

**Love's betrayal: The Decline of Catholicism and Rise of
New Religions in Ireland By Peter Mulholland Oxford, UK:
Peter Lang, USD 90.95, ISBN 9781787071278**

VERRIER, Diarmuid <<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4148-3948>>

Available from Sheffield Hallam University Research Archive (SHURA) at:

<http://shura.shu.ac.uk/26616/>

This document is the author deposited version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

Published version

VERRIER, Diarmuid (2020). Love's betrayal: The Decline of Catholicism and Rise of New Religions in Ireland By Peter Mulholland Oxford, UK: Peter Lang, USD 90.95, ISBN 9781787071278. *British Journal of Psychology*, 111 (2), 413-415.

Copyright and re-use policy

See <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/information.html>

Review of Love's Betrayal by Peter Mulholland

The research for this book was conducted while the author was situated with an anthropology department, but his first degree was in religious studies, and those deep roots reveal themselves throughout the book. What is probably most relevant to the readers of this journal, though, is his adoption of psychology, alongside theology and anthropology, as a means to understand the fall from grace of Catholicism in Ireland.

Mulholland's main argument is that the Church's authoritarian dominion over political discourse, the press, education, and healthcare, and the abuse that went alongside this, led to a nation of repressed and insecurely attached individuals. Across the latter half of the 20th century, as the populace became more educated and liberal and their opinions diverged from the pessimistic conservatism of the Church, this grip loosened, and the number of practicing Catholics waned. This process was helped along by a number of scandals, most notably in relation to clerical child abuse. Simultaneously, however, new (in this context) religious movements, including wicca, Buddhism, Hinduism (e.g., yoga), and charismatic evangelism, began to appear in Ireland as part of the general wave of 60s counterculture characterised by alternative lifestyles, the quest for self-actualisation, and various idiosyncratic spiritual beliefs. Mulholland suggests that a predisposition to "magical devotional" beliefs, fostered in the population by the Catholic Church, in conjunction with the general pattern of anxious attachment, meant that the Irish people were primed to seek out these new religious movements and the responsive attachment figures and validation they promised.

The book is built around an analysis of articles and programmes sifted from the Irish media archives across three decades – the 60s, 70s, and 80s. His efforts are impressively exhaustive – Mulholland seems to have located every notable mention from that period of new religious movements, interpreted broadly to include clairvoyance, faith healing, and the use of complementary and alternative medicine. He stitches these together into a relentless narrative of movements appearing and spreading across the island. Along with the rise of new religious movements, the other strand of the book concerns the decline of Catholicism. This part of his argument is based on a highly detailed exploration of the Church's use of corporal punishment in the schools and institutions it managed and media debates on its efficacy and morality. It is this abuse – "love's betrayal" – that largely underlies the loss of faith in the Church.

This loss of faith is explored in more depth in the following chapter. Again, using media archives, Mulholland lists instance after instance of people questioning and undermining the church's position. On the one hand, this creates a convincing summary of the increasing challenges to the Church's control over the press and public narratives. On the other, though, the instances he mentions are so specific and capture so much minutiae, that it sometimes feels bewildering. I grew up in Ireland during the 90s, so I am familiar with some of the names that recur (e.g., Bishop Eamonn Casey, who scandalised the nation by purloining church funds to support his child), but I still felt dazed by the sheer number of more or less minor celebrities and cultural commentators that appear and disappear across the chapter.

Psychology comes to the fore towards the end of the book. Mulholland starts out by describing, then dismissing, psychodynamic, object-relations based explanations of why people affiliate themselves with new religious movements. He then moves on to attachment. The negative impact of the Church on attachment is mentioned several times throughout the book, but it is not until this chapter that the theory is fully sketched out. He provides a clear explanation of the work of Bowlby and Ainsworth, subsequent studies that have shown associations between attachment and life outcomes, and the attachment-based therapeutic ideas of Peter Fonagy. He concludes his argument

that the practices of the Church in Ireland made insecure attachment styles more likely, particularly in those from the lower classes, and moves on to describe how that insecure attachment might lead to a growth in new religious movements. Here he draws chiefly on the work of Pehr Granqvist, Phillip Shaver, and Lee Kirkpatrick, who have done numerous studies looking at the relationship between attachment and religion. The theoretical core of their work suggests that God (or similar) can serve as an attachment figure who serves a compensatory, distress regulation, function in those who are insecurely attached. While this chapter is a fascinating synthesis of work, and there is certainly empirical support for the theory, it is difficult to move from the primarily associational studies that have been done in this area to using the theory as the main explanation of why people would become attracted to new religious movements. The impacts of the Church on the people of Ireland are infinite in their variety, and there are equally as many factors that might bring someone to embrace a particular alternative lifestyle or new religious movement. Even acknowledging all of this complexity and ambiguity, though, I found Mulholland's efforts to provide a grand unifying theory to be intriguing and admirable.

So, who is this book for? I think it would be a worthy read for those interested in the decline of the Catholic Church in Ireland across the latter half of the 20th century. I, myself, particularly appreciated his application of attachment theory as a model for explaining an entire nation's religious manoeuvrings. I think its main value, though, is for people who lived in Ireland through those decades as an honest, detailed summary of what they experienced. They were remarkable times, crucial to the formation of a nation that is now seen in many respects to be a model of burgeoning liberality. They deserve to be recorded and reflected on.