

Fact Sheet:

Journeying to the Father: Researching Faith and Identity in a Contemporary Catholic Youth Movement in Canada

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Project Description and goals:

The Catholic evangelization movement has become an increasingly significant element in the Canadian Catholic landscape over the past 20 years. This movement promotes a form of personalized, at times, ecstatic or charismatic devotion while remaining highly conservative by deferring to the authority of the Catholic Church for the sake of disseminating Catholic values and worldview. The main concern of this movement is that religion, specifically Catholicism, continues to lose social and civic prominence in the modern world, which has enshrined liberal values of individualism, pluralism and secularism. Their program of ‘proselytization from within’ seeks to engage “Cultural Catholics” into actively asserting their religious identity and promoting Catholic values in their public lives. Today, many Catholic youth in Canada are actively engaged in the conservative religiosity offered by this evangelization movement. Their presence on the public landscape as involved religious persons raises questions about the contours of Canadian diversity and the place of religion in shaping modern Canadian identity.

In order to investigate this socio-religious and political phenomenon, I have centered my research on a single case study: the annual revival weekend designed specifically for Catholic youth aged 13 to 18 called *Journey to the Father*. My aim is to emphasize specifically how the youth participants negotiate (i.e. appropriate and/or negate) the confluence of Catholic values of institutionalized religiosity and the variety of charismatic religious experiences as a tier in the construction of identity. This research explores how the youth who are engaged in the Catholic evangelization program see themselves and the world around them.

Methodology:

With the financial help from the Religion and Diversity project, I was able to cover the travel costs for a large part of my field research. First, this funding allowed me to travel to Saint Raphael’s to attend the 2013 Journey to the Father conference. There I was able to gather participant observation data, and do a series of interviews with organizers and volunteers.

Secondly, I was able to organize two research trips to separate towns in South-Western Ontario at the end of March 2014. My purpose was to set-up series of one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with young people (ages 13 to 18) who had participated at Journey to the Father.

These interviews revolved around questions of religious identity in Canada today. My interlocutors were asked to describe their religious identities at home, in their communities, and at school, to express their experiences of Journey to the Father in terms of the religious and the social, to reflect on gender and what it means to be a Catholic man or woman, and to explain their current attitudes, feelings, difficulties, and/or concerns of being young and Catholic in Canada today.