PREFACE

The origins of the thesis

This thesis originated in the classroom. It was the last class on a hot Friday afternoon in early February, at the height of an Australian summer. It was a Religious Education class with Year 10 girls, one of the first classes in the new school year. Aware of the Friday afternoon challenge I had taken steps, or so I thought, to plan the lesson carefully. The subject matter was “images of God”. However, what I had not anticipated, within the first few minutes of the eighty-minute period, was the firm and articulate statement from a student in the front of the class: “I don’t believe in God”. If the mercury had not been approaching the forty degree Celsius mark, and if I had established a relationship with the class, that comment would have represented a challenge which I could have used to open a most productive discussion. As it was, the opportunity was lost. Teacher and students endured together the next seventy minutes, amicably, but with little intellectual excitement.

In a later class, chatting with the same student, I stated that parts of the Bible were not meant to be taken literally. She agreed. However, her next question, a seemingly simple, “But what parts do have to be taken literally?” raised a host of theological and hermeneutical questions which are far from easy to answer, especially as one’s mind flashes to Church doctrine. A seed was sown: the student was highly intelligent, in earnest and seeking answers. She, and other students with similar questions, deserved a well-thought out response and a religious education programme which addressed the issues raised by the minds of thinking adolescents. That seed of an idea was nurtured by subsequent dealings with adolescents and by further theological studies.

Today, several years later, young people seem loath to voice their questions, perhaps because religion is of less relevance to their lives. However, when given the opportunity to do so anonymously, the younger ones at least can express in a few terse
words the difficulties which they have with an unquestioned literalist understanding of
the Bible.

That tiny seed has become this thesis. It represents the response of one
teacher who has tried to respond to the genuine questions which thoughtful young
people may still wish to ask. They have the right to ask and to expect a well-thought
out response, including the reassurance that the spiritual path is not paved with iron-
clad certainties. Even more do they deserve a curriculum and a pedagogy which
addresses biblical interpretation honestly and openly, drawing on the best of
contemporary biblical scholarship, so that rather than becoming an obstacle to belief,
the biblical text has the capacity to be “revelatory” and life affirming for young people
as they seek to find meaning in life amidst the challenges of the twenty-first century.
INTRODUCTION

The initial impetus for the study comes from personal professional experience over a long career of teaching students in girls’ Catholic secondary schools and an interest in the application of developmental psychology to education. A particular area of interest is students’ understanding of, and attitudes towards, scripture and how this understanding—or misunderstanding—impacts on their religious knowledge, beliefs and praxis. The subject matter for the research derives from reflection on the questions which students ask from time to time which indicate that they believe, at least implicitly, that Christian faith requires that the biblical text be understood literally. Initially the focus on students’ understanding of scripture arose from teaching senior students aged sixteen to eighteen years. Subsequently, the focus shifted to younger students. The attitudes of the older adolescents and young adults were fairly firmly settled; many had ceased to practise the religious tradition in which they had purportedly been raised; most evinced little interest in religious learning or willingness to engage in an introduction to a study of scripture informed by contemporary biblical scholarship. It became clear that the issue needed to be addressed earlier in the secondary school.

The research issue

This study is an exploration of the way in which the teaching of scripture takes cognisance of the apparently difficult transition from the primary school child’s understanding of Bible stories to an understanding of scripture at a level commensurate with the developing cognitive faculties of adolescents and young adults. As the secondary school student moves from the concrete operational thinking of middle childhood to the critical thinking of the adolescent operating in the formal mode, one would expect there to be a transition from a literalist understanding of bible stories to a more nuanced understanding and interpretation of the biblical text.
However, this transition, which does not necessarily occur of its own accord, will be a period which is fraught with difficulty if there is not a match between cognitive level and pedagogy in religious education as there is in other disciplines.

Young adolescents in a transitional stage of thinking react to what they perceive to be contradictory accounts of phenomena presented in science and religious education classes. They have not reached the stage identified by Reich (1989) as complementarity of thinking between two apparently contradictory explanations. A classic example is the way in which science and religion address some of the “big questions” (e.g. Davies, 1996), such as “how it all began”. Explanations of the origins of the universe and of evolution operate within the paradigm summarised in the term the scientific method, which operates on observation and experimentation and the rigorous testing of hypotheses. This paradigm is both implicit and explicit in the secondary school science curriculum. Furthermore, the rules of evidence and the need to substantiate one’s point of view represent the way in which rational discourse is carried on in all areas of the curriculum and is unquestioned by students and adults.

The Bible is the foundational text of Christianity. How it is understood, therefore, is of fundamental importance. The early chapters of Genesis encapsulate the problem which religious education teachers must address competently in their teaching of the Bible. The miracles of Jesus present similar difficulties in the study of the New Testament. The concrete thinker, characteristically, has a literalist understanding of Bible stories. However, if he or she is to reach an interpretation of the biblical text which does not equate religious truth with scientific fact, the teaching programme must facilitate the transition to formal operational thinking in the religious domain. The specific concerns expressed by adolescents include questions about the truth of the Bible and the nature of evidence. Students need to be reassured that their growing capacities for abstract reasoning may be exercised in the religious as well as in
the scientific domain: in fact, their understanding of the biblical text will be enhanced by the application of critical thinking to their analysis of the text.

The objective of teaching the biblical text is threefold: it has a cognitive dimension, to enhance adolescent students’ capacity to interpret scripture in a way that leads to clear understanding; an affective and experiential dimension, an appreciation of its role in their lives; and a spiritual dimension, as a means of enhancing spiritual growth. The principal focus of this thesis is on developing students’ understanding of the biblical text. The focus on the cognitive domain is by no means to underestimate the relevance and the powerful formative influences of the affective domain throughout all stages of development, nor of the social context in which the child develops through adolescence to adulthood. Rather, it is to limit the study to an area which is the particular responsibility of the school as an educational institution, namely, to facilitate and deepen students’ knowledge and understanding. The attention accorded the other domains, and the significance of engaging the imagination, will be mediated through this lens of cognition and understanding.

Key questions which arise in the classroom include the truth of the Bible and the Bible as the Word of God. Students’ attitude towards religion is influenced by the way in which their questions are received in the religious education classroom. A spirit of openness to students’ questions is necessary if adolescents in the secondary school are to feel confident in seeking clarification of religious beliefs. At this period in their lives students are seeking to establish their own identity; this may include a quest for their own religious identity which they may be tentatively undertaking at this time, possibly without their being fully aware of their quest. Inviting questions requires confidence on the part of the teacher. The best teaching of scripture requires the teacher to be a mediator between the scholars of the biblical text and the developing minds of the youthful members of the faith community. Two of the requirements for a successful pedagogy of the Bible are the depth of knowledge and understanding of
religious education teachers, both of contemporary Biblical Studies, provided principally in tertiary institutions, and of the process by which students make the transition from concrete thought to the critical thinking characteristic of formal operational thought and how this is applied to religious thinking.

Evidence of the need for the study is available from a number of quarters: teaching experience and anecdotal evidence, which provided the stimulus for this study and which continues to do so; and evidence provided in the literature, such as the findings of Ronald Goldman, although these have not gone unquestioned. The media also provides evidence on an on-going basis of the consequences when individuals are not given the opportunity to come to a more nuanced understanding of religious texts and religious belief. Contributions to religious radio programs and newspaper articles frequently reflect the anger and disillusionment of the commentator or writer with his or her religious background. Christian beliefs are accompanied by ridicule which could in part be a reflection of an extreme literalist understanding of the biblical text, the legacy of a childish understanding which has never been transformed into an adult interpretation. Recent research studies, both in Australia and overseas, provide further evidence that the transition to a non-literalist understanding of the Bible is not achieved automatically.

The specific context of the study is the Catholic secondary school, although the findings would also be applicable to other Christian denominational schools and places of religious education of young people and, indeed, of the education of adults. The broader context is the world of the early twenty-first century and the characteristics of the post-modern secular society of which Australia forms a part.
Theoretical foundations

This study seeks to address the following question: How does one teach scripture to junior secondary students in the Catholic secondary school in such a way that it takes into account students’ dialectical engagement with the biblical text? This research involves exploring how young people think and reason, their cognitive capacities; the characteristics of the biblical text and its interpretation; and an educational process which facilitates the interaction between reader and text. The process is dialectical: a dialectical model of religious education and the dialectical process between reader and text, based on an appreciation of the developing cognitive capacities of the adolescent.

The approach to education underpinning the study is that which is premised upon the development of students’ thinking and reasoning skills in order to prepare them for an ever-changing world which requires adaptability and the capacity for lifelong learning. The process of transition from concrete to formal operational thinking in religious thinking, and its application to the interpretation and understanding of the biblical text, is considered within the religious education framework provided by Groome’s dialectical hermeneutic.

The theoretical foundation for the exploration of the individual’s cognitive capacities is structural developmental theory, specifically, the cognitive developmental theory of Jean Piaget: Piaget’s theory provides insights into the development of the individual’s cognitive capacities and of the characteristics of the thinking of the child and of the adolescent; Piagetian concepts, such as “assimilation”, “accommodation” and “disequilibrium” provide an established theoretical framework in which changes in the young person’s religious thinking can be explored. Extension of the work of Piaget beyond the adolescent and the stage of formal operational thought, through the research of Perry, and of Belenky and associates, provides further insights into the individual’s epistemological understanding and awareness of different forms of
knowledge. The Reflective Judgment Model of Kitchener and King provides a developmental schema encompassing the nature and certainty of knowledge and how knowledge is gained and beliefs justified. A further extension of this line of enquiry is Deanna Kuhn’s exploration of the transition to critical thinking in the school context.

The understanding of religious thinking draws on studies starting from, but not restricted to, a Piagetian paradigm, especially Goldman’s application of the work of Piaget and Peel to the study of religious thinking. The debate which ensued after Goldman’s publication of his findings opens up new approaches, through a focus on religious language, especially the research of McGrady on the role of metaphor. Recent research by Francis and Loman into young adolescents’ understanding of biblical texts draws on a different theoretical foundation, “styles” of religious thinking.

In exploring the understanding by the student of the content of religious education, specifically the dialectic between the reader and the text, the research derives partly from a structural developmental perspective but includes other perspectives. Fowler’s theory of faith development derives in part from structural developmental theories, particularly those of Piaget and Kohlberg, but introduces other factors as well as the cognitive, for example, Erikson’s psychosocial perspective and Kegan’s ego development. Of particular interest is Fowler’s application of Ricoeur’s concept of a “second naiveté” to the development of a personal faith response.

Critical biblical scholarship provides the hermeneutical framework for an interpretation of the biblical text. Of particular import is the historical-critical approach and subsequent critical methods, for example, literary criticism and narrative analysis.
Methodology

The chosen methodology has been to draw on published material. The initial tentative hypothesis, that a persistent literalist interpretation of scripture was linked to a perception of religion and religious belief as childish, was tested against the data provided by published studies. The findings and analysis of studies ranging from the research of Goldman in England in the 1960s to comments found in transcripts from the Australian report, *The Spirit of Generation Y* (2007), provide confirmation of the hypothesis that some young people have reacted negatively, even angrily, to a literalist understanding of scripture which has never been satisfactorily addressed during the course of their religious education. Among the older students these statements were in the context of a move away from any religious commitment.

The decision was made not to embark upon further empirical studies at this stage. Instead, this study explores the theoretical foundations which may best inform contemporary educational practice. The investigation considers *how one teaches scripture to junior and middle secondary students in the Catholic secondary school in such a way that it takes the cognitive stage of the student into account*. The purpose is to address the following academic, pedagogical and pastoral issues:

(i) **Academic**: Academic integrity and honesty must be respected so that what is taught at one age does not have to be “untaught” later. Ideally the groundwork for such teaching would begin in the primary school.

(ii) **Pedagogical**: The subject matter needs to be taught in a way that is compatible with the growing competencies of students as learners and as developing critical thinkers; and,
Pastoral: The teaching must be sensitive to the pastoral needs of young people, whose religious beliefs and commitment are in the process of being examined and re-imaged as they develop from childhood to adolescence. This involves both recognising and directly addressing their right to an adult understanding of the Christian message and their freedom to choose their response to that message.

The study will also lead to the identification and precise statement of specific questions which could be the subject of further research and empirical investigation.

Outline of the study

This thesis argues that religious education in the Catholic secondary school must engage students’ capacity for critical thinking. The approach to religious education is education for faith, a theoretical framework based on a set of fundamental principles which derive from the dual function of the Catholic school as an educational institution with a secular and an ecclesial dimension. Education for faith is not catechesis: it is not presumed that the nurturing of faith meets the needs of all students. Education for faith is not religious studies: rather, the Catholic Christian Story and Vision\(^1\) are presented as offering a set of values and beliefs which address the existential and spiritual needs of life in the twenty-first century. An essential component of education for faith is teaching for the transformation of students’ understanding of scripture by facilitating the application of students’ developing skills of critical thinking to a dialectical engagement with the biblical text. The ideal of education for faith is an adult commitment to Christian praxis informed by a critical appropriation of scripture.

Chapter 1 describes the learning context, ecclesial and secular. The first section considers the role of the Catholic school as a part of the ministry of the Church as

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\(^1\) “Story” and “Vision” are key concepts in Groome’s (1980) Shared Praxis approach to religious education.
expressed in the documents of Vatican II and the post-conciliar period on the role of the Catholic school and on religious education. The focus then shifts to the Australian context. The discussion of the findings of empirical research in section two provides a snapshot of how effective the Catholic secondary school has been in achieving its religious and secular goals and of the changing expectations of the Catholic school. The last section provides a short description of the characteristics of contemporary society and of the religious beliefs and practices of senior students in the Catholic school, drawing principally on the longitudinal research of Marcellin Flynn and *The Spirit of Generation Y* study. The empirical research identifies the contexts in which contemporary Catholic Christian education is undertaken and highlights the issues which need to be addressed in providing that education.

Chapter 2 argues the need for educators to teach scripture in a way which directly addresses the questions which young people raise. In this context the research of Goldman is considered in some detail. The debate generated by Goldman’s findings opened up productive lines of research and a focus on religious language.

Chapter 3 considers the theoretical foundations for the teaching of religious education. Contemporary models of religious education are considered, with particular reference to Thomas Groome’s shared Christian praxis. The argument by Graham Rossiter for an educational approach rather than catechesis is compared to and contrasted with Groome’s catechetical approach. The key issue is whether a catechetical approach, the fundamental premise of which is developing the faith of believers, is appropriate for the contemporary Catholic secondary school. Models of religious education coming from a non-confessional position are described, the Phenomenological approach of Ninian Smart, and Moore and Habel’s Typological approach. In the last section of this chapter education for faith is presented as an approach which is considered the most appropriate for the contemporary Catholic secondary school and one which will accommodate critical engagement with scripture.
Chapter 4 explores the cognitive characteristics of students from a structural developmental perspective. The foundations are those established by Piaget, but the exploration goes beyond formal operations and beyond Piaget. The research of Perry and of Belenky and associates opens up areas where cognitive capacity is shown to influence the person more broadly. The reflective judgment model of Kitchener and King, and the research of Deanna Kuhn,² open up the area of epistemological understanding, which, together with the insights provided by Mezirow and Basseches, is subsequently applied to teaching for critical engagement with the text in Chapter 7. Erikson, Norman and Norman, and Kegan broaden the exploration beyond the cognitive domain to psychosocial development, group identity, and ego development respectively. Fowler’s application of structural developmental theories to faith development is considered, and reference made to Slee’s critique from a feminist perspective.³

While Chapter 4 considered the characteristics of the learner, Chapter 5 focuses on the characteristics of the biblical text. In the first section ways in which the Bible has been interpreted over the centuries are reviewed, providing a historical perspective, with a focus on the constraints and opportunities for the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation in the Catholic Church. The way in which the Bible has been taught from the eve of Vatican up to the present is considered in the second section, with a focus on religious education in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. The third section discusses the approaches to biblical interpretation from a theoretical perspective and describes those which have most relevance to teaching scripture in the Christian secondary school, the historical-critical approach and narrative analysis. The final section discusses certain hermeneutical principles which are particularly

² Throughout this thesis, Kuhn refers to Deanna Kuhn. When reference is made to Thomas Kuhn this will be indicated by using his full name or initial.
³ More detail of Fowler’s theory and of Slee’s research from a feminist perspective is provided in Appendix 3.
applicable to this thesis. For example, the principle of pre-understanding in relation to the interpretation of texts resonates with key features of epistemic understanding considered in Chapter 4, and is subsequently applied to the approach to teaching scripture advocated in Chapter 7.

Chapter 6 links the learner and the text. The focus is narrowed down to religious language and literary genre. Given the ubiquity of metaphor in religious discourse and in the biblical text, the characteristics of metaphor are discussed in detail. Two genres, myth and parable, are identified as requiring an understanding of metaphor to be fully appreciated. The characteristics of myths and parables are considered from the following perspectives: as a literary form; as biblical genre; and as applied to education. Empirical research emanating from the post-Goldman debate provides insights into the cognitive demands which these texts make upon the cognitive competencies of their readers. The findings of the research of McGrady are applied to teaching and learning.

The research of Reich into complementarity of thinking also comes from a structural developmental perspective. Reich suggests a number of stages in the development of the capacity to perceive apparently conflicting theories as complementary rather than necessarily contradictory. This he applied to an understanding of the scientific explanation of the origins of the universe and Genesis. These stages correspond to epistemological stages discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 7 draws on the insights from the research discussed in the preceding chapters to suggest an approach to teaching for critical engagement with the biblical text in a way which facilitates the transition from the literalist understanding typical of the child to an understanding founded on contemporary biblical scholarship and consonant with the educational focus on thinking skills. The approach is compatible
with the model of religious education presented in Chapter 2 and, it is argued, has credibility academically, pedagogically and pastorally.

Chapter 8 articulates the conclusions which can be drawn from the research and suggests directions for further research.
CHAPTER 1 – THE LEARNING CONTEXT: ECCLESIAL AND SECULAR

Introduction

The Catholic school is both an educational institution, responsible to the civil society for the education of the next generation, and a participant in the mission of the Church (The Catholic School, 1977, n. 6, 7, 8). In the first section of this chapter the ecclesial foundations of the Catholic school are considered, drawing on Vatican II and post-conciliar statements on education. The principal areas to be discussed are the role of the Catholic school in the ministry of the Church, the nature of the Catholic school and approach to religious education.

Section 2 explores how the Catholic secondary school functions. Concern about the “effectiveness” of Australian Catholic schools generated research into how well they were meeting their ecclesial and educational goals. Australian empirical studies of Catholic secondary schools, especially the extensive research of Marcellin Flynn over almost thirty years from the early 1970s, provide much of the data. The findings of the research provide insights into the way in which the schools function, how they are regarded by students and parents, and the capacity of the school to influence educational outcomes. The longitudinal research also reveals changes in expectations of the school in the period covered by the research.

Section 3 considers the contemporary cultural context. Drawing on data from empirical studies, the characteristics of students are discussed, focussing on their religious practice and religious beliefs. This section identifies the context in which the

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4 The official Church documents discussed in this section are referred to by their title. In the Bibliography these documents are recorded according to the issuing body or person as follows: (i) The Catholic school, 1977, and Lay Catholics in schools: Witnesses to faith, 1982: Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education; (ii) General catechetical directory, 1981: Sacred Congregation for the Clergy; (iii) The religious dimension of education in a Catholic school, 1990, and The Catholic school on the threshold of the third millennium, 2002: Congregation for Catholic Education; (iv) General directory for catechesis, 1997: Congregation for the Clergy; (v) Catechesi tradendae, 1979: John Paul II.
Catholic school operates at the present time, the “signs of the times” to which religious educators must respond.

1.1 Catholic Christian Education: Foundations

From its genesis in first century Palestine, the Christian community has been committed to bringing others, both Jew and Gentile, into full participation in the new community whose faith was “that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31).

The New Testament itself clearly shows this commitment of the nascent Church in the letters of Paul (e.g. Rom 1:1, Gal 1:1, Phil 1:12-13) and in the gospels (e.g. Mark 1:1; Matt 28:19-20). In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke describes the work of evangelisation, starting from the preaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36) and ending with Paul, in Rome under guard, but still “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 28:31).

From apostolic times the response of the Christian community to the commission to evangelise “all nations” has had two moments: evangelisation and catechesis. Evangelisation, the proclamation of the “good news” to those who have not heard the message of salvation, is the first of these two key moments. The second, catechesis, is the deepening of the faith of the new converts. The Didache provides perhaps the earliest extant record of catechesis in its “detailed … step-by-step transformation by which gentile converts were to be prepared for full active participation in their assemblies” (Milavec, 2003, p. ix).

Both evangelisation and catechesis have been integral throughout the two thousand year history of the Catholic Church. They are still fundamental to its mission today (e.g. Catechesi Tradendae, 1979, n. 19, p. 17; General Catechetical Directory,
Traditionally, the teaching of religious education in the Catholic school has been focussed on catechesis (e.g. *The Catholic School*, 1977, n. 9, pp. 13-14).⁵

Vatican II (1962-1965) established the ecclesial and theological framework within which the Catholic Church has operated since its conclusion in 1965. Key features include more engagement with the modern world (*Gaudium et spes*),⁶ a more ecumenical approach to seeking Christian unity (*Unitatis redintegratio*), and more open relations with non-Christian religions (*Nostra aetate*), notwithstanding opposition, both then and now: for example, Confoy (2008, p. 62) refers to “an echo of the ‘intransigent’ faction at the council … still resounding in the present church.” This is the ecclesial context within which the Catholic school in Australia operates today.

**Catholic teaching on Christian education: Vatican II**

Vatican II’s *Declaration on Christian Education* (*Gravissimum educationis*, 1965)⁷ endorses the following indisputable general educational principles: the dignity of the human person and the paramount importance of education as a fundamental right of every human person (*GE*, Preface, pp. 725-726). The purpose of education is to develop the human person for his or her own sake—defined in Church documents in teleological terms—and for the well-being of society (*GE*, n. 1, pp. 726-727). The Church also asserts that its mandate “to announce the mystery of salvation” brings with it a responsibility to promote human welfare (*GE*, Preface, p. 726). Positive reference is made to advances in human knowledge in the “psychological, pedagogical and intellectual sciences” (*GE*, n. 1, p. 727). Christian education is declared to be the “right” of all Christians (*GE*, n. 2, p. 727), complementing the Church’s own mandate.

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⁵ In citations the documents *Catechesi Tradendae*, *General Catechetical Directory*, *General Directory for Catechesis* and *The Catholic School*, will be abbreviated to *CT*, *GCD*, *GDC* and *School* respectively.

⁶ Vatican II documents are listed in the Bibliography under “Vatican II”.

⁷ In citations *Gravissimum educationis* will be abbreviated to *GE*.
While education is primarily the responsibility of the parents (*GE*, n. 3, pp. 728-729), education is a special concern of the Church (n. 3, p. 729), especially “catechetical instruction” (*GE*, n. 4, p. 730), in which the school has a key role (*GE*, n. 4, p. 730).

In the years following Vatican II, the expectation was that “the theological-pastoral principles drawn from the Second Vatican Council” would lead to the establishment of “guidelines for the preparation of diocesan catechisms” (*The Renewal of the Education of Faith*, 1970, p. xii, *Letter from Cardinal Villot* to the Italian Episcopal Conference, 1970). *The Renewal of the Education of Faith* (1970) was the response of the Australian Episcopal Conference. A translation, with an Australian supplement, of the document of the Italian Episcopal Conference earlier that year, this document endorsed the definitions of evangelisation and catechesis and the principles of the conciliar document. It showed awareness of the context in which catechesis is carried out, extending it to “those who have made, even implicitly, the fundamental choice of Christ and His Church” (*Renewal*, n. 31, p. 19), and the need to take into consideration the “actual stages of Christian growth, their crises and their spiritual progress” (n. 31, p. 19). The need to pay “particular attention … to the cultural and social context” is recognised (n. 31, p. 19) and the necessity of the co-operation of the person in the catechetical endeavour (n. 30, p. 18). While noting the need for “those who possess the faith” to “constantly rediscover how much in accord with reason it is” (n. 26, p. 16), catechesis is “not restricted to satisfying the legitimate inquiries of the mind” (n. 34, p. 22).

The Catholic school: its dual function

The ecclesial and secular dimensions of the Catholic school have a considerable degree of complementarity. Both parties assert the right of every individual to education and see the primary purpose of education to be the full development of each individual.

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8 In citations this document will be abbreviated to *Renewal.*
student as a unique person who can participate fully and actively in society. In both cases, transmitting the culture is deemed necessary. However, for the Catholic school there is the additional task of providing a critique of culture (e.g. *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, 1990, n. 101, p. 91).

The broader culture in which the school is situated influences the way in which human knowledge taught in the secular subjects is integrated with “the light of the gospel” (*School*, 1977, n. 37, p. 33). The *General Catechetical Directory* (1971) identified the characteristics of the modern world, including rapid change (n. 2, p. 5), the influence of the instruments of social communication (n. 2, p. 6) and pluralism (n. 3, p. 6), as impacting upon the Catholic school. The recognition of the necessity of adapting to “a pluralist society” (*School*, 1977, n. 2, p. 7), and of putting into practice the “more open-minded approach” recommended by Vatican II (n. 23, p. 22), included “the systematic formation of the pupils’ critical faculties” (n. 48, p. 39), and the aspiration of producing committed adult Christians—implied in the stated aim of educating Christians who can “take their place in social and political life” (n. 22, p. 22).

The relevance of the social context is specifically addressed in *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (1990) which makes it clear that the principles of the Catholic school need to be “appropriately applied to the world of today” (n. 3, p. 9). The consequences for youth of the change in society and societal values include young people’s concern about the future, lack of stability, religious indifference and the abandonment of religious practices (n. 10-16, pp. 15-18). This recognition of the reality of the changed situation is reaffirmed in *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1997), which McLaughlin (1998) describes as being “frank and realistic in many of its observations, as well as refreshingly

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9 In citations this document will be abbreviated to *Religious Dimension*. Citations are from the 1990 edition.
10 In citations this document will be abbreviated to *Third Millennium*. Citations are from the 2002 edition.
optimistic and outward looking” (p. 29). In the 1997 document the role of the Catholic school is expressed in pastoral terms, in providing “sensitive help” (Third Millennium, n. 5, p. 9) in addressing the “difficulties” which families and young people experience in this “restless” age (n. 5, 6, pp. 8-9).

In these later documents, the rights of students are considered. For example, The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School (1990) explicitly states that the “religious freedom and the personal conscience of individual students and their families must be respected” (n. 6, pp. 10-11). While this statement is preceded by a reference to the fact that in many countries there may even be a majority of students in Catholic schools who are not Catholics (n. 6, p. 10), by extension, the descriptions of the characteristics of young people in contemporary society (n. 7-23, pp. 13-23) may, logically, be applied to those who are nominally Catholic while in a stage of questioning and exploring their ideas and their role in the world. Proclamation of the gospel is seen as being offered, it is not to be imposed (n. 6, p. 11); rather the Catholic school needs to “respond to the questions which come from the restless and critical minds of the young” (n. 23, p. 22). The critical study of the biblical text, based on the principles of contemporary biblical scholarship, fits comfortably into this explication of the role of the Catholic school in the early twenty-first century.

**Religious education in the Catholic school: catechesis?**

In many of the Church documents religious education in the Catholic school means “catechetical instruction which illumines and strengthens the faith, develops a life in harmony with the spirit of Christ”; it is expressed in participation in the liturgy and taking “an active part in the apostolate” (GE, n. 4, p. 730). Religious education is “education in faith” (School, 1977, n. 9, pp. 13-14) concerned with “the complete christian formation of its pupils” (n. 45, p. 37). This involves explanation of the Christian faith (GCD, 1971, n. 2, p. 6), “imparted explicitly and in a systematic manner”
“explained in language that includes an appeal to reason” (CT, 1979, n. 25, p. 21). In these documents the implication is that religious education is catechism.

There are two aspects of the religious dimension of the Catholic school: (i) a broad understanding of religious education as encompassing the whole life of the school, including “participation” in liturgy; and (ii) “explanation”, the specific role of the formal classroom programme. In relation to the former, there is the repeated emphasis on the culture, or the “climate”, of the school (e.g. School, 1977, n. 47, p. 38; Religious Dimension, 1990, n. 24, p. 25): the school is to be a Christian community (e.g. School, n. 53, 54, pp. 41-42; Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith, 1982, n. 38, p. 45; Third Millennium, 1997, n. 12, p. 15). Furthermore, as a “genuine community” (School, n. 60, p. 46), the Catholic school is to be concerned about the needs of the poor (e.g. School, n. 58, pp. 44-45), recognise a responsibility towards the wider community (n. 62, pp. 46-47) and be attuned to social justice (e.g. Religious Dimension, n. 45, pp. 41-42).

This thesis is principally concerned with formal religious education in the classroom and whether classroom religious education in the Catholic secondary school is necessarily catechism. Catechesi Tradendae (1979) recognises the reality of the difficulties involved in catechisis when children come from families in which religion is not practised (n. 81, p. 65), and the difficulties associated with adolescence (n. 82, p. 65); however, the inherent tension between the assumptions underlying catechesis and the reality of its recipients in Catholic schools at the end of the twentieth century is not engaged in Catechesi Tradendae.

In later Church documents “a clear distinction” is made “between religious instruction and catechesis” (Religious Dimension, 1990, n. 68). The General Directory for Catechesis (1997) describes it as “one of distinction and complementarity” (n. 73).
Catechesis is “the handing on of the Gospel message” (n. 69); its aim “is maturity: spiritual, liturgical, sacramental and apostolic” (n. 69), and is located principally in “a local Church community” which is “living out its faith” (n. 68). Catechesis fits more readily into the life of the Catholic school as a Christian community, rather than being subsumed into the classroom programme. While the “Catholic school is a most important locus for human Christian formation” (GDC, 1997, no. 259), the “aim of the school ... is knowledge” (Religious Dimension, 1990, n. 69). This document seems to assume a symbiotic relationship between knowledge and faith: “religious instruction cannot help but strengthen the faith of a believing student, just as catechesis cannot help but increase one’s knowledge of the Christian message” (n. 69). While justification for this assumption is not provided, it does accord knowledge an important role in religious education in the Catholic school. That the statement is qualified by its reference to a “believing student”, hints at factors which are beyond the scope of the school.11

Catholic Church documents: summary of principles

From the Vatican II and post conciliar documents a number of principles can be identified for schools to consider as they address the challenges faced as a daily reality. It is within this framework of challenge and opportunity that the teaching of the biblical text in the secondary school takes place.

- Contemporary culture: There is an acknowledgement of context and an acceptance of the reality of pluralism (GCD, 1971, n. 3, p. 6; School, 1977, n. 2, p. 7; Third Millennium, 1997, n. 1, p. 5) and its consequences on individuals making their own decisions (GCD, n. 2-3, p. 6). The ecumenical dimension initiated at Vatican II is part of the contemporary ecclesial culture (CT, 1979, n. 32-3, pp. 28-30).

11 In order to locate more precisely the nature of catechesis and the nature of religious education, the process of evangelisation will be explored further in Chapter 3.2.
• **Adolescents**: The characteristics and needs of adolescents and their “deeper questioning” are recognised. (CT, 1979, n. 38, pp. 32-33). Further, it is acknowledged that there are those who have been baptised as infants but have had no further engagement with the Christian church, and so no initial evangelisation has taken place. In this case, it is stated that catechetics involves arousing faith and converting as well as “nourishing and teaching the faith” (n. 19, pp. 17-18). The extent to which this is the role of the school may well be debatable.

References to the young, their choices and the presentation of the gospel as “giving meaning to life” (CT, n. 39, pp. 33-34), represent a change from the unquestioning acceptance of dogma and doctrine which was characteristic of earlier approaches to catechesis. There is an implied change of focus: from the young person as the passive recipient of the Christian message to a focus on the gospel providing hope and a point of stability to young people searching for meaning in a changing world. This is a profound theological and educational shift in understanding the role of religious education in the Catholic school.

• **Insights from other disciplines**: These include psychology, sociology and pedagogy. The *General Catechetical Directory* (1971) recognises the importance of taking into account the ages and “stages of faith” of the recipients, including adolescents (n. 30, p. 25; n. 84, p. 67) with their search for personal autonomy and their growing intellectual capacities (n. 86-87, pp. 68-69).\(^{12}\) However, faith is assumed (e.g. CT, 1979, n. 16, p. 14).

The need to adapt catechesis to the intellectual development of the recipient is acknowledged (GCD, 1971, n. 79, p. 64; CT, 1979, n. 51, p. 42), as is the necessity

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to take into consideration differences in individual ability, for example, “by using more profound explanations” to meet “the requirements of the more lively and capable minds” (GCD, n. 33, p. 26).

An example of the recommendation to use “new pedagogical insights”, recommended in The Catholic School (1977, n. 67, p. 51), is the recognition of the need to devise methods and search for a language suited to different groups, for example, children, young people, and intellectuals (CT, 1979, n. 17, p. 14; n. 59, p. 49). In relation to teaching scripture, the introduction of concepts and terminology which facilitate the understanding of the Bible, including its use of metaphorical language, is essential.

- **Reason in catechesis:** What is stated to be a characteristic of a catechesis for adults—“to develop the rational foundations of the faith”—may be said to apply increasingly to adolescents and young adults in the final years of secondary school (GCD, 1971, n. 97d, p. 75). However, how “reason” is understood is important. The role of reason in this thesis is a celebration of the growing cognitive competencies of young people; the intention is to engage those competencies so that rather than being a barrier to religious belief, understanding opens up the way for young people to value the message contained in the scriptures and to enhance their affective use in prayer.

The point made about those termed “quasi-catechumens” (CT, 1979, n. 44, p. 36), adults who have “drifted” and have “religious knowledge of a rather childish kind” or who “feel the effects” of a catechesis “badly imparted or badly assimilated” (n. 44, p. 36) is of special relevance: if adults have “drifted” because their religious knowledge has not gone beyond that of a child, clearly there is the need for a more sophisticated understanding of religion, including scripture.
The documents of Vatican II establish the principles upon which contemporary Catholic religious education is founded. How those principles are implemented is dependant upon the circumstances which obtain in a particular time and place. Australian empirical studies provide insights into what is actually occurring in Australian Catholic secondary schools and the educational outcomes achieved.

1.2 Catholic Christian Education: The Australian Catholic Secondary School

If one is seeking to engage students in a critical appreciation of scripture it is necessary to consider the capacity of the school and the religious education curriculum to achieve that outcome. The findings of empirical studies contribute to an understanding of the educational impact which the school and the classroom programme may have. The issues explored in the empirical studies include the relative importance of home and school factors in educational outcomes, students’ attitudes towards religious education, and the significance of the school as a whole in influencing students’ religious learning and development.

The broad educational context for the investigations into Australian Catholic schools by Flynn and Fahy was the school effectiveness research which began in the United States, first in a secular context in the mid 1960s and then applied to Catholic schools in the United States by Greeley and Rossi (1966) (Fahy, 1992, pp. 34-36, 52-54). Its findings indicated that the school had “little unique effect upon pupil achievement” (p. 36). To establish the specific context within which this research took place a brief excursus into the historical circumstances of Catholic education in Australia is warranted.
Australian Catholicism: the significance of the Catholic school

The Catholic school has been integral to Australian Catholicism. The Catholic people and the Church hierarchy in the Australian colonies in the late nineteenth century embarked upon a course which resulted in an Australia-wide system of Catholic primary and secondary schools and, subsequently, a number of tertiary institutions. The dedication of the Catholic community was expressed in financial support of this extensive Catholic school system for almost a century before any Government financial support was forthcoming. The model of religious education was a socialisation or enculturation model. Children were socialised into their role as members of the Catholic faith in a society frequently seen to be hostile. Religious instruction taught children what being a Catholic meant in terms of beliefs and practice. The rubric “passing on the faith” encapsulates the essence of the impetus behind the efforts expended.

Catechesis was the means by which the faith was “passed on” to the next generation and the traditional or transmission model of religious education, which was current in Australian up until it was succeeded by the kerygmatic approach in the early 1960s, was unquestioned. The subsequent introduction of a life-centred approach to religious education drew strong criticism, which led to a questioning of the effectiveness of Catholic schools.

Linked to the ferment generated by the new life-centred approach to religious education was a broader debate over the future of Catholic schooling itself (e.g. Bourke, 1969) and whether the heavy expenditure of resources on the Catholic school system was disproportionate to the effectiveness of the schools, especially when there

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13 An overview of the approaches to religious education in the Catholic secondary school from the period prior to Vatican II to the early twenty-first century is provided in Appendix 1.
were large numbers of Catholic children in Government schools. At this time success was gauged in terms of students’ knowledge of fundamental Christian doctrine and religious practice, especially attendance at Sunday Mass.

Sociological studies contributed to concern about declining religious practice within the Catholic community. For example, Gallup Polls indicated a decline in the proportion of Catholics who said that they attended church every week: from 62% in 1950 to 54% in 1961 (cited in Mol, 1971, p. 14). Mol’s Religion in Australia survey, conducted in 1966, considered the effects of Catholic schools (pp. 183-196) and stated that some argued that “the Catholic school system has not achieved what it set out to do” (p. 192). The findings of Mol’s (1971) detailed statistical survey was part of the data available to those engaged in the debate over Catholic schools’ “religious effectiveness” (Rossiter, 1984, p. 14) “as agencies for promoting religious faith” (p. 11). While some in the Catholic community recommended that Catholic schools be closed, others recommended reform (Flynn, 1975, pp. 5-6). It was in this climate that the empirical studies, which investigated the “religiosity of pupils” rather than “the religiosity of adults” (Rossiter, 1984, pp. 11, 9-10), were undertaken.

In exploring the way in which Catholic schools were operating, the comprehensive studies of Flynn (1975, 1979, 1985, 1993) and Flynn and Mok (2002) provide a detailed picture of Catholic schools as educational institutions with a particular culture and of the trends over almost thirty years in the post-Vatican II period. Relevant also is the research of Carmel Leavey and Patrick Fahy, whose doctoral theses, in 1972 and 1980 respectively, were followed up by subsequent published research (Leavey, et al., 1992; Fahy, 1992). Both Flynn (e.g. Flynn, 1975, p. xi; Flynn, 1993, pp. 23-24) and Fahy (e.g. Fahy, 1992, p. 26) acknowledge the earlier

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14 Mol (1971) stated that there was a “rapid proportional decrease of Catholic pupils attending Catholic schools” (p. 178), citing estimates from “Monseigneur J. E. Bourke, Director of the Federal Catholic Education Office” that “in 1965, 29.52 per cent of Catholic children in Australia were not in Catholic schools; in 1967, 35.73 per cent and in 1968, 37.62 per cent” (p. 178).
research of Leavey (1972), especially her introduction of school climate as a variable in researching the influence of religious education on student outcomes.

Reflection on the circumstances which gave rise to the research in the early 1970s and the expectations which the Catholic community had of the Catholic school at that time, compared with the situation which obtains in the early twenty-first century, highlights the changes which have occurred over that period. The characteristics of the Australian Catholic community have changed; so too have the expectations which many in that community have of the Catholic secondary school.

**The Catholic secondary school in the late twentieth century: changing circumstances**

The findings of Flynn’s 1972 study of 1393 Sixth Form (Year 12) boys in twenty-one Catholic Boys’ High Schools in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory (Flynn, 1975, pp. 2, 36-37)\(^{15}\) were published in 1975. The results of the school effectiveness literature were corroborated in that the most important influence on students’ religious development was determined to be the home (pp. 179, 186, 273); however, “the general culture and religious climate of good religious schools influence students’ religious development even when home influences are controlled” (p. 280). School climate was shown to affect student morale: “Students with high morale were found to be significantly higher on all religious variables—religious beliefs, values, practice and attitudes towards religious education classes—than students of low morale” (p. 278).

Flynn’s follow-up study ten years later in 1982 provided a means of comparison over the period 1972-1982 (Flynn, 1985, pp. 4-5), and provided more specific information on the relative importance of the role of the school, both in academic outcomes and in the religious domain. There were twenty-five schools in the sample, three country schools were co-educational; however, the data does not report findings for the small number of girls.
including the twenty-one schools in the 1972 research (Flynn, 1975). Of the sample of 2041 Year 12 students, 1738 (85%) were boys and 303 (15%) were girls (Flynn, 1985, p. 40). The findings confirmed that Catholic schools were having an educational and a religious effect independent of the home background. Statistical analysis indicated that the largest unique contribution to students’ academic achievement, measured by their performance in the external Higher School Certificate (HSC) examinations, was the school’s informal curriculum or ethos (pp. 314-316, 353), followed by the school’s formal curriculum (p. 353). Catholic schools, therefore, were deemed to be having an effect independent of the home background (p. 351). Furthermore, there was an interesting correlation between high HSC scores and religious variables: the top 5% scored well above the average on religious practice, personal faith and religious attitudes (p. 350).

The influence of parents and home was the strongest influence on students’ religious development, followed by school retreats, with the school religious education curriculum as the third strongest effect (Flynn, 1985, p. 347). The religious education curriculum was shown to have a significant role in seven of eight criterion measures of religious development\(^{16}\) (p. 327) as shown in Table 1.1.\(^{17}\)

**Table 1.1: Influences on dimensions of religious development**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Primary unique effect</th>
<th>Secondary unique effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal faith</td>
<td>RE curriculum</td>
<td>Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious commitment</td>
<td>RE curriculum</td>
<td>Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes towards the Church</td>
<td>RE curriculum</td>
<td>Formal school curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious knowledge</td>
<td>RE curriculum</td>
<td>Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious practice</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>RE curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral values</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>RE curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice values</td>
<td>Quality of school life</td>
<td>RE curriculum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{16}\) The eighth criterion was HSC achievement, for which the school’s informal and formal curriculum were the primary and secondary unique effects respectively.

\(^{17}\) Slight adaptation of Table 12.14 (Flynn, 1985, p. 327).
Flynn’s third large-scale study in 1990 (Flynn, 1993) involved a sample of 5932 Year 12 students from fifty Catholic High Schools from all the dioceses of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. This was the first of Flynn’s studies to have almost equal numbers of boys (51.4%) and girls (48.6%) (p. 95). In this study Flynn explored the “culture” of Catholic school defined in terms of the principles enunciated in *Gravissimum educationis* (1965) and subsequent official Church statements. He concluded that there was evidence of the “integration of faith and culture of which the Church documents speak” (Flynn, 1993, p. xiii) and that the decision in the late nineteenth century to establish Catholic schools had been vindicated (p. 400).

The research showed that “Catholic schools have an influence on students which is independent of other influences such as that of the home, parish or peer group.” Varying schooling effects were identified, including “religious education and religious values”, which were relatively large (Flynn, 1993, p. 366). “The percentage of variance due to school membership was as follows”: attitudes to religious education curriculum, 9.4%; social justice values, 8.6%; religious commitment, 7.2%; attitudes to Jesus, 6.5%; and image of God, 6.4% (p. 366). Flynn’s analysis indicated that “8-10% of the total variance in students’ religious beliefs and values was due to the schools’ influence” (p. 389). A link was also found between the attitudes towards religious education in schools and the religiosity of students: when ten schools with positive attitudes towards religious education were compared with other schools, students in the former “were found to be significantly more religious than students in the remaining schools” (p. 418). He concluded, that “Catholic schools, therefore, are having an independent religious effect on the beliefs and values of their students” (p. 389). Flynn’s approach to religious education was catechetical and based on a socialisation model in which students were immersed in the Catholic culture of the school. The catechetical approach to religious education was not questioned and what was actually occurring in the religious education classroom was not investigated.
The significance of classroom teaching.

The research of Patrick Fahy (1992) is firmly within the effectiveness research corpus. At a time when the religious education debate posited a choice between “education-in-faith”, and “education-in-religion” (p. 19), Fahy’s particular concern was to challenge the assumption that the Catholic school and its catechetical programme had little impact on students’ religious development.

Fahy’s study (1992) involved a total of 3431 students (1991 boys and 228 girls) in Year 10, and 1212 Year 12 students (1117 boys and 95 girls) in 103 classrooms in twenty-three Marist schools in three states of Australia (pp. 25-27). The research investigated both the formal curriculum and the ethos or culture of the school as a community. Fahy used commonality analysis (p. 106) to explore the relative influence of home and school on religious variables at the “level of religious education classrooms” (p. 18).

Findings indicated that “both school and home environments have a unique as well as an overlap effect” (Fahy, 1992, p. 117). Six predictors of students’ Christian faith were identified—four school factors and two home factors—which accounted for “98.3% of the absolute variance between schools” (p. 118). Of the four school factors, two related to the formal and two to the informal curriculum (pp. 117, 119, 120-121, 212-217), one of which, liberal educational goals, is of particular interest. Items which constituted the “liberal education goals” (pp. 215-216) measure were openness to all areas of human knowledge; love of learning; tolerance towards other religions; and the development of independent and critical thinking (pp. 215-6). The finding relating to the development of critical thinking is significant, given the professed goal in this thesis

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18 His study includes a lengthy critique of the school effectiveness research, both secular (Chapter 2) and the application of that research to Catholic education (Chapter 3).
19 Graham Rossiter’s “education in religion” or “educational approach” is discussed below in Chapter 3.1.
of applying students’ developing capacity for critical thinking to the study and understanding of scripture.

Fahy’s analysis of the variation at the classroom level revealed a small, but statistically significant unique effect (p < 0.05), indicating that there is a difference between religious education classrooms, even within the same school (Fahy, 1992, p. 118). This finding suggests that the way in which scripture is taught could influence outcomes, especially if advantage is taken of students’ capacity and commitment to independent and critical thinking.

The Catholic secondary school at the end of the millennium: changed expectations

The longitudinal research of Flynn, and Flynn and Mok (2002) provided the opportunity for a comparison of data for the 1972 to 1998 period, roughly the last quarter of the twentieth century, a period of great change. The trends identified in the longitudinal research are a measure of the changes which occurred in Australian Catholicism in the last three decades of the twentieth century. Significant changes include parents’ and students’ expectations of the school and attitudes towards religious education. These changes influence the circumstances within which the Catholic secondary school engages with the secular and ecclesial dimensions of its educative task, including the approach to religious education and the teaching of scripture.

The 1998 (Flynn & Mok, 2002) study of Year 12 students from seventy Catholic schools in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory included 4646 (56%) male and 3664 (44%) female students (p. 88), 78% of whom (6441 students) were Catholic (p. 88). These data provide an insight into young people’s concerns and priorities and of the influences on their religious development as they came to the end of their years of secondary schooling at the close of the twentieth century.
Influences on religious development.

The influence of parents became more pronounced, with 71% of students citing the example and lives of their parents as an important factor in their religious development, an increase of 15% from 1972 (Flynn & Mok, 2002, p. 240). Even more dramatic was the increase in the influence of peers and friends, rising from 23% in 1972 to 54% in 1998 (p. 240). Table 1.2 summarises the data for the whole 1998 cohort of 8310 students on the relative influence of nine factors on students’ religious development, five of which are school related, with the comparable figures for the Catholic students (n = 6465) in the last column (slight adaptation of Table 10.1, p. 239, and data from Table 10.3, p. 242).

Students’ expectations of Catholic schools: priorities.

Data on students’ expectations of the school provide an insight into young people’s priorities at the end of their Catholic schooling. Of the five scales, religious development showed the lowest support, and also recorded a decline over the years 1982 to 1990 to 1998, especially from 1982 to 1990: vocational, academic, personal and social development ranked higher. However, most of those in the study “were found to be generally happy with their experience of Catholic schools” (Flynn & Mok, 2002, pp. 135, 213), with levels of satisfaction being similar to those in the earlier studies. Similarly, students’ perceptions of the culture of Catholic schools were positive: for example, 81% believed that they had sufficient freedom, and 71% reported a good spirit of community (p. 174).

20 The findings of Malone (1995, p. 7) were similar in relation to the influence of peers and parents on religious beliefs and practice on Year 11 students in New South Wales.

21 Table 10.3, p. 242 (Flynn & Mok, 2002), gives the number of Catholic students as 6465; however, previously the number of Catholic students, 78% of the total cohort of 8310 students, was given as 6441 (p. 88) as noted above. Furthermore, the heading of this section—Section 3 of Chapter 10 (Flynn & Mok, 2002)—and the heading in Table 10.3, from which the data is taken, refers to “Practising Catholic Students”. Given the more restricted use of the term “practising” in other contexts in this thesis, and subsequent data in Flynn and Mok’s Chapter 10 on “Students’ religious practice” (2002, pp. 243ff), the word “practising” has been omitted in Table 1.2.
Table 1.2: Influences on students’ religious development, 1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All students</th>
<th>All students</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Catholic Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% Important</td>
<td>% Not important</td>
<td></td>
<td>% Important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example and lives of parents</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends and peers</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School retreat or camp</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic school</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School religious education</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School liturgies and Mass</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example and lives of teachers</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The parish</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth group</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Catholic secondary schools, therefore, can be said to be meeting the educational and personal needs of their students and to do so within the framework of a positive sense of community in which there are “generally very positive” relationships with their teachers (Flynn & Mok, 2002, pp. 191, 214). Young people’s priorities, at this stage of their life, not surprisingly, are on gaining the necessary academic results to provide an entrance into courses which will enable them to achieve their vocational goals.

**Attitudes to religious education.**

The 1998 data on students’ attitudes to religious education and religious education classes indicated that while 60% agreed that teachers allowed “sufficient time for discussion”, for 50% classes did not “arouse much interest” (Flynn & Mok, 2002, p. 280), and only 41% “enjoyed RE classes” or found classes “interesting” (p. 281).
Resistance was found to written work and assessment in religious education (p. 284), at a time when more attention being given to assessment in order to raise the profile of religious education within the curriculum (p. 283). A positive response to retreats, which previously had been well received by students, declined from 54% in 1990 to 43% in 1998 (p. 287). Of the responses to open-ended questions, 39% indicated positive attitudes (p. 284) against 61% expressing negative attitudes (p. 285) to religious education. Many students stated that religious education should be optional at Years 11 and 12 (p. 285).

To summarise:

- The key influences on students were parents (71%) and peers (54%) and these influences had increased over the 1972-1998 period.
- The importance of the “ethos” or “culture” of a school was repeatedly confirmed.
- Students were generally satisfied with their school experience; however, it would seem that while they did not reject the religious dimension of the school, it was not their principal concern.
- Attitudes to religious education classes indicate that at least 50% of students did not find classes interesting; many held that RE should be optional in the senior school.
- Of concern is the 61% who expressed negative attitudes to religious education, especially the finding that at times the open-ended responses indicated anger (Flynn & Mok, 2002, p. 282). This suggests an area for further research.

The situation indicated by these statistics is one which many teachers of Year 12 students would not find surprising. What is confirmed is the difficulty of engaging students intellectually in religious education: for example, only 19% stated that

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22 Hughes (2006b) states that in discussing questions related to The Spirit of Generation Y research with “a class of young people in a Catholic school”, when asked about the time when they had most fun they responded in “a united chorus” that it had been on a recent retreat (p. 191). However, there is no way of actually comparing this anecdotal evidence with that of Flynn and Mok cited above.
religious education classes were taken seriously by students and only 20% agreed that there should be more emphasis on knowledge and content (Flynn & Mok, 2002, p. 280). These findings confirm the decision, derived from experience, that if one is to endeavour to address the need for young people to be guided through the transition from a literalist to a more nuanced interpretation of scripture, this task needs to be undertaken well before Year 12. Whether students who had an intellectually satisfying understanding of scripture would be more engaged in religious education at Year 12 would need to be monitored. Anecdotal evidence indicates that students who choose an academic study of religion, Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) Religion and Society or Texts and Traditions, are enthusiastic about these courses.

The Catholic secondary school: expectations reconsidered

The major findings of Flynn’s research are confirmed by several other Australian studies in terms of the more problematic findings with regard to its role in religious socialisation and the success of the Catholic school as an educational institution in which students feel secure and develop confidence and a positive response to life.

Neidhart and Hansford (1988) investigated the issues which were of concern to Year 12 students in nine Catholic secondary schools in and around Melbourne. The findings from their sample of 752 (206 male; 546 female) 17-18 year olds indicated that “erosion of Christian values and ideals” (p. 20) ranked low in their concerns.

The findings of Darmody (1990) were comparable to those of Flynn with regard to Catholic secondary schools producing students with a strong self-image and a general satisfaction with their experience of the Catholic secondary school, especially academically. However, declining moral standards, declining religious beliefs and church attendance, and lack of understanding of the teaching of Christ (p. 115) were of less concern than issues which relate more directly to the experience of youth, for
example, drugs (p. 115); however issues of social justice ranked as a concern (p. 115), a finding comparable with the Neidhart and Hansford research (1988, p. 21).

The findings of Dorman (2001) provide further endorsement of the success of the educational achievements of Catholic secondary schools, indicated that Catholic school graduates had a positive outlook on life (p. 26) and that they were “very tolerant of the rituals and practices of others” (p. 26). However, they had what Dorman called a “passive rather than active Christian commitment” and were “not willing to engage in personal faith practice within the Church” (p. 27).

In a study involving 227 Year 12 students and eleven teachers from eleven Catholic schools in Victoria, de Souza (2000) researched perceptions of religious education programmes. The findings indicated that “the majority of students did not find the classroom programs interesting, meaningful or relevant” and that these programmes did not represent an “intellectual challenge” (pp. 41, 42). The findings also highlighted the disparity in the perceptions of students and teachers, the latter being much more sanguine about students’ level of interest in the religious education programmes (e.g. p. 42).

Rymarz and Graham (2006) researched the experiences of “core Catholic youth”\(^{23}\) in Australian Catholic schools, a group so defined by virtue of their regular church attendance and involvement (p. 81). The study of fifty-eight 14-15-year old Year 9 students from eleven secondary schools in the diocese of Lismore, New South Wales (p. 81), provides further empirical confirmation of the general satisfaction of students with Catholic schools, finding them “safe places” (p. 82) which had a “welcoming environment for students” (p. 86). However, the attitude of these

\(^{23}\) Rymarz and Graham (pp. 80, 89) cite the source of the term “core Catholic” as Fulton, J., Abela, A., Borowik, I., Dowling, T., Marler, P. & Tomasi, L. (2000). *Young Catholics at the New Millennium: The Religion and Morality of Young Adults in Western Countries.* Dublin: University College Press.
students to religious education is described in terms of “a weak positive light” (p. 84), “enjoyed” by many (p. 84), but “few were strong in their endorsement” (p. 84).

These empirical studies indicate that as an educational institution the school is effective. It is successful academically and it provides a supportive environment in which young people feel secure, develop a positive self-image, are tolerant of others and have a concern for social justice. These are achievements which are intrinsic to its success as a secular and ecclesial educational institution. However, the research also reveals the Catholic community’s changing expectations of the school. The role of the school, its raison d’être, is no longer predominantly that envisaged by those whose concern instigated the research, that is, the socialisation of the next generation into the Catholic Church. These changed expectations have implications for the way in which the religious dimension of the school is expressed and for religious education and how it is taught in the classroom.

**Implications for the teaching of religious education**

While students and parents appreciate what the school offers, and are quite favourably disposed towards the religious dimension of the school, religious development is accorded a low priority by students and many parents (Flynn, 1993, Table 6.6, p. 170).

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24 The debate over the future of the Catholic school system in Australia became redundant. The system expanded and now over 20% of Australian students attend Catholic schools (Pascoe, 2007, p. 788; Pell, 2007, p. 842). The introduction of comprehensive Commonwealth Government funding in the early 1970s, together with an increase in State Government funding, ensured that the schools survived. In a sense they have become too successful. There is now a changing pattern of enrolment which is raising concerns for Catholic Bishops and school system administrators in maintaining the Catholic identity of the schools (Croke, 2007, pp. 826, 827, 831; Pascoe, 2007, pp. 792-794). While only 53% of Catholic children are in Catholic schools (Pascoe, 2007, p. 792) the proportion of non-Catholics attending Catholic schools has increased to about 22% nationally (Pascoe, 2007, p. 794; Croke, 2007, p. 826) and the demand for places by non-Catholic families is greater than that of Catholic families. A further concern is the trend in enrolments from Catholic families: the proportion of low income families halved from 1996 to 2000, while that of high income families doubled (Croke, 2007, p. 821). This raises concern about the Church’s mission to have a “preferential option for the poor”. There is also concern that academic high achievers are choosing an academically selective or specialist government high school in preference to Catholic schools (Croke, 2007, p. 821; see also Pell, 2007, p. 843).
Surveys in 1995 and 2001 (cited by Croke, 2007, pp. 816-817) go further and indicate that “religion is not a strong factor in choosing a Catholic school” and that “fewer Catholic families are choosing Catholic schools”. The school, therefore, is serving the needs of students and families, many of whom are on the periphery of the Christian community, rather than socialising students into a community whose values are almost universally shared.

The data regarding attitudes towards the formal religious education programme was one of the least encouraging findings of the research. Even allowing for the fact that many of the studies were of Year 12 students in the last year of school, when concerns about examinations, tertiary entrance and future careers are paramount, there is clearly a need to reassess the way in which religious education is addressed.

Reviewing and critiquing Australian research in religious education, Rossiter (1984) expressed reservations about the focus on the school as a “community of faith” (p. 19), arguing that this led to the concept of “community” becoming an “alternative” to “formal religious education” (p. 18). Rossiter opposed the conflation of religious education and students’ religiosity (pp. 24, 25), instead arguing that religious education should be evaluated “in terms of knowledge and understanding” (p. 27). He rightly argued that more focus should be placed on the cognitive dimension of religious education. He argued for education in religion. This thesis argues for education for faith, an approach to religious education in the Catholic secondary school which is responsive to the existential situation of adolescents in the early twenty-first century and is true to the principles enunciated in post-Vatican II documents. In this approach the teaching of scripture as critical engagement with the biblical text is an essential component.
Attention needs to be paid to engaging students’ critical faculties in exploring religion well before Year 12: to neglect to do so carries a tacit message that religious issues are not open to critical analysis, undermining the academic credentials of religious education. It is essential that a literalist understanding of scripture be directly challenged; critical thinking should be coopted in order to guide students towards an understanding of Christian beliefs which will support an adult faith.

1.3 The Contemporary Cultural Context: Catholic School Students in the Twenty-first Century

The evidence of Catholic school students’ religious practices, beliefs, and religious commitment provided by empirical studies demonstrates clearly the changes which have occurred in the Australia Catholic community. The declining religiosity which generated the studies of the “effectiveness” of the Catholic school in the 1970s was not a temporary aberration but representative of an on-going trend. To address the present reality the premises upon which religious education are based must be reassessed.

The first part of this section is largely descriptive, drawing principally on Australian studies. Brief references to data from the United States and the United Kingdom provide a point of comparison with culturally comparable societies. The second part of this section puts this data into its cultural context.

\[25\] While the focus is on Australia, similar trends have occurred in other Western societies traditionally deemed “Christian”.
The characteristics of students: religious practice and religious beliefs

Church attendance and personal prayer are the two most common measures of religiosity in sociological research. The findings of Flynn’s longitudinal research, 1972, 1982, 1990, and that of Flynn and Mok, 1998, are recorded in Table 1.3. The most significant data relate to trends in weekly Mass attendance, seen in conjunction with parents’ expectations about their children’s attendance at Sunday Mass, and the data on prayer.

Table 1.3: Religious Practice: Year 12: Flynn, 1972-1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mass at least once a week</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communion at least weekly</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacrament of Reconciliation: once a month or more</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer/meditation: daily</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>several times a week</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>daily</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example of Jesus influences daily life.</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>33% (of total sample of 5932)</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ expectations of student’s attendance at Sunday Mass</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

26 For example, these measures are prominent in the recently published research of the Christian Research Association (Hughes, 2010), although the title refers to “spirituality”.
27 The dates listed for Flynn are the years in which the studies were conducted; they correspond to the publication dates of 1975, 1985 and 1993 respectively, and 2002 for Flynn and Mok.
28 The data for 1972, 1982, 1990, come from Table summaries in Flynn (1993), pp. 297-302; the 1998 data are from Flynn and Mok (2002), pp. 245, 248-250, which also recorded the comparable earlier data.
Mass attendance.

Flynn’s findings show a steep decline in Mass attendance, which at 23% in 1998 was one-third of the 69% in 1972. The decline may in part be attributed to parents’ lessening insistence on their children’s attendance, which declined by 49% over the 1972 to 1998 period.

The study by Rymarz and Graham (2006) reinforces the important role played by the family in young people’s religious identification and practice. The key factor was “familial patterns of church involvement” (p. 82), rather than the young person taking “personal responsibility for their beliefs and practices” (p. 82); religious practice, it seems, was part of the culture of the family and in the case of these adolescents accepted by them.

The findings from Church and census data in 1996 and 2001 (Dixon, 2003) show a similar pattern. Table 1.4 provides the rate of church attendance by age when Church-based data on Mass attendance is used in conjunction with census data for the Catholic population as a whole.

Table 1.4: Comparison of church attendance of Catholics for selected age groups: 1996, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>1996 Attendance rate</th>
<th>2001 Attendance rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-14</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Selected from Table 4, p. 6 (Dixon, 2003).
Attendance falls in the early years of the secondary school and declines further in the middle and upper secondary school and in the early post-secondary school period, a pattern which continues in the early twenties. Dorman’s (2001) research of Catholic school graduates in their twenties confirms this pattern.

**Prayer.**

While Mass attendance is the public face of religious practice, personal prayer is its private expression. The Flynn research reported that daily prayer declined somewhat during the 1970s, but remained steady from 1982. This could be interpreted as indicating that quite a significant proportion of young people maintain a spiritual dimension in their lives, over 40% in the early 1970s and over 30% at the end of the 1990s.

The research of Dorman (1998) provides support for young people’s quite positive attitude towards prayer as distinct from Church attendance (p. 47).

These findings are compatible with the literature which suggests that spirituality, as distinct from its traditional public expression through the Churches, is alive in Australian society, including its youth (e.g. Hughes, Thompson, Pryor & Bouma, 1995; Tacey, 2000, 2003b; Mason et al., 2007).

**Religious beliefs, attitudes and commitment.**

Flynn and Mok (2002) link values, beliefs and commitment. They report an overall “decline in students’ religious commitment” (p. 253) over the three studies in 1982, 1990 and 1998, based on a comparison of the overall averages of those who

---

30 Dorman’s questionnaire was an adaptation of the “Francis scale of attitude toward Christianity” used in the UK (Kay & Francis, 1996).
agree with the statements of belief, as shown in the selection of items recorded in Table 1.5.  

Table 1.5: Religious beliefs and commitment: Year 12, 1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1982</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>1998</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belief in God</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God a loving Father</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ is a real person in daily life</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God always forgives me</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base life on teaching, example of Jesus</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus—truly God</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus—truly human</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Averages: 62% 59% 55%

Belief in God is high, with 86% expressing belief in God in the latest study in 1998. However, a comparison of the figures for 1982 and 1998 indicate an interesting comparison between different types of beliefs:

(i) beliefs which reflect the personal relationship between God and the individual tend to remain quite positive, especially God perceived as “a loving Father” (76%, 73%);

(ii) beliefs which influence actual life style, such as basing one’s life on the “teaching and example of Jesus”, already quite low, decreased: 44%, 37%;

(iii) beliefs related to core Christian theological statements such as belief that Jesus is truly God and truly human, declined quite substantially; belief in the divinity of Jesus (70%, 51%) is considerably higher than belief in his humanity (57%, 33%).

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31 Selected items taken from Table 10.13, “Students’ Religious Commitment and Values 1998” (Flynn & Mok, 2002, p. 251).
Adolescents’ interests, not surprisingly, are more focussed on relationships, including their relationship with God, than on more theological learning, a situation recognised in several models of religious education and in religious programmes since the move away from the traditional model.

To summarise:
- Young people’s belief in God is quite high.
- Their attitude to prayer indicates that many are open to the spiritual dimension.
- However, young people do not identify with the formal practices of the institutional Church and they have little understanding of certain Christian doctrines.
- It would seem that apathy and indifference typify the attitude of many adolescents in Catholic secondary schools rather than outright rejection of religion.

These research data show a clearly discernible general trend away from a time when it could generally be assumed that the beliefs and practices of those attending Catholic schools were at least overtly compatible with those of the Church. The decline in religious practice shown in the school-based research is reflected in the findings for the Catholic community as a whole: for example, the 60-65% attendance rate at Sunday Mass in the 1950s had become 15.3% in 2001 (Dixon, 2003, p. 4).

Students’ religious beliefs and attitudes influence the way in which they respond to the content of religious education classes and how it is presented. An appropriate pedagogy will be one which recognises students’ entry point to religious education. *Education for faith* seeks to build on the positive qualities which young people exhibit, and to open up religious discourse by engaging students' growing capacity for critical thinking.
The characteristics of students: moral attitudes and values

Sexual morality.

On matters of sexual morality students’ attitudes were generally at variance with the position of the Catholic Church: In 1990, 58% agreed with abortion in a case of rape; 70% agreed that it “is all right for people who are not married to live together”; 20% agreed with the Church’s teaching that sexual intercourse outside of marriage is morally wrong; 29% agreed that euthanasia is morally wrong (Flynn, 1993, p. 313). Although not canvassed in the research cited, anecdotal evidence suggests a similar disjunction between young people and the Church presently obtains on issues related to homosexuality.

Overseas studies indicate that this phenomenon is not confined to Australian students. Studies in Northern Ireland by Greer and Francis found that “a large proportion of Catholic pupils rejected moral absolutes maintained by traditional Catholic teaching” (Francis, 1996, p. 18). Writing in the United States context, Day (1996) referred to a “pedagogy of estrangement” (pp. 163-166), where there is a disjunction between the realities of students’ lives and the teaching of the Church.

Social justice and tolerance.

A consistent finding was students’ positive attitudes towards social justice issues and tolerance of others, a position in accordance with Catholic teaching. For example, Flynn’s research (1993) showed that students agreed that people should show respect for the environment (92%) and respect for those “of different race, nationality and religion” (80%); 81% expressed concern about world poverty, and 80% expressed concern for the “homeless and disadvantaged” (p. 314).
Research in the United Kingdom and Ireland: Leslie Francis and associates

Research into the attitudes toward Christianity of children and adolescents conducted by Francis and associates in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland over twenty years covers a similar period to the research of Flynn in Australia. Both sets of research provide longitudinal data, both involved large samples, both used sophisticated methods of statistical analysis.

The data collected using the specially devised Francis scale of attitude toward Christianity provided evidence of age and gender differentials and enabled comparisons between schools, including comparisons between Catholic and other religious and government schools.

Generational trends.

Francis accumulated longitudinal data from a total of three thousand students over a twenty-four year period (Kay & Francis, 1996, p. 5, Chapter 4). A comparison of the average scores on attitude to Christianity from 1974 to 1994 reveals a drop of 9.3 points, or 11.9%, over twenty years (pp. 39-41). A finding of particular relevance for the secondary school teacher is that the “real and significant drift” was occurring “among pupils in years eight, nine and ten” (p. 42), as shown in the comparison of the mean scores (p. 41) in Table 1.6.32

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32 Data from Kay and Francis, 1996, p. 42, and selected from Table 4.3, p. 206.
Table 1.6: Comparison of mean scores on Francis scale of attitude to Christianity: 1974 and 1994

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year level</th>
<th>Mean score: 1974</th>
<th>Mean score: 1994</th>
<th>Drop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 7</td>
<td>82.0</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>5 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 8</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>12 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 9</td>
<td>79.0</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>12 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 10</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>14 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 11</td>
<td>66.0</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td>3 points</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Expressing these data differently, the mean score for Year 7 in 1994 was lower than that of Year 10 in 1974; and the mean score for Year 9, 1994 was as low as that of Year 11 in 1974 (Kay & Francis, 1996, p. 42). The negative attitudes, which were previously characteristic of older adolescents, have been adopted by students in Years 8-10. This confirms the position taken in this thesis that it is of increasing importance that the religious education programme challenge a literalist understanding of scripture from the early years of the secondary school.

**British Catholic schools: their effectiveness.**

Schools “make a difference to pupils’ attitude to Christianity”, and that difference is “quantifiable and statistically significant” (Kay & Francis, 1996, p. 57). The attitudes of students in Catholic schools in the United Kingdom are consistently higher than those in other denominational and non-denominational schools: “there is a more positive pupil attitude toward Christianity among pupils in Catholic schools” (p. 53); however, research indicates that challenges to that positive attitude (Curran & Francis, 1996, pp. 385, 388) come from an increase in the number of non-Catholic students in Catholic schools and an increase in non-practising Catholics (Kay & Francis, 1996, p. 58).
The Spirit of Generation Y study

The most recent large-scale empirical research to provide an insight into the attitudes of young Australians to religion and their religious practice is The Spirit of Generation Y study (Mason et al., 2007), conducted in three stages between July 2003 and June 2006 (p. 64).

Religious practice and beliefs of respondents who identified as Catholic.

This discussion of the religious practice of the 21 per cent of the Generation Y respondents who identified as Catholic (Mason et al., 2007, pp. 72-73) will focus principally on attendance at religious services and private prayer. The percentages of Catholics associated with these practices and beliefs are summarised in Table 1.7.

No significant gender differences were reported (Mason et al., 2007, p. 101). Furthermore, when Generation Y as a whole was compared with the two earlier generations—Generation X and the Boomers—there was very little difference (p. 101), indicating that the present low level of church attendance in Australia is characteristic of the generations born after the Second World War and not confined to today’s youth.

The 20% of the Catholic cohort who attend Mass weekly is comparable to the 23% cited by Flynn and Mok (2002) in Table 1.3 above. Also comparable are findings in relation to the proportion of Catholic youth reporting that they pray daily or regularly.

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33 Generation Y is defined, in accordance with the practice of the Australian Bureau of Statistics, as those born 1981 to 1995. [Earlier published data from this study had defined Generation Y as those born 1976-1990.] (Mason et al., 2007, Preface).
34 While this study reported on a number of religious variables, the focus of the research was the wider concept of “spirituality” (e.g. Mason et al., 2007, Chapter 2, pp. 33-62).
Table 1.7: Generation Y study: Religious practice and beliefs (Catholics)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice / Belief</th>
<th>Frequency or Agree or Disagree</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belief in God (p. 83)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance at religious services (p. 99)</td>
<td>Weekly or more</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At least once a month</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private prayer (p. 119)</td>
<td>Once or more a day</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Once a month to a few times a week</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God relates personally (pp. 87-88)</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not personal</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closeness to God (pp. 88-89)</td>
<td>Very close (5 on 5-point scale)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Close (3 + 4 on 5-point scale)</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief that Jesus was truly God and rose from the dead (p. 95)</td>
<td>Definitely</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other religious beliefs: Definitely believe in (p. 96)</td>
<td>Miracles</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Life after death</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Angels</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demons</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief that it is okay to pick and choose religious beliefs without having to accept the teachings of your religious denomination (pp. 90-92)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morals are relative (pp. 92-93)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of faith in shaping life (pp. 94-95)</td>
<td>Important</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medium (3 on 5-point scale)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seventy-seven per cent of those who identified as Catholic believe in God (Mason et al., 2007, p. 83). This is higher than for Gen Y as a whole, 51% of whom believe in God (p. 83). Twenty-three per cent of Catholics were unsure (p. 83). In a follow-up question asked of those who stated that they did not believe in God or were
uncertain, 86% of Catholics answered “Yes” to belief “in a higher being or life force” (p. 86).

Fifty-seven percent of Catholics definitely believed in the key Christian doctrine of Jesus’ divinity and resurrection (Mason et al., 2007, p. 95); however, more believe in miracles (59%), life after death (69%), and angels (61%) (p. 96). The influence of contemporary society is evident in the high proportion (71%) who believe that one can pick and choose religious beliefs (pp. 90-92), and the 59% who agree that morals are relative (pp. 92-93). Over one-third (37%) regard faith as important in shaping life (pp. 94-95). For the 30% of Catholic respondents who were “committed” or “regular” the primary importance of the family (pp. 150-153) and of the attendance of young peoples’ friends (p. 151) was confirmed.

The most significant differences between the Flynn and Mok 1998 study and the Generation Y study are in the increase in those who see religion as not important: 27% in the 1998 study (“not very important” + “of no importance”) became 40% in the Generation Y study, when the category of “unbeliever/uncertain” is included.

**The influence of the Catholic secondary school.**

The influence of denominational secondary schools on respondents was explored by investigating “how helpful or unhelpful religious education was” in strengthening the faith of those “who definitely believed in God” (Mason et al., 2007, p. 159). These findings, which are summarised in the left column of Table 1.8, were not different from those of students attending “Other Christian schools” (p. 160). There were no differences in the findings for Active and Marginal Christians in whether school religious education was “helpful/very unhelpful” (p. 160).
Table 1.8: Influence of the Catholic school on belief and unbelief

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Believers</th>
<th>Unbelievers / Uncertain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very helpful / helpful</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither helpful nor unhelpful</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhelpful / very unhelpful</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those who were unbelievers or uncertain about their belief in God were asked whether “religious education at secondary school” made them inclined “to take a more positive or a more negative view of religion, or not have much effect either way” (Mason et al., 2007, pp. 160-161). Of those who attended a Catholic school 29% reported a negative effect, which was higher than for those attending “Other Private (Christian)” schools (p. 161). These findings are summarised in the right column of Table 1.8. The almost equal proportion of believers (28%) and unbelievers/uncertain (29%) whose experience of religious education are negative, raises questions which warrant further research.35

These findings also raise questions regarding how religious education is taught. An overly pious approach, or a classroom dynamic which does not recognise and respect students’ present position on religious belief, will alienate adolescents. Contemporary young people want to come to their own conclusions; they resent “being told what to think”. An openness to a range of religious positions, and a commitment to critical engagement with the biblical text, is a fundamental premise of education for faith.

35 These data, together with the 61% of Year 12 students who expressed negative attitudes to religious education (Flynn & Mok, 2002, p. 282), are a cause for concern, warrant investigation, and have implications for a religious education programme that contributes to the development of critically competent Christians.
The cultural context

Each generation grows up in a different economic, social and political context (Hughes, 2007b, p. 22). Each also has a different mindset: one which is unconscious, implicit, and unquestioned, rather than explicitly chosen and the subject of conscious analysis. Whether one refers to our “rapidly changing world” (Hunt, 2003, p. 35) as post-modern (e.g. Horell, 2003; Pohlmann, 2001; Imbrosciano, 2000) or one prefers the term “late modern” (Mason et al., 2007, p. 37, n. 10, p. 355), the world in which young people are growing up is “very different from that of their parents” (p. 41).

Religious educators need to be aware of the way in which contemporary culture influences young people and the mind-set which student bring to the classroom if their teaching is to respond to the signs of the times. All educators have a responsibility to prepare students to take their place as confident and competent members of society, and, in a democracy, to be able to contribute to their society and critique it. However, if the Catholic school is to achieve “a synthesis of faith and life” (The Catholic School, 1977, n. 37, p. 33), engage with society (e.g. The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, 2002, n. 16, p. 19), and critique society in the light of the Christian Story and Vision (Groome, 1980), the approach to religious education must contribute to the development of critically competent young adults. The skills of critical thinking and open dialogue are integral to Christian praxis.

Characteristics of contemporary culture.

Rather than providing an analysis of contemporary culture, the intention is to provide a brief overview: to identify several characteristics of contemporary Western—specifically Australian—society which is the milieu of the “unique life experiences” (Horell, 2003, p. 82) of adolescents.
One of the defining features of Australian society is its multi-cultural and multi-faith character. Other features include secularism, consumerism, technological change and the “digital revolution” (Hughes, 2007b, pp. 22-23), which directly affect the lives of today’s youth. The changing nature of the workplace and the cultural and economic consequences of globalisation affect their families’ present circumstances and the career paths of young people and their prospect of financial security. Changes in family life, for example, “increased instability in families”, “increased anxiety about personal and environmental risk” and “greater individualisation” (Mason, et al., 2007, p. 41) influence young people’s perception of life and what it offers.

Young people value social contacts and friendships which, in turn, are influenced by the rapid changes in communication wrought by the mobile phone, the internet and social networking sites. Adolescents are tolerant of different lifestyles, which can be a point of conflict with traditional values. They are confident, share an interest in music, want to enjoy life, seek excitement and want a peaceful world (Hughes, 2007b, p. 171); beliefs and morals are relative (Gascoigne, 1991). They are wary of traditional religion (Pohlmann, 2001, p. 31), and are questioning of “the roles played by large institutions” (Horell, 2003, p. 87). However, the young are open to a spiritual dimension of life.

Declining religiosity and a loosening of affiliation with the local Church community (Hunt, 2003, p. 38), the distinction “between the spiritual and the religious” (Crawford & Rossiter, 1995b, p. 17), the “privatization of beliefs” (p. 19) and “indifferentism” (pp. 18-19), are expressions of contemporary culture which represent a divergence from the values of the denominational Christian school, which is just one participant in the “spiritual marketplace” (Mason et al., 2007, p. 41). The empirical data from the Flynn and Spirit of Generation Y studies cited above fit into this pattern: declining religiosity and affiliation with the institutional church, the importance of
personal relationships, and a belief that it is “okay to pick and choose religious beliefs” (pp. 90-92).

What follows will be a brief review of the qualities of the mindset underpinning post-modernism. Drawing on Horell’s (2003, p. 82) distinction between “cultural post-modernity” and “philosophical post-modernity”, the focus will be on the former and the challenges and opportunities which this way of thinking poses for religious education and the teaching of the biblical text.

The contemporary mind-set.

One word which sums up the post-modern mind-set is, arguably, “relativism”. For young people there are no absolutes: beliefs are relative; morality is not perceived as operating according to objective principles (Gascoigne, 1991), but is subjectively chosen according to what feels right.

At a more philosophical level, “the postmodern mind” (Tarnas, 1991, pp. 395-410) exists in a milieu which is “profoundly complex and ambiguous” (p. 395). Several “working principles” are identified: the “constant change of reality and knowledge”; “the priority of concrete experience over fixed abstract principles”; the rejection of “a priori” thought systems; and the acceptance “that human knowledge is subjectively determined” (p. 395). Reality is “fluid” and constructed rather than “given” and one’s “assumptions must be subjected to direct testing”.

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36 The discussion of epistemological understanding in Chapter 4 and of models and paradigms in Chapter 6 below provide a link with these aspects of “the postmodern mind”. The questioning of one’s assumptions is fundamental to the approach to teaching scripture enunciated in Chapter 7.
Post-modernity and religious education: challenge and opportunity.

The post-modern mind-set presents a challenge to many of the premises—or, perhaps, assumptions—upon which Christianity is based. The “movement away from reliance on metanarratives” as “inclusive frameworks of meaning”, a characteristic of “cultural postmodernity” (Horell, 2003, p. 83), directly impinges on an understanding of the Christian story as absolute and paradigmatic for all people and all time. Contemporary students respond negatively to Christianity and its beliefs and values being presented as an absolute. Those currently engaged in religious education in the twenty-first century note Hamilton’s (1981) prescience in foreseeing the challenges of the subsequent decades, namely, that “a central task of education” would be “to persuade ... young Catholics that there are good reasons why they should commit themselves to Christ within the Catholic church in which they were born and raised” (p. 22).

Although they recognise the challenges, there are religious educators who “welcome” post-modernism. Imbrosciano (2000, p. 15) portrays post-modernism as a reaction to modernity, the negative characteristics of which include a narrow positivism, a reliance on reason alone (p. 12) and “a process of radical de-mythologisation” (p. 12) which has undermined the numinous (p. 12). For Imbrosciano post-modernism offers the opportunity to discern “archetypal motifs within mythology” (p. 16) and religious stories.

Horell (2003) sees postmodernity as an opportunity for renewal (p. 97). He distinguishes between two “postmodern attitudes” which influence the relationship between the post-modern thinker and Christian religious education: “trivializing postmodernity”, which can be quite negative (pp. 89-90), and “questing postmodernism”, which is “open” and “honest” and sees the opportunity to use freedom in a “life-enhancing” and creative way (p. 91). Horell sees in “questing postmodernity” the possibility of a “spiritual quest” and “more authentic ways of
connecting with God, self, and others” (p. 92). In religious education, he advocates encouraging community to counteract fragmentation (p. 100) and giving spirituality a central place (p. 102).

Summary

Catholic Church documents show the integral role of the Catholic school and religious education within the ministry of the Church. More recent documents distinguish between catechesis and classroom religious education and demonstrate an awareness of the challenges which contemporary society presents to religious educators in bringing the gospel message to youth. The educational principles enunciated in these documents support the approach to religious education and the teaching of scripture advocated in this thesis.

The findings of the empirical studies discussed in Section 2 indicate that the school can have an influence on students’ academic and religious development independent of the primary influence of the home. The Catholic secondary school has been shown to be successful academically and to provide a nurturing educational environment. However, students’ interest in religious education classes was relatively low. Section 3 presented data which provide a snapshot of the religious beliefs and practices of students in Catholic secondary schools, that is, the characteristics of the recipients of religious education.

Notwithstanding the discussion in Section 3, which identified the present age as post-modern, the thinking described as typical of modernity, especially the scientific paradigm, is ubiquitous in Western thought (Gaukroger, 2006, p. 11). The process of demythologisation and the undermining of the numinous (Imbroscliano, 2000, p. 12) persist in this present age, perhaps better called late modernity (Mason et al., 2007, p.
37, n. 10, p. 355). What prompted this thesis was the need for an interpretation of scripture which invites re-mythologisation and a restoration of the numinous. The need for this research is presented in Chapter 2.
CHAPTER 2 – THE RESEARCH ISSUE: STUDENTS’ UNDERSTANDING OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Introduction

It is the fundamental contention of this thesis that the teaching of scripture must take cognisance of the transition from the primary school child’s understanding of Bible stories to an understanding of scripture at a level commensurate with the developing cognitive faculties of adolescents and young adults. And it must be done sensitively.\(^{37}\)

The need for sensitivity in negotiating the transition from a literalist understanding of the Bible, whether with secondary school students or adults, cannot be overemphasised. Any peremptory dismissal of naïve beliefs is to be avoided: teaching needs to show that established beliefs are being opened up to a deeper and richer understanding, not denigrated as childishness and foolishness, which can engender “disenchantment” (Smith, 1987). Of paramount importance is the wellbeing of the learner as he or she negotiates the shoals of a demythologising of the understandings appropriate for the child and moves toward adult appropriation of his or her religious heritage. Expressed in terms of Ricoeur’s (1980a) three dialectical moments—“naïve’ understanding, objective explanation, and appropriation” (pp. 43-44)—the educative task is to address “naïve understanding” by undertaking “objective explanation” in a way which avoids “disenchantment” and makes possible an eventual transition to “appropriation” in a “willed” or “second naïveté”.\(^{38}\)

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\(^{37}\) One may add that it is not only in schools that biblical literacy should be addressed, but also more broadly by the Christian Churches where, it seems, many adults, including teachers, retain a literalist interpretation of the Bible.

\(^{38}\) Awareness of Ricoeur’s term “second” or “willed naïveté” came initially from Fowler (1981) who used it in the context of Stage 5, Conjunctive Faith (p. 187).
In the first section of this chapter the specific issues which prompted this thesis are identified, their educational and pastoral significance considered and the consequences of not addressing a literalist understanding of scripture discussed.

In Section 2 empirical studies are cited to illustrate students’ perceptions of the relationship between religion and science in support of the argument that facilitating a non-literalist interpretation is integral to addressing the perceived contradiction between religion and science.

In Section 3 the hypothesis concerning the need to facilitate adolescents’ transition to a critical engagement with the biblical text will be tested against the research findings of Ronald Goldman in England in the 1960s, who identified a literalist understanding of the Bible persisting well into adolescence. This research directly addressed many of the issues canvassed in this thesis and provides the historical framework for the study.

Section 4 discusses the discourse on religious thinking which ensued on the publication of Goldman’s findings and recommendations. The research generated by this debate is directly relevant to exploring the issues raised in this thesis and it opened up areas which are explored later, especially in Chapter 6.

In Section 5 the research of Loman and Francis (2006) demonstrates that students may move from a literalist to a symbolic understanding of scripture. The styles of religious thinking research on which the Loman and Francis study drew provides a further body of literature which is drawn on in Chapter 6.
2.1 The Research Issue: Need and Justification

Classroom experience, supported by empirical studies, for example, Goldman (1964), indicates that for many young people, a literalist understanding of scripture persists well into adolescence. That scripture is interpreted literally may well be unrecognised and unquestioned until the biblical account of creation is directly challenged by what are perceived to be contradictory accounts of the origins of the universe derived from the scientific worldview and of the evolutionary development upon which contemporary science is predicated. When this occurs, the disillusionment is likely to be more significant if, as it is suggested, many students have the mistaken belief that a literalist reading is obligatory if one is to maintain a religious dimension to life.

The questions which young people ask and the comments which they make indicate that this is an issue which is a matter of personal significance. Their language indicates indignation when they talk about the Bible having “phoney stories” and about feeling “betrayed” when what they are taught in secondary school differs from what they recall from primary school. It is suggested that young people’s understanding of the biblical text does not keep pace with their general cognitive development, especially with the development of critical thinking during adolescence.

When Goldman (1964) expressed concern about adolescent attitudes toward religion, which he attributed to what he regarded as premature teaching of scripture, he cited similar language: words such as “betrayal” and “guilt” were used to express the “shock and anger” felt by adolescents “that they had been allowed to continue literal and childish beliefs for so long” (p. 115). He argued that the continued prevalence of a literalist interpretation of scripture results in difficulties for many adolescents when the “two modes of looking at the world, one theologically and the other logically-scientifically” are “each held in isolation from the other” (p. 242). He argued that by not challenging the literalism of the child at an appropriate time,
adolescents may well “become hostile to religion because they recognise childish patterns of thinking as inadequate and are not offered a satisfactory intellectual alternative” (p. 80).

That this situation persists indicates that the lack of understanding of the nature of the biblical text needs to be addressed educationally. Stead and Rossiter have reached similar conclusions. Stead’s doctoral thesis (1996) investigated the way in which scripture is used in Catholic primary schools in Victoria and how critical biblical study influences—or, rather, fails to influence—teaching in primary schools. She argued that “the teaching and use of the Bible to primary school students must be informed by critical biblical study”, and claimed that its absence “results in interpretations that are pious, moralistic, devotional or allegorical” (Stead, 1996, p. ix). Rather than using the Bible as a means to an end—as “an instrument in the catechetical process” (p. 127)—Stead recommended the introduction of a “biblical studies curriculum” (p. 263). Her emphasis was on the need to develop “knowledge and skills” (p. 252) which promote a “critical reading of scripture” (p. 132) and the development of interpretative skills” (p. 132) “appropriate to [students’] age and stage of development” (p. 264). One can but concur.

Rossiter (1996) discussed the conflicts which have arisen as a result of an inadequate understanding of the distinctions between the scientific and the religious explanation of phenomena, citing the Genesis accounts of creation as a significant example of this conflict and the difficulties which follow from reading the Bible “as if it were a science text on human origins” and a reading of Genesis which “‘historicises’ the creation stories” (p. 54). He concluded with a series of recommendations for addressing this perceived educational problem, including the need to address “the

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39 Ways in which scripture is used in religious education, both as a separate study or discipline and to underpin the teaching of religious beliefs, are distinct but complementary. The teacher must understand the nature of scripture and its relation to Christian doctrine in order to avoid using scripture inappropriately, for example, as proof texting.
relationship between science and religion” (p. 56) and to consider the “theological and critical interpretation of Scripture” (p. 56). It is the purpose of this research to explore how the achievement of these objectives may be advanced.

The issue to be addressed

It is argued in this thesis that specific teaching is needed to facilitate students’ transition from a literalist understanding of the biblical text to a hermeneutic compatible with the adolescent’s growing cognitive competencies and capacity for critical thinking. That there is an issue which needs to be addressed is clear, not only anecdotally but also from the evidence of recent empirical studies (e.g. Mason et al., 2007) which illustrate the difficulties which young people have reconciling religious belief with scientific theories.41

In this thesis the issue is defined in terms of a mismatch between students’ developing cognitive capacities and religious subject matter, especially when the certainties of the concrete thinker are challenged in the transition to formal operational thought. The increasing intellectual demands made upon students in the secular subjects need to have their counterpart in religious education, especially in the study of the scriptures. If the nature of the biblical text and the characteristics of religious language are not explored, literalism is not only unchallenged but actually reinforced. The implicit message is that critical thinking is not part of religious education, thereby further undermining the credibility of religion for many young critical thinkers.

A distinction is made between the “literal sense” of biblical interpretation and a literalist interpretation. The literal sense can include “what the author intended” and “the verbal and grammatical sense”, as defined, for example, by Soulen and Soulen (2001, pp. 18-22). On the other hand, a literalist interpretation—often referred to as “Biblicism” (p. 25; pp. 104-5)—in its most extreme form leads to assertions that the world was actually made in six days and inspires a search for Noah’s ark.

The historicity of the Bible is a related area which is not addressed directly. However, challenging a literalist understanding of the Bible in class will address the historicity of some biblical events.

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That this is a pedagogical issue is justified on educational and on pastoral grounds. Educationally, the importance of knowledge and understanding supplanting ignorance and misunderstanding is axiomatic. Contemporary learning theory has, *inter alia*, a focus on “the thinking learner”, which is as relevant in religious education as in any other area of the curriculum.

Sound pedagogy includes inducting students into the ways of thinking characteristic of each discipline. For example, the science teacher not only teaches scientific knowledge and the related skills, but also imbues respect for the scientific method and the scientific way of thinking; similarly, the history teacher introduces students to the principles and methods of historical research and the English teacher opens up for students the skills and methods of literary analysis. The religious education teacher has a responsibility to induct students into the particular characteristics of religious thinking.

To facilitate the transition to a non-literalist interpretation of scripture, it is argued that the religious education curriculum should include a sequential programme for the development of the skills related to an appreciation of the figurative character of religious language and how this language relates to an understanding of different genres in the Bible.

As part of the ministry of the Church, it is incumbent upon the Catholic school to ensure that students’ understanding of scripture be accorded the same priority as their understanding in other subject areas. In doing so, cognisance needs to be taken of the way in which the Bible is understood in the Church, and pedagogy informed by the findings of contemporary biblical scholarship. This is a pastoral as well as an educational issue. Pastorally, the intention is to support students in their growth towards an adult faith, freely chosen. Neglecting to remove obstacles to belief such as
those which derive from an unchallenged literalist understanding of scripture may well prove inimical to that pastoral goal.

**Consequences of an unchallenged literalist interpretation of scripture**

When students become conscious of a conflict between their understanding of the biblical account of phenomena and their understanding in other areas, for example, scientific theories, the dilemma may be addressed in different ways. Some students may not feel a need for consistency in their thinking: for them religion is either unquestioned or irrelevant. Believers may ignore the questions which arise from the conflicting explanations, and assent to the biblical accounts as they have always understood them. At the other extreme are those who have rejected all religious belief and have no interest in religion.

However, for some young people the impact of the perceived contradictions will be quite direct: growing awareness of unexplained discrepancies between the scientific and the biblical account of phenomena will pose serious questions regarding the credibility of Christian religious beliefs. Students may well resolve the cognitive conflict by concluding that religion is based on grounds which are rationally untenable and thereby consign religious belief and commitment to the category of childish practices which they have outgrown.

Those who retain their religious beliefs and religious practice are faced with an invidious choice between two responses, both of which are psychologically and educationally unsatisfactory: to compartmentalise their scientific understanding and their commitment to critical thinking, on the one hand, and their religious beliefs on the other, and live with the resulting cognitive dissonance. Alternatively, they may suppress their legitimate questions and difficulties and reject the role of reason in religious and theological discourse, a course which may well pave the way for a
fundamentalist approach to scripture. A literalist interpretation of the scriptures, which discounts scientific knowledge and explanation of phenomena and holds a creationist perspective, is as disturbing as a crude scientism which denies a spiritual and transcendent dimension to life.42

Furthermore, unless an individual makes the transition from a literalist to a more nuanced understanding of scripture, the positive religious and spiritual values resulting from a deeper appreciation of the imagery and poetry in the texts may well be lost, as will the possibility of an exploration of its deeper meaning and the application of the religious message to life in the twenty-first century.

Unless the teaching of the Bible engages students’ critical faculties, and their understanding of the text is based on sound hermeneutical principles, the outcome will be educationally unsatisfactory and pastorally a tragic failure. Meeting the educational challenge is of fundamental importance for the church school, irrespective of religious denomination. The questioning encouraged in the educational context, the increasing focus on the teaching of thinking skills, and the characteristics of contemporary Western society make the crisis faced by many students, who are experiencing the need to reconcile two distinct worldviews, more severe and very likely to occur at an increasingly earlier age.43

42 In exploring the relationship between religion and science, Barbour (2000) used a fourfold typology: conflict, independence, dialogue and integration. In discussing “Conflict”, he identified the two contenders as “biblical literalists” and “(a)theistic scientists”, who both hold “that a person cannot believe in both God and evolution” (Barbour, 2000, pp. 1-2; 10-11). This can be applied to young people who tend to see but one choice, either science or religion. It is suggested that this may be an expression of their stage of cognitive development, which is discussed below. Barbour favoured “dialogue” and “integration”, a position which may only be achievable when one is able to hold both the scientific worldview and the religious worldview as complementary, as discussed by Reich (e.g. 1989). It is the role of education to open up to students the ways of thinking held by Barbour, and explained in cognitive terms by Reich; such insights are not ordinarily arrived at spontaneously.

43 The longitudinal research cited in Kay and Francis (1996) above (Chapter 1.3, Table 1.6, p. 48) indicates that negative attitudes to Christianity are occurring at an earlier age.
The influence of classroom teaching on educational outcomes

Empirical research provides support—albeit principally by inference—for the contention that what occurs in the classroom can influence educational outcomes, positively and negatively. The finding from Fahy’s Australian research that there was a small but statistically significant unique effect (p < 0.05) between religious education classrooms, even within the same school (Fahy, 1992, p. 118),\(^\text{44}\) indicates that the pedagogical approach taken can influence learning. Studies by Kay in England, Ulster and Eire indicate the importance of classroom climate and the importance of discussion in achieving a positive attitude toward Christianity (Kay & Francis, 1996, p. 56). Together the findings of these studies suggest that classroom climate and the way in which scripture is taught could influence outcomes, especially if advantage is taken of students’ capacity for and commitment to independent and critical thinking.

An educational intervention in the UK, *The Loman Accelerated Symbolic Thinking* programme, sought “to promote the symbolic interpretation of scripture among year 7 pupils” (Loman & Francis, 2004). Over the period of a year four classes of Year 7 students were taught a programme which drew attention to the role of symbolism in Sikhism, Judaism and Christianity (p. 349). The conclusions drawn were favourable for both the test instrument and the programme which sought to promote symbolic thinking (p. 351).

Empirical studies have reported quite a negative attitude towards religious education. For example, Flynn (1993) reported that some of the Year 12 students in his studies found religious education “boring and repetitive” (p. 230) and “a waste of time” (p. 231); some were enthusiastic (p. 231); and a “small number of students would have liked a more thorough study of Scripture” (p. 231). In the 1998 study only 38% of respondents agreed that religious education was taught at a level comparable

\(^{44}\) See Chapter 1.2, p. 32, above.
with other subjects (Flynn & Mok, 2002, p. 282). It is argued that how the school actually teaches religious education, especially in comparison with other subjects, impacts on its credibility as an intellectual pursuit.\textsuperscript{45} From the first year in the secondary school religious education must be shown to have intellectual and academic substance by engaging students’ creativity and developing capacity for critical thinking. The study of figurative language and literary genre in both English and in the study of the biblical text provides students with links between religious education and other subjects with a higher academic status.

Responses from Year 9 students described as “core Catholic youth”, indicated that students “did not seem to be challenged” by religious education and some stated that they “had done it before” (Rymarz & Graham, 2006, p. 84). It is argued, therefore, that students, especially in the earlier years of the secondary school, need to be intellectually challenged in religious education classes and be critically engaged in the subject matter; curriculum planners need to ensure that the content is not “more of the same”.

The findings from “surveys of approximately 28 Catholic and Lutheran schools” in Australia (Hughes, 2010, p. 71) from the Schools Spirituality Project, 2005-2008, which involved over 5500 students (p. 157), provides evidence that the school and, by extension, the classroom, does have an influence on students. What they “learn at school” ranked sixth, in terms of the influences on how students think about life, with 81% stating that it was an influence (42%, a “major influence”). The influence of

\textsuperscript{45} That religious education should be treated in the same way academically as other subjects was one of the reasons given by Marie Macdonald (1988) for advocating assessment in religious education in secondary schools. The present Religious Education Curriculum Framework for Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne has adopted a structure which enables religious education to be integrated into the State mandated framework within which the secular subjects are set (Coming to Know, Worship and Love, Curriculum Framework, 2005).
teachers ranked ninth, 63% (18%, a major influence), and religious education ranked eleventh, 56% (16%, a major influence) (Figure 8, p. 72).\(^\text{46}\)

Students indicated that schools had influenced their belief in God (44%), in following Jesus (42%), and going to church (30%). The corresponding figures for those who said that schools had influenced them “a lot” were 23%, 21%, and 12% respectively (Hughes, 2010, Figure 9, p. 73). Of the topics in religious education which students had found most helpful personally, the Bible ranked fourth, with a score of 4.4 (on a scale of 1-10), 21% of students scoring it as “very helpful” (p. 71). The highest scoring topic was ethics, with a score of 5.2, around 30% regarding it as “very helpful” (p. 71).

2.2 Science and Religion: Student Perceptions

Scientific explanations of phenomena operate within the paradigm expressed in the term “the scientific method”, which operates on observation and experimentation and the rigorous testing of hypotheses. This paradigm, which is both implicit and explicit in the secondary school science curriculum,\(^\text{47}\) challenges the religious paradigm unless students are engaged in an open exploration of the different epistemological grounds for what constitutes scientific and religious knowledge. Rossiter (1996) argued that in the teaching of school subjects such as religion and science there should be “special attention to learning how to differentiate between religious and scientific interpretation” (p. 55). A recent study by Freathy and Aylward (2010)\(^\text{48}\) into the

\(^{46}\) This study confirmed earlier findings that the major influences are family and friends, followed by their own thinking (Hughes, 2010, Figure 8, p. 72).

\(^{47}\) The scientific paradigm is not only encountered in science classes. Rather it is the way of thinking which Gaukroger identifies as “a distinctive feature of Western modernity” whose influence goes beyond the scientific disciplines and has developed into “a scientific culture” which has resulted in “the gradual assimilation of all cognitive values to scientific ones” (Gaukroger, 2006, p. 11).

\(^{48}\) This study researched the relationship between students’ beliefs and understanding “regarding Jesus’ miracles, resurrection, and status as the Son of God” (p. 86).
difficulties 11-13 year-old students have in the relationship between understanding and belief indicated that many held that scientific knowledge is “superior to religious belief” (p. 99). The assumption that scientific knowledge was associated with “logic, observation, and evidence” was unquestioned (p. 99).49

A study by Greer (1972) “showed that many young people experienced difficulty in combining a religious understanding of the biblical stories of creation with what they know of scientific accounts of the origins of the earth and humanity” (Greer, 1972, p. 109; cited in Fulljames, 1996, p. 258). Analysis of data drawn from the BBC Schools Television questionnaire indicated young people’s uncertainty regarding the impact of science on religious belief: 52% of 11-15 year olds in the sample “were uncertain whether science has disproved religion”, while 15% “were clear that science has disproved religion” (Fulljames, 1996, p. 261).

Empirical studies indicate that a substantial proportion of young people do take the account of creation in the first chapter of Genesis literally and some believe that Christian belief requires that the Bible must be read as literally true. In a study of 866 adolescents in Scotland between 11 and 15 years, 21% agreed with the statement “I believe that God made the world in six days and rested on the seventh” (Gibson & Francis, 1996, p. 21). Three studies—one in Kenya and two in Scotland (Fulljames, 1996, pp. 258-259)—explored “creationism” and “scientism” and their influence on attitudes toward Christianity. Creationism was defined as the “perception of Christianity as necessarily involving creationism” (p. 258).50 The findings included an age differential, especially evident in the second study in Scotland which considered three age groups, 11-13 years, 14-15 years and 16-17 years (Kay & Francis, 1996, p. 106). For the youngest subjects, 11-13 years, “the view that Christianity necessarily

49 In their conclusion the researchers raised epistemological questions which are explored in this thesis. See especially Chapter 4.3 and 4.4 below.
50 The relationship between holding such views and attitude towards Christianity is discussed in more detail in Kay and Francis (1996, pp. 97-110), where variables of age and sex are also considered.
involves creationism” was associated with a positive attitude to Christianity; with the 16-17 year olds, it was associated with a negative attitude to Christianity (Kay & Francis, 1996, p. 107; see also Fulljames, 1996, p. 259). This supports the contention of this thesis that a literalist understanding of the scriptures needs to be addressed in the early years of the secondary school if not earlier. 51

Responses by a sample of third and fifth year secondary school students in West Yorkshire to questions about their belief in God (Kibble, Parker & Price, 1981) revealed the significance of the Bible, and their understanding of it, to their beliefs. The researchers stated that the most popular reason given by those who were “certain that there is a God” was “the ‘creator reason’” (p. 31). Comments such as “I am certain there is a God because we have evidence in the Bible” were said to be typical (p. 31). Statements by those who were uncertain about the existence of God indicated that many respondents were confused when the biblical account of creation was compared with what they learned in history and geography; religious belief was “compared unfavourably with evolution” (p. 32). The issue of proof was significant for those who were uncertain and for those who did not believe in God (pp. 32, 33), with science disproving the Bible being a common position held by unbelievers: for example, “The universe was created by an enormous explosion: nothing supernatural in that. Man evolved into his present form: again, nothing supernatural in that” (p. 33). The problem of the existence of evil and of suffering was also raised in the reasons given for the responses chosen to the question on belief in God (p. 34). 52

A German study of 16-22 year-old students used open-ended statements or quotations to research belief in God (Nipkow & Schweitzer, 1991). The 1,236

51 This is not to deny that the issue may need to be addressed at an earlier age. What is essential, however, is that there is no sharp break in the teaching of scripture. An understanding of cognitive development and faith development in children and adolescents must inform the teaching at all ages and ensure that early teaching does not subsequently have to be contradicted.

52 Theodicy, the theological problem of the existence of evil and suffering, frequently comes up in discussions with young people. This issue is not addressed in this thesis, although given its significance for young people it is one on which research is warranted.
statements were classified according to four “expectations about God”. One of these was described as “cognitive”, the expectation that God provided the “key to explaining the world” (p. 92). The “origins of the universe” was one of the issues raised, and “the relationship between creation and evolution was frequently discussed” (p. 92). It was noted that the students “perceived within themselves their movement from an unquestioning faith in childhood to a faith in adolescence based largely on questions” (p. 93). In this study, too, theodicy was one of the issues which concerned young people.

In the Rymarz and Graham study (2006) most of the Year 9 students “responded negatively” when “asked directly if there were things about being a Catholic that they found difficult to accept or do” (p. 85). However, those who responded positively identified issues which “had a strong cognitive flavour” (p. 85), such as “the Virgin Birth, the physical reality of Christ’s resurrection and veracity of scripture” (p. 85). One student “had trouble believing all those things that didn’t really happen”, such as “the creation story and everything because it just doesn’t fit. Also Adam and Eve—you know you think it sounds impossible”, and went on to identify “other stories I find hard to believe—like the loaves of bread and the fish”. Students did not seem to see religious education classes as the context in which to raise their concerns (p. 85). Furthermore, while students perceived a “clash” “between the Christian view of creation and the scientific view” (p. 85), schools stated that they did not teach a “pre-scientific view” (p. 86). This finding clearly supports the point made in this thesis that in the early years of the secondary school it is necessary to address directly and unambiguously the way in which the Bible is understood. To assume that by not teaching a “pre-scientific view” of creation students will “see” that the two worldviews are complementary rather than contradictory is inadequate if students have yet to develop the capacity for complementarity in thinking described by Reich (1989).
Extracts from the protocols of representatives of two of the Spirituality types (Committed Christian and Secular) identified in *The Spirit of Generation Y* study (Mason et al., 2007) provide clear evidence of the negative consequences of a literalist interpretation of the Bible. This research included those who had left school as well as those who were still at school.

The following extract is from the response of Christine, one of a small group (9% of Gen Y) defined as *committed Christians* (Mason et al., 2007, pp. 141, 143-144):

*Would you hold a creationist view of the origin of the world?*  
Yes. But my views are a little bit different. I do believe in the Big Bang, but I think that it was God who created the Big Bang. So yeah, I don’t think so far—I’ve found that what I think conflicts with anything in the Bible. I mean, I still know that God created everything ...

*So was that something you came to yourself, or something you worked out at school?*  
I think—I wrestled with it for a long time, but that’s what I believed in the end.

Unlike Christine, many young people reject religious belief when faced with the apparent contradictions between science and religion as their capacity for and commitment to critical thinking develops. *The Spirit of Generation Y* reported on the reasons given by the *Nonreligious* and *Ex-religious*, those who had moved away from belief in God. The following statistics refer to the most common reasons from the verbatim responses of “more than 250 comments” to the question “why people no longer believe” (Mason et al., 2007, pp. 221-223):

- Doing further study, especially science: 16%
- No convincing evidence or proof for God: 13%
- Disillusionment with churches or religious organisations: 11%
- Couldn’t accept that there is a God with so much suffering in the world: couldn’t accept that God allows suffering: 9%
The first two reasons, those with the two highest percentages, suggest cognitively-based reasons, especially the perceived conflict between religion and reason. The fourth raises the theodicy issue, already identified as a significant issue for young people in the studies by Kibble, Parker and Price (1981) and Nipkow and Schweitzer (1991).

The following extracts from the protocols provide evidence of the effect of this conflict (Mason et al., 2007, p. 222):

“Just studying about it—the study of evolution helped make me change my mind.” (14-year-old male)

“There is no evidence to back up what they are saying.” (17-year-old female)

In summary, the specific concerns expressed by adolescent students and by young adults, and therefore the issues which need to be addressed in the secondary school, include questions about the “truth” of the Bible and how it is understood at different ages and stages of development; the nature of “evidence”; and the distinction between a scientific world view and a religious worldview. The educational aim is to assist students to hold these two worldviews “in fruitful tension” (Fahy, 1980, pp. 334, 351) and achieve the complementarity described by Reich (1989).\(^{53}\) The research of Ronald Goldman in England in the 1960s is of direct relevance to this issue and provides the historical context for this thesis.

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\(^{53}\) The significance to young people of the issues of evidence and the perceived clash between religion and science indicates that the influence of modernity on their thinking is still powerful, notwithstanding the ways of thinking in contemporary society being described by many as postmodern (as discussed at the end of Chapter 1.4 above).
Concerned “for the effectiveness of religious education”, Goldman (1964, p. xi) sought to provide “a descriptive account of how school pupils think about religion and the content of their thoughts as they are taught religion” (p. xi). Using Piaget’s stage theory of cognitive development, Goldman investigated the religious thinking of children and adolescents, especially in regard to their understanding of the biblical text. Drawing on the work of Peel (1960), who applied Piaget’s theory to verbal materials and children’s understanding of story, Goldman used three short biblical stories “to evaluate the logical processes used by children and adolescents at varying stages of development, taking Piaget’s scheme of the development of operational thinking as a comparative guide” (Goldman, 1964, p. 34). Goldman also explored the development of a significant number of religious concepts (p. 34) and considered “what factors may influence religious thinking” (p. 34).

The research study

Using the clinical interview approach, which provided the opportunity for follow-up or probing questions, Goldman (1964, p. 35) interviewed two hundred students aged 6 years to 15+ years, using the following tests: (i) three “pen and ink drawings”, used as “a projective device” (p. 36), were followed by a series of questions; (ii) the texts of three biblical stories—simplified versions of the biblical text prepared by the researcher—were played, after each of which a series of questions was asked. The passages used were two Old Testament stories—Moses and the Burning Bush (Exod 3:1-6) and Crossing the Red Sea (Exod 14)—and one New Testament passage, The Temptations of Jesus (Matt 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). Another set of questions—eleven items, which included church attendance and reading of the Bible—completed the

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54 Piaget’s theory is summarised in Chapter 4.1.
The students tested had an overall IQ of 106.2, even when the more able 15-17 year olds were excluded (p. 41).

Goldman described the position taken on biblical interpretation as “a centre-to-liberal position” (Goldman, 1964, pp. 48-49), and the methods those of “literary and historical criticism” (p. 49). This position provided the basis on which Goldman devised the criteria to evaluate responses. Theological concepts and operational thinking were separately assessed by experts (p. 48).

Despite the enormous amount of data generated by the lengthy interviews, one questions the wisdom of using only five questions to explore operational thinking, especially when three of those questions were on the story of the burning bush:

*Why was Moses afraid to look at God?*
*Why do you think the ground, on which Moses stood, was holy?*
*How would you explain the bush burning, but not being burnt?*
*How would you explain the dividing of the waters of the Red Sea?*
*Why wouldn’t Jesus turn the stone into bread?*

(Goldman, 1964, p. 51)

It is quite possible that these questions would elicit a literalist interpretation of events. It would seem appropriate to examine the way in which such biblical passages were interpreted in the churches in the 1960s with which these children and their parents were affiliated, and how widespread was the understanding of a historical-critical approach to scripture. The point here is not to question Goldman’s findings, but to indicate that factors other than cognitive competence must be considered in interpreting students’ responses to religious questions, a point which Goldman himself recognized (Goldman, 1964, p. 3).

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55 Full details of the test and administrative procedures are provided by Goldman (1964) in Appendix A, pp. 247-259.
56 Details of the statistical analysis used to evaluate responses are provided by Goldman in Appendix B, pp. 260-263).
The research findings: (i) operational thinking

Goldman claimed that his analysis “substantiates very clearly the view put forward by Piaget that there is a continuum of thinking which follows an ‘operational’ sequence” (Goldman, 1964, p. 62). He identified “three major stages of thinking (and two intermediate stages)” (p. 62), and used the Piagetian terms of Pre-operational, Concrete operational and Formal operational thought (p. 64), with two transitional or intermediate stages. The sequence is more marked when mental age and the total score are used (p. 62). Table 2.1 summarises these stages and their characteristics.

Goldman emphasised that “the age boundaries are very approximate” (Goldman, 1964, p. 64), and while the attainment of formal operations “is very much later than that suggested by Piaget” (p. 63), it is compatible with the findings of Peel (1960). Goldman suggests that this “could substantiate” his “theory ... that religious thinking is secondary, dependent ... upon ... general experience ...” (Goldman, 1964, p. 63). The actual material used is also shown to be significant, with students attaining both concrete and formal operations first in the story of the burning bush (pp. 62-63). This would seem to indicate that horizontal décalage operates not just across domains, but within domains, in this case biblical stories, suggesting that inter-task differentials are complex and generalisations about students’ competencies need to be made with due caution.

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57 This terminology is preferred to Goldman’s less-than-felicitous labelling of the stages as “pre-religious”, “sub-religious”, and “religious” in his second book (Goldman, 1965a, e.g., pp. 23-24, p. 40.)

58 See Chapter 4.1 for Piaget’s (1972) qualification of his original theory.
Table 2.1: Operational thinking about religious stories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Approximate Age (MA)</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intuitive, Pre-operational</td>
<td>(Up to 7-8 years)</td>
<td>Transductive; fragmentary; inconsistent; episodic; focus on unessentials; no reversibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate—Intuitive to Concrete</td>
<td>Achieved between 6:6 and 8:10 (7-8 to 13-14 years)</td>
<td>Attempts at inductive and deductive logic; circular argument; attempts to classify and attempts to check thinking; literalism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concrete operations</td>
<td>6:6 and 8:10</td>
<td>Successful inductive and deductive logic, but limited to concrete situations; classification; two or more facts can be related, but no generalisation from one concrete field to another; verbal problems judged only in terms of content, and often in light of own experience; focus on specific and concrete features of the story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate—Concrete to Abstract</td>
<td>Beginning between 13:5 and 14:2 (13-14 years onwards)</td>
<td>Gradual change: more advanced inductive and deductive logic; move to abstract thinking, but concrete elements persist; attempts to go beyond the story for a possible explanation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract—Formal operations</td>
<td>Beginning between 13:5 and 14:2 (13-14 years onwards)</td>
<td>Thinking changes from situations to verbal propositions; abstract and symbolic thinking; reversibility at a propositional level and implications of a statement can be explored; working from theory back to facts. There are differences in the quality of responses between those just entering the stage and established formal thinkers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The research findings: (ii) religious concepts

Having established to his satisfaction the existence of a series of developmental stages in religious thinking which conform to the Piagetian model, albeit with a spread of ages at which the levels of thinking are attained, Goldman used the characteristics of each

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59 This Table draws on the discussion in Chapter 4, pp. 51-64 (Goldman, 1964).
60 Goldman does not maintain a consistent reporting of the ages which correspond to each of his stages. The age ranges in the Table are taken from the section, “Sequences of Thought” (pp. 62-63); those in parentheses are from his summary of this section (p. 64).
stage as norms to represent the type of thinking displayed by children and adolescents in a number of religious concepts under eight headings, including concepts of the Bible, the identity and nature of the Divine, and God’s activity in the natural world. Selected questions from the task material were used for each concept. The four biblical concepts will be reported on in some detail: firstly, for the insights provided into students’ understanding of the biblical text at different ages; and secondly, to identify key themes and issues which are common in the religious thinking of students.

Tables 2.2 to 2.5 summarise students’ development of an understanding of the kind of book the Bible is, how it came to be written, the truth of the Bible and its relevance to life.

**Table 2.2: Concepts of the Bible: kind of book**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Characteristics of responses</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Characteristics of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical nature: size, colour, print; external uses.</td>
<td></td>
<td>An original source book of religion through revelation, based on concepts of its origins and its importance in the struggle for truth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Continues until: 9:8 10:1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Focus on the Bible as the only completely true book; content: learn about God and Jesus; sweeping generalisations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Continues until: 14:8 16:7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Insight into teaching content; Bible helps people; Bible is true because it is based on eye-witness accounts; has more truth and religious meaning than other books.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>From: 14:8 16:7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Emphasis on spiritual meaning and significance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*Source of data:*While full appreciation of the source of the data upon which these findings are based is not possible without the actual questions—which it is deemed unnecessary to include in this summary—the number of items upon which each set of conclusions is based is instructive: for example, the number of questions range from one to four. (The number of questions is indicated in the bottom row in each table.)
Table 2.3: Concepts of the Bible: how it came to be written

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Characteristics of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Continues until: 9:0+ 9:7</td>
<td>Written by God or Jesus; by one powerful person or very religious man. Unitary composition, magical associations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Continues until: 14:6 15:8</td>
<td>Some concepts of multiple authorship, based on eye-witness accounts or an oral tradition, but ideas confused.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>From: 14:6 15:8</td>
<td>Concepts of multiple authorship clear, confusions resolved. Inspiration rather than accuracy is the major characteristic. Bible seen as fallible record as well as an inspired one.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source of data: Picture 3, Q. 4.

Table 2.4: Concepts of the Bible: truth of the Bible

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Characteristics of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Continues until: 10:6 11:0</td>
<td>Responses are irrelevant, repetitious; authority is external; “truth” is seen in terms of opposite of lies; “pious literalist”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Continues until: 12:6 13:0</td>
<td>Authority from God or Jesus, not as the writer but as the originator of the action of the stories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>At about: 14:0 15:0</td>
<td>Authentic because “somehow based on eye-witness accounts”; or, consistent with other sources or one’s own inner experience”; “development of a critical approach”. Authority seen “in terms of how it speaks to human experience, not in terms of externally induced authority.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source of data: Story 1, Q 7; Story 2, Q. 6, Q.7; Story 3, Q. 6.

63 Goldman (1964), pp. 73-75.
64 The basis for differentiating between the stages is principally in terms of an understanding of authorship as “unitary” or “multiple” and in relation to “inspired” vs. “accuracy”.
65 Goldman (1964), pp. 77-80.
Table 2.5: Concepts of the Bible: relevance to life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Characteristics of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>9:6</td>
<td>“Bible experience is seen as very remote”. (Continues for many children after the ages noted here.) Incidents isolated in history.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10:0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>12:6</td>
<td>An intermediate stage; attempts to explain differences, and sometimes similarities between ancient and modern times; confused views.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13:2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>12:6</td>
<td>More realistic differences and similarities between ancient and modern times; perceive genuine relevance of the stories for today.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13:2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source of data: Story 1, Q. 8B; Story 2, Q. 8A; Story 3, Q. 5A.

Goldman’s findings regarding the concepts of the Bible presented above in tabular form, provide insights into students’ gradual development of understanding of the principal issues being explored in this thesis. Although the wording is somewhat different, the four concepts Goldman chose to organise his research raise the following interconnected issues: the nature of Revelation, the role of the human authors of the biblical text, and the nature of religious truth. These questions are explored from a theoretical perspective in later chapters of this thesis, where the fourth concept, the issue of the relevance of scripture to the reader, is considered in terms of the existential appropriation of the text as revelatory. The discussion which follows highlights a number of points relevant to teaching the Bible to students at different cognitive stages. The discussion is organised into two broad categories: (i) the ages associated with each stage; and (ii) the significant characteristics associated with the description of these stages.

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66 Goldman (1964), pp. 80-84. Goldman titles this section “Concepts of the Relevance and Possible Recurrence of Biblical Experience”. I regard “Relevance to life” to be clearer and more succinct.
67 Chapter 5 explores the nature of the text and Chapter 6 considers the issues involved in the learner’s coming to a critical appreciation of the text.
68 Goldman used the word “stage”.

81
(i) The first stage, pre-operational, generally continues until the age of 9 or 10 years. In the case of an understanding of the “truth” of the Bible, this continues until the mental age of 11 years. Similarly, formal operational thought is attained very late, the earliest mental age being 13:2 years, but more commonly 15 to 16 years. However, this finding is less startling when compared with the findings of Peel (1965) on verbal material and, subsequent to Goldman’s study, Hallam (e.g. 1967) and Jurd (1973) on specifically historical material. Clearly the biblical passages share certain similarities with historical passages: for example, the events related are far removed from young people’s experience, and understanding is influenced by the level of development of the child’s concept of time. In fact, the effect of remoteness from students’ experience is substantiated by Goldman’s findings in relation to the extent to which children see the relevance of the biblical stories to their lives, as shown in Table 2.5. However, when compared to the other concepts related to the Bible, it is on this concept that formal operational thought is first attained. One may suggest that teaching in other areas of the curriculum, especially history, provides a foundation for such understanding.

While the content and the nature of the biblical stories present challenges endemic in any verbal material—where ideas and language structures, not physical items such as rods (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958) are being manipulated—one can argue that the nature of the biblical text adds another dimension, that of the sacred, which the students in Goldman’s research clearly recognised: to the extent that these children were from Christian backgrounds—and Goldman excluded from the sample those who were withdrawn from “religious instruction” (Goldman, 1964, p. 40)—the

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69 Although the characteristics of the responses are reported as representative of sequential stages, the stages are not actually named; the usual Piagetian series of stages is assumed.
70 The issue of “truth” was not explored in detail by Goldman.
71 For example, Hallam’s study indicated that concrete thinking begins around 12 years and that it is not until 16 years that young people begin formal thinking in history. Jurd’s Australian study indicated that on history-type material the late concrete stage was established at 15-17 years.
special status of the Bible is, in fact, a key variable, possibly inhibiting critical responses.\textsuperscript{72}

The crucial ages, from a pedagogical point of view, are those which represent a period of transition. As the Tables above indicate, and as Goldman repeatedly stated in his discussion of his findings (e.g. Goldman, 1964, p. 239), an important transition occurs around the age of 13 years, which Goldman called a “watershed” (p. 239). This coincides with the first years at secondary school and usually involves the transition from the concrete thinking of the child to a facility with abstractions such as “truth” and “inner experience” demonstrated by those adolescents whose thinking is at an established formal operational level. However, as is clearly shown in Table 2.6 below, which summarizes Goldman’s findings in relation to what in the context of this thesis is a significant concept—that of students’ understanding in relation to the truth of the Bible—the 12-13 years transition is a tentative transition from the first stage, a basic literal understanding of the truth of the biblical text to a partly-critical position. This crucial transition extends to about 15 years, thereby encompassing Years 7-10 of the secondary school.

Table 2.6: Truth of the Bible: Stages according to Yes/No answers\textsuperscript{73}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Age (CA)</th>
<th>Full literalism\textsuperscript{74}</th>
<th>Full or Near-literalism\textsuperscript{75}</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic literal</td>
<td>To about 12:11</td>
<td>58.9%</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate, partly critical</td>
<td>From about 12:11 to 14:11</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>57.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fully critical</td>
<td>About 15:0 onwards</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{72} What is arguably a related point—Goldman’s theological presuppositions—is discussed below in the context of the debate generated by Goldman’s research (Chapter 2.4).

\textsuperscript{73} Goldman (1964), pp. 75-77, 79-80.

\textsuperscript{74} Goldman (1964) used the term “full literalism” to indicate that “all three stories are accepted as literally true” (p. 76).

\textsuperscript{75} Goldman (1964) used the term “full or near literalism” to indicate that “two out of the three stories” are accepted as literally true” (p. 76).
The other concepts identified by Goldman in relation to the biblical texts, such as how the Bible came to be written, contribute to an understanding of the nature of the “truth” of the Bible. Yet these concepts are not without difficulties. It is argued that it is hard to see how an appreciation of the concept of multiple authorship of the Bible, which Goldman used as the principal criterion in students’ understanding of how the Bible came to be written (Table 2.3 above), is comparable to insights gained through the manipulation of physical materials in Piaget’s experiments or even to the analysis of the simple, short “anecdotes” Peel used to explore different types of thinking, which can be assimilated into the child’s cognitive schemata. The question of authorship of a complex ancient sacred text would not impinge on the child’s consciousness. One must assume that the participants in Goldman’s study had been given direct teaching\textsuperscript{76} to even consider the question of multiple authorship and that the results reported represent the age at which this information has been assimilated and accommodated by them to the extent that they could start to articulate it at around 10 years but not to have a full appreciation of multiple authorship until 14-15 years. This highlights the difficulties and complexities of exploring thinking about the biblical text: for students, for researchers seeking to understand young people’s thinking and for teachers attempting to address the associated pedagogical and spiritual issues raised.

(ii) From an analysis of the characteristics which Goldman associated with each level of thinking in relation to “concepts of the Bible”, one can identify several key issues, or ways of thinking, which impact on students’ understanding of the biblical text. These concepts resonate in a number of ways with the characteristics of the “stages” identified in the models of thinking by Perry (1970), Kitchener (1986), and Kuhn (2005).\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{76} Details of the actual teaching which students received have not been given, beyond statements relating to the widespread use in the curriculum of the stories chosen.

\textsuperscript{77} See below, Chapter 4.2 and 4.3.
The most significant factors characterising the level of students’ thinking involve anthropomorphism, literalism, ideas related to authority, and an appreciation of figurative language, which, together with the apparent competing knowledge systems of science and religion, contribute to an understanding of “truth”. When one considers Goldman’s findings on other religious concepts, for example, an understanding of God and divine communication and presence, concepts of divine love and justice, and an understanding of the person of Christ, a similar pattern is discernible.

Anthropomorphism in relation to an understanding of God is a persistent characteristic of the child’s thinking. The gradual transition from the pre-operational Stage 1 to formal operations, usually Goldman’s Stage 3, can be traced in terms of the young child’s visualising God “in purely physical and human terms” (Goldman, 1964, p. 89): the Deity is seen as directly intervening in events and arbitrarily dealing out punishment, for example, drowning all the Egyptians and their chariots (pp. 136-137). A spiritual understanding of the Deity (p. 92) is a later development. Similarly, there is development from evil being depicted as the devil, a “horrible man with horns” (p. 173), to an appreciation of evil “as a propensity within every person” (p. 174). The early stages resemble Perry’s (1970) Position 1, Basic Duality, and Stage 1 of Kitchener’s (1986) Reflective Judgment Model where there is “certain knowledge” and beliefs need “no justification”, while Stage 3 can be identified with the nuanced epistemology represented by the various descriptions of Relativism and of Procedural Knowledge in Belenky et al. (1986).

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78 Goldman (1964), Chapters 6, 9, and 11 respectively. Arguably, a number of references to “Christ” in Chapter 11 should refer to “Jesus” rather than to “Christ”.
79 See below, Chapter 4.2, Table 4.1.
80 See below, Chapter 4.3, Table 4.5.
81 See below, Chapter 4.2, Table 4.3.
What anthropomorphism is to an understanding of God, literalism is to children’s understanding of the biblical text, its authority, and the activities of the characters portrayed in its stories. The most irrelevant features of pre-operational thinking, which focus on the physical characteristics of the Bible as “a big book” with “small print” (Goldman, 1964, p. 70), and the type of literalism which leads to misunderstandings of Jesus’ statement that one does not live “on bread alone” (p. 167), are overcome by about the age of ten years. However, they are replaced by concepts still characteristic of Simple Dualism (Perry, 1970, Position 1) well into adolescence: a very concrete conception of God’s presence, the external authority of the Bible, and its truth understood in a very literalist manner.

The figurative language characteristic of much of the biblical text contributes substantially to the child’s difficulties in understanding the stories in the Bible in an other than concrete or literalist way. Similarly, the ancient writers’ conception of historical “fact” and the multiplicity of genres in the Bible are further impediments. Metaphor, analogy and allegory are characteristic of much of the biblical text (p. 14), and while Jesus’ parables may be able to be explained to children as “stories with a message”, Goldman’s research showed that the use of the parabolic form by the gospel writers in the Temptations of Jesus (p. 112) is very difficult to discern before the establishment of formal operations. The difficulty experienced by students—and many adults—with passages in the Old Testament, which seem to recount historical events, can be expressed in terms of the distinction between “truth” and “fact”: the story form in which religious “truth” is couched is perceived as historical, or literal, “fact”. Other genres present similar difficulties, for example, myth, the comprehension

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82 Goldman (1964, p. 14), makes this point more strongly, stating that biblical language “is almost entirely based upon analogy and metaphor, inferring from other non-religious experience the nature of the divine”. Figurative language is discussed in Chapter 6.2 below.

83 However, research on parables indicates that children’s understanding of this genre is far from straightforward; for example, Murphy, 1977a, Slee, 1983. Parable is discussed below in Chapter 6.3 and empirical studies on children’s understanding of parable in Chapter 6.4.

84 See below, Chapter 6.4, the research of McGrady (1994a, 1994b) and Cometa and Eson (1978).
of which requires an even more sophisticated understanding of literary forms than that required for simpler uses of figurative language, such as similes.  

Goldman’s research, and an understanding of Piaget’s developmental theory upon which it is based, help to explain why simply telling students, even in the early years of the secondary school, that the Creation stories, for example, are myths is so fraught. If the child’s existing schemata are only capable of contrasting truth with lies, or if myth is the equivalent of fairy stories, a new definition of myth will not be able to be accommodated, and adaptation to the new concept will not be achieved. For this reason, facilitating the transition in thinking from the concrete thinking typical of the child to the formal operational thought characteristic of the adolescent is one of the most important tasks of religious education in the secondary school, made even more difficult because of the different times at which individual students make this transition.

The need to teach for critical engagement with the biblical text

Goldman’s extensive analysis of his data demonstrated two key findings with relation to ages and stages: the extent of individual differences, both between students and intrapersonal differences; and the ages at which particular stages are attained, especially the late attainment of formal operations in religious thinking. The protracted nature of the “transition to analogy” (Goldman, 1964, p. 15) highlights the difficulties associated with achieving what Goldman understood to be an intellectually sound interpretation of scripture.

The conclusions which Goldman drew from his research focus on the persistence of literalism over critical thinking (Table 2.6 above) and his concern “that

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85 Myth is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.3 below.
86 Reich (1989) applied his “complementarity in thinking”, or “relational and contextual reasoning” (RCR) approach (1996, pp. 141-142), to this task with some success, as discussed in Chapter 6.5.
childish immaturities continue so long into adolescence” (Goldman, 1964, p. 67), with the result that not only will the use of the biblical text be educationally ineffective but it will reinforce “crude immaturities” (p. 67) which will militate against the acquisition of “a more critical and rational approach to religion” when the child moves towards adolescence (p. 67).

Goldman was highly critical of “teachers and clergy who fear to introduce critical ideas about the Bible” (Goldman, 1964, p. 85) which they see as “tampering with the innocent faith of the young”. He argued that by not addressing literalism, students for whom logical-scientific thinking comes to dominate can “become hostile to religion” which they regard as “childish” (p. 242). Despite the scathing remarks, however, Goldman’s advice to teachers does not go beyond exhortation, nor did he choose to address the problem of the persistence of a literalist approach which he had so clearly identified.

It is argued that Goldman’s identification of the importance of how scripture is taught cannot be overestimated. The difficulties associated with students negotiating a successful transition from concrete to formal operational thinking and the application of critical thinking to a study of scripture raise theoretical and pedagogical issues which are explored in this thesis. Suffice to say at this point, the transition from a literalist understanding of scripture to a more nuanced interpretation needs to be gradual and carefully calibrated given the range in students’ competencies and experiences, especially when one seeks to avoid a thorough-going demythologisation which undermines the credibility of the scriptures and thereby the foundations of Christian faith and belief.

87 The reference to “childish” echoes the finding of Loukes, that the fourteen-year-olds in his study were “interested in religious issues” (Loukes, 1961, p. 90), but wanted a “shift of viewpoint, from ‘childish’ to ‘adultish’” (p. 106). This statement by Goldman (1964, p. 202) is cited by Reich (1989) in the context of young people’s rejection of “their theological framework”; Reich cites two instances from his own research (p. 63).
88 See especially Chapter 7.
2.4 On-going Discourse on Religious Thinking

The publication of Goldman’s research findings in *Religious Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence* (Goldman, 1964) was followed the next year by *Readiness for Religion* (Goldman, 1965a) and the publication of teaching materials of the same name (p. xi), advocating a new curriculum in British schools. From the start, the atmosphere was highly-charged, and the debate went well beyond dispassionate discourse on the relative merits of Goldman’s contribution to research into the development of religious thinking. The context of the original debate is noted here because of its influence on the positions taken by some critics. More important, however, is the fact that Goldman’s research generated an on-going discourse on religious thinking whose findings go well beyond the original parameters of operational thinking. This review of the literature critiquing Goldman will focus on the critique of the research study and subsequent research.

**Critique of Goldman’s research study**

Although there was acceptance of Goldman’s research design, and direct endorsement by some, for example, Elkind (1971, p. 679), there was criticism of the intellectual, or cognitive, basis of the research (e.g. Black, 1965, p. 128; Howkins, 1968, p. 7). It is worth noting that Goldman clearly stated that the study was focussed on cognitive development and he did not claim that his findings constituted the “whole of a child’s religion”. Cox (1968, p. 428) accepted the deliberate limitation of the research to the cognitive domain and Peatling (1968) applauded “the recognition of the intellectual or cognitive part of the whole person involved in religious education” (p. 450). The following aspects of the study were prominent in the ensuing debate:
(i) **The Piagetian basis of Goldman’s research** was applauded by some, for example, Hyde (1968, p. 429); accepted with little criticism by others (e.g. Godin, 1968, p. 440; Greer, 1980, p. 28); and its appropriateness not questioned by Cliff (1968), Ryan (1968), Cox (1975), even if they did not necessarily agree with all of Goldman’s conclusions. Goldman attracted strong criticism from Fleming (1965a) and Murphy (1977a, 1977b) who were highly critical of Piagetian theory and, *a fortiori*, of Goldman. However, both of these critics themselves attracted criticism: McMillan (1967) and Hyde (1968, pp. 432-433) critiqued Fleming, while Greer (1980) and McGrady (1983) subjected Murphy’s critique to extensive criticism, although also critical of Goldman (p. 127). The appropriateness of the Piagetian paradigm was also questioned by Alves (1966b, p. 24), McGrady (1983, p. 127), Rowe (1981, pp. 18-19, 21), and Slee (1986a; 1986b; 1987, p. 60).

Several researchers clearly demonstrated their acceptance of the Piagetian paradigm by using it themselves in empirical studies which sought to replicate Goldman’s research. These include a small study by Whitehouse (1972), Morley’s application of Goldman’s findings to slow learners (1975), and large-scale studies in the United States by Peatling and associates (Peatling, 1977) and Hoge and Petrillo (1978).\(^{89}\)

(ii) **Goldman’s tests and their analysis**: The principal criticisms of Goldman’s tests, as they relate to this thesis are the test materials; theological perspective; and statistical analysis. Criticism of the test materials can be summarised in terms of the choice of stories—Moses and the Burning Bush, the Crossing of the Red Sea and the Temptations of Jesus—and the theological bias attributed to the simplified versions of the stories. Howkins (1968) claimed that they heightened “the miraculous element” (p. 11), and Langdon (1969) referred to the “dramatic, somewhat magical effect” (p. 49) of the language used in the two Old Testament passages. Goldman’s use of only

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\(^{89}\) See below for a more detailed discussion of the studies of Peatling (1977) and Hoge and Petrillo (1978).
five questions to establish operational stage was a serious shortcoming and, quite rightly, criticised by McGrady (1983, p. 127) and Slee (1986b, p. 169).

Reflecting on the later arrival of formal thinking “when it is a question of ‘miraculous’ narratives”, Godin (1968) suggested that “narratives of personal encounters would be useful” (pp. 441-442), a suggestion adopted by Whitehouse (1972) in his small study of primary school children using the story of Zacchaeus (p. 19).

Cox (1968, p. 427) and Prince (1970, p. 94) remarked that Goldman did not clearly and precisely state his theological position. However, Cox (1968) also made the point that the acceptability of Goldman’s writings varied with the theological position of the reader (p. 427), an observation virtually echoed by Prince (1970, pp. 94-95) and borne out by Howkins (1968) who described the theological differences between himself and Goldman in terms of his acceptance of the “historicity of the events” in the Bible, in contrast to Goldman, for whom “understanding the Bible meant seeing through the literal story to the ‘truth’ behind it” (p. 28).

Langdon (1969) was concerned that the evaluation of responses could have been influenced by Goldman’s theological position (p. 52), for example, by the membership of the panel (p. 57). Slee claimed that “the theological and psychological criteria employed by Goldman to discriminate between subjects’ responses are both subject to grave bias” (Slee, 1986a, p. 90), a claim she subsequently considered in more detail (Slee, 1986b).

Goldman’s choice of the Guttman Scalogram method of statistical analysis to determine operational stages was criticised by Fleming (1965a, p. 125), and Langdon (1969, p. 54), and subjected to detailed critical examination by Slee (1986b). Slee argued that the methodological shortcomings undermined Goldman’s claim that his research supported a three-stage model of religious thinking (pp. 171-172).
(iii) **The research findings and conclusions:** In considering the value of Goldman’s research, a distinction needs to be made between two types of conclusions drawn from his findings: the “descriptive” and the “prescriptive” (Cox 1968, p. 248), that is, between the psychological insights and the curriculum recommendations. The psychological insights proceed from Goldman’s analysis of his data. These relate directly to the issues being explored in this thesis: Goldman’s claim to have discerned three operational stages in religious thinking; the late attainment of formal thinking in religious concepts; the persistence of a literalist interpretation of scripture well into adolescence, and especially, the consequences of persistent literalism—Goldman’s “two worlds” problem or “arrested development”.

Many of the criticisms levelled against Goldman’s research relate to his focus on the intellectual domain, and, more specifically, to the area of logical thinking about religious material. However, the Piagetian basis for Goldman’s study can be justified in terms of the vast body of research data which has accumulated in a range of subject areas. The research of Peel, and of Hallam and Jurd who investigated history thinking, demonstrates that the Piagetian paradigm can be applied to verbal material, despite the difficulties, and the general finding that formal operational thought is reached at a later chronological age than that originally suggested by Piaget.

Goldman’s protocols, from which he quoted extensively, clearly demonstrate qualitative changes in young people’s thinking on the three biblical texts as they move from childhood to adolescence. Less well established, perhaps, is Goldman’s claim to have demonstrated the existence of a three-stage (or, five-stage, with the inclusion of transitional stages) Piagetian model of the development of religious thinking. One has concerns regarding the small number of items used to establish “mode of thinking”, as pointed out by McGrady (1983, p. 127) and Slee (1986b, p. 169) and Slee’s detailed criticism of Goldman’s content analysis and less-than-stringent use of the Guttman
Scalogram weakens the case for the claim that discrete stages in religious thinking have been firmly established.

The criticism levelled against the stories used by Goldman is justified, namely, the simplified versions, the removal of the stories from their context, and the focus on miraculous events. The imputed bias regarding Goldman’s theological presuppositions was basic to much of the criticism of his study. However, theological stance can no more be totally eliminated than can choice of psychological theory or choices between methodologies. Certainly it needs to be acknowledged, which Goldman did, albeit in rather general terms. In regard to hermeneutical principles, Goldman adopted an approach in line with contemporary biblical criticism, again, a matter of choice, but one which can be justified.

Information on prior teaching on the material with which Goldman’s subjects had to engage, an omission criticised by Howkins (1969, p. 9) and Langdon (1969, p. 43), would have been of interest. However, to be fair to Goldman, the multiplicity of syllabuses would have made such a task virtually impossible (Goldman, 1964, pp. 38-39). Similarly, subjects’ familiarity with the test material is a significant variable, and one which Goldman acknowledged; however, he conceded that to determine if this variable had any influence on his subjects’ insights was “an almost imponderable question” (p. 214).

Despite the criticism generated, Goldman’s research has provided valuable insights into the substantive changes which occur as religious thinking develops in childhood and adolescence. Furthermore, the issues raised and the debate generated led to further investigation of religious thinking, its definition, its characteristics and its development.
Subsequent research into religious thinking: follow-up studies

Empirical studies which sought to replicate Goldman’s research include that of Whitehouse (1972), who, citing Godin’s critique of Goldman, regarding “narratives which showed personal encounters like Zacchaeus’ call” (p. 19), used this story (Luke 9:1-10) in a small study with first and fourth year primary school children (p. 19). He confirmed the “sequence of thought suggested by Piaget and substantiated by Goldman” (p. 22). Whitehouse suggested that “it is difficult to promote religious insights through an appeal only to the intellectual side of children if their thinking is below the formal level” (p. 22). He also noted that the value of using a narrative involving personal encounter was not completely established (p. 22).

Morley (1975) used Goldman’s “pictures and story tests” in his study of a sample of sixty-seven slow learners. The results confirmed the stage sequence but these children reached each stage “at a much later chronological age” (p. 108). He found that the use of mental age provided a clearer picture of the stages (p. 109) and that in comparison to Goldman’s findings, the children in his study “reached the stages at a later chronological age, but an earlier mental age”, a finding he attributed to life experience (p. 109).

In exploring issues related to age and the attainment of abstract thinking with large groups, and the hypothesised “gap” between religious and other modes of thinking, the studies by Peatling and associates (e.g. Peatling, 1977) and Hoge and Petrillo (1978) are significant. However, caution is urged in interpreting their findings, given the different test conditions.

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90 Stead’s research identified the story of the call of Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10) as the passage used most frequently by teachers in Victorian Catholic primary schools. It was first in a list of twenty passages, nominated by 30.4% of teachers in the study (Stead, 1998, p. 11).
Peatling’s *Thinking About the Bible (TAB)* Test

Peatling devised a pencil-and-paper test instrument, the multiple-choice *Thinking About the Bible (TAB)* test (Peatling, 1977, p. 100), for use with large groups, drawing on Goldman’s three miracle stories and the associated “criterion-referenced responses” (p. 99). Results from large-scale studies supported Goldman’s findings with regard to stages of development in religious thinking (pp. 100-101, 102, 103). However, the progress through the stages followed a different pattern from that described by Goldman, and, indeed, from that of Piagetian studies, thereby raising doubts about the value of the test.

Peatling was sanguine about the success of his *TAB* test, given similar findings with very large numbers of subjects, including studies of adults. However, two points call for comment: the divergence from the usual Piagetian pattern of transition from one stage to another; and the differences he found between groups with regard to the stage of abstract thinking. Peatling accounted for the latter in terms of the theological background of the students and “the school system’s *milieu*” (Peatling, 1977, p. 105), the Lutheran school in the study being deemed more “theologically and biblically ‘conservative’” than the Episcopalian school (p. 102).

Peatling’s *Thinking About the Bible* test attracted interest and criticism, some of which was based on its Piagetian and Goldman foundations (e.g. Rowe, 1981, pp. 18-20, 21); some in terms of its divergences from Piaget and Goldman (e.g. McGrady, 1983; Greer, 1983), for example, the inclusion by Peatling of “pre-operational intuitive thinking within concrete religious thinking”, contrary to Piagetian theory, and variations from Goldman’s questions (McGrady, 1983, p. 130).

Greer (1983) questioned the construct validity of Peatling’s test (pp. 119-120). Citing his own “small-scale experiment” using Peatling’s instrument, Greer gave
qualified support for the concurrent validity of the TAB; however, the “anomalies” which he found indicated that while the “TAB does appear to give a useful measure of the level of religious thinking at which groups are operating”, it is doubtful whether there was “sufficient validation” when assessing the level of thinking of individuals (p. 121).

Testing Goldman’s hypothesised gap: Hoge and Petrillo

The research of Hoge and Petrillo (1978) raises some interesting issues with regard to Goldman’s conclusions. Extrapolating from what Goldman had written regarding the adverse effects of “literalism” being allowed to continue unchallenged (e.g. Goldman, 1964, p. 115), Hoge and Petrillo stated that Goldman “theorized” that “a gap between level of religious thinking and level of thinking in other areas” (Hoge & Petrillo, 1978, p. 140) would lead to “rejection … of religion as being childish and simple-minded” (pp. 140-141). Their research sought to assess “the determinants of level of religious thinking and the theory that a gap will produce rejection of religious training” (p. 142). Their claim that “Goldman hypothesised that the larger the gap, the more rejection of religion would result” (p. 152) was the basis of their statistical analysis and their conclusions.

Their sample was composed of approximately 150 Maryland tenth graders from each of three denominational groups—Catholic, Baptist and Methodist. These students, largely from “upper middle class” backgrounds, responded to a battery of tests, including instruments to measure religious attitudes and beliefs and general cognitive ability; Peatling’s TAB was used to determine abstractness of religious thinking (Hoge & Petrillo, 1978, pp. 142-143).

The most significant finding with regard to the effects of schooling was revealed when differences between Catholics attending public schools (n = 103) and Catholics
attending a private Catholic school (n = 48) were compared and a “strong effect” of religious education was identified (Hoge & Petrillo, 1978, p. 149): “the education received by the private school Catholics increased their familiarity with the Bible and encouraged a more abstract way of thinking about it” (p. 149). However, the researchers stated that it was not “familiarity with Biblical material itself” which was crucial, but rather “another associated factor … such as Biblical interpretation or theological approach” (p. 148). This would seem to imply that the teaching of the Bible which these students received encouraged an understanding which utilised their growing cognitive capacities. This point is significant in relation to the findings with regard to the correlation between religious education, religious beliefs and abstract religious thinking (pp. 149-151), and supports the stance taken in this thesis regarding the capacity of the school to influence outcomes.

Comparing their findings with the those of Goldman which led him to suggest a gap, Hoge and Petrillo (19778) concluded that Goldman’s theory with regard to a gap between level of religious thinking and capacity for abstract thinking in other areas, had been disproved; rather, “more abstract religious thinking” in the case of these students was “associated with more, not less, religious rejection” (p. 153). The exception, however, was the finding that for the private school Catholics their religious education “both encouraged more abstract religious thinking … and also reduced the amount of criticism of the church” (p. 152). It is this exception which is significant.91

The point which Goldman was making (e.g. Goldman, 1964, pp. 115, 242-243), which gave rise to the imputed gap, was that as students develop the capacity for abstract thinking their increased cognitive skills are not applied to the religious domain. He was arguing that these enhanced cognitive capacities should be utilised in religious

91 A detailed analysis of the Hoge and Petrillo (1978) research would examine in detail their methodology and analyse the statistical procedures they used to reach their conclusions. However, apart from noting that an accurate assessment of level of thinking is dependent upon the validity and reliability of the TAB test, and noting the smallness of the sample of Catholics attending a private school, these remarks will focus on the interpretation by Hoge and Petrillo of the point which Goldman was making which they summarised as a gap between abstract thinking in general and its application to religious thinking.
education: that as formal operational thought develops, the literalist understanding of the Bible and the religious images characteristic of the concrete thinker should be challenged. Goldman criticised the avoidance of addressing the issue of literalism by those who fear that to do so would undermine the young person’s belief (p. 85). Rowe (1981, p. 24), for example, who cited Hoge and Petrillo (1978) without question as evidence contra Goldman, is representative of the opinion that abstract thinking undermines religious belief.

The Hoge and Petrillo (1978) findings with regard to the Baptists and Methodists in their sample, for whom abstract religious thinking was associated with rejection of religious “doctrine and the church” (p. 152), can, in fact, be interpreted as supporting the argument of this thesis. It is not abstract thinking per se which leads to rejection of religious belief; rather, it is unchallenged literalism that is the obstacle to belief. Rather than undermining belief, engaging students in religious learning at an abstract level can consolidate religious belief, engaging reason and employing the academic tools of contemporary biblical criticism. The Hoge and Petrillo (1978) findings with relation to Catholic private school students support this position.

The direction of further research into religious thinking

Goldman’s research and the debate which it generated stimulated further research into a range of related issues and brought disparate studies together in a broader discussion of religious thinking. The areas of this broader debate which are particularly relevant to this thesis include the following, although distinctions between the following areas are not clear cut:

(i) Religious thinking and understanding: its characteristics, the importance of a theoretical model for its investigation (e.g. Slee 1986a, 1987; McGrady, 1987), and the link between religious thinking and religious language (e.g. Slee, 1987).
(ii) **Religious language** (e.g. Slee, 1987; McGrady, 1987): the role of story (e.g. Priestley, 1981, 1983); particular literary genres, such as the parable (e.g. Slee, 1983) and myth (e.g. Priestley, 1981, 1983); the characteristics of metaphor (e.g. McGrady, 1987).

(iii) **Developing a hermeneutic**: interpretation of symbols (e.g. Godin, 1968) and the role of the symbolic function (e.g. Godin, 1968; Davies, 1985; Heimbrock, 1986); developmental tasks in religious education (e.g. Godin, 1971); the demythologising of the biblical text (e.g. Priestley, 1981).

(iv) **Religious attitudes and the interaction between understanding and attitude** (e.g. Francis, 1977, 2000; Kay, Francis & Gibson, 1996).

(v) **The role of teaching**: the distinction between model of religious education and pedagogy (e.g. see Howkins, 1968, p. 17); the selection of appropriate biblical texts (e.g. Rowe, 1981, pp. 29-31); presenting and interpreting texts, especially those dealing with “miraculous narratives” (e.g., Godin 1968, Priestley, 1981).

Selections from these studies will serve as one stream of the resources drawn upon in investigating the characteristics of religious thinking in Chapter 6. The research of Francis and associates on the attitudes of young people towards religion has already been considered. More recent research by Loman and Francis (2006) has focussed directly on students’ interpretation of the Bible.

### 2.5 An Alternative Conceptual Framework: Research by Loman and Francis

The research of Loman and Francis (2006) adopted “an alternative conceptual framework” (p. 133) to Goldman’s Piagetian-based stage-developmental approach. Loman and Francis in effect criticised Goldman for his implicit assumption that rejection of a literalist interpretation of scripture necessarily meant a rejection of the

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92 See above, Chapter 1.3, pp. 47-48.
biblical text itself, raising the possibility that the stories may have been interpreted symbolically (p. 132). Their study is situated within a framework derived from the research by Hunt (1972a, 1972b) into styles of religious thinking.

Hunt’s (1972a) research was developed in the context of empirical studies of the religious belief and commitment of adults. He was dissatisfied with the way in which test instruments gave respondents no option but to agree or disagree with each statement of religious belief. He identified three styles of thinking: literal (L); anti-literal (A); and mythological (M), which were operationalised to produce the LAM scales. The mythological style of thinking, and the language in which meaning was expressed, represented “a reinterpretation of religious statements to seek their deeper symbolic meanings” (p. 43), a capacity which he stated “may … be related to the complexity of cognitive functioning, education, age” (p. 46). While applauding Hunt’s innovation, Greeley argued that Hunt’s interpretation of the items in the M (mythological) scale did not adequately represent the “transcendental implications” of the religious symbols (Greeley, 1972, p. 287).

Hunt’s instrument was modified and used in subsequent studies of religious types. Poythress (1975) changed Hunt’s three choices for each stem of a religious statement into three separate statements, presented in random order, mixed in with the other variables being considered, and measured on a Likert scale (pp. 274-275). Eight religious types were identified, four each under the rubrics of “Believers” and “Skeptics”. The modified LAM scales enabled permutations to be identified within each category, between Mythological and Literal believers and Anti-religious and Non-religious sceptics (pp. 276-277).

Further adaptation of Hunt’s LAM scale was made by van der Lans (1991). While retaining Hunt’s stem + statement format, van der Lans re-phrased almost all the M scale items and re-named the revised M scale “Metaphorical” (p. 110). Other
modifications of Hunt’s LAM scale included re-writing some of the literal alternatives, removing items “that do not refer to biblical issues but to ethical ones”, and adding “item stems that refer to resurrection and prayer” (p. 110).

Loman and Francis further adapted Hunt’s LAM scales. The Loman Index of Biblical Interpretation was an instrument devised to categorise the responses of young people from 11 years upward to passages from the New Testament (Loman & Francis, 2006, p. 135). The test material\(^93\) consisted of eighteen items, all of which are based on a short excerpt, usually one-sentence, from the gospels. Nine items require students to choose from three statements about the passage, which represent the three different modes: literal\(^94\) understanding, symbolic understanding, and rejection of the text.

The research, which involved 3412 Year 7 and Year 9 boys and girls in eighteen secondary schools in the UK, was designed to test the reliability and validity of the Index as a research instrument and to test two hypotheses derived from the findings of previous research (e.g. Kay & Francis, 1996): (i) that girls will score higher than boys on both literal and symbolic acceptance scales; and (ii) that rejection will increase with age as literal acceptance decreases (Loman & Francis, 2006, pp. 135-136).

Both gender differences (Table 2.7) and age differences (Table 2.8) were found in literal acceptance and rejection modes of interpreting the Bible. These findings were congruent with the outcomes expected from the existing body of research, and, coupled with statistical tests for the “internal homogeneity reliability” and “construct validity” of the three scales (pp. 136-137), were taken as supporting the validity of the test instrument.

\(^93\) A copy of The Loman Index of Biblical Interpretation, kindly provided by Professor Francis, is in Appendix 2.
\(^94\) The term “literal” used here represents what has been called “literalist” in this thesis.
Table 2.7: Gender differences in modes of interpreting the Bible

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Male Mean scores</th>
<th>Female Mean scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literal</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejection</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p < .001

Table 2.7 indicates that girls were more likely to accept a literal interpretation than boys. When a literal acceptance of biblical interpretation was no longer satisfactory, boys were more likely than girls to adopt the rejection mode; girls were more likely than boys to adopt the symbolic acceptance mode.

Table 2.8: Age differences in modes of interpreting the Bible

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Year 7 Mean scores</th>
<th>Year 9 Mean scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literal</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejection</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p < .001

Table 2.8 indicates, not surprisingly, that change occurs between Year 7 and Year 9 in students’ responses to passages from the New Testament: fewer accept a literal response; more reject the truth of the biblical text. However, there is also a

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95 From Table 1 (Loman & Francis, 2006, p. 137).
96 From Table 2 (Loman & Francis, 2006, p. 137).
statistically significant shift to a symbolic interpretation. Rejection of a literalist understanding of the Bible need not necessarily lead to rejection of religion: some adolescents are clearly capable of a more critical understanding of the biblical text. Of the students who rejected a literal mode of biblical interpretation between Year 7 and Year 9, about half moved to a rejection mode and about half moved to a symbolic acceptance mode.

These findings highlight the importance of the early years of the secondary school in leading students to a more sophisticated understanding of the biblical text. There is no indication in the report of their findings regarding any influence which approaches to teaching scripture may have had on the results. That was not the purpose of the study. However, whether occurring spontaneously or as a result of specific teaching, at school or elsewhere, this research indicates that students can move beyond a literalist interpretation of the Bible.

The two studies by Loman and Francis, testing the Index (2006) and the intervention programme,97 The Loman Accelerated Symbolic Thinking programme (2004),98 indicate that some students may be able to move spontaneously from a literalist interpretation in early adolescence to a symbolic interpretation of short passages from the New Testament. Educationally, the task is to facilitate the transition to symbolic understanding by appropriate teaching.

Summary

This thesis was inspired by the need to address the questions which secondary school students ask, particularly about the Bible. The basic contention is that young people

97 See Section 2.1 above.
98 The research which established the test instrument titled the Loman Index of Biblical Interpretation (LIBI), and used in the 2004 study, was published in 2006. In the 2004 study it was listed in the References as “manuscript under review” and dated 2005 in anticipation of publication.
experience difficulties when the literalist interpretation of the biblical text, appropriate in childhood, is challenged by adolescents’ developing critical faculties and increasing knowledge, especially of scientific explanations of phenomena. It is suggested that many young people, and, it may be argued, many adults, may believe, perhaps implicitly, that the Bible must be accorded a literalist reading if one is to maintain religious belief. The consequences of this way of thinking are pastorally damaging and educationally untenable. Addressing these misconceptions is a pedagogical task to be undertaken within the religious education programme from the earliest years of the secondary school. The teaching of the biblical text must directly consider the nature of the text, religious genres and the characteristics of religious language. Otherwise, for many young people the credibility of the Bible and associated religious beliefs will be seriously compromised; others will struggle to reconcile two apparently contradictory mindsets, while some may adopt a fundamentalist position.

The empirical studies cited in Section 2 support the contention that as scientific understanding increases, many young people grapple with the perceived conflict between scientific explanations and religious belief premised upon what is, in fact, an unchallenged literalist reading of the biblical text. These studies show an age differential. Younger students were more likely to take the Genesis account literally; however, within a few years, the credibility of religious belief had been seriously undermined, thereby confirming the contention that intervention is needed from the early years of the secondary school when many students will be moving towards formal operational thought and developing their skills of critical thinking. The research of Loman and Francis (2006) (Section 5) confirms the importance of the period between Year 7 and Year 9. Their educational intervention (2004) indicates that the school programme can be effective in addressing this issue.

Goldman’s research on religious thinking provided an insight into the stages in children’s and adolescents’ thinking: young people’s anthropomorphic images of God
and the way in which the Bible was understood are of special relevance. Key points include Goldman’s finding of a persistent literalism in interpreting the Bible and, as a result, problems associated with the emergence of “two modes of looking at the world”, one religious and one scientific. Goldman’s conclusion was to restrict the use of the Bible until students reach the stage of formal operations; this thesis recommends a pedagogy which addresses literalism directly.

Hoge and Petrillo (1978) contested what they claimed was Goldman’s hypothesised “gap” between level of cognitive development in science and religious thinking. They argued that overall their research disproved Goldman’s point. However, the exception which they found was particularly interesting: their findings with regard to private school Catholic students ran counter to their general findings, and, in fact, supports the contention made in this thesis that how the Bible is taught is a key factor.

The debate which Goldman’s research generated opened up a number of areas for further research in religious thinking, especially in relation to religious language. This is explored in Chapter 6. Chapter 3 considers the theoretical foundations for teaching religious education and seeks a model within which critical thinking in the teaching of scripture may be accommodated.
CHAPTER 3 – THE TEACHING OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Debate over the nature and purpose of religious education has a long history. Section 1 of this chapter considers the extent to which a catechetical model is an appropriate model for religious education in the Australian Catholic secondary school in the twenty-first century. The contrasting positions of Thomas Groome, whose Shared Praxis approach is catechetical, and Graham Rossiter, who advocates education in religion, are explored and their differences and similarities discussed. The discussion turns on defining catechesis in terms of its fundamental premise—the deepening of the faith of believers within the context of a Christian community—and the extent to which these conditions are met in the contemporary Catholic secondary school.

Two education in religion models are discussed in some detail. British philosopher, Ninian Smart’s phenomenological model of religious education has been widely used, particularly in a non-confessional setting, and is appropriate for an interfaith study of world religions. A development of Smart’s model, the typological approach to religious education by Moore and Habel (1982), has been widely used in Australia, especially in senior secondary courses in religious studies accredited by external educational authorities.99 The secondary school student texts in the To Know, Worship and Love series of mandated texts in the Archdioceses of Melbourne and Sydney are predicated on the typological model. These education in religion models also provide ideas for developing a pedagogy which promotes a more nuanced understanding of scripture.

99 For example, in Victoria Religion and Society is a two-year course which may be taken at Year 11 level (Units 1 or 2 or both units) and Year 12, at which level Units 3 and 4 must be taken. Units 3 and 4 include school-based assessment tasks which are subject to external moderation, principally via the end-of-year external examination.
Section 2 considers the concept “catechesis” within the context of “New Evangelisation”. Section 3 identifies a set of fundamental principles for teaching religious education and to guide classroom practice. Section 4 discusses an approach to religious education, *education for faith*, which has been developed for this thesis in light of the approaches of Groome and Rossiter and the principles enunciated in Chapter 1.1. It is a model within which teaching for critical engagement with the biblical text is a key feature.

### 3.1 Religious Education: Contemporary Theoretical Models

The debate over the nature and purpose of religious education is frequently encapsulated in differences over terminology.\(^{100}\) Such was the case in the theoretical and methodological debate in the United States from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s and such is the case in the debate over the differences in approaches to religious education in Catholic schools in Australia in recent decades. The issues raised tap into fundamental questions about the purpose of religious education in contemporary Western society and practical questions regarding how it is to be implemented in the classroom.

**Two approaches to the teaching of religious education**

From the earlier debate in the United States comes the distinction by Marthaler (1973) between “catechesis” as a pastoral activity and “religious education” as an academic pursuit. This distinction gained currency at the time (e.g. McBrien, 1976, p. 168; Westerhoff, 1977, p. 356) and represents a clear differentiation between the primary

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\(^{100}\) For the sake of focus and depth, this discussion is confined to the debate in the English-speaking world, especially Australia. The contribution of European scholars and the key role played in catechetical debate by *Lumen Vitae* is acknowledged.
The focus of the debate, therefore, is on the intention of religious education: whether it is to enhance the students’ growth in faith, or whether it is to increase students’ knowledge and understanding, be it of a shared faith tradition or of religion more generally. Stated in these terms there is an implicit assumption that each approach represents a single distinct type; furthermore, there is the implication that one must make a choice between two distinct approaches. This is too simplistic a picture. Firstly, each term covers a multiplicity of models. Education in faith, or catechetics—Marthaler’s pastoral activity—may refer to a transmission model or an experiential model, to mention but two approaches to catechesis. Some of the criticism of a catechetical approach may well be a reaction against a form of catechesis which is no longer practised. Similarly, as an academic activity, education in religion, may, for example, seek to explore one’s own tradition quite factually and even analytically and critically, or, adopting a phenomenological or similar model, compare religious traditions, that is, an interfaith approach. Secondly, religious education is not simply a matter of choosing between two mutually-exclusive approaches. An approach to religious education which develops knowledge and understanding of the faith tradition may also contribute to students’ progress towards an adult faith.

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101 The more recent debate over approaches to religious education in Australia has introduced a further array of terms. For example, Lovat (2002) contrasts “enfaithing” models and “interfaith” models. Similarly, Rossiter’s distinction between education in faith and education in religion, which is, perhaps, the most widely used terminology in the recent and current literature in Australia, draws attention to the primary focus, or intent, of religious education, especially in the Catholic secondary school in Australia.
The term “religious education” will be used in this thesis to denote the educational activity which is undertaken in schools. This term is justified on two grounds: firstly, its widespread usage at the present time, and, secondly, that under this generic term different theoretical models and different approaches to teaching may be accommodated.

In exploring the theoretical foundations for religious education appropriate for the Catholic secondary school in an advanced Western society such as Australia in the early twenty-first century, it is necessary to consider the following interrelated factors: the specific context in which the religious education takes place, including the perceived role of the school, its raison d’être; the purpose or goal—the fundamental intent—of the school; and the role and practice of the formal religious education curriculum in that school setting. How one responds to these questions constitutes the ideal, the desired outcome of the school’s pastoral and educative endeavour. The broader context, which includes the society in which the school is situated and the characteristics of the recipients of the education, identifies the particular milieu, the reality in which the school operates, which establishes the parameters within which it seeks to achieve its purpose.

**The Australian context**

The Catholic school has had an important role in assisting Catholic parents in their responsibility to educate and raise their children in the Catholic faith. “Catechesis” was the means by which the faith was “passed on” to the next generation.\(^{102}\) The approach to catechetics which was current at any particular time was a reflection of the changing socio-cultural and ecclesial circumstances and the changing theoretical approaches to religious education, including the change in substance and tone of official Church documents, especially since Vatican II. However, the underlying assumptions were

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\(^{102}\) The significance of the Catholic school to Australian Catholicism is discussed above in Chapter 1.2, p. 26. Appendix 1 provides an overview of historical perspectives on catechesis.
largely unquestioned: that students had the faith and were being brought up in the faith in practising Catholic families and that the school was working in concert with the family and the parish community to which children and their families belonged. The school was making explicit what was being inculcated in the family.

The latter part of the twentieth century was a time of change in the post-Vatican II Church, in society, and in Australian Catholics’ place in society. Migration from Europe broadened the community’s awareness of ways of being Catholic other than the predominantly Irish model. Higher levels of education brought increasing affluence to the Catholic community which became increasingly integrated into mainstream Australian society and identified more closely with society’s values. The negative response of many Catholics to *Humanae Vitae* (1968) contributed to a weakening of the type of authority previously held by the Church. Sociological studies provided evidence of a decline in religiosity (Mol, 1971). Many “concerned parents” and “older Catholics” (Hamilton, 1981, p. 1) blamed the schools, and especially the changes in the approach to religious education, for the declining religiosity of young Catholics.

The viability of a socialisation model of religious education has been questioned, and with it, the appropriateness of catechesis. The debate in Australia in recent years has, accordingly, been between two schools of thought: (i) those who support a catechetical approach; and (ii) those who believe that catechesis is no longer appropriate and favour education in religion. In seeking an approach to religious education which is compatible with the principles summarised in Chapter 1.1, a comparison will be made of Thomas Groome’s catechetical model and Graham Rossiter’s argument for education in religion.
Thomas Groome’s *Shared Praxis: a catechetical approach*

Groome’s *shared praxis* “approach”\textsuperscript{103} has made a significant contribution to religious education, both theoretically and in practice, in the United States and in Australia; his writing has also been widely translated in both Europe and Asia.

Groome starts from the existential situation of the human person as a historical being living out one’s life “in time” rather than with a body of doctrine which must be “covered”. The lens through which he understands both the human person and the role of education is that of the Christian, specifically the Catholic, tradition. The model is soundly grounded philosophically and in developing his comprehensive approach to religious education, Groome draws on a range of related disciplines, including psychology, sociology and education, as well as bringing to the task a distinctly post-Vatican II theological perspective. Drawing on the philosophy of Heidegger and Gadamer, Groome states that ontologically we are “beings in time”, yet having possibilities beyond the present existential situation. For the Christian, one’s “ultimate ground of being” is revealed through Christian faith, and expressed in theological language as “the Kingdom of God”, a metaphor whose eschatological dimension links the ontological, educational and theological dimensions of his model.

For Groome, education is deliberate and intentional (Groome, 1980, p. 20); it is “holistic”, and concerned with the “total person, cognitive, affective, and behavioral” (p. 23). Christian religious education\textsuperscript{104} has a specific *telos* (p. 33), expressed in terms both of a “purpose”, which is “to enable people to live as Christians”, and a

\textsuperscript{103} The use of the term “approach” in this discussion will refer to Groome’s “shared praxis approach” to Christian religious education. Unless there is a particular reason for doing so, quotation marks will not be used in subsequent uses of these terms. Groome prefers the term “approach” to describe what one might otherwise call his “theory” or “model” of religious education.

\textsuperscript{104} Groome (1980) chooses the term “Christian Religious Education” deliberately, preferring it to “catechesis”, both for its specificity in drawing on the Christian Story (p. 25) and in order to focus on the educational endeavour.
“metapurpose”, which is for the sake of the “Kingdom of God” in Jesus Christ” (pp. 33-34).

Groome’s approach to religious education focuses on human freedom and advocates a “critical consciousness” hermeneutic which he deems “necessary for transformation of society, for the reformation of the Church, and for the maturation in faith of individual Christians” (Groome, 1980, p. 122). Education takes place within, and is nurtured by, the Christian community, or Church, whose mission is working towards the Kingdom (pp. 46-47).

Faith has three dimensions: believing (cognitive); trusting (Groome, 1980, p. 61) (the affective dimension); and faith as doing (p. 63), “orthopraxis” (p. 65); the “purpose of Christian religious education [is] ...to sponsor people toward maturity in Christian faith as a lived reality” (p. 73). Drawing on the philosophy of Habermas, Groome posits a dialectic by which one engages in critical reflection which goes beyond the self to one’s relationship with society, an activity which he terms “conative pedagogy” (Groome, 1991, pp. 104-108). The detailed weaving together of the philosophical and theological foundations of his approach is provided in extensive and elegant detail in Sharing Faith (Groome, 1991).

The five “components” (Groome, 1980, p. 184), or “pedagogical movements”, in Groome’s approach presuppose a group situation and a dialectical approach.

1. **The First Movement: Naming the Present Action** (Groome, 1980, p. 208) focuses the group on issues of relevance to the lives of its members.

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105 Subsequently, Groome referred to the metapurpose of Christian religious education as the “reign of God” (e.g. Groome, 1991, p. 14).
106 Although both Groome’s *shared praxis* model and the *socialisation* model of education in faith draw attention to the need for a Christian community, Groome (1980, p. 122) regards the “socialisation” model to be inadequate as an educational endeavour.
2. *The Second Movement: The Participants' Stories and Visions* (Groome, 1980, p. 211): participants “are invited to reflect on why they do what they do, and what the likely or intended consequences of their actions are” (p. 208).


4. *The Fourth Movement: Dialectical Hermeneutic Between the Story and Participants’ Stories* (Groome, 1980, p. 217): participants are invited to appropriate the Story to their lives in a dialectic with their own stories (p. 208).


Groome’s approach calls for an openness and willingness to share experiences which is quite demanding in personal commitment and in a capacity to move between experience and the tradition. However, Groome cites examples of the approach being used with school students.107 Groome considers the cognitive requirements of “critical reflection”, and students’ capacities in “the use of *reason, memory, and imagination*” (Groome, 1980, p. 251), possible for the concrete operational child, albeit “with concrete objects, situations or representations” (p. 251). Groome emphasises the need to teach children to think rather than to present them with too much content or material which is inappropriate or cognitively inaccessible (p. 254).

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107 Some of the examples given by Groome of the use of shared praxis are with school students: for example with fourth-graders (Groome, 1980, pp. 216-217, 219, 221-222) and ninth-graders (pp. 216, 219). Groome has also applied the approach to the authorship of religious education curriculum materials in the United States (see Groome, 1992, p. 45, note on author) for students up to Year 8.
Groome’s shared Christian praxis has been influential in the religious education curriculum documentation in several Australian dioceses, for example, Parramatta, Canberra-Goulburn, and Hobart. Three Australian educators critical of Groome’s approach are Rossiter (e.g. 1997), Radunz (1995b), and Lovat (1988, 1995, 2002). Rossiter’s criticism will be discussed below in the context of his advocacy of an educational approach to religious education.

Radunz is critical of Groome’s acceptance of “the normative status of the Christian tradition and its essential truth” (Radunz, 1995b, p. 200). She argues that despite “Groome’s claims that his approach is grounded in praxis epistemology, critical pedagogy, and critical theologies”, he is “conservative” (p. 191). Lovat applauds Groome’s “comprehensive weldings of religious education to contemporary educational thinking” (Lovat, 1988, p. 32). However, he claims that the catechetical dimension of Groome’s model detracts from its critical credentials, arguing that when used as the total religious education programme the model is inadequate in “a multicultural and multi-faith society” (Lovat, 1995, p. 186).

Graham Rossiter: an educational approach

Rossiter’s response to addressing the issues facing religious education was to split it into two components: “catechesis” or “education in faith” and “education in religion”, thereby separating the religious education undertaken in the classroom from...

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108 For example, the religious education guidelines of the Parramatta diocese in New South Wales, published in 1991 under the title of Sharing our story were based on a modified version of Groome’s shared praxis (Devlin, cited in Rossiter, 1997, p. 31).
catechesis (Rossiter, 1981a).\textsuperscript{110} The following points gleaned from Rossiter’s writings\textsuperscript{111} explain his focus on “education in religion”.

The first point hinges on an interpretation of catechesis and the conditions required for a catechetical approach to religious education. The premises upon which catechesis is based could, logically, be said to require an initial faith commitment on the part of the recipient and that catechesis be undertaken within the context of a faith community. The significant decrease in the religious beliefs and practice of students attending Catholic secondary schools, their families’ declining identification with the Church, which had been confirmed by the research from the early 1970s,\textsuperscript{112} militate against “education in faith”. It can no longer be presumed that young people were “being brought up ‘in the faith’” (Rossiter, 1981a, p. 159). Rossiter did not regard the school as necessarily fulfilling the role of a Christian “community of faith”, seeing this as a “goal to be worked for rather than a given” (p. 159). Furthermore, an overemphasis on the school as “community” could detract from “formal religious education rather than seeing the two as complementary” in fostering faith (Rossiter, 1984, p. 18). Rossiter proposed an “education in religion” model where there are no such assumptions, a position which is not without its critics (e.g. Groome, 1992).

Secondly, for Rossiter the particular responsibility of the school is educational, (Rossiter, 1981a, p. 161; Rossiter, 1984, p. 19). Rossiter was concerned about the lack of attention given to “formal religious education” (Rossiter, 1984, p. 23), which should be more concerned with pupils’ cognitive grasp of religion than with trying to influence directly their personal faith and religious behaviour” (p. 24): that is, the school should do well what is its primary responsibility, and recognise the “natural constraints that a

\textsuperscript{110} In his critique of Rossiter’s writings, Goosen (1992) questions the wisdom of Rossiter’s bifurcation of religious education, arguing the term “religious education” “serves the same purpose” (p. 47).
\textsuperscript{111} In many instances Rossiter has co-authored publications with Marisa Crawford, e.g. Crawford and Rossiter, 1988. Rossiter was adamant that their publications were the result of “joint research, seminar presentations and writing” (Rossiter, 1994, pp. 43-44).
\textsuperscript{112} See above, Chapter 1.3.
school as ‘school’ imposes” on sponsoring faith (Rossiter, 1981a, p. 160). Rossiter argued for an “educational focus” (p. 166) and endorsed “an inquiring, evaluative study of religion in Catholic schools” (Rossiter, 1995, p. xxv), arguing that a cognitive approach can also provide a basis for addressing affective aims (Rossiter, 1988a; Crawford & Rossiter, 1988, p. 68) and that “knowledge and understanding” can have a role in “bringing faith to expression” (Crawford & Rossiter, 1988, p. 68) in the classroom setting.

A third reason for Rossiter’s support of an educational approach to religious education relates to respect for students’ privacy and “personal freedom … regarding their faith” (Rossiter, 1981a, p. 160). Classroom religious education which is mainly “cognitive or intellectual” provides an opportunity for students to participate in “discussions of belief” where such situations arise, but without the expectation of “personal revelations” (Crawford & Rossiter, 1988, p. 71). He advocates an approach to classroom religious education where students can “see clearly that there is no hidden agenda” and there is “respect for the individual’s freedom and privacy” (Rossiter, 1995, p. xxiv). These points are well taken, especially in regard to adolescents and young adults.113

Despite advocating different models, and proceeding from different philosophical premises, the fundamental intentions of Groome and Rossiter with regard to the desired outcomes of religious education in a Catholic school have certain similarities.

**Groome and Rossiter: a comparison**

Rossiter’s objection to Groome’s shared Christian praxis, which he saw as an “appropriate and effective method in adult catechesis groups and in voluntary youth

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113 Respect for the privacy of the student is also espoused in official Vatican documents, e.g. *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, 1990, n. 6.
commitment groups” (Rossiter, 1997, p. 30), can be explained, at least in part, by Rossiter’s interpretation of catechesis as necessarily involving believers and the deepening of faith. In the light of the compulsory nature of religious education classes in the Catholic secondary school, it is not surprising that Rossiter doubts that Groome is “attuned to the difficulties that a ‘devotional’ approach to classroom religious education creates with secondary school students” (p. 30). Rossiter has a point: to the extent that Groome’s shared praxis approach is interpreted as dependent upon participants’ willingness to share their thoughts and faith experiences and to reflect on the issue under consideration from a faith perspective, its appropriateness in the secondary school classroom is open to question.

There is in Rossiter’s position, however, a conflation of catechesis, by definition necessarily involving faith, and Groome’s shared praxis which calls for “dialogue among believers” (Goosen, 1992, p. 46). This is the basis for Rossiter’s concern about students’ privacy. As an approach to classroom teaching the open sharing of one’s faith becomes less appropriate as assumptions about the faith background of students become more problematic and as students move beyond childhood. A model which is highly suited to a group of willing participants meeting voluntarily cannot necessarily be transferred to a classroom situation where attendance is obligatory, and perhaps unwilling, as can be case with adolescents whose knowledge is sketchy and many of whom are at best indifferent to religion and reluctant to openly engage in dialogue about their religious beliefs. In this regard, Rossiter’s critique of a narrow catechesis is justified.114

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114 It is interesting to note that Rossiter associates “faith-sharing” with the experiential approach to religious education current in the 1970s, which was characterised by “informality” and “group dynamics and a de-emphasis of content and intellectual learning” (Crawford & Rossiter, 1988, p. 67). Those teachers whose exposure to poor applications of the experiential model may have made them sceptical of faith-sharing, may well be in favour of an approach which reinserts a cognitive dimension to religious education. Yet Groome’s approach has a strong cognitive dimension, which, in fact, goes beyond the cognitive to the conative.
However, what follows is not axiomatic: it does not necessarily follow that an approach to religious education which seeks to promote or invite faith should no longer be pursued in the Catholic secondary school. To the extent that students can be led to be critically engaged with the subject matter, and the symbiotic relationship which Groome posits between the cognitive, affective and behavioural domains entered into in a dialogical and dialectical manner, progress may well be made towards the realisation of conation, the active engagement of the whole person (Groome, 1991, pp. 8-9, 18-21). Assumptions about sharing faith, understood in a narrow sense, are not essential to such a goal. Rather, an invitation to know and understand the tradition within which the school stands is, arguably, the role of the religious education programme in the secondary school. The classroom provides the opportunity for young people to explore ideas and religious concepts, to share their reflections on making meaning should they so choose, and, most importantly, in the context of this thesis, to be led to a more critical and deeper understanding of the scriptures.

Despite their differences, there are points of commonality between Rossiter and Groome. Both value cognitive and intellectual skills. For example, Groome’s advocacy of “critical reflection” (e.g. Groome, 1980, pp. 194-188) incorporates the “inquiring, evaluative study” which Rossiter also advocates. Both value knowledge and understanding; both recognise that education encompasses the cognitive—knowledge, understanding and skills—and the affective domains, and both recognise that a balance between them is educationally desirable. While advocating the need for a cognitive dimension to religious education, Rossiter does not undervalue the responsibility of adults to support young people’s spirituality (Crawford & Rossiter, 1995a, 1995b), nor the importance of affectivity (Rossiter, 1988). Both Groome and Rossiter are concerned with the well-being of the individual and his or her flourishing in the contemporary world. Groome advocates educating in the Christian tradition in a way which “not only informs ... minds but also forms ... values and transforms ... lives” (Groome, 1992, p. 45), and he provides suggestions for the incorporation of “formation
in a Catholic spirituality” (Groome, 1997, p. 161). For Rossiter, religious education has a role in meeting the “challenge to find ways of making the Church’s 2000-year heritage of wisdom articulate with young people’s perceived world view” (Rossiter, 2001a, p. 14) as a means of helping young people in developing their identity (Rossiter, 2001a) and in their search for meaning and a spirituality (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006).

Irrespective of the cogency of the theory, how the course to which it gives rise is actually taught is dependent upon the knowledge and skill of the teacher. For the optimal delivery of a sound religious education programme it is essential to ensure that teachers are thoroughly conversant with the theoretical foundations of the model upon which the curriculum which they are implementing is based.

Both Groome and Rossiter envisage a confessional setting which seeks to advance the religious development and spirituality of the young. In the non-confessional setting religious education may mean “education about religion” (Rummery, 1975a, p. 157), with a focus on religious literacy in a pluralist, “multi-cultural and multi-faith society” (Lovat, 2002, p. 33). Two significant theoretical models which seek to achieve such ends are the Phenomenological Model of Ninian Smart and the Typological Model of Moore and Habel (1982).

The Phenomenological model

As religious practice declined in Britain, and religious instruction was deemed by many to be generating boredom and rejection of religion (Grimmitt, 1973, p. 2), there were calls for a non-confessional approach (e.g. Grimmitt, 1973) to religious education, which had been a compulsory subject in all British schools since the 1944 Butler Act. In

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115 The importance of adequate professional development in the theoretical basis of a changed curriculum in the Archdiocese of Melbourne is attested by Buchanan and Engebretson (2009).
the context of a search for a more “objective” approach to religious education, following the Durham Report, 1970 (Rummery, 1975a, p. 119), Ninian Smart’s phenomenological model of religious education became the option recommended in the Schools Council Working Paper 36: Religion in Secondary Schools (1971) (Grimmitt, 1973, pp. 26-31, p. 88; Leech, 1988, p. 70; O’Grady, 2005, p. 228). In the increasingly pluralist and multi-faith society which Britain was becoming, a course which provided broader understanding of and tolerance towards religious diversity in British society was deemed appropriate, Smart’s phenomenological model of religious education was recommended.

Smart applied the philosophical phenomenology, as developed by Husserl, to the study of religious phenomena in an educational setting. He contrasted “doing theology and studying religion” (Smart, 1973a, p. 6): while theology approaches religion from the perspective of the believer, he advocated the scientific study of religion, which, he claimed, “does not reduce religion in any way” (p. 3).

Smart identified six “dimensions” by which religious phenomena could be studied in order to better understand a particular faith tradition or to facilitate the comparative study of world religions. Distinguishing between beliefs and practices, Smart identified two sets of three “dimensions”: “doctrines, myths and ethical beliefs, on the one hand, and rituals, experiences (sentiments), and institutions on the other” (Smart, 1973a, p. 24). While these six dimensions are the most well-known features of the phenomenological model, Smart’s method goes well beyond a simplistic attempt at “value-free descriptions” or “typology” (pp. 20-21).

Two defining characteristics of phenomenology, epoché or “bracketing out”, and eidetic vision (Barnes, 2005, p. 10) are educationally relevant beyond one particular model. Phenomenology “refutes the notion that anyone can be purely objective about anything” (Leech, 1988, p. 71). Since subjectivity cannot be avoided,
its effects need to be neutralised by “bracketing”, or “leaving aside” (Smart, 1973a, p. 38), one’s own preconceived ideas, for example, about a religious tradition. In bracketing, the existence of the phenomenon being considered is neither affirmed nor denied (p. 54). By *bracketing* out one’s own beliefs or ways of seeing, it is claimed that one is able to consider religious phenomena objectively; by applying the *eidetic vision*, one attempts to enter into the mindset of the other to gain an appreciation of the way in which the religious phenomenon which is the “focus” of one’s study, such as the Trinity in Christianity (p. 67), is seen from the perspective of adherents of that religion. There is objectivity in the study, but there is also the possibility of empathetic understanding, “a kind of imaginative participation” (p. 20) from the perspective of the other. This is an approach which can be conducive to tolerance and understanding of other religions without compromising one’s own religious beliefs.\(^{117}\)

In the context of religious education in the secondary school, the cognitive demands of epoché and the eidetic vision, or, to use the more educationally familiar terms employed by Leech (1988, p. 72), to set aside one’s “assumptions”, and the affective capacity for “empathic understanding”, may be beyond the capacity of many students. However, becoming increasingly aware of one’s assumptions and entering into other realms of thought and existence are important educational goals in a range of studies, including the critical engagement with scripture.

The phenomenological model has had both its critics and defenders. Barnes (2005), for example, argued that it “gives insufficient attention to the issue of religious truth” (p. 11) and “removes any critical dimension from religious education” (p. 11). Barnes is also critical of “neutrality” and argues that tolerance and religious commitment are, in fact, compatible (p. 12). Lovat (2002), reflecting on his debate with Barnes over phenomenology as a method in religious education, attributed the

\(^{117}\) However, it is worth noting that those who believe that one’s own religion is the “right” or only “true” religion would find in the phenomenological model a relativising of a religion’s claims to that status.
grounds of their disputation to be in part to “the highly politicized way” in which a version of phenomenology had been practised in Britain (p. 87). In Australia, Lovat (2001, p. 5) and Ryan (2005, p. 19) view a phenomenological approach favourably, although each proceeds to develop his own model.118

The phenomenological model does not provide a blueprint for its practical implementation. O’Grady (2005), for example, notes that “Smart has little to say about classroom pedagogy, leaving it to others to apply his theoretical insights” (p. 227). However, the model has influenced the framework within which the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) Religion and Society study has been structured, principally through Moore and Habel’s typological model.

The Typological approach

In devising their typological model, which is specifically designed for the classroom, Moore and Habel (1982) acknowledge their “indebtedness” to Smart, but state that they are specifically concerned with the classification of religious phenomena (p. 71). A distinction is made “between religious activity and educational activity” (p. 26). The former they relate to “faith”, and define as “the inward act of believing/trusting in ... specifically religious phenomena ... and the outward act of expressing that belief” (p. 26). Religion is seen as “a first order activity” as is “religious training or formation” (p. 33). Education is seen as a “second order activity” which involves reflection on first order activities, for example “to interpret them” (p. 27). Accordingly, they draw a distinction between “religion-specific training (e.g. catechesis) and religious studies” (p. 45), depicting their model as “a distinct, indeed technical view of education” (p. 45).

118 Lovat’s “Integrated Model of Religious Education” or “Critical Model” seeks to integrate what he regards as the positive features of typology and praxis (Lovat, 2002, Section C). Ryan’s “educational approach” (Ryan, 2005, p. 20) starts from “the situation of Australian school religion classrooms” rather than from a “pre-designed theory”, and advocates drawing on materials ranging from poetry (p. 21) and “historical controversies” to “biblical texts” (p. 22).
In this model, “Religious Education” is “education concerning religion”. It “is necessarily a multi-cultural or cross-cultural study” (Moore & Habel, 1982, p. 34); it “must be open-ended” (p. 34); “careful, discriminating observation of the religious phenomena is of the essence” (p. 35); “it must include the affective in its explicit and particular context” (p. 35); observation is “directed not simply at the ‘externals’ of religion, but also at its characteristic passions” (p. 36); and integration or synthesis is involved (p. 36). Their typology of religion as a “method” is specifically designed to “help students to acquire skills to interpret and understand religion” (p. 22).

The “two major and related aspects of the method” are “cognitive skills and affective skills” (Moore & Habel, 1982, p. 49). Eight cognitive skills are listed and described: selection, observation, description, component analysis, structural synthesis, functional synthesis, religious synthesis and social synthesis (pp. 51-52). The affective skills show the theoretical influence of phenomenology: “bracketing” (or “epoché”); empathy; and imaginative identification, which is their “attempted translation of what phenomenologists call the ‘eidetic vision’” (pp. 62-65).

While Smart identified six “dimensions”, Moore and Habel (1982) classify religious traditions according to eight “categories”: beliefs, texts, stories, ethics, ritual, symbols, social structure, and experience (p. 71). Each category is described in detail and further refined into more and more precise “components” and “structures”, which together constitute an “integrated system” (e.g. pp. 73, 76). This makes for a very precise exploration of such “structures” of religious beliefs as different cosmologies (p. 76), and for the detailed identification of different “components” of sacred texts (pp. 86, 89).

The typological approach has informed course development in Australia; for example, the VCE study Religion and Society, which “seeks to develop understanding
and respect for the perceptions of the participants in religious traditions” (*Religion and Society*, Study Summary, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority). These courses, which are part of the externally accredited VCE, and which are available to all secondary schools in Victoria, have provided the religious education curriculum for Years 11 and 12 in many Catholic schools.\textsuperscript{119} The approach has been extended to texts produced within the context of an enfaïthing model of religious education, albeit one which claims to have an educational approach to religious education. The structure of the secondary texts *To Know, Worship and Love* was derived from the typology of Moore and Habel (Engebretson, 2000, p. 30; 2002, p. 41).

### 3.2 Catechesis Revisited: From Catechesis to New Evangelisation

A key distinction between the religious education approaches of Groome and Rossiter is in terms of an understanding of catechesis. The point has been made that the preconditions for catechesis, narrowly defined as deepening the faith of believers in order that they may grow in their understanding of and commitment to the Christian message, no longer obtains.\textsuperscript{120} Very many students do not have a sound knowledge of their religious tradition and their socialisation into that tradition outside the school is such that predicating religious education upon the presumption that what is being done is “passing on … the deposit of faith to the new members”’” (Audinet, 1975, p. 175, quoting J. Daniélou) is less appropriate than formerly.\textsuperscript{121} Furthermore, given the post-Vatican II understanding of personal faith as a free choice made by the individual, and faith understood as an on-going and developing commitment, rather than a once-

\textsuperscript{119} The inadequate knowledge and skills base of students in Catholic schools, revealed when they undertook the VCE accredited studies in religion, was cited as one of the reasons for the new textbooks in Melbourne, *To Know, Worship and Love* (Engebretson, 2002, p. 39; see also Buchanan & Engebretson, 2009, p. 143).

\textsuperscript{120} One may question whether such conditions have ever existed, or are likely to exist, in a school situation.

\textsuperscript{121} The term “passing on … the faith” may seem to imply a transmission model of catechesis; however, other approaches, such as the kerygmatic or life-centred models, had the same purpose.
for-all acquisition, the traditional metaphor of faith being “passed on” to the next generation can be seen to be inadequate. However, school-based religious education does seek to enhance students’ knowledge and understanding of their religious tradition and to provide an environment which promotes students’ spiritual development and facilitates a personal faith decision.

The vast majority of students in the Catholic secondary school will have been baptised. Religious educators who propose a socialisation or catechetical model of religious education tend to argue that by virtue of their baptism students “have faith”. In this regard the distinction made by Nebreda (1970a), between “the habit of faith ... the capacity to make an act of faith” and “the act of faith itself” (p. 111), which requires “conversion” and requires a personal decision (p. 115), is an important one. Rummery (1975a) makes the same general point, referring to “the habitus fidei received in Baptism” as “the technical qualifications” for faith (p. 174). The “diversity of the religious situation” (GDC, 1997, n. 184) of students is a fact: any secondary school classroom will include students whose positions in relation to a personal decision with regard to faith would encompass a broad spectrum (n. 184). Many young people may be described as “indifferent” and “non-practising” (Third Millennium, 1997, n. 6), or, to use the categories in the Generation Y study (Mason et al., 2007, Chapter 6; summary on pp. 350, 351), they are “marginal” or “nominal” Christians. These young people may be “the children of Christian families”, however they are at the stage of “primary proclamation” (GDC, 1997, n. 51) or evangelisation rather than catechesis, requiring “a missionary dimension rather than a strictly catechumenal dimension” as “a necessary first step” (n. 185) for their “religious awakening” (n. 51).

Evangelisation, narrowly defined, is concerned with missio ad gentes, of preaching the gospel to all people, especially those to whom it has yet to be preached. Catechesis involves ‘maturing ... initial faith” through “deeper and more systematic knowledge” (CT, 1979, n. 19). In recent Vatican documents the traditional distinction
between evangelisation and catechesis as two separate moments is affirmed, however, the permeability of the “boundaries of these activities” (GDC, 1997, n. 61) makes for less rigidity in differentiating between them. The distinction between “initiatory catechesis” and “continuing catechesis” may be relevant to the secondary school. Initiatory catechesis is described as “comprehensive formation” (GDC, n. 67), appropriate for the newly evangelised and newly baptised, (n. 82); also included in this stage are “children and young people” (n. 72). The subsequent stage, “continuing catechesis” (n. 71), is “on-going education in the faith” (n. 69), the usual definition of catechesis.

The contribution of Nebreda (1970a) to the exploration of the concept of pre-catechesis, especially in the case of adolescents who have been baptised as infants, is of particular relevance. Nebreda saw the “transit from a more or less ‘notional’ to a ‘real’ assent” (p. 117) a difficult one for the subjects of infant baptism. In fact young people’s religious knowledge was seen to be an “obstacle” to their “grasping the meaning” of the kerygma (p. 117). He emphasised the folly of assuming that “once baptized our children will automatically grow into Christian adulthood if only they are given catechetical instruction” (p. 114)—a point which has still not been grasped by many, including concerned parents (see Pascoe, 2006). 123

Drawing on the three-stage process by which adults journey to faith, described at the Bangkok Catechetical Study Week (1962)—pre-evangelisation, evangelisation (which together constitute “the pre-catechumenate”) and catechesis proper (Nebreda, 1970 article from The Medellin Papers. By the time of the Catechetical Week at Medellin, Colombia, in 1968, enthusiasm for the kerygmatic approach to catechetics was waning, partly because of the repetition throughout the years of schooling of the same story of salvation history. It is in this context that Nebreda perceives “knowing by heart”, that is, knowing factual material “off by heart”, as an “obstacle” to young people “grasping the meaning of those saving events” (1970a, pp. 117-118). However, one may note that while there has been much written about the lack of knowledge of young people in the Catholic secondary school, students themselves often believe that they have “heard it all before”. The problem, therefore, is broader than that specifically identified by Nebreda: it is one which warrants careful consideration in all curriculum and course design.

122 These 1970 articles by Nebreda come from The Medellin Papers. By the time of the Catechetical Week at Medellin, Colombia, in 1968, enthusiasm for the kerygmatic approach to catechetics was waning, partly because of the repetition throughout the years of schooling of the same story of salvation history. It is in this context that Nebreda perceives “knowing by heart”, that is, knowing factual material “off by heart”, as an “obstacle” to young people “grasping the meaning of those saving events” (1970a, pp. 117-118). However, one may note that while there has been much written about the lack of knowledge of young people in the Catholic secondary school, students themselves often believe that they have “heard it all before”. The problem, therefore, is broader than that specifically identified by Nebreda: it is one which warrants careful consideration in all curriculum and course design.

123 Reply by the (then) Director of the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, to the “anguish” expressed by a parent whose children had ceased “to practise the faith after leaving school”.

126
Nebreda identified the educational task with regard to adolescents as “how to prepare our youth to discover ... and welcome” the kerygma, which he saw as “the problem of pre-catechesis” (p. 118). Drawing on Liégé, whose use of the term pre-evangelisation referred to the process of addressing the “structure and values that often prevented people from hearing the kerygma” (Dooley, 1997), Nebreda identified two types of pre-catechesis: (a) “indirect, or ambiental pre-catechesis” which focuses on “socio-psychological conditions” and “tries to ... prepare the ground for adult faith”; and (b) “direct or personal catechesis” (Nebreda, 1970b, pp. 146-147), which starts with the existential situation of the individual.

The “basic principle of pre-catechesis” is “the anthropocentric approach”, which is implicit in the documents of Vatican II (Nebreda, 1970b, pp. 148-149), and which is characterised by an understanding of young people and being “alert” to their “open and implicit questions” (p. 148). The theme of “preparation” is a recurring one: Nebreda’s recognition of the need “to prepare the ground for adult faith” (p. 146) is echoed in the identification by the Congregation for Catholic Education of the role of teachers in “preparing the soil” (Religious Dimension, 1988, n. 71) for catechesis. Many students in the secondary school religious education classroom fall into the category identified as pre-catechesis. Much of what occurs in religious education classes is, in fact, “ambiental pre-catechesis”: “preparing the soil”, respecting the freedom and the privacy of the individual while encouraging young people to be open to the religious dimension of life. In part that involves removing the obstacles to a willingness to listen to what is taught in religious education—including misunderstanding with regard to the biblical text.

Distinctions between the various stages and sub-stages in the processes of evangelisation and catechesis are not always clear. If pre-catechesis is understood to presume a prior stage of “evangelisation” and the indication of an openness to the gospel on the part of the recipient of “initiatory catechesis”, the concept of pre-
evangelisation may well be more appropriate in describing the position of many secondary school students. Nebreda’s indirect or ambiental pre-catechesis, could be seen to represent pre-evangelisation. Whether the preparatory work basic to the religious education endeavour is described as pre-catechesis or pre-evangelisation is, perhaps, a moot point. However, the more recent reflection by Michael Mason (2007) on his experience of conducting “Stranger Camps” for Year 12 students from Australian Catholic secondary schools, merits serious consideration in identifying students’ existential starting point and therefore the point of departure for both the theoretical approach to religious education and pedagogical practice.

Mason suggested that rather than attempt “to catechize the unevangelised” (Mason, 2007, p. 8), “pre-evangelisation” was the appropriate pedagogical point of departure. The findings of the Generation Y study (Mason et al., 2007) confirm the need for those working with young people “to go back to very basic levels” (Mason, 2007, p. 8). Year 12 students’ evaluation of their experiences on the voluntary camps revealed the power of symbols, especially the “liturgical symbols of the Mass” (Mason, 2007, p. 6) celebrated within the “community” formed during the camp, albeit a “temporary and fragile” community (p. 7). Reasoning from these experiences, and drawing on the literature of religious experience and on “a large-scale Australian survey of Catholics” (p. 7), Mason identified these young people as having a “sense of the presence of God” (p. 7) which he called “‘primordial’ religious experience” (p. 8). Pre-evangelisation he saw in terms of a “pedagogy” which helped people “to reflect on their primordial religious experience” (p. 8). Classroom paraliturgies and meditation, which use religious symbols and evoke a sense of the numinous, perform such a role for students from a range of positions from pre-evangelisation to catechesis proper, and are well-received, especially by senior students.

124 According to Rummery (1975a), Nebreda makes little distinction between pre-catechesis and pre-evangelisation (p. 200).
125 Mason was one of the researchers in the Generation Y study (2007).
The point made by Mason with regard to symbols can be extended to include music, religious art, and knowledge and understanding of the symbolic dimensions of language, especially the use of metaphor and imagery in scripture. Engaging with the scriptures using the tools of critical biblical scholarship to analyse and deconstruct a text is neither the end point nor the only way to arrive at a more nuanced interpretation; the ultimate intention is rather to free texts from literalism in order to open up the possibility of a deeper engagement with the mythic elements of scripture. For some students, and adults, that end may be advanced via an appreciation of the power of symbolic and poetic language. The symbolic may be a means by which young people can be brought to an appreciation of the way people have engaged in the search for meaning and have sought to engage with the numinous since time immemorial: articulating the meaning of such symbols can, if done sensitively, extend students’ understanding while at the same time authenticating their experience. It is suggested that such a process could be entered from a number of faith positions, including that of “primordial” religious experience.

The concept of “new evangelisation” gained currency during the pontificate of John Paul II. Its development can be traced over three documents, two of which are directly on catechesis and in the context of the religious education.\textsuperscript{126} New evangelisation was applied principally to adults, more specifically adults from countries “of long-standing Christian tradition” (\textit{GDC}, 1997, n. 26); however, it is worth considering this concept in relation to religious education in the secondary school.

\textit{Catechesi Tradendae} (1979) used the term “Quasi-Catechumens” (heading to n. 44) in the context of the importance of the catechesis of adults (n. 42), and in particular to apply to those who had been the subjects of catechesis as children but “who later drifted away from all religious practice as adults” (n. 44). In \textit{Redemptoris Missio} (1990) John Paul II identified “three situations” in which evangelisation

\textsuperscript{126} It is not to be inferred that the term occurs only in these sources; these particular documents are chosen for their relevance to catechesis and education.
occurred, the third of which involved “entire groups of the baptized” [who] have lost a sense of the living faith” and who may “no longer consider themselves members of the Church”: for these a “new evangelization” or a “re-evangelization” was said to be necessary (n. 33). The General Directory for Catechesis (1997) identified the mission to this group of baptised adults as “kerygmatic catechesis” or “pre-catechesis” (n. 62). Interestingly, however, in stating the type of “catechetical activity” required in “situations requiring “new evangelization”, reference is made to both “young people and adults”, for whom “a period of prior proclamation and awakening” rather than “ordinary catechesis” will be needed (GDC, 1997, n. 276). Its application to students in the secondary school, therefore, is relevant in describing the families from which many of these students come, but may also be descriptive of older adolescents and young adults in the final years of the secondary school who no longer identify with their Christian roots.

Identifying a clear-cut, single starting point for the teaching of religious education is not possible. As in all subject areas, students come to their religious education classes with a wide variety of experiences and prior knowledge and a range of attitudes. What an exploration of the terms evangelisation and pre-evangelisation, catechesis and pre-catechesis and new evangelisation achieves, however, is to more precisely identify the characteristics of the range of positions on the continuum from pre-evangelisation to permanent catechesis, all of which are likely to be present in any class. However, not all students will necessarily find a place on that continuum. The situation of those class members who are disinterested in religious education or, perhaps, alienated, also warrants consideration.

Fowler’s extension to the religious domain of Erikson’s concept of a “psychosocial moratorium” during adolescence (Erikson, 1968, p. 156) is instructive. Fowler’s identification of a “moratorium”, “a time when the near young adult avoids premature overcommitment”—understood here in terms of the decision to make or
delay a religious commitment (Fowler, 1981, p. 43)—resonates with Babin’s concept of a “fallow” period (Babin, 1968, p. 420; translated and cited by Rummery, 1975a, p. 99). What is of particular interest in the context of religious education throughout the Catholic school, from the earliest years to late adolescence and early adulthood, is Babin’s point that “what the young person rejects is not so much catechesis but the world of childhood to which it is so closely tied” (p. 99). There are many reasons why young people may be resistant to religious education. However, it is worth considering that disinterest may not necessarily mean a rejection of faith, of religious belief or of a spiritual dimension to life: it may be that developmentally the young person needs “time out”, a “moratorium” or “fallow period”. He or she may also be responding to how religion has been presented throughout the years of schooling. In attempting to arrive at a basis upon which to build a theoretical approach to religious education, the wide range of students’ prior learning experiences and attitudes need to be accommodated. Pedagogically, it is necessary to ensure that students’ developmental stage is taken seriously, including respect for their developing cognitive capacities which cannot be satisfied with interpretations of religious subject matter, especially the scriptures, which have not changed from early childhood.

3.3 Teaching Religious Education: Principles to Guide Classroom Practice

In the light of a rethinking of catechesis as constituting for many students pre-catechesis or pre-evangelisation, it is necessary to identify the precise nature of the ecclesial mission of the Catholic school and how it is to be interpreted and implemented at the present time. This section draws on the insights from Church documents, from writers who advance an internally coherent, philosophically and theoretically well-grounded model of religious education, and from reflection as a practitioner. The objective is to provide a theoretical basis for religious education which is contextually and educationally coherent and consonant with a critical
approach to the teaching of scripture. The process is inductive. The first stage is to enunciate a number of fundamental principles in order to provide scaffolding for a more precise statement of the purpose, goals, content and pedagogy for religious education.

Religious education in the twenty-first century: fundamental principles

The first set of principles focuses on the ideals which inform the Catholic school in its dual role as a secular and an ecclesial educational institution.

A secondary school has a responsibility to educate young people in the knowledge and skills necessary for the full development of the human person who can participate actively and competently in the life of the community. The intellectual, social, physical and moral dimensions of life come under the purview of the school and its educational task.

- The school is fundamentally an educational institution; its primary responsibility and raison d’être is to educate.

The ecclesial dimension of the Catholic school is affirmed. The Christian vision is constitutive of the identity of the Catholic school: it shares in the evangelising mission of the Church in its endeavour to integrate culture and faith in the lives of the members of the school community. The Catholic school seeks to enhance the flourishing of the individual as a spiritual person and to contribute to the common good by promoting values which advance the cause of peace and justice and the wellbeing of all human beings.\(^{127}\)

- The Catholic school has a responsibility to advance students’ knowledge and understanding of their Christian religious heritage, to promote students’ spiritual development and to facilitate their on-going faith development.

\(^{127}\) There is much discussion in Australian Catholic schools about Catholic identity. It is not possible to do justice to the depth and breadth of this issue in this thesis.
The second set of principles concerns the way in which the school actually operates, its authenticity as an institution which seeks to perform its dual role.

The secular and ecclesial roles of the school are complementary, albeit with the potential for tension. One source of tension can come in the potential for ambiguity between the prevailing cultural values and the Christian values the school seeks to advance. For example, the steps which a school takes to achieve high academic outcomes need to be evaluated in the light of the Christian values espoused in units on social justice within the religious education programme. Enrolment policies and how the school balances the implicit values associated with success in a competitive environment against a preferential option for the poor are but two instances of this potential for tension in the school as an institution. How this tension is resolved influences the credibility of the school as a Christian institution.

- The school has a responsibility to seek congruence between its espoused values and its practice.

One of the principal criteria for establishing the Christian credentials of the Catholic school is the extent to which the functioning of the school as an organisation and the relationships within the school—its culture or ethos—are congruent with the Christian principles enunciated in its mission statement. The informal curriculum is fundamental to the school’s religious educational endeavour. How the school as an organisation treats its members, and how the school complements the formal religious educational programme through community enhancing liturgical celebrations is a measure of the authenticity of its religious education endeavours.

- The Catholic school’s pastoral care and liturgical celebrations need to provide students with the experience of belonging to a Christian community.
That religious heritage also requires that the school look beyond itself as an institution and engage with the wider world. To educate its students so that they develop a critical appreciation of their own culture and an increasing capacity for outreach within that culture is an important function of the school as a whole and complements the religious education programme. Concern for peace and justice in the global context is an important extension of this development of critical consciousness.

- The culture of the Catholic school needs to encourage an attitude of critical engagement with the world and educate its students for shared Christian praxis.

*The third set of principles concerns the reality of the environment in which the school operates, including the characteristics of contemporary society and the characteristics and needs of the students.*

The interpretation of the school’s vision needs to be conducted in the light of the present reality. Responding to the signs of the times requires an acknowledgement of the opportunities and of the constraints imposed upon it as a school in the twenty-first century, especially in terms of the religious characteristics of students.

The students who attend Catholic schools have, in the vast majority of cases, been baptised; their parents have sent them to a specifically Catholic school, aware of the expressed values of the school—and in many cases, as the empirical evidence suggests, because of those values. If it is not necessarily the reason why parents choose a Catholic school they are fully aware that participation in the formal religious education curriculum is required of all students. Whether this is accepted as the price to pay for the advantages they perceive in choosing a Catholic school, or whether there is a residual commitment to their own Christian roots to which they would like their own children to have some access, is a moot point.
What is clear is that an increasing number of students in the Catholic secondary school in the twenty-first century have little contact with the Christian community beyond the school: for them the school is the Christian community. These young people exhibit many of the qualities conducive to the building up of the Kingdom, such as idealism, generosity, and tolerance towards others, but generally without reference to an explicit commitment to the Christian vision. That schools can contribute to students’ religious development has been confirmed by the empirical research (e.g. Flynn, 1993, p. 389). In its relationships, however, what is of fundamental importance is respect for the human person and acceptance of his or her existential situation.

- Acceptance of the students “as they are”, and an appreciation of the positive qualities which they bring to the school, must be the starting points for the way in which the school engages in its mission of meeting the needs of young people growing towards maturity. This principle is also fundamental to the development of the formal religious education curriculum and finds pedagogical expression in the classroom.

While the first three sets of principles focus on the wider educational context, the focus now shifts to the formal religious education programme.

Religious education is a compulsory subject in Catholic secondary schools. As a school subject it must be conducted with an academic rigour comparable with other school subjects. However, as a subject where the pastoral dimension is integral, the special nature of the subject needs to be acknowledged. To the cognitive and affective objectives, is added a spiritual dimension and a conative dimension.

- Religious education is both like and unlike other subjects in the school curriculum: it has both academic and pastoral dimensions. The teaching of religious education needs to reflect a coherent integration of these two dimensions.
In developing the religious education programme in an explicitly Christian secondary school, students’ incoming level of knowledge and understanding of the subject matter needs to be realistically assessed. There is a general consensus (e.g. Engebretson, 2002, p. 39) that the knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith of contemporary students is limited. However, this is not to see religious education merely to address any perceived deficit in knowledge of students’ own religious tradition. Rather, knowledge, skills, and understanding of the subject matter are integral to teaching and learning in any other school subject: religious education is no exception, a point made explicit in the General Directory of Catechesis, 1997 (n. 73).

Furthermore, as a field of study, religious education is relevant to the life of each student, both as an individual and as a member of an increasingly multi-faith society.

- The academic aspects of religious education are affirmed. The acquisition of knowledge and skills is integral: they are necessary, although not sufficient, elements of the subject.

The unique nature of religious education does not detract from the importance of knowledge and understanding. In fact, the link between religious knowledge and life enhances the significance of accurate religious knowledge. While inadequate knowledge frequently arouses concern in church circles, what is equally, if not more concerning, and not acknowledged, is students’ misunderstanding of what Christian teachings are. This is particularly significant in relation to the assumptions made by many young people with regard to the scriptures: many seem to think that they must believe what they increasingly find to be insupportable as their cognitive capacities develop, that is, a literalist understanding of the Bible stories with which they have become familiar as young children. If not addressed, this false perception can have a profoundly negative effect on adolescents’ attitudes towards religious education and their openness to the Christian message. This is especially so if religious education is not conducted in an atmosphere where questioning and critical thinking are not only tolerated but are a constitutive part of the classroom experience.
• The religious education programme needs to address students’ misunderstanding of the biblical text.

The characteristics of openness in discussion and critical analysis which are established features of education in the secular subjects must also be accepted and implemented in the classroom teaching of religious education. Such an approach is congruent with the Catholic tradition. For example, in identifying the distinctive character of Catholicism, Groome proposes five characteristics, which include a “commitment to tradition” and an “appreciation of rationality and learning” (Groome, 1996, p. 108). Groome’s shared praxis is firmly set within a learning environment which celebrates human freedom and his commitment to critical reflection may be applied to the present understanding of the learner and the religious tradition. Rossiter seeks to preserve the privacy and freedom of the student in the classroom through intellectual discussions which are free from a hidden agenda.

If students are to engage with religious education they need to respect it as a subject in which their active participation is welcome and they do not feel constrained by a perceived expectation that their questioning will be interpreted negatively in the light of the received religious beliefs of the tradition. In fact, the hurdle to overcome in this regard is students’ preconceived ideas that religious education is “different” and responding to their misconception of what is “expected”, despite the fact that the teacher is willing to engage in open dialogue. Such a perception, a residual suspicion of a “hidden agenda”, is arguably a component in findings from empirical studies that the attitude towards religious education classes, especially in Year 12, is tepid (e.g. Flynn & Mok, 2002, p. 217; de Souza, 2000, pp. 41, 42). Throughout students’ experience of teaching in this subject, mutual respect for the religious tradition and for students’ freedom to question need to be engendered, in a manner compatible with their level of development.

128 In identifying the five characteristics which he proposes as distinctive of Catholicism, Groome acknowledges his debt to Gilkey, a Protestant observer of Catholicism.
The religious education programme is to be built on the same respect for free and open discussion and critical analysis as students experience in the secular curriculum.

In summary: Both the ecclesial and the secular dimensions of education must be respected and integrated when addressing the particular and unique position of religious education as a subject within the curriculum of the school.

3.4 An Approach to Religious Education for the Twenty-first Century

This chapter started with a consideration of the debate over the nature and purpose of religious education in the school setting, with a focus on the lack of agreement in the definition and use of terminology and of whether the intention was to enhance students’ growth in faith or to increase their knowledge and understanding. Marthaler’s (1973) distinction between the terms catechesis and religious education as a pastoral pursuit and an academic pursuit respectively is mirrored in a dichotomy between approaches to religious education represented as education in faith (catechesis) or education in religion.

Education in faith reconsidered

Instead of focussing on students “having faith”, it is suggested that “faith” be understood in terms of the faith heritage into which it is assumed that the majority of students attending a Christian school have been born and into which most have been initiated at baptism. If “faith” denotes the tradition which is upheld by the school community of which young people are a part, then education in faith gains credibility. Young people have a right to be inducted into their religious and spiritual heritage just as they have a right to an education which inducts them into the accumulated wisdom.
and mores of their culture and society. That students’ religious practice outside the school may be scant is not the crucial point. Certainly it makes the task of educating and socialising young people into the life of the community more difficult; but in every time and place the educative mission of the Church has been to meet the needs of people in their existential situation. The school does, in fact, socialise its students into the values and practices of the religious tradition: this occurs, for example, through whole-school liturgies and through opportunities for prayer and reflection which can be provided in the classroom without being disconcertingly pious, or compromising students’ religious freedom. This has always been the case; what is different is that circumstances have changed so that the Catholic school is bearing much of the role previously fulfilled by family and parish.

For many students the appropriate starting point in religious education will be pre-catechesis, the indirect or “ambiental pre-catechesis” which Nebreda identified (Nebreda, 1970b, pp. 146-147)—which will be referred to in this thesis as pre-evangelisation. It is argued here that the qualities which Nebreda recommends at this stage of pre-evangelisation be the *implicit* element in religious education, constituting the *learning environment*, which accepts students’ existential situation, is “alert” to students’ “open and implicit questions” (p. 148), and provides a milieu in which the spiritual dimension of life may be addressed (e.g. Crawford & Rossiter, 1995a, 1995b, 2006; Rossiter, 1999, pp. 13-14). Spirituality, however defined, is perceived as a need among young adults (Tacey, 2000, 2003b), and has being researched in empirical studies of youth (Hughes, 2007b; Mason et al., 2007). Groome (1997) has highlighted how teaching religious education can be engaged in “through the lens of *spirituality*” (p. 161), drawing on the rich Catholic Christian tradition; the “Stillness and Silence” strand in The “Five Strands” approach to religious education advocated by Peter Vardy, and implemented in many Christian schools in Australia is another example of how this
need may be addressed. Young people’s capacity and willingness to engage with religious symbols, given the appropriate ambience (Mason, 2007), is further evidence that there can be engagement at an experiential religious level.

However, the classroom must directly address the educational dimension of “education in faith”. Knowledge and understanding have a primary role in the classroom programme, as befits a school, constituting the explicit element in religious education. Nebreda sought to remove obstacles to students’ willingness to learn. This thesis argues that one of those obstacles is students’ misunderstanding of scripture, and their belief, often unrecognised by themselves and by significant adults, that a literalist interpretation is demanded of the Christian, a position which they quite rightly reject. To the openness of the interpersonal, implicit, learning environment must be added an explicit openness to critical thinking and engagement with ideas and issues in a dialectical and dialogical exchange which encourages and facilitates learning.

Knowledge of other religious traditions—education in religion—needs to be a component of students’ religious understanding. While the direction of the overall religious education programme in the case of the Catholic school needs to come from the Catholic Christian tradition, the teaching of comparative religion, especially in the senior years is essential (e.g. Lovat, 2002) in a multi-cultural and multi-faith society such as Australia. State-accredited courses, such as the VCE study, Religion and Society, are widely taught at the senior level in Catholic schools. A study of other religious traditions rather than presenting a threat, can paradoxically, enhance one’s understanding of and appreciation of one’s own religious tradition (Boys, 1997, p. 7).

129 Dialogue Australasia is the journal of the network of schools which have introduced such an approach, although the material in the journal is of wider appeal. More information is available on the website: www.dialogueaustralasia.org

130 Globalism is increasingly a feature of the international scene and the increased movement of peoples is making multi-culturalism a reality in more and more countries. Furthermore, international relations and the cause of world peace require a deeper and broader understanding of world religions in the world post September 11, 2001, especially in democratic countries where there is the possibility of an informed electorate influencing foreign policy.
The classroom programme and atmosphere needs to be premised on the fact that the contemporary challenge is to show students that the integration of Christian values into their life, and the practice of the faith which is their religious heritage, is worthwhile.

**Towards an overall approach**

This present response follows an analysis of the approaches of a number of contemporary writers, each of whom has influenced the position adopted. Groome’s shared praxis approach and Rossiter’s advocacy of an educational approach have been shown to have in common a concern for the religious and spiritual wellbeing of young people. Writing out of the British context of compulsory religious education in all schools, Gerard Rummery compares the changing approaches in the British government schools over a thirty-year period with a model of catechesis in Catholic schools. Drawing on the French *l’éducation de la foi*, he proposed a model for Catholic schools of “education in (the) faith”. What is clear in all approaches is the struggle to resolve the tension between the two separate but interwoven concepts of religious education and catechesis as faith development (e.g. Rummery, 1975a, pp. 171-172). A further distinction, also expressed linguistically by the use of a particular preposition, is that of Langdon (1994).

Writing in the context of his support of the provision of denominational religious education in government schools in New South Wales, Langdon describes such religious learning as “interpretive” (Langdon, 1994, p. 52). He explores the rubric “education in faith”, using the distinctions provided by Latin. Education *in fide*, education in faith, he sees as inappropriate as it presumes the faith of teacher and students (pp. 54-55); education *in fidem*, which he translates as “education into faith”,

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131 Apart from Groome, Rossiter and Rummery, other writers to influence the approach suggested include Mary Boys (1989), Harold Horell (2003) and Tom Beaudoin (2003).
is deemed inappropriate as it could imply that “learners were ... outside faith” (p. 55). The option he chooses is *ad fidem*, “education towards faith” (p. 55), which he supports with the following reasons: (i) it is “oriented towards” faith, which “accords with” the identity of the school and with parental expectations, and is “conducive ... to growth into greater maturity of faith; (ii) it is “faith motivated”, linked to the “wider Church” and promotes “greater understanding of faith” and “the challenge to personal appropriation of faith”; and (iii) the content “will be *faith interpreted*” and “*faith focussed*” (pp. 55-56).

Langdon’s reasons in support of religious education as “education towards faith” express many of the requirements of the compulsory religious education programme in the Catholic secondary school:

- it is oriented towards faith: the starting point is the Catholic faith tradition;
- it is faith motivated: it seeks to provide the circumstances which will invite students to a personal faith commitment expressed in Christian praxis;
- it has an intellectual component: knowledge and understanding of the beliefs and values of the tradition and their application to everyday life, the integration of faith and life.

It is suggested that these objectives constitute an educational approach which can be encapsulated in the term *education for faith*.

**Education for faith**

*Education for faith* is presented as an interpretive framework which seeks to guide students in their journey towards adult faith. It seeks to inform and to remove obstacles to belief. The educational climate is one which encourages discussion and personal engagement which is respectful of both the religious tradition and the individual. To slightly adapt the statement by Colomb (quoted in Rummery, 1975a, p.
education for faith is characterised by fidelity to God and fidelity to the human person. To achieve the first, the Christian tradition is presented faithfully, sensitively and rationally, not defensively. Students are invited to respect the wisdom of the tradition, inherent in the lived reality of adherents over the centuries and in the present. The tradition’s foundational text, interpreted in a hermeneutically appropriate way, is a source of hope and guidance for people in today’s complex world.

To respect the circumstances of the adolescent, the material is presented openly and honestly so that students may be confident that there is “no hidden agenda”: the Catholic Christian perspective is acknowledged but presented in a dialogical and dialectical educational environment. It is an approach which provides a framework which can accommodate the distinctions made earlier: between the specific context in which the religious education takes place, the role of the school, and its purpose—the ideal; and the broader context, which includes the society in which the school is situated, the students and teachers—the reality in which the school operates.

This framework has much in common with Groome’s “catechetical education” (Groome, 2003, p. 1) and Rossiter’s educational approach. What is different from Groome’s approach is that “sharing faith” is not seen as an essential component, albeit a desirable one; and the starting point is not catechesis, but a range of positions ranging from disinterest, to pre-evangelisation and up to and including catechesis. What is different from education in religion is an acknowledgement of the Christian denominational perspective within which knowledge and understanding are located.

In elaborating the approach suggested, education for faith, the interaction between the ideal and the real, will be considered under the following headings: the

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132 The English translation of Colomb’s aphorism, as recorded by Rummery, is “Fidelity to God, fidelity to man”.
133 Those sharing this education in faith approach include Horell who explores his “vision of education in faith” in the context of post-modernity (Horell, 2003, p. 81).
name of the subject and the associated definitions; the context or setting; the participants; the purpose and goals; the content and skills; and how the educational endeavour should be conducted.

The name of the subject, Religious Education, justified earlier in terms of its widespread usage in Australian schools, provides equal weight to both the educational and faith-oriented dimensions of what is, in fact, a subject within the curriculum and timetabled along with the secular subjects. As such, it shares common cause with these subjects by contributing to the overall education of the student.

*Education* is defined as the deliberate and systematic programme of activities and experiences which are intended to contribute to the development of the whole person—mind, heart and will. It involves inducting the individual into the knowledge, skills and mores of the society, for the good of the individual and the continuation of society.

*Religion* refers to that which pertains to ultimate reality and the transcendent. It is characterised by beliefs and values which contribute to the making of meaning in life and norms for living one's life.

*Religious education* refers to a deliberate and systematic programme to develop knowledge and skills and the beliefs and values of the religious or faith tradition and involves the mind, heart and will.

The context is the Christian denominational school in an advanced Western democracy, a secularist and multi-cultural society in which religion may be practised freely but one in which a religious perspective on life has become peripheral to the
lived reality of many within that society, including many of those who enrol their children in Christian denominational schools.  

The participants are students, teachers, parents and the denominational Church which sponsors the school. The primary participants are adolescents in the secondary school whose religiosity and beliefs have been considered in detail. The cognitive and psycho-social developmental stages through which students are passing will influence the content and delivery of the religious education programme. This thesis will consider the cognitive domain in detail, coming principally from a constructivist perspective.

Teachers need to be supportive of the ethos of the school; those delivering the teaching/learning programme in religious education should, ideally, be committed believers, witnessing to their faith as they engage students, explain, and, by the relational atmosphere established in the classroom, invite young people to choose to grow towards adult faith.

Parents have sent their children to a denominational school for numerous reasons, including but not necessarily, and often not primarily, for education in faith. Aware of the nature of the school, they are justified in having expectations of the school’s religious character and curriculum; similarly, the school has a right to seek from parents respect and support for its ecclesial role, including the religious education programme.

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134 While religious practice within the major Christian denominations has declined in Australia, and traditional religious values and beliefs are frequently challenged in the media, there is also evidence of an increase in reporting of fundamentalist approaches to religion and of a religious dimension expressed in the political arena, previously unheard of in Australia except in past sectarian disputes.

135 See above, Chapter 1.3.

136 See below, Chapter 4.
As an educational institution established under the auspices of a particular religious denomination, the school is part of the broader ecclesial community. This status raises issues of expectations and support from both school and Church, and frequently an organisational link, through parish or school board and at diocesan level.

If the metapurpose of Christian religious education is “the Kingdom of God” (Groome, 1980, p. 49) or the “reign of God” (Groome, 1991, pp. 14-17; 2003, pp. 10-12), the purpose of religious education in a denominational school is three-fold (Groome, 2003, pp. 7-8): to provide information (knowledge and understanding) about the religious heritage of the religious community; to provide occasions for formation in that tradition; and to provide a milieu which supports on-going transformation compatible with the needs, aptitudes, dispositions and circumstances of students whose freedom to choose is respected. The ideal outcome, therefore, is identical with the goal of catechesis: clear knowledge and understanding of the beliefs of the Church and movement towards a personal, adult commitment in the Catholic Christian faith and Christian praxis. This involves the mind, the heart and the will. In the reality of the secondary school the more proximate goals include facilitating personal appropriation of faith, now or later, by establishing an atmosphere which is inviting and open, by respecting the freedom of the individual and by making allowance for a “fallow period”, leaving open the possibility of latent acceptance and a deferred decision.

The more specific pedagogical goals of the education programme can be stated as cognitive, affective and behavioural goals. Those listed below are not intended to be comprehensive, but directed to the cognitive domain and the teaching of scripture:

- **Cognitive goals**: knowledge and understanding of Catholic Christian teaching and beliefs; identifying and addressing students’ understanding and any misunderstandings, especially in the interpretation of scripture; encouraging the use of reason and developing students’ critical thinking capacities.
• **Affective goals:** encouraging an openness and positive attitude in students towards the spiritual and religious dimension of life and a willingness to explore the scriptures both critically and imaginatively.

• **Behavioural goals:** providing opportunities for putting beliefs and values into practice in a praxis which seeks to advance the Reign of God through working for justice.

The **content** of the religious education course would include the core Christian beliefs and values interpreted by the particular tradition, presented in accordance with the capacities of the students and their age. In addition, a sequential programme in understanding scripture is strongly advocated. At the upper levels, an introduction to the study of world religions is highly desirable: to increase understanding and tolerance in a multi-faith society, and as another way of exploring one’s own tradition (Lovat, 2001, p. 4). Special care needs to be taken in drawing up the curriculum at each level so that students do not have the feeling that the same material is being repeated each year: this involves careful selection of the topics to be studied and the way in which material is presented at the different year levels.

The **skills** required include the progressive development of the skills of critical thinking and those associated with deepening students’ understanding and interpretation of scripture. The way in which the foundational text of Christianity is understood and interpreted is fundamental to all areas of the teaching of religious education. Teachers need to be made aware of the relevance of an intellectually nuanced understanding of scripture, without which an individual’s understanding of Christian values and beliefs will be inadequate or misinformed. Furthermore, teachers need to be as critically competent in religious education as they are in other disciplines. The teaching of comparative religion needs to be informed by the enlightened stance to other Christian denominations and to non-Christian religions enunciated in the documents of Vatican II (e.g. *Nostra Aetate*, 1965) and in the Pontifical Biblical
Arguably, the most important component in the teaching of religious education in the secondary school is how it is conducted. The approach to education for faith will be considered under three headings. The first is the fundamental premise upon which religious education is based; the second and third involve the teacher, whose role is to engage, to explain, and to invite: the approach to religious belief, and the approach to teaching.

The fundamental premise: The starting point of the dialogue which is to characterise religious education is the individual, not the Church as an institution. That the Church, as custodian of the gospel, is for people, rather than people being for the Church, has sound scriptural credentials: for example, Jesus’ statement of his mission: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10b). The Church, and the Catholic school which for many young people is the Church, exists for the sake of bringing the gospel message to humankind in its existential situation: for the school that is adolescents and young people seeking their way in the post-modern secular world.

The approach to religious belief begins with acceptance of students at their present existential position, both in terms of their beliefs and questionings and their attitude towards religious belief. This involves:

- respect for students’ freedom, including their freedom of response to the Christian message
- respect for students’ right to privacy with regard to the expression of their personal beliefs
- recognition that students’ starting points will vary, and may encompass the full range from pre-evangelisation to a capacity for the faith enrichment characteristic of catechetics
- an appreciation of students’ “psychological readiness” (Rummery, 1975a, p. 79)
- recognition that some students, may be experiencing what has been called a “fallow period” following catechesis from infancy (Babin, 1968, p. 21; translated and cited by Rummery, 1975, p. 99)
- providing opportunities for silence and meditation in a supportive environment
- awareness that the negativity which some students may have, whether expressed or not, may be based on misunderstanding due to inappropriate teaching and childish perceptions not having been challenged
- encouragement for students to challenge their own thinking, especially their pre-conceived ideas
- encouragement for students to keep open the channels to religious belief and personal commitment, principally by the teacher’s respect for Christian beliefs and values, while being prepared to engage in the open discussion of what they mean and the challenges they present to the individual
- the portrayal of personal belief and commitment as an invitation to engage more deeply with the Christian message and developing a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

The approach to teaching is to focus on the learner’s active participation in acquiring knowledge and skills. This implies:
- openness to ideas and their expression in a dialogical setting
- respect for the Christian message
- respect for each person’s religious beliefs, suspension of belief or estrangement from a Christian view of life
- commitment to academic values, such as supporting one’s point with reasons
- commitment to learning and to extending knowledge and understanding
• the development of cognitive skills, especially those of critical thinking
• challenging one’s own understanding and that of others
• the development of metacognitive skills, especially those associated with questioning one’s own basic assumptions and those of others.137

The expression education for faith allows for a play on words linking the terms with the life of the human person. Education for faith is directed towards the flourishing of the human person. Young people are confronted with personal challenges as they move towards adulthood. The media features the challenges which confront humanity as a whole. To balance their awareness of these challenges, which are also addressed in the school curriculum, it is important to reinforce in youth a faith in life itself, in themselves and in the future. Religious education can contribute to an expansion of hope by opening up to students their religious heritage and what it offers humankind today: the hope contained in the gospel message, and the faith lived in the Christian community. Ideally, a religious education for faith would lead young people to an awareness of the transcendent and immanent One who is the source of all life.

The crucial difference between education in faith and education for faith is that the latter explicitly posits as the starting point a multiplicity of positions which young people hold in their perception of and commitment to the religious message. Beaudoin’s reference to the “generational incarnation of the gospel” and the importance of “finding language comprehensible to the generation in question” (Beaudoin, 2003, p. 65) is a succinct expression of this point.

137 For a full appreciation of the premises underpinning education for faith, pre-service education and professional development of teachers is of fundamental importance.
138 The ideas expressed in this section followed reflection after re-reading the chapters by Beaudoin (2003) and Horell (2003) in Horizons and Hopes, pp. 63-80 and pp. 81-107 respectively.
Summary

In this chapter, the debate over the nature and purpose of religious education has been considered by a detailed discussion of Groome’s *Shared Praxis* catechetical approach and Rossiter’s *education in religion*. Despite their different basic premises, it has been argued that there are considerable similarities between them.

Drawing on the arguments of Nebreda (1970a, 1970b) and on Mason’s (2007) experiences with young Australians, the concept of catechesis was broadened to include pre-catechesis and pre-evangelisation to account for the faith position of many students in the secondary school classroom. The outcome has been to propose *education for faith* as an appropriate theoretical framework for contemporary religious education in the secondary school. A series of fundamental principles were enunciated to underpin this approach. The framework draws heavily on Groome’s theory and takes seriously Rossiter’s knowledge of the Australian context and of the need for more prominence to be given to knowledge and understanding.

The phenomenological approach of Smart (1973a), and Moore and Habel’s (1982) typological approach were reviewed: they have influenced religious education curricula in Australia; and elements of these approaches are incorporated in *Teaching for Transformation* (Chapter 7).

*Education for faith* accepts that the school has a unique role in developing students’ religious knowledge and understanding. It acknowledges that the school also has a role in providing an environment which contributes to students’ growth in faith; however it recognises that faith is a life-long process which goes well beyond the purview of the school.
It is the argument of this thesis that to engage the minds and hearts of today’s youth it is essential that the gospel be made comprehensible and connected to their everyday lives. To do so includes making the scriptures credible. This requires a hermeneutic involving critical reflection which proceeds from an awareness of the range of genres in the scriptures and the richness of the language, replete with imagery and metaphor. To link this task to the cognitive competencies of students requires an appreciation of students’ cognitive development which is considered in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER 4 – EXPLORING THE ISSUE: A STRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

A key to addressing the need for students’ understanding of scripture to develop in the direction of a critical appreciation of the biblical text is to take into account the cognitive capacities of young people as they grow from childhood to adolescence and towards adulthood. The educative goal is to facilitate an appreciation of the text which recognises its nature, especially the different genres in the Bible, the use of imagery and symbolism and the language of metaphor. The pastoral goal is to open up the depth of religious meaning and spiritual nourishment which can be found in the pages of the foundational text of Christianity. The focus, therefore, is on the learner as thinker and the dialectical between the individual and the text, that is, the inter-relationship between the cognitive, affective and conative domains in thinking about the scriptures.

Cognitive development theory provides the theoretical framework within which to consider students’ growth in understanding and also provides insights which are suggestive for addressing the transformation in thinking which the transition from a literalist understanding of the biblical text entails. Section 1 provides an outline of Piaget’s theory, which is followed in Section 2 by the research of Perry and of Belenky and associates who extended Piaget’s model beyond adolescence and the stage of formal operational thought.

The Reflective Judgment Model of Kitchener and King, and Kuhn’s steps towards epistemological understanding are extensions of the Piagetian paradigm in a direction which considers the developmental stages in epistemological understanding.

139 What Christians refer to as the Old Testament, or the Hebrew Scriptures, is, of course, the foundational text of Judaism.
These are considered in Section 3. In Section 4 Mezirow’s approach to transformative learning provides a link between the several levels of post-formal thought and the influence of the philosophical foundations of critical thinking. Basseches links the dialectical to the epistemological in exploring cognitive development, thinking and epistemology. Together these researchers provide insights into the process of transformation.

An alternative to the structuralist perspective is provided in Section 5 by Erikson’s research into identity from the psychosocial perspective. Kegan’s research into ego development and meaning-making links the cognitive domain to the interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions of the human person. Newman and Newman develop Erikson’s writing further in relation to the social dimension of adolescent development. The chapter concludes in Section 6 with those aspects of Fowler’s faith development research integral to the thesis.

4.1 Cognitive Development: Jean Piaget

Jean Piaget’s contribution to cognitive development theory has been of fundamental importance. Key concepts include: organization; adaptation, comprising assimilation and accommodation; equilibrium and equilibration; operations and structures. For Piaget, cognitive development is ontogenetic: the child passes through a series of sequential and hierarchical stages from birth to adolescence. Although the sequence, according to Piaget, is fixed, there are differences in the rate at which individuals progress through these stages. Following his experimental work with Genevan children, Piaget suggested the following approximate age ranges for the four stages: Sensorimotor, 0—2 years; Pre-operational, 2—7 years; Concrete operational, 7—11 years; and Formal operational, 11+ years.
For Piaget, the “development of knowledge is a spontaneous process” (Piaget, 1964, p. 176). His emphasis is on the “dynamic aspect” of thought “which deals with transformations” (Piaget, 1961, p. 275). The central idea is that of an “operation”, “interiorized action” (Piaget, 1964, pp. 176, 177). Operations are linked to form a total structure (p. 177). Cognitive structures (or schemata) are theoretical constructs inferred from the behaviour which Piaget observed, including the spontaneous behaviour of babies and the problem-solving behaviour of older children in a clinical interview in which they could manipulate physical materials.

Structures are formed and change through a process of adaptation, which is a result of internal and external factors: maturation, physical experience and social interaction. Equilibration (Piaget, 1961, p. 279) mediates the process of assimilation of new stimuli from the environment and their accommodation to the existing internal structure. Motivation is intrinsic and is explained in terms of disequilibrium, an imbalance between assimilation and accommodation, which provides the motivation for the development of new schemata as the organism seeks equilibrium (p. 281).

Each stage is characterised by its own particular structures (schemata), and represents a progressive reorganisation and transformation of the previous stage. Together the stages form a structured whole—a structure d’ensemble. The individual does not make an abrupt transition from one stage to a capacity to operate fully at the next stage and across all domains. Each stage has “an initial preparation period and a final period of achievement” (Flavell, 1963, p. 21). The term “horizontal décalage” is used to describe this phenomenon.

Given the age-stage relationship suggested by Piaget, most students entering the secondary school would be approaching the transition from concrete to formal operations. This description of stages, therefore, will be restricted to these two stages. At the concrete level the child can think logically and can solve concrete problems. The
concrete operational child can conserve and can solve problems involving transformations. The logical operations of seriation and classification develop. Other concepts to develop during concrete operations are causality, time, and speed. However, the concrete operational child operates “on objects, and not yet on verbally expressed hypotheses” (Piaget, 1964, p. 177).

By contrast, the formal thinker is no longer context bound. The adolescent’s thinking is hypothetico-deductive in nature, propositional, and combinatorial; he or she can set up hypotheses, follow the form of an argument independent of its concrete content and test hypotheses by systematically isolating variables: the adolescent begins to reason in a scientific way. Furthermore, the formal operational thinker can solve verbal problems and can think beyond the present and so commit to possibilities. At this stage one can also engage in second-order thinking and so can deal critically with one’s own thinking. The adolescent can think in the abstract, and the extension of the time perspective, especially of future orientation, allows the individual to consider long-term effects in problem-solving. Having reached the stage of formal thought, the realm of the possible is opened up.

The literature generated by Piaget’s theory has been enormous, and can be divided into two broad categories: empirical studies, which have sought, *inter alia*, to test the age at which children and adolescents achieve a particular stage; and critiques, in which researchers question the theoretical aspects of Piaget’s theory of cognitive development. Empirical studies range from replication studies which quite closely followed Piaget’s clinical approach (e.g. Lovell, 1961), through studies for which researchers devised group tests to measure stage of development (e.g. Shayer, Küchemann & Wylam, 1976), to studies which have explored the application of Piaget’s theory to verbal material (e.g. Peel, 1959, 1960, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967a, 1967b, 1968, 1971, 1975a, 1975b; Hallam, 1967, 1969a, 1969b, 1971, 1972, in England; Jurd, 1970, 1973, 1978a, 1978b, in Australia).
A repeated finding of these empirical studies which is of particular relevance in applying Piaget’s theory to an educational setting, has been that a majority even at 15 years have not reached the stage of formal operational thinking. Furthermore, it was found that when verbal material is used, the stage of formal operations is not attained until later than in other areas such as the natural sciences (e.g. Peel, 1966, p. 85; Peel, 1968; Jurd, 1973), as Goldman found in religious thinking. In contrast, other studies indicate that Piaget underestimated the cognitive capacities of young children (e.g. Cohen, 1983, Ch. 6).

In the light of the empirical evidence, Piaget (1972) revised this theory, introducing two qualifications: (i) the “diversification of aptitudes with age” (p. 9), and (ii) an extension of the age at which “all normal subjects attain the stage of formal operations or structuring”: “if not between 11-12 to 14-15 years” then “between 15 and 20 years” (pp. 9-10). These older subjects would attain this stage in an area in which they show particular aptitude. Arguably, this is compatible with the concept of horizontal décalage.

Piaget’s theory has generated criticism from a variety of sources (e.g. Bruner, 1959; Siegel & Brainerd, 1978; Brown & Desforges, 1979; Keating, 1980; Kuhn, 1983). Vygotsky (1986 [1934]) acknowledges a debt to Piaget but criticised his approach to socialisation (p. 47) and the acquisition of language (pp. 12-57). One of the most frequent criticisms has been in regard to the concept of developmental stage and the extent to which the sequential and hierarchical nature of Piaget’s discrete stages has been substantiated (e.g. Cohen, 1983, p. 122). Cross-cultural studies have revealed a Western bias in the tests used to determine stage of cognitive functioning in a theory purported to be universal (e.g. Ashton, 1975; Cohen, 1983, Ch. 8; Newman, Riel & Martin, 1983, p. 135). Piaget’s theory has been seen as relevant to education (e.g.
Flavell, 1963, pp. 265-369), and attempts have been made to apply its insights to the school situation (e.g. Wadsworth, 1978).

The research which Piaget’s theory has generated encompasses research into religious thinking (Goldman, 1964) and faith development (Fowler, 1981; Slee, 2004) which are of particular relevance to this thesis. The research of Perry (1970) was perhaps the first to use the Piagetian model to study the thinking of adults; Belenky and associates (1986) extended the findings of Perry to the specific characteristics of women’s ways of thinking.

4.2 Cognitive Development: Post-formal Operations—Perry and Belenky

In Piaget’s theory of cognitive development, the final stage was formal operational thought, purportedly achieved in adolescence. Piaget did not make fine distinctions within this stage nor explore adult thinking. The research of William Perry (1970) involved male college students, while that of Mary Belenky and associates (1986) extended Perry’s research to explore women’s “ways of knowing”.

The research of Perry: the thinking of young adults

The research of Perry (1970) on how students in the college years think and interpret experience produced “a scheme” comprising nine “positions” which demonstrate interaction between the intellectual and existential domains of these young adults. What Perry called “meta-reason” and “meta-thinking” (p. 34) are inextricably interwoven with the issue of “responsibility” and its correlate, “personal commitment,
in a relative world” (p. 34). The key features of the sequence of Positions in Perry’s Scheme are presented in Table 4.1.

In this Scheme, Position 5 is the turning point at which the individual’s epistemological understanding undergoes significant structural change in that knowledge and values are perceived as “relative, contingent and contextual” (Perry, 1970, p. 57). The individual’s previous Dualistic schema has become just one of a number of possibilities within a broader frame of reference which accommodates a multiplicity of points of view, explanations or interpretations. Unless the individual rejects growth by opting for one of the alternatives—Temporizing, Retreat, or Escape (pp. 177-200)—the perception of all knowledge and values as relative persists and becomes the normal or unconscious epistemological structure within which he or she interprets knowledge and interacts with the world.

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140 This outline draws extensively on the outline of the scheme on pp. 9-10 (Perry, 1970), the detailed description and analysis of each Position in Chapter 5, and the Glossary and fold-out Chart of Development at the end of the book. Capital letters used for “Authority” and “Absolute” represent their use by Perry. Quotation marks are only used to identify expressions of particular significance in the Scheme.

141 In the research of Perry, and in other studies on cognitive development which follow, the term “relativism” occurs frequently. In this present chapter “relativism” is restricted in meaning to a particular way of perceiving “knowledge”.
### Table 4.1: Outline of Positions in Perry’s Scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Understanding of knowledge / Epistemology</th>
<th>World view Perception of Authority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Basic Duality</td>
<td>right / wrong right answers known to Authority Truth Absolute</td>
<td>Dualistic Simple Dualism right vs. wrong we vs. others Authority Absolute—source of truth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Multiplicity Pre-legitimate</td>
<td>Diversity of opinion perceived, but seen as “alien” or “unreal”; as “unwarranted confusion”. Truth Absolute.</td>
<td>Dualistic Complex Dualism Authority Absolute, but seen (i) as incompetent, or (ii) wanting students to find the answer themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Multiplicity Subordinate</td>
<td>Diversity of opinion and uncertainty are accepted as legitimate, but seen as a temporary state. Truth still Absolute.</td>
<td>Dualistic Complex Dualism—Beginnings of Relativism In some areas Authority “hasn’t found the answer yet”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Multiplicity Correlate or Relativism Subordinate</td>
<td>Diversity of opinion and uncertainty are accepted as legitimate and extensive. “Unstructured epistemological realm”</td>
<td>Dualistic Transition to Relativism (i) Authority’s right / wrong doubted or inaccessible, therefore “anyone has a right to own opinion.” (ii) Relativistic reasoning seen as what Authority wants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Relativism Correlate, Competing, or Diffuse</td>
<td>All knowledge and values perceived as contextual and relativistic.</td>
<td>Relativism (i) Some areas in which Authority has the answers, e.g. Physics. (ii) Relativism applied to whole world. Some alternation with (i). “Authority” perceived as “authority”, i.e. has expertise, but like “all of us” does not have Absolute answers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Commitment Foreseen</td>
<td>All knowledge and values relative.</td>
<td>Relativism “authority”—within Relativistic world. Need to orient oneself in a relativistic world through some form of personal commitment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Initial Commitment</td>
<td>Commitment made and responsibility accepted.</td>
<td>Relativism “authority”—within Relativistic world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Orientation in Implications of Commitment</td>
<td>Commitment made and responsibility accepted.</td>
<td>Relativism “authority”—within Relativistic world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Developing Commitment(s)</td>
<td>Commitment made and responsibility accepted.</td>
<td>Relativism “authority”—within Relativistic world</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A simplified version of the Scheme, focusing on the key transitions in understanding, is presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Simplified version of Perry’s Scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Transition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1, 2, 3</td>
<td>Absolutist right-wrong outlook is gradually modified to accommodate, in some minimal way, simple pluralism.</td>
<td>Dualism to Multiplicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4, 5, 6</td>
<td>Acceptance of the diversity of human outlook and problematic nature of all knowledge and values which are seen as relative.</td>
<td>Pluralism of Multiplicity to Contextual Relativism Foresees the necessity of personal commitment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7, 8, 9</td>
<td>Trace the development of commitments in the person’s actual experience.</td>
<td>Relativistic world Personal commitment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perry parts company with Piaget in his extension into the adult years and his extrapolation from cognition—how one thinks—to commitment, seen as a necessary consequence of how one has come to think, of perceiving oneself in a relativistic world.

The aspects of Perry’s Scheme which are of particular relevance to religious education in the secondary school are (i) the characteristics of Position 5, relativism, and the consequences for religious thinking generally and how that relates to the study of scripture; and (ii) the role and perception of Authority in the individual’s progress through the several transitions and stages, especially in relation to the status accorded the biblical text and its authoritative interpretation in the Church. In the context of this thesis a major contribution of Perry’s research was his linking of the concept of cognitive development to epistemology, a research direction developed by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986).

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142 This table is derived from the summary on page 57 (Perry, 1970).
The research of Belenky and associates: women’s thinking

Belenky et al. (1986) questioned Perry’s study of privileged young men being taken as normative. Like Perry, the issues which were addressed included “truth”, “authority”, “evidence”, and the basic assumptions upon which such concepts rest. The statements of 135 women were considered, both “as exemplars of a particular epistemological position”, but also “in the context of the woman’s whole story (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986, p. 17). It is the former, the epistemological, which will be the principal focus of this review, as a balance to the scheme provided by Perry, and to provide insights into the thinking of women, or their “voice”.

Five “epistemological categories” were identified (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 15). Table 4.3 describes each of these categories briefly, draws parallels with the Positions in Perry’s scheme, and identifies certain key differences between the two models.

Gender differences were identified when compared with Perry’s research. For example, while the women termed “hidden multiplists” (pp. 64-68) were from similar backgrounds to the men in Perry’s study and moved to “subjectivist in the same way as Perry’s young men” (p. 65), there were differences in their approach to Multiplicity (p. 65), as indicated in Table 4.3.

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143 Belenky’s research on women’s “ways of knowing” has been significant as has the critical research of Carol Gilligan in the area of moral reasoning. Gilligan’s *In a Different Voice* pointed out the limitations of Kohlberg’s stages of moral reasoning when applied to women. It is not possible to develop Gilligan’s research in this thesis.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Perry’s “Position”</th>
<th>Differences from Perry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Silence</td>
<td>women experience themselves as mindless and voiceless and subject to the whims of external authority; representational thought is not cultivated; truth and authority external</td>
<td>No equivalent position</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received knowledge</td>
<td>knowledge comes from others; ideas are concrete and dualistic; there is intolerance of ambiguity; literal; truth comes from higher authorities, i.e., outside the individual; focus on listening</td>
<td>1: Basic Duality did not align themselves with authorities as did male subjects; focus in male study on “lecturing”, not listening</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective knowledge</td>
<td>truth and knowledge are conceived of as personal, private, and subjectively known or intuited; still convinced of “right answers”; truth based on personal, not academic experience; authority located within the person; transition related to personal experience; “Hidden multiplists” are cautious: “It’s just my opinion.”</td>
<td>2-4: Multiplicity men’s transition related to academic experience, diversity of opinion; women’s related to personal experience</td>
<td>Men: “I have a right to my opinion.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedural knowledge</td>
<td>learning and applying objective procedures for obtaining and communicating knowledge; emphasis on procedures, skills, techniques; transition—old ways challenged; enough trust in authority to learn new skills and insights; truth external. Contrast made between separate and connected knowing.</td>
<td>5-6: Relativism development linked to discovery of critical reasoning: how They want us to think.</td>
<td>Separate knowing only.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructed knowledge</td>
<td>all knowledge viewed as contextual; women experience themselves as creators of knowledge, and value both subjective and objective strategies for knowing; the self involved in knowledge; truth—a process of construction, a matter of context; commitments also involve relationships</td>
<td>Commitment Commitment more in terms of a career and oriented more towards a commitment to action</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

144 This outline draws extensively on the outline of the five “epistemological categories” on page 15, and on the more detailed descriptions throughout the book. The comparisons with Perry’s Positions are principally as stated by Belenky et al. However, the numbers which are deemed to correspond to each Position have been added.
Belenky et al. (1986) contrast “two distinctive forms of procedural knowledge”, “separate knowing” and “connected knowing”, which they label “knowledge” and “understanding” respectively. This distinction is in terms of “epistemological orientation” (p. 101), focusing on “relationship” as the point of differentiation.\textsuperscript{145} The points of distinction between these two forms of knowing are summarized in Table 4.4.\textsuperscript{146}

**Table 4.4: Two forms of procedural knowledge\textsuperscript{147}**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Separate knowing</th>
<th>Connected knowing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong></td>
<td><strong>Understanding</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“implies separation from the object and mastery over it.” (p. 101)</td>
<td>implies personal acquaintance with an object (usually but not always a person). (p. 101)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>critical thinking</td>
<td>acceptance and empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>involves evaluation and justification</td>
<td>precludes evaluation; involves connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>focus on impersonal reason</td>
<td>focus on personal experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doubt: “the doubting game”</td>
<td>belief: “the believing game”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>essentially adversarial</td>
<td>conversational; collaborative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reasons related to propositional logic</td>
<td>reasons related to experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dispassionate— all feelings excluded</td>
<td>involves feeling, but also thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>truth established through impersonal procedures</td>
<td>truth emerges through care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>morality based on impersonal procedures for establishing justice</td>
<td>morality based on care</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The transition beyond procedural knowledge is described as “searching for a single voice” (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 124). When this transition is successful it culminates in Constructed Knowledge, an integration of the objective and the

\textsuperscript{145} This distinction is one of the “ways of knowing” considered further in Chapter 7.

\textsuperscript{146} The distinction between “separate” and “connected” knowing has similarities to the distinction which Mezirow (1990a) makes between “communicative learning” and “instrumental learning” (Chapter 4.4).

\textsuperscript{147} The data presented in Table 4 is derived from Belenky et al., 1986, Ch. 6, pp. 100ff.
subjective resulting from “weaving together the strands of rational and emotive thought and of integrating objective and subjective knowing” (p. 134).

Constructed Knowledge is characterized by an awareness that while “reason is necessary ... it is insufficient” (Belenky, et al., 1986, p. 129). At this level, one is aware that “all knowledge is constructed, and the knower is an intimate part of the known.” (p. 137). Belenky et al. (1986) implicitly equate formal-operational thought with logical thought, and in stating that “women tend not to rely as readily or as exclusively on hypothetico-deductive inquiry” claim that they question the “basic assumptions” of problems addressed in the process of inquiry. The questioning of basic assumptions links this study quite clearly (and via an explicit reference) to the research of Kitchener and her third level of cognitive processing, epistemic cognition, and Kuhn’s stages toward mature epistemological understanding.

4.3 Cognitive Development: Beyond Piaget—Kitchener and Kuhn

Two areas of research which have their roots in Piaget’s theory of cognitive development and which also draw on the research of Perry (1970) are (i) the exploration of the concept of knowledge, styles of cognition and epistemological approaches to knowledge, and (ii) the extensive research on metacognition and on “thinking skills”. The research of Karen Kitchener and associates has led to an exploration of the epistemological assumptions underpinning thinking and understanding; Deanna Kuhn’s research into epistemology and thinking skills has applied the findings to education.

Both Kitchener and Kuhn regard the hypothetico-deductive thinking which characterises Piaget’s formal operations as an inadequate epistemological model for solving the complex types of problems faced by adults in everyday life. Their studies
directly address the distinction between two types of problems, “well-structured” and “ill-structured” problems\(^\text{148}\) (e.g. Kitchener, 1983, p. 224; Kuhn, 1991, p. 7). Well-structured problems “have a single solution” (Kitchener, 1983, p. 224), whereas for ill-structured problems “there is not a single, unequivocal solution” (p. 224). The models developed by Kitchener and associates and by Kuhn to address this type of thinking incorporate the concept of metacognition and the development of epistemological understanding. One of the key tasks in facilitating the transition to a non-literalist interpretation of scripture is opening up the texts to multiple readings.

**The Reflective Judgment Model**

In arguing the inadequacy of Piaget’s final stage of cognitive development, formal operations, Kitchener and Kitchener (1981) included the need to consider “an individual’s epistemological assumptions about the nature of evidence, knowledge, and justification [which] play a critical role in reasoning” (p. 161). They argue that “even in scientific reasoning” the assumptions which one brings to problem-solving influence one’s “perceptions of the problem … evaluation of the evidence” and the “criteria for evaluating” theories (p. 173). The example cited is the debate over the Ptolemaic and Copernican systems (pp. 170-171).

Formal thought and formal operations, therefore, are deemed inadequate “in reasoning about … complex issues” (Kitchener & Kitchener, 1981, p. 170), among which they include, in parentheses, “philosophical, religious, [and] ideological” issues (p. 170). An alternative model was suggested, which, it was claimed, provided “evidence for an age-related sequence of epistemological and metaphysical assumptions which have corresponding principles of evaluation and justification” (p. 174).

\(^{148}\) Kitchener (1986, p. 76) attributes this distinction to Churchman (1971).
The Reflective Judgment Model considers (i) the importance of accounting for the assumptions underlying an individual’s thought, and (ii) the concept of metacognition. This model provides insights relevant to understanding the thinking processes of secondary school students. It distinguishes between a series of increasingly more complex levels, or stages, in the “individual’s assumptions about what can be known and what cannot … how we can know … and how certain we can be in knowing …” (Kitchener, 1986, p. 76).

To identify the stage at which an individual was operating (e.g. Kitchener, 1986, pp. 80-82) “four ill-structured problems, called dilemmas” (p. 80) were used, one of which was “the creation of the human race” (Kitchener & Kitchener, 1981, p. 174). Participants were asked “to explain and defend their judgment about the issue and in what way they know their belief to be true” (p. 80). Further questions could be used to probe where answers were not forthcoming or for elaboration (p. 80). The procedure described by the researchers for rating and assessing responses was rigorous (Kitchener, 1986, pp. 80-82).

In Piagetian terms, Stages 1-3 coincide with pre-operational thinking and the concrete thinking of childhood; Stages 4-7, with the abstract thinking of adolescents at the formal operational stage and the post-formal thinking of adults. The insights provided by this model relate to the nature of the assumptions about reality and the role of authority in acquiring knowledge. As with the Positions of Perry and the Perspectives of Belenky et al., the individual, theoretically, if not in practice, moves from the dogmatism of absolute certainty and total faith in Authority, through a stage of subjectivism, with its tenacious claim to the authority of one’s own opinions when faced with uncertainty, through a relativism which is open to a wide range of differing beliefs, to the rationalism which is the goal of Western academic learning and post-Enlightenment culture.
It is not suggested that all adults, let alone all adolescents, reach the Reflective Judgment Model’s final stage in intellectual development, in fact, the studies reviewed clearly indicate otherwise. However, much of the teaching and learning in the secondary school, including religious education, takes place in a context which incorporates the implicit values of these models. While the values of scepticism and relativism are challenging for the religious educator, they can be utilised in assisting students to make the transition from a literalist to a more academically sound interpretation of scripture.

The stages in the Reflective Judgment Model are presented in Table 4.5.\footnote{The principal sources are the tables in Kitchener, 1986 (Table 5.1, pp. 78-79), and Kitchener and Fischer, 1990 (Table 1, pp. 50-51); also Kitchener and Kitchener, 1981, and Kitchener and King, 1990a, from which selected material has been taken.}
Table 4.5: Stages in the Reflective Judgment Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Nature of knowledge</th>
<th>Certainty of knowledge</th>
<th>How knowledge is gained</th>
<th>How beliefs are justified: evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Concrete reality. What a person believes to be true is true.</td>
<td>Absolutely certain</td>
<td>By direct observation.</td>
<td>No justification needed. Beliefs and reality are equated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>There is an objective reality and it can be known. <em>Dogmatism</em></td>
<td>Absolutely certain</td>
<td>By direct observation and via authorities.</td>
<td>By direct observation or via authorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>In some areas knowledge is temporarily uncertain; in other areas knowledge is certain.</td>
<td>Absolutely certain about some things; temporarily uncertain about others.</td>
<td>Via authorities in some areas; through our own biases when knowledge is uncertain.</td>
<td>Via authorities in some areas; via what feels right at the moment where knowledge is uncertain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>While there is reality, it can never be known. Knowledge is individually idiosyncratic. <em>Scepticism</em></td>
<td>No certainty because of situational variables.</td>
<td>Via our own and others’ biases, data, and logic.</td>
<td>Via idiosyncratic evaluation of evidence and unevaluated beliefs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Knowledge must be understood within a context. Personal interpretation of individual realities. <em>Relativism</em></td>
<td>No certainty except via personal perspectives within a specific context.</td>
<td>Via evidence and rules of inquiry appropriate for the context.</td>
<td>By rules of inquiry for a particular context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Reality is assumed. Evaluated personal interpretations.</td>
<td>Some personal certainty about beliefs based on evaluations of evidence on different sides of the question.</td>
<td>Knowledge is constructed by comparing evidence and opinion on different sides of an issue or across contexts.</td>
<td>Explanation of the comparison of data, arguments, and evaluated opinions of experts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Reality is never a “given”. Facts and assumptions may be constructed into evaluated knowledge claims about reality. <em>Rationalism</em></td>
<td>Certainty that some knowledge claims are better or more complete than others although they are open to evaluation.</td>
<td>Via a process of critical inquiry or synthesis.</td>
<td>Probabilistic, involving the use of evidence and argument to present the most complete or compelling understanding of an issue.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{150}\) Nature of knowledge and Certainty of knowledge together are comparable with Perry’s (1970), Understanding of knowledge / Epistemology.

\(^{151}\) How beliefs are justified: evidence, corresponds to Perry’s (1970) Perception of Authority.
The mean score across the four dilemmas used as test materials is stated “to represent the best general indicator of how that individual will reason in similar contexts (Kitchener, 1986, p. 81). Figures quoted in the Reflective Judgment literature (e.g. Kitchener, 1986, pp. 85-86) indicate that high school students tend to function in the Stage 2 to Stage 3.5 range.

The Three-Level Model of Cognitive Processing

Adaptations of the Reflective Judgment Model include Kitchener’s (1983) variation, the Three-Level Model of Cognitive Processing, formed by collapsing the seven stages into three broad categories:

(i) Cognition
(ii) Metacognition
(iii) Epistemic cognition

This model combines a simplified version of the original with finer distinctions within the level of post-formal thought. The first level, cognition, refers to the wide range of cognitive processes used consistently from one’s earliest years and upon which “knowledge of the world is built” (Kitchener, 1983, p. 225); for example, “computing, memorizing, reading, perceiving, acquiring language” (p. 225). Metacognition is split into two distinct levels: metacognition, which is involved in monitoring one’s “cognitive processes” (p. 225); and epistemic cognition, which “includes the individual’s knowledge about the limits of knowing ... the certainty of knowing ... and the criteria for knowing” (pp. 225-226). Metacognitive and epistemic cognitive processes, used together, are deemed necessary to solve ill-structured problems.

Kitchener (1983) argues “that cognitive and metacognitive processes develop in young children and are common by early adolescence” (p. 228) and that the processes
associated with “epistemic cognition” “play a critical role in the reasoning of older adolescents and adults” (p. 228). Two significant developmental shifts are identified: (i) in late adolescence when the individual’s “epistemic framework” (p. 229) shifts from the certainty about knowledge and truth of the early adolescent to the “contextual relativism” identified by Perry (1970); and (ii) “when adults begin to understand knowledge as encompassing antithetical perspectives while allowing for the progress of knowledge via integration and synthesis” (Kitchener, 1983, p. 229). Therefore, while the evidence suggests that “epistemic cognition emerges in late adolescence”, the form which it takes “may change in the adult years” (p. 230). Kitchener sees her model, especially the third level, “epistemic cognition” (p. 230), as providing a means of more precisely discriminating between the underlying assumptions of thought previously referred to as metacognition.

Kitchener (1983) refers briefly to the educational implications of understanding the differences in the way individuals understand and address ill-structured problems (p. 230), citing several discipline areas, including “philosophy, and interpretation in the arts” (p. 231), to which one may add, interpretation of the biblical text.

Kuhn: Thinking Skills

Kuhn (1990) seeks to bridge the gap between the findings of psychological research and its educational application. Her research into “thinking skills” includes an analysis of the complementary “skills of argument” (1991, 2005) and “skills of inquiry” (Kuhn, 2005) which are deemed essential if one is to be an “independent learner and thinker” (2005, p. 4). For Kuhn, “thinking well”, which involves the “ability to consider alternatives and weigh evidence” and to reach “independent judgments and … justify [them] in a reasoned way” (1990, p. 1), is an essential educational goal.
The following interrelated issues are considered in this discussion: “the nature of thinking and knowledge” (1990, p. 4), that is, the characteristics of “thinking well”; levels of thinking, explored in terms of the role of metacognition and the related epistemological underpinnings; the impact of evidence which is discrepant in relation to the individual’s existing “theory”; and the educational implications of the research.

Kuhn (1991) extends the scope of thinking beyond problem-solving (p. 2), even “ill-structured” problems, to consider in depth the processes by which knowledge is produced (p. 202) and truth is pursued. The vehicle she uses is what she calls “rhetorical argument” (p. 12), defined as “a course of reasoning aimed at demonstrating the truth or falsehood of something” (p. 12). A key skill involved in such reasoning is “second-order, reflective thinking”, or metacognition, which is one of the characteristics of Piaget’s stage of formal operations.

**Capacity for metacognition.**

The purpose of the 1991 study was to explore “the implications of people’s capacity, or incapacity, to think about their own thought” (Kuhn, 1991, p. 14). A total of 160 persons—four age groups, each of twenty and each equally divided by gender, and ranging in age from 14-15 years to the 60s—formed the principal cohort. In addition there was a small group of “experts”, comprising parole officers, teachers, and PhD philosophy candidates (pp. 18-20). Responses were sought to the following three statements: *What causes prisoners to return to crime after they’re released? What causes children to fail school? What causes unemployment?* (p. 14).

The responses were analysed in terms of increasingly more sophisticated skills of argument: causal theories; the citing of evidence to support one’s theory or explanation, and the quality of the evidence; the ability to suggest an alternative explanation; the ability to provide counterarguments; and rebuttal, a complex skill,
requiring subjects to “integrate previous lines of argument” (Kuhn, 1991, p. 145). Her findings indicate the association of education, particularly higher-level education, with the skills of argument, including “the ability to contemplate whether what one believes is true, in contrast simply to knowing that it is true” (p. 264). This has the further consequence that when one is presented with new information, which would indicate that a modification of one’s account of events, or one’s “theory”, is warranted, the tendency is to ignore or distort the new data (pp. 238-239), which is a hurdle to be overcome in introducing new approaches to understanding the biblical text.

Knowledge acquisition.

The co-ordinating of existing theories with new evidence was the focus of a study by Kuhn and associates (Kuhn et al., 1995) in which they investigated knowledge acquisition, defined as the process of theory formation and revision (p. 1), involving “metacognitive knowledge”—awareness of and reflection on the content of one’s thought—and “metastrategic knowledge”, awareness and management of the strategies applied in thinking and problem-solving (p. 12). They also considered whether cognitive skills were transferable to new domains (p. 9). The study included adults and children (fourth graders), fifteen of each group, who were tested twice, with a gap of five weeks between testing, in an interview format, on two problems in the physical domain and two in the social domain. There was the possibility to manipulate the materials in the physical problems, while the use of cards provided some opportunity for manipulation in solving the social problems.

The specific area of interest was whether participants could reflect on their “theories”, that is, how they had organized their knowledge. The findings indicated that while both groups made gains in knowledge, the children in particular found it difficult “to recognize theory-discrepant evidence” (Kuhn et al., 1995, p. 49). Children’s strategies enabled them to examine evidence; however, they “justified their
conclusions on the basis of their theories, especially in the social domain” (p. 73). Both age groups performed at a lower level on the social problems than on the physical problems. The findings also indicated “intraindividual variability in strategy usage” (p. 98). The interesting point in this regard is that the variability was not necessarily attributable to “content variability”, that is, décalage in performance across subject domains, in the Piagetian sense, was not the issue (p. 100).

**Epistemological understanding.**

According to Kuhn (2005), to be an “independent learner and thinker” (p. 4) students need to be engaged in their learning activities and to see them as worthwhile; however, adolescents especially have difficulty seeing “the intrinsic value of intellectual engagement” (p. 30). To be motivated to engage intellectually students need to regard learning—defined as “change in understanding” (p. 60)—as worthwhile and rewarding. These values, in turn, depend upon a hierarchical series of epistemological competencies, which influence the way one sees knowledge and recognises, virtually implicitly, the need to critically examine issues and explore possibilities. Table 4.6 provides an outline of the characteristics and distinctions between four levels identified in the development of epistemological understanding.
Table 4.6: Kuhn’s steps toward mature epistemological understanding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Assertions are ...</th>
<th>Knowledge is ...</th>
<th>Critical thinking is ...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Realist</td>
<td>Copies of an external reality</td>
<td>From an external source; certain</td>
<td>Unnecessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Objective dominant</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolutist</td>
<td>Facts that are correct or incorrect in their representation of reality</td>
<td>From an external source; certain but not directly accessible, producing false beliefs</td>
<td>A vehicle for comparing assertions to reality and determining their truth or falsehood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Objective dominant</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiplist or Relativist</td>
<td>Opinions freely chosen by and accountable only to their owners and not open to challenge.</td>
<td>Generated by human minds; uncertain</td>
<td>Irrelevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Subjective dominant</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluativist</td>
<td>Judgments that can be evaluated and compared according to criteria of argument and evidence</td>
<td>Generated by human minds; uncertain but susceptible to evaluation</td>
<td>Valued as a vehicle that promotes sound assertions and enhances understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Subjective and objective co-ordinated.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The transition from the relativist level is regarded as “critical to the development of intellectual values” (Kuhn, 2005, p. 35). However, this transition is difficult. Not everyone moves to the evaluativist level by adulthood where “justification for a belief becomes more than personal preference” (p. 32), and “knowledge ... consists of judgments, which require support in a framework of alternatives, evidence, and argument” (p. 32). “Adolescents who never progress beyond the absolutist belief in certain knowledge, or the multiplist’s equation of knowledge with personal preference, lack a reason to engage in sustained intellectual inquiry” (p. 32).

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152 The source of this Table is Table 2.1, p. 31 (Kuhn, 2005), together with points made on pages 32-33 which are added to the table and shown in italics.
Education is seen to be an important factor in encouraging the development of thinking skills. Kuhn (1991) states that students need to be engaged in “open debate of complex questions for which answers are not known” (p. 295) in order to practise these skills; however, the study did not indicate whether practice would be sufficient to promote metacognitive skills. The influence of emotion, or “affect”, and its ability to “energize, but also compromise, reason” (p. 297), may be of particular significance in the teaching of scripture.

Kuhn (2005) suggests that inquiry be directed by “thesis/evidence” (p. 57) and sees “cause and effect” as “the most promising framework for middle-school students’ inquiry activity” (p. 58). Errors in thinking include focusing on a single factor (pp. 61ff), “faulty inference rules” (p. 75), and the difficulties regarding the integration of new evidence (pp. 69-77) discussed above (Kuhn et al., 1995). That students need support in developing inquiry skills is noted, with “scaffolding” being seen as one strategy (Kuhn, 2005, pp. 99-106).

The skills of argument are considered in the 2005 study with particular reference to their educational context. Kuhn identifies two forms of argument, internal (individual) (Kuhn, 2005, p. 113) and dialogic (social) (p. 171). The former, which is necessary in “formulating a line of reasoning to support” one’s argument (p. 113), can be promoted by dialogue, “based on everyday conversation” (pp. 125, 149), and featuring “a topic, a purpose, a direction, and a goal (p. 125). These skills include the need to co-ordinate “three perspectives”: the perspective of the other, external information, and the self’s perspective (pp. 153-154). Scaffolding and practice are recommended.

Kuhn’s detailed exploration of the numerous processes involved in both achieving and using the skills of inquiry and of argument, implies that steps can be
taken by educators to promote the development of metacognitive and metastrategic skills.

In the focus on intellectual values (2005), Kuhn seems to link the affective and cognitive. Development would seem to be the driving force, at least up to the Multiplist or Relativist level characteristic of adolescence. However, even from infancy, as Piaget has clearly demonstrated, development is not merely a matter of maturation but is dependent upon interaction with the environment, including the educational environment.

The findings of developmental psychology provide valuable insights into the phenomenon of cognitive competence and suggestions for its enhancement. The development of thinking at all levels, but especially that of adolescents in the secondary school, requires providing an environment in which the processes of assimilation and accommodation—to use Piagetian concepts—are used reflectively to advance the quality of thinking of all students. That not all will achieve the highest levels of cognitive functioning is no reason to underestimate the value of striving to ensure that each student is progressively being impelled towards reaching his or her optimal level at this stage in life and enhancing the opportunities for continued development throughout adulthood. The teaching of scripture must be part of this educational endeavour.

The epistemological elements in the Reflective Judgment Model and Kuhn’s epistemological understanding are further developed in the research of both Jack Mezirow and Michael Basseches. Mezirow’s transformative learning and Basseches’ dialectical thinking also demonstrate the interconnectedness of the separate disciplines of cognitive psychology and philosophy.
4.4 From Cognitive Development to Transformative Learning and Dialectical Thinking: Mezirow and Basseches

In Chapter 3.4 religion has been defined as “that which pertains to ultimate reality and the transcendent” and is “characterised by beliefs and values which contribute to the making of meaning in life”. In the same chapter, following Groome (2003, pp. 7-8), the three-fold purpose of religious education has been stated to be information, which involves learning, formation in a faith tradition, and on-going transformation of the individual in his or her relationship with the transcendent. The approach to religious education advocated in this thesis is education for faith, which is premised upon a pedagogy which seeks to engage students’ critical faculties in a dialogical and dialectical educational setting. The process of Christian religious education formulated by Groome, and espoused in this thesis, has been encapsulated in his application of the concept of conation (e.g. Groome, 1991, pp. 26-29). Conation denotes a “dynamic” process, with philosophical, theological and psychological roots (p. 457, n. 43, 44; 45, 46; 52; 55), which is “similar to cognition” as described by developmental psychologists such as Piaget, but which is richer and “more holistic” in that “conation engages the whole ‘being’ of people— their corporeal, mental, and volitional aspects” (p. 116). It is within this theoretical framework that the teaching of scripture in a manner which facilitates the transition from a literalist understanding of bible stories to a nuanced interpretation of scripture which is open to its metaphorical dimensions is situated.

The contributions of Jack Mezirow (1990a) to transformative learning and Michael Basseches (1986) to dialectical thinking provide a point of intersection between the philosophical and the psychological premises fundamental to this exploration of the teaching of scripture. The philosophical premises include Groome’s use of conation, upon which education for faith is based.
Transformative learning: Jack Mezirow

For Mezirow, the transformation of the individual’s perspectives, which can result from critical reflection, has cognitive, affective and conative dimensions (Mezirow, 1990a, p. 12). The influence of Habermas’ contribution to critical theory, which is integral to Groome’s philosophical grounding of his approach to Christian religious education, is fundamental also to the “critical reflection” which Mezirow argues “triggers transformative learning” (p. 1).

Learning is defined as “the process of making a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience” (Mezirow, 1990a, p. 1). By reflection, interpretations are elaborated, further differentiated and established frames of reference reinforced (p. 5). Mezirow contrasts two types of learning: (i) learning to perform, or, instrumental learning; and (ii) learning to understand, or, communicative learning (pp. 1, 7-9), which is the type of learning relevant to understanding written texts, including scripture. Epistemologically, the link between what is learned and what can be justified as knowledge is, for Mezirow, validation through the process of critical reflection.

Figure 4.1: Diagrammatic summary of Mezirow’s transformative learning

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153 The influence of Habermas’ kinds of knowledge is clearly discernible. See, for example, Groome (1991, pp. 102-103); Pusey (1987, p. 24).
The process of “validating meaning” (Mezirow, 1990a, pp. 9-11), and the grounds upon which validation of one’s beliefs is deemed to have been achieved (p. 5), differ according to the type of learning, instrumental or communicative. Instrumental learning, characteristic of the natural sciences, is validated by reflection on the procedural assumptions, or metacognition, which can be demonstrated empirically (p. 8). Communicative learning, however, is validated by a process of critical reflection which “involves a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built” (p. 1).

Integral to “critical reflection” are the concepts of one’s presuppositions or assumptions which are the defining characteristic of epistemic cognition in Kitchener’s Three-Level Model of Cognitive Processing and Kuhn’s (2005) Evaluativist stage. Mezirow (1990a), however, deconstructs these presuppositions using the theoretical constructs of “frame of reference” (p. 1), “habitual expectations” (or “habits of expectation”), “meaning schemes” and “meaning perspectives” (pp. 2-4). These influence how a person responds to new learning.

A person’s frame of reference is constituted by his or her habitual expectations, which, in turn are a product of “meaning schemes” and “meaning perspectives”. People do not approach new learning with a completely open, or blank, mind! Rather they approach new learning with an existing “frame of reference” (Mezirow, 1990a, p. 1), a set of habits of expectation, which predispose them to process that new learning in accordance with existing assumptions or predispositions.

“Meaning schemes are habitual, implicit rules for interpreting” (Mezirow, 1990a, p. 2) and include “if-then, cause-effect” expectations (p. 2). “Meaning perspectives” include “higher-order schemata, theories, propositions, beliefs ... and ...”

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154 In this broad definition of “reflection”, Mezirow cites Dewey (1933, p. 9), for whom “reflection referred to ‘assessing the grounds [justification] of one’s beliefs’” (Mezirow, 1990a, p. 5).
familiar relationships” (p. 2) which “structure the assumptions within which new experience is assimilated and transformed by one’s past experience during the process of interpretation” (p. 2). One’s “habits of expectation and many other predispositions provide the presuppositions” (p. 2) which form the basis of one’s interpretations. For example, if a student approaches the biblical text assuming that if it is the word of God, then it must be true, and if she or he also assumes that if something is a myth, then it cannot be true, when the teacher tries to explain the creation stories in Genesis 1-2 as myths, the student’s mind set, or presuppositions, will make it difficult for the new learning to be accommodated.

Figure 4.2: Diagrammatic representation of Mezirow’s process of Critical Reflection

In communicative learning, validation proceeds via the process of critical reflection by which one’s presuppositions are challenged and “epistemic, sociocultural, and psychic distortions” (Mezirow, 1990a, p. 14) within one’s “habitual expectations” are transformed. In communicative learning the criteria or grounds on which validation is deemed to have been effected, and “the meaning of a sentence or an expressed idea” established (p. 10)—for example, an interpretation of a bible story or other scripture passage—does not have the degree of certainty typically asserted in
instances where empirical validation is forthcoming and which for many people is the
only grounds for acceptance of the validity of the statement. The epistemological
differences in validating assertions represents a different mode of determining what
constitutes knowledge and the beliefs which one is prepared to accept as constituting
“truth”. In the case of communicative learning, one must “rely on consensual
validation” drawing on “rational discourse” as “there are no empirical tests of truth” (p.
10). According to Mezirow, the transformation of perspective which results from
critical reflection “has cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions” and can be seen
as “analogous” to Thomas Kuhn’s (1970) “paradigm shift” (Mezirow, 1990a, p. 12).
These three dimensions, the cognitive, the affective, and the conative, are of particular
significance in religious thinking and in the understanding of the biblical text and
represent three types of demands made upon the individual.

The cognitive demands of challenging one’s “habits of expectation”, and the
“presuppositions” upon which knowledge is predicated, are readily appreciated. The
prerequisites and processes inherent in the cognitive dimension are described by
Kitchener and Kuhn in their respective models. The culmination of the process of
critical reflection may well be a paradigm shift, in which a new way of understanding,
or of structuring meaning, is reached which transforms former ways of knowing. It
may be a sudden insight or a gradual process; however, at some stage the individual
must be aware of a change having occurred. However, the affective and conative
dimensions may well constitute an obstacle as significant as the cognitive demands.

The outcome of one’s critical reflection in situations involving communicative
learning, such as is inherent in the reasoning required for the interpretation of texts,
including the biblical text, is epistemologically different from that with which one
asserts the truth or validity of phenomena susceptible to empirical validation. The
concrete thinker who resists a non-literalist interpretation of a phenomenon or the
text of a story will, with the attainment of a more advanced level of cognitive processes
have no difficulty in readjusting his or her understanding. However, in the religious
domain the degree of moral courage required in subjecting one’s deeply held ideas and
beliefs to critical scrutiny can be daunting. For example, if the adolescent has become
disillusioned when the habits of expectation upon which the presuppositions regarding
the veracity of bible stories held in childhood have been questioned in the normal
course of maturation, the outcome of the challenge to change one’s “horizon of
expectation” (Mezirow, 1990a, p. 3, citing Karl Popper) may well be problematic.
The cognitive, the affective and the conative in this instance may be inextricably
enmeshed and constitute an emotional and volitional barrier independent of cognitive
capacity. The outcome may be rejecting the scriptures as untrue and, as a
consequence, a rejection of religion; one may compartmentalise one’s religious beliefs,
isolating them from the higher levels of thinking attained in other areas of knowledge;
a third possibility is adopting a fundamentalist position.

**Dialectical Thinking: Michael Basseches**

The concept of a dialectic in the Hegelian sense posits a process in which there are
three moments: a proposition, *thesis*; its negation, *antithesis*; and culminating in the
integration of the first two moments in their *synthesis*, which in turn becomes a new
thesis. In his discussion of the process of “becoming Christian”, Groome uses the term
“dialectic” in its Hegelian sense to refer to the relationship between the individual and
the social environment (Groome, 1980, p. 113). Basseches uses the term in the
context of a type of thinking whose “form of cognitive organization” is post-formal in the
Piagetian sense, and develops in some individuals in young adulthood (Basseches,”

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155 This assumes that the person concerned is engaged in resolving the cognitive conflict arising from a
literalist interpretation which is now dissonant with his or her thinking in other areas. There will be
persons, both students and adults, who do not experience dissonance, either undisturbed by what
others see as dissonances or because they are not interested in religion. It is anticipated that there will
be representatives of all these types of response in most classes in the secondary school.
1986, p. 33). He asserts the significance of dialectical thinking in the way individuals analyse phenomena which “cover the full spectrum of natural science, social science, humanities subject matters, as well as situations of day-to-day life” (p. 33). One may add it can be applied to religious thinking and the interpretation of written texts, including the Bible. Basseches’ explicit statement of the dependence of dialectical thinking (p. 33) on the higher levels in the schemas of Kegan (1982) and Fowler (1981) provides further links with the material upon which this thesis draws.

Basseches examines dialectical thinking as a philosophical concept and explores it in a psychological context, having devised a “dialectical schemata (DS) framework” in order to operationalise the characteristics of dialectical thinking for empirical research (pp. 42-48). In the context of this thesis the focus is not on Basseches’ empirical research but on (i) his philosophical perspective and (ii) the epistemological implications of dialectical thinking in expanding understanding of the epistemological elements in the Reflective Judgment Model, especially at the higher stages, and Kuhn’s (2005) “evaluativist” level of epistemological understanding.

According to Basseches, “dialectical epistemologies” emphasise the following characteristics of knowledge: (i) knowledge as an active process “of organizing and reorganizing understandings of phenomena”; (ii) that knowledge is made coherent through “conceptual systems”; and (iii) that the relationships between “concepts, ideas, and facts” and between these “concepts, ideas, and facts” and “the knowers who employ them”, determine their meaning and changes in meaning (Basseches, 1986, p. 35).

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156 Basseches argues that dialectical thinking “occurs after the achievement of formal operations” and provides “a more adequate way of understanding the universe than formal operations alone” and that his empirical research [Basseches, 1980, 1984 are cited] had “provided initial support for ... the claim ... that there is a tendency for dialectical thinking to be achieved after formal operations (Basseches, 1986, p. 55).
If “dialectical analysis makes it possible both to see the limits and to see beyond the limits of the context” (p. 39) in which thinking is applied, a dialectical reading of the scripture makes it possible to see beyond the literal to a metaphorical interpretation of the meaning in the text. It is posited here, to be developed later,\textsuperscript{157} that interpreting the scriptures is a dialectical process between the reader and the text in the direction of a deepening of the meaning of text and the capacity to appropriate its religious significance. If the movement between the several stages of cognitive development is accomplished satisfactorily, the mythic elements in the religious thinking of the young child will be transformed into a second, or willed, naïveté in which religious truths are freed from the constraints of both the literalist, concrete stage of childhood and the scepticism and relativism of adolescence.

Basseches defines cognitive development as epistemic progress (p. 40). To apply this to young people’s questioning regarding the concept of “truth”, and the related demand that there be “evidence” for religious phenomena, which were recurring themes in young people’s expressed concerns about the Bible, it is important to note that what constitutes one’s understanding of “truth” has epistemological and conative dimensions. That “truth” which is not restricted to empirical, verifiable knowledge proper to the evidence forthcoming from scientific inquiry cannot be

\textsuperscript{157} See below, Chapter 7.
grasped when one is at the Relativist (Kitchener) or Multiplist (Kuhn) stage; however, to move beyond this epistemological limitation, one must be open to new ways of knowing and willing to take the risk of letting go of established patterns of thought. The role of education includes facilitating students’ development in thinking, to nudge their thinking in the direction towards more openness by challenging the assumptions and preconceptions of reality which constitute their present equilibrated state. In Piagetian terms, education sets up circumstances which induce disequilibrium, which broaden the horizon of understanding and provide the setting in which new ideas may be assimilated, accommodated to existing schemata, and lead to a new stage of equilibrium. However, achieving this level of cognitive development, for instance in religious understanding, involves more than cognition. And it is not without its costs. When one’s religious beliefs are the focus of the intellectual challenge, the affective cost of change and the resistance to change can be high: hence the need for sensitivity in those areas of religious thinking which touch on deeply-held beliefs, especially if those beliefs are being challenged by the process of maturation.

In dialectical thinking the way in which Basseches conceives of equilibrium—which differs from that of Piaget—is, in fact, an articulation, in theoretical terms, of the task to be addressed in helping students to understand intellectually, and accept existentially, a new way of seeing religious concepts and beliefs. The process has, therefore, a conative dimension in that the object of changed perceptions impinges on what can be deeply held beliefs which affect one’s whole being and relationship with the transcendent. How the individual responds to the disequilibrium occasioned by the challenge of a new way of reading scripture will depend upon factors other than the intellectual. In understanding the significance of the strength of a young person’s sense of identity and stage of ego development, the research of Erikson and Kegan are considered.
4.5 Extending the Perspective Beyond the Cognitive: Erikson, Newman and Newman, and Kegan

Although it may sound cold and remote from the reality of the vital young people whom one is seeking to educate, the term learner as thinker has been chosen as a theoretical construct for the purpose of analysing the development and characteristics of the thinking of the student, especially the adolescent in the secondary school. The intention is to identify both the constraints imposed on cognitive capacity and the opportunities provided by the process of development. However, the learner is a complex, thinking and feeling human person in a network of social relationships. Erikson (1968) focuses on psychosocial change and Newman and Newman (2001) develop the concept of group identity. Kegan (1982, 1994) seeks to integrate the insights of two psychological traditions, the neo-psychoanalytic tradition, which includes Erikson’s theoretical perspective, and the existential-phenomenological tradition, in his “constructive-developmental” approach which derives from his appropriation and extension of the Piagetian paradigm (Kegan, 1982, pp. 3-4).

Erik Erikson: identity

Erikson’s constructs of “identity” and “identity crisis” derive from the psychoanalytical tradition and his practice as a psychoanalyst. The epigenetic stages in the development of identity which he articulates provide a way of understanding “human growth” as a series of “inner and outer” “conflicts” or “crises”, each of which can result in “an increased sense of inner unity, with an increase of good judgment, and an increase in the capacity “to do well” according to his [sic] own standards and to the standards of those who are significant to him” (Erikson, 1968, pp. 91-92). Erikson focuses on the psychosocial character of identity: (i) there is an inner dimension to the

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158 Erikson defines the “epigenetic principle” as the growth of an organism according to a “ground plan” in which different parts “arise”, have their “time of special ascendancy” and all contribute to “a functioning whole” (Erikson, 1968, p. 92).
psyche of the individual; (ii) every individual comes into being and maturity in a particular time and place and within a particular cultural setting; and (iii) the individual must work through the several stages in the on-going development of identity by integrating the conflicts which Erikson identifies as fundamental to each stage, conflicts which come from within oneself and from the society within which one must exist, and, ideally, flourish.

By the time secondary school is reached, the young adolescent will have already passed through four of the eight stages posited by Erikson: infancy, early childhood, play age, and school age (e.g. Erikson, 1968, Ch. 3, diagram, p. 94). Each of these stages represents a particular crisis, or “necessary turning point” (p. 16), in the organism’s “growth, recovery, and further differentiation” (p. 16). Each stage has a unique and demanding psychosocial task to be achieved. Yet rarely, if ever, is each developmental task fully accomplished at its designated time; rather, throughout one’s life one is continually faced with the unresolved developmental tasks of earlier stages (e.g. Erikson, 1968, p. 82).

Erikson describes “identity” as “a process ‘located’ in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture” (Erikson, 1968, p. 22). It is a process which is “for the most part unconscious” and “always changing and developing: at its best it is a process of increasing differentiation” and inclusive as the individual’s perception of “significant others” expands (p. 23). Erikson repeatedly asserts the significance of the link between the individual and how he or she perceives himself or herself, and the congruence of this perspective with how the individual is perceived by the community and, in turn, perceives others’ response (e.g. pp. 22, 23, 49, 50). Identity is socially bound (p. 43). “Ego identity” is subjective and refers to the quality of the individual’s existence (p. 50). The task of the ego is “to promote the mastery of experience” and the on-going achievement of “wholeness” (p. 81).
To achieve the psychosocial task of adolescence the individual needs to wrestle with the conflicting forces within the psyche and the multitude of conflicting forces emanating from a complex and rapidly changing contemporary society. One’s responses to these competing demands must be integrated into the psyche if one is to come out of the crisis “with an increased sense of inner unity” (Erikson, 1968, p. 92). In the context of religious education, students will be challenged to integrate within their personality the conflicting patterns of beliefs and values from the school, which fosters a Christian community and advocates a particular perspective on life, with the powerful influence of a society whose values, expressed in the popular culture and the peer group, are frequently antithetical to the school’s perspective and in which an anti-religion and atheist agenda is currently being canvassed.\(^{159}\) The concept of a “psychosocial moratorium” (pp. 128, 156) may be applied to young people’s reassessment of their religious beliefs and commitment, akin to Babin’s concept of a “fallow” period.\(^{160}\) In the adolescent’s processing of competing allegiances the family is significant, as has been demonstrated empirically in the several studies of Year 12 students in Australia by Flynn.\(^{161}\) However, the family is not the only, nor necessarily the definitive, influence on the young person (e.g. Newman & Newman, 2001).

It is in recognition of the psychosocial demands on adolescents, as well as arguments from a philosophical position, that the approach designated education for faith advocates that religious education be predicated upon openness to students and their ideas in a dialogical and dialectical learning environment, in which respect for the individual is coupled with intellectual challenge. The demands of coming to an understanding of the scriptures which transcends the literalist, clearly involve cognition; yet the anger and disillusionment expressed by some young people in relation to their reading of the Bible, indicate that forces are involved which impinge

\(^{159}\) For example, the publicity given in the media to high profile participants in the Atheists’ Convention in Melbourne in 2010.

\(^{160}\) See above, Chapter 3.2, pp. 130-131.

\(^{161}\) Chapter 1.3 above.
deeply on the psychosocial “identity crisis” (Erikson, 1968, p. 17) which the adolescent is also experiencing. Transformation in thinking involves the whole person, including the person as a social being.

**Newman and Newman: the importance of the group**

One of the characteristics of young people is the importance which they place on friendships and on social contacts. Newman and Newman (2001, 2009) balance the negative perception which adults may have of peer pressure by drawing attention to the role of the group in the development and well being of adolescents. They seek to redress what they argue has been an inordinate emphasis on individual identity, partly a result of the direction of research influenced by Erikson’s focus on the “psychosocial crisis of individual identity” (2001, p. 516). Interacting with others in various groups and establishing a group identity contributes to the development of a healthy personal identity (p. 527).

Their analysis of group identity includes identification with family, school, and, for example, sporting teams, as well as peers in friendship groups. Interaction with others in the groups to which one belongs, either voluntarily or as a result of birth or social circumstances, such as race, gender, social class and, religion (Newman & Newman, 2001, p. 525), influences an individual’s perception of his or her place in the wider society.

In adolescence, gaining acceptance within a group, and establishing one’s identity as a member of a group, contributes to the broadening of the young person’s horizons and social skills beyond the family. Group attitudes and values are internalised. At times, the young person will need to negotiate situations where there is a clash between personal and group values, a painful experience, but one which may result in a stronger sense of personal identity. Membership of a group provides
emotional support, a sense of belonging and establishes commitments to others beyond the family. The relationships between members of the group provide a context in which leadership roles may be adopted, but also where negative feelings, such as “depression or jealousy associated with betrayal” (p. 525), are experienced.

Newman and Newman (2001) contrast the establishment of a group identity, with “alienation” (pp. 526-527). A period of “feeling alone and lonely” may be salutary and contribute to young people’s recognition of the importance to them of association with others; however, if long standing, alienation has negative consequences for the individual (p. 527).

Young people’s propensity to interact with peers is used widely in education, where co-operative learning situations have become an integral part of the educative process, including classroom interaction in religious education. Group activities which engage the interest and spark critical thinking are an essential part of education for faith and teaching for transformation of students’ understanding and response to the biblical text.

**Robert Kegan: ego development as the transformation of mind**

Kegan (1982) refers to his theory as a “metapsychology” (p. 15). He draws on the “root metaphors and premises” (p. 7) of the “underlying framework” of Piaget’s genetic epistemology (p. 15) to explore the development of the human person actively and necessarily engaged in “the activity of meaning-making” by the organising of experience (p. 11). Kegan designates his approach to “the evolution of meaning” (p. 15) as “constructive-developmental” (p. 4): it is “constructivist” in that the person constructs reality; it is “developmental” in that the organism evolves “according to regular principles of stability and change” (p. 8). He takes from Piaget the

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162 See below Chapter 7.
“evolutionary motion” (p. 44) intrinsic to the processes of adaptation, involving assimilation and accommodation by the organism to the outside world, and equilibration, the construct used by Piaget to mark the progressive stages which adaptation produces through the dynamics of equilibrium and disequilibrium within the organism (pp. 43-44). Kegan applies this evolutionary process, or “evolutionary motion”, to “personality” and the “development of ‘knowing’” (pp. 44-45).

According to Kegan, the process by which the individual develops goes beyond the cognitive, as described by Piaget, to encompass the “sequence of emotional, motivational, and psychodynamic organizations” (Kegan, 1982, p. 74) which, for him, constitute the development of the ego or the self. The way in which he builds up the components of his theory of ego development is in terms of the progressive differentiation in the relationship between subject and object (e.g. pp. 76-77), a process which is marked by “a succession of qualitative differentiations of the self from the world” (p. 77): through these “renegotiated balances” (p. 81) the individual comes “to organize … experience … in qualitatively different ways” (p. 81) in three domains: the logical-cognitive, the social-cognitive, and the intrapersonal-affective (Kegan, 1994, pp. 30-31).

The stages posited by Kegan extend across the lifespan (Kegan, 1982, p. 85). Stages 1-5 identify the several types of balance achieved as subject and object become increasingly differentiated. Listed here by short title (pp. 86-87, Table 6), the stages from Stage 0 to Stage 5 are the Incorporative, Impulsive, Imperial, Interpersonal, Institutional and Interindividual. Rather than focus on a detailed description of these stages, attention will be paid to Kegan’s later publication which considers how the “transformation of mind”, which leads to “new ways of knowing” (Kegan, 1994, p. 21), is experienced by the secondary school student.
Kegan (1994) explores ways in which schooling may “support and foster (not just promote and expect)” what he calls a “consciousness curriculum for youth” (p. 56). He does this in the context of highlighting the developmental demands which adult expectations can place on adolescents and young adults (p. 37), expectations which require a more advanced way of knowing than that of which many young people are capable (p. 38). The curriculum which Kegan advocates highlights the constraints and potentialities for understanding which impinge on learning. Teachers can nudge students in the direction of a higher, or more complex “and more inclusive” (p. 33), “order of consciousness” (e.g. Figure 1.3, p. 28) via a pedagogy which “involves an epistemological stretch just a little beyond” (p. 53) the level at which students are currently operating. In Piagetian terms, disequilibrium is induced in order to propel thinking to the next level of cognitive functioning. How this “epistemological stretch” can be applied to increasingly more sophisticated interpretations of the biblical text will be considered in the context of religious thinking and the teaching of scripture.\(^{163}\)

The value of Kegan’s theory is its breadth and inclusiveness, integrating the cognitive and the affective domains within a process of constructing and organising meaning which involves “the selective, interpretive, executive, and construing capacities” of “the ‘ego’ or ‘self’” (Kegan, 1994, p. 29). Kegan depicts ways of knowing in terms of a decentring process between object and subject in which a new “mental organization” (e.g. p. 21) at each level increases the capacity of the person to organise experience in the logical-cognitive, the social-cognitive, and the intrapersonal-affective (pp. 30-31) domains. Three “principles for organizing experience” (p. 29) are posited, each associated with a particular age span which, in fact, corresponds to Piagetian stages. The first organising principle is “independent elements” (p. 29), typical of the young child. In this first “order of consciousness”, thinking is “atomistic”, “illogical”, tied to the present moment, and “egocentric” (p. 29). The next two stages, or principles, are of relevance to education in the secondary school. The principle of

\(^{163}\) Chapter 7 below.
“durable category” or “second order consciousness” is typical of Piaget’s concrete thinker. Thinking becomes “concrete and logical”, “momentary impulses” have become “dispositions” and the different perspectives of others are recognised (p. 29). For the “third order consciousness”, “cross-categorical knowing”, abstract thinking is required (p. 28, Figure 1.3; p. 29). As well as the capacity to deal with abstract ideas, engage in inferential thinking, and reflect on what one knows and how one knows (metacognition), interpersonal relations change as an awareness of the perspective of others is more fully appreciated and there develops the capacity for a mutuality in relationships (e.g. p. 25, Figure 1.2). The transition from second to third order consciousness is stated to be a “gradual transformation of mind” which takes place between the ages of twelve and twenty (p. 37).

Kegan’s constructive-developmental theory deepens one’s insights into the developmental processes being experienced by adolescents. “Knowing”, or epistemological understanding, involves more than cognition; rather it is a process in which cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal development (e.g. Kegan, 1994, Figure 1.4, p. 35) contribute to the construction of knowledge and the “evolution of meaning” (Kegan, 1982, p. 15). It is a developmental task which affects the whole person, epistemologically and ontologically (p. 44): making “meaning” is an activity which “is about knowing and being, about theory-making and investments and commitments of the self” (pp. 44-45).\textsuperscript{164}

\textsuperscript{164} Kegan’s recent work has been extended to adult development within an organisational setting (Kegan & Laskow, 2009).
4.6 Faith Development and the Secondary School Student

Fowler’s theory of faith development provides insights which can be applied to students’ developmental understanding of scripture. His starting point is the human person—thinking, feeling and interacting with others in the existential quest for meaning. Fowler was primarily concerned with the structure of faith, not its content. His understanding of “faith” is interpersonal and relational and includes, but is not restricted to, religious faith. Faith is understood as the way in which one engages with that which is of fundamental concern. However, it is clear that for Fowler there is a religious dimension to faith, discernible, for example, in the statement that “human beings are genetically potentiated for partnership with God” (Fowler, 1987, p. 54). Furthermore, the role of pastoral care within a Christian community becomes the focus of Fowler’s later development and application of the theory (e.g. Fowler, 1984, 1987, 1991).

The theory draws heavily on structural-developmental theories and incorporates the insights they provide as “aspects” of the “evolutionary changes” (Fowler, 1981, p. 34) which constitute a series of “sequential and invariant” stages (Fowler, 1991, p. 17) through which individuals pass in the development of faith and in their quest for meaning. These stages trace the development of “faith” from infancy to Universalising faith which he posits as the ultimate stage of human relationship with others and the ultimate environment.

Stages of faith development

Seven stages are posited: an initial “stage” of “Undifferentiated Faith” in Infancy (Fowler, 1981, Ch. 15), and Stages 1—6. Each stage is characterised by its developmental position according to seven “aspects”: form of logic (Piaget);

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165 A more detailed discussion of Fowler’s theory of faith development is in Appendix 3, together with a critique of the theory, and Slee’s research from a feminist perspective.
perspective taking (Selman); form of moral judgment (Kohlberg); bounds of social awareness; locus of authority; form of world coherence; and symbolic function (Table 5.1, pp. 244-245). Subsequently, Fowler related each of Kegan’s stages of ego development to his faith development stages. Although Fowler regards the stages of faith to be normative (p. 300), he is adamant that the stages not be used to devalue persons whatever the stage at which they are operating (Fowler, 1987, p. 80), nor does he regard the transition to a new stage as a specific goal, pastorally or educationally (p. 81).

Table 4.7 lists Fowler’s stages of faith development with the corresponding Piagetian stages of cognitive development and Kegan’s stages of ego development. Table 4.8 states the approximate ages with which each stage is associated.

**Table 4.7: Stages of Faith Development**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faith Fowler</th>
<th>Cognition Piaget</th>
<th>Selfhood Kegan</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 Primal faith</td>
<td>Sensorimotor</td>
<td>The Incorporative Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Intuitive-Projective</td>
<td>Preoperational</td>
<td>The Impulsive Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Mythic-Literal</td>
<td>Concrete Operational</td>
<td>The Imperial Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Synthetic-Conventional</td>
<td>Early Formal Operations</td>
<td>The Interpersonal Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Individuative-Reflective</td>
<td>Formal Operations (Dichotomizing)</td>
<td>The Institutional Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Conjunctive</td>
<td>Formal Operations (Dialectical)</td>
<td>The Inter-Individual Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Universalising</td>
<td>Formal Operations (Synthetic)</td>
<td>The God-Grounded Self</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Principal source: Fowler (1981), Table 5.1, pp. 244-245. Fowler (1987), Chapter 4, draws parallels with Kegan (1982). The Sensorimotor, as first stage in Piaget’s schema, has been added. This is Fowler’s addition to Kegan’s six-stage schema. (See Fowler, 1987, p. 76.)
Table 4.8: Stages of Faith x Ages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fowler’s Faith Development Stage</th>
<th>Ages (approximate)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 Primal faith</td>
<td>Infancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Intuitive-Projective</td>
<td>Early childhood: 2 to 6/7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Mythic-Literal</td>
<td>Childhood and beyond: 6 to 10/11 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Synthetic-Conventional</td>
<td>Adolescence and beyond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Individuative-Reflective</td>
<td>Young Adulthood and beyond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Conjunctive</td>
<td>Early Mid-life and beyond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Universalising</td>
<td>Mid-life and beyond</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The stages of faith development particularly relevant in an exploration of how the biblical text is understood by students in the secondary school are Stages 2 and 3, Mythic-Literal and Synthetic-Conventional; however some students may still be in Stage 1, Intuitive-Projective, and some may be moving towards Stage 4, Individuative-Reflective. The open-ended upper age limit for each of these stages (and for the subsequent Stage 5 and Stage 6) indicates that a person does not necessarily "progress" through the full series of stages: the way in which adults relate to ultimate reality in the context of the experiences of their lives can be "from the Intuitive-Projective stage on" (Fowler, 1987, p. 96); however, he suggests that adults at the Intuitive-Projective stage are those who are influenced by extremist cults (p. 84). An individual may also be firmly established in a transitional stage.

Critiques of Fowler’s theory of faith development included criticism of his definition of faith, the Piagetian foundations of the theory, the hierarchical nature of the stages and limitations due to its gender bias. Brief reference is made here to

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169 See Appendix 3 for details.
those criticisms which most closely affect the application of the theory to religious education, especially the interpretation of the Bible, in the secondary school. Nipkow (1992), for example, pointed out that the understanding of faith expressed in “a child’s simple and firm trust in God” is not adequately accommodated in a theory focussed on hierarchical stages (p. 96). Moran (1992) suggested that there are more appropriate images for development than a “ladder” (p. 156). Slee’s (2004) research on faith development from a feminist perspective¹⁷⁰ led her to suggest that Fowler’s focus on analytical thinking (p. 165) needed to be balanced by acknowledgement of the significance of “imagination” and “symbol”. The point at which metaphorical language and its symbolic signification can be appreciated becomes a key question when exploring the relationship between the stage of thinking of the reader and the cognitive demands imposed by the text and one which is of particular significance in this thesis.¹⁷¹

**Summary**

Cognitive developmental theory provides insights into the way in which thinking and understanding changes qualitatively as the student moves from childhood to adolescence and young adulthood during the years of secondary education. In Piagetian terms, the transition is from the concrete operational thinking of the child to the level of formal operational thought in early adolescence and its consolidation in later adolescence. In the subsequent research, the transition may be expressed as a transition to mature epistemological understanding, or the transformation of learning through critical reflection and the application of dialectical thinking, which is conceived of as a process integral to the development of the self as a thinking, feeling and relating member of a community.

¹⁷⁰ See Appendix 3 for details.
¹⁷¹ The relationship between the cognitive capacities of the reader and the cognitive demands of the text are discussed in Chapter 6 below, especially in Section 6.4.
Piaget’s theory of cognitive development provides both a conceptual framework within which progressive age-related cognitive capacities are elucidated and analytical tools with which to explore the process of development. In this thesis the Piagetian processes of assimilation and accommodation are integral to understanding cognitive change. Facilitating the transition from an unquestioned literalist understanding of scripture to a more nuanced interpretation is advanced by linking the cognitive demands of the interpretive task to the cognitive capacities of the student.

The post-Piagetian research makes two important contributions to understanding the processes involved in the development of understanding relevant to a critical engagement with the biblical text: (i) the link between the cognitive, the affective and the volitional, or conative, domains; and (ii) the developmental aspect of epistemology, which provides a link between cognitive development and an understanding of developmental aspects of knowledge. The intersection of these two processes occurs in “critical reflection”.

The link between the cognitive and affective domains is discernible in the research of Perry (1970) who extended Piaget’s stages of cognitive development beyond the intellectual to encompass young people taking up personal commitment in a relativist world. His scheme links cognitive competence and epistemology to perception of authority. The research of Belenky et al. (1986) into women’s ways of thinking contrasted “separate knowing” and “connected knowing”, in which “understanding” has affective dimensions.

Adolescents’ questions about evidence and the truth of the Bible have, in part, a developmental source, while, at the same time, their stage of epistemological

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172 The socio-political context is also a significant factor.
development imposes constraints in understanding the nature of knowledge. Epistemologically, despite their differences, in the stages posited by Perry (1970) and by Belenky et al. (1986) knowledge progresses through a series of stages which move from an understanding of knowledge and truth as “absolute” to knowledge being understood and accepted as “relativist” and being “constructed” and “contextual”. The Reflective Judgment Model (e.g. Kitchener, 1986) develops this epistemological dimension further. Development in understanding of (i) the nature of knowledge, (ii) the certainty with which it is held, and (iii) how knowledge is acquired and how beliefs are justified, elucidates the way in which knowledge and truth are understood at different cognitive stages.

The distinction between different forms of knowledge, represented by the contrast between “well-structured” problems and “ill-structured” problems (e.g. Kitchener, 1983, p. 224; Kuhn, 1991, p. 7) point to the differences between knowledge susceptible to empirical validation and knowledge validated by different procedures. A similar distinction is made by Mezirow (1990a, pp. 7-9) in terms of “instrumental” learning and “communicative” learning which have different types of validation. This is an epistemological distinction not automatically appreciated by the thinker in transition from concrete to abstract thinking who is requiring evidence to substantiate religious truths. However, it is a distinction which is necessary for an appreciation of the nature of religious knowledge and for an acceptance that the biblical text may offer different interpretations. Kuhn further developed the concept of stages of epistemological understanding and applied the skills of critical thinking to education.

The concept of “critical reflection” is of direct application to teaching for critical engagement with the biblical text. To achieve this goal involves not only the cognitive capacity to reflect on one’s thinking, metacognition, but the willingness to reflect on one’s assumptions and the presuppositions which one brings to the interpretive task. This involves the interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions of “knowing” considered
in Kegan’s model which point to the link between philosophy, especially epistemology, and cognition implicit in the research of Mezirow (1990a) and Basseches (1986).

Knowledge is conceived of as an active process in which the knower draws on his or her conceptual system to organise facts and concepts to produce meaning or knowledge (Basseches, 1986). The “transformation” which Basseches’ dialectic explores, and which involves “increasing inclusiveness, differentiation, and integration” (p. 36), involves an epistemology situated principally within the cognitive domain.

In his analysis of transformative learning, Mezirow (1990a) deconstructs the process of “critical reflection”, drawing attention to the constraints imposed by the presuppositions which the learner brings to the task. This insight has parallels with the hermeneutical principle of pre-understanding.\textsuperscript{173} Mezirow’s concepts of “transformative learning” and “making meaning” are complemented by deeper insights into the learner as a person whose “transformation of mind” is an integrative process of the development of the self or ego.

Kegan’s (1982) research is grounded in a neo-Piagetian paradigm and includes the cognitive domain, but expands the concept of knowledge to include the interpersonal, or social, and the intrapersonal expressions of “making meaning”. His epistemology goes beyond the cognitive to account for the existential situation of the person as an “evolving self”. Similarly, Erikson (1968) provides insights from a non-structuralist perspective into personality factors which impinge upon the individual as a thinker and as an autonomous person and member of a community. The challenge or “crisis” of adolescence in achieving an “ego identity” will affect the presuppositions, the assumptions and habitual expectations which the secondary school student brings to the learning task, and influence his or her openness to engaging in critical reflection.

\textsuperscript{173} See below, Chapter 5.4.
Similarly, the groups with which young people identify will influence their perceptions and choices (Newman & Newman, 2001).

Teaching for critical engagement with the biblical text, which is a fundamental component of *education for faith*, involves the whole person. The cognitive dimension, which has been explored in this chapter, is integral; it illuminates the predispositions which the learner brings to religious learning and the capacity for understanding at a particular age and stage. The stages of faith development are applied to that teaching in Chapter 7.

This chapter has focussed on the *learner*. The insights provided by the research reviewed in this chapter will be applied in Chapter 6 to exploring “religious thinking” and the dialectic between the learner, as reader, and the text. Chapter 5 considers the *text*, how it has been interpreted within the Christian tradition historically and the characteristics of contemporary biblical scholarship.
CHAPTER 5 – THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Introduction

The biblical text, like all written documents, requires interpretation. Two fundamental features of this text which influence its interpretation are: (i) it is a collection of ancient texts; and (ii) its status as a religious text which functions as sacred scripture for certain religious communities for whom it is the Word of God. This chapter considers both of these intertwined features of the Bible. The first two sections consider the influences on the interpretation of the Bible as sacred text, especially in the Catholic Christian tradition; the next two sections focus on contemporary biblical scholarship and the hermeneutical principles which underpin the interpretive process.

Section 1 discusses the interpretation of the Bible in the early Christian period when two contrasting approaches were established which still have resonances up to the present. The focus then moves to the approach to biblical interpretation in the Catholic Church in the modern era, tracing the responses to critical biblical scholarship over that period. Significant Church documents from 1883 to 1993 are examined, establishing the ecclesial context for the teaching of scripture in the Catholic secondary school.

Section 2 considers the confluence between Church approaches to religious education, discussed in Chapter 1, and the interpretation of the Bible in the Church, both of which have influenced the teaching of scripture in the Catholic secondary school. Change over time is considered, from the period prior to Vatican II up to the early twenty-first century, with the focus on the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

In Section 3 the principal focus is on the features of the historical-critical method and more recent approaches to exegesis, which are of relevance to teaching at
the secondary school level: either as informing teachers’ background knowledge and understanding, or as applicable to classroom teaching.

The philosophical hermeneutical principles which influence the interpretive task are reviewed in Section 4. These principles of meaning-making have points of intersection with the epistemological and psychological dimensions of knowledge and understanding considered in Chapter 4.

5.1 The Study of Scripture: A Historical Perspective

The two features of the Bible, as an ancient text, requiring a range of interpretive skills needed for the study of any ancient text, and as sacred scripture, interpreted within the context of the believing community, can constitute a source of tension for the scholarly study of the Bible and its interpretation.

The early Christian period

The interpretation of the Christian Bible is influenced by the time and place in which it was written and by the time and place in which it is read. The Old Testament developed over a period of more than a thousand years as the Jewish people came to express, in oral and then written form, their experiences as a nation in terms of their relationship with YHWH, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the founders of their people, Israel. The New Testament, which developed over a much shorter period of time, represents the testimony of the early Christian community that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, the Messiah promised to Israel, who, by his life, death and resurrection had brought salvation to all humankind. Jesus was a practising Jew, his first followers were Jews. Christianity arose within Judaism, whose sacred texts constituted the sacred text of Jesus and his disciples and the earliest Christian communities.
The writings which became the Christian Scriptures, or New Testament, commenced with the writings of Paul in the middle of the first century CE to the Christian communities which he had founded during his mission to the Gentile world. The writing of the gospels, initially that of Mark around 70 CE, introduced a new and unique genre; neither history nor biography in the ancient or modern sense, the gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John, were testimonies of faith in Jesus as Lord. Written in the second half of the first century CE, each for a particular community, these documents represent the third stage in the development of the gospels. The twenty-seven books which eventually came to be accepted as the canon of the New Testament were completed by the early years of the second century, possibly with 2 Peter (Grant & Tracy, 1984, p. 40).

As the gospels record, notwithstanding the difficulties associated with discerning the words of Jesus in the first stage of their development, Jesus drew on and cited the Hebrew Scriptures (Grant & Tracy, 1984, Chapter 2). For example, in the Temptation in the Desert passage (Luke 4:1-14) Jesus quotes scripture (e.g. Deut 3: 8b; 6:16). Jesus encapsulated his teaching in the great commandment to love God and to love neighbour, quoting the Shema (Deut 6:5) and Leviticus (19:18).

Similarly, Paul’s theology drew on the Hebrew Scriptures and the methods of interpretation current in first century Judaism, especially in his Christology. For example, he referred to Jesus, typologically, as the new Adam (Rom 5:17-21) and used the story of Abraham’s two sons, by Hagar and by Sarah, slave and free.

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174 Scholars are not agreed on the actual dates. Some date Matthew and Luke to around 80-90 CE, and John to about 95-100CE (Charpentier, 1982, p. 11); others (e.g. Perrin & Duling, 1982), broaden the time span, assigning Matthew and Luke to 70-90 CE and John to 80-100 CE (p. 43).

175 The first two stages, identified by biblical scholarship, were the life and teaching of Jesus, and the oral teaching about Jesus in the early Christian communities (e.g. Sancta Mater Ecclesia, Pontifical Biblical Commission, 1964, in Murphy, 2007, p. 320; Charpentier, 1982, pp. 10-11).

176 For an exposition of this feature of Paul’s theology encapsulated in this passage, see Byrne, 1990, especially, pp 19-25.
respectively, as an allegory of the two covenants (Gal 4: 22-26) (cited in Grant & Tracy, 1984, p. 19).

The details of the history of the development of scripture in the early years of the Christian era, and the dependence of Jesus and Paul on the Hebrew Scriptures, are not the issue here; rather, the intention is to highlight the following points which directly relate to the nature of the biblical text and its interpretation in the earliest years of Christianity and in the present day:

(i) The New Testament canon did not spring into being fully formed and unquestioned in the early Christian community. Rather, the process by which the documents which constitute the New Testament came to be written, and distinguished from other documents written in the early Christian community, for example, the Didache, and the process whereby they were gradually accepted as canonical, was a long and gradual one.177

(ii) For Jesus and his earliest followers, the Old Testament was the sacred scripture. This is seen within the New Testament itself, in Jesus' teachings in the gospels and in Paul’s writings, as has been revealed by subsequent biblical scholarship.

(iii) The status of the Old Testament within the Christian Bible was subject to disputation; similarly, the particular relationship between the two testaments was forged in the crucible of debate between advocates of varied approaches to the interpretation of texts held to be sacred.

177 The process by which books were accepted as constituting the canon of the New Testament developed slowly, but was fairly well established by the fourth century (e.g. Grant & Tracy, 1984, p. 144). The “festal letter of Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria”, in 367 is cited as significant, as is “the work of Jerome in the West” (Perrin & Duling, 1982, pp. 444-445). A Decree of the Council of Trent in 1546 (extract, Document 29 in Murphy, 2007, pp. 30-31) is the first occasion on which the Catholic Church issued a formal list of the books of the Catholic canon.
That the intellectual milieu in which a Christian community is situated has a bearing on the mindset of the interpreters of scripture and their philosophical presuppositions is as evident in the Patristic period as it is in the post-Enlightenment modern Western world which is the inheritance of biblical scholars in the twenty-first century. The Patristic period is of particular significance because it was in the early centuries of the Common Era that patterns in biblical interpretation and the role of the Church in determining authoritatively the meaning of scripture were first established.

**Two distinct approaches: the Schools of Alexandria and Antioch**

The influence of the philosophical climate in which scripture is conducted is evident in the early Patristic period when two distinct schools of interpretation emerged. The school of Alexandria espoused the allegorical method of interpretation, the school at Antioch adopted a literal approach to the interpretation of scripture. Both have been influential throughout Christian history and although the “literal-historical exegetical method became the principal exegetical method of the Christian church” (Grant & Tracy, 1984, p. 72), within these two approaches lie elements still relevant to biblical interpretation.

Alexandria was a centre of intellectual ferment in which Hellenistic thought was flourishing. Origen (CE 185-253), who became perhaps the most significant of the Christian scholars and biblical interpreters of the Alexandrian school, was influenced by Clement’s allegorical approach and by Neoplatonism: for Origen, the Bible speaks “only in the language of symbols” (Grant & Tracy, 1984, p. 59).

Origen distinguished between those who could interpret the scriptures allegorically, recognising the significance of meaning hidden in symbols, and “the interpretation placed on scripture by the simplest of simple believers, those who cannot understand the meaning of metaphors, parables, or allegories, and who insist
that every detail in them is literally true” (Grant & Tracy, 1984, p. 59).\footnote{What Origen called a “literal” understanding of scripture is nowadays designated a “literalist” understanding.} Coming from a post-Enlightenment worldview, and a modern understanding of human cognitive development, this thesis explores how young people for whom a literalist understanding of scripture may become an obstacle to belief may be taught in a way which enables them to become increasingly aware of the way in which metaphor and parable function in religious discourse.\footnote{This is discussed in Chapter 6 of this thesis.}

In the philosophical milieu of third century Alexandria, Origen’s use of the allegorical method “made it possible to uphold the rationality of Christian faith” (Grant & Tracy, 1984, p. 62) “against gnostic and pagan critics” (Ferguson, 1986, p. 147). However, the subjectivism of the allegorical approach, its esoteric elements, and its implications for the historicity of the scriptures had its critics, especially at the equally influential centre of Christian thought and biblical interpretation at Antioch.

Where Greek philosophy was in the ascendance in Alexandria, in Antioch in Syria “the influence of the synagogue” was a dominant force, a situation deemed to be associated with a literal interpretation of scripture (Grant & Tracy, 1984, p. 63). The literal meaning of the text was the fundamental basis for Antiochene interpretation (p. 66). Jerome, who was responsible for the translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew into Latin in the late 4th-early 5th centuries, was of this school, having changed from earlier allegiance to the allegorical method. His translation became the basis of the Latin Vulgate, the official translation of the Catholic Church for almost 1500 years (Soulen & Soulen, 2001, pp. 90, 206; Fitzmyer, 1994, p. 100).

The contrast between the schools of Alexandria and Antioch in the Patristic period highlights the contrast between two distinct ways of approaching the
interpretation of scripture, the allegorical or spiritual sense of scripture and the literal approach, which still have resonances down to the present day,

A further development during the Patristic period which set the parameters within which the Bible was interpreted was the establishment of the Church as the locus for determining biblical orthodoxy. As sacred text, the Church reserves to the magisterium the right to preserve the integrity of scripture from interpretations inconsistent with Christian tradition and belief. In the context of this thesis, the focus is on the interpretation of the Bible within the Catholic Church in the modern era.

The Catholic experience

The course of Catholic biblical scholarship up to the present day will be traced through a series of official Church documents which have been particularly significant in identifying the progressive change in approach to the methods of exegesis which had already been adopted by Protestant biblical scholars in the modern era. These documents are:

- 1893 – Providentissimus Deus (Leo XIII)
- 1943 – Divino Afflante Spiritu (Pius XII)
- 1964 – Sancta Mater Ecclesia (Pontifical Biblical Commission)
- 1965 – Dei Verbum (Vatican II)
- 1993 – The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church (Pontifical Biblical Commission)

The Catholic Church perceived the post-Enlightenment world as a threat to faith. The principal enemy of the faith was rationalism which, inter alia, challenged the historicity of the Bible: for example, Pius IX in his Syllabus of Errors (1864) refuted claims that the “prophecies and miracles set out and narrated in the Sacred Scriptures are poetical fiction” (Document 36 in Murphy, 2007, p. 51).
What became significant for Catholic biblical scholars in the early twentieth century, such as M.-J. Lagrange, founder of the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem (Fitzmyer, 1994, pp. 16, 33), was the inflexibility of the contemporary Church authorities with regard to Catholic biblical scholarship. Two totally different mind-sets were operating: on the one hand, a total opposition to the perceived threat which Modernist thought, outside and even within the Church, represented for Christian doctrine and Church authority, and, on the other hand, the strong desire by Catholic biblical scholars to use the academic tools which Protestant biblical scholars were using so effectively.

*Providentissimus Deus (1893).*

Leo XIII stated his reason for the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* (1893) to be his desire to advance “the noble study of these Sacred Letters” and to do so “in a way that is more relevant to the needs of the time” (n. 2, p. 54 in Murphy, 2007). Differences between Church authorities and Catholic scholars of the time related to what exegetical practices came under the rubric of “erroneous” and “imprudent innovations”.

*Providentissimus Deus* denounced whatever could be understood as supportive of a rationalist approach. It endorsed the study of ancient languages and literature, but contemporary tools available to exegetes were proscribed. However, if one looks carefully at the second part of the encyclical it is possible to discern the seeds of the later opening up of the scriptures to critical biblical study. While categorical statements are made, many are accompanied by what could be interpreted as a qualification which hinted at new, yet circumscribed, possibilities. For example, paragraphs 15, 17, 18 and 20, indicate respectively, that there was room for further

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180 This document has been read within the collection of Church documents edited by Murphy (2007), Document 38, pp. 53-82. When paragraphs are noted, they are those within the encyclical; page numbers are those in the Murphy collection.
scholarly enquiry in the study of the biblical text; that attempts to interpret the Bible primarily to support dogma should be resisted; that the biblical text did not necessarily record natural phenomena in a way understood by (then) contemporary science; and that human error had occurred in the transmission process.

To facilitate his determination to counter the errors of “a certain newly-invented free science” (n. 10, p. 63), in 1902 in an Apostolic Letter, *Vigilantiae*, Leo XIII established the Pontifical Biblical Commission to ensure that “the sacred texts get the sort of research our times demand” and “are kept safe not only from any breath of error but also from every hasty opinion” (Document 41, in Murphy, 2007, pp. 85-89). However, Leo XIII encouraged biblical scholars “not to neglect the new things that recent research has discovered” (p. 86). He stated his strong approval of the “critical method, which was deemed “very useful in understanding more deeply the thought of the sacred writers” (p. 87).

In the period which followed, however, there was a tightening of the constraints on Catholic biblical scholarship; in this climate the Commission exercised its responsibility to respond to “the principal questions that arise among Catholic academics” (p. 88) in a manner which stymied biblical scholarship.

**The early 20th century: the Modernist crisis.**

The pronouncements of the Pontifical Biblical Commission at the height of the Modernist crisis in the early 20th century brooked no questioning of established positions of the type which the writings of “French biblical scholar Alfred Loisy” raised (Wansbrough, 2003; see also, Brown & T. Collins, 1995, p. 1167). For example, in *Norms concerning narratives only apparently historical*, 1905, the Commission upheld the historical accuracy of “the books of Sacred Scripture” (Document 45 in Murphy,
2007, p. 94) and in 1906, The Mosaic Authorship of the Pentateuch (Document 47, pp. 98-100).

The context in which these pronouncements were issued is made clear in the Decree Lamentabili by The Holy Office in July 1907, which listed and condemned the errors of Modernism (Document 50 in Murphy, 2007, pp. 103-111) and the encyclical letter of Pius X, Pascendi Dominici Gregis (On the Doctrines of the Modernists), 181 1907, a scathing and detailed denunciation of the philosophical propositions of Modernists (Part 1, pp. 10-52) and of the influence of this way of thinking on the understanding of scripture (p. 40). Pascendi denounced practices which result in the “dismembering of the records” so that “the Scriptures can no longer be attributed to the authors whose names they bear” (p. 42).

In 1909, in The historical nature of the first three chapters of Genesis (Document 57 in Murphy, 2007, pp. 131-133), the Pontifical Biblical Commission confirmed the literal historical meaning of the first three chapters of Genesis. However, it was permissible “to discuss ... freely” that the word for day in Genesis 1 may be used figuratively to mean “a certain period of time” (p. 133). In subsequent statements by the Pontifical Biblical Commission the identities of Mark and Luke were affirmed as disciple and interpreter of Peter, and physician and assistant and companion of Paul, respectively (The Gospels according to Mark and Luke, 1912a, Document 63, pp. 147-149), and Paul was held to be the author of the Pastorals (The Pastoral Letters, 1913, Document 67, pp. 154-155) and of the Letter to the Hebrews (The Letter to the Hebrews, 1914, Document 68, pp. 155-156). With regard to relationships between the synoptic gospels (The synoptic question, 1912b, Document 64, pp. 149-150), exegetes were permitted “to discuss freely ... conflicting opinions of authors and to appeal to

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181 The version studied was that of the London Catholic Truth Society and page references are from that edition. Excerpts of the encyclical specifically related to the Bible are also in Murphy (2007), Document 51, pp. 111-117.)
hypotheses of oral or written tradition, or even to the dependence of one on another or on both in order to explain the similarities or differences between them” (p. 150).

The encouragement which biblical scholars had derived from Leo XIII’s Providentissimus Deus was extinguished by Pascendi (Pius X, 1907) and Lamentabili (The Holy Office, 1907), and the replies of the Pontifical Biblical Commission in the anti-modernist period of the early 20th century. Fifty years were to elapse before Pius XII opened the door to the practice of critical biblical exegesis.

*Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943).182

The 1943 encyclical of Pius XII on *The promotion of biblical studies* (*Divino Afflante Spiritu*) was a turning point in the Vatican’s response to the challenges posed by critical biblical scholarship. Marking the fiftieth anniversary of Leo XIII’s *Providentissimus Deus*, the encyclical represented continuity with the past, provided implicit testimony to the development in biblical scholarship in the intervening period, and in its response to “what needs to be done today” (n. 2) provided the impetus for a future in which Catholic biblical scholarship would thrive.

That change had occurred in official Church attitudes to critical methods of biblical interpretation is discernible in the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s document, *Response to a defamatory anonymous brochure* (Document 83 in Murphy, 2007, pp. 228-237) in 1941. In its support of the literal sense of scripture, the use of textual criticism, and the study of Oriental languages, the Commission was doing no more than endorsing *Providentissimus Deus*. However, what is clear in this document is that not only had the position of the Commission changed, but also that there was resistance

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182 This document has been read within the collection of Church document edited by Murphy (2007), Document 86, pp. 239-267. Where paragraphs are noted, they are those within the encyclical; page numbers are those in the Murphy collection.
within some quarters of the Church to any trend towards an accommodation with modernity.

*Divino Afflante Spiritu (DAS)* welcomed the “more abundant and more accurate information” resulting from new archaeological excavations in Palestine (DAS, n. 11, p. 247), and “the discovery and study ... of papyri” (n. 11, p. 247) which enhanced understanding of the first century. The discoveries of “ancient codices of the Sacred Books”, the opportunity for the “exegesis of the Fathers of the Church” to be “more widely and thoroughly examined”, and for “past ways of speaking, narrating and writing” to be clarified (n. 12, p. 247) were commended to interpreters for their use (n. 12, pp. 247-248).

The study of ancient languages and textual criticism, recommended in *Providentissimus Deus*, was given broader scope: for example, knowledge of Hebrew and Greek was deemed essential (DAS, n. 14, p. 248); textual criticism was deemed necessary to restore the text “as perfectly as possible to its original state”, and in removing errors introduced by copyists, glosses and omissions (n. 17, p. 250). Translation of the scriptures into the vernacular was approved (n. 22, p. 251).

Pius XII widened the parameters within which biblical interpretation could be conducted. For example, exegetes’ main task was “to discover ... the literal sense” (DAS, n. 23, p. 252), taking into account “the literary forms” used at the time of writing and the historical context of the human author (n. 33, p. 256), since the “words of God” were “expressed in human languages” (n. 37, p. 257). The “contributions of secular science” were accepted and used “gratefully” (n. 48, p. 261). The approach to the interpretation of the biblical text “recommended” in this encyclical, was described as that which is “required for the adaptation of Scripture studies to the needs of our day” (n. 59, p. 265). The work of exegetes was commended as responsible for
restoring Catholics’ “confidence in the authority and historical value of the Bible” (n. 43, pp. 259-260).

Two further documents, one in 1948, the other in 1955, were significant in furthering the trajectory set by *Divini Afflante Spiritu*. In a Letter to Cardinal Suhard, Archbishop of Paris, in 1948 (Document 91 in Murphy, 2007, pp. 273-276), the Pontifical Biblical Commission stated that notwithstanding their responses in 1905, 1906 and 1909\(^{183}\) (p. 274), “concerning narratives only apparently historical”, the “Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch” and the historicity of Genesis 1-3, respectively, these earlier statements did not preclude further study or “scientific examination of these problems” (p. 274). In 1955, the Secretaries of the Biblical Commission virtually rescinded the decrees issued by the Commission in the early twentieth century: provided that matters of faith and morals were not concerned: “it goes without saying that scholars may pursue their research with complete freedom … provided always that they defer to the supreme teaching authority of the Church” (pp. 300-301).

The pontificate of Pius XII (1939-1958) was a period in which scholarship gained momentum. Scholars such as Joseph Fitzmyer and Raymond Brown (Byrne, 2003, p. 3), using the historical-critical method, provided the foundations for the next generation of Catholic biblical scholars (p. 3). However, in the last year of Pius XII’s pontificate and the early period of John XXIII those opposed to the new direction in biblical scholarship sought to gain the ascendancy (Byrne, 2003, p. 4; Brown & T. Collins, 1995, p. 1168): for example, in 1961, on the eve of Vatican II, “the Holy Office issued a warning against ideas that were calling in question the genuine historical and objective truth of Scripture” (Brown & T. Collins, 1995, p. 1168). These conservative forces sought to influence the position on biblical scholarship to be adopted by Vatican II which began in 1962 (Byrne, 2003, p. 4; Brown & T. Collins, p. 1168).

\(^{183}\) These are documents 45, 47, 57 (Murphy, 2007) discussed above.

The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Vatican II, Dei Verbum, was proclaimed on 18 November, 1965. It endorsed the study of scripture which sought to “carefully search out the meaning which the sacred writers really had in mind, that meaning which God had thought well to manifest through the medium of their words” (n. 12). In doing so, scholars were to consider “literary forms”, “the customary and characteristic patterns of perception, speech and narrative which prevailed at the age of the sacred writer,” while paying attention “to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture, taking into account the Tradition of the entire Church and the analogy of faith” (n. 12).

The document issued on the eve of the closure of the Council, Dei Verbum, had gone through five revisions (Brown & T. Collins, 1995, p. 1169) from 1962 to 1965. The draft, “The Sources of Revelation”, prepared by those who sought to entrench a conservative position on the interpretation of scripture, was withdrawn by John XXIII (p. 1168). For three years the commission appointed by John XXIII, on which biblical scholars were represented, debated successive drafts of what became Dei Verbum. During the period in which Dei Verbum was being produced, the Instruction by the Pontifical Biblical Commission on “The historical truth of the Gospels” (Sancta Mater Ecclesia), 1964, (Document 101, Murphy, pp. 318-325) signified the acceptance of a “scholarly, Catholic hermeneutics” which makes “use of the new exegetical techniques, particularly those advocated by the historical method taken as a whole” (p. 319). The most significant pronouncement was that which recognised the three stages in the development of the gospels (pp. 320-322). It was in the spirit of this document, that the Council’s pronouncement on biblical interpretation was given its final form.

Chapter 5 of Dei Verbum, on the New Testament, affirms “the apostolic origin of the four Gospels” (n. 18) and their historicity (n. 19); the three stages in the
composition of the gospels, affirmed in *Sancta Mater Ecclesia*, 1964, is implicit (n. 19). Chapter 6, on the role of scripture in the life of the Church (n. 21, 26), elevates the significance of the “Word of God” to a position comparable with the “Body of Christ”, particularly in the celebration of the Eucharist.\textsuperscript{184} Access by the people to the scriptures is affirmed and the spiritual life of the faithful is to be nourished by prayerful reading of the scriptures (n. 25). The provision of appropriate translations was to be “a joint effort with the separated brethren” where possible (n. 22). As the historical-critical method of exegesis became the accepted approach to the exploration of the text, so, too, was ecumenism, already a reality among scholars (e.g. Byrne, 2003, p. 3), furthered by *Dei Verbum* (e.g. O’Collins, 2006, pp. 8-9).

However, in the post-conciliar period the historical-critical method of exegesis, freed from the constraints of earlier decades, came to be judged by many biblical scholars as inadequate if used exclusively. Many scholars sought to include the response of the reader in the world in front of the text, and considered the way in which the received text, as a literary entity in its own right, addressed the needs of people in the contemporary world.

*The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993).\textsuperscript{185}

In this document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission the statement that the “historical-critical method is the indispensable method for the scientific study of the meaning of ancient texts” (p. 35) represents the apogee for critical biblical scholarship. Approaches, including those based on literary analysis (pp. 42-52), the human sciences (pp. 59-65) and contextual approaches—liberationist and feminist (pp. 66-72)—are also described and evaluated. The “primary task of the exegete” is defined as determining “as accurately as possible the meaning of biblical texts” in their literary

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\textsuperscript{184} This new emphasis conforms to other outcomes of Vatican II in relation to the liturgy and the Church perceived as the People of God.

\textsuperscript{185} The text cited is that published by St Paul Books & Media, 1993.
and historical contexts and “then in the context of the wider canon of Scripture”. The section on Hermeneutical Questions (pp. 76-88) extended the scope by considering the philosophical issues involved in the interpretation of texts.

Scholars welcomed the document, setting it within the context of the key documents, including *Dei Verbum*, which had brought the tools of the historical-critical method within the purview of Catholic scholars (e.g. R. Collins, 1994). While this method was accepted as “the foundational method for exegesis”, there was recognition of its limitations. Scholars endorsed the argument implicit in the 1993 document that other approaches were needed to supplement critical exegesis in order to address the conditions in which the text was read in the twenty-first century (e.g. Kenney, 2006).

**Trends in the twenty-first century.**

The document by the Pontifical Biblical Commission (2002), *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*, affirmed both the integrity of the Jewish scriptures and their integral role in the Christian Bible. This document marks a felicitous moment after almost two thousand years of a fractured and fraught relationship. The portrayal of the Jewish people in the New Testament, especially in the gospels, is examined honestly and the context in which these texts were written—one of the fruits of the historical-critical method of exegesis—is explained. Although steps had already been taken in some local communities to redress the insensitivities and injustices perpetrated in earlier inadequate exegesis, for example, in the 1994 document of The Council of Christians and Jews, Victoria, *Rightly explaining the word of truth*, the formal statement of the Church was highly significant.

*The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993) had criticised a fundamentalist or “naively literalist interpretation”, and asserted that such an
interpretation is theologically unsound and “incapable of accepting the full truth of the Incarnation itself” (p. 73). In recent years this theological problem has been cited by those concerned about the growth of fundamentalism, including Trainor (2004c, p. 34) and Fallon (2004). Trainor identified two factors contributing to the appeal of a literalist, or fundamentalist, understanding of scripture: (i) “nostalgia” for the past (Trainor, 2004b, p. 31), and (ii) ignorance and biblical illiteracy on the part of many Catholics (p. 32). The second point confirms the stance taken in this thesis that it is essential that students have a hermeneutically sound understanding of the biblical text.

Recent statements by Benedict XVI, for example, his Discourse to the Swiss Bishops, 7 November, 2006 (Document 178, in Murphy, 2007, pp. 1003-1005), indicate his concern that scripture speaks to people in the present. He recommends “‘canonical exegesis’ (still ... in its timid first stages)”, and “a spiritual interpretation ... that is not merely externally edifying but rather an inner immersion in the presence of the Word” (p. 1005). At the Bishops’ Synod on the Word of God, 5-26 October, 2008, Benedict XVI is reported in an article in The Tablet (18 October, 2008, p. 35) urging the Synod to include in its proposals the following two points: (i) “to insist that the historical-critical method be balanced by a ‘hermeneutic of faith’”; and (ii) “that scripture scholars be educated in this principle” (Mickens, 2008).

**Biblical scholarship and education.**

This discussion of biblical scholarship has focussed on the gradual acceptance within the Catholic tradition of the historical-critical approach to biblical exegesis. This focus is justified on two grounds: (i) the history of Catholic biblical scholarship is reflected in the way in which the Bible has been taught in the religious education classroom; and (ii) the relevance of biblical scholarship for religious education in the present.
The alacrity with which Catholic biblical scholars embraced their greater academic freedom was not matched by the fruits of their study extending far beyond academia: for example, J. Collins (1986, p. 11) noted that “the principles of historical criticism have not deeply influenced the laity of either Catholicism or mainline Protestantism”.

Writing later, and in an Australian context, Byrne (2003) makes a similar point, noting that beyond a “minority” who have undertaken courses and workshops and become “scripturally literate” (p. 6), for most people the “legacy of the historical-approach” is not a reality, and that “biblical literacy in the wider cultural sense diminishes more and more” (pp. 6-7). It is from the group which has become conversant with the insights provided by contemporary biblical scholarship (Byrne, 2004b, p. 28) that those who seek to promote the educational application of biblical insights to the next generation must be drawn.

Before considering what should be taught about scripture in the twenty-first century and how it may be taught more effectively, an appreciation of the teaching of the Bible in schools in the past is appropriate.

5.2 Teaching the Bible: A Historical Perspective

Just as official Church teaching establishes the parameters within which biblical scholarship is conducted, so too does it determine the way in which Catholic religious education is conducted and the way in which the Bible is used within the religious education programme. This section will consider the way in which the Bible was used within each of the approaches to teaching catechetics in Australia from the period prior to Vatican II up to the early twenty-first century: the traditional, kerygmatic, and
life-centred approaches,\textsuperscript{186} and, in Melbourne, the Guidelines period and the Textbook Project.\textsuperscript{187} The following three factors will be considered: (i) the approach to the scripture and biblical scholarship underpinning the use of scripture in religious education; (ii) how the biblical text is used in teaching; and (iii) the extent to which an understanding of the Bible \textit{per se} is part of the education.

\textbf{The traditional approach}

In the period of the traditional approach, current up until the early 1960s, the main instrument of instruction was the Catechism, a series of questions and answers to be memorised. In many of these answers points of doctrine and moral precepts were emphasised by short quotes from the Bible. The Bible was used primarily for proof-texting. In this period the Bible was not studied as such: the nature of the Bible was not discussed; the various genres within the Bible were not differentiated; and the literal truth of the scripture was not questioned, within the hierarchical Church generally and within education; rather it was taught as Bible history.\textsuperscript{188} Stories from the Bible were re-told in contemporary language, so that knowledge of the Bible was in the form of uncritical learning of biblical narratives from secondary sources. The implicit understanding was that the stories were true—for children that meant historically true—and were for the moral edification of the young. At the secondary level, in some schools at least, a gospel was read in each of the first four years, in canonical order. In this period Sunday Mass attendance was widespread and young people would have heard the Sunday readings from the Epistles and Gospels, and, more infrequently, readings from the Old Testament.

\textsuperscript{186} Noted above in Chapter 1.2, p. 26.
\textsuperscript{187} These approaches are all discussed in detail in Appendix 1.
\textsuperscript{188} For example, Schuster’s Bible History (1889) was widely used. It covered the period from the Creation to the end of the Acts of the Apostles. Each chapter told a particular story (e.g. \textit{The Parable of the Prodigal Son}, Chapter XLV in the New Testament section, pp. 302-305) in a series of short numbered paragraphs, with key words (e.g., “unquenchable”, p. 241) explained, and several short comprehension-type questions at the end.
The opportunity provided to biblical scholars by *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, 1943, caused no ripple in the classroom. This was to be typical in the teaching of scripture in schools: advances made in the realm of biblical scholarship in seminaries and academies took a very long time to percolate down to the parish, the people, and the classroom in Australia. *Heilsgeschichte*, or Salvation History, changed the approach to religious education and the way the Bible was used, but in a way which was dependent upon quite a different approach to biblical interpretation from that espoused by historical-critical practitioners.

**The kerygmatic approach**

The kerygmatic approach to religious education derived from two quite distinct sources: the Catholic catechetical renewal in Europe in the 1930s (Jungmann, 1959, p. 33); and *Heilsgeschichte*, the “overarching hermeneutical principle” (Boys, 1980, p. 9) which had initially developed within the context of the Protestant “biblical theology movement” (p. 13). This movement, which started in nineteenth century Germany, was furthered in the twentieth century by biblical scholars von Rad and Cullman (p. 9). Jungmann (1959) brought these two sources together, incorporating his particular understanding of the principle of salvation history into Catholic kerygmatic theology (pp. 76-88) and catechesis.

As a hermeneutical principle, *Heilsgeschichte* was Christocentric (Boys, 1980, pp. 84-88). The approach to scripture was typological. The Old Testament recorded God’s covenant with Israel which was seen as a preparation for the culmination of God’s salvific action in Christ (e.g. Jungmann, 1959, p. 103), with “the history of salvation being carried through to the parousia” (Boys, 1980, p. 100). Events in the Old Testament were interpreted in the light of the new covenant in Christ: for example, the Exodus was seen as prefiguring Christian baptism.

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189 Discussed in Appendix 1.
Jungmann focussed on Bible History in catechetics. The focus was to be on “the gradual growth of the kingdom of God” and “the Christian economy of salvation”, in which the Old Testament was seen as “preparing and laying the foundations; the New Testament building up and perfecting it” (Jungmann, 1959, p. 103). In “Bible History the focus was on narratives, for example, “paradise, the fall, the promise of the Redeemer … and finally the coming of the Saviour, his work for the whole of mankind which is continued in and through the Church” (p. 106). These narratives were to be told from “an abridgment of Sacred Scripture for the use of children” (p. 105).

Hofinger introduced the kerygmatic approach to Australia. The substance of his message was that catechists “should initiate their subjects” into the “mystery of Christ”, “primarily through a biblical-historical catechesis that leads to Christ through the telling of the story of salvation” (Boys, 1980, p. 91). From the Old Testament, the focus was to be only on “the creation, fall, and promise of the redeemer” (p. 91).

In Australia the influence of the kerygmatic approach was clearly discernible in the development of the new *Catholic Catechism*—Book 1 (1962) for Grades 5 and 6, and Book 2 (1963) for the early years of the secondary school—which were “Issued and Prescribed for Use in the Catholic Schools of Australia by the Australian Hierarchy” (*Catholic Catechism*, Book Two, 1963, title page). The students’ books followed the history of salvation from Genesis through the Patriarchs, the “life of Christ in and through His Church” (p. viii), the Commandments and the four last things.

The approach in these short-lived texts was clearly kerygmatic: the focus was on salvation history, and the approach to the Bible was typological. The Teacher’s Book for Book 1 (1962) included examples of how to interpret the Bible typologically: the New Testament “lies hidden in the Old” (pp. 13-15). The Teacher’s Book for Book 2

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190 These texts and the accompanying Teacher’s books were issued by the Australian Bishops’ Committee for Education.
(1963) reiterated the salvation history approach and provided further discussion of typology (pp. 27-28). Teachers were advised to not get “bogged down” in exegesis (p. 31), and when using the Bible in class to consider what the text says, to draw on the explanations of good scholars, and avoid “legendary accretions” which had occurred in the past (p. 32). Students’ interest in science at that age was noted (p. 99) and that teachers had once been “embarrassed” (p. 98) by the question of science and Genesis. The 1948 document by the Pontifical Biblical Commission was cited, referring to the “literary form”, the use of “figurative language” and the fact that there were two accounts of creation (p. 98).

In Australian religious education in the early 1960s, therefore, biblical scholarship was acknowledged and the significance of literary genre and the use of figurative language in scripture were drawn to the attention of teachers. However, the Bible was interpreted typologically, exclusively, it would seem, and the texts were used to support a Christocentric pedagogy. The Bible was not studied in its own right. The kerygmatic approach was short-lived, to be followed by the life-centred approach to religious education, the seeds of which were sown in the later Catechetical Study Weeks by scholars such as Nebreda and Audinet.

The life-centred or anthropological approach

With the shift in emphasis from the subject matter of instruction to the recipients, the focus became the life experiences of the students. The use of scripture was integrated into the course. It was essentially up to the teacher to determine how Christian belief and scripture were used. In the Come Alive teaching materials used at the senior secondary level in Australia, for example, Unit 2 on Jesus—“Was there such a

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192 To the extent that teachers actually read the Teacher’s Book which accompanied the student text!
193 See Appendix 1 for a more detailed discussion.
194 Issued by the Australian Bishops’ Committee for Education.
person?”—sought to engage “the meaning of Christ for us as proclaimed in the Scriptures and understood in the Church” (p. 16) and “the historical Christ” in the Gospels (p. 16). The study of the Bible as such was not part of the programme. This is significant because many of those who subsequently became religious education teachers were products of this period which eschewed a detailed sequential curriculum and cognitive outcomes.

The Melbourne Guidelines period

A survey of the way in which the Bible was featured in the Guidelines for teaching religious education in the Archdiocese of Melbourne (1977-78, 1984 and 1995) indicates how the role of the Bible in religious education, and what was expected of teachers and students in relation to an understanding of the biblical text, changed over a generation. The focus will be on the secondary school.


The approach to religious education was catechetical. The “learning process” was organised around four aspects (Guidelines, Part 1, Overview, 1977, p. 13); of the five responses to one of those aspects, experience, one related to scripture (p. 13), otherwise there was no specific reference of scripture.

The way the Bible was used in these Guidelines was principally to support the points made in the context of the chosen concepts. The Middle Secondary course, however, included interpretation of certain passages from the prophets and a study of a gospel. The references to the gospels indicates that the understanding of the three stages in the formation of the gospels, enunciated in 1964 by the Pontifical Biblical Commission in Sancta Mater Ecclesia, was filtering through to the secondary school

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195 All the Guidelines were issued by the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne.
curriculum. However, the scriptures as such did not constitute a separate section of the course; skills in the use of scripture were to be addressed, almost incidentally, in the course of addressing the topics which comprised the content of the religious education programme.¹⁹⁶

The 1984 Guidelines.

In the Curriculum Overview (Guidelines, 1984, pp. 13ff) scripture was included in the sources of the Church’s teaching (pp. 11-12). Citing the Australian Bishops’ Renewal of the Education of Faith (1970), it was stated that a “sound interpretation of Scripture is made ‘by keeping in mind the unity of all the Scriptures and by having recourse to the faith and the mind of the Church’ (R.E.F. 107)” (p. 11). However, the biblical text was still used in the context of the development of particular units, although Concept 2, Revelation, was more directly focussed on scripture and the skills in interpreting it. The influence of the historical-critical method, interpreted within the teaching authority of the Church, is clearly discernible in the topics to be covered, the learning objectives and, perhaps more importantly, in the support provided for teachers. For example, each topic included a Theological Reflection which provided background information and a Teacher Reflection which included a number of biblical references to which teachers were directed. However, the extent to which advantage was taken of the resources provided would have depended upon the planning of courses at school level

¹⁹⁶ Topics and Units under certain sub-divisions of Concept 1, Jesus, and Concept 2, Revelation, included references to scripture: for example, “Significant Old Testament People”, “The World of the New Testament”, at the Junior Secondary level; “Writing of the Gospels”, “A Synoptic Gospel”, “at the Middle Secondary level; and “Israelite Images of God” at the Senior Secondary level (Part 2, 1978, p. 17). More detailed descriptions of each sub-division of Concept 1, Jesus, indicated that shades of the salvation history approach remained (Part 1, 1977, p. 26). Middle Secondary students were to have “some skill in use of New Testament” (p. 23). For example, for Concept 2, Revelation, at the Middle Secondary level, work with the scriptures included the skill of interpreting “some of the passages from the prophets” (p. 31); within the context of different types of literature, a “simple study of one of the Gospel accounts of Jesus and his message” (p. 33); and “Knowledge and understanding of the authorship of the Gospels and how they came to be written” (p. 33).
and the professional development of staff, many of whom would have had little background in biblical studies and biblical interpretation.

In Concept 2, Revelation, the world behind the text was being given more attention than previously. For example, at the Junior Secondary level, references to Old Testament and New Testament “stories” included “knowledge of, and skill in using the Old Testament” (p. 30) and the New Testament (p. 32), a “Basic knowledge of the Jewish culture in which Jesus lived” and “of the world and people of New Testament times” (p. 32). At the Middle Secondary level, reference was made to the “literary forms” of the gospels, “the inspired word of God written in human words” (p. 33), and the process by which they were written (p. 33). The addition of “literary” to the “historical … context of scriptural passages” was also made at the Senior Secondary level (p. 31), indicating that the historical-critical method of exegesis was influencing secondary school curriculum documents.

The 1995 Guidelines.

The 1995 Guidelines gave more prominence to scripture than had previously been the case. Section 3, “Curriculum and Policy Development in Religious Education” (pp. 25-48), contained a sub-section on the role of the scriptures in religious education (pp. 35-36). Three uses of the scriptures were identified as of “benefit” to students: “as nourishment for prayer and meditation; as a reference to enrich the teaching and learning content; as a study of the text as literature” (p. 35). The third use opened the way for more specific teaching of the Bible as a text, using the insights and tools of critical biblical scholarship. It was specifically stated that “as well as familiarising themselves with biblical texts, it is also important that students understand and use

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197 The 1995 Guidelines encompassed Years P-12. The Secondary Guidelines were produced for three levels: Junior, Middle, and Senior Secondary for Years 7-8, 9-10 and 11-12 respectively. Sections 1-5 were identical for each level. Section 6, which contained Units of Work, was particular to each level, as were many of the resources listed in Section 7.
methods of biblical criticism” (p. 36) in order that they “be drawn more deeply into the
texts, leading to more informed beliefs and understandings” (p. 36).

An analysis of the fourteen Learning Goals, which were further sub-divided into
fifty-four Key Learnings, reveals that for the most part specific references to the Bible
occur within the context of other teaching. For example, The Creation stories in
Genesis were to be studied within the context of “God, the Creator, values us and
invites us to cooperate in the work of creation. In so doing, we enjoy, explore and
discover more about the world around us” (Guidelines, 1995, p. 106). At Years 7-8 the
focus was on human “responsibility towards creation”; at Years 9-10, students were to
“be familiar with creation stories from a range of religious and cultural traditions” and
to “compare religious explanations of creation with some scientific explanations” (p.
106). The approach to texts is clearly influenced by biblical scholarship; however,
scripture is embedded within topics on broader theological issues.

Of the seventeen Units for Years 7-8, two focus quite substantially on the Bible,
especially Unit 2, “Remembrance of Things Past” (pp. 2.1-2.17, Section 6, Junior
Secondary). This includes “the story of God’s relationship with the Hebrew people” (p.
2.2): for example, “the Exodus and its key significance for the Hebrew people” (p. 2.2);
and King David, understood in terms of “the Jewish expectation that the Messiah
would belong to the house of David” (p. 2.3). The context, therefore, is the covenant,
salvation history and the New Testament as the culmination and completion of the Old
Covenant. In this unit it was also expected that students would “become familiar with
and use the system of abbreviations and references for biblical texts” (p. 2.3).

At the Middle School two units dealt specifically with the Bible: Unit 1, the Old
Testament and Unit 2, the New Testament. The full titles indicate the focus: “The Story
of the Covenant” and “The Jesus Story”. The content in each was extensive. Unit 1
included inspiration; literary form; creation stories in a range of traditions and
comparison with scientific explanations; “some knowledge of the history of salvation as recorded in the Exodus and the Exile”; the prophets; and skills in cross-referencing (p. 1.3). Unit 2 included: the role of the evangelists, the infancy narratives “in their historical and literary contexts”, the gospels as written for a particular audience, and the writings of Paul as “a guide for living a Christian life today” (p. 2.3).

As in 1984, the biblical text was still used principally in the context of units of work organised around broader doctrinal topics. However, more attention was paid to studying the Bible as a text, with an awareness of the context and form of the different genres and the need for interpretation. What is questioned is the extent to which teachers’ background knowledge in biblical interpretation would have enabled them to take full advantage of the opportunities which these Guidelines presented, and, just as importantly, the demands made on students’ understanding of the issues and skills in interpretation. This is especially so as teaching of the biblical text occurred within parameters set by a broader doctrinal and catechetical context rather than as a study of the Bible in its own right.

The 1995 Guidelines—delayed by the imminent expectation of the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church—incorporated an approach to the teaching of scripture which showed that cognisance was being taken of the insights provided by biblical scholarship. The period during which these Guidelines were current was curtailed by the introduction of the textbook project.

The text-based religious education curriculum: To Know, Worship and Love

In June, 1997, Archbishop George Pell established a Committee “to enquire into material that might be incorporated into new religious education texts for primary and secondary students in the Archdiocese of Melbourne” (Report of the Committee of

198 This is also referred to as “The Melbourne Textbook Project” (Engebretson, 2000, p. 30).
Enquiry into Religious Education Texts, 1998, p. 1). The Terms of Reference for the Committee linked development in faith to knowledge and understanding and directed that the texts “be written to encourage thinking and enquiry” and “strive to provide reasons for the faith which the Church professes”. The content was to be “Scripture-based and taken from the traditional Catholic sources, especially the Catechism of the Catholic Church” (Report, 1998, p. 3).

The text-based curriculum which ensued was an adaptation of Moore and Habel’s (1982) typology. One of the six aspects of religion which provided the structure within which the textbook material was organised, was Story and Scripture (Engebretson, 2002, p. 41; Buchanan & Engebretson, 2009). The organisation of the content of To Know, Worship and Love meant, therefore, that scripture was being taught as a part of the course in its own right, rather than solely within the context of a broader unit as had been the case previously. Separate chapters in the texts were devoted to a study of scripture. For example, in the first edition of the texts Chapter 8 in the Year 10 text was “How to read the Bible”, and included such sections as “Understanding biblical writing”, “Is the Bible true?”, and “The synoptic gospels”, with a consideration of the context of each synoptic gospel (Teaching Companion, Year 10, 2002, p. 72). Teachers were directed to thirteen paragraphs from the Catechism of the Catholic Church “for background reading and reflection” (pp. 72-74). An article by a biblical scholar was included for teachers’ background reading (pp. 77-79). The influence of contemporary biblical scholarship and the historical-critical method was readily discernible in the student texts.

The present programme in Victoria, Coming To Know, Worship and Love, issued by the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, has five content strands, the first one of

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199 Topics were re-organised in the second edition (2003) and the chapter on “How to read the Bible” became Chapter 2 in the Year 9 text. The Year 10 text (2003) has two chapters on the Bible: “Formation of the Gospels” and “The Good News of Mark”.

200 Student and teacher texts are referenced in the Bibliography under the name of Peter Elliott as General Editor.
which is “Scripture and Jesus”. Objectives are expressed in terms of “Values and Attitudes”, “Knowledge”, and “Skills”. The following provides a short quote from each of these categories of overall objectives for the “Scripture and Jesus” strand for Years 7-10: students are to appreciate “that the Scriptures are the Word of God for all people and generations”; to develop “an understanding of the nature of Scripture and its portrayal of the story of the People of God”; to use “appropriate tools to interpret the Scriptures” (Secondary Framework, Introduction, p. 10). Six units of “Scripture and Jesus” are contained in the texts over the four years, 7-10. The titles of these Units are listed, together with the corresponding chapters in the present student text (Secondary Framework, Introduction, p. 15):

Year 7:  Unit 1a: The Word of God as Sacred Story (Chapters 1, 2, 3)
Year 7:  Unit 1b: Key People and Stories in the Old Testament (Chapters 2, 4, 5, 6, 7)
Year 8:  Unit 1a: The Jewish context of the life and words of Jesus (Chapters 1, 16)
Year 9:  Unit 1a: Literary Forms in the Scriptures (Chapters 1, 2)
Year 9:  Unit 1b: Wisdom and Prophetic Literature (Chapters 3, 4)
Year 10: Unit 1a: A Synoptic Gospel (Chapters 1, 2)

In this Curriculum Framework, therefore, scripture is studied in its own right; the approach draws on the findings of contemporary biblical scholarship and students are encouraged to develop their skills and understanding: for example, the Year 10 unit lists one of the skills as using “Gospel material to illustrate the portrayal of Jesus in Mark’s Gospel” (p. 17).

This approach to the study of scripture in the secondary school represents a marked change from the proof-texting in catechism answers of the 1950s. Students in the twenty-first century have available to them a curriculum which incorporates the insights provided by Catholic biblical scholarship. In devising an effective learning

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201 Details of the Units are in the Curriculum Framework for each year level: Year 7, pp. 17-37; Year 8, pp. 17-28; Year 9, pp. 17-39; Year 10, pp. 17-31.
programme, an understanding of the various approaches to biblical interpretation is required, including an appreciation of methods of exegesis and hermeneutical principles.

5.3 Approaches to Biblical Interpretation

How the Bible is interpreted influences the meaning which is derived from the text. Interpretation involves both the methods used in exegesis and the hermeneutical principles which constitute the philosophical framework within which the interpretation or reading of the text occurs. This description of approaches to interpretation and methods of exegesis is directed towards understanding how texts are read today and identifying elements which are residues of former approaches which may go unrecognised. Historical-critical exegesis has made clear the importance of recognising how texts are constructed; however, it is also important to identify the explicit and implicit presuppositions which are integral to a reading of the texts. The need to be clear about how the text may be understood by the uninitiated is especially relevant in an educational context such as the secondary school.

The allegorical approach

The allegorical approach was at its zenith in Alexandria in the early Patristic period in the second and third centuries. Allegory has been described as “a rhetorical device that calls for a ‘higher’ sense of interpretation than the literal” (Ferguson, 1986, p. 140). It is “a veiled presentation, a figurative story with a meaning implied but not expressly stated” (p. 140). However, it is necessary to differentiate between the use of allegory by an author and an allegorical interpretation of a text. An allegorical interpretation refers to the reader looking beyond the literal or historical sense to find “a hidden meaning” (p. 140). The distinction between the use of allegory as a literary
device and allegory as an interpretative principle is vital. It is the latter which is the focus of this section.

One who uses an allegorical interpretation is seeking “the symbolic meaning” (Ferguson, 1986, p. 143) in a text. An allegorical interpretation was polyvalent, seeking to identify layers of meaning in a text in order to reach its spiritual meaning. In the case of Origen, it was “pastorally orientated” and intended to address the different “spiritual capabilities” of the members of the congregation (p. 168).

Spiritualising the message (Thiselton, 1992, p. 158) may have been the main purpose of Christian allegorical interpretation in Patristic and Mediaeval times (p. 158), however it is also interesting to consider other ways in which such an interpretation was used. In the third century Origen was responding to issues raised in the interpretation of scripture which are still significant in the twenty-first century, including issues which concern adolescents. An allegorical Interpretation was a way of dealing with “unacceptable” passages of scripture, for example “accounts of events in Scripture which if taken literally are absurd” and gospel passages “that contradict one another” (Ferguson, 1986, p. 144). Thiselton cites Origen, who, he stated, “invites his readers to use their intelligence about what this language is meant to convey” (Thiselton, 1992, p. 169).

Typology “represents a parallel, analogy, or correspondence between two or more historical events” in contrast to allegory where the comparison involves “ideas” (Thiselton, 1992, p. 163). Salvation history, in which the Old Covenant is seen as a type of the fulfilment of God’s promise of salvation in and through Jesus, is an example of typology which has been widely used, for example, in the kerygmatic approach to religious education. Analogy is similar to typology, but “implies a less binding and

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202 Origen, Contra Celsum 4:41; De Principiis iv 3:1, 2 (Thiselton, 1992, pp. 169, 177).
exact correspondence”; “people and events in the Old Testament correspond to people and events in the New Testament” (Ferguson, 1986, p. 87).

**The spiritual sense**

A spiritual reading may be associated with an allegorical interpretation of the scripture; however, they are not identical. The term “spiritual sense” has been used in a number of ways over the centuries (Fitzmyer, 1994, pp. 62-68). In the Middle Ages, “the spiritual or mystical sense … was subdivided into three forms: the allegorical, the moral (or tropological), and the anagogic (or eschatological) senses” (p. 67). The fourth form was the literal.

The Pontifical Biblical Commission (1993, pp. 84-86) defines “the spiritual sense as understood by Christian faith, as the meaning expressed by the biblical texts when read, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, in the context of the paschal mystery of Christ and of the new life which flows from it” (p. 85). Typological understanding is cited as one aspect of the spiritual sense, for example, “Adam as the figure of Christ” (p. 86). The understanding which the Commission puts forward is one which is not antithetical to the literal sense of scripture: when “a biblical text related directly to the paschal mystery of Christ … its literal sense is already a spiritual sense” (p. 85; cf Fitzmyer, 1994, p. 63). In contrast, the “‘fuller sense’ (sensus plenior)”, “another way of indicating the spiritual sense of a biblical text” (PBC, 1993, p. 87), is defined as “a deeper meaning of the text, intended by God but not clearly expressed by the human author” (p. 87). This “fuller sense” entails reading meaning into a text as distinct from extracting the meaning from the text as is the case in a literal interpretation.
Literal interpretation

The literal interpretation of scripture has been widely used throughout Christian history. It seeks to use the available interpretive skills to determine what the human author meant in the historical, cultural and linguistic setting in which a particular text was written.

The literal approach is to be clearly differentiated from a literalist interpretation in which the words of the biblical texts are read literally, without consideration of the context in which they were written or the literary genre used by the author. A literalist interpretation holds, for example, that the earth was created by God in six days and uses biblical texts to calculate the age of the earth. Such an interpretation of the Bible can lead to fundamentalism in which, *inter alia*, the Bible is seen as a source of scientific knowledge and attempts are made to stop the teaching of evolution in schools. Fundamentalists consciously adopt a literalist reading of the scriptures. Young people, becoming aware of the discrepancies between the biblical account of creation and the scientific explanation, can become critical of the Bible, because they implicitly apply a literalist interpretation to familiar passages or because they believe that such an interpretation is the only way in which the Bible may be read.

It is the purpose of this thesis to seek ways to facilitate young people’s transition from a literalist interpretation of scripture to one which appreciates the nature of the biblical text and interprets it in a way which takes cognisance of the historical setting in which the different books were written. Difficult texts, which in earlier times were explained to the satisfaction of believers and scholars through an allegorical interpretation, can now be explained to sceptical young people in the twenty-first century using insights provided by the historical-critical method of exegesis. Students’ critical faculties can be engaged in interpreting texts and, ideally, in
discerning the religious message contained within texts which use a range of genres and linguistic techniques.

**The historical-critical method of exegesis**

The principles of the historical-critical method are summed up in the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s 1993 document: (i) it is a historical process which seeks to understand the diachronic processes which led to development of the text; (ii) it is a critical method, which seeks “to be as objective as possible” (p. 38).

During the nineteenth century the historical-critical method of biblical exegesis came to dominate Protestant biblical scholarship. In the Catholic tradition its acceptance was slower but it is now deemed “the indispensable method for the scientific study of the meaning of ancient texts” (*PBC*, 1993, p. 35). The premise upon which this method is based is the fact that the Bible is an ancient text, “composed by many human authors over a long period of time” (Fitzmyer, 1994, p. 19). The first task of exegesis is to determine as far as possible “the precise meaning of texts as produced by their authors” (*PBC*, 1993, p. 82). The tools, or processes, used to achieve this end, and which have developed progressively, one leading on to the next and a refinement of its predecessor, are as follows: textual criticism, literary criticism, source criticism, form criticism and redaction criticism.

- **Textual criticism**, the first in the process, sought out the earliest Greek and Hebrew manuscripts to establish a text “as close as possible to the original” (*PBC*, 1993, p. 39).

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203 The list varies somewhat between scholars. For example, the *PBC* (1993) document does not include “form criticism” referring instead to “genre criticism”, and adds another category, “tradition criticism” (p. 39).
- **Literary criticism** draws on philology to analyse “the grammar, syntax, and style” (Kenney, p. 8) of the particular text and the division of the text into smaller units (*PBC*, 1993, p. 39).

- **Source criticism** traces the units of which a text is composed back to their sources, using linguistic features within the text to isolate earlier versions of the text. Examples include the Pentateuch, within which three sources, the Priestly, Yahwist, and Elohist texts have been identified (Campbell & O’Brien, 1993, *passim*), and the two-source theory regarding the writing of the synoptic gospels.

- **Form criticism** considers the *Sitz-im-Leben* of the community in which a text developed and identifies the literary form of a biblical passage, and traces its history (Montague, 2003, p. 794); for example, in the gospel, a particular passage may be “a parable or other type of saying of Jesus, a miracle story, or a pronouncement story” (Fitzmyer, 1994, p. 23). The literary genre of a text is of fundamental importance in reading and interpreting the text.

  These steps “have sought to explain the text by tracing its origin and development within a diachronic perspective” (*PBC*, 1993, p. 39). The final step in the historical-critical process, is “synchronic” (p. 39), involving the text as it stands in the present.

- **Redaction criticism** studies how the writers of the biblical texts as they now stand “have shaped, modified, edited, or redacted the source material they have inherited” (Fitzmyer, 1994, p. 23) “in the interest of their own literary and religious goal or purpose” (p. 23). It is in this final redacted form that the original audience

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204 Arguably this is a misnomer in the light of subsequent approaches to the study of the biblical text as a literary construct, which is called narrative analysis.
received the text from the human author and is the form in which we now read it as part of the canon.

The historical-critical method has been invaluable in establishing the historical context in which a biblical text developed and reached its final form and in drawing out its literal meaning, as intended by the human author. Fitzmyer (1994, p. 29) sums up the ways in which the meaning of the text may be understood, which:

... includes not only the *textual meaning* (the sense of its words and phrases—what the medieval meant by the ‘literal’ sense), but also its *contextual meaning* (the sense of the words or phrases in a given passage or episode, a unit of the text), and its *relational meaning* (their sense in relation to the book or the corpus of works as a whole).

In the historical-critical method the focus is on the world behind the text, but starting from the text itself in discerning the processes at work in its construction, its genre and the linguistic features used by the author. Although pronounced “absolutely essential” (*PBC*, 1993, p. 82) for an understanding of the biblical text, the historical-critical method has its limitations: (i) “little is said about the text in its present state” (Kenney, 2006, p. 9); and (ii) it does not address the situation of contemporary readers. While the method has clearly shown “what a biblical text meant in its original context” (Byrne, 2003, p. 5), it has been less “helpful in regard to what it might now mean” (p. 5) in people’s lives in the present. Other approaches are needed to supplement—not replace—the historical-critical approach in order to examine and engage with the text in its final form and to address the world in front of the text.

**Other approaches to interpreting the biblical text**

The Pontifical Biblical Commission (1993) discussed a long list of recent methods of biblical interpretation: (i) New methods of literary analysis: for example, narrative analysis; (ii) approaches based on tradition: for example, the canonical approach; (iii)
approaches that use the human sciences: for example, the sociological approach, and (iv) contextual approaches: the liberationist approach and the feminist approach (pp. 42-72). Most of the recent approaches are synchronic, except the feminist approach which, like the historical-critical method on which it draws, is diachronic (Kenney, 2006, p. 10).

The focus in this overview will be on those approaches which are seen as applicable to the study of the scripture at the secondary school level, namely narrative criticism and feminist interpretation.

**Narrative criticism.**

The literary methods focus on the internal unity of the texts (PBC, 1993, p. 52). Of these the most important for teachers and students is narrative analysis which “studies how a text tells a story in such a way as to engage the reader in the ‘narrative world’ and the system of values contained therein” (p. 46). The narrative approach is a synchronic approach which involves both the world of the text and the world before the text. Focussing on the unfolding of a story is a well-founded means by which the reader can identify with and “enter into the experience of others” (Weber, 1994, p. 17).

While not all biblical texts are narratives, for those texts which do tell a story, readers can become involved in the events in the story, the characters, and the settings (Kenney, 2006, p. 9), and be drawn into “the world created by the author so that a certain response can be elicited” (p. 10). The approach has the potential for involving students in a range of activities which facilitate understanding; for example, by having students engage imaginatively in the story as a participant or as an observer and then articulate their experiences. Gospel stories, parables, and selected narratives from the Old Testament could be used in this way, facilitating “the transition ... from the
meaning of the text in its historical context ... to its significance for the reader of today” *(PBC, 1993, p. 48).*

That the narrative approach “needs to be supplemented by diachronic studies as well” *(PBC, 1993, p. 48)* does not detract from its potential. Recent scholarly publications have utilised the narrative approach in conjunction with a historical-critical basis and a faith-based vision to engage readers, for example, *Readings of the gospels of Luke, Matthew and Mark* (Byrne, 2000, 2004a, 2008).

**Feminist analysis.**

The feminist approach “seeks to transform androcentric scholarship and knowledge into truly human scholarship and knowledge, that is inclusive of all people” (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1983, p. xx). It includes devising a feminist critical hermeneutic (Chapter 1) and a reconstruction of Christian beginnings (Chapter 3). The purpose of a feminist biblical scholarship is not only to retrieve the text from its male bias, but also to challenge the consequences of an androcentric reading for women throughout Christian history and in the present.

Drawing students’ attention to the way in which the gospels portray Jesus in his interactions with women, and the role of such women as Priscilla (Acts 18:18) and Lydia (16:13-15) in the early Christian communities, can be a means of redressing an overly male bias by a re-focusing on what is clearly present in the texts. Similarly, drawing attention to feminine images of God in the Old Testament can challenge anthropomorphic images of God as well as showing the value of the feminine qualities which they convey.
Application to education

An understanding of the main approaches to biblical interpretation is applicable to religious education in three ways: (i) what it is important for teachers to be aware of and take into consideration in their teaching; (ii) the techniques of interpretation which it is appropriate that students should be taught to recognise and apply in reading and interpreting texts; and (iii) those skills which students should be trained in using.

In the context of religious education in the secondary school, the historical-critical approach is the most important in providing a “window” (PBC, 1993, p. 47) onto the world behind the text. The historical and cultural features of the ancient world of the Old Testament and of the first century CE need to be unmasked for students in order for them to understand the context in which the events in historical narratives unfold, for example, the cosmogony of peoples in the ancient Middle East; the Roman occupation of Judea at the time of Jesus, and relations between Jews and Samaritans. Depending upon the age of the students, numerous activities can be engaged in to arouse interest and to make the period come to life: for example, younger students could devise maps to give directions to a person travelling from Nazareth to Jerusalem (Ryan, 2001c, p. 3) and follow instructions to make a mezuzah (p. 28), thereby gaining skills in locating the appropriate passages in Deuteronomy and learning about the religious beliefs and practices of the Jewish faith.

The world of the text can be better understood by identifying and working with different genres: for example, students could “compare and contrast various literary genres in the New Testament that focus on the passion and resurrection of Jesus” (Ryan, 2001c, p. 131). As discussed above, by focussing on appropriate narratives, students can be given the opportunity to enter imaginatively into the world of the text with its rich array of locations and large cast of characters.
The Bible contains the Word of God whose message is to be applied to “contemporary circumstances” (PBC, 1993, p. 116). The more the biblical text, far removed in time and place, can come alive to students and its exotic qualities capitalized upon, the greater will be the openness of students to an awareness of the drama of human history. Re-interpreting parables, for example, the Good Samaritan, in the light of present circumstances and marginalized groups, can be a means of using narratives to focus on the world in front of the text.

In summary, an understanding of the historical-critical method of exegesis is essential for teachers’ background knowledge, and can be used profitably to provide students with an appreciation of the historical and cultural settings of the writers in order to better interpret the text. Students can be taught to analyse passages of text using the tools of critical biblical scholarship and to explore the world of the text through narrative analysis. In order to understand the processes involved in making meaning from a text, such that one’s personal life is influenced, an exploration of hermeneutics is in order.

5.4 Hermeneutics and Meaning

Hermeneutics is understood here in its broadest sense, to refer to the principles which constitute the philosophical framework within which the interpretation or reading of the text occurs. These principles are fundamental assumptions or presuppositions upon which an interpretation is premised and which accordingly influence the process of interpretation and the meaning which the reader takes from the text. The extent to which the reader is conscious of the way in which a reading of a text is presented is dependent upon a number of factors. These include the openness with which a reading or interpretation of a text is presented, the familiarity of the reader with the text within its context, and the extent to which the reader is both made aware of the
underlying assumptions and his or her capacity for metacognition, that is, reflection upon the interpretive task.

In relation to the study of the biblical text, hermeneutics has been defined as “an interpretation ... that proceeds from and addresses our world today” (PBC, 1993, p. 79). Hermeneutics is at the interface between text and “knowing subject” (p. 76), that is, between the cognitive and the existential dimensions of meaning-making. The cognitive, or intellectual, stages in acquiring meaning move from comprehension, to understanding of what is read, then, ideally, to a realisation or deeper awareness of the significance of what is learned. At a cognitive level, realisation is followed by application: there is a facility in using and interacting with the learned material which is expressed in the ability to apply it in new and different circumstances. At an existential level, realisation is, ideally, followed by appropriation. Appropriation involves both cognition and volition: not only does one see how one may respond existentially to the material learned, but one must also have the will to do so. In the interpretation of scripture, appropriation refers to “the encounter between the biblical text as Word of God, and the reader or hearer” and how in that process “the scriptures can become revelatory text” (Schneiders, 1991, p. 169).

The principles which constitute the philosophical framework within texts may be read and interpreted derive from philosophical hermeneutics (PBC, 1993, p. 76). The principles considered here are pre-understanding, the dialectic between text and reader, and the principle of distanciation (pp. 76-78). A brief description will be followed by a consideration of the application of these principles to education, using the questions stated above as a framework.205 (i) what it is important for teachers to be aware of and take into consideration when teaching; (ii) the hermeneutical principles which it is appropriate that students should be taught to recognise in reading and interpreting texts; and, in the process, (iii) promoting the development of

205 Reference will also be made to certain of these philosophical insights in Chapters 6 and 7.
metacognitive skills, including reflecting on one’s understanding of the text and the presuppositions which the reader has brought to the interpretation.\textsuperscript{206}

**The principle of pre-understanding\textsuperscript{207}**

Pre-understanding is defined by Ferguson (1986, p. 6) as “a body of assumptions and attitudes which a person brings to the perception and interpretation of reality or any aspect of it”. The concept can be traced back to Heidegger (Godzieba, 2003, p. 789). Objectivity is unattainable. Yet there is a positive aspect: one must have some pre-understanding to embark upon any interpretive task. To avoid the negative influence which pre-understanding may impose by distorting perceptions (Ferguson, 1986, p. 14) “one must allow preunderstandings to be deepened and enriched ... by the reality of the text” (PBC, 1993, p. 77).

In the educational context, it is necessary to first acknowledge to oneself the presuppositions which one brings to the study of the biblical text. Next, the teacher will encourage students to reflect on what they knew about and how they felt about the text before studying it, how their presuppositions may have influenced their initial response to the text, whether in the course of the study their assumptions had changed, and the possible reasons for any change or lack thereof. By making this process explicit, the religious educator will also be fostering the skills of metacognition and the broader educational goal of educating for reflective thinking.

\textsuperscript{206} The capacity for metacognition is discussed in Chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{207} Pre-understanding is implicit in Kitchener’s Reflective Judgment Model and three-Level Model of Cognitive Processing, in Kuhn’s epistemological understanding (Chapter 4.3 above) and in Mezirow’s Transformative learning (Chapter 4.4 above).
Gadamer and horizons of understanding

Gadamer starts from the premise that pre-understanding, is not only unavoidable but “enabling”, providing a starting point from which one can “begin understanding by projecting meaning” on to a new experience, for example, reading a text, “on the basis of our partial experience of it” (p. 790). A significant element in Gadamer’s hermeneutical theory is the concept of horizons. Just as past knowledge and experience has influenced one’s “present historical horizon” (p. 790), so when one comes into contact with new ideas the fusion of horizons broadens one’s existing boundaries and a new interpretation occurs. By engaging with a text one’s horizon may be enlarged: “Texts ... open new horizons for readers” (Thiselton, 1992, p. 8). In Gadamer’s hermeneutical philosophy, “the key to hermeneutical understanding is the application that occurs in the fusion of horizons” (Godzieba, 2003, p. 790), “a dialectical process” in which “the understanding of a text ... entails an enhanced understanding of oneself” (PBC, 1993, p. 77). The biblical text has the potential to be “transforming” (Thiselton, p. 8), provided that there is “a creative and productive interaction of horizons” (p. 8).

Educationally, the teacher’s role is to encourage the dialectic between the student’s present understanding and his or her active engagement with the text. This entails the type of classroom climate which, it has been argued, is conducive to education for faith: an open approach in which engagement with the subject matter is in the context of critical thinking and the exchange of present perceptions is the starting point for deeper exploration. However, the teacher needs to be aware that the distance between the present horizon of the student and the horizon which the text opens up for the student may be very different from that experienced by the teacher. Explanation of the historical and cultural context in the world behind the text

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208 See above, Chapter 3.4.
may be needed to bridge the gap between the student’s present level of knowledge and the contents of the text.

Gadamer’s construct of horizons of understanding is a reminder that understanding is neither simple nor immediate; nor can it be imposed. Understanding in this sense is deep and personal and is generated gradually by the individual. The educative task is to provide the circumstances in which such existential understanding may thrive. This is especially relevant in the case of young people’s encounters with the biblical text, where one’s ultimate hope is that the meaning will become “actualized in the lives of readers who appropriate it” (PBC, 1993, p. 78) and that the text becomes revelatory.

**Ricoeur and distanciation: the autonomy of the text**

Ricoeur has had a significant impact on hermeneutical theory. His tripartite distinction between the world behind the text, the world of the text, and the world in front of the text has become widely used in discourse on the biblical text (e.g. Schneiders, 1991, Part II).209 Ricoeur’s focus is on the text as it stands in its final form (Mudge, 1980, p. 2).

In his analysis of “the revelatory function” of texts, Ricoeur (1980c) argues that writing “produces a form of discourse that is immediately autonomous with regard to the author’s intention” (p. 99). Ricoeur moves from the world of the text to the world into which the text is projected and open to being appropriated by the reader: “what is finally to be understood in a text is not the author or his presumed intention, nor is it the immanent structure or structures of the text, but rather the sort of world intended beyond the text as its reference” (p. 100).

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209 These distinctions have been used in this thesis.
In Ricoeur’s hermeneutics, the term *distanciation* refers to the distancing of the text from its author and from the context in which it came into being. The text becomes autonomous and is, accordingly, open to being “recontextualized with new meanings” (Montague, 2003, p. 796) by new readers.

Meaning is attained by interpretation and involves “the methods of literary and historical analysis” (*PBC*, 1993, p. 78). Ricoeur (1980a) identifies three moments in the interpretive task, “‘naïve’ understanding, objective explanation, and appropriation” (pp. 43-44). Meaning comes from the text itself, with no recourse to the intention of the author or of the situation of the original audience.

Ricoeur accords language a significant role in his analysis of how meaning is attained. Especially significant is symbolic language, including metaphor and myth (Mudge, 1980, p. 4), which are important features of religious language. Metaphors “evoke new meanings” and “are a semantic signal of the ‘surplus of meaning’ that exceeds the literal meaning” (Godzieba, 2003, p. 790). However, for Ricoeur, “the meaning of a text can be fully grasped only as it is actualized in the lives of readers who appropriate it” (*PBC*, 1993, p. 78). Hermeneutics, therefore, is not only about explaining texts, but understanding human experience (Ferguson, 1986, p. 178). Interpretation involves the world in front of the text: through active engagement with the text, in a dialectic between explanation and understanding, the reader takes meaning from the text which has the power to be transformative. The process of meaning-making, therefore, goes beyond the cognitive and for Ricoeur is only completed when appropriated existentially.

The distinction between the world behind the text, the world of the text, and the world in front of the text provides a salutary reminder that a focus on the historical context within which a text is set is but one aspect of the teaching of a text, albeit an

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210 Religious language is discussed in detail in Chapter 6.
important one. The historical-critical method has provided a wealth of information on the historical and cultural period in which particular texts developed. Similarly, awareness of the literary form of a text influences the way in which meaning is taken from the text, especially when one is seeking to ensure that students do not take literally passages whose genres require a metaphorical or parabolic understanding of language. However, in Ricoeur’s hermeneutical philosophy, of which a key concept is distanciation, the crucial role is that of the reader or hearer, the actual, or real, readers in the twenty-first century classroom.

Ricoeur’s three moments in interpretation from initial understanding through explanation to comprehension, provide a reminder that, like pre-understanding, it is worthwhile ascertaining students’ present understanding of texts, such as gospel stories, parables and the creation stories, which they have heard many times. Accretions of misunderstanding are more likely to build up around what is most familiar, especially since the stories have accompanied their hearers from the time when they were very young children, through a mythic-literal stage of faith understanding and concrete operational thinking into the scepticism of late childhood and adolescence. The emotional changes which a young person undergoes can also affect the light within which religious texts are held, especially in adolescence. By taking Ricoeur’s first movement seriously, by engaging students in a discussion of their present understanding of and response to a particular text, the next stage, explanation, which is usually the focus of classroom teaching, may be more attuned to the type of explanation which will be most effective in leading to understanding.

Mudge (1980) refers to Ricoeur’s third interpretive moment as “the post-critical moment when we ourselves begin to testify in a divestiture of consciousness, which implicates our lives in the world ‘in front of’ the text” (p. 27). This statement of Ricoeur’s conflation of understanding and meaning-making with the actualization of meaning in the existential domain, as distinct from apprehension in the cognitive
domain, must sound a cautionary note to teachers who are dealing with young people in a non-voluntary educational situation. Appropriation of meaning so that a text becomes revelatory is deeply personal and part of the life-long journey of faith. Actualisation must not be forced. The role of the religious education classroom is to encourage students to think about a text, to ask questions, to suggest meanings, to be reflective, to consider how the message of a text may be applied to life in contemporary society. Appropriation may be facilitated by classroom activities; however, an open atmosphere which is free from any hint of pressure to respond existentially is essential for the integrity of students as individuals and the integrity of the scriptures whose message is offered freely and requires a free response. It is a response which many young people will not be ready to make at this stage in their lives.

The educative task is to ensure that in the cognitive dimension of meaning-making each student has a level of comprehension appropriate to his or her age and stage of cognitive development. As the young person matures, intellectually and emotionally, the teaching-learning process should seek to deepen the individual’s level of understanding, so that in a deeper awareness of the cognitive the religious and spiritual dimensions of scripture may be nurtured. One crucial element in such a pedagogy is to ensure that students learn to appreciate the significance of the distinctive characteristics of religious language; another is that they learn to recognise the language appropriate to different genres.

**Summary**

The historical review of the Catholic Church’s position on the interpretation of scripture shows how fraught the area can be. However, Vatican II confirmed the trend established by Pius XII to open up the scriptures to critical biblical scholarship. In these
early years of the twenty-first century the approach to teaching scripture advocated in this thesis may be accommodated within the parameters established by the magisterium. In the middle of last century it would not have been possible, and probably not even considered.

The teaching of scripture within the religious education programme has followed both the approach to Christian education and the Church’s pronouncements on biblical interpretation. In some periods the approach to religious education followed the general trend found in secular subjects; for example, school based curriculum development in Victoria in the 1970s. However, the intellectual credibility of religious education has in general diverged from that accorded other school subjects, in the devising of curricula, in the expectations of educators and in students’ attitudes. It is argued that this situation needs to be addressed, especially in the teaching of scripture.

Yet changes have occurred. In fifty years the use of short quotes from the Bible as proof-texting in Catechism answers has been transformed into chapters on the Bible in the current texts used in Melbourne and Sydney: for example, Year 7 students learn that the Bible is a “library” of books which contain different styles of writing; Year 10 students study Mark’s gospel and may complete an exegesis of a passage as an assessment task. Despite a significant time lag, the historical-critical method has arrived in the secondary school classroom.

Despite the influence of critical biblical scholarship being clearly discernible in student texts, one questions the degree and depth of understanding which adolescents have of scripture. The hermeneutical principles identified in this chapter point beyond exegetical techniques to an exploration of how meaning is taken from the text by the reader in the world before the text. The key, it is argued, is meaning.
It is essential that young people know that there are different books in the biblical “library”. However, unless they open those books and have the language tools to decode their contents, the library is to all intents and purposes closed. The penultimate stage in considering the constituents of meaning-making is to explore the characteristics of religious language and to learn how to apply figurative language to the different genres, especially myths, which are misunderstood, and parables which are frequently denuded of their potential to engage the minds and creativity of young readers. The next chapter addresses the characteristics of religious language and considers its potential for meaning-making and its cognitive demands on the reader.
CHAPTER 6 – THE LEARNER AND THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Introduction

This chapter explores the relationship between the learner and the biblical text; in doing so it integrates and develops findings from the earlier chapters. Chapter 4 provided insights from cognitive development theory into the way in which students’ thinking and understanding change qualitatively from childhood to adolescence and young adulthood. The focus was on the learner. In Chapter 5 the focus was on the text. The way in which the biblical text has been interpreted within the Christian tradition, the tools of contemporary biblical exegesis and the hermeneutical principles upon which interpretation is premised provide the basis for appreciating how meaning is made in the process of interpretation.

The framework within which the relationship between the adolescent learner and the biblical text will be considered in this chapter is principally linguistic: the characteristics of religious discourse and the religious language in which religious meaning is formulated and articulated. Although interpretation can present a challenge to the reader at any age, it presents particular challenges for the learner in the secondary school where many students are making the transition to formal operational thinking and responding to the existential challenges of adolescence.

One consequence of the debate which Goldman’s research generated (Chapter 2.4) was furthering research into religious thinking. Slee (1986a, 1987) argued that “the largely figurative and symbolic nature of … religious language” (1987, p. 61) suggested that a “linguistic … model of religious thinking” (p. 61) would be more appropriate and more representative of children’s “descriptions of … religious concepts and stories” than one based on “logical reasoning” (p. 67). Slee (1986a) contended that “research needs to develop criteria which are much more sensitive to the linguistic
and imaginative dimensions of interpretation, and to the complex and subtle functions of religious language and texts” (1986a, p. 90).

Section 1 considers the characteristics of religious language. Section 2 explores the nature of figurative language, especially metaphor, which is applied in Section 3 to the literary genres in the biblical text, especially myth and parable. Section 4 considers empirical studies, including McGrady’s research (1987, 1994a, 1994b) into secondary school students’ capacity to understand metaphor and its application to parables. Reich’s research provides a way of understanding thinking in religion and science in terms of complementarity rather than contradiction. This is discussed in Section 5. Section 6 considers two perspectives on religious truth derived from the exploration of religious language and from complementarity in thinking.

6.1. The Characteristics of Religious Language

Religious thinking and religious language are inextricably linked. If religion is understood as a particular way of looking at the world—one’s model of what constitutes Ultimate Reality (Tillich, e.g. 1957, Chapter 1) or Absolute Mystery (Rahner, 1994, Chapter 2)—then the medium by which that model is explicated is language. A religious perspective on life and the language in which it is articulated, of its very nature evokes the Transcendent and involves beliefs regarding Revelation to humankind concerning what constitutes Ultimate Reality. Religious language “evokes and expresses commitment” (Barbour, 1974, p. 4). Religious reflection on, and communication of, religious beliefs and practices have an existential dimension for individuals and for the religious community. They have the capacity to evoke a deep response from adherents, frequently perceived as an invitation to faith and personal commitment. Of its very nature, therefore, religious language seeks to communicate that which is both ineffable and personal.
Religious texts require interpretation

While the means of communication include the visual, for example, religious art, and actions, religious ritual, the focus in this thesis is on verbal communication. The Judaeo-Christian scriptures are written documents. This deceptively simple, self-evident statement defines the nature of the transaction between the individual and the medium of revelation, the biblical text. It is a tripartite transaction, each element of which involves meaning: (i) the subject matter or original meaning which is to be conveyed—the revelation; (ii) the medium in which the meaning is encoded and transmitted—religious language; and (iii) the process of interpreting or decoding the religious meaning—the received meaning.

This statement of the transaction may be recast to focus on the hermeneutical task: the author, the text, and the reader;\textsuperscript{211} or, in the terminology frequently used in biblical interpretation, the world behind the text, the world of the text and the world before the text\textsuperscript{212} respectively. A fourth element must be added if the meaning-making process is to become “revelatory” (Schneiders, 1991, p. 39), namely, appropriation (p. 168). For appropriation to occur, there must be a “fusion of horizons”,\textsuperscript{213} that of the “world horizon of the reader” and the “horizon of the world projected by the text” (p. 172). In this “existential interpretation”, the reader engages with the “truth claims” of the text (p. 175), and the text becomes transformative (pp. 172, 177); such “engagement” with the text, and “its truth claims”, however, “remains a critical one” (p. 175), that is, one which engages the critical faculties.

\textsuperscript{211} McFague (1983) refers to a “complex triad of speaker, text and hearer”. (p. 56).
\textsuperscript{212} This terminology is attributable to Ricoeur.
\textsuperscript{213} In the use of the term “fusion of horizons”, Schneiders (1991) is drawing on Ricoeur and Gadamer for whom “fusion of horizons” is “the fullest and most proper sense of the term” “understanding”, and “the final objective of interpretation” (p. 172). See above, Chapter 5.4.
Critical engagement with the text is fundamental. That readers be led to engage critically with the biblical text is the educational outcome sought, and, if one accepts Schneiders’ (1991) hermeneutical theory, critical engagement with the text can also be the approach most conducive to the pastoral objective which is, ultimately, an adult appropriation of the scriptures. In the tripartite interpretive transaction identified above, each element represents a cluster of complex concepts and understandings, each of which is a field of study in its own right: examples include the author of a particular text and the putative intention of the author, which are matters for exegesis; what is understood by the term revelation, and the criteria for attributing that designation to an interpretation, which are theological questions; and the question of meaning, the domain of hermeneutics, in its nature a philosophical question, but in its attainment a developmental issue.

Implications for religious education

Religious language influences the understanding which young people take from the biblical text, which in turn has existential consequences for their religious development. That which is meant to be revelatory and to nurture faith can become an obstacle to belief when the nature of religious language is misunderstood, as may occur in an unchallenged literalist reading. The meaning one takes from the scriptures has cognitive and volitional dimensions. It is dependent upon one’s awareness of the nature of the text and one’s capacity and willingness to engage with the literary characteristics of the text as text.

Some well-meaning believers fear for the faith of the young, or of the biblically naïve adult, should a literalist understanding of the Bible be challenged; however, to neglect to incorporate into the secondary school religious education curriculum an appreciation of metaphor and symbol in religious language, and how it operates in religious discourse, presents a greater challenge to the belief, and faith, of many young
people, especially those who react negatively to a persistent, unchallenged literalism. For Ricoeur “the importance of critical explanation of the text ... is not to destroy faith but to open the way for it” (Mudge, 1980, p. 23). For the believer, to allow literalism to remain unchallenged is a recipe for fundamentalism and it precludes an appreciation of the numinous which is accessed by engagement with the imagery evoked by symbolism. The question is not if this issue should be addressed, rather, it is the pedagogical question of how the educative task is to be approached.

**Kinds of religious language**

Religious language, of necessity, is largely symbolic and metaphorical; literary genres in the scriptures include myth and parable. The task of interpretation, or meaning-making, described by Schneiders (1991, p. 17) as “a dialectic between explanation and understanding”, involves identifying the literary genre of the particular section of the text being read and responding to the language of each particular form of religious discourse.

Coming from a linguistic philosophical perspective, Binkley (1962) used a “descriptive-classificatory method” (Hick, 1962, p. 23) in his analysis of “the nature of religious language, how it is used, how it functions, and what kind of meaning it may be said to have” (Binkley, 1962, p. 18). He identified “seven different kinds of language usage” (p. 19). These are listed in Table 6.1, together with a brief statement of the characteristics he attributed to each and an example which he provided for each. Also included in Table 6.1 is an eighth type, “metaphysical language”, suggested by Hick (1962) in his critique of Binkley.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kinds of language usage</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Example</th>
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| 1 Empirical             | Includes “factual and historical claims” (p. 19).
                              “Jesus was born in Bethlehem, was crucified under Pontius Pilate” (p. 19.) |
| 2 Tautological          | True by definition (p. 19).
                              Christian statement that “God is good and omnipotent” (p. 19). |
| 3 Emotive               | Includes language which “has some of the qualities of poetry”, such as appealing to the imagination and attempting to arouse feelings (p. 19).  
                              I feel at peace with God (p. 19). |
| 4 Performatory or ceremonial | Includes language found in religious rites and services of worship, e.g., “prayers, rites, and creeds” which are used in “the context of a worship service (p. 20).  
                              “Oh God” ... as at the beginning of a prayer (p. 20). |
| 5 Prescriptive           | Language which reinforces “moral directives with parables and stories” (p. 20).  
                              To follow the example of the Good Samaritan (p. 20). |
| 6 Mythical              | Language used in myths: (i) Used by some to represent a pre-scientific account of, for example, “creation, sin” (p. 20); (ii) myth as conveying deeper meaning of an essential truth (p. 21).  
                              The fall of Adam (p. 21). |
| 7 Paradoxical\(^{214}\) | Statements which seem absurd if taken literally but can “call attention to something we might not otherwise have noticed” or be able to convey (p. 21).  
                              “Christ is both God and man” (p. 21). |
| 8 Metaphysical          | “Making statements of (putative) religious fact” (p. 24).  
                              “God loves mankind (sic)” (p. 24). |

\(^{214}\) It is to paradoxical statements that Reich (1989) calls attention when considering the role of complementarity of thinking.
At first sight, certain of these categories of religious language usage seem quite straight-forward. However, on closer analysis, each presents a different type of challenge and several require a critique. A selection of the kinds of language usage identified by Binkley will be discussed briefly before focussing on the preeminent role of metaphor.

The first category, *empirical usage*, seems quite straightforward. Many of the statements made in religious education classes are of a historical nature. The way in which historical phenomena were considered in biblical times compared with the present time can be a problematic area. Issues raised include the source of the evidence cited to support what may be taken to be historical statements. That “Christus ... was executed at the hands of the procurator Pontius Pilate ...” is reported by the Roman scholar Tacitus\(^\text{215}\) and therefore has corroboration independent of the Christian scriptures; however, it is doubtful if Jesus’ birth has similar corroboration, and the stories associated with the birth of Jesus in the gospels of Matthew and Luke are not primarily a record of historical events. Similarly, the nature of the study of history itself is brought into question if one considers, for example, the stories of the Patriarchs in the Old Testament. Determining whether these stories have a historical basis is, in part at least, a function of exegesis and hermeneutics. Making the distinction between historical truth as it is understood today, and the religious truth inherent in historical narrative in the world behind the text, is pedagogically challenging. It is not just a matter of the type of language involved, rather it is also a matter of what that language denotes.

The issues raised under the headings of “tautological usage” and “paradoxical usage”, are perhaps more theological than biblical: for example, the Christian creedal affirmation that “Christ is both God and man”, which is cited as an example of the paradoxical usage of religious language (Binkley, 1962, p. 21). This example raises a

crucial point which is clearly identified by Hick (1962) in his *Comment* on Binkley’s article. In brief, the point at issue is the nexus between religious language and the question of what is *real or true*. Referring specifically to “the language of Judaic-Christian religion”, Hick sees the “prime question” to be “in what sense … core statements … make *factual* assertions; and how these are related to the assertions of everyday life and the physical sciences” (p. 22). Although expressed less clearly in the classroom, this is at the core of the difficulties which many students have regarding the truth of the Bible: what is to be taken literally, what is to be seen as myth or metaphor, and how metaphor actually works.

Within his “mythical” category, Binkley (1962) conflates language with literary genre. The focus needs to be on the nature of the language itself, figurative language—especially metaphor—which is not only typical of religious myth but has much broader application in both the Bible and in religious discourse more generally. An appreciation of the characteristics of metaphor is fundamental to facilitating the transformation of thinking which marks the transition from a literalist understanding of scripture.

**The nature of religious language**

This section will seek to elucidate the following features and applications of religious language and their relationship to meaning:

(i) **figurative language**: the characteristics of metaphor and its relationship to religious models and paradigms and the role of symbols and symbolic language;

(ii) **literary genre**: the relationship of metaphor to two key genres featured in the biblical text: myth and parable;

(iii) **biblical interpretation**: the way in which an understanding of these features of religious language can inform interpretation of the biblical text in a religious
education setting: this will be integrated into the discussions in the other two categories.

6.2 Figurative Language: Metaphor, Models, Paradigms and Symbols

Fundamental to much figurative language, especially simile and metaphor, is comparison or analogy. Analogy may be simple and straightforward or complex. In the case of simile, the comparison is direct, and made explicit by the words like or as; it is frequently used to explain a novel idea or concept by reference to that which is known. In the case of metaphor, the comparison is indirect and open-ended. In poetry, for example, metaphor may open up new and evocative images of the familiar by the juxtaposition of words from quite distinct domains; in science, metaphor can suggest new connections between variables and lead to new discoveries or patterns in phenomena which generate new theories. Analogously, in religious discourse, metaphor is complex and indispensable.

Metaphor

Metaphor is the interpretive key to an appreciation of the religious meaning of a text which is not accessible via a literalist reading. What all metaphors have in common is a tension between two poles, the is and the is not. To use Black’s terminology, the tension is between “the focus of the metaphor”—the word or expression used metaphorically—and the rest of the sentence, “the frame” (Black, 1962, p. 28). A metaphor involves “semantic change” and “some transformation of a literal meaning” (p. 35). According to Barbour (1974), a “metaphor proposes analogies between the normal context of a word and a new context into which it is introduced. Some, but not all, of the familiar connotations of the word are transferred” (p. 12).

216 Others follow I. A. Richards and use the terminology “tenor” and “vehicle” instead of “focus” and “frame” (e.g. Ricoeur, 1975, p. 77; Culpepper, 1983, p. 181; Coloe, 2001, p. 5).
A key feature of metaphor is that it is not literally true; the “strategy of discourse by which the metaphorical statement obtains its meaning is absurdity” (Ricoeur, 1975, p. 77). To hold as true a statement which is metaphorical, would mean, for example, that that which “humans know is not true” would have to be held to be true (Schneiders, 1991, p. 33). The intention of the writer in using metaphor is to say more about a word or expression, the frame, than can be conveyed literally, by using a focus, a word or expression, which by virtue of its dissimilarity from the frame evokes surprise and challenges the reader to re-think his or her preconceptions. For example, in referring to God as a “rock” (Psalm 95, v. 1), rock is the focus of the metaphor which is intended to enhance the understanding of the frame, God.

A distinction between different types of metaphor provides an appropriate framework within which to discuss the nature, use and cognitive demands of metaphor by identifying the degree of complexity in the transformation of the literal meaning (Black, 1962, p. 35). A simple metaphor is “a sentence or other expression in which some words are used metaphorically while the remainder are used nonmetaphorically” (p. 27). The psalmist’s reference to God as a “rock” is such a metaphor, in which the is not, or negative pole, may be readily recognised. A “substitution view of metaphor” is one in which “a metaphorical expression is used in place of some equivalent literal expression” (p. 31). When what is being expressed metaphorically may have been expressed using a literal equivalent (p. 32), the metaphor is a stylistic literary device (p. 34). Students may be relatively familiar with literary metaphors from their language studies.

The most complex form of metaphor is what Black (1962) refers to as an “interaction view of metaphor” (p. 38) in which the meaning of the focal word is extended by the new context (p. 39). In this case, the metaphor acts as “a filter” (p. 39), through which the “commonplace” understandings and connotations
“characteristic of the subsidiary subject” (or focus) are “evoked” and the “associated implications” applied to “the principal subject of the statement” (pp. 39-41, 44). This complex metaphor is one which “suppresses some details, emphasizes others” and “organizes our view” (p. 41), for example, of God as father. This form of metaphor is the most cognitively demanding. It cannot be replaced by a literal translation; rather what is involved is “a distinctive intellectual operation ... demanding simultaneous awareness of both subjects but not reducible to any comparison between the two” (pp. 45-46).

It is this type of metaphor, which Ricoeur (1975) calls a true metaphor, which is fundamental to interpreting scripture. It produces “a semantic innovation” which has “the power of redefining reality” (p. 75). These “true metaphors are metaphors of invention” in which there is “a new extension of the meaning of the words” (p. 80) in which the tension in the metaphor “gives rise to a veritable creation of meaning” (p. 79): “Metaphor proceeds from the tension between all the terms in a metaphorical statement” (p. 77).

Metaphor requires that the reader “be simultaneously aware” of the “two frames of reference” whose “juxtaposition” constitutes the metaphor (Barbour, 1974, p. 13). To do so makes cognitive demands on the reader.217 Students need to be made aware that there are two frames of reference, and explicitly taught to identify them in simple examples from everyday life or from familiar literary sources in order to develop interpretive skills which can then be applied to religious discourse.

Metaphor is a powerful epistemological tool. Although he is writing in the context of the use of metaphor in science, Black’s (1962, pp. 236-237) statement of the significance of metaphor is applicable to the use of metaphor in religion:

217 See below, Chapter 6.4, especially the research of Cometa and Eson (1978).
A memorable metaphor has the power to bring two separate domains into cognitive and emotional relation by using language directly appropriate to the one as a lens for seeing the other; the implications, suggestions, and supporting values entwined with the literal use of the metaphorical expression enable us to see a new subject matter in a new way.

Barbour (1974) takes up Black’s point that metaphorical language impinges on attitudes (Black, 1962, p. 42): metaphors “often have emotional and valualational overtones. They call forth feelings and attitudes. Because metaphors “influence attitude, perception and interpretation” (Barbour, 1974, p. 14), it is particularly important that religious educators ensure that metaphors are recognised and comprehended by students and advantage is taken of their “open-ended” (p. 14) character.

Relevance to religious education.

In the context of religious education, the expressions Jesus is the Lamb of God, and, God is our father, which are among the frequently used Christian religious metaphors, need to be explored as “genuine metaphors”. The first expression is more likely to be recognised as not literally true; however, what was a powerful image in first century Palestine may be less accessible and therefore less effective in a twenty-first century Western urban society and its power may be lost. In the second metaphor, the connotations of the focus, father, whose implications are applied to the frame, God, is more problematic. The very familiarity of the focus encourages an over-application of the positive, is, pole of the metaphor, and a neglect of the negative, is not, pole, with the result that the metaphor is highly susceptible to being taken literally. If a metaphor which has been assimilated into religious discourse loses its tensive

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218 Barbour (1974), identified metaphors such as of the fatherhood of God, which “are invoked more often and developed more systematically” than “personal analogues” such as “The Lord is my Shepherd”, as “models”, which are “more fully elaborated and serve as wider interpretive schemes” (p. 16).
(McFague, 1983, p. 38) quality, it becomes “trite” and “literalized” (p. 41). Reference to the Bible as the Word of God is highly susceptible to being taken literally.

It is essential that teachers be aware of the ubiquity of metaphorical language in religious texts and discourse, and employ a pedagogy which enables students to develop skills and a mindset which enable them to recognise when metaphor is being used, to comprehend the religious meaning of content expressed in metaphorical language, and to engage with the open-ended character of metaphoric language to explore new meaning. The cognitive skills which foster analysis of texts, however, need to be supplemented by inculcating a “symbolic sensitivity” (McFague, 1983, p. 5) to such language which encourages students to respond imaginatively to religious imagery. The foundations need to be laid early when the rich imagination typical of early childhood is flourishing and encouraged in the primary school when the majority of students will be at the stage of concrete operational thinking.219

Children’s imaginations can be engaged by the wealth of biblical images for God: for example, naturalistic metaphors abound in the Old Testament; in the New Testament the metaphor of a “hen [which] gathers her brood under her wings” (Matt 23:37; Luke 13:34), provides an image of God which challenges crude anthropomorphism and militates against the powerful metaphor of God as father being literalized. A “symbolical mentality” (McFague, 1983, p. 5) will thereby be nurtured, which will prepare the ground for a more discursive analytical exploration of figurative language at the stage of formal operational thought. At this stage metaphors such as those which derive from the I am statements in the gospel of John, for example “I am the vine” (Coloe, 2001, p. 5), may be a rich source of religious imagery which can lead to deeper discussion of the use of religious symbol integral to the text: for example, the “misunderstandings” of characters in John’s gospel (Coloe, 2001, pp. 5-6; Culpepper, 1983, pp. 154-157).

219 These are the intuitive-projective and the mythic-literal stages in Fowler’s faith development theory (1981).
The link between metaphors and models and paradigms.

Metaphors are not simply instances of figurative language which need to be identified and comprehended within the narrow framework of a section of a text. Rather, metaphors play a substantive role in religious discourse. By giving rise to models they structure religious thinking, providing concepts and ways of representing what are held to be the core beliefs of a religious tradition: for example, biblical “images form a model of God as a personal being” (Barbour, 1974, p. 56), which is the fundamental premise, the paradigm, for Judaism and Christianity. The “kingdom of God” has become a root-metaphor of Christianity: it has moved from its metaphorical use in parables to “conceptual thought” (McFague, 1983, pp. 26-27) and become a model for the Christian way of being in the world.

An appreciation of the role of religious models and paradigms should inform the educator’s frame of reference, although specific teaching of more than simple explanations of models before the tertiary level is unlikely to be appropriate, given the cognitive demands of such a level of abstraction.

Models and paradigms

Models and paradigms are theoretical constructs which organise knowledge and structure its interpretation; they provide the parameters within which theories are generated and research conducted. At a more abstract level, paradigms provide an overarching set of assumptions which represent a coherent theoretical structure within which the results of extensive experimentation, analysis and research may be explained. Much has been written about models and paradigms in the sciences, especially since Thomas Kuhn’s (1962, 1970) concept of “paradigm shift” gained currency. The role of models and paradigms in the sciences is widely recognised, for
example, “Bohr’s model of the atom” (Black, 1962, p. 229); the role of models and paradigms in religion is less well known or appreciated and perhaps may even be resisted. However, an examination of the role of models in religious discourse, grounded to a large extent in biblical imagery, flows inexorably from an appreciation of the role of religious metaphor (e.g. Barbour, 1974; McFague, 1983).²²⁰

**Religious models.**

While “a metaphor is used only momentarily” (Barbour, 1974, p. 16), a model is “sustained” and “systematic” (Barbour, 1974, p. 16; McFague, 1983, p. 67). Barbour (1974) defines a model as “a symbolic representation of selected aspects of the behaviour of a complex system ... an imaginative tool for ordering experience” (p. 6). Like theoretical models in science, models in religion “are also analogical ... they are neither literal pictures of reality nor useful fictions”²²¹ (p. 7). Religious models “encourage allegiance to a way of life and adherence to policies of action”, while “their vivid imagery elicits self-commitment and ethical dedication” (p. 7). Models “are not pictures of entities, but networks or structures of relationships” (p. 102) which “are taken seriously but not literally” (pp. 7, 50) and are used to interpret experience (p. 51).

McFague (1983) emphasises the dangers inherent in models; for example, “they exclude other ways of thinking” (p. 24), and they “can easily become literalized” (p. 24) if the tension between the positive and the negative poles of the model is lost (pp. 74, 102). Models, of their nature “are always partial ... necessitating both alternative and complementary models” (Barbour, 1974, p. 102). For example, the biblical metaphor,

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²²⁰ One wonders if the application of the constructs of models and paradigms to the religious domain is itself analogical; however, to see their use in this light would be to assume that such a way of organising thought belongs “rightly” to the sciences, and reflect one’s unfamiliarity with seeing the religious and theological domain in this light!
²²¹ The term “useful fiction” is defined as a statement that is “neither true nor false” (Barbour, 1974, p. 5).
“God is a Father to his children”, has made the transition to a model whereby the world is construed “through the model of a father’s love and purpose” (p. 16). The anthropomorphism found in children’s religious thinking (e.g. Goldman, 1964, pp. 87-92), which has been related to age and level of cognitive development, can be made more specific if anthropomorphism is seen in the context of models of God based on metaphors being taken literally, as “‘pictures’ of the deity” (p. 97) in which “God the father” is frequently pictured as “an old man with a white beard” (p. 97). Similarly, the “resistance” one finds to the metaphor “God is mother” (p. 24) is explained: “if God is father, then God cannot be mother” (p. 97).

Religious models are powerful; they become an accepted, rarely questioned, framework within which religious phenomena are understood and “serve as wider interpretive schemes” (McFague, 1983, p. 16); religious models, “like literary metaphors, influence attitudes and behaviour and also alter ways of seeing the world” (p. 16) by means of a dialectical process of interpretation (p. 27).

Paradigms.

A paradigm may be characterised as a theoretical construct which encompasses one’s fundamental way of organising the images, metaphors, models and concepts in a given area of discourse, for example, Christianity. McFague (1983) refers to a paradigm as “an entire set of assumptions” (p. 70), “largely unquestioned” (p. 71). Fundamental to the concept of a paradigm, is its permanence: unless the assumptions, or premises, upon which the way of seeing reality is founded are challenged in a serious and sustained manner, the established paradigm prevails.

The extent to which broad movements within Christianity can be categorised as paradigm shifts is a moot point. The significant changes which have occurred in recent
years within the Catholic tradition, the change in approach to biblical scholarship occasioned by *Divino Afflante Spiritu* in 1943, and the changes in many areas of Catholic perceptions flowing from the Second Vatican Council, 1962-1965, could be classified as paradigmatic.

The significance of models and paradigms.

Paradigms seem far removed from the religious education classroom; however, they are the theoretical constructs within whose purview models, and their linguistic predecessors, metaphors, must fall. Models and paradigms influence one’s understanding of religious texts and beliefs. They constitute the underlying cognitive framework within which religious discourse and text interpretation occurs. They are no less influential because they are frequently unrecognised: “an implicit or submerged model operating in a writer’s thought” (Black, 1962, p. 239) can have a profound influence on educational thought and practice. The most significant cognitive feature of well-established paradigms and models is that they are based upon assumptions and presuppositions which in the normal course of events are unquestioned. However, religious metaphors are in a dialectical relationship with the existing models and paradigms which both ground the metaphor and impose constraints. The open-endedness of metaphors provides the potential for enlivening religious education by exploring and challenging familiar metaphors, especially those which have become literalised. In the classroom the familiar metaphor which represents the qualities of God’s relationship with humankind as that of a father, may be enlivened by consideration of the challenging metaphor of God as mother: the ideal outcome would be that young people recognise the language as metaphorical, yet also respond positively to the new model of God as a loving parent.

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223 Although discussed separately here, the terms model and paradigm are frequently used interchangeably.
The extent to which a new model gains currency within the tradition is not guaranteed. One such model is that of the Church as the People of God, coming from the intellectual and spiritual ferment of Vatican II. It provided fresh insights into the role of the laity within the Church, which in turn resulted in some changed practices. Models, therefore, can influence perception and decision-making. The different models of religious education, historically and those being debated at the present time, have resulted in fundamentally different curricula and pedagogies, including the way in which scripture has been taught.

**Symbols and symbolic thinking**

“As the mind explores the symbol it is led to ideas that lie beyond the grasp of reason” (Jung, as cited in Clift, 1983, p. 51). Clift adds that symbols are “the best representation for an unknown content” (p. 51); when “something is functioning as a symbol, a rational explanation or comprehensive definition is not possible” (Clift, p. 51). Symbols and symbolic thinking, therefore, together with metaphors and metaphorical thinking, provide an alternative way of exploring religious understanding to that provided by an exclusively cognitive approach which focuses on reason and logical operations.

Religious symbols function at a number of levels and include the visual and ritual as well as symbolic language. Symbols have an expressive quality (Godin, 1968, p. 440; Barbour, 1974, p.15); they involve “emotions and feelings, and are powerful in calling forth ... response and commitment” (Barbour, 1974, p. 15). The symbols of light

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224 As discussed in Appendix 1.
225 See above, Chapter 3.1.
226 See above, Chapter 5.2.
227 The literature on symbolism and religious symbols is vast. The reference to symbols here is brief: the focus is on symbolic language and to provide the context for the empirical research of Godin and Sister Marthe (1960) which is based on developmental theory and provides a valuable insight into the way in which an understanding of symbol and metaphor operates in an educational context.
and water (p. 15) are widely used in Christian life, in language and in the liturgy: for example, the metaphor of Christ as the Light of the world is made more tangible liturgically when the Paschal Candle, a symbol of the Risen Christ, becomes literally a light shining in the darkness of the church darkened during the liturgy of Holy Saturday. Symbols are intrinsic to the sacramental life of the Christian community. The water used in baptism, the bread and wine used in the Eucharist, are religious symbols which “seem to be metaphors based on analogies within” our experience (p. 15); they have “become part of the language of a religious community in its scripture and liturgy and in its continuing life and thought” (p. 15).

Symbol also functions at an ontological level, representing that which cannot in itself be otherwise conveyed. Symbol has been described as “the mode of presence of something that cannot be encountered in any other way” (Schneiders, 1991, p. 35). Language as “the primary instance of symbolic activity” (p. 35), is a form of “mediation” which extends understanding and communicates meaning (p. 20), but functions “only in interaction with an interpreter” (p. 35). Symbol “participates directly in the presence and power of that which it symbolizes”, and “embodies and thereby brings to expression, reality that it can never fully ‘say’” (pp. 35-36).

Davies (1985) cited Sperber’s (1975), hypothesis that “symbolic data of diverse kinds are integrated into a single system within the individual” (Davies, 1985, p. 76), which he applied to biblical interpretation (pp. 76-78). He considered symbolic thought as another way of perceiving which supplements logical or rational thought (pp. 76-66). Symbolic thought is not a “stage in the development of thought, rather it is an element in the perpetual structure of thinking” (p. 76).

Godin considered the symbolic nature of sacraments from a developmental perspective (1968, p. 440; 1971, pp. 124-130). Developmentally, the critical point in

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229 These two quotes were in bold type in the original.
relation to the religious interpretation of symbolic narratives (Godin, 1968, p. 440) is when “myths, culturally and passively received, are transformed into symbols with religious meaning” (p. 441). Godin strongly advocated an education which addressed the development of the symbolic function in relation to prayer (Godin, 1971, pp. 130-131), the sacrament of the Eucharist (pp. 131-134), and “the progressive ability to develop a Christology” (1968, pp. 443-445; 1971, pp. 111, 123). The transformation of “a magical and superstitious mentality” (1971, pp. 112, 130-134) to a “sacramentality mentality” was researched empirically.

**Godin and the symbolic function: an empirical study.**

Godin and Sister Marthe (1960) explored children’s understanding of the symbolic meaning of the sacraments. The results demonstrated that the younger children understood the sacraments of Penance and Eucharist in largely “magical” terms. There was confusion “between the sign and what is signified” (p. 280). A developmental process was found, with significant progress in the transformation from a “magical mentality” to a “sacramental mentality” occurring between the ages of eight and fourteen years (p. 288). Age, rather than intelligence, was the significant factor (pp. 288-289): “the magical mentality depends on a general maturation of the affective life ... and the pedagogical influences of the milieu” (p. 292). It was considered that the continuation of the magical mentality could be the result of inappropriate teaching (p. 292).

The understanding of symbols is relevant to students’ understanding of the biblical text. In addition to the movement from “a magical and superstitious mentality”, two other developmental tasks which Godin (1971) identified as important for Christian education were an understanding of “sign and symbol” (p. 123) and an understanding of the stages in the development of “historical consciousness” (pp. 119-
He questioned children’s “symbolic comprehension” of the majority of the biblical stories, including parables, in religious education textbooks (pp. 123-124). Writing at a period when the kerygmatic approach would still have been influential, and salvation history the focus of Catholic religious education, Godin warned against providing too much historical data at too early an age, stating that it “could nourish a strong taste for the magical … which will be of little use for subsequent Christian maturity” (Godin, 1971, p. 123). The biblical material drawn on to build up the story of salvation history included stories of the Old Testament patriarchs presented as history: hence his concern that children could not comprehend “the symbolical value” of the narratives used and “the analogical value of many religious insights” (Godin, 1971, p. 129) would not be appreciated.

Although critical of some aspects of Goldman’s research, Godin welcomed his findings with regard to the appropriateness of the biblical texts used in religious education. His principal criticisms were Goldman’s focus on conceptual thought (Godin, 1968, p. 442) and his neglect of the “symbolic function”, that is, “the ability to connect actively a physical sign with a spiritual sense” (p. 440). Godin’s focus was on the “development of a hermeneutic capacity … to interpret symbolic narratives” (p. 440), the “expressive aspect of religious symbols and the perceptive distortions which inhibit assimilation of the symbols” (p. 441). Godin emphasised the role of education in contributing to an increasingly mature understanding of “the symbolic function” (e.g. Godin & Marthe, 1960, pp. 289, 293; Godin, 1971, p. 130).

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230 Research has shown that the child’s concept of time develops gradually. Studies which have applied the Piagetian paradigm to the study of history indicate the late development of formal operational thought in historical subject matter (e.g. Jurd). See above, Chapter 4.1.
6.3 Literary Genre

This section will consider two literary genres widely used in education, myths and parables: both represent an application of metaphorical language to specific biblical genres. The Creation stories and the story of the Fall in Genesis 1-3 are the biblical myths which are most frequently cited as students grapple with religious and scientific accounts of the origins of the world and of humankind. However, it has also been demonstrated that children and adolescents are capable of providing interpretations of these chapters of Genesis appropriate to their age and stage of faith development (Worsley, 2006). The parables of Jesus are widely used in the primary and secondary school. They have the potential to function as a source of rich religious discourse which can bridge the gap between text and the reader; however, this potential may be constrained by how parables are presented and how they are understood.

Myth

Myth is a means of expressing that which is otherwise inexpressible. Myth has been defined as “a story which is taken to manifest some aspect of the cosmic order” (Barbour, 1974, pp. 19-20) which results from the combination of “religious symbols and images” into “complex narratives” (p. 19) and “provides a community with ways of structuring experience in the present” (p. 5). Soulen and Soulen (2001) state that there is “no agreed-on definition” (p. 115) and allude to the ferment occasioned by efforts to interpret myth (p. 115). Biblical myths are one of the ways in which religious truth, or revelation, is articulated and transmitted. For example, the Creation myths are the means by which the ancient Israelites expressed their belief in YHWH as creator of all,231 the God of Israel who was in relationship with his people. A faith dimension is integral to biblical literature.

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231 This is not to deny that expressions of God as creator are not found in other texts, for example, Psalm 8.
Young people have been familiar with the Creation stories in Genesis 1-2 since early childhood; furthermore, these stories have entered general discourse in a way which reinforces a literal interpretation. The understanding of myth in everyday parlance is associated with that which is fictitious, which presents a hurdle to be overcome in the teaching of myth in the biblical text. It can be a significant hurdle at the present time when for many people scientific thinking has been debased to a scientism, in which the real is associated with the literal for which concrete evidence must be available, and, on the other hand, where religious fundamentalism reduces biblical interpretation to literalism. The pedagogical task is to facilitate an understanding of myth as a literary genre: merely telling students that these are myths is highly problematic. Unless the concept of myth is firmly grasped, the desired educational outcome will not be forthcoming; rather, the result may well be to engender in some students anger that until now they had been misled and in others disbelief.

**Myths: application to education.**

Teaching which seeks to provide a sound appreciation of biblical myth draws on exegesis and hermeneutics: (i) to set the text in its context, the world behind the text, (ii) to decode the metaphorical language in which the religious meaning of the text is transmitted, (iii) to interpret the meaning, and (iv) to facilitate the “fusion of horizons” between the learner and the text in order that the text becomes transformative.

Binkley (1962) drew attention to two ways in which the use of myths in religion has been perceived: (i) “as pre-scientific accounts of such things as creation, sin …” (p. 20); and (ii) as a means of conveying “a deeper meaning which could not be expressed in straight-forward, empirical narrative” (p. 20). The second definition is the more frequently cited in religious discourse. The biblical myths encapsulate religious truths

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232 The Oxford dictionary has five items under “myth”, two of which, the third and fifth, are associated with falsity and the fictitious. These are the definitions generally assumed in ordinary discourse.
otherwise inexpressible. These texts require an interpretation which recognises their literary characteristics and the religious context from which they emerged if they are to be perceived as inviting a response in the world before the text. In practice, however, religious educators use both ways of perceiving the mythical use of religious language. In setting the myth in the world behind the text, one is, in fact, employing the first use of myth: as representative of the mindset of the pre-scientific world in which the stories developed. By drawing students’ attention to such characteristics of the ancient Hebrew world as the cosmology inherent in Genesis 1, the teacher is seeking to explain how the scriptures are a product of the worldview of its human writers. The subsequent steps in interpretation include clarifying the religious message of the text and relating it to the lives of the present readers.

The most difficult aspect of this endeavour is explaining to students the concept of religious truth, and differentiating religious truth from those forms of knowledge which are subject to verification, either empirically, as in science, or according to well-accepted principles, as in disciplines such as history. The difficulties are conceptual and epistemological and understanding flounders on the widely held perception that truth equates with the empirically verifiable—partly a function of contemporary Western thinking and partly a function of age and stage of cognitive development.

Parable

The parables of Jesus in the New Testament are among the texts most frequently used in religious education. The term parable has been applied to a number of different

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233 Biblical scholar Lawrence Boadt (1984) followed this practice. As a teacher of secondary school students I have frequently used Boadt’s diagram showing a reconstruction of ancient Hebrew cosmology (p. 115) to explain the context from which the worldview represented in the Priestly account of Creation in Genesis 1 derived.

234 Experience in teaching the Year 10 text in the series To Know, Worship and Love, which addresses different kinds of truth, testifies to the pedagogical difficulties of the concept of religious truth.

235 Basseches distinguishes between instrumental and communicative learning and assigns to each a different method of validation.
literary forms in the New Testament, including parabolic sayings, similitudes, example stories (e.g. Soulen & Soulen, 2001, p. 129), proverbial sayings (Perrin & Duling, 1982, pp. 420-423; Ricoeur, 1975, p. 32), “enigmatic sayings” and even “vivid images” and “short comparisons” (Ryan, 2001c, p. 117), as well as the parable proper, of varying length. It is the parable proper, or the narrative parable, which is the subject of this discussion.

These narratives, which have been described as “colourful, illustrative stories taken from everyday life” (Byrne, 2008, p. 77), are vivid and engaging and to the uninitiated seem straightforward and appropriate for the instruction of the young. However, as a genre the parable is a highly sophisticated literary form which is susceptible to simplistic interpretation, especially if the surface details of the narrative, and the perceived opportunity to make a moral point, are the only criteria for its choice as a story suitable for young people. Defined, in brief, as an extended metaphor (e.g. McFague, 1975, p. 2; 1983, pp. 43, 45), the parable has all the linguistic subtleties and complexities of metaphor. Ricoeur (1975, p. 30) describes it as “the conjunction of a narrative form and a metaphorical process”. The parable, especially the parables of the Kingdom of God, has been the subject of description and detailed analysis by philosophers of language, literary critics and biblical scholars.

The characteristics of parable as a literary form.

The most significant characteristic of parable as a literary form is its metaphorical character. As an extended metaphor in narrative form the parable conveys meaning in a distinctive way. Within the parable there are two frames of reference. The first is the ordinary features of human life and relationships, which are the surface elements

236 Although there are parables and parabolic sayings in the Old Testament—and in non-biblical texts—this discussion will focus on the parables of Jesus in the gospels. The research by Stead (1996) revealed that of the ten passages of scripture most frequently cited for use in the middle and senior primary classes, three were parables: the Father and Two Sons (the Prodigal Son), the Good Samaritan, and the Lost Sheep (Stead, 1996, Chapter 6; 1998, p. 11).
in a vivid story; although set in a particular time, place and culture, the characters and their experiences are applicable to the human condition in any age. This constitutes the “narrative structure” (Ricoeur, 1975, p. 75) of the parable, characterised by the mundane and secular (McFague, 1983, p. 44) terms in an analogy which compares “two perspectives” on reality (p. 45). The second frame of reference is the new insight generated by the metaphorical tension within the parable. The elements of “surprise”, of “incongruity” and “reversal” (p. 44), are the narrative features which encapsulate what constitutes the “permanent tension in a parable” which, in the case of the parables of the Kingdom of God, are “two ways of being in the world, one of which is the conventional way, and the other the way of the kingdom” (McFague, p. 45, citing Ricoeur). Furthermore, Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom can only be spoken of in figures of speech (Schweizer, 1970, p. 89).

In contrast to allegory, a parable has only one point of comparison (e.g. Schweizer, 1970, p. 88) and the story is not a means to an end which can be discarded once the point is made; the narrative—the plot and characters—is integral. Meaning is not “extrinsic” but embedded in “what the story says” (McFague, 1975, p. 67), “the story as a whole conveys the comparison” (Barbour, 1974, p. 16).

Like metaphors, parables function epistemologically, as a way of knowing (McFague, 1975, p. 4). Parables allude to, rather than define. What the Kingdom of God is like is “intimated indirectly through telling a story” (p. 45). Accordingly, a key characteristic of a parable is its open-endedness: “Like a metaphor, a parable presents a comparison to be explored, insights to be discovered” (Barbour, 1974, p. 17), and has the capacity “to constantly recreate meaning and evoke response” (Slee, 1983, p. 135).

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237 For adolescents in the twenty-first century the characteristics of life in the first century CE may need some explanation if the parable is to be fully appreciated. This is a preliminary hurdle which needs to be overcome in order that the deeper meaning of the parable may be explored.

238 The relationship between these two elements has been expressed by Ricoeur (1975) as the problem concerning the “articulation between the narrative structure and the metaphorical process” (p. 75), a process which he explored in depth but which is not addressed in this thesis.
Parables involve a call for a decision (e.g. Barbour 1974, p. 16; McFague, 1975, p. 77); the “goal of a parable is finally in the realm of willing, not of knowing” (McFague, 1975, p. 80). However, it is not a moral imperative, rather an invitation which draws on the realities of everyday life to present new ontological insights as to how one may be in the world: parables “are paradigms of persons encountering the kingdom, not abstractly but concretely and existentially” (McFague, 1983, p. 45). Writing in an educational context, Ryan (2001c) suggests a simple way in which secondary school students can be introduced to the parable as a literary form, listing four straightforward elements, one or more of which are present in a parable: repetition, contrast, the rule of three, and end stress” (p. 117), the “shock” at the end of a parable which “overthrows conventional expectation, making space for fresh insight and revelation” (Byrne, 2004a, p. 107).

**Scholarly approaches to parables.**

Scholars from different disciplines agree on the essential characteristics of the parable and are committed to revealing the meaning of the text; however, there are differences in the focus and the direction from which they approach the study of parable. For example, Ricoeur (1975), as a “philosopher of language”, sees parables as forms of “religious discourse” (pp. 32ff), and commences his analysis from the perspective of the structure of the parable, its narrative form (pp. 37ff), and “the semantics of metaphor” (pp. 75ff). Interpretation and the meaning attributed to the parables of the Kingdom of God are approached through an analysis of the narrative, its “realism”, “the extravagance of the dénouement” (pp. 32-33), and the way in which the tension in metaphor works within the structure of the narrative as a whole (pp. 94-95).
The biblical scholar focuses less on the specific internal functioning of metaphor as a linguistic device; rather, close attention is given to the specific context in which parables are situated within a particular chapter and within the gospel as a whole, for example, the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:1-52 (Byrne, 2004, p. 105) and Mark 4 (Byrne, 2008, pp. 77-79). The meaning the contemporary reader takes from the parable is influenced by the particular interpretation of Jesus’ teaching by the evangelist, writing for a particular audience at a particular time, and the narrative structure of the gospel.

Biblical scholarship complements the understanding of parables which results from a focus on religious language. Applied to an educational setting this includes: (i) the finer distinctions which are made between types of parables and their function; (ii) the use of allegory in the gospels, and (iii) the way in which the evangelists used Jesus’ parables, which emphasises the importance of interpreting them in the context of the gospel as a whole.

Perrin and Duling (1982) distinguish between two broad types of parables used by Jesus: those which function as proclamation of the Kingdom (p. 419), and those which “function as parenesis”, or instruction (p. 419). The proclamation parables present a “reversal of human judgments and human situations” which is “the sign of the breaking in of God’s Kingdom” (p. 419). For example, the following parables represent examples of how “the metaphorical point” is made by means of different types of reversal: the “reversal of human situation” in the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31); the “radical reversal of accepted human judgment” in the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18:10-14); and “situational reversal on a literal level” in the parable of the Wedding Guest (Luke 14:7-11). Examples of parables which seek “to instruct or teach” include the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl (Matt 13:44-46).
The distinction by Jülicher between parable and allegory is a recurring theme in the literature and depicted as a defining moment in “parable criticism”, ending a “long history of allegorical interpretation” (Soulen & Soulen, 2001, p. 129). However, Byrne (2004) notes that recent interpretation suggests that Jülicher’s distinction may be “too sharply drawn” (p. 106). He identifies within Matthew’s gospel parables used by Jesus which had been allegorised in the early Christian community, for example “the Murderous Tenants [21:33-34]; the Spurned Invitation to the Wedding [22:1-14]; and the Ten Bridesmaids [25:1-13]” (p. 106). Byrne states that a “sure sign of allegory is the appearance of details difficult to relate to the situation presupposed in the main story, rendering it unrealistic [e.g., the coda about the guest without a wedding garment in Matt 22:1-14]” (pp. 106-107).

The perspectives of the philosopher of language and of the biblical scholar are both relevant to teaching the scripture: each provides a lens through which different dimensions of parable may be more comprehensively understood and applied to the teaching process. The scholar of the philosophy of language and linguistics advances meaning and understanding by focussing on parable as an instance of metaphorical language within a narrative form; for the educator, an appreciation of the characteristics of metaphor and the cognitive demands which it makes on the learner provide direction for pedagogy. The biblical scholar facilitates the understanding of parables by establishing their meaning within their context—within the world behind the text and the world of the text. Both perspectives contribute to the pedagogical decisions needed to engage the world before the text, that is, how best the teacher may assist students to interpret the parables, to decode their religious meaning, and to facilitate its appropriation by readers in the contemporary world.
Parables: application to education.

The linguistic and literary characteristics of parables as extended metaphors make them susceptible to creative thinking and the opening up of new meaning. Biblical scholarship suggests that between Jesus’ teaching and their written form, the parables have undergone interpretation by the early Christian community. Understanding is also dependent upon the type of parable and its location within the gospel, which is not a matter of chance but of authorial choice by the evangelist. Context affects meaning.

The identification of allegory in some parables, and the suggestion that the explanations in the gospels of several of the parables are additions to the parables themselves and are in allegorical form, is particularly important. Pedagogically, it follows that parables should be selected carefully and distinctions made between the several types, with those which are “heavily allegorized” (Byrne, 2004a, p. 106) treated with a great deal of circumspection and introduced, if at all, only after the more accessible and engaging narratives have been understood. Similarly, what Perrin and Duling (1982) refer to as “proverbial sayings” and aphorisms (pp. 420-424), and which seem to be highly susceptible to a literalist interpretation, need to be explained, a task made more open to success if students already have an appreciation of parables and parabolic language.

A starting point in the teaching of parables is the story itself; hence the importance of selecting parables appropriate to students’ age. Parables provide a powerful tool in teaching for a transformation of thinking from literalism to an understanding which optimises an adult appropriation of the scriptural message. However, if parables are simply presented as children’s stories with a moral message.

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239 The criticism of Christianity which one hears in the media is frequently illustrated by reference to such “radical” proverbial sayings (Perrin & Duling, 1982, pp. 421-422) as turning the other cheek, expressed in a way which implies that Christians interpret them in a literalist way.
they will be left behind with the detritus of childhood when critical thinking emerges in adolescence. The way in which parables are treated should include the following: an understanding of metaphor, linking the language characteristics of parables to the level of understanding which students bring to their reading; presenting parables to students in a manner which encourages multiple readings; engaging students’ imagination; and avoiding moralistic interpretations.  

Parables, therefore, are ideal for use in the classroom in which discussion and critical thinking are valued. Precisely because parables need not be didactic, they provide the opportunity for the open-ended exploration of ideas at a range of levels and in different styles of thinking. By engaging the imagination and encouraging creativity in thinking, parables may provide opportunities to engage students for whom a didactic and doctrinal approach to religion, which forecloses on questions and requires belief, is ineffectual.

6.4 Metaphorical Thinking: Empirical Studies

Empirical studies on religious thinking and religious language are useful in three ways: (i) they provide insights into students’ understanding of religious language; (ii) they provide insights into the type of thinking required for understanding religious language; and (iii) they contain, at least implicitly, insights into how to address the pedagogical task. One such study is that of McGrady (1987, 1994a, 1994b) who

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240 Although many of the parables of Jesus do “function as parenesis” (Perrin & Duling, 1982, p. 419), presenting parables in the classroom should avoid extracting a moral message; such an approach is inimical to exploring the range of meanings which the parable invites. One of the “developmental tasks” which Godin (1971) recommended for Christian education, was “the progressive reduction of moralism” (pp. 136-141).

241 Dowling (2010) draws on contemporary biblical scholarship on parables to recommend their use in the religious education classroom in a way which is compatible with the approach argued in this section.

242 Paradoxically, students can find open-endedness disconcerting; for example, Year 10 students studying the gospel of Mark, in which the Kingdom of God in Chapter 4 is presented through a series of parables, frequently seek a clear-cut definition.
investigated the cognitive demands of metaphorical language and students’ understanding of religious metaphor.

**McGrady: operationalising metaphorical thinking**

Recognising and comprehending metaphor impose cognitive demands on the reader. McGrady (1987, p. 87; 1994a, pp. 149-150) proposed six capabilities as “cognitive operations required by religious metaphors”: recognition, comprehension, production, elaboration, interrelation, and validation. These operations require an increasing degree of complexity in cognitive functioning. These capabilities were used to develop a “metaphor and model paradigm of thinking” in which the characteristics of metaphor were narrowed to focus on their “verbal or textual context” (1994a, p. 149). The model was subsequently used in empirical research (McGrady, 1994a, 1994b).

McGrady conducted empirical research in Dublin between 1987 and 1989, with a random sample of 117 Catholic secondary school students from (the Irish) first, third and sixth years. Average ages were 12.86, 14.78 and 16.74 years respectively. In the research McGrady used two different measures of metaphorical understanding and of level of cognitive development in the Piagetian sense. Different results were reported.

In the first part of the study metaphorical religious thinking was measured by means of the instrument which McGrady had devised, the *Metaphor and Model Test of Religious Thinking (MMTRT)*, based on the six capabilities he had identified as representing the elements of metaphorical thinking. Level of cognitive operations was measured using a “modified form” of “Peatling’s paper and pencil test Thinking about the Bible”, *(TAB)* (McGrady, 1994a, p. 153). In the second part of the study cognitive

243 The terms “extension” and “evaluation” were first used (McGrady, 1987, p. 87) for what he later named “elaboration” and “validation” (1994a, pp. 149-150).

244 The choice of this test is most surprising; not only is the validity and reliability of the test questionable (see above, Chapter 2.4) but McGrady had in an earlier article been very critical of Peatling’s research (McGrady, 1983, pp. 126-127, 129-131).
development was measured using a modified form of Goldman’s test, and included questions to test students’ recognition and comprehension of the bread metaphor in the story of Jesus’ temptation, when Jesus replies that “man does not live on bread alone”.

Both studies showed an association between year level and age and cognitive stage. In the first study there was evidence of considerable progress towards formal operational thought between first and third grade, from 15% to 55% respectively (McGrady, 1994a, pp. 153-154). In the second study a clear pattern of stage-related development was discernible: the proportion of formal or advanced formal thinkers at Grades 1, 3, 6 was 10%, 50% and 67% respectively (McGrady, 1994b, p. 57).

McGrady’s findings with regard to metaphorical thinking were similar in the two studies: the highest scores were in recognition of metaphor and fluency increased across the grades. In both studies the scores on comprehension of metaphor were lower, but increased according to age and grade. In the study which used the specially designed instrument to measure metaphorical thinking (MMTRT), the results were statistically significant on both recognition of metaphor (p = 0.05) (McGrady, 1994a, p. 154) and comprehension of metaphor (p = 0.0001) (p. 155). In the second part of the study, which tested metaphorical thinking via the bread metaphor, fluency in recognition and comprehension increased according to age, but were not statistically significant. The younger secondary school students had difficulty in attaining fluency in recognition of metaphor (30% fluency) and only 10% were able to understand metaphor and explain it fluently (McGrady, 1994b, pp. 57-58).

When considering the cognitive demands of metaphorical language, a useful way of gauging those demands is in terms of the stage of cognitive development necessary for mastery of a particular skill. In McGrady’s research, differences in the

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245 A steady decline was found in capacity to engage with the other capabilities (McGrady, 1994a, pp. 154-155).
relationship between metaphorical thinking and stage of cognitive development were reported in the two parts of his study. In the first part, McGrady concluded that the attainment of formal operations was not a pre-requisite for metaphorical comprehension: partial fluency was firmly established during concrete operations and increased at the level of formal operations (McGrady, 1994a, p. 159).

In the second part of the study, fluency in recognition and comprehension of metaphor correlated with operational stage and was statistically significant. Table 6.2 shows the trend.

Table 6.2: Recognition and comprehension of the “by bread alone” metaphor in the story of Jesus’ temptation according to cognitive level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COGNITIVE STAGE</th>
<th>N = 29</th>
<th>Partial fluency of Recognition*</th>
<th>Fluency of Recognition*</th>
<th>Partial fluency of Comprehension#</th>
<th>Fluency of Comprehension#</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concrete operations</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>54.55%</td>
<td>45.45%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal operations</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced formal operations</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* High positive correlation
# Very high positive correlation

One-third of concrete thinkers had achieved fluency or partial fluency in recognition of metaphor; none had achieved fluency or partial fluency in comprehension. At the stage of advanced formal operations, 100% fluency was recorded for both recognition and comprehension of the bread metaphor.

These findings indicate that it would be unwise to take for granted that the majority of the younger students in the secondary school are able to recognise when
metaphor is being used in religious texts. Comprehension of metaphor presents an even greater challenge to concrete thinkers. Specific teaching on the recognition of metaphor and explanation of the meaning of simple, carefully-selected metaphors is recommended for concrete thinkers and for those students who are making the transition to formal operations.

The cognitive demands of religious metaphor

McGrady’s deconstruction of the global term metaphor into several elements confirms what personal reflection and experience in the classroom indicate. The term metaphor covers a range of qualitatively different cognitive demands on the reader. Depending upon cognitive level, some will readily recognise when a comparison is “not literally true” (Barbour, 1974, p. 13), but will not be able to explain any further; others will be able to explain what is meant, indicating comprehension. However, to appreciate the full import of a “genuine metaphor”, one which is “not translatable into literal meaning” (Schneiders, 1991, p. 29), the flexibility of well-established formal operational thinking is a prerequisite: for example, when the metaphor involves “a suggestive invitation to the discovery of further similarities” (Barbour, 1974, p. 14) or the level of metaphorical import is carried by a “root metaphor”, such as “Sacred scripture is the word of God” (Schneiders, 1991, p. 32). Not only will the metaphor not be appreciated, but what is of greater significance is that many who encounter such root metaphors, especially many adolescents, will not recognise that the author’s language is metaphoric. The concept of the Bible as “word of God”, which prefaces much of the teaching of scripture, is a much more difficult concept for young people to comprehend than those which Goldman explored and which elicited responses which indicated high levels of confusion until the mid-teens.246

246 See above, Chapter 2.3, Tables 2.3 – 2.5.
These suggestions are confirmed by McGrady’s analysis of the results from his two test situations. McGrady (1994b) suggested that there “may be three phases in the application of metaphorical religious thinking capabilities to biblical material” (p. 59):

(i) For short statements involving a displaced metaphor, and when the subject matter is within the experience of the student (p. 59), especially where there are “contextual clues such as ‘like’ or ‘as’” (p. 60)—that is, a simile—“formal operational thought does not seem to be a pre-requisite” (p. 60).

(ii) In the case of extended metaphors and more complex parables (p. 59), some aspects do not seem to need formal thought, while others apparently do.

(iii) Formal operational thinking is required for the “application of metaphorical thinking as a broad, generalised paradigm”, “especially when conflict arises with a scientific-world view (p. 59). This includes the possibility of seeing miracle stories (such as the temptation story ...) as symbolic, or the Genesis creation accounts as mythic” (p. 59).

It seems, therefore, that an appreciation of the metaphorical nature of much religious language is not a once-and-for-all acquisition: rather, the capacity to comprehend that metaphor is part of religious discourse, to recognise when statements are to be understood metaphorically, and to understand—at various levels of sophistication—the metaphor and its import, develops progressively and is associated with students’ general cognitive capacity. That students need to be cognitively ready to be able to absorb explanations which introduce the concept of metaphorical meaning has implications for teaching. The study by Cometa and Eson (1978) provides an explanation of the cognitive prerequisites for an understanding of metaphor.
The cognitive demands of metaphor from a Piagetian perspective

The investigation by Cometa and Eson (1978) of the relationship between children’s ability to comprehend and interpret metaphor and Piagetian operational stage is predicated on the Piagetian concept of intersection. As described by Barbour (1974), metaphor requires the reader to “be simultaneously aware” of the “two frames of reference” (p. 13) which constitute the is/is not tension in the metaphor between the word or expression used metaphorically and the rest of the sentence (Black, 1962, p. 35). The concept of the construction of intersecting classes suggests a theoretical explanation of the cognitive demands inherent in the nature of metaphor.

In the Cometa and Eson (1978) study 60 children from grades K, 1, 3, 4 and 8 were divided, on the basis of a battery of Piagetian tasks, into four groups of 15 each according to the following four stages: Preoperational (P), Concrete (C), Intersectional (I) and Formal (F). The mean ages for the four groups were 6.9, 6.11, 9.5 and 14.3 years respectively. Their responses to questions administered in individual interview, and designed to gauge the level at which metaphors were interpreted, were then related to Piagetian stage of cognitive development. The seven metaphors used with the children had been selected from books and magazines and had also been rated according to how common or rare they were.

The link between cognitive stage and ability to interpret metaphor is seen as integral. It is explained in terms of the Piagetian model of language acquisition as a function of the gradual “development of intersectional class structures” (Cometa & Eson, 1978, p. 657), a capacity which starts at the beginning of the stage of concrete operations and is established at the latter part of that stage.

The discussion by Cometa and Eson (1978, pp. 649-651) of the Piagetian concept of intersection is instructive. The metaphor used was “Everyone says that the
man is a sheep” (p. 649). Drawing on Piagetian theory, the interpretation of metaphor is explained in terms of the requirement that two “initially incongruent classes”—man and sheep, or, God and rock to use the religious example given in Section 6.2 above—be aligned (p. 649). This requires the construction of “a subclass or intersecting class which focuses upon less common, alternate meanings for the term which is assigned a metaphoric function” (pp. 649-650)—sheep and rock in the two given examples. This in turn leads to “the construction of an intersectional or mutually inclusive class” (p. 650) which enables the attributes of one frame of reference, the word used metaphorically, for example, rock, to be assigned to the other frame of reference which it is the speaker’s or writer’s intention to elucidate, in the case of this religious metaphor, God. Cometa and Eson (1978) claimed that their findings confirmed that a necessary precondition for explanation of metaphor was “a fully developed system of intersectional classes” (p. 658).

Three stages were identified: (i) syncretic: an inability to deal with metaphor—identified by “syncretic or anomalous responses” (Cometa & Eson, 1978, p. 656); (ii) paraphrase: the ability to paraphrase metaphors—defined in terms of providing an interpretation acceptable to adults; and (iii) explanation: the ability to provide an explanation—defined as the capacity “to explain the reasoning inherent in metaphoric figures of speech” (p. 658). Two distinct steps, therefore, were identified in progress towards metaphor comprehension: the ability to paraphrase metaphors; and subsequently the ability to explain the metaphor. Children at the preoperational level were incapable of comprehending metaphor, “giving either syncretic interpretations or viewing metaphor as meaningless” (p. 650). At the level of concrete operations the capacity to paraphrase metaphors gradually developed (p. 656) and by the time children reached the latter stages of concrete operations they were able to explain metaphors (p. 658). Formal operational thinkers were able to paraphrase metaphors and to explain them with increasing facility and competence.
This study also demonstrated that the degree of difficulty of a metaphor influenced children’s comprehension. How common a metaphor was “had a significant (≤ .01 level) impact upon group C children attempting to paraphrase metaphors and for the group I children attempting to explain metaphors” (Cometa & Eson, 1978, p. 656). There was little impact on those at the level of formal operations.

These results suggest that children in the primary school, having reached the stage of concrete operations (mean age 6.11 years in the study) would be able to paraphrase metaphors in common use, and those who have reached late concrete operations, defined in terms of the establishment of intersectional classification (mean age 9.5 years in the study), would be able to explain common metaphors.

The findings of empirical studies of metaphor, that of Cometa and Eson (1978) and of that of McGrady (1994a, 1994b), provide insights into the cognitive demands of metaphor. How these findings may be applied to teaching and learning in religious education classrooms at the secondary school will be considered, then applied to the more complex expressions of metaphor in the genres of myth and parable.

**The application of empirical studies of metaphor to teaching and learning**

Recognising when religious language is used metaphorically does not necessarily occur spontaneously in children or adolescents: deliberate and systematic teaching for recognition and comprehension of metaphor is necessary. McGrady’s study provides evidence for the differential operation of the degrees of complexity in metaphors, suggesting that it could function as a taxonomy for the classification of metaphors, similar to the taxonomy of Bloom (1979), and be a useful guide for the religious education teacher in providing learning activities which take cognisance of the cognitive demands of the language: for example, metaphor as one word in a short statement (e.g. Black, 1962, pp. 27-28) at one end of the spectrum and religious myths
and narratives at the other. Teaching could then be structured to consolidate students’ present level of understanding of metaphor while providing learning activities which challenged movement to the next level of linguistic sophistication. Such teaching would reinforce the metaphorical nature of much religious language and challenge a literalist interpretation of religious texts.

Specific findings from the McGrady research are illustrative of the difficulties experienced in the comprehension, as distinct from recognition, of metaphors, and the complexity of the interpretive task. These findings highlight the particular demands imposed on the reader by the theological concepts intrinsic to many religious metaphors, and on the terms used to illustrate the meaning. McGrady’s (1994a) test instrument (MMTRT) included four common religious metaphors, four metaphors which were probably unfamiliar, and two parabolic statements (p. 152). The common metaphors included Jesus as the Lamb of God (p. 152) and the appearance of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in the form of tongues of fire (p. 156). The first, which had one word displaced, was easily recognised as not literal, however only 3.45% could adequately explain the metaphor. The theological meaning is highly abstract, and, furthermore, the context in which the “focus” of the metaphor lamb, is used is far removed from contemporary experience. More young people were able to explain the meaning of tongues of fire in the Pentecost text; however 77.6% were unable to do so (McGrady, 1994a, p. 156). McGrady suggested that these “images had ceased to function as metaphors and were regarded as literal descriptions” (p. 156). This explanation accords with the statements made earlier about metaphors losing their tensive quality. However, there are also other possible explanations: (i) that young people are reluctant to deconstruct such familiar religious metaphors—perhaps because of the association of the metaphor with the sacred; (ii) perhaps the unarticulated perception that they are expected to believe these as religious truths, even if they have difficulty understanding them; and (iii) an inadequate comprehension of familiar religious metaphors as a result of artistic portrayal which reinforces a
concrete interpretation; for example, religious pictures of Pentecost which depict tongues of fire visually.

Comprehension of the relatively unfamiliar metaphors was higher than for those which are quite well-known. In the four unfamiliar metaphors, the mental images provided by familiar objects may well have assisted understanding: for example, the wheel associated with a Hindu text, a canoe in a story from the New Hebrides. The only biblical metaphor in this section was the potter and the clay, which 32.7% were able to explain, a capacity which progressed according to year level. This metaphor provides a clear and comprehensible visual image; furthermore, the story is not readily identifiable with what young Christians believe they must accept as religious truth, so the pressure imposed by the religious subject matter would be lessened.

The significance of students’ familiarity with the focus of a metaphor is discernible in McGrady’s findings in relation to parental images of the divine (McGrady, 1994a, p. 156). The metaphor of God as father was recognised by 72.4% as a metaphor; however, only 47% could clearly explain it. The use of a woman with her child as a metaphor for God, however, was recognised at first year level by 5%, increasing to 60% and 55.6% in the third and sixth years respectively; the corresponding figures for comprehension were 10%, 45% and 50% respectively (p. 156). The persistent anthropomorphism in the image of God, which Goldman’s research identified (Goldman, 1964, p. 89), is reinforced by male images of the divine; the use of feminine images young people find very challenging.

To summarise: in the application of the insights provided by McGrady’s research (1994a, 1994b), the following suggestions are made: 247

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247 These suggestions could be formulated as hypotheses for testing empirically.
(i)  **The visual element** in the focus of the metaphor: If students can readily visualise the image, there is a concrete element which may function in the transfer of meaning from one part of the metaphor, the focus (Black, 1962, p. 28), to the other, and enhance understanding of the religious element in unfamiliar metaphors.

(ii)  **The religious dimension**: If students believe that to be a Christian requires that one interpret religious language and religious texts literally, their understanding of metaphor will be impeded, and rejection of religious belief a distinct possibility when the cognitive dissonance resulting from literalism demands resolution.

(iii)  **Familiarity with religious imagery**: While familiarity with the material usually assists in interpretation, in the religious domain this may not necessarily be the case. Familiar stories and images, especially if reinforced by religious pictures, may militate against the recognition of the operation of religious metaphor.

**Empirical research on parables**

This review of research into children’s understanding of parables identifies some of the issues which need to be considered if the theological richness of the parable as a literary genre is to be revealed and opened up for imaginative engagement.

**Contrasting findings: Murphy and Bucher.**

The research by Murphy (1977a) involved 200 children aged six to eleven years, whose understanding was tested on four parables (p. 168) in an interview situation (p. 169). Murphy assessed responses at three levels according to the following criteria: (i) repetition of facts, a literal application; (ii) a simple application, indicating movement towards allegorical understanding; and (iii) understanding of the allegorical meaning of the parable (p. 169). The results indicated “a developmental increase in ... levels of understanding ... with increasing age” (p. 170). However, analysis of responses revealed different levels of understanding on different parables (pp. 170-171). The
proportion that achieved a level 3 score was much higher on the parable of the Good Samaritan (p. 170)—45% of seven-year-olds, and 80% of eleven-year olds (p. 170)—than on the parable of the Rich Fool, 0% and 30% respectively (p. 171), which marked the two extremes. The results when using a modernised version of the parable (p. 171) also differed according to the parable. Differential results were also found when a multiple-choice questionnaire was used (p. 172).

Murphy (1977a) concluded that these findings suggested a gradual age-related development in the capacity to appreciate the allegorical meaning of parables rather than stage-related development (p. 172). However, an understanding of the allegorical meaning of a parable by the age of seven is problematic. Slee (1983, p. 134) claimed that researchers did not differentiate between parable and allegory. As a result, she argued, the empirical studies of children’s understanding of parables, including that of Murphy (1977a), are “severely limited, if not invalidated”, because of their “inadequate theoretical model of parable” (Slee, 1983, pp. 135-136).

Murphy’s (1977a) research pointed to the significance of the parable itself (p. 172), a finding confirmed by McGrady (1994a). The two parables used in McGrady’s study of secondary school students—“the camel and the eye of the needle” and “the treasure hidden in the field” (p. 152)—yielded different results, indicating that as with metaphors the particular features of the parable are significant: 70.7% clearly recognised the camel parable as a metaphor, against 24.1% for the hidden treasure parable. The corresponding results for a partial or fluent explanation were 84.5% and 44.8% respectively. McGrady cited “literal interpretation of the hidden treasure parable” as the “most common difficulty” (p. 156).

In a small-scale empirical study with 28 Swiss aged 7 to 50 years, half of whom were younger than thirteen, Bucher (1991) used Oser’s Paul dilemma to identify stage of religious judgment, as defined by Oser and Gmünder, against which to investigate
understanding of the New Testament parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Matt 20:1-16) and the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30).

The study identified three levels of understanding of parables:

**Level 1**: Concrete-Literal: in which “the youngest children took the parables to be true stories about events in Jesus’ time” (p. 102);

**Level 2**: Concrete-Moral: in which it was understood that the parables were fiction, but they were interpreted as having a moral message (p. 103);

**Level 3**: Symbolic-Analogical: in which the parables were clearly seen as fiction “containing a deep meaning about religious concepts that could not be said as effectively in another way” (p. 103).

The interpretations of the parables were aligned with Stages 1-4 of Oser and Gmünder’s scheme, on the assumption that “stage of religious judgment, not age, would be the primary determinant of how parables were interpreted” (p. 103), an assumption which, it was claimed, was supported by the evidence (p. 105). Bucher’s conclusion that his findings did not “contradict the findings of Goldman”, and supplemented “the Piagetian explanations by providing a closer look at how interpretations are fashioned” is in contrast to Murphy (1977a) who argued that development was age-related and was gradual rather than progressing in stages.

**Implications for education.**

Murphy identified three factors influencing young people’s understanding of parables—the parable itself, its form, and the test situation. The discussion earlier in

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248 It is suggested that the parable of the talents is not one which is appropriate for young people until there is a sound understanding of parable as a genre. Byrne (2004) states that it “presents difficulty on two fronts”: in regard to the use of wealth, and the allegorical interpretation which may be given to “the returning businessman” (p. 189). The parable has been used with secondary school students to encourage them to use their talents, understood in terms of abilities.

249 Oser and Gmünder proposed a five stage model of religious judgment. See, for example, Table 1, Summary of the Stages of Religious Judgment, Oser and Gmünder (1991, pp. 12-13).
this chapter revealed the complexity of parable as a genre and the need for distinctions to be made between types of parable and the characteristics of the parables chosen for students of different ages and cognitive stages. Both findings warn against a simplistic, unitary view of the parable genre: not all parables are the same in terms of the cognitive demands which they make, especially on young readers. The following factors need to be considered in the teaching of parables: 250

(i) **The setting**: The historical setting influences the parable’s accessibility to the reader. The first century CE setting of the parables is a world which is totally unfamiliar to young people in the twenty-first century (e.g. Slee, 1983, p. 136). The historical-critical method of biblical exegesis situates the stories in their cultural context. Teachers need to be familiar with contemporary biblical scholarship and take advantage of resources which facilitate the application of these insights to students (e.g. Ryan, 2001c). 251

(ii) **The situation**: Some situations are more readily accessible to young people than others. This is clear from Murphy’s research, in which the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37), was more readily understood than that of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:16-21).

(iii) **The ideas and concepts**: Similarly, the ideas in the parables frequently used in primary school, the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan and the Lost Sheep, are at a straightforward level more accessible to young people than, for example, the ideas in the parable of the Rich Fool: father-son relationships, helping those in need and being sought out and found when lost, as against the story of an over-confident rich land owner.

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250 The focus in this discussion is on the parable as narrative.
251 Numerous on-line resources are now available; however, their quality and approach needs to be very carefully monitored, e.g., to guard against a fundamentalist approach. The 31 May 2010 RESource E-News, prepared by fraynework.com.au, and issued by the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, provides a link to “The Parables of Jesus” at http://resource.fraynework.com.au/object.cfm?o=204
The research by Stead indicates that several parables are used extensively throughout the primary school (e.g. Stead, 1998, p. 11). The actual choice is important and should take into consideration their capacity to be understood at both a literal and a metaphorical level. At primary school, where most children will be at a concrete level of thinking, a literalist understanding will predominate, despite Murphy’s apparent claim to the contrary. Over exposure at a young age to the same few parables will eliminate any freshness in response to the narrative and, as a result, will limit the impact of the parable when formal operational thinking and an increasing facility with metaphor can be brought to the interpretive task. As a result, the parable “as an aesthetic whole” (McFague, 1975, p. 13) will lose its capacity to be comprehended as an “open-ended” narrative, in which “ordinary meaning” is expanded and the reader or listener is “shocked into a new awareness” (p. 13). Furthermore, the identification in young people’s minds of parables with childhood stories will also militate against acquiring a facility with parabolic thinking in less clear-cut instances than the narrative: for example, “Jesus as the parable of God” (p. 3). The evocative power of parables and parabolic thinking, and the density of their religious meaning, is accessible only if understood in the light of their sophisticated metaphorical meaning; this potential is lost if parables have been robbed of their power through early teaching that restricts them to a childish, often moralistic, understanding.

6.5 Religious Thinking and Scientific Thinking

In his discussion of the “Christian myth”, Smart (1974) contrasted a time when “there was no need particularly to ask too closely about the existence and nature of Adam”, with the period, post evolutionary theory, where “Adam’s real existence is called in question” (p. 143); the “myth evaporated round the literal” (p. 143). Nowadays, one of
the issues constantly raised by adolescents is the truth of the Bible given the perceived incompatibility of the biblical text with scientific theory.

In this chapter the focus has been on the nature of myth as a literary genre. It has been argued that an understanding of myth as a story which encapsulates an “essential truth” (Binkley, 1962, p. 21) which cannot be articulated except in metaphorical language, is dependent upon the attainment of an appropriate level of cognitive development, at least late concrete operations, or, according to some research, formal operational thought. Issues dependent upon a clear understanding of myth as a distinct genre include the perceived conflict between the scientific explanation of the origins of the universe and the biblical account, the nature of truth and the role of evidence.

While the capacity for formal operational thought is necessary for a facility in dealing with figurative language, adolescents’ newly attained cognitive flexibility can function negatively as well as positively. If students’ increasing competence in abstract thinking is exercised in the scientific domain before it can be applied to religious thinking, it is quite likely that the capacity to identify perceived inadequacies in religious belief may preclude the application of critical thinking to religious language and the interpretation of the Bible. McGrady (1994b) aptly sums up this point:

since with the onset of formal operations the individual is provided with a range of critical and analytical empirical tools not previously available (often initially causing religious ideas to wither under their scrutiny) the appeal to the metaphoric may be dismissed by the individual as a denial of factual status. Only later, as formal operations become firmly established (advanced formal operations) and the relativity of scientific thinking is grasped, is the apparent conflict between the scientific and the biblical-religious examined in a way that is open to the symbol and the metaphoric (p. 60).

The reality may well be that before formal operations are firmly established the young person may have rejected religious belief: hence, the necessity to begin the
process of challenging literalism early, so that students are adequately prepared for
the demythologising experience and, most importantly, they can recognise that they
have not been duped. In the late primary school and in the early years of the
secondary school, in the period of transition from concrete to formal operations,
literalism must be addressed, gradually and sensitively, through a staged programme
whereby the metaphors used in religious language are identified, explored in a positive
way, and become an accepted feature of religious discourse.

At the same time, students’ understanding of the nature of science and
scientific thinking need to be addressed. In particular, teachers need to support the
transition to an appreciation that science and religion do not present a simple dualism;
rather, instead of necessarily being contradictory, they provide complementary ways of
perceiving the breadth and depth of reality and of human life. With complementarity
in thinking between religious and scientific explanations of phenomena (Reich, 1989)
the full import of “genuine metaphor” and its evocative richness can be accessed.

**Science and Religion: complementarity in religious thinking**

Reich (1989) used the concept of complementarity in thinking to address the
challenges presented by the perceived contradictions between religious and scientific
world views and the persistence of a literalist understanding of scripture. Reich
explained how both a scientific and a religious understanding of phenomena can be
held, each in its own domain, so that apparently conflicting views can be seen to be
complementary, rather than necessarily contradictory. His research indicates that the
capacity to think in terms of complementarity proceeds through a series of stages
which have their counterparts in epistemological stages.252

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252 Although Reich later came to call this way of thinking *Relational and Contextual Reasoning*, or RCR,
(Reich, 1996, p. 129, 143), the term “thinking in terms of complementarity” expresses the type of
thinking in a clear and succinct way and will be retained.
In a study which Reich conducted with Fritz Oser in 1985 (Oser & Reich, 1987) participants were required to decide for nine problems whether theory A or theory B was correct and to justify the decision. One of the questions is of relevance in exploring students’ understanding of the Bible. In this question, Theory A represented the scientific world view (the Big Bang theory and evolution), while the role and ongoing presence of God in creation was Theory B. The five consecutive levels of complementarity in thinking which this study identified are presented in the first three columns of Table 6.3. The fourth column provides parallels with the Reflective Judgment Model and, in italics, Kuhn’s stages in epistemological understanding.

Table 6.3: Stages of complementarity in thinking and corresponding epistemological stage\(^{253}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Age [From 1985 study: n = 24]</th>
<th>Suggested Corresponding epistemological stage(^ {254})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A or B is correct</td>
<td>Two-thirds of 6-10 year olds</td>
<td>Dogmatism Absolutist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>A and B? Possibility that A and B are correct</td>
<td>One-third of 11–14 year olds</td>
<td>Transition to Scepticism Transition to Multiplist or Relativist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A and B necessary; beginning of complementarity</td>
<td>One-third of 11–14 year olds</td>
<td>Scepticism Multiplist or Relativist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A and B immediately seen as complementary</td>
<td>About 80% of 21–25 year olds</td>
<td>Relativism Transition to Evaluativist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Problem considered afresh; sophisticated synopsis of logically possible explanations and relationships.</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>Rationalism Evaluativist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Oser and Reich, 1987; Reich, 1989.
Parallels can also be drawn with the earlier research of Perry (1970).
These data suggest that many adolescents in the early years of the secondary school are beginning to see the possibility of two apparently contradictory explanations being complementary rather than necessarily contradictory, and more than one explanation being logically possible. This is of crucial significance in addressing students’ perception of a perceived conflict between religion and science. Unless challenged, a literalist interpretation of Genesis 1–2 will reinforce Stage 1 in complementarity of thinking, that is, a contradiction between the biblical and scientific approaches to “how it all began”, and an important educational opportunity will be lost.

The sample responses in Table 6.4 represent the different levels of complementarity in thinking on the scientific world view (Theory A) and a religious world view (Theory B) discussed by Reich (1989).
Table 6.4: Sample responses representative of the different stages of complementarity in thinking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level*</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Reason given (Sample responses)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Theory B</td>
<td>“God told him the truth”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“it is written in the Bible”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>referred to the Minister of a church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theory A</td>
<td>“He [the scientist] can <em>prove</em> his point; the minister cannot”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Both A and B are correct</td>
<td>“A could be right, but I believe B because I know it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I believe more in the Bible, but that humanity descends from apes is also right.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Some Complementarity between Theory A and Theory B</td>
<td>“God works, perhaps through good luck, like, that at a given moment just the right thing happens, that just the stuff arrives that is needed.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“the big bang is alright, but insufficient as an explanation. That takes something more, like a higher spirit who originated the big bang.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“the scientists are also right, but they cannot say why the world exists ... God wanted it to exist ... but one has to understand this symbolically, this portrayal of Adam and Eve ... I would simply combine it with the theory of evolution”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Complementarity</td>
<td>“A and B belong to different dimensions ... God exists in a dimension that we cannot understand ...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Scientific and religious statements are complementary; both are helpful and are needed ...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“… a physics theory ... does not <em>per se</em> contradict a religious view. Adam and Eve in the Bible is a possible model of human origin, calling for interpretation …”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Level of complementarity of thinking

Co-operation between Religious Education, English and Science teachers can be mutually beneficial.\textsuperscript{255} Language skills could be consolidated across English and Religious Education and the implicit and unrecognised perception that religious

\textsuperscript{255} It is frequently the case that Religious Education teachers are also English teachers. In the early years of the secondary school it is not uncommon for the same teacher to teach a class group for both Religious Education and English.
education is cognitively different from other parts of the curriculum would be challenged. Similarly, the joint efforts of Religious Education and Science teachers can be employed in the difficult task of addressing two complementary tasks: “the limitations of the scientific method” and “the role of imagination in scientific theory highlighted”, and demonstrating that both science and religion draw on “the imagination” and “use metaphors and models as heuristic devices” (McGrady, 1994b, p. 62). It is suggested, however, that such a counter-cultural enterprise would be very demanding, given the virtually unquestioned acceptance of scientific thinking and empiricism in contemporary society (e.g. Gaukroger, 2006, p. 11; Barbour, 1974, pp. 2-4).

6.6 Perspectives on Religious Truth

A recurring theme in studies which have reported young people’s responses to questions on religious belief is the question of truth, the truth of religious statements and the truth of the Bible. Issues which need to be addressed by the classroom teacher include distinguishing between religious truth and other kinds of truth, for example, historical truth and scientific truth. Two approaches to the question are considered briefly in this section: (i) the philosophical status of religious language and the question of reality; and (ii) the development of logical necessity and its relationship to ways of knowing and understanding.

The philosophical status of religious language and the question of “reality”

The nature of religious statements and their relation to “reality” is implicit in many of the questions which students ask. This question has been seen as a “central problem”

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256 McGrady (1994b) saw a role for interdisciplinary work in post-primary schools involving religion, science, literature (p. 62).
in the “philosophical study of religious language” (Hick, 1962, p. 22). For example, used philosophically, statements about God do not make a judgement about whether the term “God” refers to a Being who actually exists. However, for the believer, there is “a nexus of religious faith and language” (p. 24): “the concept of God which is embodied in the language of Judaic-Christian faith is the concept of a Being who exists objectively” (p. 24). Within “the circle of faith”, “there are religious realities and theological facts as well as physical realities and scientific facts” (p. 22), which need to be accommodated. Hick referred to the “metaphysical” use of language, “the making of statements of (putative) religious fact” (p. 24).

The context in which religious language is used is significant in determining its meaning; however, the different contexts represent a deep philosophical divide over the nature of religious discourse: whether “statements about God are cognitive or non-cognitive\textsuperscript{257} in nature” (p. 22). Coming from a theological perspective, the issue is not a question of whether religious statements are about reality or whether they are true; rather, it is the nature of the religious meaning. In analysing the religious language in the Bible and, for example, deconstructing biblical myths, the believer is seeking to establish the particular religious truth the text contains. However, the questions which young people raise are not necessarily predicated upon religious belief: to respond, it is necessary to go beyond the basic premises of theology. The discussion which follows considers (i) the truth claims of religious language from the perspective of the philosophical status of religious language; and (ii) logical necessity, which operates at the interface between epistemology and cognitive psychology.

\textsuperscript{257} In this context the term “cognitive” refers to statements which refer to reality; the term “non-cognitive” refers to statements which do not refer to reality. Blackburn (1994), in the \textit{Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy}, defines the “cognitive aspect of the meaning of a sentence” as “the truth condition of a sentence” (p. 67).
The truth claims of religious language: cognitive and non-cognitive functions.

The claim by logical positivists and empiricists, influential during much of the twentieth century, that religious language was purely subjective has resonances in the questions raised by young people in the transition to formal thought. In a sustained argument in response to positivism, Barbour (1974) claimed that religious language can sustain cognitive statements, that is, statements which are true.

Barbour’s argument turns on “three themes”, “the diverse functions of language, the role of models and the role of paradigms” (1974, p. 11). These, he claims, “combine to support the position of critical realism ... in both science and religion” (p. 11). The fundamental position which he argues is “that science is not as objective, nor religion as subjective, as many philosophers maintain” (p. 171).

In developing his argument Barbour (1974) draws on his analysis of models and paradigms. Although there are differences between models in religion and in science, Barbour argues that in both cases, models “are neither pictures of reality nor useful fictions” (p. 7). Similarly, scientific paradigms contain assumptions which influence scientific theory and research. While he concedes that the subjective features of science are more evident in religion (p. 144), and the objective features of science are less evident in religion (p. 145), he identifies criteria for cognitive beliefs in religion—coherence, supporting evidence, extensibility of application, and comprehensiveness (p. 143).

Critical realism takes symbolism seriously (Barbour, 1974, pp. 172-173).258 It is contrasted with two extremes: (i) “naïve realism”, characterised by its “literal pictures of reality”, which represents “traditional and orthodox” teaching of religion (p. 172); and (ii) “instrumentalism”, such as “the study of religion in secular universities” which

258 In developing his position on “critical realism”, Barbour (1974, p. 173) cites Robert Bellah and his position on “symbolic realism”. 

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is reductionist (p. 173). Teaching for critical engagement with the biblical text is, in fact, seeking to move from the Dualism represented by these two extremes to a more nuanced interpretation of scripture which takes religious symbolism seriously.

The construction of logical necessity

The distinction between “logical and causal necessities” (Reich, 1989, p. 66), is explored in the research of Moshman and Timmons (1982). A key distinction is between statements which are “contingently true”, which are justified in terms of the empirical data, and those which are “necessarily true” (p. 310), which are justified “by appealing to the meaning of the words and to the necessary logic of classes, relations and numbers” (p. 311). The capacity to make this distinction is dependent upon the capacity for metacognition, which is the basis of the series of stages which Moshman and Timmons postulate in the development of the construction of logical necessity (p. 315). The model which they developed is based upon a synthesis of elements found in constructivist theories, such as that of Piaget (p. 314), and the relation between development and learning (pp. 315-316). The three-stage model (pp. 316-320) is summarised in Table 6.5.
Table 6.5: Stages in the construction of logical necessity (Moshman and Timmons)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Piagetian stage</th>
<th>Characteristics / Logical processes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prenecessity</td>
<td>Sensorimotor</td>
<td>o Protological: arranging, counting, ordering, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preoperational</td>
<td>o Oriented toward pragmatic usefulness or empirical truth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o No logical necessity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o Knowledge implicit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o Gradual development in empirical abstraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o Move towards reflective abstraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o Transition to internalization of overt behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implicit</td>
<td>Concrete</td>
<td>o Use of knowledge of logical necessity; not explicitly aware of the necessity of the relation itself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>necessity</td>
<td>operations</td>
<td>o Ability to recognise sound arguments but not able to distinguish between logical validity of argument and empirical truth of content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o Progressive development of reflective abstraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o Development of explicit metacognitive awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o Construction of concept of logical necessity, but limited to content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit</td>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>o Development of a more explicit conception of logical necessity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>necessity</td>
<td>operations</td>
<td>o Further development of reflective abstraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o Distinction between logical validity and empirical truth of content</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In considering the development of thinking which marks the transition to a stage beyond a literalist interpretation of scripture, the elements in this model may be re-framed as components in an awareness of how knowledge and truth are constituted and perceived. Some of these awarenesses apply to students’ understanding; others provide the teacher with an insight into how students may be guided towards a more epistemologically mature understanding of truth statements.
Moshman and Timmons (1982) posit a series of distinctions between knowing and understanding. Of particular interest for teachers is the distinction between explicit and implicit knowledge, and between development and learning (pp. 315-316). Initially, knowledge is “only implicit (procedural, tacit, knowing how)” (p. 315). At the next stage, knowledge becomes “an explicit (declarative, metacognitive, knowing that)” (p. 315); knowledge becomes understanding. The distinction between development and learning highlights the distinction between superficial knowledge, the result of “exogenously caused changes”, and the “later developmental reconstruction of that knowledge into a more fundamental structural understanding, or “endogenous construction” (p. 316). This deeper level of understanding may occur when students’ readiness coincides with teaching strategies which aim at understanding. An awareness of this crucial distinction can better inform religious education teachers in their presentation and explanation of religious language and in the teaching of scripture.

A further point: Moshman and Timmons’ (1982) statement that “considerations regarding the necessity of logical truths thus come after those truths are learned, not before” (p. 316) supports the teaching of the Bible to children and adolescents before they can fully appreciate the types of truth and a non-literalist interpretation of the text, a practice recommended by Godin (1971, p. 122). From mid primary school, such teaching should be directed to encouraging a deeper, non-literalist understanding by introducing appropriate concepts and explanations of the text which students can gradually absorb, thereby providing the exogenous preconditions for endogenous reconstruction of their understanding of the scriptures and the “progressive capacity of the child for a hermeneutic … a clear intellectual comprehension of the religious sense of symbolic narratives” (Godin, 1968, p. 440). The knowledge goal of religious education is teaching in a way which provides the external conditions which stimulate

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259 This is a different conclusion from that which Goldman reached with regard to “readiness” for a study of the Bible and which influenced his subsequent development of curriculum materials.
the internal reconstruction of understanding of the nature of religious language and its application to the biblical text.

**Summary**

Fundamental to an understanding of religious language is an awareness of the ubiquity of religious metaphor. The purpose of this chapter has been to explore the issues which have been raised by young people in their engagement with the biblical text by focussing on the linguistic features of religious language and the religious genres of myth and parable. The religious meaning of many texts and passages can only be fully appreciated when the reader understands metaphor. The capacity to recognise when metaphorical language is being used is a necessary first step towards a non-literalist interpretation of biblical narratives such as myth and parable.

The characteristics of metaphor were initially considered from a philosophical perspective then applied to the way in which metaphor is used in religious discourse. A significant element in teaching directed towards a non-literalist interpretation of scripture is revealing the metaphorical character of familiar religious statements which have lost their metaphoric tension and are likely to be taken literally. Of fundamental importance for teachers, rather than students, is an understanding of the role of the models and paradigms in the underlying framework within which religious statements and beliefs are couched; otherwise, these theoretical constructs may be taken literally.

Understanding myth and parable is dependent upon an appreciation of figurative or metaphorical language. The alternative is a persistent concrete and literalist interpretation and the attendant difficulties with regard to religious truth and the perceived conflict between scientific and religious perspectives on reality. A related issue is the significance of symbols and symbolic thinking in religion. The
movement from a magical mentality to a symbolic mentality parallels the movement from a literalist to a more nuanced interpretation of the biblical text. Furthermore, symbolic language and symbolic narratives impinge directly on one’s interpretation of the Bible.

An examination of the characteristics of parables, from perspectives provided by both philosophers of language and biblical scholars, reveals both the cognitive demands of such texts and the potential they provide for teachers to engage students’ creativity. Parables can be presented to young people as lively stories of everyday people—albeit in a different time and place—in which there is a reversal of the expected and a surprise ending. So presented parables are open-ended and have the power to continue to reveal more and more about the Kingdom of God; to present parables in order to extract a moral message is to foreclose on their creative potential.

Empirical studies provide insights—sometimes conflicting—into how young people actually understand religious language and biblical texts. For example, McGrady’s findings with regard to young people’s increasing fluency in recognising metaphor and subsequently comprehending its meaning, indicate that these capacities are developing, perhaps quite slowly, during the years of secondary education. The research of Cometa and Eson draws on the Piagetian concept of intersectional class structures to explain how the growing capacity for young people to understand metaphor occurs. The research of Reich and Oser indicates the development of the capacity to hold apparently contradictory explanations of phenomena as complementary.

However, empirical studies record the spontaneous insights of which students are capable; unless specifically designed to do so, they do not reveal what can be achieved by purposeful teaching. It is the educator’s task to devise educative programmes which provide the external (exogenous) conditions which will make
explicit what may be implicit in students’ thinking, and to facilitate understanding at a pace compatible with their developmental stage. For the researcher and teacher, understanding how figurative language functions, the ability to identify the cognitive demands of texts and the cognitive capacities of students at different ages and stages of development is a necessary prerequisite for devising a curriculum and pedagogy which addresses the transformation of thinking from a literalist to a post-literalist, deeper and critical understanding of scripture.

Chapter 7 applies the insights gained from cognitive development theory, from faith development theory and from an understanding of the cognitive demands of religious language and religious texts to the educative task of teaching for critical engagement with the text.
CHAPTER 7 – TEACHING FOR TRANSFORMATION

Introduction

This thesis considers the following issues which have been identified as needing to be addressed educationally: the truth of the Bible, the question of evidence, and the perceived contradiction between biblical and scientific explanations of phenomena. These issues extend across a number of discipline areas: epistemological questions about the nature of knowledge; the differences between scientific and religious knowledge; hermeneutical issues in approaches to interpreting the biblical text; and questions of meaning. It is argued that the task is to facilitate the transition from a literalist interpretation of scripture to a richer, more nuanced understanding which also opens up the potential for the text to be “revelatory” (Schneiders, 1991).

That educational intervention can make a difference to student learning is supported by the findings of research by Kay and Francis (1996), Fahy (1992), Flynn (1993), Flynn and Mok (2002), and Rymarz and Graham (2006). More specifically, the research by Hoge and Petrillo (1978), who investigated the effects of what they called Goldman’s hypothesised “gap” between religious thinking and thinking in other areas, provided findings which, in the case of the Catholic students attending a private Catholic school (pp. 148-151), supports the claim that teaching can have an effect. The Loman and Francis (2004) research on an intervention programme to promote Year 7 students’ understanding of religious symbols is more direct evidence of the potential of teaching specifically designed to address literalism.

In this chapter the findings of the earlier chapters will be applied to the dialectic between the learner and the text. This involves a consideration of the developmental stage of the reader of the text, specifically the adolescent in the secondary school, and

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260 See above, Chapter 2.2.
a consideration of the nature of the biblical text. Structural developmental theory, operating out of a Piagetian paradigm, is the theoretical framework within which the characteristics of the reader are addressed. A consideration of the nature of religious language and the nature and epistemological status of religious statements is chosen as the entrée into the philosophical and hermeneutical issues raised by the need to interpret the written religious text. The educative task of teaching for critical engagement with the text is encapsulated in the term teaching for transformation.

7.1 The Process of Transformation

The term teaching for transformation is intended to convey the idea of a process which has psychological, philosophical, and theological dimensions. It is directed towards a transformation in thinking which proceeds by a dialogical learning process which in turn facilitates a dialectical relationship between reader and text. Its psychological roots are in cognitive development theory, starting with Piaget’s stage theory and drawing on the research of those who investigated post formal operations. The research of Perry, Belenky and associates, the Reflective Judgment Model of Kitchener and King, and Kuhn’s promotion of thinking skills as integral to education, provided insights into epistemology. Mezirow’s transformative learning and Basseches’ dialectical thinking provide links between the psychological and philosophical dimensions and between the cognitive, the affective and conative domains.

The concept of conation, and their common philosophical roots in the critical theory of Habermas, link Mezirow and Groome. Groome’s shared praxis approach to religious education locates critical thinking in a dialectical process which is directed towards a transformation of the individual who becomes open to the transcendent, and, through “critical consciousness”, becomes engaged in a praxis which can transform society (Groome, 1980, p. 122). Teaching for transformation seeks to
advance transformation in thinking, in understanding, in praxis, and in openness to the transcendent.

Crucial for transformative learning is “critical reflection” (Mezirow 1990a, p. 1) by which new meaning or new interpretations are arrived at. This requires a capacity and a willingness to challenge one’s presuppositions, that is, the assumptions upon which one’s thinking is predicated. Mezirow’s specific contribution to understanding the process of transformation is in directing attention to the components of the person’s “frame of reference” (p. 1) which need to be critically evaluated in order for a new understanding to be assimilated and accommodated within one’s existing cognitive structure. One’s “habitual expectations”, the “implicit rules for interpreting” (p. 2), need to be reflected upon and critically evaluated for new learning to occur; for example, a new understanding of myth. Critical reflection is akin to epistemic cognition (Kitchener, 1983) and Kuhn’s evaluativist level of epistemic understanding (Kuhn, 2005). This explains why it is insufficient to simply provide a definition or a verbal explanation of Genesis 1 and 2 as myths, or that the term “word of God” in relation to the Bible is a metaphor. The concrete thinker’s habits of expectation will militate against the explanation being assimilated into their cognitive schema or frame of reference.

The culmination of the process of critical reflection will be a paradigm shift in which a new way of understanding, or of structuring meaning, is reached which transforms former ways of knowing which are now superseded. If the qualitative change, or transformation in thinking, can be accomplished successfully, the person, adolescent or adult, will move beyond a literalist understanding of scripture to an interpretation which takes cognisance of the genre, form, and language of the text. Rather than rejecting the Bible as out-of-date or childish, a transformation of perspective (Mezirow, 1990a, p. 13) will lead to a reassessment of outgrown or distorted assumptions and the emancipation of the scriptures from the constraints of
literalism. One of the ways in which this transition to transformative learning is facilitated is by a classroom environment which is open to new ways of thinking which, in turn, are furthered via a process of dialectical thinking.\textsuperscript{261}

Basseches (1986) describes transformation as an interactive process (p. 36) resulting from dialectical thinking which makes it possible to “see the limits and to see beyond the limits of the context”. Again this is linked to the cognitive capacities which constitute epistemic cognition. Considered in these abstract terms, the culmination of the process of transformation involves the high level cognitive capacities constitutive of mature epistemological understanding (Kuhn, 2005), and a willingness to engage in such thinking.

7.2 Factors which Facilitate and Factors which Impede Transformative Learning

Factors which facilitate or impede teaching for transformation involve both students’ cognitive capacities and their willingness to engage in the critical reflection required for transformative learning.

Students’ cognitive capacities

If the process of transformation requires the advanced level of formal operational thought which the term epistemic cognitive denotes, then the intellectual or cognitive impediments to teaching for transformation seem insurmountable. A brief reprise of cognitive development theory and the findings of empirical studies such as that of Goldman, make it clear that very few young people in the secondary school have reached a sophisticated level of epistemological functioning.

\textsuperscript{261} It may be added that a prior step to achieving this outcome for students is to ensure that teachers have undergone such a transformation in thinking about scripture and are therefore in a position to sponsor a similar process in students.
Piaget’s original findings led him to state that formal operational thinking was attained at 11+ years. However, subsequent research revealed that formal thought was reached at a later age, especially when verbal material was involved. When Piaget (1972) revised his theory to put the attainment of formal operations at 15 to 20 years (pp. 9-10) he added a qualification regarding the “diversification of aptitudes with age” (p. 9). This may well be relevant in the case of the teaching of the scriptures, where an ancient text may not readily evince interest.

In religious thinking, Goldman’s (1964) findings indicated that formal operational thought began between 13 and 14 years. However, his data on concepts of the Bible indicate that the chronological age on two concepts—“kind of book” and “how it came to be written”—was well over 14 years, and in three of the four cases the mental age ranged from 15:0 to 16:7 years. Kitchener (1986) placed high school students at approximately Stages 2 to 3.5 on the seven stage reflective judgment model (pp. 85-86). Research by Kuhn (1991) with participants aged 14-15 years to the 60s (pp. 18-20), indicated that only a minority were at the evaluativist level; however, the finding that education rather than age was the significant variable (p. 192) indicates a role for the teaching of the thinking skills which underlie epistemic cognition.

Non-cognitive factors

Affective and conative factors may facilitate or impede teaching for transformative learning. For example, resistance to change may come from the learner’s unwillingness to question his or her basic assumptions; it this occurs, new meaning will not be accommodated.

262 See Tables 2.2 to 2.5 above.
Transformative learning is dependent upon validation of what one has learned by means of the process of critical reflection which involves questioning one’s presuppositions or “habitual expectations” (Mezirow, 1990a, pp. 2-4, 14). This can be challenging. It takes moral courage to be willing to subject one’s religious presuppositions, for example, regarding the veracity of the Bible, to scrutiny, when the creation stories are described as myths. Teaching which explains the creation stories in terms of myth and metaphor may be resisted. A young person who has rejected religious belief may regard teaching about the metaphorical character of much religious language as rationalisation and be unwilling to consider a challenge to his or her habits of expectation. In cognitive terms, new ideas need to be assimilated and accommodated into existing schemata if they are to lead to a new stage of equilibrium. When one’s religious beliefs are challenged, the loss of “intellectual security” (Basseches, 1986, p. 40) may impose a high affective cost. Sensitivity is needed in those areas of religious thinking which touch on deeply-held beliefs, especially if those beliefs are already being challenged by the process of maturation and conflicting societal and peer group pressures. The cognitive, the affective and the conative in this instance may be inextricably enmeshed and constitute an emotional and volitional barrier independent of cognitive capacity.

At the secondary school, therefore, a fundamental task for the religious educator is to engage the student in a process which initiates a fundamental change in thinking. To transform the student’s thinking about the Bible involves conation as well as cognition. The transition from a literalist understanding of the Bible to a more nuanced interpretation of scripture is a process which involves not just the learner’s cognitive capacities but the whole person.
**Education of the whole person**

Psychosocial factors can impinge on students’ capacities and willingness to participate in learning and thereby influence transformative learning of the biblical text. The degree of success in completing the psychosocial developmental tasks which Erikson (1968) identified as typical of each of the eight stages he postulated, will influence the extent to which the student feels confident in addressing new learning. Similarly, unresolved issues will affect individual responses in a range of activities. For example, whether initiative or guilt dominated in childhood, and whether industry over inferiority has been a feature of the child’s experience in the primary school, will affect the way in which the adolescent in the secondary school will respond to the challenges which teaching for transformation may represent for his or her attitudes towards the scriptures. Similarly, the attitudes and values of the groups with which the adolescent identifies, and to which he or she seeks to conform (Newman & Newman, 2001), will influence engagement with learning, including, or perhaps especially, in religious education.

A significant contribution by Erikson to an understanding of adolescents is his concept of a moratorium (1968, p. 128), a time in which the developmental tasks of the earlier stages may be integrated and contribute to the development of identity. This is particularly applicable to religious education. The adolescent may need time in which to process the changes wrought by adolescence, including his or her religious commitment. This must be respected. For example, it is quite likely for the adolescent to be reluctant to commit herself or himself openly in religious discourse, especially among peers in the classroom. This is reason to question a catechetical approach which focuses on shared faith and to consider preferable an approach in which the espousal of a personal religious response is minimised. To focus on skills of interpretation in an atmosphere where scripture is treated with respect but approached as a text for which a range of readings is possible, may be an appropriate
teaching style for adolescents. In teaching for transformation, however, the educator is still contributing to and influencing the multiplicity of ideas and worldviews which produce tensions which the adolescent needs to integrate and resolve in forming a distinct identity.

Knowing is incorporated into and constitutive of the self at a particular stage, hence, intensely personal. The incorporation of “knowing” into the essence of what it is to be a self at a particular stage helps to explain the anger and disappointment expressed by some young people when their increasing cognitive capacity leads them to reject a literalist understanding of biblical stories: they feel personally affronted and disillusioned that they have been allowed to continue in ignorance. Kegan’s concept of an “epistemological stretch” (Kegan, 1994, p. 53), which recommends teaching at a level which is just beyond students’ present capacities, is apposite. Expressed in Piagetian terms, this involves presenting material which cannot be immediately accommodated within one’s cognitive schema, thereby setting up a state of disequilibrium in which new ideas need to be assimilated and a new more advanced state of equilibrium reached. Applied to teaching for transformation, this indicates the educative value in challenging students with increasingly more sophisticated skills for the interpretation of the biblical text.

Teaching for transformation, therefore, involves more than a series of planned learning activities. The classroom atmosphere conducive to an open exchange of ideas and engagement with the issues raised is one which respects the learner. A respect for learning is encouraged by the expectation that points of view need to be substantiated.
7.3 Insights from Cognitive Development Theories: A Theoretical Framework

Students’ concerns regarding the truth of the Bible and the nature of evidence are epistemological questions which have been addressed from the developmental perspective by researchers writing in a post-Piagetian paradigm. Epistemologically, knowledge involves the notion of truth: to say that one knows something, implies that one holds it to be true, or, using less stringent criteria, that one has good grounds for holding it to be true. The purpose of this section is to suggest a theoretical framework, derived from the insights provided by theories from the structural developmental perspective, within which to explore these epistemological questions and the interaction between the cognitive capacities of the reader and the cognitive demands of the biblical text. The ultimate goal is to consider ways in which teachers in the classroom may facilitate the transition from a literalist understanding of the biblical text to a reading which is predicated upon an understanding of the significance of literary genre and figurative language.

In devising a theoretical framework designed to identify the epistemological positions from which readers of the biblical text may be operating, the findings of the following researchers have been used and adapted: Perry, Belenky and associates, Kitchener and King, Kuhn, Reich, and Mezirow for the term “validation”. The terms and concepts used in developing the stage-like epistemological models discussed below are drawn from the summary of findings presented in the tables which accompanied the discussion of their research in earlier chapters of this thesis.

The intention is (i) to identify different ways in which knowledge is perceived and the relationship between perceptions of knowledge and truth: Epistemological Framework, summarised in Table 7.1; and (ii) how one undertakes particular tasks, for example solving a problem such as interpreting a text: Epistemological Functioning, summarised in Table 7.2. The purpose is to guide educators in understanding how
readers, of whatever age, perceive knowledge in order that an appropriate pedagogy may be devised to guide students towards a more critically aware and nuanced reading of biblical texts.

*Epistemological Framework* is the term chosen to refer to the individual’s basic cognitive position, the fundamental presuppositions which one brings to a cognitive task. These are understandings with regard to the source of knowledge, how beliefs are justified, the nature of knowledge, the certainty of knowledge and the perception of truth. In the first mode, one is operating from an unreflective position where knowledge comes from an external authority and statements are either right or wrong. The final position represents what Kuhn (2005) describes as mature epistemological understanding, where knowledge is susceptible to validation by a process of critical reflection (Mezirow, 1990a). In this mode the individual engages in reflection on his or her own thought processes (metacognition) and on the theoretical position or model from which he or she is operating (epistemic cognition) (Kitchener, 1983).

The set of presuppositions which constitute one’s epistemological framework produces a relatively stable position, which indicates one’s epistemological *way of seeing* or “way of knowing” (Belenky et al., 1986). However, one’s epistemological mode is not static; rather it is open to growth and adaptation by the processes of assimilation and accommodation which Piaget described. While maturation is involved in a change in one’s mode of perceiving knowledge, interaction with the environment may evoke development in one or more dimensions, for example, applying skills learned in English to a study of religious language. Experience in the classroom leads to the suggestion that students do not necessarily utilise in their religious education studies the skills of which they are capable. Religious education is more likely to be perceived as comparable academically with other school subjects if the educational and skill dimensions are given comparable attention from the beginning of the secondary school.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Source of knowledge</th>
<th>How beliefs are justified</th>
<th>Nature of knowledge</th>
<th>Certainty of knowledge</th>
<th>Perception of truth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Absolutist</td>
<td>External source: from Authority</td>
<td>Higher authority</td>
<td>Certain</td>
<td>Absolute certainty</td>
<td>Absolute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Direct observation</td>
<td>By comparison with reality</td>
<td>Right or wrong</td>
<td>Unquestioning</td>
<td>From higher authorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Realist</td>
<td>External concrete reality</td>
<td>What works</td>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>Certain</td>
<td>Absolute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Verified by reference to an authority</td>
<td>Can be known</td>
<td>Refusal to question</td>
<td>Conformity with perceived reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Subjectivist</td>
<td>Personal, subjectively known</td>
<td>Personal experience</td>
<td>Subjectively known</td>
<td>No certainty</td>
<td>Uncertain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Generated by human minds</td>
<td>What feels right</td>
<td>Reality can never be known</td>
<td>Idiosyncratic</td>
<td>Individually idiosyncratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Relativist</td>
<td>Generated by human minds</td>
<td>Rules of enquiry appropriate to context</td>
<td>Contextual and relativistic</td>
<td>Relative</td>
<td>Relative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Constructed, using objective procedures</td>
<td>Argument, explanation of data</td>
<td>Evaluated personal interpretation</td>
<td>Related to how verified</td>
<td>Related to use of evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Evaluativist</td>
<td>Generated by human minds</td>
<td>Critical thinking</td>
<td>Relative</td>
<td>Relative</td>
<td>Relative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Susceptible to evaluation</td>
<td>Use of evidence and argument</td>
<td>Contextual</td>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>Dependent upon evaluation and argument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>Capacity for metacognition</td>
<td>Dimensions of outcome</td>
<td>Need for validation</td>
<td>Complementarity in thinking</td>
<td>Novelty vs. closure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Absolutist</td>
<td>No capacity for reflection</td>
<td>Univocal: one right answer</td>
<td>Approval of authority</td>
<td>No complementarity</td>
<td>Ad hoc experimentation with concrete materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realist</td>
<td>Some capacity to reflect on task</td>
<td>Univocal: one right outcome</td>
<td>Satisfied if it works</td>
<td>No clear or genuine complementarity</td>
<td>Some experimentation with concrete materials</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subjectivist</td>
<td>Capacity to reflect on processes</td>
<td>Multivocal</td>
<td>Different outcomes possible</td>
<td>Personal opinion</td>
<td>Beginning of complementarity</td>
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<td>Approval of peers</td>
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<td>Awareness of objective criteria</td>
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<td>Relativist</td>
<td>Capacity for metacognition</td>
<td>Multivocal</td>
<td>Validation an integral part of the process</td>
<td>Complementarity firmly established</td>
<td>Capacity to consider a range of approaches</td>
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<td>Well established capacity to consider range of approaches</td>
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<td>Evaluativist</td>
<td>Capacity for epistemic understanding</td>
<td>Multivocal</td>
<td>Validation an integral part of the process</td>
<td>Complementarity firmly established</td>
<td>Openness to a range of possible solutions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Well established capacity to consider range of approaches</td>
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<td>Synopsis of logically possible approaches part of the process</td>
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While the *Epistemological Framework* sets relatively stable parameters within which an individual can operate, the schema *Epistemological Functioning* seeks to operationalise the factors involved in actually engaging with particular cognitive problems or tasks, such as interpreting a text. The starting point is one’s basic assumptions with regard to the nature of knowledge, the capacity to reflect on the demands of the task and to critically appraise one’s own procedures, that is, the capacity for metacognition. The factor titled *Dimensions of Outcome* refers to whether one recognises that there may be more than one appropriate outcome to a task. If the person brings to the interpretive task the thinking that there is only one right answer—a univocal response—there will be difficulties in solving “ill-structured problems”. For example, the possibility of accepting that there may be different interpretations of a parable will be circumscribed. Reich’s “stages of complementarity in thinking” fit well into this schema and is especially pertinent in comparing the Genesis accounts of creation with scientific explanations.

While there is a clear connection between epistemological capacities and Piagetian operational stage—for example, the Realist mode coincides with the stage of concrete operations—qualities beyond logical operations are involved. In several of the items related to epistemological functioning, affective and conative factors may influence the individual’s utilisation of the available cognitive capacities. Recognising the need for the conclusions one draws in a problem-solving situation to meet objective criteria of validation is a key step towards epistemological maturity. For example, as noted above, questioning one’s “habits of expectation” (Mezirow, 1990a, p. 1) with regard to long-held beliefs regarding the Bible, can be emotionally demanding and may be resisted. The theoretical framework constituted by mode of epistemological functioning incorporates volitional as well as the cognitive dimensions constitutive of one’s way of knowing.
The need to go beyond linear progress in logical thinking and to include “mythos” as well as “logos” (Labouvie-Vief, 1990), or “connected knowing” in addition to “separate knowing” (Belenky, et al., 1986), is accommodated in the epistemological functioning schema. The capacity to delay closure on a task is not only a function of being able to recognise that another approach to solving a practical problem or interpreting written material may be possible, but also relates to one’s willingness to expend the effort and to risk novel ideas or new interpretations which may challenge one’s epistemic or sociocultural or psychic distortions (Mezirow, 1990a, p. 14). Openness to novel ideas may be more within the affective and conative domains than the cognitive.

Style of thinking refers to the tendency to adopt as one’s preferred style either logical, hypothetico-deductive reasoning or one which readily uses imagination, creativity and spontaneity. It is the distinction which Labouvie-Vief (1990) termed logos and mythos. In educational discourse, the terms convergent thinking and divergent thinking (Gilchrist, 1972) have been used to refer to the logical and creative styles of thinking: both need to be accommodated, encouraged and advanced in the process of education. Creative thinking has a cognitive dimension: the imaginative leap, the intuitive insight both have a role in the advancement of knowledge. Creativity is as an indispensable element in cutting-edge science and in paradigmatic change such as that identified by Thomas Kuhn (1962, 1970). Imaginative thinking is integral to a full appreciation of non-literal language, in appreciating metaphor, in delighting in the multi-dimensional evocations which symbol and symbolic language can arouse, and in exploring layers of meaning in texts, be they poetry or parable.

Belenky and associates (1986) distinguished between “separate knowing” and “connected knowing”. Separate knowing includes critical thinking, evaluation, and justification via impersonal procedures (pp. 101-104). Connected knowing, which in the Belenky research was found to be more typical of women’s thinking, included the
personal dimension, which involved feeling, collaboration, and reasoning related to experience (pp. 101-103, 112-113). The context in which Belenky was operating is relevant. She and her associates sought to assert the credibility of women’s “ways of knowing”, as different from, rather than inferior to, those taken as the norm in assessing high levels of thinking, which were seen as reflecting a male bias. Their research contextualised what had been accepted as the norm. Logical reasoning is the way of thinking held in high esteem in Western culture, and given greater prominence in cognitive psychology and education through the influence of researchers such as Piaget and those who adopted a similar model of cognition. Dispassionate abstract reasoning has its place, and an important place; however, it should not be the only respected player on the cognitive stage.

The epistemological framework and epistemological functioning suggested in this chapter as a means of representing changing modes of operating epistemologically, are intended to provide for the integration of logical thinking and creative thinking, for abstract reasoning and experiential learning. The model is structurally dependent on and derived from structural developmental theory, while the insights provided by Mezirow’s (1990a) concept of transformative learning and Basseches’ (1986) concept of dialectical thinking deconstruct the process of validation. One’s capacity to critique one’s presuppositions and habits of expectation (Mezirow) is dependent upon psychosocial and social factors as well as cognitive capacity. Similarly, the way in which the individual organises and reorganises concepts and ideas is dependent upon one’s conceptual system (Basseches). While it is possible to align certain modes of thinking with Piagetian stages and certain ages—for example, Mode 2, the Realist, is typical of the concrete thinker and Mode 3, Subjectivist, is typical of adolescents—such an interpretation would impose an unnecessary constraint. Although devised primarily for the secondary school context, the model is descriptive.

263 See Chapter 4, especially Figures 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3.
of ways of thinking of adults as much as it is of children and adolescents; applying it to adults’ understanding of the biblical text would be a timely exercise.

The model is intended to provide a means of exploring how religious educators in the secondary school may facilitate a critical engagement with the biblical text and the requisite critical reflection on language and genre. Religious education teaching could then focus on becoming a dialectical process, directed towards “developmental transformation” (Basseches, 1986, p. 35), in which knowledge is seen as an active process (p. 35) whereby students and teachers explore “concepts, ideas, and facts” (p. 35). Groome’s shared praxis approach to religious education calls for such engagement of students’ “reason, memory, and imagination” (Groome, 1980, p. 251), starting from their existential situation, and directed towards its “metapurpose” (p. 34), which in Christian education is the “reign of God” (e.g. Groome, 1991, p. 14).

7.4 Applying the Insights of Developmental Theory to Teaching the Biblical Text

The purpose of this section is to consider the cognitive demands of a nuanced interpretation of the biblical text. This focuses principally on the intellectual domain, but also takes into consideration the affective and conative factors incorporated into the schemas titled Epistemological Framework and Epistemological Functioning. Included is the individual’s capacity for logical operational thinking, imaginative and creative thinking and symbolic understanding. More specifically, the areas of interpretation involve the capacity to recognise different literary genres and to apply to their reading and interpretation an appreciation of the characteristics of metaphor. Equally important is the individual’s capacity to engage with religious imagery,

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264 Some of the research in post-Piagetian and post-formal thought was conducted with adults; for example, that of Perry. However, Kuhn paid close attention to the application of metacognition and thinking skills to the school situation.

265 This section refers closely to Fowler’s stages of faith development. The detailed description and discussion of these stages is in Appendix 3.
especially as it is expressed in written texts, and to make a successful transition from a “magical” response to symbols to an appreciation of their deeper religious significance (Godin & Sister Marthe, 1960; Godin, 1971). Teaching for transformation requires an understanding of the key characteristics of children’s capacities for religious thinking and engagement with the scriptures in the ages and stages preceding those in which difficulties arise from a persistent literalist interpretation.

The scriptures and the young child: the first naïveté

The basis upon which later understanding of the biblical text is founded is, ideally, laid in early childhood. In Piagetian terms, this is the stage of pre-operational thought; in Fowler’s (1981) stage theory of faith development, Stage 1, Intuitive-Projective faith. Both refer to children aged approximately two to six or seven years. The pre-operational child has yet to develop logical operations and is tied to his or her immediate perceptions (Cohen, 1983, p. 38). An environment rich in stories and symbols, including biblical stories and religious symbols, will influence the content and character of the child’s imagination (Fowler, 1981, pp. 130-134). Godly Play is one way in which children’s imaginations can be engaged in listening to bible stories such as parables. Motor skills can be engaged in responding actively and imaginatively to these stories, reinforcing their concrete images. There is considerable growth during these early years, one of the most important being in the development of language skills, making it possible to communicate linguistically with others. Explaining how they have portrayed the stories in two-dimensional or three-dimensional form is a further means of reinforcement.

An approach to teaching young children, Godly Play derives from the pedagogy of Maria Montessori; it has been revived by Jerome Berryman in the USA and has gained currency in recent years in a number of countries including Australia. The method has been made known to teachers through professional development activities. I attended such professional development in Melbourne in 2006. (Fowler refers to Berryman’s method in his discussion of the Intuitive-Projective stage [Fowler, 1981, p. 133]).
To the extent that it is possible to speak of the very young child’s epistemology, the closest approximation is to the Absolutist mode. The source of knowledge is external, and authority figures provide knowledge and reinforcement of the child’s imaginative and creative activities, otherwise no verification or justification is needed. Thinking is unreflective and composed of a multitude of vivid disconnected images rather than a sustained sequence of ideas. As the child reaches the early school years, the qualities of one working out of an Absolutist epistemological framework becomes more obvious. Knowledge comes from an external source and is verified by authority figures; it is held with certainty and is either right or wrong and not questioned.

Fowler emphasises the imaginative qualities of the young child’s engagement with story and symbol. Mystery is embraced with both wonder and curiosity. The questions which children ask are in search of more information, and need to be answered simply and clearly, providing reassurance that they and their questions are respected. It is important that adults’ responses do not anticipate later questions and give answers which are beyond the cognitive scope of the child. It is also important that responses nurture positive images and foster imaginative engagement with story and symbol rather than try to provide literal answers which will later be contradicted. The role of religious education for the young child is to enrich the child’s repertoire of religious images and ensure that the associated affectivity is positive.

Scripture for the young child is stories from the Bible, for example the story of the birth of Jesus. The sense of wonder on the face of a young child in front of the Christmas crib epitomises this period of early childhood as the stage of the first naïveté, “an unquestioned dwelling in a world of symbol” (Mudge, 1980, p. 6), now only possible in modern and post-modern contemporary society in early childhood. This “naïve’ understanding” (Ricoeur, 1980a, p. 43) is the first of three moments in a dialectical process of interpretation. The subsequent moments, “objective explanation and appropriation” (pp. 43-44), are played out in the stages which follow.
The concrete thinker: the realist

The period of concrete thinking coincides with the growth towards middle childhood in the primary school years and extends into the early years of secondary school; however, concrete thinking may continue well into adolescence and even adulthood. The un-coordinated images of the young child are replaced by a perception of the world as orderly and predictable in which the real is distinguished from fantasy (Fowler, 1981, pp. 64-65). A process of decentring occurs in the “cognitive, social, and moral” (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969, p. 128) domains. The development of cognitive structures, including “classifications, seriations, correspondences” (p. 100), make it possible for the child to interact with concrete objects; reversibility of operations becomes established. The concept of causality develops (Wadsworth, 1971, p. 98), principally with tangible objects; the concrete thinker cannot yet deal with “verbally stated hypotheses” (p. 100).

The concrete thinker is at Fowler’s (1981) second stage, Mythic-Literal faith. Fowler depicts the person at this stage as one who can distinguish the real from the make-believe, can reason inductively and deductively, and interact with others on the principle of reciprocity (pp. 135-136; 147-148). In particular Fowler emphasises the significance of stories for the child at the concrete operational level: recounting stories in extreme detail, telling one’s own experiences and generating stories (p. 135-136). Meanings “are conserved and expressed in stories” (p. 137); however, meaning is “trapped” in the story, and there is yet to be developed the capacity to draw more general conclusions (p. 137). Images of God are anthropomorphic (pp. 138-139), thinking is literal and symbols are “one-dimensional and literal in meaning” (p. 149).

Epistemologically, the concrete thinker operates in the Realist mode. Knowledge comes from the real world; it is objective and certain. There is the capacity
to reflect on the concrete task and experiment with different ways of manipulating materials to try to get the right answer. Curiosity is tied up with real objects and there can be an almost insatiable appetite for new, complicated gadgets, about which the child will expatiate at length.

Narrative stories from the Bible will be the most appropriate texts at this age. Long complicated narratives, for example, the epics of the Patriarchs, may generate a series of questions relating to small details, and be taken quite literally. From the teacher’s perspective, the temptation to explain in detail what is occurring needs to be resisted; for example, there is the danger of the adult mind reading into the text the details which are demanded by the child but not in the actual story, which is not intended to be read literally. To provide answers which may satisfy the curiosity and appetite for precise concrete details is to risk alienating the same child when he or she becomes an adolescent. The more appropriate response would be to respond to primary school children’s questions with questions which engage the imagination and leave interpretation open. This tactic will better prepare the “young empiricist” (Fowler, 1981, p. 135) for a non-literalist interpretation of Old Testament epic and New Testament stories, rather than reinforcing the implicit belief that the empirically verifiable is the only legitimate form of validation. Fowler identifies the breakdown of literalism as occurring when the individual becomes conscious of “contradictions in stories” (p. 150), the point at which formal operational thought is emerging and the transition to Stage 3 is begun (p. 150).

Fowler refers to the earlier literalism leading to “disillusionment with previous teachers and teachings” (p. 150). The primary school teacher, and the teacher in the early secondary school, should endeavour to minimise that disillusionment. To see the concrete thinker’s questions as an expression of interest in the Bible which must be reinforced by responding without qualification to the child’s questions, is, in fact, to invite disillusionment when the child moves on to the next educational level and the
next stage of cognitive and epistemological functioning. The more the teacher colludes with a literalist interpretation, the greater, in fact, is the damage done to the subsequent endeavour to interpret the biblical text in a hermeneutically sound way.

The primary school child can be introduced to the Bible as a collection of books which represent a number of genres, with links made to learning of different types of writing in English classes. For example, Old Testament epics may be compared and contrasted with epics from other cultures; poetry and the psalms may be studied for their use of imagery. By treating the biblical texts as texts the magic element may be discouraged and the religious meaning, rather than the literal meaning, may become the focus of attention. Ideally, the texts will retain their credibility, not as sources of scientific explanation of the origins of the universe or as a source of historical fact, but as religious texts, whose criteria of validation are different. Their power as religious texts comes from an understanding that they are an expression of the faith of those who saw the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob to be in relationship with his people, Israel, and of the faith of the early Christian communities in Jesus as the Christ.

The adolescent

Adolescence is usually associated with formal operational thinking. The characteristics of formal operations are summarised in statements such as the capacity for propositional reasoning, including “drawing the necessary conclusions from truths which are merely possible” (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969, p. 132); “a precise and flexible manipulation of language” (p. 145); a time perspective which goes beyond the immediate; and thinking which can consider possibilities. The tests used by Piaget to represent formal thought involved manipulation of materials and scientific experiments (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958), which showed the progressive development of increasingly complex logical operations. The manipulation of verbally-expressed problems and hypotheses is a later development. While cognitive structure rather
than specific content is the determinant of operational stage, the different areas in which formal operations will be expressed was acknowledged by Piaget (1972) in his revision of the age at which formal operations is attained and the disciplines in which it is expressed.

Two qualifications of the identification of adolescence with formal operational thinking will be considered: the significance of the length of the period between the onset of formal thought and its advanced stage; and the distinction between adolescent thought and formal operational thought.

Piaget and Inhelder (1969) date the commencement of the development of these capacities from “preadolescence” (p. 131), “between eleven or twelve and fourteen or fifteen, when the “new structure of thought is formed” (p. 131). It is this age bracket, from late primary school to middle secondary school, which is most vulnerable to an unchallenged literalism and the distortions which it produces in religious thinking. The disillusionment to which Fowler refers (1981, p. 150) occurs at this point of emerging formal operations. Goldman is concerned about formal operations emerging in scientific thinking before it can be applied to religious thinking, that is, the lengthy period during which this stage is being established—the problem of horizontal décalage. It is during this transition period that the match between cognitive capacity and the cognitive demands of the text need to be addressed via appropriate and deliberate teaching. The findings of McGrady (1994b) and Cometa and Eson (1978) indicate that in the late concrete stage there is the capacity to recognise and to paraphrase metaphor. Teaching of metaphor, especially recognising, paraphrasing, and explaining simple metaphors, starting with similes and familiar metaphors from everyday life, and then progressing to simple, unfamiliar religious metaphors, needs to start as this transition period is being reached, if not before.

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267 See above, Chapter 6.
268 See discussion in Chapter 6.4, especially the section *The application of empirical studies of metaphor to teaching and learning.*
The relevance of figurative language to an adult understanding of biblical language needs to be made explicit to students. Teaching for transformation needs to start before disillusionment becomes an issue; teaching needs to prepare for the transitional stage, not try later to ameliorate its deleterious effects.

Not all adolescents reach the stage of formal operational thought as described by Piaget. The type of thinking he describes is highly sophisticated hypothetico-deductive reasoning, essentially scientific reasoning, used competently and confidently. In a wry passage in his critique of Piaget, Cohen (1983) states that “the impression Piaget gives is that, in formal operations, the adolescent can waltz on syllogisms” (p. 47). Not all adolescents have such a facility with syllogisms or to engage in high level logical reasoning. These are the thinking skills which Kuhn explores in her analysis of the “skills of argument” (1991, 2005) and “skills of inquiry” (2005). These skills depend upon teaching and opportunities for them to be practised as well as cognitive readiness. Furthermore, not all subject matter is of an equal degree of difficulty and aptitudes are expressed differentially across a range of disciplines, for example, science, art, languages.269 However, all adolescents are affected by the physical, emotional, and psychosocial changes typical of this period of development. These changes influence thinking and this new thinking influences attitude towards religious knowledge in a number of ways, including attitudes to authority.

In Fowler’s faith development schema the transition to formal operations generally means the move to Stage 3, Synthetic-Conventional Faith (Fowler, 1981, pp. 151-173). For the adolescent, or the adult whose faith position has equilibrated at this

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269 Gardner’s thesis on multiple intelligences, in which intelligence is seen to have several expressions, has gained currency in educational circles in recent years. Gardner (1999) considered adding spiritual intelligence to his original seven intelligences (pp. 53-66). He explored the concept of the “spiritual” and expressed concern about “the problematic nature of the ‘content’ of spiritual intelligence” (p. 59). He “put aside the term spiritual” and considered “an explicit concern with spiritual or religious matters” within the context of a proposed “existential intelligence” (p. 60). However, his decision was to not add to the list of intelligences either “spiritual” or “existential” intelligence (p. 66). In a footnote he added that in response to an article by R. Emmons on the question he had presented the “case against spiritual intelligence” (p. 64).
stage, Stage 3 “structures the ultimate environment in interpersonal terms” (p. 172). The expectations and judgments of “significant others” (p. 172) are taken seriously. To use Parks’ terminology, the locus of authority for the adolescent is still external (Parks, 1986, p. 86). However, the individual chooses the authority, which is the peer group for many adolescents. For many adults at this stage the significant authority may be the institutional Church.

Epistemologically, the adolescent is typically operating in the Subjectivist mode. Knowledge is now perceived to be generated by human minds and known subjectively. The lack of certainty of knowledge, and the consequent uncertainty regarding the establishment of truth, is, at this stage, a source of confusion rather than clarity or the freedom which is sought. Yet, despite the subjective elements, the adolescent at this stage becomes aware, through educational demands, of the need to justify one’s position by appeal to certain objective criteria and to reflect on how he or she went about solving a problem. That the adolescent is aware that there may be more than one outcome makes it an appropriate time to consider a range of possible interpretations of scripture passages. The subversive character of many parables may be explored profitably and enjoyably. Teaching at this stage needs to engage interest and explore different possible interpretations and to avoid unnecessary demands regarding doctrinal belief and commitment.

7.5 Relativism and a Demythologisation of the Sacred

Those students who do have the capacity to function at an increasingly more advanced level of formal operational thought may move to the Relativist mode of epistemological functioning. They will appreciate the need for validation of what is held to be knowledge; the capacity for metacognition will mean that they can reflect

270 See Tables 7.1 and 7.2.
on their problem-solving processes and on their own thoughts and ideas; and complementarity of thinking may be applied to the erstwhile perceived conflict between scientific and religious meaning. By the senior years of secondary schooling, some of these students may well be able to function in the evaluativist mode, and epistemic understanding and a creative approach to problem-solving become a distinct possibility. They are the students who will be most capable of engaging in a dialectic with the text, of critical reflection on the text and questioning their own assumptions. These students pose a different type of challenge for the teacher in the secondary school. They require a pedagogy which engages their enquiring minds. Being in a minority, perhaps a small minority, it is these more intellectually competent young people who are most likely to be overlooked. Yet, from the perspective of educating for faith, the needs of these young people will perhaps be the most pressing and the most demanding.

The capacity for critical reflection may result in some older adolescents making the transition to Stage 4, Individuative-Reflective faith. Fowler associates this stage with young adulthood, although many adults do not make the transition until years later, if at all (Fowler, 1981, p. 182). To be fully accomplished, this transition involves “critical reflection on one’s previous ... tacit system or values” and “a relocation of authority within the self” (p. 179)—a transition to which Parks added an additional step (1986, pp. 86, 95; 2000, p. 91). From a religious education perspective, the questioning of previous value systems includes a relativising of religious belief once held, implicitly at least, as absolute. Fowler refers to this as a “demythologizing’ stage” (p. 182) and draws on Tillich’s concept of the “‘broken symbol’” (p. 180), whereby symbols and rituals held to directly mediate the sacred are subjected to critical questioning and perceived to be a symbol: “A symbol recognized as a symbol is a broken symbol” (p. 181).
The relativism which Fowler identifies with the young adult, will likely find expression in adolescents at an advanced cognitive stage. However, a likely consequence of societal changes is that demythologisation now occurs at a much earlier age. Contemporary society is imbued with a relativist approach to all values and beliefs. Children and adolescents growing up in a multicultural and multi-religious society realise early that others may subscribe to different values and recognise that Christian beliefs are not the only beliefs which can be described as religious. The consequence of greater tolerance of difference found among many young people is matched by a relativisation of religious beliefs and by an unambiguous rejection of religious beliefs and Church positions perceived as absolutist. Godin’s (1971) identification of one of the “major developmental tasks” of religious education as the development of “the symbolic function” (p. 111) has, in fact, two dimensions: one related to an understanding of symbolic language, and the other related to an appreciation of the nature of religious ritual and the sacramental. While both areas need to be addressed educationally, the present focus is on language and interpretation of the biblical text.

Tillich’s (1957) concept of the “broken myth” (pp. 50-54) is apposite. His basic premise is that what is of “ultimate concern must be expressed symbolically, because symbolic language alone is able to express the ultimate” (p. 41). Myths are defined as “symbols of faith combined in stories about divine-human encounters” (p. 49) and are “objects of demythologization” (p. 50). Tillich argues that demythologisation “must be accepted and supported if it points to the necessity of recognizing a symbol as a symbol and a myth as a myth. It must be attacked and rejected if it means the removal of symbols and myths altogether” (p. 50). A “broken myth” is that which is “understood as a myth, but not removed or replaced” (p. 50). Tillich’s use of the term “myth” goes beyond its use as an element of language: rather, myth is seen to be of

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271 Francis’ longitudinal data in the UK revealed that the decline in attitude toward Christianity occurred at an earlier age in 1994 than in 1974 (Kay & Francis, 1996, pp. 39-42). See above, Chapter 1.3, Table 1.6.
the essence of religion, which is concerned with that which is ultimate and of existential significance for the individual.

Teaching which addresses myth as a literary genre, and the metaphorical character of much religious language, is seeking to anticipate and prepare for the experience of demythologisation. Tillich (1957) refers to literalism as “resistance against demythologization” (p. 51); literalism has the “presupposition ... that God is a being, acting in time and space, dwelling in a special place, affecting the course of events” (p. 52). He posits two stages of literalism: (i) the natural stage, in which “the mythical and the literal are indistinguishable” (p. 52); and (ii) “the conscious stage”, in which the “questioning mind” is aware that a literal understanding is inadequate (p. 52), but the person represses their questioning in a “surrender” to “an acknowledged authority” (p. 53). The first stage includes young children and concrete thinkers. The emergence of the second stage is the reason why this thesis argues for appropriate teaching, in anticipation of “the conscious stage” and during that stage.

Whether or not young people, including the academically able who are more adept in articulating and pursuing their questioning, are willing to engage with the issues to which their questioning gives rise will depend in part on whether they see religion and scripture as an area in which questioning is accepted and critical enquiry may be engaged. How the demythologisation of religious symbols and scripture is experienced, and whether it has to be dealt with alone or whether it has been addressed at the appropriate time within the Christian community, such as the secondary school, may determine the outcome for those who experience the “broken

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272 I would suggest that the belief that God acts “in time and space” is widespread, and implicit in the thinking of many, including those critical of religion. For example, Letters to the Editor of *The Age*, Melbourne, in the lead up to the canonisation of Mary Mackillop on 17 October, 2010, have expressed not only cynicism about miracles, but anger about those who have purportedly been cured when the letter writer has experienced the loss of a loved one as a result of a painful illness.

273 Many people may well believe that religious faith requires that what is referred to here as “demythologisation” must be resisted. It has been argued that many young people may believe that this is so, and, as a result, reject all religious belief.
myth”. Whether it be rejection of belief, a “conscious” literalism, or engagement with the questioning which holds open the possibility of a second or willed naïveté, the outcome may depend partly upon how the biblical text is taught in schools and partly on the response to more nuanced interpretations by the Church and Christian community.

Teaching for transformation needs to provide challenging tasks at every age level and at every level of cognitive functioning. Development is dependent upon maturation and with it the capacities typical of each stage; however, whether or not specific skills and competencies are expressed and refined is related to whether or not latent capacities are stimulated. In the educational setting, providing such stimulation is wrought by direct teaching: for example, bringing to awareness the metaphorical sense in which familiar religious expressions, such as “the Bible is the Word of God”, are understood. When that understanding is achieved, the role of the author and of the redactor in the world behind the text will be appreciated.

Second naïveté

The concept of a second naïveté speaks of the possibility of going beyond the demythologising of religious myths and symbols and accepting the reality of transcendence.274 The term has been chosen in this thesis to represent an engagement with the scriptures which goes beyond literalism and demythologisation to accept that they point to a way of seeing reality as incorporating that which is beyond human experience and which opens humankind up to the divine.

274 Fowler (1981) uses Ricoeur’s term “second or willed naïveté” to describe Stage 5, Conjunctive Faith (p. 187), as a “postcritical desire to resubmit to the initiative of the symbolic” (pp. 187-188). For example, symbols and stories and liturgies are recognised as “inevitably partial, limited to a particular people’s experience of God and incomplete” (p. 186), but important nonetheless.
The term second naïveté is intended to provide the horizon towards which religious understanding and commitment may travel. The goal of education is to teach in such a way that a re-mythologisation of the scriptures is possible; that the development of increasingly more complex ways of knowing is neither undermined nor reified. The difficulties which young people have with the biblical text and with religious concepts and beliefs need to be prepared for, addressed openly and their religious meaning explored. That the secondary school which accepts the responsibility of teaching for faith has a key role in this endeavour is accepted. However, what is equally clear is that education for faith is the responsibility of the whole faith community. An understanding of scripture which can lead to freely chosen commitment implied in the term “willed naïveté” will rarely be achieved, if at all, by the age of seventeen or eighteen. The Church community has a responsibility to teach for transformation, in which adults are treated as adults, and the growth of adult faith supported (Regan, 2002, 2003). In particular, young adults, the exit students from faith-based secondary schools who are entering the world of tertiary education or adult employment, need encouragement and openness from the Christian community if they are to negotiate the demythologisation phase and make re-mythologisation possible.

The whole Christian community needs to teach for transformation. The role of the secondary school, in its brief intervention in young people’s lives, should be that of teaching in a way that makes transformation at the cognitive, affective, epistemological and spiritual levels possible.

7.6 An Approach to Teaching for Transformation

The following approach, modelled in part on Groome’s shared praxis approach, is suggested as a means of implementing the time-honoured teaching maxim of moving
from the known to the unknown. The intention is to foster reflective thinking by encouraging students to identify their present understanding, to engage openly with the text so that the skills requisite for an understanding which draws on biblical scholarship may be introduced and practised. The opportunity to engage reflectively and prayerfully with the text is built into the approach as the culmination of Step 5: for example, by various styles of meditation, including the possibility of the Ignatian model for religious education developed by Daly (1998), which addresses students’ Deepest Longings (Daly, 1990). The suggested approach has five steps:

1. **Identifying one’s present understanding** of a text or of a particular passage, facilitated by appropriate questioning.

2. **Reflecting on and critically appraising one’s present understanding** of the text: for example, why the passage is seen in a particular way; where present ideas may come from—leading to an awareness of present assumptions or presuppositions; initially facilitated by questions from the teacher.

3. **Critical engagement with the text**: for example, questions to establish the world behind the text, where appropriate; identifying genre; exploring the narrative structure; identifying and exploring the meaning of figurative language. Initially the teacher will use questions as a framework for this stage; later, students may suggest ways in which the text may be critiqued. At times this will involve specific skill development: for example, skills associated with the recognition and comprehension of metaphor and identifying different genres.

4. **Dialogic engagement with others**: Discussion in which students compare their understandings, defend a position, consider other ways of taking meaning from the text. Further activities could include dramatic portrayal of a story and comparison of the written text with several artistic portrayals of the passage.
5. **Dialectic between the reader and the text:** What is the text saying? Do I see it differently from my first reading? How do I perceive it? How do I respond? Does it relate to my life? This may be followed by the opportunity for quiet reflection, for prayer or meditation or for reflective or imaginative writing.

Two features of the phenomenological model of religious education—epoché, or bracketing out (Smart, 1973a, p. 38) and eidetic vision (p. 67)—may be used to take into account the fact that some adolescents will be experiencing a “moratorium” with regard to their religious belief and commitment. Although intended to neutralise subjectivity, epoché could also function as a means of distancing the religious subject matter from students’ present religious status, while enabling them to engage critically with the biblical text. Similarly, eidetic vision, intended as a means of participating imaginatively and emphatically with the beliefs of others (p. 20), could function as a means by which adolescents may engage with Christian beliefs with empathy but without making a personal statement of belief or commitment.

The literature from contemporary biblical scholarship provides a rich source of background information for the interpretation of the scriptures. A distinction is drawn between teacher background information and what is directly presented to students. Familiarity with biblical scholarship will inform the development of a curriculum and teaching strategies. The age and capacities of the student will determine when a more formal approach to interpretation is appropriate.

Pre-service teacher training should ensure that religious education teachers entering the profession have a sound grounding in biblical studies at an undergraduate level. Furthermore, courses in child and adolescent development should be extended to incorporate development in religious understanding, especially as it relates to the

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275 See above, Chapter 3.1.
transition from a literalist interpretation of religious texts. Professional development is equally important to extend and update the knowledge of teachers already in schools. Such tertiary-based professional development would up-grade teachers’ understanding of contemporary biblical scholarship, encourage them to discern what is appropriate to present to students, and promote epistemic cognition and an adult understanding and response to the “broken myth” in the teachers themselves.

A pedagogy which teaches for a transformation in students’ understanding of scripture by critical engagement with the text will consider how curriculum design and teaching strategies are informed by an adult understanding of scripture and a preparedness to draw on biblical scholarship in order to inform religious education generally. A sequential programme which provides specific teaching of the biblical text, with a special focus on genre and skills in recognising, understanding and discerning the purpose of figurative language, is recommended. The gradual introduction from the early years of the secondary school of skills which facilitate an understanding of texts can be formalised in the middle and senior years by more direct application of the skills of exegesis and hermeneutics, while retaining an imaginative engagement with figurative language and symbol.

Summary

Teaching for transformation is directed towards understanding the young child’s early engagement with biblical stories, then identifying the changes which occur in understanding the biblical text as the influence of concrete thinking leads to literalism, and subsequently to the questioning and de-mythologising thinking typical of adolescents. Teaching for transformation seeks to address the de-mythologising phase by using critical reflection on both the text and on one’s thinking. The intention is to facilitate a re-mythologising in which the wonder and delight of the first naïveté of the
young child may be transformed into the second or willed naïveté of adult belief. At this stage there is an acceptance of mystery which transcends human knowledge while at the same time embracing all that human knowledge can offer. It is not an innocence based on ignorance; rather it is a free, adult, openness to “the divine milieu”.\textsuperscript{276} If the Christian believer is to be open to such a willed naïveté, she or he must first pass through the crucible of adolescent (and young adult thinking) about the Bible, in which literalism is replaced by a critical appreciation of the text and the broken myth replaced by an understanding of symbol, just as the credulous young child was superseded by the young sceptic. A magical and superstitious mentality (Godin, 1971) must be transformed into an adult understanding of “sign and symbol” (p. 123) and an appreciation of metaphor and myth which transforms literalism into imagery evocative of the divine.

\textsuperscript{276} This term derives from \textit{The Divine Milieu}, Teilhard de Chardin, 1960.
CONCLUSION

This thesis has its genesis in the secondary school classroom, at the fusion of horizons between the *ideal* in relation to the religious education of the generation of young people growing up in the early twenty-first century, and the *reality* of the challenge which that endeavour poses for the religious education teacher in the Catholic secondary school. The Catholic school has a dual function, a secular and an ecclesial educational role. In addressing the classroom religious education component of the school’s ecclesial function, the approach advocated in this thesis is *education for faith*. This approach seeks to honour the *ideal*, by making available to adolescents an awareness of the Christian Vision and Story in a way which presents it as an invitation to appropriate that Story and Vision in their lives. In some cases, the invitation will be taken up and become a lived reality in the present; for others, the invitation remains open and may be taken up in adulthood. *Education for faith*, that is, *teaching for transformation*, proposes that the contemporary Catholic school’s ecclesial goal can only be advanced through a strong commitment to its function as an educational institution: by pursuing in religious education the same commitment to knowledge and understanding and critical thinking which a worthy educational institution accords to all learning.

The Christian Vision and Story are found in the Scriptures. However, in order for the biblical text to have the capacity to function as Scripture—to be revelatory—obstacles to its appropriation by young critical thinkers must be removed and the words, and therefore the message, made meaningful for the contemporary reader. Fundamental to *education for faith*, therefore, is critical engagement with the biblical text, a dialectical interaction between the reader—adolescent or adult—and the text. Meaning is not imposed on students; rather, teacher and student are open to the depths of meaning contained in the text. *Teaching for transformation* of students’ understanding of the text seeks to facilitate the transition from the literalist
understanding of biblical story, appropriate for the primary school child at the stage of concrete operations, to a hermeneutically sound interpretation of scripture appropriate to the developing critical faculties of the adolescent and young adult. Fostering that transition is deemed critical if the Christian Story and Vision is to be released from the constraints of a persistent literalism, which for many young people functions as an obstacle to its credibility and its power to transform lives. The process through which students need to be guided is the demythologisation of a literalist understanding of the biblical story in adolescence in order to make possible a subsequent re-mythologisation which opens up the possibility of a second or willed naïveté and the movement to an adult faith.

Cognitive development theory: its relevance

Key issues which young people raise in relation to scripture are the question of evidence for what they read in the Bible and the related question of the truth of the Bible. These concerns derive in part from a society in which the canons of scientific verification have been taken to be the unquestioned norm in validating truth claims. However, at a popular level scientific thinking has tended to be debased to a simplistic scientism which has been criticised by philosophers of science who recognise the limitations of an indiscriminate rejection of that which is not empirically verifiable (e.g. Barbour, 1974; Gaukroger, 2006). These questions also derive in part from students’ cognitive capacity; that is, they have a developmental dimension. The approach taken in this thesis to exploring issues of evidence and truth, and how they may be addressed, draws principally on cognitive development theory especially that based on a Piagetian paradigm.

The questions which students raise concerning truth and evidence, and their capacity to understand the full import of the issues raised by these questions, relate primarily to stage of cognitive functioning. The adolescent making the transition from
concrete to formal thought becomes aware of ways in which biblical stories do not conform to the standards of scientific validation or the ways in which historical claims are justified. However, the capacity to comprehend the full import of the issues raised generally requires advanced formal operations. Validating truth claims, discerning what constitutes knowledge and how knowledge claims are validated, are epistemological questions. Cognitive development theory, especially research into the relationship between cognitive capacity and epistemological understanding (e.g. Kitchener, 1986; Kuhn, 2005) provides a point of intersection between the philosophical dimension of epistemology and competence in thinking epistemologically. Implicit in students’ understanding of the ways in which religious truth is validated is their stage of epistemological understanding.

Addressing the questions students ask about the credibility of the Bible involves their facility with language, especially the capacity to recognise and comprehend the figurative qualities of much religious language. Biblical scholarship identifies a range of literary genres in the Bible, each of which imposes particular demands on the reader. In this thesis the focus has been on the genres of myth and parable. An appreciation of the characteristics of metaphor has direct application to an understanding of myth. Recognition of the qualities of figurative language and of symbols is key to interpreting religious texts and leading students from a magical to a symbolic and sacramental appreciation of many religious concepts and liturgical practices. Cognitive development theory contributes directly to teaching for critical engagement with the text by identifying the cognitive demands of the text and matching them to the cognitive capacities of the students.

**Teaching for critical engagement with the biblical text**

The fundamental position argued in this thesis is that students’ literalist understanding of the biblical text needs to be addressed directly and that this teaching needs to be
part of the religious education curriculum from the first year in the secondary school. *Teaching for transformation* seeks to promote critical engagement with the text by providing students with interpretive skills and a dialogical learning environment which invites engagement with texts in order to discern their meaning. Research reviewed in this thesis supports the contention that the classroom teaching-learning situation can influence learning.

It is recommended that a sequential programme be drawn up which focuses on the gradual development of students’ skills in understanding the nature of the biblical text, in recognising the qualities of religious language, and in integrating insights from contemporary critical biblical scholarship. Rather than undermining the faith of the child, as some believers fear, such a programme carried out with sensitivity would facilitate the transformation of the beliefs appropriate to childhood into a deeper, critical appreciation of the text, open to appropriation, in due course, as a component of an adult faith.

While the development of a person’s critical faculties reaches its intellectual high point in epistemological understanding, it is unlikely that that stage will be attained by students in the secondary school; however, its precursor, metacognition, the capacity to reflect on one’s thinking, is actively promoted in contemporary education. Metacognition may be applied to understanding in religious discourse. Research into transformative learning highlights the importance of critical reflection on one’s presuppositions; dialectical thinking focuses on how the “knower” organises and re-organises facts and ideas to create meaning. These research areas provide a link between cognitive psychology, philosophy, and hermeneutics. It is this link which provides a key to understanding learning as meaning making, and connects cognitive capacity with a willingness to engage in critical reflection. In interpreting the Bible, the tools of exegesis are a means to understanding; pastorally, the desired outcome is the
existential appropriation of the text by the reader in the third of Ricoeur’s moments of interpretation.

The findings from post-Piagetian research have been used to produce two related schemas—Epistemological Framework and Epistemological Functioning—to provide an overview of student characteristics which may be applied to teaching for transformation. The Epistemological Framework identifies such issues as the source of knowledge and how beliefs are justified. For example, adolescents, as has been stated, ask for evidence of what is recounted in the biblical text. However, the way in which knowledge is understood and what constitutes evidence, or the justification of beliefs, depends upon the mode, or epistemological stage, within which one is operating. For example, an adolescent operating in the subjectivist mode will typically have recourse to personal experience and what is subjectively known. It is in the evaluativist mode that critical thinking and using argument to justify beliefs becomes dominant. The Epistemological Functioning schema identifies the way in which students may actually function. This schema includes metacognition, or capacity to reflect on one’s thinking, complementarity in thinking and the non-cognitive category of novelty vs. closure. These schemas are intended to identify the way in which students approach such issues as the distinction between scientific and religious verification and the truth status of statements. Explanations may then be tailored to address the student’s present way of thinking.

Fowler’s dynamic understanding of faith development as lifelong combines the cognitive and epistemological characteristics of students with a series of non-cognitive characteristic, such as Kegan’s ego development, to elucidate the ways in which young people make meaning. This model provides a theoretical framework within which the religious dimension of the teaching of scripture may be explored. Tillich’s concept of the “broken myth”, which Fowler sees operating within the transition to Individuative-Reflective faith, is illustrative of the specific difficulties which many students may
experience and which teaching for transformation seeks to address. Within the context of demythologisation, the “broken myth”\(^{277}\) provides an explanation of the cognitive conflict for those who question a literalist understanding of myth but repress their questioning. The impetus for this thesis was, in part, concern about the cognitive dissonance which students may experience between their developing cognitive capacities and their understanding of what is demanded in their reading of scripture.

**The interrelationship between the cognitive and affective domains**

The focus on the cognitive domain is a deliberate choice which derived from the belief—at that initial stage untested—that a factor in students’ disenchantment with religious education was intellectually based. The interrelationship between the cognitive and affective domains is clearly discernible in the responses by young people in empirical studies. For example, the Generation Y research (Mason et al., 2007) cited one young woman who “wrestled” with the perceived conflict between science and religion.\(^{278}\) The emotion is palpable in the “anger” expressed by other adolescents who speak of feeling “betrayed”\(^{279}\) when they learn that they have been allowed to continue with a literalist reading of the Bible. That the cognitive and the affective domains interact has been shown in the research coming from structural developmental theory,\(^{280}\) for example in the research of Perry and of Belenky et al. Kuhn (1991) identified the influence of emotion or “affect” and its ability to “energize, but also compromise, reason” (p. 297); her later research (2005) demonstrated that motivation and cognition are linked.

*Teaching for transformation* includes encouraging students to reflect on their own thinking about the Bible. Critical reflection has a volitional dimension: not only

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\(^{277}\) This is discussed in Chapter 7.5.
\(^{278}\) See above, Chapter 2.2.
\(^{279}\) See above, Chapter 2.1.
\(^{280}\) See above, Chapter 4, including the Summary.
must one have the capacity to reflect on the assumptions and presuppositions which one brings to the interpretive task, but one must also be willing to do so. This has the possibility of an emotional cost. Similarly, dialectical thinking, as described by Basseches (1986), imposes affective costs, for example, the loss of “intellectual security” (p. 40) when one’s previous certainties are brought into question.

Emotion and feeling cannot be disentangled from learning in any subject area, least of all in religious education. Groome’s emphasis on religious education as involving the whole person (1980, p. 23) is confirmed and reinforced. The interconnectedness of the cognitive, affective and conative domains has been demonstrated by the literature focussed on cognitive development and epistemological change. The difficulties which students’ experience if a literalist interpretation of the biblical text is not addressed as part of the religious education programme in the secondary school are cognitive in origin. The consequences, for example, disillusionment and disaffection with religious education and perhaps with religion, are affective and existential. Teaching for transformation engages the intellect, together with the emotions and the will, in the learning process, in a supportive learning environment, in a dialectic between the adolescent learner and the biblical text. The intended outcome is to facilitate the integration of mind, heart and will in an appropriation of scripture. This thesis is predicated on belief in the significance of the intellectual dimension of learning: “The paths of the mind are also the paths of the heart” (Steele, 2010).

It is suggested that many students do not consider that critical thinking can or should be applied to religious beliefs. The demand in secular subjects, such as history and English, that students support their opinions by giving reasons, if unmatched by similar demands in religious education, may contribute to a belief that religion requires blind faith at the expense of reason. While many students do not think deeply,

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especially on religious matters, and others are simply not interested in religion, for those who do think and question, the cognitive dissonance may have significant affective consequences. It is incumbent upon the religious educator to respond to students’ intellectual questioning, whether voiced or unvoiced, with an appropriate pedagogy; *teaching for transformation* seeks to facilitate the transition from literalism before the feelings of anger expressed by some young people become disillusionment with religion.

**Two types of thinking: logical reasoning and creative thinking**

Theories of cognitive development, such as the Piagetian, and those which derive from it, focus on the rational and logical, with “development” defined in terms of the maturation of logical thinking. These theories have an important place in understanding thinking. They help to identify the characteristics and cognitive capacities of young people at different ages and stages of development and help to identify the way in which the biblical text can become a barrier to belief as children move towards adolescence. However, logical reasoning is not the only way in which cognition operates. Creative and imaginative thinking are important components in thinking, whether it be in science (e.g. Black, 1962, p. 243) or religion, two intellectual spheres frequently seen as antithetical.

Historically, in Western thought, the logical and rational has dominated as the preferred and respected mode: hence, one may add, the dominance of scientific standards of evidence in adjudicating truth claims. However, the prominent role of figurative language in religious discourse requires imaginative engagement with the text to create meaning. In religious education and the teaching of scripture, mythos,

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282 Nor, of course, is cognition the only dimension of development.
283 Recent publicity regarding the “new atheism”, promoted by writers such as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, promulgates the notion that science and religion have no common ground.
thinking that is “organic” and “concerns the imagination ... and [is] not easily verified” (Labouvie-Vief, 1990, p. 44), must balance logos.

An exploration of figurative language and of myth and parable demonstrates how logical and conceptual reasoning needs to be supplemented by the power of imagery and symbol in order to enhance understanding and to tap into affectivity and the “expressive dimension of religion” (Hay, Nye, & Murphy, 1996). Imagination and creativity are significant in opening up the transcendent by an evocation of the numinous. Both styles of thinking are important, even essential; they are complementary; both are integral to understanding and to personal appropriation if the text is to be revelatory. Labouvie-Vief’s (1990) argument that a “new view of reason and a new model of development” be adopted which is “built on a dialectic between these two styles of knowing” (p. 57), logos and mythos, is particularly apposite in interpreting scripture. Writing from the perspective of a biblical scholar, Brueggemann (2001) speaks of “the generative ... power of imagination” (p. x) as a way of seeing or discerning which involves the whole being. Imaginative thinking complements logical or convergent thinking: “imagination is indeed a legitimate way of knowing” (p. x).²⁸⁴

It is important, therefore, that in applying theoretical insights to pedagogy, one does not feel compelled to choose between theoretical perspectives. Logical thinking, such as that which forms the basis of developmental stage, and the imaginative and creative thinking integral to engaging with figurative language and symbol, are both...

²⁸⁴ As an Australian reading and reflecting on Brueggemann’s The Prophetic Imagination (2001), my thoughts on the de-mythologisation and re-mythologisation of myths turned to the ANZAC story: the forging of the myth; the telling of the story, then later the process of de-mythologisation. The play The one day of the year came to mind. ANZAC became a broken myth! Yet in recent years there has been a resurgence in interest by young Australians who are visiting Gallipoli in large numbers and participating in the Dawn Service on ANZAC day. The history of Gallipoli has been re-energised as a powerful Australian myth. And it has been largely young people who have been responsible for this re-mythologisation. The story is an expression of the nation’s identity; it represents hope and triumph over adversity. Teaching for transformation seeks to direct young people’s energies to a similar re-mythologisation of the Christian Story and Vision.
essential for fruitful critical engagement with the biblical text. An awareness of their combined influence is essential in the exploration of the interaction between the cognitive capacities of the reader and the cognitive demands of biblical texts. These insights need to inform the specific teaching strategies used in teaching which focus on students’ critical engagement with the text.

**Recommendations and suggestions for further research**

The initial purpose of this thesis was to explore the theoretical issues raised by the hypothesis that students’ understanding of the biblical text remained at a childish level while in all other areas of the curriculum critical thinking became integral to the way in which teaching and learning was conducted. It was suggested that the consequences of an unchallenged literalist reading of the Bible could have significant negative consequences for the credibility of the scriptures and for young people’s religious perspective on life. A strong version of the hypothesis would see persistent literalism as a contributing factor to the decline in religious belief and religious practice among young people. Such a decline has been documented in Australia by Marcellin Flynn and in the United Kingdom by Leslie Francis and associates. To investigate a possible causal link between an inadequate understanding of the biblical text and rejection of Christian belief and practice, however, would have required empirical studies, which was not the purpose of this thesis. The alternative has been to explore the theoretical issues upon which such an empirical study could be predicated. It is recommended that research be conducted to consider the cognitive demands of interpreting the biblical text and to suggest ways in which teachers may facilitate the transformation in thinking required for a non-literalist interpretation of scripture.

The suggestions for such research are of two broad types: those which would investigate the fundamental issues which this thesis addresses, and those which would investigate more specific issues relating to language and genre. One recommendation
is for empirical research to ascertain the age at which children and adolescents are most vulnerable to a perceived clash between religious and scientific explanations of phenomena. More specifically, data is needed on how students’ understanding of the nature of the biblical text influences their perception of the credibility of the Bible and whether there is a correlation between literalism, the credibility of the Bible, and religious belief and practice. A corollary is the age at which students are affected by historical discrepancies in the Bible. Equally important is the extent to which students perceive this issue to be addressed in religious education classes, and the relative success of different pedagogies.

It has been argued that a key to facilitating the transition from a literalist to a more nuanced interpretation of the biblical text is an appreciation of the nature of religious language, especially metaphor and its application to myth and parable. Suggestions for specific research related to language and genre include testing students’ capacity to recognise, comprehend, paraphrase, explain and generate metaphors. A suggested first step is a classification scheme, or taxonomy, which identifies degrees of complexity in figurative language. Starting with similes, which children in the primary school can recognise and understand, the taxonomy would identify increasing degrees of complexity in the recognition, comprehension and explanation of complex “genuine” metaphors and metaphorical discourse.

Parables have been used extensively in religious education. It has been argued that the open-endedness of parables makes them eminently suited to engaging the creative thinking of students. However, students’ present level of familiarity with and understanding of parables will influence their response to new teaching approaches. Parables which are so familiar that their tensive quality has been lost are in danger of being literalised. Sampling students’ response to different kinds of parables, the level at which parables are understood, and the extent to which the parable is interpreted as having a moral message, would provide teachers with an understanding of students’
presuppositions when reading this genre. Classification of parables according to the type of parable, the subject matter, and the cognitive demands which they place on students would determine their appropriateness for students at different ages.

A valuable area for research designed to enhance the teaching/learning process would be the development and testing of programmes which address specific skills. Pre-testing before the intervention and post-testing afterwards would enable the programme to be assessed and improvements suggested. Examples for such interventions include the following: an open-ended approach to teaching parables; a graduated programme for teaching for understanding of religious metaphor; and a programme which fostered in students a growing awareness of their own assumptions and presuppositions.

This thesis has focussed on the cognitive capacities of the student and the cognitive demands of the biblical text. Further research is needed which focuses primarily on the role of the teacher. For example, teaching for transformation of students’ understanding of the biblical text requires teachers to have adequate training in contemporary biblical studies, to have an appreciation of the development of religious thinking and access to resources in implementing a programme which directly addresses the difficulties which young people may experience in interpreting the Bible. The principal recommendations relate to the pre-service training of religious education teachers and the on-going professional development of teachers currently in the classroom.

A priority area for further research would be to ascertain from practising teachers the form of professional development which would be of most assistance to them in teaching scripture. The demands on teachers are great. Religious education is one of a number of subjects in which teachers require expertise. Further research needs to be directed to determining how best to provide religious education teachers
with the support which they identify as of most benefit to their classroom engagement with students. Dialogue between classroom teachers and tertiary institutions and between educators and biblical scholars would facilitate a transfer of knowledge and skills which would be of benefit to all parties.

The dialectic between the reader and the text can be productive of a synthesis of old and new knowledge which produces a new and deeper understanding. In the first moment of this dialectic the old literalist understanding is de-mythologised; the “broken myth” is addressed. In the next moment, new insights are brought to bear on the text: for example, through critical analysis and an appreciation of the power of symbol and metaphorical language. In a “dialectic of criticizing and energizing” (Brueggemann, 2001, p. 4), the synthesis in the third moment of the dialectic would, ideally, contribute to the re-mythologisation of the Christian Story and Vision, energising its appropriation and providing a source of hope, a sense of purpose to sustain the person existentially and promote deeper engagement with the wider community in a “synthesis of faith and life” (The Catholic School, 1977, n. 37, p. 33). If the classroom teacher is to be successful in engaging students in this dialectic, then she or he needs first to engage in a similar process. Research needs to focus on how this process may be facilitated and how the expertise of the biblical scholar may be mediated to the teacher in the classroom.
AFTERWORD

Mythos and logos revisited: two ways of understanding myth

This thesis has been concerned principally with *logos*, a consideration of the significance of the development of hypothetico-deductive reasoning, of mature epistemological reasoning and critical thinking. The understanding of myth in this thesis has been in terms of a literary genre which uses figurative language to express meaning which cannot be expressed in any other way. Logos gives rise to such analytical thinking.

The Bible contains myths. To say this is for many believers a scandal, for others a source of misunderstanding and for some a link with the human condition: in all ages and in all cultures human beings have endeavoured to find meaning in life and to ponder that which is transcendent. Myth has been the medium for this engagement with the transcendent. A recent television programme, *Art and Soul: Bitter and Sweet*, provided an immersion in imagination and feeling, a reminder that *The Whisper of Spirit* (Campbell, 2008b) comes through art and poetry and through “exploring stories” which tell of “faith and faithlessness and fear”, of “immigrants and survivors”, of “power” and of “justice” (Campbell, 2008a). Campbell draws on the evocative stories in the Bible; *Art and Soul*, showed the portrayal in art of the myths and Dreaming of Australia’s indigenous people.

In both cases, story is integral to humankind’s search beyond the present and concrete reality. In both cases, *mythos*, imagination and creativity are in the forefront. In both cases art—in word and in painting—proved to be extraordinarily powerful, penetrating the psyche, tapping into universal and primordial yearnings to know and to experience the transcendent, linking all cultures and belief systems.

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285 Telecast on ABC1, Melbourne, Thursday, 21 October 2010, 8.30-9.30 p.m.
The importance of story and of imagination has been reinforced by my own research. A short period of doubt ensued over the wisdom of focussing on deconstructing myth as a way to coming to an understanding and appreciation of the Bible. Myth and its artistic representation can go straight to the heart. Why approach myth via a circuitous path which traverses genre, figurative language and discourses on how truth may be established?

On reflection, three principal thoughts emerged: (i) that both mythos and logos—imagination and analytical thinking—are needed in religious education; (ii) that the *Sitz-im-Leben* of the community and its culture, and the specific section of the community which constitutes the recipients of teaching, is the determinant of the balance between mythos and logos; and (iii) for some, and I am one, the only satisfactory route is the circuitous one.

People of all ages, including students in the secondary school, respond to stories, verbal and represented visually. For some the experience may be profound, for others the effects may be short-lived. From the scepticism of contemporary post-Enlightenment Western culture questions emerge; in the era of post-modernism, all “grand narratives” are suspect. Young people today have been educated to question, to adduce reasons and cite evidence. Sophisticated thinkers, or those seeking to be so, eschew what is unsubstantiated. The findings of studies into post-formal operations, and of Fowler’s investigation of the development of faith, indicate that a circuitous route may be the only path for many of today’s youth. The dialectic between the reader and the text may need to go via critical thinking and an appreciation of metaphorical language in order to arrive at a respect for the truths contained in myths. Paradoxically, for the rational mind, an understanding of myth, an acceptance of its intellectual credentials, may well be essential if myth is to achieve its purpose.
Educators tread a fine line between providing an intellectually satisfying explanation of myth while retaining its potential to evoke the numinous. Different individuals will respond differently, according to personality, age, psychosocial stage, stage of epistemological functioning and capacity to respond imaginatively to the wisdom contained in myth, poetry and story.

*Logos* need not destroy *mythos*; critical thinking is needed to open up the depths of wisdom contained in the scriptures. The dialectic between the reader and the text can become a dialectic between the intellectual and the imaginative, between logos and mythos, between knowledge and wisdom. After deconstructing religious texts, *Teaching for Transformation* must restore the parable and the myth if scripture is to evoke the numinous in pondering Absolute Mystery.
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APPENDIX 1

The Australian Catholic Secondary School: An Overview of Historical Perspectives to Catechesis

The approaches to religious education in the period prior to Vatican II will be limited to an analysis of the Traditional approach and the Kerygmatic approach to religious education. Subsequently, the Kerygmatic approach gave way to the Life-centred approach which straddled the period immediately after Vatican II and throughout the 1970s and beyond. These three approaches, although all catechetical, represent significant differences in terms of the model of teaching, the content and the role of texts, especially the use of the catechism, and in the way in which the Bible was used (Rummery, 1975a, pp. 2-3). Each approach was a product of changing theological positions and their philosophical presuppositions as well as of the pedagogical and sociological characteristics of its time. The present curriculum in the Archdioceses of Melbourne and Sydney differs in that it has “a more cognitive approach” (Elliott, 2002, p. 20).

The traditional approach

The traditional approach, or “transmission model” (e.g. Rummery, 1975a, pp. 45-47), clearly saw the role of religious education as the passing on of the faith to the next generation. The authority of the teaching of the magisterium was complemented by the way in which the teaching took place: the authority of the teacher over the pupils; the authority of the question and answer method contained in the catechism, which required memorisation of the statements of Christian doctrine and dogma.

The traditional approach had its historical foundations in the Catholic Counter Reformation and developed subsequently in response to the philosophical changes of

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286 The way in which the Bible was used is discussed in Chapter 5.2.
the Enlightenment and of the scientific revolution which the Church saw as a threat not only to its authority but also to religion itself. The Church’s perception of its mission was to preserve and pass on the faith in a hostile world. In Pius XI’s encyclical *Divini Illius Magistri (On the Christian Education of Youth)*, 1929, education was essentially “moral formation” and the human person was seen from a teleological perspective, directed towards a supernatural end (*Divini*, n. 7, p. 8). Given the “fallen” condition of human beings (n. 67, p. 28) the encyclical condemned “any educational method which takes little or no account of original sin or of divine grace, and is thus entirely and exclusively based on the powers of nature, is a complete aberration” (n. 69, p. 29). New trends in educational theory, such as those proposed by Pestalozzi, Montessori and Dewey, who focussed on experience (Kelty, 2000, p. 27), were criticised as seeking the “attainment of ... earthly happiness” (*Divini*, n. 4, p. 7).

In the traditional approach, religious education was primarily instruction in one’s religious obligations: what one was to believe and how one was to respond, morally and in religious and liturgical practice. The school had an “explicit Catholic character” (McLaughlin, 2000a, p. 57) and the members of the school community were “expected to participate in the worship and religious culture of the school” (p. 57).

This approach to teaching was not unlike that of education in general at the time: the pupils were recipients of knowledge, largely unquestioned facts, transmitted to them by the teacher who held authority. It was the form of education which Freire (1972a, 1972b) referred to as the “banking approach” and which he criticised so comprehensively. One key premise upon which catechesis was based, namely, that both those teaching and those taught were believers, was substantially accurate in Australian Catholic schools at this time.\(^\text{287}\) Australian Catholic families at this time generally practised their religion, or wanted to be seen as doing so; they were members of the local parish community and, in a time before there was any State aid

\(^{287}\) The majority of those who taught in Catholic schools were members of religious orders. Their approach to teaching was influenced by the period in which they were trained.
for church schools, made sacrifices to support parish primary schools where their children could be taught the faith.

The kerygmatic approach

The traditional approach was current practice in Australia up to the early 1960s, despite the ferment which the modern catechetical movement (Rummery, 1975a, Chapter 1; Trainor, 1991, Chapter 5, pp. 79-102) had been generating in Europe. This movement, dating from the 1928 Munich Congress (Jungmann, 1959, p. 34), the “Munich Method” (p. 33), was spearheaded by Josef Jungmann, whose publication in 1936 of *Die Frohbotschaft und unsere Glaubensverkundigung* in Germany (Rummery, 1975a, p. 1; Boys, 1980, pp. 76-77) advanced the spread of the kerygmatic movement. Catechetical institutes were established, such as the *Lumen Vitae* Centre in Belgium and the catechetical Institutes in France (Rummery, 1975a, p. 1). A series of international Catechetical Study Weeks—1959, Nijmegen, Holland; 1960, Eichstätt, Austria; 1962, Bangkok; 1963, Katigondo, Uganda; 1967, Manila; 1968, Medellin, Colombia (Boys, 1980, pp. 92-96)—furthered the development and spread of the movement.

Initially, *Heilsgeschichte*, or “Salvation history”, gave a higher profile to the use of the Bible in religious education (e.g. Hofinger, 1961, pp. X-XI), tracing salvation history documented in the Old and New Testaments. The kerygma, or “proclamation” aspect of catechesis, became central. The teaching was still catechetical; however, the focus shifted to the recipients of the education, to whom the “Good News” of salvation was to be made known (Rummery, 1975a, p. 3, p. 10).

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288 According to Boys (1980), Jungmann’s, *Die Frohbotschaft und unsere Glaubensverkundigung*, 1936, “initiated the ‘kerygmatic movement’ in catechesis” (pp. 76-77). The English translation was published in 1959 as *Handing on the faith – A manual of catechetics*. Citations are from this 1959 edition.
Catechetical conferences, at which religious educators were addressed by international speakers, led to the acceptance of the new approach. In the early 1960s new Australian catechisms were prepared (Rummery, 1975a, pp. 12-13; Trainor, 1991, pp. 82-84), together with teachers’ manuals, to facilitate the transition to a salvation history focus in the teaching of religious education in Catholic schools. However, given the Church’s traditional negative attitude towards Catholics reading the scripture (e.g. Rummery, 1975a, pp. 9-10) teachers in Catholic schools lacked a sound understanding of the Bible. Boys makes this same point in relation to Catholic secondary teachers in the United States (Boys, 1980, p. 119). Raymond Brown, commenting on the failure of the salvation history approach, stated: “To some this has meant the Bible was irrelevant for catechesis. To others it has meant that a better approach to the Bible should be chosen, and a more thought-provoking pedagogy should be adopted both for teacher and for student” (Boys, 1980; Foreword, pp. 1-2). This thesis endorses the second alternative.

Just as the traditional approach was critiqued (e.g. Rummery, 1975a, p. 45-47), for example, for its “exaggerated emphasis on authority and categorical statements” (Rummery, 1975a, p. 95), so the kerygmatic approach failed to meet the high expectations which had attended its introduction and it declined in Australia as it had in the United States (Boys, 1980, p. 109). For students there was the perception that nothing new was being taught as at each level the story of salvation history was being recapitulated. Nebreda (1970a p. 117) acknowledged this: “They ‘know by heart’ (often to the point of sheer boredom!) all the external details of the history of salvation”. At a theoretical level, discussions and debates on religious education emanating from the Catechetical Congresses provided a focus for the articulation of concerns and the development of new approaches. Marcel van Caster changed

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289 Johannes Hofinger, who had earlier introduced the kerygmatic approach to the United States (Boys, 1980, pp. 88, 91), introduced the approach to Australia in 1959 (O’Brien, 1999, p. 25), at a time when the influence of the Congresses, and of the German Catechism, long in preparation and published in the 1950s (Rummery 1975a, p. 1), was starting to be questioned in Europe.
“kerygmatics in a more anthropocentric direction following the 1962 Catechetical Study Week in Bangkok”, a direction which began to influence the English speaking world when his works were translated in 1965 and 1966 (Boys, 1980, p. 121).

The life-centred or anthropological approach

While “the foundations for a more experiential and anthropocentric approach to education” had been laid by Vatican II (Trainor, 1991, p. 87), the international Catechetical Study Weeks played a significant role in the approach gaining currency (pp. 87-90). In response to the realisation by many of the “inadequacy” of the kerygmatic approach (p. 108), Nebreda argued that “the catechetical problem is in its final analysis one of conversion” (1970a, p. 114). While maintaining the “appeal” of the kerygma, he re-stated the catechetical problem as “the problem of pre-catechesis”, preparing youth to “discover” and “welcome” the kerygma (p. 118).

By stages the kerygmatic approach moved towards a life-centred approach to religious education which sought to engage students by drawing on their life experiences, an educational application of Moran’s (1966) theology of ongoing Revelation. Audinet (1968) argued that the Christian message must be expressed “in terms that are the terms of experience, without being false either to the experience of the young people or to the richness and clarity of experience in the Church or the Bible” (p. 81). Drawing on Ricoeur, Audinet stated that the best way of expressing “one’s life and experiences” is “the language of symbols” (pp. 77-78).

Three key articles were influential in the development of this catechetical debate. Moran (1970) criticised the catechetical approach of the time and argued that “religious education” must be “a combination of sound religion and good education”

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290 The significant contribution of Nebreda (1970a, 1970b) to understanding the situation of young people is discussed in Chapter 3.2.
291 The role of symbols is discussed in Chapter 6.
(p. 300) and “taught in an atmosphere free of any church structure” (p. 301). Colomb (1970) also criticised the catechetical model as “cut off from real life” (p. 370) and argued that an “intellectual structure is necessary” in the teaching of adolescents (p. 385). Babin (1968) re-directed catechesis from adolescents, for whom he believed a “fallow period” was necessary, to adults (cited in Rummery, 1975a, pp. 96-99).

The anthropological approach spread rapidly and represented a significant change in perspective. Just as the kerygmatic approach had shifted the focus from the content, which marked the traditional approach, to the recipient of the teaching, now the focus was on the recipient’s life experience. Instead of being required to acquire a knowledge of doctrine, students were being encouraged “to reflect on [their] situation, and see how [they] could bear witness in this situation” (Rummery, 1975a, p. 19). Accordingly, the role of the teacher and the relationship between teacher and students changed, with less emphasis on authority. The methods of teaching changed, with more focus on discussion and the sharing of experience. There was a move from the set syllabus to a more open-ended attitude towards content.

**The Australian context: the 1970s to the present**

In *The Renewal of the Education of Faith* (1970), the Australian Bishops accepted the need to consider “the different ages, capacities, mentalities, stages of responsibility, life styles and degrees of growth within the Church community” when preparing catechisms (n. 75, p. 54), but concluded that “continuous research is needed in the preparation of the content of catechesis” (n. 75, p. 54). The development of a centrally produced and mandated “catechism” lapsed.

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292 Ronald Goldman, whose research (1964) led him to support a life-based religious education programme (1965), also visited Australia about this time, providing support from a different perspective. Goldman’s research is discussed in Chapter 2.3 and 2.4.
At the 1973 National Catechetical Seminar in Melbourne, the contributions by Nebreda and Amalorpavadass were significant. The influence of Amalorpavadass regarding the importance of “both anthropology and theology” in faith education and “the need to reflect on human experience”, provided “a clearly enunciated process” (Trainor, 1991, pp. 93-94). The catechism had become redundant. Instead, set texts were replaced by a range of new programmes focussed on students’ experience and delivered via magazine-type resources, such as *Come Alive* (1971), *Let’s Go Together*, and *Move Out* (Trainor, 1991, p. 95). At the senior secondary level the *Come Alive* teaching materials were used, based on “an eight point plan for Christian life”. The change from a set syllabus to the curriculum development approach (Rummery, 1975a, p. 21) was, in fact, the direction in which secular education was moving in Victoria at the time, hence the new approach to religious education was largely comparable with the teaching methods and teaching styles in other subjects in the curriculum. However, differential expectations in terms of intellectual rigour and assessment of knowledge and skills in religious education, compared with the secular subjects, became significant during the period of the life-centred approach to religious education in Australia in the 1970s and subsequently.

The life-centred approach, which gained currency in Australia during the 1970s, was attended by considerable debate, even acrimony, especially in Victoria (e.g. Trainor, 1991, pp. 104-105; O’Brien, 1999, pp. 61-64). The parents of those being taught in the period of uncertainty and change following Vatican II had been brought up in the traditional approach to religious education. While many, especially educators, responded positively to the new directions, many other stakeholders were highly critical.

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293 The “Four Point Plan”, which defined the methodology used in the Melbourne religious education Guidelines (Primary from the 1970s until 1995; Secondary, 1995) derived from the approach of Amalorpavadass (Engebretson, 1997).

294 Enunciated in a Vision Statement (with an open letter to parents) in a brochure which accompanied the *Come Alive* materials which were published in 1971.
The debate over the teaching of religious education erupted in 1968 with complaints about “the doctrine being taught in schools ... and the orthodoxy of publications produced by the CEO for children in government schools” (O’Brien, 1999, pp. 26-27). The dispute intensified when conservative forces reacted strongly to such catechetical publications as the *Come Alive* series (pp. 62-65).

It was clear that whatever reservations one might have about particular expressions of the life-experience approach to religious education, a return to the past was impossible, even were it desirable. In the decade or so from the late 1960s religious education teachers, struggling to adjust to the paradigm shifts in theological, social and educational thinking, were largely left to solve the problems for themselves until the publication of a succession of religious education *Guidelines* by the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne.

**Religious education Guidelines.**

In the Archdiocese of Melbourne more direction in the planning and implementation of the religious education curriculum was provided by a succession of *Guidelines* starting in 1972 for Catholic children in government schools and in January 1973 for Catholic secondary schools. These brief early guidelines were revised and a more detailed set published in 1977 as the next stage in an on-going process of development and evaluation (*Guidelines*, 1977, p. 1). Part II for the Senior Secondary school was published in 1978, as were Guidelines for the Middle and Junior Secondary school (*Guidelines*, 1978).

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295 CEO refers to the Catholic Education Office.
297 This document will be referred to as *Guidelines*, 1977 in the discussion which follows. Similar abbreviations will be used for subsequent documents.
Guidelines, 1984 was a much longer and more detailed document, produced in three volumes for Senior, Middle and Junior Secondary levels, with introductory sections on a “Pastoral Overview” and a “Curriculum Overview”. “Catechetical Method” was to be “considered in the context of fidelity to the Word of God and fidelity to the human person” (p. 10). The method was to be “student-centred”, with a recognition of the significance of the stages of “human development” (p. 10) and a recognition that “catechesis is a continuous process ... throughout life” (p. 10). The insights which led to the introduction of the life-centred approach to religious education, with its focus on the age and stage of the learner, the lifelong nature of catechesis and the importance of incorporating the experience of the learner (e.g. Colomb, 1970, p. 377) were, therefore, recognised; however, in these later Guidelines more direction was given for curriculum planning and the delivery of a teaching programme.

The last decade of the twentieth century saw the culmination of this process. The 1995 Guidelines were the most comprehensive. Organisationally these Guidelines followed the structure of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994), drew on post-Vatican II official thinking on religious education, and on insights from other disciplines. The purpose or goal of religious education, summed up in the statement by Archbishop Little of Melbourne in the form of a letter endorsing the 1995 Guidelines, was to make “Religious Education ... meaningful for students in the 1990s” by bringing “the Gospel into dialogue with the concerns of our time and with the distinctive realities, issues and concerns which students experience in their daily lives” (Guidelines, 1995, p. iv). The process was stated explicitly to be based on four “interactive elements”: “experience shared, reflection deepened, faith expressed, and insights reinforced” (p. 27).²⁹⁸

²⁹⁸ This process was based on Amalorpavadass’ catechetical pedagogy, which had been used in previous sets of primary Guidelines and was now extended to the secondary level (Engebretson, 1997, pp. 26-27).
Not long after the publication of the 1995 *Guidelines*, and after schools had drawn up curriculum documents and units of study based on them, moves were afoot to change the entire philosophical and theoretical basis upon which religious education was predicated. This “involved the transition from a life-centred approach that emphasised the formation of faith through shared reflection on life experience, to the implementation of an educational approach which emphasised the formation of faith via a knowledge-centred outcomes-based approach” (Buchanan, 2006, p. 60). The structure of the secondary texts, *To Know, Worship and Love*, introduced from 2001, and mandated for use in the Archdiocese of Melbourne for Years 7-10, derived from the typology of Moore and Habel (1982) used in the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) Study Design, *Religion and Society*, (Engebretson, 2000, p. 30). The texts were “revised by Sydney, in collaboration with Melbourne”, prior to their introduction in the Archdiocese of Sydney. The secondary texts for Years 7-10 (2nd edition) were published in December 2003 and mandated for use in Sydney from 2004 as the resource for “the re-developed Religious Education Curriculum (December 2003)” and in Melbourne replaced the first edition.

The current *Coming to Know, Worship and Love, “A Religious Education Curriculum Framework for Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne”*, 2005, is a curriculum development subsequent to the introduction of the text books. Religious education is seen as encompassing “three intersecting areas of school life”: “the formal classroom religious education curriculum”; “the prayer, sacramental and liturgical life of the school”; and “living within the Catholic tradition” (p. 1). While still maintaining the “core aim” of “educating in faith” (Pascoe, 2007), this Curriculum Framework also

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299 Primary school texts were introduced at the same time as the secondary texts in both Melbourne and Sydney. Texts for Years 11 and 12 were later produced for use in Melbourne and Sydney.

300 Details of the dates of the second edition and their introduction in the Archdiocese of Sydney were kindly supplied by Sue Moffatt, Education Officer: Religious Education (Primary), Catholic Education Office, Sydney, by e-mail to the researcher on Tuesday, 19 October 2010, 12.27 p.m.
serves to mesh the religious education component of Catholic education with the curriculum, assessment and reporting structure mandated for the secular subjects in all schools in Victorian, the *Victorian Essential Learning Standards* (VELS) (Overview, 2005), thereby giving religious education an academic status equal to that of all other school subjects.
APPENDIX 2

The Loman Index of Biblical Interpretation (LBI)\textsuperscript{301}

\section*{INSTRUCTIONS}

In this section there are some quotes from the Bible. Each quote is followed by three comments. Tick the comment which BEST shows your views about the quote. For each question please tick ONE box only.

\textbf{“He really was the Son of God!” (Matthew 27 v 54)}

- Jesus was really the son of God
- Jesus was an ordinary human like everyone else and certainly not God
- Jesus was a person with an extra special relationship with God

\textbf{“Jesus went to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, the man he had raised from death”. (John12v1)}

- Jesus really brought people back from the dead
- The writer of the story wanted to show Jesus had power in this world and the next
- Nobody can give life to a dead person

\textbf{“Suddenly a strong wind blew up, and the waves began to spill over into the boat, so that it was about to fill with water. Jesus stood up and commanded the wind, ‘Be quiet!’ and he said to the waves ‘Be still!’” (Mark 4 v 37-39)}

- The miracles recorded in the Bible actually happened
- Although not factually correct, the miracles are interpretations of events
- Miracles cannot happen, since they go against scientific laws of nature

\textbf{“He (Joseph) had no sexual relations with her (Mary) before she gave birth to her son”. (Matthew 1 v 24)}

- Mary really was still a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus
- Saying Mary was a virgin was a way of showing Mary’s purity and the importance of Jesus
- Mary could not have been a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus

\textsuperscript{301} Copy provided by the researcher, Professor L. Francis.
“When the angels went away from them back into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened’”. (Luke 2 v 15)

The shepherds were working nearby and the angels told them what had happened
The writer was trying to show that Jesus would be especially close to the poor
The shepherds were working and not interested in a baby being born

After Jesus’ crucifixion “the disciples were gathered together behind locked doors. Then Jesus came and stood among them”. (John 20 v 19)

Jesus came back to life and appeared to his disciples in a physical form
Jesus’ followers felt he had communicated with them in a spiritual way after his death
Jesus had been fully human and after he died he could not communicate with anyone

“As he (Jesus) was blessing them, he departed from them and was taken up into heaven”. (Luke 24 v 51)

This could not happen as heaven does not exist
Jesus’ body left the earth and rose up into the sky to heaven
The writer wanted to show the disciples felt that Jesus would live on in power and glory

“An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right of the altar where the incense was burnt”. (Luke 1 v 11)

Angels exist and are messengers of God
There is no scientific evidence for the existence of angels
The writer wanted to show how God uses angels to communicate with people

“Then the three disciples saw Moses and Elijah (important Jewish leaders who had died) talking with Jesus”. (Matthew 17 v 3)

This was impossible as they had died years before
This was to show that Jesus was as important as Moses and Elijah
This actually happened through the power of God
“Jesus said to the servants, ‘Fill these jars with water. Now draw some water out and take it to the man in charge of the feast.’ They took him the water, which now had turned into wine”. (John 2 v 8-9)

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Jesus “broke the (5) loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people” (about 5000 of them). Everyone ate and had enough. (Matthew14v19-20)

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“They (wise men) brought out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and presented them to him.” (Matthew 2 v 11)

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“Between three and six o’clock in the morning Jesus came to the disciples, walking on the water.” (Matthew 14 v 25)

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“Drink it (the wine), all of you,’ he said; ‘this is my blood, which seals God’s covenant, my blood poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” (Matthew 2 v 27-28)

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After Jesus died “the curtain hanging in the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom.” (Matthew 27 v 51)

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“Suddenly there was a violent earthquake; an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled the stone away, and sat on it.” (Matthew 28 v 2)

This actually happened as described in the Bible
These events did not happen
The events were described like this to give them extra religious meaning

Jesus went “into the desert, where he was tempted by the Devil for forty days. In all that time he ate nothing, so that he was hungry when it was over.” (Luke 4 v 2)

This actually happened as described in the Bible
These events did not happen
The events were described like this to give them extra religious meaning

“Jesus said to Simon ‘let down your (fishing) nets for a catch.’ Simon answered ‘we worked hard all night long and caught nothing.’ They let them down and caught such a large number of fish that the nets were about to break.” (Luke 5 v 4-5)

This actually happened as described in the Bible
These events did not happen
The events were described like this to give them extra religious meaning
APPENDIX 3

Faith Development Theory: Fowler and Slee

Fowler’s starting point is the human person’s quest for meaning. Rather than define faith, this key concept is premised on the theology of Paul Tillich (1957) and H. Richard Niebuhr, both of whom make a clear distinction between faith and religious belief (Fowler, 1981, pp. 4-5), and the distinction which Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1977, 1979) makes between “faith” and “belief” (Fowler, 1981, pp. 9-11). The theological understanding of faith espoused by these writers links the theological, the psychological and developmental domains with their focus on the existential subject.

For Fowler, as for Tillich (1957, p. 9), faith is “fundamental”, “universal”, “infinitely varied” (Fowler, 1981, p. xiii), “an active mode of knowing”, involving images whose “representations” include “metaphors, symbols and concepts” (p. 29); faith involves “imagination”. Faith is “interactive and social” and “requires community” (p. xiii), compared with belief which has come to be associated with giving assent to propositions (pp. 13-14; Smith, 1977 [1998], Section II), and which in modern usage has come to be understood as indicating uncertainty with regard to the “truth” (Smith, pp. 58ff).

The covenantal model of faith, which Fowler uses to focus on the centrality of relationships, is a “triadic” pattern of mutual relationship involving “self and others” and “shared center(s) of value and power” (Fowler, 1981, p. 17); faith is the forming of “life stances of trust and loyalty, of belief and commitment” (Fowler, 1984, pp. 51-52) in relation to “the ultimate environment”, which in the Christian tradition is “the Kingdom of God” (Fowler, 1981, p. 29).

Fowler’s (1974) re-worked thesis on H. Richard Niebuhr demonstrates Niebuhr’s influence on his own theological perspective.
Stages of faith development

Fowler’s theory of faith development has a structural-developmental basis and insights from several structural theories are incorporated in the model. He postulated seven sequential stages. The following Table provides a summary of these stages and the ages associated with each.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fowler’s Faith Development Stage</th>
<th>Ages (approximate)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 Primal faith</td>
<td>Infancy</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Intuitive-Projective</td>
<td>Early childhood: 2 to 6/7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Mythic-Literal</td>
<td>Childhood and beyond: 6 to 10/11 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Synthetic-Conventional</td>
<td>Adolescence and beyond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Individuative-Reflective</td>
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Characteristics of the stages

Stage 1: Intuitive-Projective: This stage is characterised by the young child’s “responsiveness … to symbols and images” (Fowler, 1981, p. 130). Images are transitory and uncoordinated, but young children’s active imaginations can be engaged in Bible stories and their exploration through such activities as the visual and tactile

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303 This is Table 4.8 from Chapter 4, repeated here as it provides a convenient list of the stages prior to the detailed discussion of Stages 1-6 which follows.

representation of parables in *Godly Play*.\(^{305}\) Fowler’s research leads him to conclude that “education at this age ... has a tremendous responsibility for the quality of images and stories we provide as gifts and guides for our children’s fertile imaginations” (p. 132).

**Stage 2: Mythic-Literal:** This stage corresponds to the concrete thinking of the primary school child. Children at this age distinguish “the real from the make-believe” (Fowler, 1981, p. 135) and, which is relevant in their relationship to the Bible, insist on demonstration or proof for claims of fact” (p. 135). Narrative is an important means of organising meaning and the child’s relationship to the divine is one of “reciprocity”; images of God are anthropomorphic, and the biblical text is typically taken literally (pp. 148-149).\(^{306}\) Fowler specifically states that it is when literalism “breaks down” and children perceive conflict between the biblical story of creation and scientific explanations at the transition to formal operations, that the transition from the mythic-literal to the synthetic-conventional stage of faith development is precipitated (p. 150). The cognitive element is significant; however, faith development theory, also accounts for the existential dimension and the young person’s “disillusionment with previous teachers and teachings” (p. 150). Evidence of disillusionment is discernible in the comments by some of the young people quoted in relation to reasons why they no longer believe.\(^{307}\)

A crucial question in the context of this thesis is the extent to which such disillusionment can be alleviated by teaching and learning processes which directly address the change in how truth and reality are perceived which is precipitated by changes in cognitive capacity, coupled with the adolescent’s growing demand for autonomy. The transition from concrete thinking, the mythic-literal stage in the theory

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\(^{305}\) As noted in Chapter 7, *Godly Play* is an approach to teaching young children derived from the pedagogy of Maria Montessori and recently revived by Jerome Berryman.

\(^{306}\) The perception of God by many adolescents, and, one suspects, many adults, is characterised by anthropomorphism and biblical literalism.

\(^{307}\) See above, Chapter 2.2.
of faith development, can be protracted and, in fact, may never be fully accomplished; furthermore, the attainment of formal operational thought proceeds at a differential rate across various areas of cognitive interest. As a consequence of what can be an extended period in transition, the task of addressing the “broken myth” (Tillich, 1957, pp. 50-51)\textsuperscript{308} may need to be undertaken by teachers of students in the upper levels of the primary school and in the first two or three years of the secondary school. It is a task made more difficult by the fact that in any one class students will be at a range of different faith stages.

Fowler associates the “broken myth” with Stage 4. However, that is the stage at which one has the capacity to address the issue. When the “myth” is shattered, for example, when Genesis 1-2, which is a \textit{representation} of a religious interpretation of how the world began, is no longer able to be taken literally by the “young empiricist” (Fowler, 1981, p. 135), this thesis argues that the effect is all the more damaging in that the capacity to reconceptualise the significance of symbols and myths through a constructive process of demythologisation is beyond the cognitive capacity of the child or young adolescent at this time.

\textbf{Stage 3: Synthetic-Conventional}: Fowler situates the beginnings of this stage at adolescence when new cognitive capacities, represented in the transition to formal operational thought, are accompanied by “social and interpersonal” changes (Fowler, 1981, p. 152); however, the “authority” for one’s beliefs is still external to the self (p. 154). The community of one’s significant others is important in determining what one’s beliefs are. For the adolescent the peer group is significant (Newman & Newman, 2001); the adolescent typically identifies with and accepts the beliefs and values of peers and defends them as his or her own (Fowler, 1981, p. 162). For some religious young people, and for some religious adults who remain at this stage throughout their lives, the significant group may be the Church or social group; hence,

\textsuperscript{308} See above, Chapter 7.5.
for them “conventional” faith may be that which accords with the teachings of the religious institution. The structure of faith, as distinct from its content, is “tacit”, or “unexamined”, the system is not the “object of reflection” (pp. 157-162). Hence, the adolescent will not challenge, or, at least, not openly, the values of the peer group; adults who identify with the Church will not challenge the beliefs and values of the Church. Symbols are important and the “deepest meaning and loyalties” which they express “are not separable from what they symbolize” (p. 163); “demythologization feels like a fundamental threat to meaning, because meaning and symbol are bound up together” (p. 163).

Rejection of a literalist interpretation of symbol and myth can lead to “trivialization” of the symbol whose sacred quality is now lost (Fowler, 1981, p. 163): broken myths are emptied of their sacred symbolic qualities which may totally undermine the credibility of that which they once symbolised and of the authorities with which the myths have been associated. If the adolescent in the secondary school does not have the capacity for metacognition, to reflect on his or her thinking, or to make explicit what is held implicitly, the task of transforming the myth from a literalist understanding to an appreciation of its symbolic significance in expressing religious truth is likely to flounder. Erikson’s concept of a moratorium (Erikson, 1986, p. 156; Fowler, 1981, pp. 43, 82) may well be applicable with regard to the religious demands put upon adolescents; religious education teaching will proceed, and students need to be challenged intellectually, but individual enlightenment, or recognition and acceptance of the authenticity of the symbolic value of the myth must await its interior verification according to the developmental process.

Religious education for adolescents, therefore, may well be a holding operation, where the questioning of literalism is supported and students’ expanding cognitive capacities challenged with new interpretations. The risk is that students’ religious thinking will equilibrate at this level, never going beyond the negativity engendered by
the shattering of the childhood conception of myth, and religious belief will be rejected before the capacity for a “second naïveté” is developmentally possible.\textsuperscript{309} The classroom which will be most conducive to educating for faith during the adolescent years is the classroom which is open to students’ questions, the classroom in which the teacher is not defensive but facilitates discussions which allow misgivings and criticism to be externalised, while at the same time challenging students with new ideas and interpretations.

**Stage 4: Individuative-Reflective:** It is at this stage of “dichotomizing logic” (Fowler, 1981, p. 185) that critical reflection becomes a significant characteristic of one’s thinking. The values and beliefs which one has held without close examination may now be subjected to scrutiny. The distinguishing features of the individuative-reflective stage is the capacity “to look with critical awareness at the assumptive system of values” (p. 177) which one has shared with significant others, “the emergence of an executive ego” and consequent acceptance of responsibility for one’s own choices (p. 179). One’s source of authority is internal; one has “an ideology” that one “has formed and re-formed over time” (p. 180). Meanings which previously were “tacit” now become “explicit” (p. 181). The symbols and rituals which have “previously been taken as mediating the sacred in direct ways” are now “interrogated by … critical questioning”, a process which Fowler refers to as a “demythologizing strategy” (p. 180). It is at this stage that Fowler cites Tillich’s concept of a “broken symbol” (p. 180), the process whereby a symbol which has been used as a means to “relate to the transcendent” is recognised as a symbol, which engenders “a sense of loss, dislocation, grief and even guilt” (p. 180).

This stage is linked with the expanded capacities acquired with the consolidation of formal thinking. Fowler associates its onset with young adulthood,

\textsuperscript{309} The concept of a “second naïveté”, originating with Ricoeur and adopted by Fowler, is a significant metaphor used in this thesis to express the desired outcome of the process of transformation from biblical story to adult biblical interpretation. It is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.
although the cognitive skills associated with metacognition and the questioning of one’s assumptions are skills now promoted in the secondary school. As described by Fowler, the characteristics of this complex stage, when applied to the religious dimension, indicate a movement away from religious belief and religious commitment. If the hierarchical nature of the stages is to be taken seriously, the implication is that this is progress. For the religious educator, whose ultimate aim is to facilitate students’ commitment to an examined faith freely chosen, the issue becomes not an unquestioned acceptance of the demythologising process, but a further critique of that process in order to re-mythologise the symbol or myth as the way in which humankind can express and seek to engage with the sacred—to reach a second or “willed” naïveté.

For the teaching of religious education, including scripture, the capacities inherent in young people at Fowler’s Stage 4, present not only a challenge to previously held religious beliefs, but also a valuable opportunity to transform students’ religious thinking by challenging them to discern and embrace the paradoxical qualities of symbol, myth, and metaphor, by which religious meaning is both revealed and concealed.

Stage 5: Conjunctive faith: The epistemology by which Fowler characterises this stage is “dialogical knowing” (Fowler, 1981, p. 185) which implies a capacity for “detachment” and “complementarity” (p. 185). He illustrates “complementarity” by pointing to the contrast between the historical critical study of scripture and the insights provided by the Ignatian approach, in which he learned “to let the text read me” (pp. 186-187). It is at this stage that dissatisfaction with the “demythologizing strategy”, the result of Stage 4 “critical reflection”, leads the individual to an appreciation of the symbolic which is “postcritical”, and to which Ricoeur’s concept of a second or willed naïveté may be applied.

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310 The significance of metaphor in religious language and in the biblical text is discussed in Chapter 6.
For Fowler, this stage is not expected before early mid-life and is far from universal. If this is so, there are difficulties in extending young people’s thinking about religious language and symbols to a level beyond literal interpretation and relativistic rejection. However, Reich (1989)\textsuperscript{311} has shown that complementarity in thinking can occur during adolescence. Furthermore, one may question why such a stage is uncommon, even in adults. Perhaps Fowler is referring to the thinking characteristic of Stage 5 being reached spontaneously: that this may be so is suggested by the empirical grounds upon which the theory of faith development was based, which derive from extended interviews in which what the respondent stated was subjected to analysis according to the criteria which establish each stage. Educational level attained may be a factor, with higher education inculcating thinking habits which stimulate epistemological maturity. Similarly, deliberate pedagogy designed to extend students’ thinking capacities beyond their present level, what Kegan (1994) referred to as “an epistemological stretch”, may facilitate the transition to higher levels of cognitive functioning. Neither adults nor children will spontaneously operate at, say, the level of complementarity of thinking unless there is some stimulus to do so; nor will it be automatically expressed in any particular area, such as religion, unless there is an interest or other stimulus which prompts a person to make the transition.

**Stage 6: Universalising faith**: Fowler had difficulty determining a theoretical end-point to the process of faith development. Instances of Stage 6 are rare. It is described as being radically open to the highest principles and an acting upon them in a manner which expresses a universal concern for an all-embracing concept of community and radically open to Ultimate Reality. Fowler illustrates this stage by listing world figures recognised for their contribution to humanity, for example, Gandhi and Mother Teresa (Fowler, 1981, p. 201). Stage 6 is the least well-integrated of the stages and its theoretical consistency with the earlier stages has been questioned. Fowler acknowledges the difficulties (e.g. Fowler, 1992, pp. 25-26) and the criticism which

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{311} See above, Chapter 6.5. 
\end{footnote}
Stage 6 has attracted (e.g. Broughton, 1986, pp. 95-97), not least in response to the introduction of a transcendent dimension, the Kingdom of God, as an eschatological category (Fowler, 1981, pp. 209-211).

The concept of operating at a particular stage in the faith development sequence was initially applied to individuals: for example, Stages of Faith (1981) contains detailed extracts from the protocols of persons interviewed and Fowler’s discussion of their faith development stage. Subsequently, Fowler introduced the concept of “modal developmental levels” for groups (Fowler, 1987, p. 81), local congregations, especially in the context of the “public church” (Fowler, 1991, Ch. 6).

**Critiques of Fowler’s theory of faith development**

Critiques of Fowler’s theory of faith development will be divided into the following categories: Fowler’s definition of faith; the nature of Stage 6; the philosophical and social context from which the theory derives; methodological concerns; and critiques of its Piagetian basis. In many cases these categories overlap. Questioning of the appropriateness of a hierarchical series of stages has been considered in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

For both Dykstra (1986b) and Fernhout (1986) criticism of Fowler’s definition of faith is central to their response to his theory. Dykstra criticises faith defined as “a human universal” (pp. 48-50) with the focus on structural level rather than contents (p. 53), and growth and change expressed in terms of structures (p. 59); he suggests an alternative definition which links faith to gift and to God’s revelation (p. 57). Fernhout (1986) argues that Fowler’s definition does not deal thoroughly with the “substance” of faith (p. 65) and that “the core of faith (faith as commitment)” has not been adequately integrated into the theory (p. 87). Concern about the adequacy of the
definition of faith has also been expressed by Webster (1984), Broughton (1986), Harris (1986), Nipkow (1992), Schweitzer (1992) and Moran (1992).

Stage 6, Universalising faith, has been deemed the least satisfactory of the stages, a point appreciated by Fowler. For example, Nipkow (1992) questions its appropriateness as the “terminal point of ‘faith’ development” (p. 96); for Broughton (1986) introducing the transcendent at Stage 6 makes this final stage discontinuous from the other stages (p. 98); Webster (1984) and Slee (2004) question Fowler’s choice of “exemplars of Stage 6” (p. 17). Others see the introduction of a theological concept as undermining the scientific status of the theory (e.g. Webster, 1984).

The philosophical and social context in which the theory is situated—modern, secular, individualistic—is fundamental to much of the criticism which has been directed at Fowler’s theory in terms of a cultural and social bias. Broughton (1986) focuses on the “intellectual tradition” in which Fowler’s theory stands: “the American functionalist, pragmatist, and symbolic interactionist traditions” (p. 90). Nipkow (1992) cites Broughton in claiming that Fowler cannot challenge modernisation because his theory is “a derivative of the modern process of individualization and pluralization” (Nipkow, 1992, p. 89). For Dykstra (1986b), Fowler is influenced by “the ‘experiential-expressivist’ theory of religion” dominant in Western culture (p. 51). Although Slee (2004) states that Fowler’s theory “has contributed greatly to a rich and multidimensional understanding of faith” (p. 9), she identifies “limitations” (p. 9) and provides a feminist critique.

Fowler’s experimental design and methodology have been questioned by Webster (1984) who sought a clear statement of Fowler’s hypotheses and procedures (pp. 15-16). Broughton (1986) also criticised the methodology, especially the way in which autobiography was used (p. 92), and what he saw as “the marked ethnic and
religious bias of the sample” and what seemed to be a gender bias in assigning subjects to Stage 6 (p. 92).

The Piagetian basis of the theory has also been the focus of criticism (e.g. Nipkow, 1992; Power, 1992). Heywood (1986) identified what he regarded as the limitations of Piagetian theory, especially its application to faith development. There is also criticism of structural developmental theories *per se*, in which, according to Hull (1992), “content is replaced by form” (p. 213). Hull situates developmental theories within the historical and political context of the “development of capitalism” and of modernity (p. 211), many of the features of which are depicted negatively: for example, “structuralism” is seen as an “attempt to reduce human experience to its essential structures” and eventually “becomes a legitimization of the status quo” (p. 216).

Subsequent developments in faith development theory, which are responses to that of Fowler, and which derive from similar foundations in Piagetian and structural-developmental theory, include that of Nicola Slee (2004) who adopted different metaphors to trace women’s faith development.

**Nicola Slee: a feminist perspective**

Slee’s “examination of the patterns and processes of women’s spirituality and faith development” (Slee, 2004, p. 1) is undertaken from the perspective of a “feminist Christian commitment” (p. 11). While acknowledging the value of Fowler’s theory she finds several aspects “problematic”: for example, Fowler’s “sources”, the “images and metaphors of faith”, the “models of mature faith”, “the theoretical understanding” of faith and how it is operationalised, and “the account of stage development”, all of

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312 Slee’s response to Fowler’s theory of faith development can be seen to parallel the feminist critique and re-working of Kohlberg’s theory of moral development by Carol Gilligan (1982) in her *In a Different Voice*. 
which she critiques “for their inbuilt androcentric bias” (p. 9). The linear model of faith development, composed of “sequential and irreversible stages” (p. 40), she argues, does not account for the “more fluid and varied” accounts of women’s faith (pp. 32-37). To do justice to women and their “characteristic ways of knowing” (p. 41), other resources are needed “to set alongside the faith development paradigm” (p. 41).

Slee (2004) explored the faith of thirty women “belonging to, or on the edges of, Christian tradition” (p. 1), using an extended interview. From their “faith stories”, she identified three “major generative themes”: “alienation, awakenings and relationality” (p. 14). Comparing her findings with Fowler’s theory, she identified aspects of his model which were confirmed: (i) “the basic hypothesis of faith” was confirmed: faith was shown to be an orderly and patterned deep structure in women’s lives which integrates and gives coherence to all the disparate events of their lives” (p. 164); and (ii) the process of change described by Fowler, using the concepts of “disrupted equilibrium”, “cognitive dissonance” and time in “a neutral zone”, was useful (p. 164).

However, Slee highlighted “four key findings” from her research, two of which will be discussed: (i) those which reflect on the use of language, which reflect a different way of knowing; and (ii) those which reflect on the stages which are most relevant to students in the secondary school.

Slee found that the language in which women expressed their faith experiences was “concrete”, “visual”, and in a “narrative” and “embodied” form which contrasted with the “propositional, abstract or analytical thought” which characterised Fowler’s stages (Slee, 2004, p. 165). She suggests that Fowler pays insufficient attention to the “role of intuitive knowing, imaginative, metaphoric and concrete forms of thinking” (p. 165), and that his overemphasis on “abstract thinking and formal logical thought” —
which is attributed to the Piagetian basis of the theory—needs to be balanced by “affect, imagination, symbol and narrative” (p. 165).

In Slee’s analysis, how Fowler’s stages are characterised is intrinsically related to the question of language. How women report their experiences could lead to a false attribution to stage of faith. She cites as an example women’s use of concrete images and narrative form, which could, Slee argues, be interpreted as representing Stage 2, mythic-literal, or Stage 5, “the reworking of concretion the other side of critical reasoning” (Slee, 2004, p. 165). This potential ambiguity may contribute to a false picture of the level of women’s faith development and an undervaluing of their life experience.

Slee’s statement that Fowler pays insufficient attention to the “role of intuitive knowing, imaginative, metaphoric and concrete forms of thinking” (Slee, 2004, p. 165), warrants further comment. That “concrete” and “visual” forms of expression are associated with “intuitive knowing” and “imaginative” forms is not surprising; however, the coupling of “metaphoric and concrete forms of thinking” is problematic. In Piagetian terms, these two ways of thinking can differentiate thinking capacity, metaphorical thinking representing formal operations. This makes one question the extent to which the understanding and appreciation of symbol and metaphor is dependent upon formal operational thinking and the capacity for “critical reasoning and analytical thinking” which is associated with the transition to Fowler’s Stage 4 (p. 165). Given the significance of the understanding of symbol and myth in a post-literalist interpretation of scripture, the point at which metaphorical language and its symbolic signification can be appreciated becomes a key question when exploring the relationship between the stage of thinking of the reader and the cognitive demands imposed by the text.