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Post Modernity in Trinidad and Tobago – the response of the Catholic Church.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the effects of Post Modernity in Trinidad and Tobago, and how the Catholic Church responded. The primary objective of this research seeks to identify and evaluate the pillars of Post Modernity and its impact on the Catholic Church. It's secondary purpose points in the direction as to why this is such a critical issue, and how the Catholic Church is challenged to respond.

The research objective explores the main tenets of Post Modernity, namely the rejection of meta narratives that leads to relativism and individualism. The research methodology evaluates primary sources which involves an extensive survey. The data was collated, interpreted and analysed to contextualize the effects of Post Modernity within the Catholic Church in general, and Trinidad and Tobago in particular. Information from secondary sources explores the works of philosophers in the likes of Jean-Francis Lyotard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Rene Descartes and others. The Church's response came primarily from the papal teachings of John Paul II, Benedict XVI and the present Pope Francis.

This research has founded that the issue of Post Modernity has been identified as a major concern to the Catholic Church in contemporary times, and the traditional response of papal teachings is the appropriate reply that best treats with this growing cancer which needs to be curtailed within the entire Christian community.

Key Words and Phrases: Post Modernity, Catholic Church, rejection of meta-narratives, relativism, individualism.

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INTRODUCTION

In an academic journal article titled: “The Relevance of Postmodern Epistemologies in Multicultural Studies in the Caribbean,” Dr Bennie Berkley stressed the importance of using postmodern epistemologies to truly investigate, understand and analyse social issues in the Caribbean. Dr Berkley stated: “We cannot expect to explicate social phenomena with the mere production of meta-narratives and meta-theories” (Berkley 2012). During the second half of the 20th Century, the Catholic Church through its use of meta-narratives through the contents of The Bible, has been a pillar of moral authority that shaped and guided Christian and some non-Christian societies throughout the world. In Trinidad and Tobago some of the main tenets of Postmodernism have resulted in the prevalence of dysfunctional social behaviours which draws continuous responses of the Catholic Church.

0.1: Rationale

Although the effects of Postmodernity has not been extensively researched in Trinidad and Tobago, the majority of scholars agree that Postmodernity is not easily defined because of its abstract ideological nature. However, several scholars have observed that the Postmodern era is characterized by observable and measurable behavioral traits such as relativism, individualism, consumerism and globalization. The Catholic Church recognizes the negative impact Postmodernity has on every society. Robert Emmet Baron, auxiliary Bishop of the Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles identified three main pillars of Postmodernism as the rejection of grand narratives, relativism and individualism (YOUTUBE 2020). These pillars of Postmodernity are counter-cultural to the biblical and theological teachings of the Catholic Church. Because of

the universal characteristics of Postmodernity, the Catholic Church is duty bound to speak out against the negative effects of Postmodernism in Trinidad and Tobago.

0.2: Thesis Statement

This research will show how the Postmodern pillars of the rejection of meta-narratives, relativism and individualism have negatively impacted upon the behavior of people in Trinidad and Tobago thereby causing the Catholic Church to continuously respond to the dangers associated with Postmodernity.

Parameters of Research

0.3: Chronology

This research focuses on the philosophical pillars of Postmodernity which were mainly espoused during the second half of the 20th Century and to a lesser extent the 21st Century. This research also investigates some of the Church's responses to the dysfunctional effects of Postmodernity from the papacy of John Paul II to the current pope. Data will be gathered and analyzed to evaluate the efficacy of the Church's response to the effects of Postmodernism in Trinidad and Tobago.

0.4: Geography

Because of the current pandemic, this research is limited to investigating the response of the Catholic Church in Trinidad and Tobago in conjunction with the teachings of the three most recent Popes and the initiatives of the Archdiocese of Port of Spain

0.5: Themes

The three main themes of this research will be philosophy, theology and pastoral ministry. The philosophical themes of Postmodernity in Trinidad and Tobago will focus on the rejection of meta-narratives, relativism and individualism. Theological themes will be explored through some

papal teachings of the Catholic Church which oppose the dysfunctional aspects of Postmodernity. Pastoral themes will be surveyed and generated from the primary data gathered from this research to evaluate the effects of Postmodernity in Trinidad and Tobago and the efficacy of the Church's response from a statistical sample of the people in Trinidad and Tobago.

0.6: People

The risks and health protocols associated with the COVID-19 limits this research to the Catholic and non-Catholic community of Trinidad and Tobago only. According to the Census in 2011 the religious demographics of Trinidad and Tobago are: "Protestant Christians 32.1%; Roman Catholics 21.6% Hindus 18.2% and are the largest religious minority community in Trinidad and Tobago with Muslims, Jehovah's Witness, and others account for 5%, 1.5%, and 8.4% of the country's population, respectively. Additionally, 2.2% of the population are non-believers and 11.1% did not specify affiliation with any religion" (worldatlas.com, 2018). Though Christianity is the largest religion in the country, it was statistically significant for this research to obtain the views of Catholics and non-Catholics on the effects of Postmodernity in Trinidad and Tobago.

0.7: Objectives

The purpose of this research is to identify and evaluate the pillars of Postmodernism which have drawn the most criticism from the Catholic Church in Trinidad and Tobago. This research will be guided by the following two investigative questions:

1. The main investigative question explores: What are the Postmodern effects of the rejection of meta-narratives, relativism and individualism on the people of Trinidad and Tobago?

2. The secondary investigative question evaluates: Why is it important for the Catholic Church to respond to the negative effects of the rejection of meta-narratives, relativism and individualism on the people of Trinidad and Tobago and how has this been achieved?

The research objectives will be investigated through the following framework:

- a) A review of some of the philosophical tenets relevant to Postmodernism according to: Jean-Francois Lyotard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Rene Des Cartes and others. Attention will be given to the effects of the rejection of metanarratives that cause relativism and individualism.
- b) The response of the Church will be evaluated from the papal teachings of John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis. These teachings will be foundational to theologically develop the pastoral response of the Archdiocese of Port of Spain on the issues of the rejection of meta-narratives, relativism and individualism.
- c) Collect, collate, interpret and analyze the data gathered from primary and secondary sources to establish if the effects of Postmodernism on the people of Trinidad and Tobago. This data will also assist in evaluating the efficacy of the Church's response. Based on the data, recommendations ought to be made to increase the effectiveness of the Church's response to Postmodernism in Trinidad and Tobago.

In addition to the above, the information and insights from this research should encourage future research on the effects of Postmodernism not only in Trinidad and Tobago but throughout the entire Caribbean.

Methodology

0.8: Data Collection

Research data was gathered by use of primary and secondary methods. Primary data was gathered using a structured questionnaire in conjunction with structured and unstructured interviews. The development of a structured questionnaire was disseminated through social media because of the health protocols currently enforced. Approximately one hundred and twenty-five Catholics throughout Trinidad and Tobago were contacted. Designed in a structured multiple-choice format the questionnaire asked relevant questions along with predetermined options for the respondent to choose a single response. The questionnaire comprised of twenty-five questions that were selected to determine how the pillars of Postmodernism through the rejection of grand narratives, relativism and individualism impacted the lives of these people with special emphasis on their faith and religion. Respondents were not required to give their names and non-Catholics were not required to state their religion.

Complementing the primary research method was the robust use of secondary sources of data. Books, academic journals, videos and online research of various philosophers who spoke of Postmodernism through the rejection of meta-narratives, relativism and individualism were utilized as the foundation for this research. Similarly, secondary data provided the foundational information for the Church's response to the effects of Postmodernism on the lives of people. Some of these secondary sources included papal encyclicals and theological perspectives on the dangers of Postmodernism.

0.9: Data Utilization:

Secondary data was used to establish the philosophical premise of Postmodernism and its negative effects through the rejection of grand narratives, relativism and individualism on the lives

and lifestyle of people. The primary data was generated to gather first hand data that was analyzed to ascertain if the Church's response was effective in helping people to overcome the negative effects of Postmodernism on the lives of people in Trinidad and Tobago. CHAPTER ONE is a review of the literature that was used for secondary research. CHAPTER TWO laid the philosophical foundation for the social phenomena of Postmodernism through the rejection of grand narratives, relativism and individualism. CHAPTER THREE is an exposition of the Church's response through the papacy as they address the negative aspects of Postmodernism.

CHAPTER FOUR provides the analysis and conclusions drawn from the primary data collected on the effects of Postmodernism through the rejection of grand narratives, relativism on the lives and lifestyles of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and the efficacy of the Church's response in overcoming these challenges. The data was analyzed and conclusions were generated by using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to understand, interpret and present the data generated from this research.

0.10: Research Approach

The research approach for this investigation is categorized as analytical. In order to draw a significant and scientific understanding of the effects of Postmodernism on the lives of people in Trinidad and Tobago caused by the rejection of grand narratives, relativism and individualism, this research was divided into two distinct parts. The three aspects of main investigative question: "What are the effects of the rejection of meta-narratives, relativism and individualism on the people of Trinidad and Tobago?" are broken into three parts. They are then woven together and presented as three pillars of Postmodernism which negatively affect the lives of people in Trinidad and Tobago.

The sub-investigative question: “Why is it important for the Catholic Church to respond to the negative effects of the rejection of meta-narratives, relativism and individualism on the people of Trinidad and Tobago and how is this achieved?” brings the research into the lived context of Trinidad and Tobago. The primary data allows for the universal philosophy of Postmodernism to be interpreted and analyzed in the context of the people and the Catholic Church in Trinidad and Tobago. The findings of the data will provide the basis for drawing conclusions, offering solutions and identifying areas for further research.

0.11: Chapter Outline

CHAPTER ONE is a review of the literature review of this research. This chapter provides a comprehensive account of the philosophers and their respective philosophies on Postmodernity and its tenets of the rejection of meta-narratives, relativism and individualism. This will be followed by a review of some of the papal responses of the Church that denounce the tenets of Postmodernism as they relate to this research. To contextualize this research to the Trinidad and Tobago experience, data will be gathered and analyzed to understand the effects of Postmodernity in Trinidad and Tobago.

CHAPTER TWO explores the main philosophical understanding of Postmodernism according to the espousals of Jean-Francois Lyotard, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Friedrich Nietzsche, Benedict de Spinoza and others. Jean- Francois Lyotard, considered the “father” of Postmodernism lays the philosophical foundation for understanding for the rejection of meta-narratives and relativism. Wittgenstein is considered to be a great philosopher of the modern era who postulated on the philosophy of the mind. An exploration of the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche’s

individuality and freedom of spirit follows. The philosophical tenets of Benedict de Spinoza virtue theory and the free man is explored and concludes the chapter.

CHAPTER THREE presents some of the Church's responses to the dangerous effects of Postmodernism. Some of the papal teachings and thoughts from Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis will be examined to understand their theological and pastoral concerns and warnings against the dangers of Postmodernity.

CHAPTER FOUR contextualizes this research into the lived experience of Postmodernity of Trinidad and Tobago from the findings of the primary data gathered and analyzed. The analysis of the data will show how Postmodernity affects the lives of people in Trinidad and Tobago and how the Church has responded theologically and pastorally.

The Conclusion is a summary of the thesis objectives with recommendations for future research on the effects of Postmodernity in Trinidad and Tobago, the role of the Church and the further development of pastoral programs.

CHAPTER ONE

Literature Review

1.0: Introduction

To understand the effects of Postmodernity¹ on the people of Trinidad and Tobago requires an investigation of three general philosophical tenets of Postmodernity. There has been a paucity of academic research on the effects of Postmodernity in Trinidad and Tobago. Although the Church has not relied on academic research to recognize the ill effects of Postmodernity, this thesis brings together academic research on the findings of three key pillars of, the Church's response and the efficacy of the Church's response which will be analyzed using primary data that reveals the lived experience of Postmodernity in Trinidad and Tobago. This research fills a void in academic research and paves the way for future research.

Research literature several tenets associated with the philosophy of Postmodernity. Of these tenets, the following three major pillars were identified with Postmodernity are: the rejection of grand narratives, relativism and individualism. The works of key philosophers who espoused foundational philosophical underpinnings on Postmodernity include: Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924-1998), Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) and others.

¹ Postmodernity is: "the name given to the period of literary criticism that is now in full bloom. Just as the name implies, it is the period that comes after the modern period. But these are not easily separated into discrete units limited by dates as centuries or presidential terms are limited. Postmodernism came about as a reaction to the established modernist era, which itself was a reaction to the established tenets of the nineteenth century and before. What sets Postmodernity apart from its predecessor is the reaction of its practitioners to the rational, scientific, and historical aspects of the modern age. For postmodernists this took the guise of being self-conscious, experimental, and ironic. The postmodernist is concerned with imprecision and unreliability of language and with epistemology, the study of what knowledge is" (<http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-postmodernism>). Accessed 11/12/21.

In response to the negative effects of the Postmodernity's rejection of grand narratives, relativism and individualism this research reviewed some of the papal responses from Popes: John Paul II (1978-2005), Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI (2005-2013) and Francis (2013- present). This literature research will be contextualized by the lived experience of the effects of Postmodernity in Trinidad and Tobago from the analysis of the responses obtained from the data gathered through a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with priests and the laity.

Philosophers of: Rejection of Meta-narratives, Relativism and Individualism

1.1 Rejection of Meta-narratives

Jean- Francois Lyotard's 1979 publication: The Postmodern Condition, used the term Postmodernism as a foundation for academic and philosophical debate. The Postmodern condition grew out of distrust against the modern era dominated by science. Lyotard defined Postmodern as: "incredulity towards meta-narratives" (xxiii-xxiv). This condition of the rejection of grand narratives is inextricably linked to the pillars of relativism and individualism.

1.2 Relativism

Lyotard also referred to the assent of relativism which opposes absolute truth. The philosophical debates arising out of Lyotard's: Postmodern Condition, resulted in the term Postmodernism being applied to: "the denial of facts but as modes of discourse that forever block us from making truth claims about reality" (xxiii-xxiv). Philosophers on relativism do not agree on a standard definition of relativism but they commonly agree that: "moral values, beauty, knowledge, taste or religion is relative to a particular framework of reference influenced by the individual subject's experiences, culture, era, language, education or religion (Emrys Westacott, Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy). In his work Culture and Value, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1989-

1951) wrote: “rules of life are dressed in pictures... that only serve to describe what we are to do and not justify it” (29e). Wittgenstein opposed interpretations associated with religion and doctrine intended to prove God’s existence. He referred to language as “games” of religion whereby expressions such as “God exists” are not to be literally treated or understood as true (29e).

1.3 Individualism

Particularly in the last quarter of the twentieth century, the benefits of scientific progress and mass culture shifted to Postmodern individualistic interpretations of: “political, sexual, social, artistic and religious ideologies which provides nothing outside of human life that provides a set of values by which to live, no set of rules for living, no framework of “good” and “bad” (crossref-it.com, 2021). The Postmodern condition has given rise to secular humanism as opposed to a faith based outlook to life. The rise of individualism as experienced in Postmodernity can be traced to its genesis in the Enlightenment. Two philosophers who presented philosophical paradigms that examine individualism that pre-date Postmodernity are Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900).

In 1677, Spinoza published a most influential philosophical book titled: *Ethics*. In the Cambridge Companion to Spinoza’s “*Ethics*”, the editor stated that Spinoza in the latter part of “*Ethics*”, espoused that human are “essentially embodied and their passions are the experience of the way that their bodies are acted on by external things” (Koistinen, 225). Spinoza also argues that humility, repentance, and pity—character traits highly esteemed by traditional religious authorities—are *not* virtues, for they are “useless” and “do not arise from reason” (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, E4p50, 53, and 54).

Friedrich Nietzsche originally published one of his philosophical works: *Gay Science*. In this book Nietzsche declared that “God is Dead” (xii). Nietzsche also appeals to the human need for:

“self- determination for individuality by the value of autonomy as valuable individuals are the ones who-give themselves laws and create for themselves (Gay Science, 335). Additionally, individuals have independence and a freedom of spirit to: “exhibit self-governance to bring about one’s own future” (225).

Church Response: Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis

The three most recent Popes of the Church have each responded in varying degrees to the effects and dangers of Postmodernity’s negative effects of the rejection of meta-narratives, relativism and individualism. Though the responses directed at Postmodernity are scarce the Church has been a major protagonist that is outspoken against the dangerous effects of the rejection of meta-narratives, relativism and individualism.

1.4 Pope John Paul II

The only pope to have written on Postmodernity in a Papal Encyclical is Pope John Paul II. In 1998 John Paul II referred to the dangers of Postmodernity in his Encyclical²: *Fides et Ratio*. John Paul II stated that in the era of Postmodernity: “the human being must now learn to live in a horizon of total absence of meaning, where everything is provisional and ephemeral” (*Fides et Ratio*, 92). Consistent with a similar trend of thought are Colin and Russel Standish who wrote the 2007 book: *Postmodernism and the Decline of Christianity*. In this book the authors are resolute that due to the impact of Postmodernity, “many Christians do not believe that the Ten Commandments are binding upon their behaviour and lifestyle, thereby perverting moral values and significantly

² Papal Encyclical: “According to its etymology, an encyclical (from the Greek *egkyklios*, *kyklos* meaning a circle) is nothing more than a circular letter. In modern times, usage has confined the term almost exclusively to certain papal documents which differ in their technical form from the ordinary style of either Bulls or Briefs, and which in their superscription are explicitly addressed to the patriarchs, primates, archbishops, and bishops of the Universal Church in communion with the Apostolic See. By exception, encyclicals are also sometimes addressed to the archbishops and bishops of a particular country ” (<https://www.papalencyclicals.net/encyclical>). Every encyclical is a pastoral letter addressed by the pope to the whole Church. Encyclical letters generally: “address matters of faith or morals, encourage a particular commemoration or pious devotion, or deal with matters of Church discipline which are to be universally observed” (<https://www.simplycatholic.com/what-is-an-encyclical>). Accessed 23/4/22.

contributing to the rapid breakdown of marriages resulting in the amazing increase in divorce” (11).

1.5 Pope Benedict XVI

Though Benedict XVI did not write any encyclicals addressing Postmodernity, he has written extensively on the issues of relativism and individualism as Cardinal and Pope. In 2005 prior to his election as Pope Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger in a homily stated: “Relativism is a poison. It attacks our most human capacity to seek and know the truth, including the moral truth” (National Catholic Register, 2013). Additionally, in 2012, Pope Benedict XVI called for young people to recognize that global economic crises are usually rooted in the selfishness of individualism (Catholic Online, 2012). Benedict’s critique on relativism and individualism will be dealt with in greater detail in CHAPTER THREE.

According to Patrick Nullens and Ronald T. Michener in their 2010 book: *The Matrix of Christian Ethics- Integrating Philosophy and Moral Theology in a Postmodern Context*: “The climate of postmodernity has allowed a radical questioning of those values that once provided the footing to moral worldviews. Values that seemed stable to our parents and grandparents are now scrutinized” (5).

1.6 Pope Francis

Continuing in the footsteps of Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI articulation of the Church’s response against the negative effects of Postmodernity, Pope Francis continues to actively respond and rally the Church to be aware and of relativism and individualism and the need to rise above these dysfunctional Postmodern tendencies. In His Encyclical *Laudato Si* Pope Francis declared: “Practical relativism typical of our (Postmodern) age is even more dangerous than doctrinal relativism. When human beings place themselves at the center, they give absolute

priority to immediate convenience and all else becomes relative” (122). Additionally, Hannah Brockhaus reported for the National Catholic Register that Pope Francis addressed health and emergency workers in the fight against the COVID pandemic by denouncing the selfishness of individualism which he said was an “illusion as we quickly forget we need others” (June 2020). Francis’s critique on relativism and individualism will be dealt with in greater detail in CHAPTER THREE.

Reinforcing Pope Francis call for unity, solidarity and community, theologian Robert Sherman in his 2015 publication: *Covenant, Community and the Spirit- A Trinitarian Theology of Church*, emphasises community as a reflection of the Trinitarian image of God. Sherman emphasised that: “the Church God wants us to become is a community that befits God’s own triune communion and majesty” (9). Sherman further stated that: “At the heart of our being stands not the egocentric “I think, therefore I am,” but the theocentric “God loves, therefore we are” (17).

1.7 Conclusion

The literature review highlighted some of the key texts, articles and publications that will provide the framework to evaluate the negative effects of rejection of grand narratives, relativism and individualism as the negative effects of Postmodernity in the following chapter. The response of the Church against the negative effects of Postmodernity will be examined and expanded through encyclicals, theological publications and online reporting as highlighted above. Analysis of the primary data gathered through a questionnaire and interviews will establish the framework that will contextualize the effects of Postmodernity in Trinidad and Tobago and the Church’s response in CHAPTER FOUR.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 Introduction

There are three universal principles associated with Postmodernity. Three of these principles are: the rejection of grand narratives, relativism and individualism. The contents of this chapter will investigate the negative concerns of the three pillars of Postmodernity that have prompted the Catholic Church to denounce and respond to the effects of Postmodernity in Trinidad and Tobago.

2.1 Rejection of Grand Narratives

In 1979, French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard wrote: *The Postmodern Condition*. From this publication of Lyotard arose many philosophical and academic debates about the effects of the pillars of Postmodernity on the human condition. In *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard claimed that Postmodernity is a condition which came about as people began to distrust modern science. For examples, wars continued, diseases continue to affect humanity as people continue to suffer as a result of the failure of science. Arising from the assertion of skepticism against science, Lyotard postulated that, “Any science legitimates itself by appealing to some grand narrative” (*Postmodern Condition*, xxiii-xxiv). The failure of promises of science through its grand narratives is characterized by the Postmodern phenomena that rejects grand narratives or, “An incredulity towards meta or grand narratives” (xxiii-xxiv).

Lyotard further asserted that, “Science has always been in conflict with narratives. Judged by the yardstick of science, the majority of them prove to be fables. But to the extent that science does not restrict itself to stating useful regularities and seeks the truth, it is obliged to legitimate the rules of its own game” (xxiii). As people reject grand-narratives the world is plunged into crisis between those who uphold the legitimacy of grand narratives and those who reject the

validity of grand narratives as a source of truth. In Postmodernity, the rejection of grand narratives is not confined to science but extends into religion and more specifically the Bible. As a result of the Postmodern condition, humans are also rejecting the meta-narrative of the Bible as the Word of God, thereby causing the Catholic Church in Trinidad and Tobago to respond against effects of rejection of grand narratives. \7

2.2 Relativism

In the Postmodern Condition, Lyotard also referred to the opposing force of relativism against absolute truth. Lyotard asserted that Postmodernists continuously appeal to, “The denial of facts as modes of discourse that forever block us from making truth claims about reality” (xxiv). Among philosophers and academics, there is no standard definition on relativism. However, Emrys Walcott contends that the critics of relativism believe it to be, “The thesis that all points of view are equally valid” (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2161-0002). Walcott stated that one thing common to relativism is that, “Moral values, beauty, knowledge, taste or religion is relative to a particular framework of reference influenced by the individual subject’s experiences, expectations, culture, era, language, education and religion (2161-0002). With the rejection of grand narratives as sources of truth, Postmodernism denies that any standpoint is uniquely privileged over all others (2161-0002). Walcott stated that it is possible to classify the different types of relativism according to, “The object they seek to relativize” (2161-0002). In contemporary philosophy the three main types of relativism discussed are: moral relativism; cognitive relativism and aesthetic relativism³.

³ Moral relativism; cognitive relativism and aesthetic relativism: “Relativism is sometimes identified (usually by its critics) as the thesis that all points of view are equally valid. Moral relativism is the position that moral or ethical propositions do not reflect objective and/or universal moral truths, but instead make claims relative to social, cultural, historical or personal circumstances. Cognitive relativism is the idea that our knowledge of the real world must be assisted by our mental constructs, and that the truth or falsity of a statement is relative to a social group or individual. Aesthetic Relativism is the philosophical view that the judgment of beauty is relative to individuals, cultures, time periods and contexts, and that there are no universal criteria of beauty” (https://www.philosophybasics.com/branch_relativism.html). Accessed 20/11/21.

This thesis focuses primarily on the genera of moral relativism that relativizes moral value and its religious foundation to the moral subjectivism of the Postmodern human condition.

Austrian philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, in his work: *Culture and Value*, stated that, “The rules of life are dressed in pictures as they only serve to describe what we do and not justify them” (29e). Wittgenstein rejected interpretations associated with religion and doctrine intended to prove God’s existence. He coined the phrase “language games” by which words are used to describe and not justify God’s existence as literally true (29e). Wittgenstein contended that themes interact with language in the form of a game to describe and not justify reality (60). Therefore, for Wittgenstein, the Church’s interpretation of the Bible is a language game that should be describing and not justifying God’s existence. Postmodernity’s rejection of the veracity of the Bible as the grand narrative of the Word of God has roots in Wittgenstein’s language games which describe and not justify the reality of God. Compounded with the historical and current scandals within the Church, many Postmodernists equate the Church as a man-made institution which tries to impose the will of a few upon the man, in the name of God.

For example, Dr. John A. Gedeon of the University of the West Indies and a member of the Humanist Society of Trinidad and Tobago argued in his article: *Religious vs Secular Parenting*, that, “Children from religious families are less kind and more punitive than those from non-religious households” (1). One argument used by Dr. Gedeon is that in the Bible exhorts humans to, “Imitate God...in everything you do, because you are his dear children” (Ephesians 5:1); but found Richard Dawkins’s description of God more compelling to believe. Dr. Gedeon stated that Dawkins described the God of the Old Testament as: “the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential,

megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully” (6-7). Such word games used by Postmodernists in Trinidad and Tobago have prompted the Church to respond and reject such assertions.

2.3 Individualism

The Cambridge Companion on Spinoza stated that in Benedict de Spinoza’s: Ethics, that: “all individuals seek their own advantage above all else so that other individuals were of value to himself or herself only in terms of their usefulness to him or her” (Cambridge Companion on Spinoza, 1). Spinoza further indicated that: “the State is itself an individual and protects itself from its citizens through the use of power” (9). For Spinoza, God is the greatest individual from who all else exist as extensions of God’s substance (35). Because all individuals are modal extensions of God, there is a need for differentiation for identification. Spinoza continued his argument that all individuals are continuously: “striving to persevere in its own being and is thus a consequence of the conditions for being an individual that constitutes each individual's own power” (11). For Spinoza every individual is a modal extension of the nature and existence of God and does not require humility, repentance, pity or religion but require power in order to assert one’s identity for recognition and survival (Koistinen, 225). These views of Spinoza are central to the tenets of Postmodernity which emphasizes the rationality and the rights of the individual over that of the community.

In Bernard Williams’ edition of Friedrich Nietzsche’s monumental work: *Gay Science*, contends that: “any life worth living must involve individuality and creative bloody-mindedness” (xiv). Nietzsche postulated that no two individuals are alike. He used the concept of the snake as a cultural classification of grouping all snakes together as the same snake (xxi). As a result of grouping all humans as the same nature and identity, each human being has an innate desire to

seek one's: "“self- determination for individuality by the value of autonomy as valuable individuals are the ones who-give themselves laws and create for themselves” (Gay Science, 335). To achieve individuality, one cannot depend on the world which is helpless in helping one to search for his or her identity. Nietzsche used the analogy of a madman searching for God in the bright morning sunshine with a lantern. The madman's attempts to find God are futile and Nietzsche coined this outcome as: “God is dead, remains dead and is still dead because we have killed him” (Williams, 125). Therefore, each individual is responsible for his or her life and survival without any input from God and community. Postmodernists claim that individuals have independence and a freedom of spirit to: “exhibit self-governance to bring about one's own future” (225).

In 2018, retired and influential lecturer at University of the West Indies and newspaper columnist Denis Solomon stated on behalf of the Humanist Society of Trinidad and Tobago: “Religion has nothing to do with reason. There can therefore be no such thing as a religious reason for anything. By the same token, religion has no place in argument, which by definition is the exercise of reason. But this has never stopped the followers of religion from attempting to impose their wishes by argument” (Solomon, 2018).

2.4 Conclusion

The negative effects of the Postmodern pillars of the rejection of grand narratives, relativism and individualism highlights many presented above are considered by the Church to be destructive and deleterious forces that can undermine the dignity of humanity based on religious traditions and beliefs of Catholics in Trinidad and Tobago. The Catholic Church has found it necessary to continuously responding to these negative forces of Postmodernity in order to help Catholics in Trinidad and Tobago navigate through the deceptions of Postmodernity.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 Introduction

Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis have responded with Papal authority to the negative effects of the Postmodern pillars of the rejection of grand narratives, relativism and individualism. This Chapter examines the Church's response to these negative effects of Postmodernity by examining relevant papal encyclicals and other theological perspectives. Additionally, this Chapter will examine how papal teachings have influenced the Trinidad and Tobago Church's response to Postmodernity.

3.1 Pope John Paul II

In his 1998 encyclical: *Fides et Ratio*, Pope John Paul II indicated that the era of Postmodernity is dangerous whereby: "humanity must learn to live in a world with a total absence of meaning where everything is provisional and ephemeral" (92). This position of Pope John Paul II is further clarified in the 2008 book: *Postmodernism and the Decline of Christianity*, which states that: "Postmodernism is associated by the expansion of the mass media, especially television and in today's push button society, children tend to learn about the world around them, vicariously by television" (Standish and Standish, 15). Furthermore, Standish and Standish also stated that a Commission on the Mental Health of Children stated that, "many children are almost nowhere in the realities of their self-initiated experiences. Much of what children see and learn of the world is the vivid depiction of war, sex, drugs and social upheaval" (15-16). These authors also concluded that the negative effects and tools of Postmodernity is a major factor for many Christians: "no longer believing that the Ten Commandments are binding upon Christian behaviour and lifestyle, thus perverting moral values and significantly contributing to the rapid break down of marriages leading to alarming high rates of divorce" (11-12).

3.2 Pope Benedict XVI

Though Pope Benedict has not written encyclicals devoted to Postmodernity, he preached and wrote extensively on the negative effects of relativism and individualism which are two major pillars of Postmodernity. In 2005, prior to his election as Pope, Cardinal Ratzinger addressed the conclave and warned that: “we are moving toward a dictatorship of relativism which does not recognize anything as for certain and which has as its highest goal one’s own ego and one’s own desires” (Fisher, 2006). Throughout his pontificate, Benedict XVI was never tired of repeating this warning of the danger of relativism which his predecessor identified as “everything is provisional and ephemeral” (John Paul II, 1998).

Benedict XVI emphasised that: “relativism is a poison. It attacks our most human capacity, the capacity to seek and know the truth, including the moral truth” (Fisher, 2006). Moreover, Patrick Nullens and Ronald T. Michener in their 2010 book: *The Matrix of Christian Ethics- Integrating Philosophy and Moral Theology in a Postmodern Context* stated: “The climate of Postmodernity has allowed a radical questioning of those values that once provided the footing to moral worldviews. Values that seemed stable to our parents and grandparents are now scrutinized” (5).

Benedict XVI also warned of the pitfalls associated with individualism. In the Postmodern world, the culture of individualism champions human independence as highly valued, individual rights and self-reliance take center stage, great emphasis is placed on a person standing out from the crowd rather than being unique. Individualism is on the extreme pole of Postmodernity in comparison to collectivist cultures where being self-sacrificing, dependable, generous, selfless, and helpful to others is highly prized. Christianity has always recognized the unity of the body of which is made of different parts functioning differently but for the collective good and harmony

of the body. Benedict XVI warned that individualism is a threat to:” the unity of our common faith that leads to dangerous spiritual individualism” (Maggio, 2009). To protect the Church from the ravages of Postmodernity, Benedict XVI is calling on Catholics to:”commit ourselves to defending and cultivating the perfect unity of Christ’s body, in which peace of the order and sincere personal relations in the spirit can flourish in harmony” (Maggio, 2009).

To overcome the root of individualism and selfishness, Pope Benedict XVI believes the antidote lies in: “the Eucharist which wrenches us away from individualism, communicates to us the spirit of Christ dead and risen and conforms us in unity to His body, the Church and our sisters and brothers” (Vatican, 2011).

3.3 Pope Francis

Following in the footsteps of Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, Pope Francis currently leads the Church’s response towards the negative effects of the pillars of Postmodernity. Pope Francis warns against the dangers of relativism and individualism and urges his flock to rise against these dysfunctional Postmodern tendencies. The Pope warns that every form of relativism deeply harms the building of a healthy culture in which fragile lives of families and individuals can flourish (Adkins, 2015). Pope Francis says that: “relativism causes everything to be irrelevant unless it serves one’s own immediate interests” (Laudato Si, 122). Pope Francis identified a connection between relativism and the throwaway culture (122). The culture of relativism underpins the disorder of individualism as it is: “the same disorder which drives one person to take advantage of another, treat others as mere objects, imposing forced labour on them or enslaving them to pay their debts; thereby leading to sexual exploitation of children and women and the abandonment of the sick and elderly since their dignity is diminished and eroded” (122-125).

Pope Francis reminds all of humanity that: “now more than ever the claim to focus everything on ourselves is illusory – to make individualism the guiding principle of society has proved to be illusory” (Brockhaus, 2020). The Pope further emphasized that the Postmodern condition of rejection of grand narratives, relativism and individualism can cause us to: “quickly forget that we need others, someone who takes care of us, who gives us courage. Forgetting that we all need a Father who holds out his hand.” Praying to God the Father, invoking him, “is not an illusion,” he stated. “Illusion is to think of doing without it!” (Brockhaus, 2020).

3.4 The Trinidad and Tobago Context

On 13 June 2018, the Humanist Society of Trinidad and Tobago published an article titled: “Religious leaders on the wrong side of history.” In this article, the Society indicated that six religious leaders including Archbishop Jason Gordon, came under attack for their religious belief on the sanctity of marriage and not recognizing homosexual marriages as equal to the sacrament and sanctity of heterosexual marriage. The Humanist Society of Trinidad and Tobago publicly and politically lobbies for individual rights over the collective rights associated with religious beliefs as seen in the narrative of Divine Law, Natural Law and the Christian understanding of heterosexual marriage. The Humanist Society has rejected the veracity of the Biblical meta-narrative of marriage and family as the natural union between a man and a woman as seen in Genesis (1: 26-28)⁴.

⁴ ²⁶ Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the ²⁷sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” ²⁷ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. ²⁸ God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the ²⁹sky and over every living thing that ³⁰moves on the earth ” (NAB Revised Edition, 1995).

This action of the Humanist Society of Trinidad and Tobago is an example of the teachings of the dangers of Postmodernity spoken of by Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis who have given the authority and support to the Church in Trinidad and Tobago to stand firm against the onslaught of rejection of grand narratives, relativism and individualism. The Church's response to the negative effects of Postmodernity will always be guided by the Word of God which is a meta-narrative of truth and love for humanity and God's creation.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented an overview of some of the many teachings espoused by Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis, on the negative effects of major Postmodern pillars of rejection of grand narratives, relativism and individualism. Moreover, these papal teachings on the dangers of Postmodernity were illustrated by reference to the context of Trinidad and Tobago with reference to the Postmodern and secular position of the Humanist Society of Trinidad and Tobago and the response of the Church in Trinidad and Tobago. An understanding of the philosophical tenets of Postmodernity which has elicited counteractive responses from the Church allows for the analysis of the data presented in the following chapter. This analysis of the data gathered will assist in determining if the Church's response in Trinidad and Tobago is effective against the negative Postmodern effects of the rejection of grand narratives, relativism and individualism.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 Introduction

To determine if the response of the Church is sufficient against the effects of Postmodernity through the rejection of grand narratives, relativism and individualism, primary data was collected through a questionnaire of twenty five (25) questions that was circulated to at least one hundred and fifteen (115) participants of which one hundred and two (102) persons responded. The respondents were evaluated on the Postmodern tenets of the rejection of grand narratives, relativism and individualism which was quantitatively and qualitatively analysed to determine the efficacy of the Church's response to the negative effects of Postmodernity in Trinidad and Tobago.

4.2 Data Analysis- Rejection of Grand Narratives

In Chapter Two, Jean-Francois Lyotard referred to the rejection of grand or meta-narratives as one of the conditions of Postmodernity. Additionally, in his 1998 encyclical: *Fides et Ratio*, Pope John Paul II indicated that the era of Postmodernity is dangerous as it causes: "humanity must learn to live in a world with a total absence of meaning where everything is provisional and ephemeral" (92). The data collected showed that approximately 76.4% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that people in Trinidad and Tobago must be fearless in questioning authority of societal facts and beliefs (Diagram 1). In questioning societal facts and beliefs, 49% Catholics and non-Catholics in Trinidad and Tobago depended on their experiences to shape their response to life while 40% depended on faith (Diagram 2).

However, life experiences combined with education amounted to 58.8% of the respondents not seeing the importance of faith as a basis for analyzing established facts and beliefs in society. Therefore, most Catholics in Trinidad and Tobago have the Postmodern propensity to reject grand narratives, which may lead to an absence of meaning where everything is provisional and

ephemeral. Additionally, it can be inferred that only 40% of Catholics are open to the teachings of the Church as a means of becoming more aware of Postmodernity and overcoming its dangers in Trinidad and Tobago.

People should be fearless in questioning authority of society's accepted facts and beliefs.

Responses

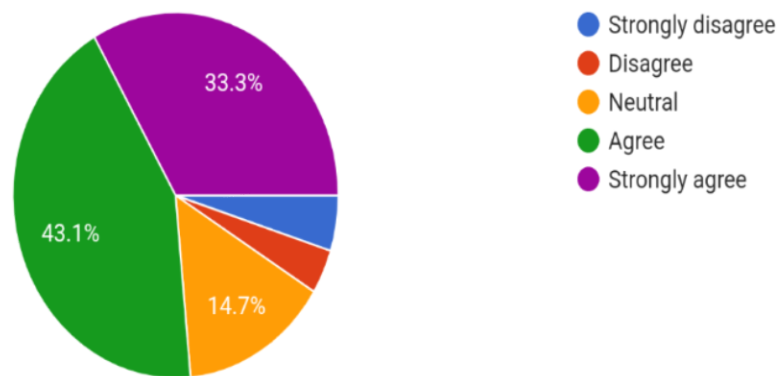


Diagram 1

What shapes your response to life the most

Responses

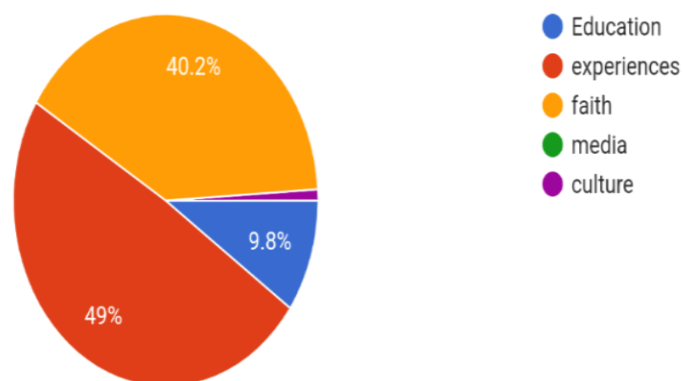


Diagram 2

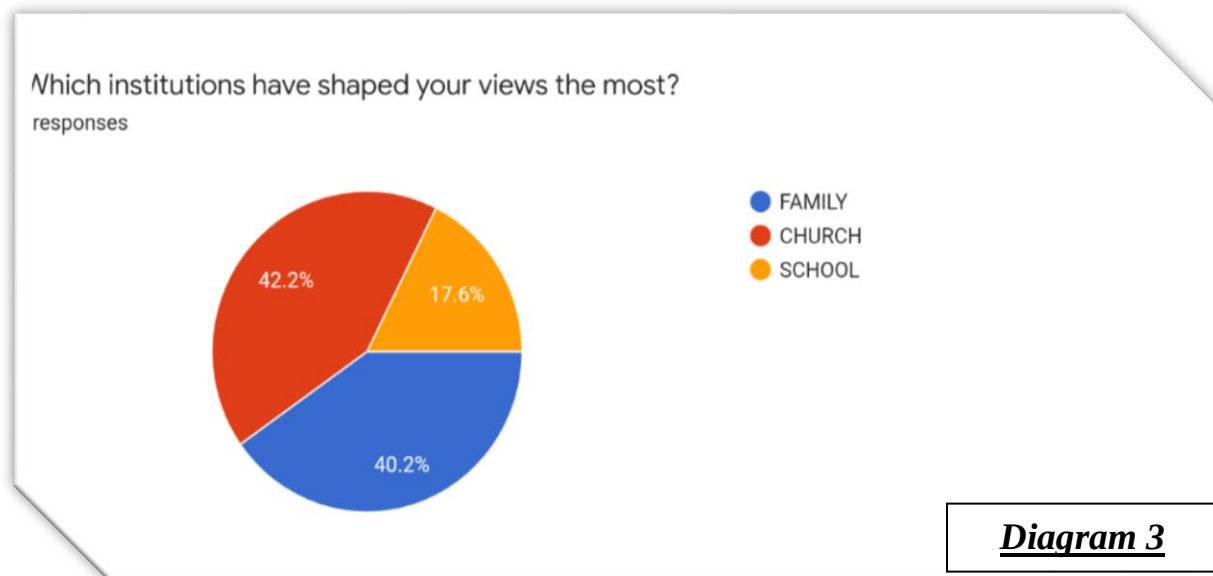
4.3 Data Analysis- Relativism

In Chapters Two and Three it was established that relativism is a major pillar of Postmodernity. Lyotard referred to relativism as the opposing force against absolute truth; while Wittgenstein contended that themes interact with language in the form of a game to describe and not justify reality (60). In Chapter Three, Pope Benedict XVI emphasised that: “relativism is a poison. It attacks our most human capacity, the capacity to seek and know the truth, including the moral truth” (Wiker, 2013); and that we are in a “dictatorship of relativism which does not recognize anything as for certain and which has as its highest goal one’s own ego and one’s own desires” (Wiker, 2013). Additionally, Pope Francis says that: “relativism causes everything to be irrelevant unless it serves one’s own immediate interests” (Laudato Si, 122).

The collected data revealed that 42.2% of the respondents (Diagram 3) believed that the Church was the single most influential social institution in Trinidad and Tobago. The influence of the Church as a social institution was marginally stronger family influence at 40.9% of respondents but more than twice the institution of education which amounted to 17.6% (Diagram 3). However, when the institutions of family and education are combined they amount to 57.8% of respondents compared to 42.2% of respondents favouring the Church’s influence. Therefore, the majority of respondents indicated that 75.5% of Catholics in Trinidad and Tobago believe that the Pope is fallible (Diagram 4) and by extension, does not espouse infallible doctrine and dogma through the Church’s teachings. Therefore, the data shows that most Catholics in Trinidad and Tobago are highly likely to reject or fully embrace papal teachings on many issues such as the majority

Catholics in Trinidad and Tobago indicating they support both pro-life and pro-choice (Diagram 5).

Moreover, Diagram 6 reveals that 43.1% of Catholics consult the internet on the veracity of information, Catholics in Trinidad and Tobago consult the internet; 32.4% consult professionals while only 15.7% consult the Bible. This data reveals that the prevalence of the Postmodern pillar of relativism among the Catholics in Trinidad and Tobago is significantly greater than the Church's ability to respond with authority and efficacy since the Pope is seen as fallible; the combined forces of family and school may outweigh the Church as the overwhelming influencer of views and the bible is among the least consulted form of truth verification. Therefore, it may be said that the Church's response to the dangers of the dictatorship of relativism is not as effective as it would like it to be against the effects of Postmodernity on Catholics in Trinidad and Tobago.



Is the Pope infallible
responses

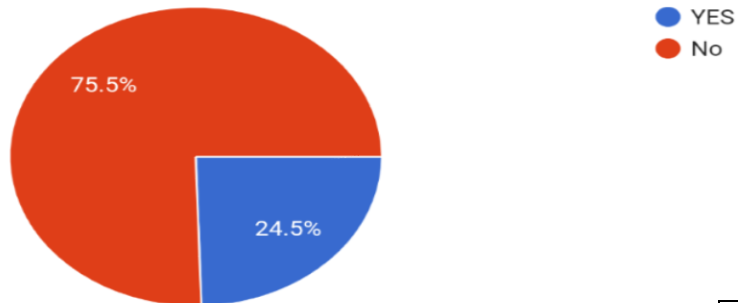


Diagram 4

Are you (A) pro-choice or (B) pro-life
esponses

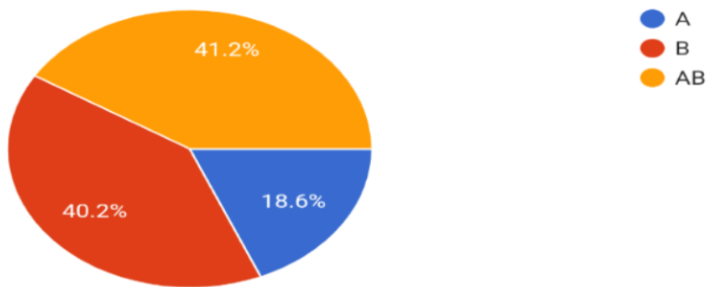


Diagram 5

Where do you consult if you want to verify something is true?
responses

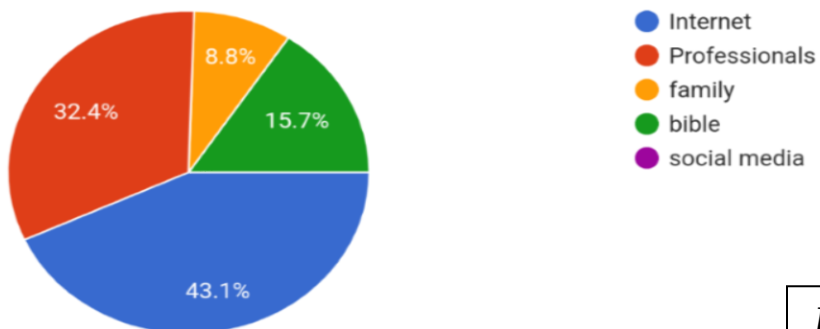


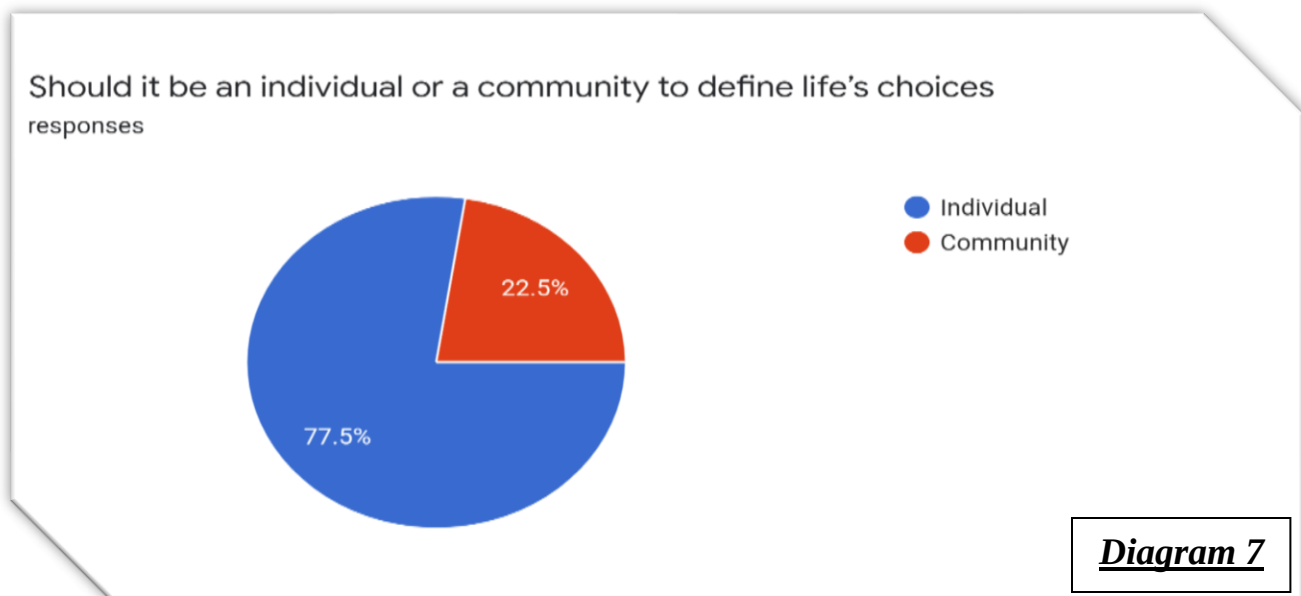
Diagram 6

4.4 Data Analysis- Individualism

Individualism is one of the facets associated with Postmodernity. In Chapter Two it was established that centuries before the advent of Postmodernity, Dutch philosopher, Benedict de Spinoza pointed out: “all individuals seek their own advantage above all else so that other individuals were of value to himself or herself only in terms of their usefulness to him or her” (Cambridge Companion on Spinoza, 1). In the era of Postmodernity, this heightened reality of individualism is seen to be very pervasive in Trinidad and Tobago. In Chapter Three, Popes Benedict XVI and Francis also spoke of the pitfalls of individualism in the age of Postmodernity. The former pope indicated that the culture of individualism champions human independence as people highly value the ability to stand out and apart from the crowd. The latter pope reminds humanity that: “now more than ever the claim to focus everything on ourselves is illusory – to make individualism the guiding principle of society has proved to be illusory” (Brockhaus, 2020). In recent times, the Humanist Society of Trinidad and Tobago continues to lead in lobbying for the legality of homosexual marriage and openly attacks the religious beliefs of Archbishop Gordon and other religious leaders who do not support the individual rights of homosexual marriage.

The data gathered in this research supports all that has been alluded to above in support of the Postmodern tenet of individualism over communal beliefs, norms and traditions. For example, an overwhelming majority of 77.5% of the respondents believe that has the right to define choices made in one’s life (Diagram 7). Moreover, 88.2% of the respondents indicated that they strongly value and prize their independence from the influence of others (Diagram 8). This individual independence of Postmodernity is feature of the culture of individualism which Pope Benedict XVI alluded to as illusory. The Church insists that individualism is illusory because it can undermine and disrupt the stability and integrity of the order of Christian norms, beliefs, values

and traditions. For example, Diagram 9 shows that 66.7% of respondents indicate that it is up to the individual to make life meaningful and pursue one's goals without restraint. This position is consistent with the position of the Humanist Society of Trinidad and Tobago which lobbies for the legalization of homosexual marriages and publicly attacks religious leaders to speak against such practices. In a report on CTV-News Archbishop Gordon stated that democracy allows for all persons to share their views, but in the name of democracy, one has to reassess one's values and beliefs and stay true to such beliefs. He reiterated that marriage is between a man and a woman unification and procreation. The Archbishop of the Diocese of Port of Spain gave this interview in response to criticisms of many Catholics who felt that he may have been in favour of homosexual marriages.



Do you strongly value your independence from the influence of others
responses

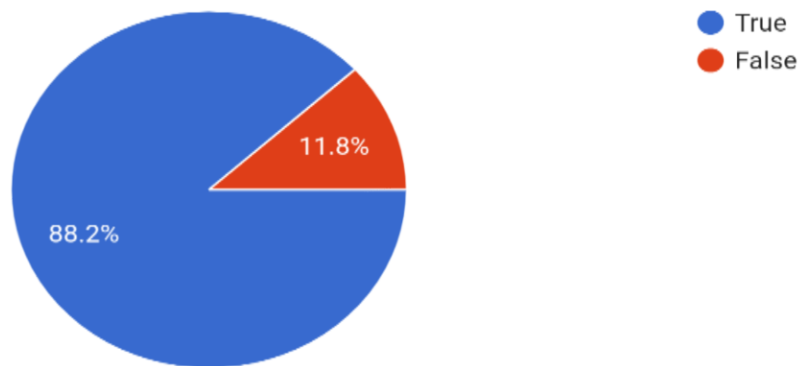


Diagram 8

Do you believe it's up to the individual as to what makes life meaningful and pursue your goals
without restraint?
responses

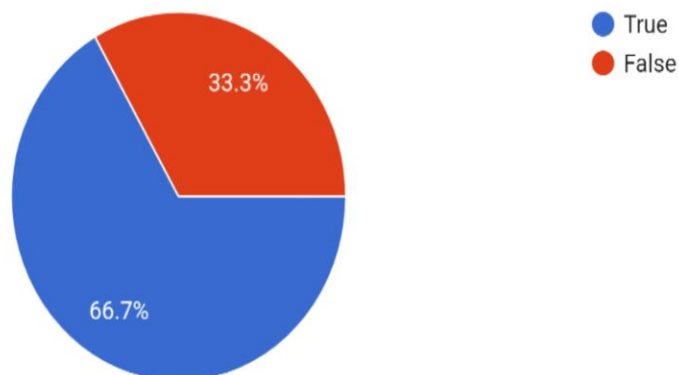


Diagram 9

4.5 Conclusion

The Catholic Church believes that the best and most effective response to the negative effects of Postmodernity is prayer. To endure and navigate a successful path through the scourges associated with the Postmodern tenets of the rejection of grand narratives, relativism and individualism, both Popes Benedict XVI and Francis have called for Catholics to hold on to their faith through prayer and participate in the Eucharist. To overcome the root of individualism and selfishness, Pope Benedict XVI believes the antidote lies in: “the Eucharist which wrenches us away from individualism, communicates to us the spirit of Christ dead and risen and conforms us in unity to His body, the Church and our sisters and brothers” (Vatican, 2011). Pope Francis further emphasizes that the Postmodern condition of rejection of grand narratives, relativism and individualism can cause us to: “quickly forget that we need others, someone who takes care of us, who gives us courage. Forgetting that we all need a Father who holds out his hand.” Praying to God the Father, invoking him, “is not an illusion,” he stated. “Illusion is to think of doing without it!” (Brockhaus, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The information and data presented in this thesis shows that the Postmodern effects of the rejection of grand narratives, relativism and individualism in Trinidad and Tobago has caused the Catholic Church to respond against their effects on the morality of people in Trinidad and Tobago. The data also indicates that the Church to be more effective in its battle against the negative effects of Postmodernity, it needs the support of other institutions such as the family and other religious and the openness of each individual to carefully scrutinize and desire a positive change from the dangers of the negative effects of the rejection of meta narratives, relativism and individualism in Trinidad and Tobago. As a bastion of truth, the Church cannot become discouraged or frustrated in its attempts to help people overcome the dangers of rejecting meta-narratives, relativism and individualism. The Church may further benefit in the efficacy of its responses against Postmodernity by being more proactive in its research into the negative effects of Postmodernity on the people of Trinidad and Tobago. With Trinidad and Tobago being a plural society of races and religions, other religious bodies ought to collaborate with the Church to find effective methods to help the people of Trinidad and Tobago positively navigate their lives and behaviour through the effects of Postmodernity.

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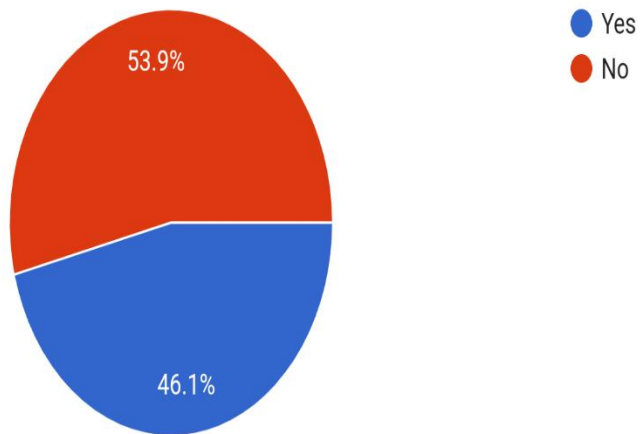
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APPENDIX A

Questionnaire, Responses and Charts

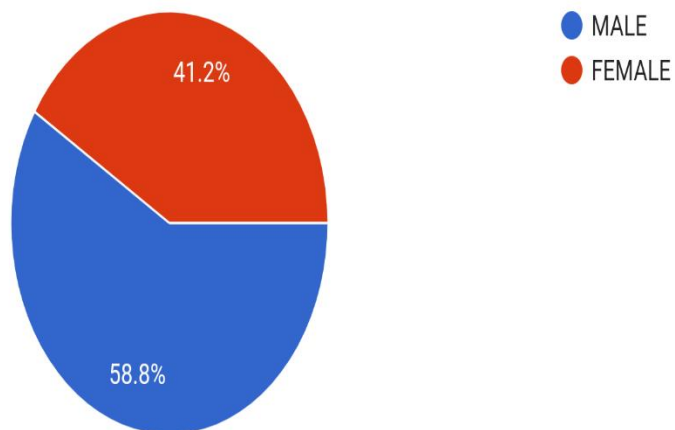
1) Are you Catholic?

102 responses



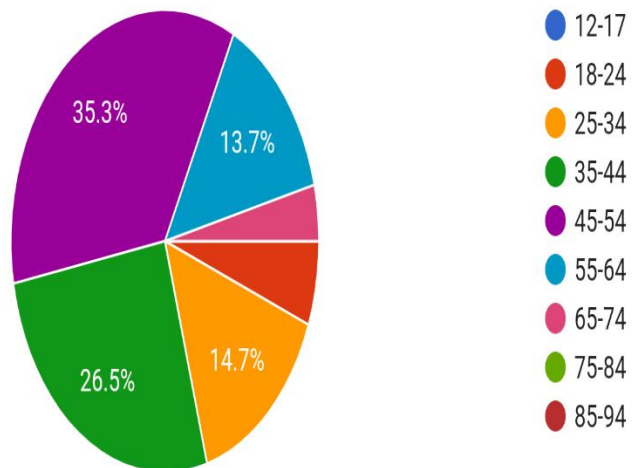
Sex

102 responses



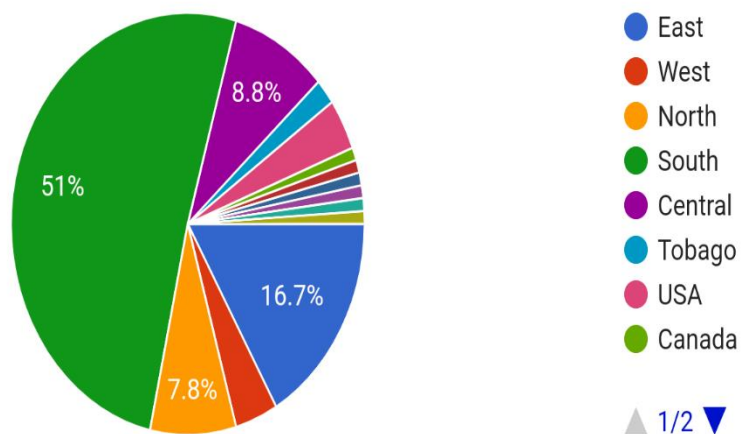
3) Age?

102 responses



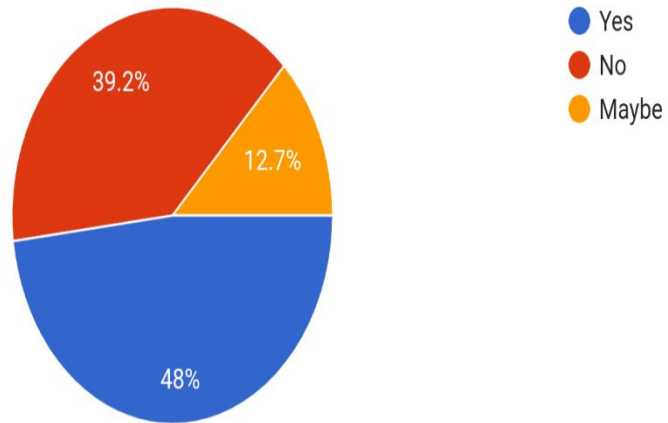
4) Which area do you live

102 responses



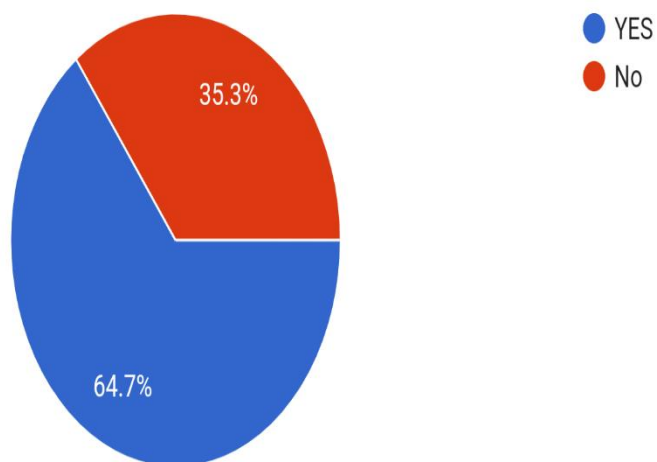
5) Have you ever heard of the term Postmodernism

102 responses



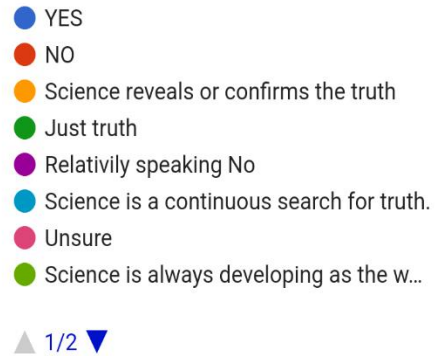
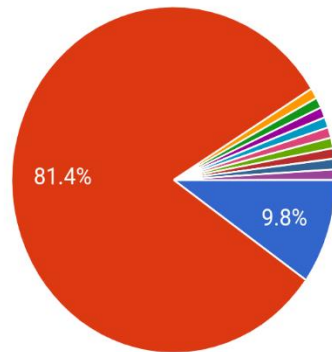
6) Is there anything as "Absolute Truth?"

102 responses



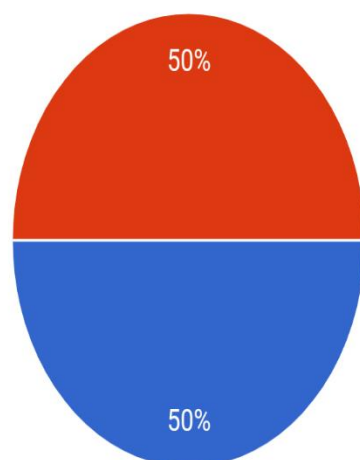
7) Is science an “Absolute Truth?”

102 responses



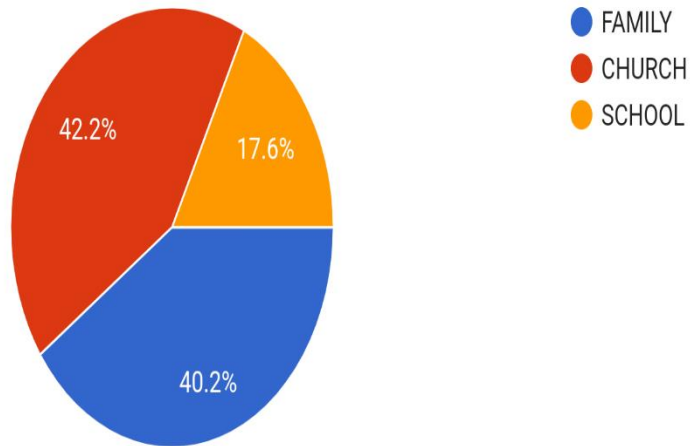
8) Is the Bible “Absolute Truth?”

102 responses



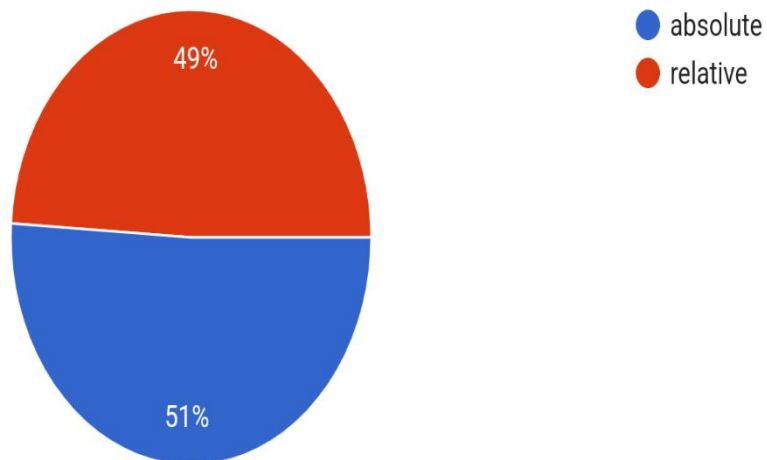
9) Which institutions have shaped your views the most?

102 responses



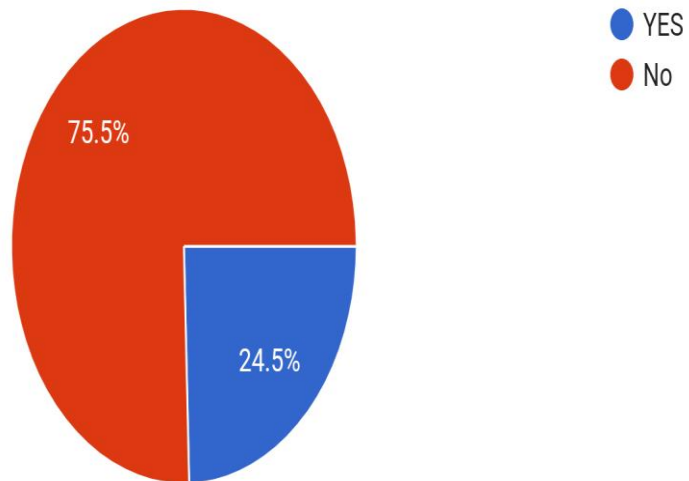
10) Is truth

102 responses



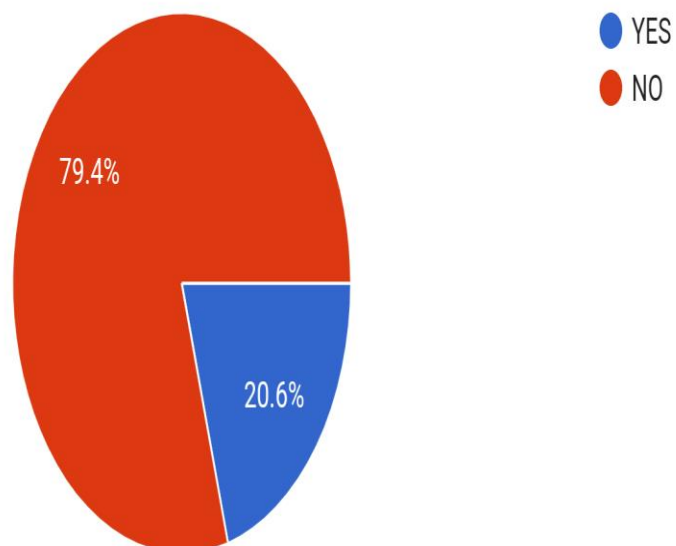
11) Is the Pope infallible

102 responses



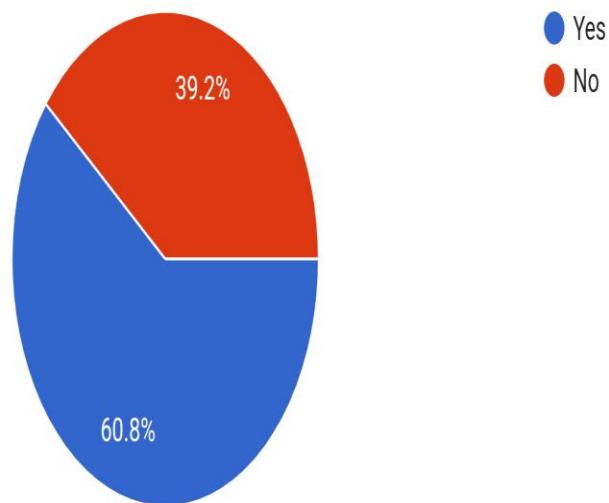
12) Is the Catholic Church the “source of truth?”

102 responses



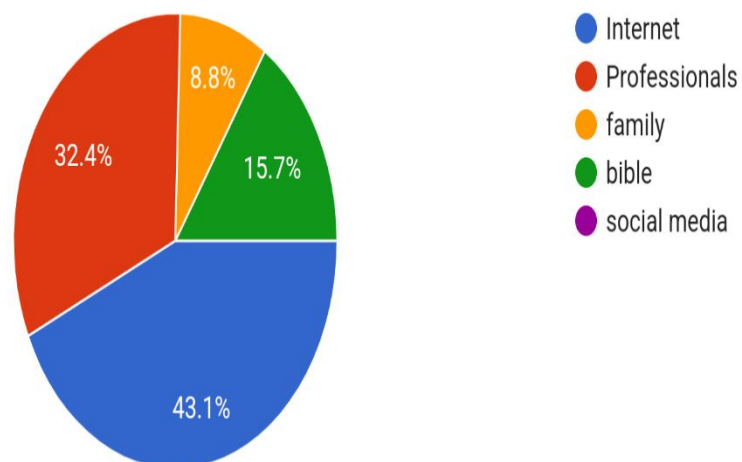
13) Do you use the Bible for guidance when faced with important decisions?

102 responses



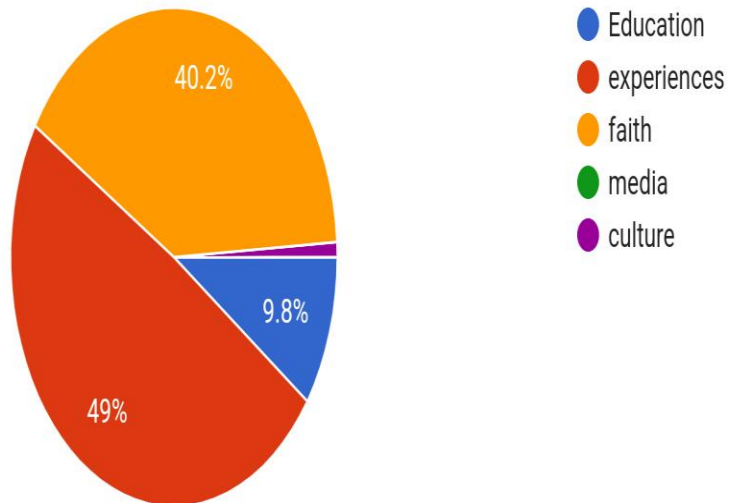
14) Where do you consult if you want to verify something is true?

102 responses



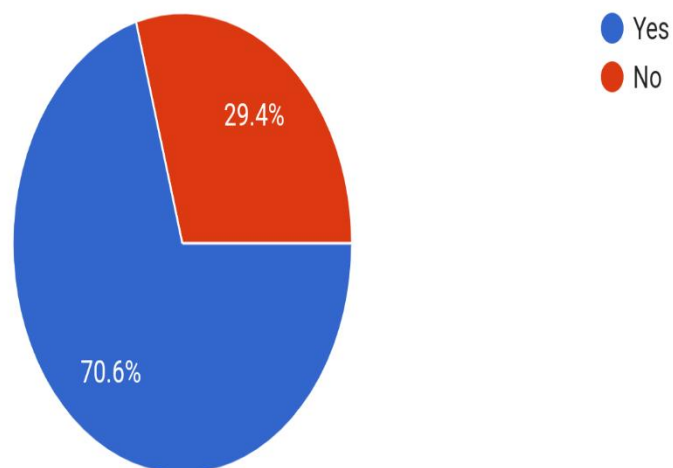
15) What shapes your response to life the most

102 responses



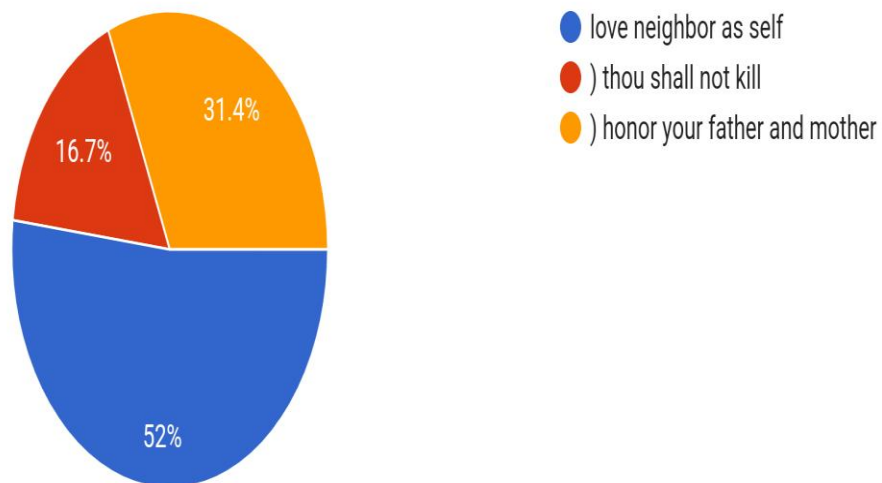
16) Do you use the ten commandments as your guide for living?

102 responses



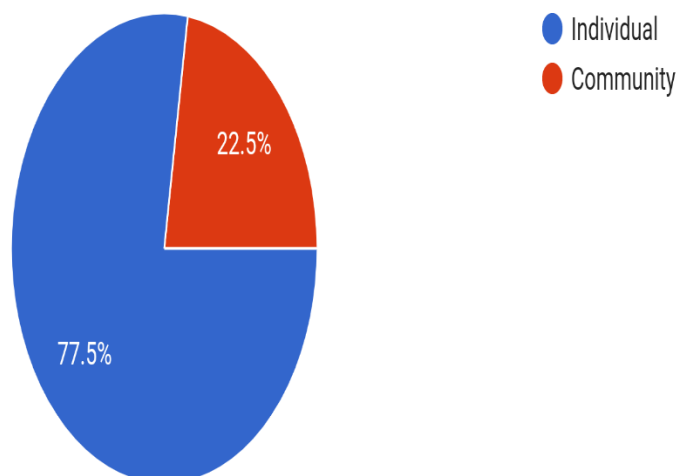
17) Which of the ten commandments is most important to you?

102 responses



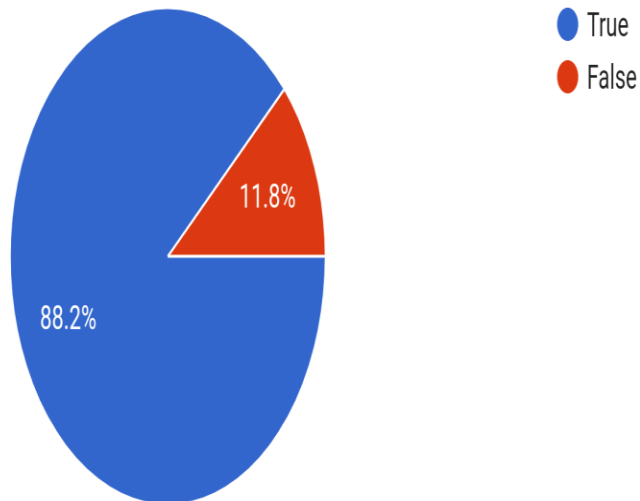
18) Should it be an individual or a community to define life's choices

102 responses



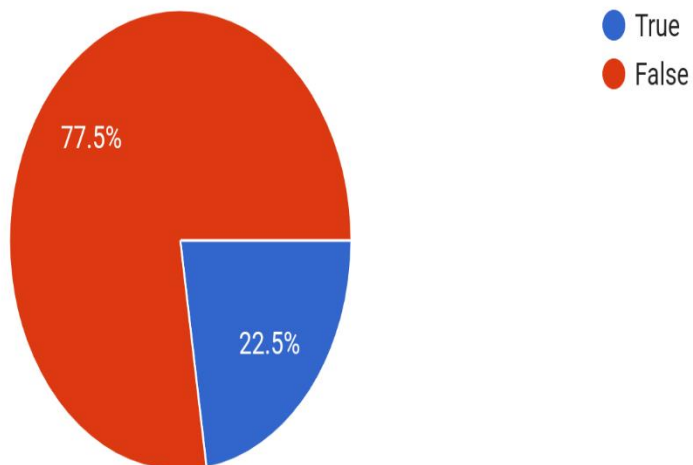
19) Do you strongly value your independence from the influence of others

102 responses



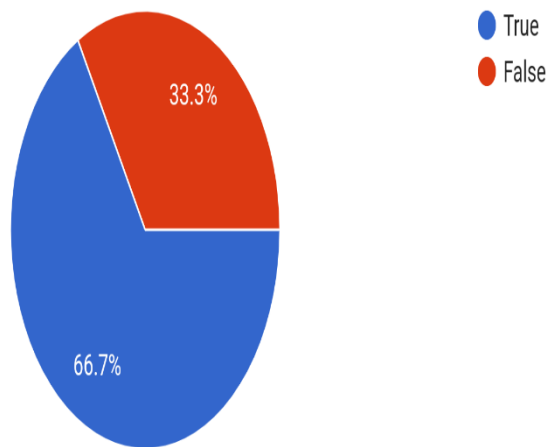
20) Do you believe pleasure is the main good thing in life and pain is the main bad thing?

102 responses



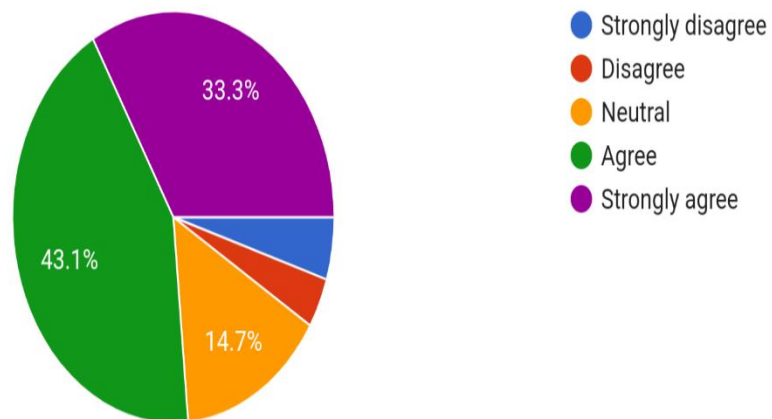
21) Do you believe it's up to the individual as to what makes life meaningful and pursue your goals without restraint?

102 responses



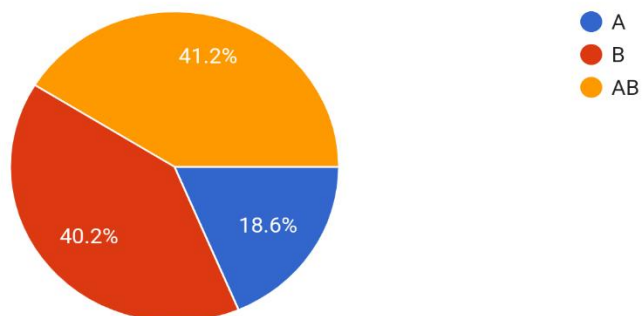
22) People should be fearless in questioning authority of society's accepted facts and beliefs.

102 responses



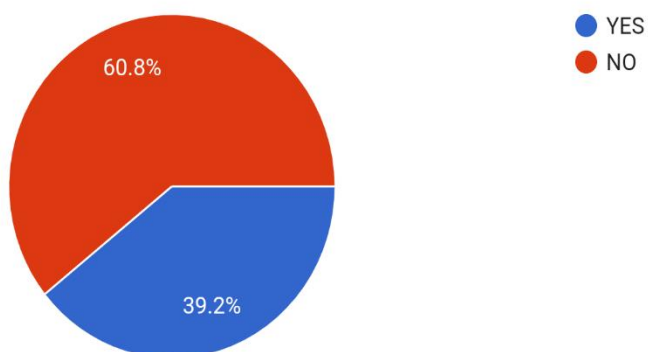
23) Are you (A) pro-choice or (B) pro-life

102 responses



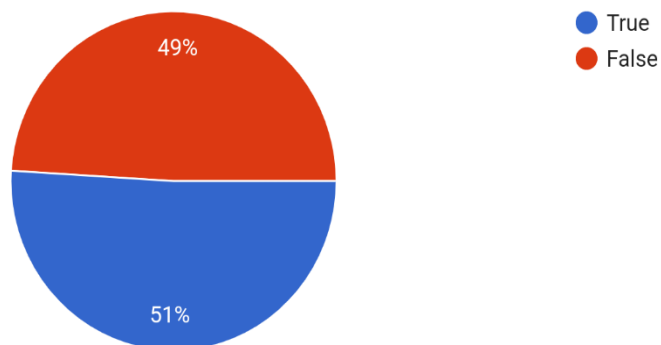
24) Do you believe nothing is universally true or false, right or wrong?

102 responses



25) Do you believe that all religions are of equal importance?

102 responses



APPENDIX B

Breakdown of Religious Beliefs in Trinidad and Tobago

RANK	RELIGION	POPULATION %
1	Protestant Christianity	32.1
2	Roman Catholicism	21.6
3	Hinduism	18.2
4	Religious but Unaffiliated	11.1
5	Other	8.4
6	Islam	5
7	No Religion	2.2
8	Jehovah's Witness	1.5

Source: <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/religious-beliefs-in-trinidad-and-tobago.html>