, for the time that as a church we did not show the survivors of whatever kind of abuse compassion, in the seeking of justice and truth, and concrete actions. ... We ask forgiveness for some members of the church hierarchy, who did not take charge of these painful situations and kept quiet. We ask for forgiveness for all those single mothers who were told that to seek their children that had been separated from them ... that this was a mortal sin, this is not a mortal sin.

The same story pointed out that 500,000 people had been expected to attend the mass, which was free to the public. For health and safety reasons, the organizers had made the mass a ticketed event limited to that number. Those tickets had “sold out”. It is possible practical factors mitigated against attendance: police warnings that people would need to walk for miles to reach the mass (due to road closures), and should treat it like a pilgrimage up Ireland’s holy mountain Croagh Patrick (Burns 2018); and strong winds and heavy showers on the day. Yet the turnout was still regarded as disappointing.

In his speech at the civic reception, Francis said “the Catholic Church’s failure to address the ‘repugnant crimes’ of clerical sexual abuse ‘remains a source of pain and shame’” for Irish Catholics (Carswell 2018a). Yet most commentary on the civic reception agreed that the pope was upstaged by Taoiseach Leo Varadkar. Varadkar called for a “new covenant” between the Irish State and the Catholic Church. Public Affairs editor Simon Carswell judged it as “one of the finest speeches of his career and one of the best of our recent political history” (Carswell 2018b):

The effectiveness of his cleverly crafted 1,500-word speech – something aides said he had spent the summer considering and wrote himself – could be seen on the grave

demeanour of the 81-year-old pontiff and how it would, minutes later, expose the shortcomings in the pope's own address.

The headline of the lead editorial on the editorial/letters page summed it up: "Papal Visit: Welcome Words, but Action Needed". It was remarkably specific about what needs to be done: "The church will have to demonstrate that it is truly serious about rooting out abuse and tackling the culture that allowed it to develop. That will include new investigations, redress and handing over documents" (Irish Times 2018a).

After the Visit

The Tuesday after Francis' visit there were a further nine stories and 12 letters to the editor, including a front-page report on a poll commissioned by the *Irish Times*, with the headline: "Majority in Poll say Pope Failed to do enough on Abuse during Visit" (Leahy 2018a). This story reported the results of a poll conducted the day after Francis' visit: 55 percent said Francis had not gone far enough, 31 percent said he had gone far enough, and 14 percent had no opinion. The poll also suggested that "more than 400,000 people saw the pope at one of the three public events or when he drove through Dublin city centre in his popemobile"; with 66 percent attending "to express their faith." The poll also asked: "Are you more positive or less positive towards the church with Francis as Pope, or does Pope Francis not change your opinion of the church in any way?"; and "Has the visit of the Pope changed your views of the Catholic Church a lot, somewhat or not at all?" Thirty-eight percent of people said their view of the Church with Francis as pope was more positive, four percent less positive and 58 percent reported no change. In regard to Francis' visit, 80 percent said Francis' visit had not changed their view of the Church, a figure that includes those with both a positive and

negative view of the Church. A further story inside the paper was headlined: “Irish Favour more Liberal, less Dogmatic, Catholic Church” and offered detailed analysis of the poll, revealing the results of questions about Church teachings (Leahy 2018b). In line with previous polls,⁷ it confirmed that the Irish do not agree with the Church: 90 percent said priests should be allowed to marry, 86 percent said women should be allowed to become priests, 92 percent said contraception should be allowed in all circumstances and 77 percent said the church should recognise gay and lesbian marriages. These numbers were similar for practising Catholics and for the population as a whole. On abortion, 53 percent said abortion should be permitted in a wide range of circumstances; 41 percent disagreed and six percent had no opinion. Among practising Catholics, only 33 percent agreed abortion should be permitted in a wide range of circumstances.⁸

Alongside stories about this poll, five of the remaining seven pope-related headlines focused on negative aspects of the abuse scandal: “Increase in Abuse Victims’ calls to Survivors’ Charity [during visit]” (Power 2018); “Church should ‘willingly’ contribute to Tuam Reparations, Zappone says” (Siggins and Clarke 2018); “Pope must act on Promise to Address Clerical Abuse, Says Survivor” (McGreevy 2018); “Data Laws Prevent Full Accountability for Sex Abuse, Says Victim Group” (Pollak 2018) and “Marie Collins is Right. Pope Francis is Wrong” (McGarry 2018f). On the Friday (31 August), as public reflection on the visit began to fade, the lead editorial on the editorial/letters page summed it up: “Fallout from the Papal Visit: Now the Church Must act on Abuse”. The editorial went so far as to say, “If the Catholic Church does not address accountability in a manner which

⁷ A 2012 survey commissioned by the Association of Catholic Priests found official Catholic Church teachings on sexuality have no relevance for 75 percent of Irish Catholics, 87 percent believe priests should be allowed marry, 77 percent believe there should be women priests and 72 percent believe older married men should be allowed become priests (Amarach 2012). A *Sunday Independent*/Kantar Millward Brown poll conducted ahead of Francis’ visit (23 July-6 August) found 62 percent favour women priests, 55 percent believe the Church does not treat women equally and 67 percent believe priests should be allowed to marry (Corcoran 2018).

⁸ All of these figures were reported in the *Irish Times* story, except for the 33 percent of practising Catholics who believed abortion should be permitted in a wide range of circumstances. This figure was available in the full results, provided to me by the *Irish Times*’ Pat Leahy.

ensures children are safe, then the international community should intervene to help it do so” (Irish Times 2018b).

The Francis Effect Survey

The survey confirmed that the most popular opinion among the Irish was that Francis had not done enough to address abuse during his visit. It also found significant differences in the opinions of practising Catholics and everyone else. In addition, a sizeable minority of practising Catholics reported that Francis’ pontificate and his visit had changed their opinions of the Church for the better and increased their religious practices, providing evidence of a Francis Effect among the most devoted.

In contrast to the *Irish Times* poll – which was conducted the day after Francis left Ireland – those who responded to my survey were doing so three-to-four weeks after the visit. This was a short enough time frame that the visit would still be fresh in people’s minds; yet it may have been long enough that people had more time to reflect on the visit, rather than react instinctively to it. Because Amarach, the company that conducts the omnibus, deems questions about religion “sensitive”, people could opt-out of my questions. Ultimately, Amarach reached a sample of 840 with quotas set on gender, age, social class and region, designed to align with the national population. It did not include Northern Ireland. Due to the extensive reach of the internet in Ireland, the survey was completed online.

Sixty-four percent of respondents identified as Catholic – a full 14 percent lower than the 78 percent recorded on the 2016 Census. The next largest category was “no religion” at 19 percent –higher than the 10-12 percent on the Census. The remaining respondents were Other Christian (six percent), Church of Ireland (five percent), Other Religion (four percent) and prefer not to say (one percent). It is not beyond the realm of possibility that the difference

between the figures on religious identification on the Census and the survey are due to actual changes in religious identification during this time. But it may be that people of “no religion” were more likely to opt to complete the survey, perhaps to express their dissatisfaction with religion. This seemed to be the case in a survey of religion in Ireland which I conducted in 2009 (Ganiel 2009: 17-18). It also is possible that the way the religion question on the Census is asked creates a bias towards religious identification: people are asked “what is your religion?” rather than something along the lines of: “do you practice a religion; and if yes, what is it?” Having said that, my survey replicated the Census question. Religious attendance figures were in-line with what would be expected from previous surveys: 34 percent overall and 38 percent of Catholics attended at least monthly.

In order to gauge people’s perceptions of the visit, they were asked to agree or disagree with seven statements about it (Table 1). One statement echoed the *Irish Times* question about whether Francis had done enough to address abuse. In the *Irish Times* poll, a clear majority – 55 percent – said Francis had not gone far enough, 31 percent said he had gone far enough, and 14 percent had no opinion. But in my survey, 48 percent indicated he had not gone far enough, 30 percent said he had gone far enough, and 22 percent chose neither/nor or no opinion. It is possible that the difference between the 55 and 48 percent who thought Francis had not gone far enough can be attributed to the passage of time since Francis’ visit and a possible softening of attitudes that may come with it. But I cannot claim this explanation is conclusive. There were dramatic differences of opinion between practising Catholics and everyone else on this question. Just 28 percent said Francis had not gone far enough – with 50 percent indicating that he had gone far enough. Still, overall, the most popular view was that Francis had not gone far enough.

[Insert Table 1]

When asked whether the visit was “a healing time for victims and survivors of clerical sex abuse”, 36 percent disagreed and 31 percent agreed; when asked whether it was “a healing time for LGBTQI people and their families”, 40 percent disagreed and 23 percent agreed. Again, practising Catholics differed from everyone else: 54 percent agreed that it was a healing time for victims and survivors (23 percent disagreed); and 37 percent agreed it was a healing time for LGBTQI people (21 percent disagreed). Even so, overall, the most popular view was that the visit was not healing for victims, survivors and LGBTQI people. At the same time, 48 percent agreed that the visit was “good for Ireland as a nation”, with just 26 percent disagreeing. A further 50 percent agreed that the visit “was good for the Catholic Church in Ireland”, with just 21 percent disagreeing. Almost one-in-four, 24 percent, agreed that the visit “will revive faith in Ireland”. Practising Catholics differed again: 75 percent thought the visit was good for Ireland and 73 percent thought it was good for the Church; 47 percent thought it would revive faith.

The survey also asked whether people had attended events during the visit, and their reasons for attending or not (Table 2). Among practising Catholics, 37 percent attended events. Overall, 80 percent did not attend events. Of those, 51 percent did not attend because “I was not interested” and 30 percent did not attend because “I disagree with how the Catholic Church has handled child sex abuse.” For practising Catholics, the top reason they did not attend was because the travel/walk was too difficult (39 percent), followed by lack of interest (22 percent) and disagreement with how the Church has handled abuse (18 percent). Among those with “no religion”, 73 percent were not interested and 40 percent disagreed with the handling of abuse. So for everyone except practising Catholics, indifference seems to have trumped indignation about abuse as a reason for not attending – although abuse is still the next most significant factor.

[Insert Table 2]

Among those who attended, 51 percent did so to be “part of a big national event”, 47 percent to “express my faith”, and 16 percent as a guardian or carer. Practising Catholics were much more likely to attend to express faith (63 percent), with 51 percent attending to be part of a big national event and 10 percent as a guardian/carers. Only 37 percent of “other” Catholics attended to express faith, with 60 percent attending to be part of a big national event and nine percent as a guardian/carers. This question can be compared to the one asked by the *Irish Times*, where the overall figures were 59 percent (national event), 66 percent (express faith) and 18 percent (guardian/carers). The biggest difference between the surveys was among those attending to “express faith” – the figure was 19 percent higher in the *Irish Times* poll. Again, this may be due to the timings of the surveys. People who have recently attended an event, in some cases less than 24 hours previously, may still feel uplifted by it, and may have been more likely to cite faith as a factor. But again, I cannot claim this explanation is conclusive.

The survey also asked four questions designed to gauge a possible Francis Effect. Two of these dealt with opinions about the Church. First, “Has your opinion of the Catholic Church changed since Francis became Pope in 2013?” Overall, there was no change for 66 percent; although 22 percent said that their opinion had become more favourable. Among practising Catholics, 39 percent said their opinion had become more favourable, with 57 percent unchanged. These results contrast to the *Irish Times* poll, where a similar question revealed that overall, 38 percent had a more positive view of the Church with Francis as pope (51 percent of practising Catholics), with no change among 58 percent (47 percent of practising Catholics). Second, “Has your opinion of the Catholic Church changed since Pope

Francis visited Ireland?” Seventy-four percent (66 percent of practising Catholics) said their opinion was unchanged; the figure was 80 percent unchanged in a similar question on the *Irish Times* poll. Sixteen percent (30 percent of practising Catholics) indicated that their opinion of the Church had become more favourable since the visit; 11 percent (4 percent of practising Catholics) indicated their opinion had become less favourable. Because of the way its question was framed, there are not comparable more/less favourable figures for the *Irish Times* poll.

The other two questions addressed changes in religious practice (Table 3). Respondents were asked: “Has your religious practice changed as a result of Francis becoming Pope in 2013?” and “Do you anticipate that your religious practice will change as a result of Pope Francis visiting Ireland?” For both questions, people were given a range of options and could tick all that applied. Overall, most people indicated their practice had not changed (63 percent) and would not change (63 percent) – figures that were similar to practising Catholics (64 percent since Francis became pope, and 62 percent after the visit). Other Catholics were the least likely to change their practices since Francis became pope (85 percent) and after the visit (84 percent). For practising Catholics, the top three ways in which religious practice had changed or would change (ranging from 16 to 12 percent) were praying more often, being more kind and merciful to family and friends, and attending religious services more often. Francis’ visit also prompted eight percent of practising Catholics to say they would give more of their time and money to helping the poor, and seven percent to go to confession more often.

[Insert Table 3]

Only a *minority* of practising Catholics say their opinions about the Church or their religious practices have changed as a result of Francis' pontificate or his visit. Yet it is a sizeable minority. To repeat just one example, 39 percent of practising Catholics say they have a more favourable view of the Church since Francis became pope. Indeed, 22 percent of *all* Irish people have a more favourable view of the Church since Francis became pope, which also is a significant minority. It is impossible to say what percentage of people would need to have changed their views or practices for the Francis Effect to be considered valid. But taken together, the survey results point to at least a partial Francis Effect in Ireland – in spite of widespread dissatisfaction with the Church's handling of abuse.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to explore the Francis Effect in Ireland, using the papal visit as a lens to explore if or to what extent Francis' pontificate and his visit have changed perceptions of the Catholic Church and religious practice in Ireland. It has found that while practising Catholics are receptive to a renewal of faith inspired by Francis, it seems the abuse crisis has contributed to at least a partial negation of the Francis Effect. Indifference to religion also likely contributes to a negation of the Francis Effect in the country as a whole: most survey respondents who did not attend papal events said it was because they were not interested.

Ireland's preoccupation with the abuse crisis was exemplified in the *Irish Times'* coverage of the papal visit. The emphasis on abuse in the national conversation raises questions about Francis' impact not just on individual practising Catholics, but on the structures of the Church he leads. Such structures include the Vatican, the Roman curia and national bishops' conferences; as well as mechanisms for dealing with abuse. In this regard, the experience of Irish abuse survivor Marie Collins was prominent in national conversations before, during and after the visit. In 2014, Collins was appointed to the Vatican's

Commission for the Protection of Minors, established by Francis. The commission recommended a Vatican tribunal for holding bishops to account. Francis was originally supportive, but backed down when the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith declared that it violated canon law. Collins resigned from the Commission in 2017, disillusioned because she believed it had not taken enough concrete steps to address abuse. Collins was one of the victims who met privately with Francis during his visit; on the plane back to Rome, Francis told reporters that Collins was “fixated” on tribunals (O’Brien 2018). Collins’ highlighting of Vatican failures in this regard – and Francis’ rather abrupt dismissal of her concerns – demonstrates Francis’ *ineffectiveness* in handling the abuse crisis. An *Irish Times* headline summed it up: “Marie Collins is Right. Pope Francis is Wrong” (McGarry 2018f). Even Breda O’Brien (2018), who is more sympathetic towards the Church than most *Irish Times* columnists, wrote:

I cannot begin to describe how angry, fed up and broken-hearted ordinary Catholics are. We need answers [on abuse]; and, more importantly, we need action and we are not getting much of either.

... I can think of two names for any lay-led commission of investigation – Marie Collins and Nuala O’Loan, both women of courage, compassion and unwavering integrity.⁹ Please, Pope Francis, for all our sakes, let the light finally shine in.

In addition, two *Irish Times* lead editorials quoted above recommended specific measures the Church should take to address abuse. These included “new investigations, redress and handing over documents” (Irish Times 2018a); and a recommendation that the “international

⁹ O’Loan is from Northern Ireland and a member of the UK House of Lords.

community” intervene to set up accountability structures if the Church cannot do so itself (Irish Times 2018b).

In Ireland, the scars from the abuse crisis run deep. People are desperate for Francis to do more to address abuse. Even among practising Catholics, the people most likely to think Francis *had* gone far enough to address abuse during his visit, 28 percent thought he *had not* gone far enough. That too is a significant and sizeable minority. Despite Francis’ popularity, it seems that his ability to revive Catholicism in Ireland is limited by the Church itself, and especially by its failures to create robust structures for dealing with abuse.

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