

Fieldwork Report Assessment

Catholicism: Leeds Cathedral, Leeds, LS2 8BE.

For my Fieldwork Assessment, I decided to visit the Leeds Cathedral. The visit took place on 20 November 2013. I decided to go to the mass service which the Cathedral holds daily. I thought by attending this service, I would be able to make a realistic observation of how a Catholic believer participates in a weekday mass service. Moreover, I chose to study Catholicism due to my lack of experience with the Catholic faith. I had previously only ever been to my local Methodist Church. Additionally, I wanted to visit the Cathedral due to my personal lack of experience with places of worship. Being a Sunni Muslim myself, I had only been to the Mosque for after-school Quranic lessons during my childhood. This is mainly due to the fact that only men are expected to go to the mosque for worship, whereas women carry out their worship in the home. Also, I thought it would be interesting to observe the roles of women within the Cathedral.

In order to gain some historical understanding of the Cathedral and the Catholic community in Leeds, I decided to look at the Community Religions Project (CRP). The CRP discusses the reasons for the rise of Catholicism in the 19th and early 20th centuries. It states that the number of Catholic churches in Leeds, rose due to Irish immigration (Hufton et al., 2008, p.9). Irish immigration began mainly in the 1820s, as the Irish community moved to Leeds in search of employment (Ibid.). Immigration then peaked again in the mid-1800s, when the Irish community moved to Leeds due to the Irish potato famine (Ibid.). As a result, the need for Catholic churches rose. This also led to the eventual transformation of St Anne's in to the Leeds Cathedral in 1878, after the establishment of the Diocese of Leeds (Fraser, 1980, p.256).

After looking at the Leeds Cathedral website, I decided that I would conduct my visit on a Wednesday for the 12:30pm mass service, in order to observe the roles of women in the Cathedral (The Diocese of Leeds, 2004). Moreover, I decided that I would arrange my visit by going to the Cathedral personally. I decided that this method of contact was the most suitable, as I had failed to get in touch with other places of worship through electronic means of communication. Also, I thought that

meeting with those carrying out the service personally, would help me overcome this barrier.

On the day of the visit, I entered the Cathedral, and spoke to someone who would be participating in the service. I explained to her that I wanted to observe mass as part of my fieldwork assessment. I then showed her my Student ID card and the Module Information Sheet, which was a formal letter confirming that my visit was part of an assessment. This was important as I wanted my observations to be overt. Overt observations would consider ethical factors such as confidentiality and gaining consent, and would ensure that my presence was not intrusive.

I was told that after the service, a guide would give me a tour and answer any questions I had. I decided that I would gain information from the guide by having an informal conversation, rather than an interview. I felt that this was the most suitable method, as it would allow me to gain in-depth information. Moreover, Kothari (2004, p.99) states that in order to achieve a successful interview, the interviewer should have sufficient understanding of the interview method. As I did not, I felt that an informal conversation would be of most benefit.

I chose to carry out a non-participant observation. This meant that I would not have any personal involvement in the service, nor would I attempt to experience what the congregation was experiencing (Kothari, 2004, p.96). Another reason why I chose to carry out non-participant observation was due to my personal religious beliefs. The acceptance of the Eucharist involved the consumption of wine; an act which is forbidden in Islam. And so, it would not have been personally acceptable for me to carry out a participant observation.

Mass began when the Priest entered the lower sanctuary and rang the hand bell. In the past, bells were rang to call people to mass (McNamara, 2003, p.23). However, in contemporary Britain, bell ringing to call people to mass is no longer required. Therefore, it served a traditional purpose, rather than a religious one (Holy Spirit Catholic Church, 2013). The bell ringing reminded me of my own faith, where the *adhan* is the call to prayer, and is an Islamic tradition which has continued to this day.

The Priest who led the service was wearing a green robe, which was symbolic of purity on mass. He then read from the Gospel whilst the congregation stood. The

guide later explained that standing at this point during mass was symbolic of the Resurrection. The Priest then left the sanctuary; returning to the altar with two chalices containing wine, and a paten containing bread. He then stated that they would now: “celebrate the memorial of His (Jesus’) death”. The Priest then picked up a chalice in his right hand, and the paten in his left hand; reciting a prayer. This act was carried out to consecrate the bread and wine. Bread and wine is used in mass as Christ had declared it as his body and blood during the Last Supper. And so, Catholics believe that the bread and wine becomes the *actual* body and blood of Christ, after being consecrated.

The Priest then asked the congregation to stand and give blessings to their neighbours. Each member of the congregation stood up and shook hands with those sat around them saying: “peace be with you”. This section of mass highlighted the essence of communal worship, and the importance of unifying the congregation. Thereafter, the congregation knelt down and three, female, Eucharistic Ministers entered the sanctuary to accept the Eucharist. The Priest and the Ministers then stepped down from the sanctuary. The congregation then lined up to accept the body of Christ from the Priest, and then the blood of Christ from the Ministers. The congregation’s acceptance of the Eucharist signalled the end of the service.



Figure 1: Image showing the tabernacle at the Leeds Cathedral.

After mass, I was given a tour. The first thing I noticed were the candles which were lit around the Cathedral. They represented light and warmth. Furthermore, there was a great presence of the colour gold. Gold represented sacredness. I deduced this from the fact that the tabernacle was gold (see Figure 1). The guide told me that the tabernacle was a shrine which held the Eucharist, thus making it sacred. Another factor which allowed me to deduce that gold represented sacredness, was the fact that the stoup holding the holy water, was gold. The guide

explained that the water was deemed holy, as it cleansed an individual, and rid them of evil spirits. This idea of holy water reminded me of the holy Meccan water in my own faith called *zamzam*.

Before my visit, I had assumed that all the roles within the service, and the Cathedral in general, would be fulfilled by men. This was due to the Catholic belief that though men and women have equal roles, only men can fulfil leading positions (Taylor, 2005, p.65). This belief was founded on the appointment of Peter as “the first Bishop of Rome” (Ibid.). However, only the Priest was male during mass. All the other roles during the service were fulfilled by women. The Priest’s role during mass was to lead the service, and consecrate the bread and wine. Aside from leading the service, the Priest also accepted the Sacrament of Penance. Another role which was fulfilled by a man was the role of ‘Dean’.

However, the Eucharistic Ministers were women. I thought this was particularly significant as the distribution of the Eucharist was symbolic of the Last Supper. And so, the Ministers were representing the distribution of Christ’s blood; which Christ had done Himself on the Last Supper. Additionally, the guide informed me that the voluntary worker who carried out the Angelus and Rosary prayers before mass, was also female. The guide explained that these prayers were carried out to remember God. This demonstrated the authority of women within the Cathedral. Furthermore, there was a variety of roles available for women. The fact that my guide was female, proved that women played a significant role in strengthening the Cathedral’s relationship with the public. Also, it highlighted that women were given responsibilities, as well as being entrusted to provide information about Catholicism to the public. And so, though women may not have fulfilled the leading roles, their roles were extremely important, and demonstrated their authority and confidence within the Cathedral.

I was surprised by the number of people that attended the service. I had expected approximately 20 or 30 people to attend. However, 59 people had attended. I felt as though this was a high figure, thus making me question the theory of secularization. This was because there were many attendees; even on a cold, Wednesday afternoon. However, could the popularity of this particular Cathedral have been due to a lack of Catholic places of worship in Leeds? The Diocese of

Leeds helps refute this argument, as it records that in total, there are 9 other Roman Catholic Parishes in North Leeds alone (The Diocese of Leeds, 2004).

The method I used to calculate the number of attendees was to simply count the number of people that were present during the service. Unfortunately, I was unable to calculate the ages of the attendees. This was because there was a large group of attendees, and it would have been time consuming for myself, and the participants. Secondly, I would require permission from each participant. This would have also been time consuming, and there was no guarantee that I would gain consent from each attendee. Lastly, the majority of the attendees left after the service had ended. And so, it would have been impossible to gain data from each member of the congregation.

It is difficult to categorize whether I was an insider or an outsider during my visit. Instead, I would suggest that I was an insider during certain sections of my visit, whilst being an outsider in others (Knott, 2010 cited in Hinnells, 2010, p.259). For example, as I am a member of a religion, it is likely that I understood the importance of sacred objects, religious books and places of worship, more than a non-religious, or secular person would. This is because these were concepts which I was familiar with due to my religious beliefs. Conversely, I believe that my age caused me to become an outsider. As I was probably the youngest person present at the service, the information I received from the guide might have been adapted to meet my age range. Also, the age difference between myself and the guide, might have caused her to feel slightly detached, and may have again affected the information I received from her.

Overall, the visit was advantageous at improving my knowledge about mass. I learnt about the communal aspects of mass, as well as the sacredness of the Eucharist, and the reasons for this. Moreover, my visit allowed me to place the Cathedral in its local context. By looking at the CRP, I learnt that Irish immigration to Leeds during the 19th century encouraged the establishment of the Leeds Cathedral. Additionally, by attending the mass service, I was able to observe the roles of women in the Cathedral. I discovered that though men took the leading roles of Priest and Dean, more women than men were involved in the mass service itself. This demonstrated that women had authority and confidence within the Cathedral,

and were given important roles, such as distributing the Eucharist, and strengthening the relationship between the public and the Cathedral.

Word count: 1997

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