Pastoral Gravity in a Metanarrative Vacuum

Australian Fathers’ Attendance at the Birth of their Children Considered as a Spiritual Experience:
A Critical Inquiry in Practical Theology
CANDIDATURE DECLARATION

I certify that the thesis entitled

Pastoral Encounters in a Metanarrative Vacuum: Australian Fathers’ Attendance at the Birth of Their Children Considered as a Spiritual Experience: A Critical Inquiry in Practical Theology

submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy is the result of my own work and that where reference is made to the work of others, due acknowledgement is given.

I also certify that any material in the thesis which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by any university or institution is identified in the text.

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Introduction

1.1 Personal Raison d’être

Two strands provide the immediate background to my interest in this area of study.

Firstly, as a male brought up with traditional masculine patterns of identity there has been a constant awareness of the impact of the feminist critical thinking. At many points, my own experience of the birth process was a dialectic renegotiation of this process. As a teenager, one of my favourite tunes was the Australian epic pop song Evie. In the climax to the song, the singer, after waking up in the morning at home, grieves the loss of his wife during childbirth. What was a moving tragedy at the time would be regarded as nonsensical by most present-day fathers. The new father would have been at his wife’s side during the birth. The changing expectations of men in regard to their domestic, work and neighbourhood roles are indicated by the presence of fathers during the birth of their children. In the short time since the 1960s the patterns for men have undergone radical change. For instance it is no longer assumed that men will be the only or prime economic providers for families. I have lived through this change and I believe that it represents a window into broader social changes that shape and inform masculinity in Australia today.

Secondly, in my vocation as an Anglican priest, ordained in 1988, I have been aware that the patterns of religious formation have undergone a degree of dismantling. During my ordination training religion and spirituality were different ways of describing the same reality. As a priest, I can represent both a religious and a spiritual viewpoint which can no longer be assumed to be the

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1  S. Wright, “Evie (Part Three: I’m Losing You)” on Hard Road, written by Vanda & Young, published by Albert, 1975.
same thing. When people approach me in my role as a religious practitioner they consciously or implicitly draw on this distinction to delineate their own life experiences. They are able to distinguish between relating to an organised religious tradition and taking the driver’s seat to appropriate what most relates to them within their own frames of reference from a range of cultural sources. The birth experience has been an insight into the way the dialectical nature of religion and spirituality in our times has been highlighted and crystallised for me.

I arrived in 1990 as a priest in the parish of Port Melbourne where the predominant age profile was similar to my own. During this time I also became the father of three children – each time doing something which, though common today, was then a historical novelty. I was actually present at all the births. In reflecting on the impact of this, I was convinced that personal experiences now evoke and shape people’s formation and commitments in ways that are different from the past. These were transforming experiences for my own spirituality, and developed into a prism that influenced my religious outlook. I subsequently embarked on a study of men’s profound experiences as a basis for understanding the role of spirituality in Australia today. I have reflected on my own vivid experiences of being present at the births of my children through a prism that acknowledges the significant role of the feminist critical literature of traditional male patterns and stereotypes. It could be argued in my case that this culminated in a role reversal whereby I became primary caregiver after the birth of our second child and my wife took up her vocation and became the primary economic provider for our family. The extent to which this factor is linked to my

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having been present at the births of my children is hard to quantify — but, at the very least, it is consistent with my own participation in the birth process of our children. This study has emerged from these particular social circumstances and my own experiences as a father.

In approaching this study my role as priest has informed my view as to the nature of experiences. There is an analogous experience of birthing in my vocation that parallels my participation in the birth process of my children. The day after I attended the birth of my first child, for the first time I conducted a funeral in the parish. This sharp contrast further accentuated the experience of having been present at the birth of my son.

I followed a priest who, early in his twenty years of ministry, had faced the majority of his parishioners leaving and others withdrawing their financial support. As a result, the parish was stripped of the normal assets that allow a mainline church to function. Offerings were reduced to a pittance and many of the buildings had fallen into terminal disrepair. On a rainy day with the wind in the right direction, an umbrella was needed to stay dry inside the church building. There were only a handful of active parishioners left. The treasurer had committed suicide just prior to my arrival. There was no stipend available, therefore I had to supplement my income from other sources.

In the following years the parish was revitalised. To a great extent, it followed in the received patterns expected of a mainline church — this was not the whole story. Sunday services attracted new attendees, offertories grew, programmes for children and young people were reestablished. In addition to replicating past patterns, a new form of Christian community began to emerge. The community consisted of three sets of people. One group was simply looking for a Christian church to express their Christian identity. Such individuals commonly had a Christian faith richly grounded in their family of origin, Sunday Schools and Church Youth groups. Another group had limited, or nonexistent, exposure to Christian formation and had taken on the label of “Christian”, aware
in a minimal sense only of what was involved. For instance, this group was highly influenced by a pyramid marketing scheme. Their evangelical zeal resulted in many – if not the majority – of parishioners trying this out to explore how it would improve their quality of living. The other group had an overabundance of Christian cultivation and was looking to distance, reinterpret or deconstruct this experience as they headed in the direction of a post-Christian understanding of their religious identity. It was common for these individuals to have stories of disillusionment, frustration and abuse in their Church involvement that brought a readiness to investigate and explore alternative viewpoints and practices to those that were familiar to them. This group was happy to add resources and approaches that may not have been identified as Christian – but which, nonetheless, were accepted because they added value to their life experience. As a priest I was aware of the need such people had to be able to explore and express these within the context of their community of faith.

The reemergence of an active Christian community of faith in Port Melbourne became a parable of the challenges of belonging to a voluntary association in contemporary Australia. I was inducted into the new patterns of community life where representing a religious institution in a geographical area was no longer sufficient motivation for loyalty, financial commitment and participation. The religious hopes and aspirations were no longer easily contained by the tradition I represented. Transience was embraced as a positive value overcoming obstacles of distance in the search for religious communities that most accommodated their current outlook on life. In reflecting on this journey I became convinced that the experience of the church was not unique to communities of faith but reflected wider social patterns. Inevitably this required a reappraisal of received theological practice.

It is now no longer possible to assume that those people who gather for a Sunday Service have had a similar journey, shared patterns of formation or

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common social narratives to describe the role which religion plays in their life. I would argue that these diverse expressions of Christian religious identity which I have encountered can be seen as the social outworking of postmodern understanding of religion.\(^5\) Religious beliefs and practices are no longer monolithic traditions to be accepted or rejected as a whole. People find a way of fragmenting received traditions to isolate and integrate what is vivifying for them, even if it is not wholly representative of its source. My experience suggests that some people begin with something that they wish to perpetuate, some people wish to discover something new, while still others wish to deconstruct what they have received. Some seek a little, or much, of all three.

Indeed, a case can be made that there are antecedents to this development that stretch back as far as the Renaissance and Reformation, and which indeed may be entrenched in the human capacity for conscious reflection.\(^6\) The reality of antecedents, however, should not lead us to deny the unique factors contributing to the construction of concepts such as spirituality, by which we seek to describe and explain what constitutes the pivotal centres of gravity for people’s understanding of their life. The rise of spirituality as a way of describing this multifaceted process is a recent phenomenon in Australia.\(^7\)

Through the lens of a study in fathers’ responses to childbirth, in this study I have explored the emerging social factors that provide the impetus for such

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\(^5\) D. Lyon, *Postmodernity*, Buckingham, Open University Press, 1994, pp. 29–30. G.L. Comstock, “Is Postmodern Religious Dialogue Possible?”, *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1989, pp. 189–195. Comstock is suspicious about the tragic role that postmodern analysis can play in religious discourse. G.J. Percesepe, “The Unbearable Light of Being Postmodern”, *Christian Scholars Review*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 118–129. Percesepe disputes Comstock’s tragic take on postmodernism that ends in nihilism, tragedy and death because the modern and the postmodern form a false dichotomy. The modern needs the postmodern, turning towards it in order to reveal its own lack of foundation and offering itself as host. Yet without the modern, the postmodern could not be envisioned. The postmodern shows itself in the interrogation of foundationalist assumptions. What is left is the dialogue. We are to be consoled by the conversation of the end(s) of philosophy. The issue is not the true, good and beautiful as these are not capable of being killed off – in fact they function best in a plural context. What needs to be feared is the totalising of truth, goodness and beauty.

formation and expression and how this insight informs theological reflective practice. My experience as a priest led me to pose the question. “What conceptual tools will best facilitate reflective theological practice?” The underpinning is the social insight practical theology welcomes. This facilitates recalibration of pastoral encounters in a society where spirituality is an important part of people’s outlook.

1.2 Rationale for the Thesis

Given my own experience and identity as a religious practitioner, I have chosen Practical Theology – in conjunction with the insights of the social sciences – to interpret the role of spirituality, through theological reflection on pastoral encounters in Australian society.

Humans are involved in a continual quest of world construction and reconstruction in order to generate meaning and purpose, maintain psychic equilibrium and assure continuity.8 It has been documented that momentous encounters such as near-death or near-life experiences can often be important factors to consider in the process of religious change or even conversion.9 Religious practitioners are commonly drawn into such situations. Van Dierendonck and Mohan report on recent psychological studies indicating how religion and spirituality are significant for people’s experience.10 Their report, in which studies are summarised, has shown a link between spirituality and well-being. Spiritual experiences are considered exceptional and at the upper range of intensity, and can be life changing – tending to elicit more extreme

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positive feelings and purpose in life." Their conclusion is that the role of spirituality in the well-lived life needs more attention separate from any specific religious approach. In this regard practical theology allows a study of lived experience, of those who live theology, which commonly in an Australian context is Christian. The working definition of Practical Theology in this study is drawn from Swinton and Mowat.

Practical Theology is critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God’s redemptive practices in, to and for the world.

Birth experiences are chosen as a setting for this study because boundary situations such as birth, death or extreme situations are known to be times of existential awareness. What form and mode of practical theology is offered by religious practitioners is an intrinsic critical challenge in such pastoral encounters. The birth of a child is accepted as one pathway for experiencing the sacred. Such experiences are often described as defining moments, the greatest experience of parents’ lives. Becoming a father is known to be significant for men in a range of ways, not only positive. Heath has argued that fathers outranked nonfathers in measures of maturity, mental and physical health, competency, personal, interpersonal, and vocational adjustment. The stories of

11 ibid., p. 229. What one means by well-being does inform and shape how one responds to experiences. Whether it is hedonistic (pleasure seeking) or eudaimonic (striving to be the best one can be), shapes the role spirituality plays in the perceived purpose of life (pp. 232–234).
12 ibid., p. 234.
fathers will enable the researcher to access the life shaping experiences they affirm in being present at the birth of their children.

The assumption is that the birth of children is a common experience that is not seen as a site of religious construction or reconstruction. The aim in this research was to observe and analyse the extent of social construction of transcendence in relation to the increasing prominence given to spirituality in Australian society as a means of giving meaning and significance to a range of experiences. The framework and analysis developed from the research will be applied to how religious practitioners enact their practical theology. The recording of stories of males present at the birth of their children provided a context for understanding the nature and role of spirituality. Taking Bouma’s three fundamental modes of religious transcendence — awe, ecstasy, wonder and mystery — and adding the mind and reason, all of which may apply to the birth of children, it should be possible to examine how spirituality was enjoyed, cultivated or avoided in such an experience and how it informed the process of sacralisation which takes the ordinary and transforms it into something significant or even transcendent. This involved more than describing a person’s relationship to traditional religious resources because these now exist within a plethora of spiritual resources. In practice, the birth of a child may evoke any number of response options ranging from a religious observance that includes attending a church service to the spirituality of a weekend in a holiday house in the bush meditating and relaxing. It was anticipated that, in recording and analysing the experiences of males at the birth of their children, insights would emerge as to how spirituality is constructed and promulgated.

This study does not lead to the suggestion that spirituality is replacing religion, or that spirituality has developed out of religion or even that spirituality is completely different from religion. It is important to avoid a binary analysis.20


It is less clear what we are moving towards than what we are moving away from in the infrastructure of religious and spiritual construction. Through this study I sought to contribute a level of clarity to this issue using the lens of the experiences of fathers.

What of my own role and experience as a father? Based on my own experiences as a father I will examine and explicate the place of spirituality as expressed by men. Based on my experiences as a religious professional I will examine and explicate the challenges they represent for religious practitioners. In this report I argue that birth experiences provide a vivid context wherein the nature and scope of spirituality can be analysed and examined as it relates to men. I also explore and delineate the extent of its broader role as a cultural signifier and interpretive concept for religious practitioners in Australia today.

As a project in practical theology, this report is focused on fathers’ experiences of being present at the birth of their children. The recent phenomenon of fathers’ active participating presence at the birth of their children provides a pathway into validating the current role of spirituality. My interpretation of the fathers’ experiences enabled me to describe the social patterns and resources which inform their understanding of spirituality. An examination will be presented that indicates the significance of the role of spirituality in our society. Although I argue that what current usage tells us about society is that the impact of spirituality is at least overstated, this is not to deny that there is opportunity for advocating pathways to prepare and enhance fathers’ future responses to this pivotal experience utilising the current role of spirituality. This encounter of researcher and respondents requires a decisive reappraisal and fresh conceptual framework for religious pastoral practitioners in our postmodern milieu. Therefore I argue that to ignore or underestimate the role of spirituality for men in the context of the birth of their children is to misread and disconnect religious practitioners from the society to which they belong.
1.3 Aim and Purpose

This is a study of spirituality’s role in Australia today drawing on the methods and reflective dimensions of practical theology because I have endeavoured to bring the insights of the social sciences to inform the practice of religious practitioners. Drawing on this framework provides a foundation for this thesis. Initially my argument provides insights into the role of spirituality and the move to explore a way of understanding the current social parameters for those engaged in practical theology.

What are religious practitioners to make of the emerging emphasis on the role of spirituality? Is it a passing phase or a phenomenon that will reshape the scope and endeavours of practical theology? It is argued in this study that an effective approach for responding to such questions is grounded in qualitative research.21

As a recent new phenomenon, the study of fathers’ experiences at the birth of their children demands attention. There is a range of approaches possible such as the medicalisation of the birth process or the impact of fathers on medical intervention – but in this study I have focused on the role of spirituality. This enabled me to understand the current role of spirituality for fathers and the extent to which this is indicative of broader patterns in Australia. It also provided distinct and unique theoretical pivots for understanding how fathers in particular, and others in general, approach the role of spirituality in this society. In this study I aimed to present as its basis four such theoretical pivots.

1. Self-Authenticating Rituals

2. Human-Interest Stories

3. Consumer Identity

4. Temporary Communal Allegiances

These, I argue, uniquely frame and interpret our current social processes as they pertain to spirituality and the challenges they present to practical theologians. I will describe how these four pivots can make sense of the role of spirituality in our current milieu but also employ them to frame and inform the differing social processes which religious practitioners must consider if they are to respond to pastoral encounters with a distinctive contribution. The contention in this project is that for religious practitioners to ignore or underestimate the social patterns of our times is to fundamentally misread and disconnect them from the society within which they wish to employ their practical theology.

Through this study I sought to plot what currently prepares and shapes men’s ability to explore and develop the meaning and significance of their experience of being present at the birth of their children. There is a range of factors and influences that men use to process this experience. I then explored what is required for practical theologians to engage in this experience. In this research I identified one such factor that has had cultural prominence in recent times, that is the concept of spirituality in three dimensions.

1. The contention in the research is that the concept encapsulated in the term spirituality is utilised by fathers to label and explicate the impact of this significant experience for themselves and to others. A key assumption in this study is that spirituality is currently a term in vogue to describe a range of experiences. The focus question centres on whether or not fathers present at the birth of their children understand themselves to be involved in a spiritual experience. I therefore analysed the fathers’ experiences as a way of exploring the contemporary role of spirituality in this situation.

2. I introduce fathers who readily accessed and articulated notions of spirituality to describe being present at the birth of their children even though this was not the case for all fathers. The stories of fathers developed a pathway into describing the contribution of spirituality to
meaning, purpose and a sense of transcendence. The availability of fathers’ birth experiences is shown to be beneficial in the ongoing construction of meaning narratives for men. I did not underestimate the challenges and even the disinclination men bring to addressing this task historically and in today’s cultural climate. Nonetheless, I describe and analyse the nature, parameters and boundaries of spirituality in contemporary Australia. Once I have described the role of spirituality for these fathers, the analysis of these stories will articulate the implications for practical theology. The research process and its outcomes are the basis for outlining a shift in the practice of pastoral theology within a postmodern milieu.

3. As noted above in the thesis I postulate four distinctive theoretical pivots to provide a framework for theologically reflective practitioners as they engage in pastoral encounters.

   i. Self-Authenticate Rituals: which are the patterns of behaviour and ritual whereby we construct our own reality and meaning in a metanarrative vacuum

   ii. Human-Interest Stories: where truth is accessed through, and in, stories whereby the modern “turn to subject” sought to free human experience from external authorities so it no longer supports metanarrative.

   iii. Consumer Identity: where capitalism has provided the buying power which underpins the availability of diversity and difference.

   iv. Temporary Communal Allegiances: where belonging to group activity is characterised by transitory and passing allegiances involving a person’s belonging to many such communities.
1.4 Framework of Study

Practical theology actively draws on the social sciences to enhance the understanding and explication of the role of spirituality.\textsuperscript{22} Similarly, insights from the sociology of religion are able to be drafted into this project as aspects of practical theology.\textsuperscript{23} Furthermore, the study is informed by literature including comments on postmodern expressions of religion which differentiate between religion and spirituality.

There is an ongoing debate as to the most appropriate description of the current social milieu and its relationship with modernity.\textsuperscript{24} There are alternative descriptions to postmodern such as high modernity, late modernity, hyper-capitalism, hyper-modernity, which add insightful variations on the theme. The extent to which any of these concepts are interchangeable, overlapping or exclusive is not central to the thesis. This is not a study of the correlation of postmodernism to social reality but an examination of spirituality with particular reference to fathers in our current context. As such, the term postmodernity will be used uniformly to describe the distinctive lifestyle characteristics of the current milieu, including the rise in prominence of spirituality, as a method of recalibrating religious practitioners’ pastoral encounters.

1.5 Methodology and Methods

In this study, therefore I acknowledge my starting point as a priest who utilises practical theology and whose primary methodology is theological reflection. Though I may refer to anthropological, psychological or medical issues in this study, I will do so from this perspective insofar as it helps me to

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{22} D.S. Browning, \textit{A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals}, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1991, p 34.
\end{itemize}
describe and analyse religious social phenomena. The study is grounded in the lived experience both of the fathers and of the researcher as a priest.²⁵

The methods employed in this study draw on sociological approaches that are firmly linked to the principles that align with grounded theory. In the interviews I utilised the insights of Feminist qualitative research as an analogous pathway for exploring and describing masculine gendered experiences.²⁶

A snowballing or chain referral technique was used to identify potential respondents beginning with posters in local child-minding facilities.²⁷ Twenty interviews of fathers who had been present at the birth of their children over the previous two years were documented and analysed. The project is explicit about my understanding of the case studies as descriptions of the fathers’ perceived social reality. This is not to say that the case studies are a description of the nature of social reality itself. Further studies can be undertaken to test the representative nature of the case studies and the views expressed. In these case studies I worked with the authentic masculine voice in order to examine the outworking of their experience.

This is not an exhaustive study of masculine spirituality but one in which I sought to examine it in the light of a significant experience, and one that is outside religious settings. This is not to say that religious participation is not part of what may inform fathers, but the focus of this study is spirituality, as they experienced the birth of their children. A framework for spirituality will be provided to the extent that it will enable contemporary male experience of

spirituality to be analysed and interpreted. As a grounded study, it begins with stories of lived experience from which theoretical constructs are offered to explicate and interpret the contemporary role of spirituality.

As well as seeking to study the nature and role given by fathers to spirituality there is an acknowledgement that the research process contributed to, and was prompted by, some of the research data. My roles as researcher and priest were not passive but active reference points for the research process and analysis and the methodology validates this participatory research approach. Initially the research data were analysed in a qualitative manner by developing appropriate patterns and insights. However, the story of the fathers is also recognised as my story. My self-story, as researcher and priest, contributed to the research data whereby researcher and respondent found a conversation with which they were both familiar. The encounter in its pastoral dimensions reveals mutuality between researcher and respondent. This self-story does not need to be bracketed from the research but instead can provide the methodological keys that contribute to the data analysis for making sense of the data.

Current research practice accepts the reflexive turn to self in social sciences and no longer assumes that researchers can remain objective. In particular, applying an analysis informed by the researcher’s self-story can enable an authoritative voice for others to do likewise when examining religious or spiritual experience.

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As a researcher who is both father and priest, I invite readers to engage not only in the textual representation of the respondents but the researcher’s own critical response to their lived experience. The researcher’s self-narratives has the potential for sociocultural criticism when the narratives are located within more macrolevel sociocultural political spaces such as those offered by my understanding of our postmodern milieu. In this way the basis for a critical reappraisal of religious practitioners was developed.

1.6 Focus of the Thesis

In this research I do not describe or analyse the experience of teenage boys or mature men. The age range of 25–50 was chosen on a fourfold basis. In the first instance, it reflects the first generation of men for whom it was normative to be present at the birth of their children. Secondly, this generation of men overlaps the rise of postmodernity as a category for describing our lived experience. Thirdly, my own story as a father in this age range is mirrored in their stories. Fourthly, as a priest I have pastorally encountered numerous fathers in the 25–50 age range who have sought religious resources to celebrate the birth of their children.

The experience of fathers raised issues related to gender studies. I understand that this milieu provides significant input into the way researchers approach men’s experience. However, I did not seek to provide a comprehensive description and analysis of feminist writing. Nor did I attempt to provide a comprehensive framework for describing and understanding gender differentiation. As a phenomenological approach, I take as insoluble the current pattern whereby women give birth and men observe and respond to this event.

1.7 Previous Studies

The number of studies in a father’s experience of birth is vastly disproportionate to the range of studies that focus on how the experience plays out for mothers. Those studies that have been undertaken fall into three categories and are explored in depth in Chapter Three.
1. Pioneering studies examined the impact on women of having fathers present at birth.\(^{31}\) The process of birth has undergone significant change with the rise of modern medicine, and studies focused on the impact of these developments on women. Initially fathers were ancillary to this feminist examination of instrumental science as applied to the realm of childbirth.

2. Some researchers examined the presence of fathers at birth as a recent phenomenon and asked whether this is a good thing or not.\(^{32}\) They explored the impact this experience may have in the ongoing role of fatherhood. Initial studies highlighted how significant new developments had taken place to enable men to be present at birth, mainly at the instigation of their female partner. Though downsides are noted in having men present at the birth, in the main it is seen as a positive contribution for mothers with benefits for fathers’ continuing sense of participation in childrearing.

3. Other researchers explored how fathers approached and responded to the experience as a medical process, often focusing on circumstances where negative medical and health outcomes occur. When things go wrong at birth, studies indicate that women’s and men’s responses differ – but they are more resilient when both attend the birth process.\(^{33}\)

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There have been few studies on the positive role the experience has been for men as it relates to broader aspects of their lived experience. There are recent studies indicating a need for new ways of preparing fathers for this experience and for fatherhood. A survey of research that would prepare and inform practical theologians in resourcing fathers whom they encounter reveals a dearth of studies with the exception of grief and loss interventions, even though the positive role of religion and spirituality in fatherhood has been noted.

1.8 Contribution of the Thesis

In this study I examined the experiences of fathers who had attended the birth of their children and addressed the absence of research on their lived experience. As a result of my research I attribute a pivotal role to spirituality in this event. As the argument unfolds I argue for the following as my working definition of spirituality in Chapter Three.

Spirituality describes religious-type experiences that occur in nonreligious settings, though not necessarily limited to those that function as transcendent referents, which enable individuals to further their lived experience.

My definition provides the parameters of relevance for pastoral practice. There is an ongoing need to correlate practical theology with postmodern patterns, and this study uniquely frames such pastoral encounters. My contribution is a fourfold theoretical representation that not only effectively frames the fathers’ lived experience but which also fundamentally challenges how and what practical theologians may contribute when encountering such lived experience. In presenting this fourfold scheme I provide a conceptual map for religious practitioners to navigate Australian society and its postmodern characteristics.


The questions that are answered in the thesis include:

- How does ritual take shape in our current milieu?
- How do people convey what is important to them?
- What modes of exchange inform encounters?
- Whom do people invite to share their lived experience?

The findings from this study help religious practitioners to respond to the emerging role of spirituality. Whether this is a passing phase or a phenomenon which will reshape the whole scope of endeavours of pastoral theology is a current focus of practical theology. I have given due attention to this study of the experiences of fathers who have attended the birth of their children as a recent phenomenon. It becomes a case study in how this is indicative of broader patterns of spirituality’s role in Australia, providing distinct and unique theoretical pivots for understanding how fathers in particular, and others in general, approach the role of spirituality in our society. The four theoretical pivots presented in the thesis uniquely frame and interpret our current social processes as they pertain to spirituality and the challenges they present to practical theologians.

The nature of our cultural milieu, insofar as it can be described as postmodern, indicates that pastoral encounters are conducted in what I describe as a metanarrative vacuum. Practical theologians need to correlate their pastoral practice aware of how this shapes and impacts lived experience. Practical theology is able to equip religious practitioners for pastoral encounters in a metanarrative vacuum because it draws on a reflective method that takes account of the reflexive turn to self in social sciences. Practical theologians who draw on reflective methods are able to correlate pastoral practice to lived experience in a metanarrative vacuum by utilising my four theoretical pivots as modes of engagement for pastoral encounters.
These four theoretical pivots frame and inform the differing social processes which religious practitioners are required to take into account when they respond to people’s – those who are within the ecclesial community and those who are not – lived experience and deliver their distinctive contribution. Inasmuch as they describe any social process in our society, they can also be specifically utilised to describe and analyse the nature of pastoral encounter in nonecclesial settings.

The conclusion of this thesis is that for religious practitioners to ignore or underestimate the role of spirituality and the social patterns of our times, is to fundamentally misread these and disconnect themselves from both the society to whom they are called to offer pastoral practice – to whom they wish to contribute their practical theology – and the ecclesial communities they represent.

1.9 Outline of the Thesis

In the second chapter I present two distinct methods to support the research methodology, and initial analysis of the fathers’ stories developing headings and case studies as the basis for organising and accessing the data. This provides the tools for exploring how reality is presented by the fathers using narrative. Observation of the phenomena associated with fathers’ involvement with the birth process generated a number of hypotheses which were analysed and examined. The second part is based upon the initial analysis and in it the emergent method of autoethnography is applied wherein the researcher draws on his own experiences to emphasise the ways in which a researcher interacts with the culture being researched and, in this way, connects the personal to the cultural social context. This autoethnographic reflective focus on the researcher as priest both requires and emerges from the corroborative text of the fathers’ stories. This method not only makes sense of the role given to spirituality by these fathers but also provides an essential reappraisal that I advocate for pastoral encounters by religious practitioners.

In the third chapter I look at the literature that frames a study of spirituality and fathers in a postmodern milieu. There are two distinct aspects to the review.
In the first part of the chapter I will engage with the literature on spirituality and explore why it is a significant category for encapsulating pivotal experiences. A premise of the argument is that spirituality has emerged as a separate, though still related, category from religion. The postmodern reflectivity is central. This turn to subject as the epistemological barometer of reality allowed people to qualifying traditional external authorities such as religion. This suggests that all explanations of reality concern beliefs, not just in a traditional religious sense but encompassing the whole gamut of life experiences both communal and individual, thereby effectively fragmenting, dissipating and democratising the religious impetus. A review of the role of spirituality acts as a precursor to the presentation of a definition of spirituality that I use in this thesis. I advocate the reading of fathers’ birth stories as examples of spiritual experiences. Moreover, the background is provided for accepting how contact between fathers with such experiences and exponents of practical theology must negotiate the role which spirituality now plays in contemporary society.

In the second part of the third chapter issues related to the study of fathers are addressed and a review of feminist literature that shapes this argument is presented. I advocate a nonessentialist social reading of masculine identity as a basis for exploring the role of spirituality and a rehearsal of the relevant feminist literature on the role of spirituality is offered. Therefore this study provides an opportunity to describe and analyse the renegotiation of masculine identity – though not without the constant vigilant awareness of corrective feminist literature. This protects the descriptions of masculine identity and any of its outworking in spirituality from being a covert reaffirmation of the gender division and its corresponding dominance of men over women. A review of research into the father’s role in birth precedes the presentation and analysis of the data of this research.

In the fourth chapter I describe and analyse the stories of the fathers under three distinct headings. In the first part of the chapter I present and analyse the stories of those fathers who affirmed that being present at the birth of their
children was a spiritual experience, which they underwent accompanied by an active religious participation or heritage.

1. Spirituality was the means by which the fathers brought their religious outlook to bear on their birth experience to express what was consistent with their religious affiliation and participation.

2. The fathers were not just the receivers of an experience that was framed in a spiritual manner but were participants in an experience that empowered them to be agents of learning, examination and new insights which enriched their religious heritage. I argue that what is distinctive about our postmodern milieu is the view that the chain of religious memory has been diluted and fragmented.

3. By presenting the concept of self-authenticating rituals as a key process by which these fathers used spirituality to enact the religious chain of memory. Those with an active religious heritage in our postmodern milieu have access to religious syntax and grammar to enable their lived experience to be enacted in self-authenticating rituals both as an expression and as realisation of their spirituality.

In the second part of Chapter Four I describe and analyse the experiences of those fathers without an active religious participation or heritage who affirmed that being present at the birth of their children was a spiritual experience. For these fathers the focus was on both the medicalisation of the birth process and a distancing, denial or rejection of traditional religious rituals for the celebration of the births. Spirituality with this nontranscendent content was an expressive category rather than a transforming one. Spirituality merely connected them to previous nontranscendent outlooks, which focused on this-worldly quality of life and affirmed the present state of their relationships. Of particular interest is the type of muted self-authenticating rituals which these fathers utilised to enact their spirituality. Inadvertently, this research functioned as an active social partner in formulating their responses. These fathers pose questions as to
whether spirituality’s role in our society is as significant as is popularly claimed for those without an active religious affiliation.

In the third part of Chapter Four I describe and analyse the experiences of those fathers who maintained that being present at the birth of their children was not a spiritual experience regardless, or in spite of, whether it was accompanied by active religious participation or heritage. The respondents in this chapter indicate the ongoing impact of traditional secular theory. On the one side is the secularist mindset that denies or rejects the transcendent narratives of religion. On the other side is a traditional religiosity insisting on ongoing access to transcendent referents. Both sides of this polarity indicate a reluctant acceptance of the emerging current usage of the term spirituality and what it represents. Each side provides a legitimate alternative pathway and, in so doing, pose the question as to how important and essential spirituality is for interpreting and giving meaning to lived experience in a postmodern milieu. An examination is presented in which I argue that the popular concept of spirituality is framed increasingly by individualistic and corporatist consumer values. In this chapter I argue that the fathers’ stories reveal neither a rampant commodification of spirituality dulling their critical awareness nor an attempt at social transformation via access to the great religious traditions.

In the fifth chapter I describe and analyse the stories of these fathers taking into account my particular framework for understanding our postmodern milieu. These encounters not only outline what is required of the priests as practical theologians in their pastoral encounters but also help define the metanarrative vacuum in which they operate. The presentation of this fourfold schema requires a decisive and fundamental reappraisal for religious practitioners in their pastoral encounters with those who share their lived experience.

1. Self-Authenticating Rituals: rituals celebrate our own reality and meaning in a metanarrative vacuum. The religious practitioner moves from a being a definitive enactment of metanarrative to mediating people’s ritualisation of lived experience.
2. Human-Interest Stories: pastoral encounter occurs through and in stories. The religious practitioner is no longer a keeper of metanarrative but one who appreciates the basis of mutuality that emerges from sharing lived experiences and validating their meaning.

3. Consumer Identity: capitalism ensures that spirituality is another lifestyle commodity. This requires the religious practitioner to compete as a consumable service provider for those who would enliven their lived experience.

4. Temporary Communal Allegiances: belonging to group activity is characterised by transitory bonds involving a person’s belonging to many such communities. This requires the religious practitioner to recognise that occasional sharing of lived experience is a valid interpretive communal encounter with their own metanarrative chain of memory.

In the conclusion I summarise the findings and implications of the study, asserting that what current usage tells us about society is that the significance and impact of spirituality are at least overstated as universal phenomena. Despite this the respect that informed the pastoral encounter between the fathers and the researcher priest enables analysis and examination of how religious practitioners engage those who do – and those who do not – affirm the role of spirituality.
Chapter Two: A Binary Qualitative Research Methodology

In this study I affirm a view of practical theology based on a descriptive and analytical focus on individual and communal practice from which a hypothesis is posited to make sense of lived experience.\textsuperscript{36} Christian practical theology is usually conducted by one who belongs to a Christian community and is concerned with how people behave and function within everyday life.\textsuperscript{37} It is an engagement with contemporary social reality in order to develop and extend relevant theological practice. The particular methodology associated with practical theology and utilised in this study is \textit{theological reflection}.

As a practical theologian applying the method of theological reflection to this study I employed two methods. For the initial analysis I approached the fathers’ stories as data from the perspective of qualitative research utilising thematic headings and case studies as the schema for organising and accessing the data. Secondly, this provided the basis for exploring how reality was presented by the fathers using story. This informed the analysis of spirituality and facilitated comments on its role in our postmodern milieu.

The study was grounded in the lived experience both of the fathers and of the researcher as priest. This acknowledged the fact that the research process contributed and sponsored some of the research data. Therefore, following the initial analysis of the interviews, I applied the emergent method of \textit{Autoethnography} – whereby the researcher draws on their own experiences to emphasise the ways in which a researcher interacts with the culture being researched – and, in this way, connects the personal to the cultural social


context. This shapes my self-story to interpret the role which I attribute to spirituality and the decisive reappraisal which practical theologians need to undertake.

2.1 Practical Theology: Theological Reflection as a Preferred Method

Pastoral theology is a term dating to the early history of the church when religious practitioners were understood as being pastors whose primary role was guiding individuals and groups into ecclesial wellbeing. In this context, practical theology historically was the application of theological theory to practice assuming one-way transmission. Since the Enlightenment there has been a move away from understanding pastoral theology as the application of systematic theology to emphasising the nature of pastoral concerns beyond solely ecclesial contexts. Though in both pastoral and practical theology there is a shared interest in making appropriate and effective Christian responses to the modern world, the distinction is not a rigid demarcation in the literature relating to theory and action for religious practitioners.

Applied theology is a problematical label in that it implies immunity to the exercise of theology from lived experience. To approach practical theology as applied theology or tips for ministry or skills-directed aptitudes, even if historically this may have been the case, disconnects religious practitioners from social reality. Practical theology is preferred because it implies a mutual dialogical process between theory and practice. It is practical because it concerns the realities of the contemporary human condition. Drawing on scriptures, theology, and worship, its scope is almost infinite for contributing to theological

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40 O’Brien, p. 315.
41 Woodward & Pattison, p. 3.
42 ibid., p. 3.
44 Woodward & Pattison, p. 7.
understanding for – and beyond – the Christian community.\textsuperscript{45} For instance, Heitink defines a contemporary approach as follows.

   Practical theology as a theory of action is the empirically oriented theological theory of the mediation of the Christian faith in the praxis of the modern society.\textsuperscript{46}

   Pattison accepts that Western theologians have turned to the human experience of God rather than to the study of God’s being, so that they have increasingly focused on human beings’ lived experience in its social, psychological, cultural and political aspects as the object of theological understanding.\textsuperscript{47} Therefore, modern theologians cannot learn all that they need to know about the world and its people – if they are to be practical theologians – from within the Christianity tradition’s own discipline, texts and resources. Pattison is not arguing for a wholesale capitulation of theology to empirical endeavour but for acceptance of the view that understanding the human condition requires insights obtained through the social sciences.\textsuperscript{48} However, he argues, if theology is not to lose the centrality of communal and individual stories then practical theology must give primacy to narrative-based research and interpretation.\textsuperscript{49}

   As Browning argues, theology is not the application of theory to practice, for theory is embedded in practice.\textsuperscript{50} Rather, it is understood that theological practice is theory laden.\textsuperscript{51} Once the gulf between theory and practice is bridged the structures of theology and religious practice are taken as transposable.\textsuperscript{52} The move away from a narrow focus as an applied discipline of traditional theological fields enables practical theology to become a vital resource for

\textsuperscript{45} ibid., pp. 8–9.
\textsuperscript{48} ibid., p. 275.
\textsuperscript{49} ibid., pp. 279–280.
\textsuperscript{50} Browning, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{51} Swinton & Mowat, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{52} Browning, p. 9.
recalibrating the role of religious practitioners in a postmodern setting and enables them to avoid a collapse into clericalism.53

Since not every Christian is defined by ecclesial responsibilities that find their fulfilment in attaining a professional standing as a religious practitioner, an inclusive approach to practical theology is required.54 For theology to be a rigorous reflective discipline that is accessible to all vocations, lay and ordained, its practitioners must draw on a range of areas of knowledge which contribute to theological understanding and in turn discover how these areas are key themes of practical theology. Ecclesial practice is not the sum total of practical theology, just as religious practitioners do not represent the sum total of ecclesial practice. Practical theology transcends a clerical paradigm when its focus is on ecclesial praxis which transforms not only the ecclesial context but also the nonecclesial world. Farley argues that practical theology is not identical with professional tasks of religious practitioners for ecclesial contexts but roots religious practitioners in world transforming experiences of which ecclesial experience is an essential aspect of practical theology.55 As such it is not merely ecclesial practice – and it is not the practical treated as being in opposition to the theoretical.56 It addresses God’s activity through the ministry of people.

Even so, the predominant focus of practical theology for religious practitioners continues to be within the activities of the congregation.57 The underlying implication is that religious practitioners who operate outside the security of the ecclesial parameters are pursuing secondary priorities and battle the charge of irrelevance and some degree of resistance. Viau argues the role of practical theology is to engage in discourses on faith in relation to the diverse

55 ibid., p. 40
56 Heitink, pp. 6–7.
57 ibid., p. 324.
human practices in our culture.\textsuperscript{58} It is a faith that seeks to engage in effective discourse with effectiveness about what one knows one is sensing, what one can say about it, and what it tells us about the nature of transcendence.\textsuperscript{59} In so doing, practical theology approaches the theological task in the light of current theoretical sensibilities.\textsuperscript{60}

The present crisis confronting religious practitioners is to be found in a combination of the conflicting messages and expectations from church communities, theological training, institutional church authorities and broader society.\textsuperscript{61} Practical theology can aid nostalgia or equip religious practitioners for the new opportunities,\textsuperscript{62} and as such it is one of the vehicles for reshaping and reclaiming a public theology for pastoral ministry.\textsuperscript{63} This current redefinition of traditional practical theology helps avoid a new captivity of the church and its people.

It is not enough merely to redefine practical theology for our times, we also require a reorientation as to where we conduct our practical theology. Ecclesial settings continue to be important, but to rely primarily on them is to cut off pastoral ministry from a significant expression of the lived experience of a large proportion of people. It is a problematic that the training of religious practitioners continues to prepare them predominantly for pastoral ministry in ecclesial settings. Such a view of practical theology maybe seen as inadequate for engagement and dialogue with the lived experience of people in Australian society today. This study seeks to redress this imbalance.

Whatever our awareness of the changing social realities impacting on how religious practitioners continue to be relevant resources, much affirmation of practical theology is still based on the assumption that the primary mode of

\textsuperscript{59} ibid., pp. 21–24.
\textsuperscript{60} ibid., pp. 26–27.
\textsuperscript{61} Forrester, p. 66.
\textsuperscript{62} ibid., pp. 68–72
engagement with people’s lived experience will be located in ecclesially defined and controlled social spaces. Interpreting and reading situations taking account of their cultures and histories is an important, but neglected, aspect of the theological enterprise.

As Swinton and Mowat have asserted, practical theology’s central theme is a focus on human experience. In reflecting on experiences there is a potentially constructive conversation between practical theology and other disciplines. Therefore, the focus of practical theology is on performed and embodied faith as the context for the reciprocal relationship between lived experience and the Christian tradition. This is more than applied theology, for human experience does not provide new revelation (fresh script) but rather acknowledges that scripture and traditions emerge from a particular context. They sum this up in the following manner.

Practical Theology pushes us toward the acknowledgement of the importance of revelation as well as discovery; qualitative research draws our attention to the crucial fact that human experience is inherently interpretative and polyvalent.

This explains practical theologians’ willing indebtedness to the social sciences for their mode of analysis. Practical theology is now a vital way of bridging church and society by including methods with nontheological partners such as those typically associated with the social sciences. This allows the religious

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63 ibid., pp. 107–116
65 Swinton & Mowat, p. 15.
66 ibid., p. v.
67 ibid., p. 13.
68 ibid., p. 5.
69 ibid., p. 7.
70 ibid., p. 254.
71 ibid., p. vi.
practitioner and my own study, through practical theology, to undertake three key tasks.\textsuperscript{73}

1. Acknowledge the contemporary intellectual currents such as modernity and postmodernity which explain how current practices are constituent of our ways of understanding.

2. Bridge theology with the social, cultural and political contexts shaping lived experience.

3. Give religious practitioners and communities an active role in reconstructing Christian narratives, symbols and rituals in order to form a better world.

Theological reflection is an inherent methodology of practical theology because it is grounded in human reflection.\textsuperscript{74} Although there is not an agreed definition for \textit{theological reflection} amongst the literature and different writers propose different methods, a dominant theme suggests that it is theology shaped by its context.\textsuperscript{75} In addition to the traditional Christian texts it is known that religious practitioners draw on many sources in their theological reflection to discover the divine, make meaning and form people’s religious outlook.\textsuperscript{76} Sooner or later, life confronts people with situations that raise questions about meaning, purpose and values for their lives.\textsuperscript{77} How we respond to such questions has an important consequence for them personally and for their world.\textsuperscript{78} Theological reflection allows the study of practical theology to address such questions.

Theological reflection is the discipline of exploring individual and corporate experience in conversation with the wisdom of religious

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{73}] T.A. Veling, “Emerging issues concerning the practices of theological education”, \textit{Religious Education}, Vol. 94, No. 4, 1999, p. 414.
\item[\textsuperscript{74}] Killen & de Beer, p. 46.
\item[\textsuperscript{75}] T.S.J. O’Connor & E. Meakes, “Canadian Ethnographic Study of Sources and Definitions of Theological Reflections in Pastoral Care and Counseling”, \textit{Journal of Pastoral Care \& Counseling}, Vol. 62, No. 1–2, p. 114.
\item[\textsuperscript{76}] ibid., pp. 123–124. An important framework implied through much of this method is the approach of liberation theologian such as P. Friere, \textit{Pedagogy of the Oppressed}, New York, Herder & Herder, 1968.
\item[\textsuperscript{77}] Kinast, 2000, p. 2.
\item[\textsuperscript{78}] Killen & de Beer, p. 18.
\end{itemize}
heritage. The conversation is a genuine dialogue that seeks to hear from our own beliefs, actions and perspectives, as well as those of the tradition. It respects the integrity of both. Theological reflection therefore may confirm, challenge, clarify, and expand how we understand our own experience and how we understand the religious tradition. The outcome is new truth and meaning for living.\footnote{ibid., p. viii; R.L. Kinast, \textit{Let Ministry Teach: A Guide to Theological Reflection}, Minnesota, Liturgical Press, 1996, pp. vii–viii.}

In this approach the overlap between religious tradition and experience is emphasised, which is congruent with the definition in this argument of spirituality understood as religious-type experiences in nonreligious settings, as presented in Chapter Three.\footnote{Killen & de Beer, pp. ix–x; Kinast, 1996, p. ix.} There is an assumed dynamic reciprocal relationship between lived experience and established faith traditions.\footnote{Kinast, 2000, p. 67.}

The style of theological reflection a religious practitioner brings can be seen as a pastoral response to an issue or concern.\footnote{ibid., p. 13.} It draws on a theological wisdom rooted in the everyday experience of believing people.\footnote{ibid., p. 15.} This can be intercultural insofar as it is an effective and appropriate formation of Christian identity and response to social change.\footnote{ibid., p. 51.} A practical style of theological reflection inverts the application of theory to practice – instead seeking transformation via reflection on current praxis and belief.\footnote{ibid., p. 62.}

In qualitative research one of the tasks of practical theologians is to mediate the relationship between the Christian tradition and the specific problems and challenges of the contemporary social context, as the researcher moves from practice to reflection (theory) then back to practice.\footnote{Swinton & Mowat, p. 26.} Kinast’s fivefold schema of theological reflection will shape how the data are approached and organised.
1. Selecting an experience such as birth, which is specific, current, personal and significant. This experience contains both inner (feelings, thoughts, attitudes and hopes which affect our responses and what we make of them) and outer dimensions (the people, places and projects that accents what we experience). I did not address the nature of experience in philosophical terms but took experiences at face value, which allows any experience to be reflected on theologically. Birth is the type of experience selected because it is new, creative, positive or problematic, disruptive, a crisis event that signals that something meaningful is going on. All respondents were clear and assertive as to the significance and impact of the event, thus validating this experience as appropriate for theological reflection.

2. Theological reflection begins when we reenter and narrate our experience, and a description of this experience, such as an interview, creates a context where it can be plainly and factually tested against the reality of similar experiences and available critical voices.91

3. Entering or reliving the birth experience by describing the players, plot and the setting of the experience. Social analysis is a result of reflection on the roles, relationships, systems and status which regulate interactions among people. Theological reflection results in description of the feelings and their ties to bodily sensations which in turn connect us to the human drive for meaning as an embodied holistic response to our existence. The aim in this is to recognise, articulate or confirm the extent of the divine presence.

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87 Kinast, 1996, p. 3.
88 Killen & de Beer, p. 21.
89 Kinast, 2000, p. 65.
90 Killen & de Beer, p. 22.
91 Kinast, 1996, p. 41.
92 ibid., p. 47.
93 Killen & de Beer, pp. 27–28.
4. Theological reflection identifies the learning from the birth experience indicating whether it has reaffirmed, rearranged, or revealed new aspects of religion and theology, identified moral issues, evoked new rituals, informed practical decisions or revealed the spiritual divine presence where it was previously unnoticed. These insights are an invitation to transformation.

5. Insight leads to action, for – without learning – such insight is incomplete. It enables enaction of the learning from the birth experience relative to what a person knows and thinks in relation to their theological perspectives and preferences.

Theological reflection anticipates that every praxis will involve some time of change be it personal, communal, institutional or societal. Only experiences of sufficient magnitude will result in large-scale changes, with incremental change being more typical in the faith and formation of individuals and groups. The lived experiences both of the fathers and of the researcher as priest are the object of theological reflection.

2.2 Respondents

The respondents were fathers who had witnessed the birth of their children within the last two years. Fathers were invited in an interview to describe the birth experience from their perspective. The primary question led to explanations by the fathers as to whether or not they understood birth as a spiritual experience. The stories of those fathers formed the pathway into describing and analysing the extent to which the use of spirituality contributed to meaning, purpose and a sense of transcendence in this pivotal experience. From this exercise, I aimed to elucidate why the use of the term spirituality is prevalent, what we are to make of the concept when fathers utilise it and what

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95 ibid., pp. 102–103 & p. 149; Killen & de Beer, p. 37.
96 Killen & de Beer, p. 42.
97 ibid., p. 43.
99 Kinast, 2000, p. 70.
100 ibid., pp. 70–71.
this tells us about its role in our society. In doing so, a discussion was presented that qualifies the significance of the extent of spirituality’s role in our society.

The interviewing of respondents took place between May 2002 and April 2003, with relevant ethics approval having been requested from, and granted by, the from the Monash University Standing Committee in Ethics Involving Human Research. The fathers volunteered to participate in semistructured interviews. These provided the data for the description and analysis of their stories. The respondents had all experienced being present at the birth of their children in the previous two years at the time of interview. The 20 respondents were all fathers aged between 30 and 50 years. Most were aged between 35 and 40. The semistructured in-depth interviews were conducted in my office at Port Melbourne. Respondents came forward by general invitation from posters in Maternity Health Centres in the Port and South Melbourne locality, notice-boards in local gym clubs, and public notices on local notice-boards. They were also further encouraged by snowballing or chain referral. This locality and approach ensured that all respondents came from a higher socioeconomic profile. Nearly all had received higher education, were employed at the time of their interviews and all were either currently married or in a de facto relationship with the mother of their children. The data from this profile allowed comparison among respondents with high socioeconomic aspirations on matters religious and spiritual. My interest in this field of study was motivated in part because the stories of the respondents parallel my own story of being present at the birth of my children.

The profile of the respondent fathers represents the ever increasing prominence of the middle classes, which has significantly contributed to the rise of the postmodern milieu. The middle classes have greatly benefited from higher education since the 1960s with their work life having grown and developed into

101 Reinharz, p. 5.
102 Bouma, Ling & Ling, pp. 117–118.
new forms of cultural production and service industries. They are not constrained from exploring or expressing allegiances that are contrary to dominant cultural allegiances in constructing their lived experiences. The increasing potency of the middle class has enabled many to take up and domesticate what was once the domain of the bohemian and avant-garde – including fathers attending the birth of their children. They have made it part of their lived experience, aided by the middle class' new-found capacity for personal autonomy and freedom to search for meaning.

2.3 Part One: A Qualitative Study of Fathers’ Lived Experience

The first method used in this study was qualitative research of the fathers’ stories resulting from the interviews. Qualitative research is a particular way of seeing, discovering and embodying analysis of the fathers’ interviews. This provided their particular human experiences in a narrative form. Questions of legitimation and the traditional criteria used for evaluating and interpreting qualitative research involve a rethinking of terms such as validity, reliability, and objectivity. Nonetheless, it provides knowledge in the study of phenomena that is reflective, in that researchers can deliberately turn their attention to their own viewpoint from which they construct the world with the goal of saying something fresh and new about that personal (or shared) world. It assumes that truth and knowledge and the ways they are perceived by human beings and human communities, to a greater or lesser extent, is constructed by individuals and communities so that meaning emerges from the shared interactions of individuals and communities.

Qualitative research methods were employed to understand a participant’s behaviour from their perspective. It may not provide generalised knowledge, but

105 ibid., p. 190.
106 Swinton & Mowat, p. 31.
109 ibid., p. 35.
it can provide a degree of transferability insofar as it often raises issues and offers insights which reach beyond the particularities of the situation. The situation establishes the problem or hypothesis for further attention as a research question.

Practical Theology seeks after modes of practice and understanding which are true and faithful. Qualitative research reminds us that the search for truth and faithfulness is a complicated process wherein we recognize the complexities of the world and work together to move towards a fuller understanding of the world in which we live.

Therefore, data collection and analysis locate interviews in the context of social research devoted to examining stories and storytelling.

Feminist thinking has mapped many of the methodological options and pitfalls in qualitative research. In this study it was affirmed that the insights of feminist thinking can be applied to qualitative research, thus permitting the drawing out of males’ own interpretations of their lived experience. This contrasts with a position from which it is argued that gender-differentiated methodology is essential for such research. The argument is that experience is gender embodied and therefore does not require gender differentiated methodologies. For as long as it was held that there was only one truth, and that its discovery was guaranteed by objectivity and the rigorous pursuit of a scientific methodology, the gendered nature of this discourse and its privileging of masculinity were disguised.

Reinharz affirms that interviewing is appealing to feminist researchers in that it allows an open-ended self-description and allows the researcher to start with women’s experiences. Yet she also highlights a perceived reluctance for

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110 ibid., p. 47.
111 ibid., p. 52.
112 ibid., p. 254.
114 Denzin, pp. 29–30.
115 Usher, pp. 121–125.
116 Reinharz, pp. 18–21.
feminists to make demands on husbands in interviews.\textsuperscript{117} For Reinharz this reflects a general struggle with research into aspects of people of greater social status or power than the interviewer. When feminists engage in research on men, upper class people, and institutions with considerable power, she argues that they are likely to demand less and self-disclose less because self-disclosure diminishes one’s power. Interviews by men of men may confirm androcentric patterns – but just as such an approach enables women’s lives to be made visible and their voices audible, those aspects of male identity that do not reflect the dominant patterns may indeed be made visible and audible, producing new concepts and understandings of masculinity.\textsuperscript{118} The feminist researcher is able to understand the experience of women from her own point of view.\textsuperscript{119} The emphasis is on interpreting women’s behaviour as shaped by social context rather than as context free or rooted in autonomy or merely an outworking of personality. There is no obstacle to application of this approach to mixed gender or masculine studies, as Culbertson has demonstrated, in presenting the struggle of sixteen American Christian men as a basis for a new personal voice for men.\textsuperscript{120} Just as there are dilemmas for feminist research, so there will be for any research of male experience.\textsuperscript{121} Paradoxically, Culbertson believes that this allows men to show solidarity with feminist thought because often – if not predominantly – those experiences accentuate men’s marginal place in the church.\textsuperscript{122} Moreover, he presents this living on the margins as a creative space able to show how much the old gender roles are dying and how new ways of being men need to find expression in the church.\textsuperscript{123} Thus whilst case studies are essential for putting women on the map of social life, this method was applied also to study the reactions of men present at the birth of their children.\textsuperscript{124}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{117} ibid., p. 42.
\textsuperscript{118} ibid., pp. 46–48.
\textsuperscript{119} ibid., pp. 52–54.
\textsuperscript{121} Reinharz, pp. 65–71.
\textsuperscript{122} Culbertson, 2002, p. ix.
\textsuperscript{123} ibid., 2002, p. x.
\textsuperscript{124} Reinharz, p. 174.
\end{flushleft}
For the initial analysis I approached the fathers’ stories as data from the perspective of qualitative research, utilising thematic headings and case studies as the scheme for organising and accessing the data. This provided the basis for understanding how reality is presented by the fathers using narrative. In observing the phenomena associated with fathers’ involvement with the birth process, a number of hypotheses were generated from the approach of practical theology, which were analysed and discussed. There is a range of possible approaches that unite practical theology and qualitative research methods to inform each other’s task, including applying theological reflection to biographical or autobiographical stories.125

2.3.1 Qualitative Research and the Role of Story

For this research I employed the qualitative method to record and interpret the experiences of the fathers. What was happening or whether anything happened and how to report it were pivotal issues.126 For McCracken the long interview provides an opportunity to step into the mind of other people, to see and experience the world as they do themselves.127 Interpretative accounts can make the obvious, obvious, or make the obvious dubious or make the hidden obvious drawing out the implications for human discourse. It allows us to locate quantitative indicators in their fuller social and cultural context.

The focus on story reflects a move from traditional objective approaches in which researchers sought to judge efforts in terms of the norms of validity, reliability, truth, falsity, bias, data, hypothesis, theory, case representatives and generalisability. Users of interpretive approaches reject these norms of evaluation and regard biographical materials from within a literary, fictional

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125 Swinton & Mowat, pp. 77–82.
127 McCracken, pp. 9–11; Noblit & Hare, p. 10 & pp. 16–18. They argue an interpretation which enables the readers to translate the case studied into their own social understanding.
framework. For Denzin, lives and their experiences are represented in stories. They are pictures that have been painted over, and, when paint is scraped off an old picture, something new becomes visible. What is new was what was previously covered up. Something new is always coming into view, displacing what was previously certain and seen. There is no truth in the painting of life, only multiple images and traces of what has been, what could have been, and what is now. The fathers’ stories move outwards from the selves of the people and inward to the groups that give them meaning and structure. The fathers are arbitrators of their own presence in the world and any text needs to return to, and reflect, the words persons speak as they attempt to give meaning and shape to the lives they lead. For Denzin, methods of story telling are a way of knowing the world. A life is an unfinished project or set of projects. A person attempts to organise those projects around their identity or personal biography. Every life is a moral, political, medical, technical and economic production. Drawing on Durkheim, Denzin asserts that morally a life is given sacred meaning within the religious, legal and political doctrines of a society. This gives narration at large, and the fathers’ narratives in particular, the potential to teach us how to conceive of ourselves, what to make of our inner life and how to organise it.

No self or personal story is ever an individual production. It derives from larger group, cultural, ideological and historical contexts. A story is always an interpretive account in that it is biased. The intent is to uncover the social, economic, cultural, structural, and historical forces that shape, distort, and otherwise alter problematic lived experience. This focus on structure must never cause us to lose sight of the individuals – in this case the fathers – who live these structurally shaped lives. On the other hand, subjectivity should not be romanticised. The fathers’ stories are not true as defined by the researcher, for all are interpretations and fictions. The question is whether a father’s story is

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128 Denzin, p. 49.
129 ibid., pp. 81–83.
130 ibid., pp. 28–29.
true within the context in which the story is told. There is always more to the self than the story told by the father. Therefore, it was expected that the fathers’ stories would have the following characteristics. 132

1. Always come in multiple forms, without clear beginnings and endings.

2. Be grounded in each father’s own culture where criteria of truthfulness are established.

3. Never be the same when heard rather than spoken.

4. Be shaped by the larger ideological forces which put pressure on persons to establish their individuality (and self-control) in the stories they construct.

The stories learned and told in cultural groups, such as those which fathers present at the birth of their children, are reflective of understandings and practices that are at work in the larger system of cultural markers that are acted upon by group members. Applying theological reflection to these narratives allows for the critical development of practical theology for such circumstances.

The modernist assumptions by which people seek to establish what data mean need to be informed by a postmodern insight, which affirms the indeterminacy of the data. 133 This does not mean that interviewing is not a worthy research method. The challenge is to allow the poetry of the interview to emerge. As Melia argues, postmodern insights may have highlighted the limits of the interview but the plausible story is an appropriate outcome for the researcher. 134

132 Denzin, pp. 77–78.
It is important to acknowledge that biographical and autobiographical forms, like all writing, are incomplete literary productions.\textsuperscript{135} Nonetheless, the lived experiences of interacting individuals are the proper subject matter of sociology and practical theology as attest by the emergence of narrative theology.\textsuperscript{136} The meanings of these experiences are best given by the persons who experience them.\textsuperscript{137}

The stories contain portrayals of persons' lives and notions of how persons and experience are to be represented. Stories then, like the lives they tell about, are always open ended, inconclusive and ambiguous, and subject to multiple interpretations.\textsuperscript{138} This means that biographical work must always be interventionist. Authors of biographical studies should attempt to express how each subject deals with the problems of coherence, illusion, consubstantiality, presence, deep inner selves, others, gender, class, starting and ending points, epiphanies, fictions, truths, and final causes.\textsuperscript{139} Storytelling is the dominant form of sense making about lived experience and thus an irreducible aspect of experience itself. As an important form of modern communication, stories themselves are instrumental in creating and sustaining the very meanings through which an experience is interpreted and understood.\textsuperscript{140} Storytelling is one way of relating qualitative methods and theological reflection, which is an important tool in pastoral practice.

2.3.2 Stories of Fathers Present at the Birth of their Children

In this context the argument, insofar as it turns to a feminist style of theological reflection, is not a specific method but one in which the user is

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{135} Denzin, pp. 24–26.
\bibitem{138} Denzin, pp. 81–83.
\bibitem{139} ibid., p. 83.
\end{thebibliography}
conscious of the experiences and conditions of women.\textsuperscript{141} The purpose of using the feminist approach to theological reflection is that it is emancipatory and transformative for both women and men.\textsuperscript{142} Initially it is committed to the emancipation of women from male domination but it is committed also to the emancipation of men from distorted or erroneous ways of relating to women. This transformation extends to the systems, structures, policies and institutions that perpetuate male domination.

Upon this basis, those using this argument will bring a critical consciousness to men’s experience in all its diversity and complexity. They will do so aware that this domain has previously been a female one, and that the methodologies that drew out mothers’ experiences at birth will be utilised to draw out fathers’ stories. In this study I drew on the role which storytelling plays in such experiences. The emphasis is on the centrality of language in the social construction of reality, whereby language does not reflect any fixed intrinsic meaning in a given social reality but constitutes social reality.\textsuperscript{143} This method has been successfully utilised to enable the previously obscured voices of women to be heard and has resulted in the emergence of new patterns of social understanding and practice, in particular mothers’ stories of birth, such as the “active birth movement” which is a means of mothers more fully participating in the birth of their children.\textsuperscript{144} In a similar manner, the voices of fathers present at the birth of their children provided an analogous pathway for exploring and describing the role of spirituality in masculine gendered experiences.

\textbf{2.3.3 Each Respondent’s Religious Background}

The semistructured interviews began by my identifying the religious background of the respondents. I then sought their reflections on their experience of being present at the birth of their children. This included reference

\textsuperscript{141} Kinast, 2000, p. 28.
\textsuperscript{142} ibid., p. 38.
to the nature of the preparations, supports and commemorations undertaken.\textsuperscript{145} The primary purpose of the interviews was to elicit the spiritual significance of the story of being present at the birth of their children. To achieve the stated research aim of this study, it was necessary for the interview schedule to include appropriate questions about any religious or spiritual outcomes that resulted from the fathers’ experience. In particular, did the respondents understand their experiences as spiritual?

The religious background of the participants was one reported factor that may bring understanding to their experience of the birth. In each case the twenty fathers who were interviewed described their past and current religious affiliation:

- all twenty participants were married at the time of the births
- thirteen fathers regarded themselves as having a current religious affiliation (indicated by an * in the following table)
- three fathers who claimed current religious affiliation admitted that their involvement was irregular, intermittent or significantly diminished
- three fathers had a current religious affiliation that was a radically different religious tradition from the one in which they had been nurtured – such as moving from Hinduism to Christianity
- three fathers indicated that their current affiliation was an alternative form of the tradition in which they had been nurtured – such as a change from Baptist to Roman Catholic
- seven fathers expressed no current religious affiliation

• four fathers with no current religious affiliation had been nurtured in a religious tradition

• three fathers with no current religious affiliation had been nurtured in an irreligious tradition

• fourteen fathers had participated in more than one birth, with five in three births, making a total of 33 stories of being present at the birth of their children

• fifteen of the fathers described the experience as stand alone or pivotal in their experience

• fifteen of the fathers described the experience as spiritual.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Current Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ed</td>
<td>None (atheistic upbringing)</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron *</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>Anglican (regular attendance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bert</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>None (mind-body philosophy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rick *</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>Yoga (regular attendance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ray *</td>
<td>None (atheistic upbringing)</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rod *</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>Roman Catholic (regular attendance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ned *</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>Anglican (intermittent attendance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Len *</td>
<td>Greek Orthodox</td>
<td>None (seldom attends)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bart *</td>
<td>None (attended Sunday school)</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>Baptist (regular attendance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>Siddha Yoga (regular attendance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom *</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>Anglican (intermittent attendance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al *</td>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>Anglican (regular attendance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hal *</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>Anglican (regular attendance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mal *</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>Roman Catholic (intermittent attendance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liam</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>Anglican (regular attendance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhett *</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>Anglican (intermittent attendance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan *</td>
<td>Uniting</td>
<td>Uniting (regular attendance)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This does not attest to any statistical significance per se but its purpose is to locate the context out of which the fathers approached the role of religion and spirituality as it emerged in their experience of the birth process. In particular, the fathers’ birth experiences provide insight into spirituality in that the birth is not understood as a religious site. This is consistent with the proposed definition of spirituality in the next chapter understood as furthering a lived experience in nonreligious settings. Therefore, a father’s experience may indicate the nature of his spirituality without requiring religious affiliation or religious sensibilities and practices.

The stories of the fathers as text emerged theoretically from the first part of the methodology and provide a supportive commentary in Chapter Four. This aspect of the methodology enabled me to draw together, and make sense of, the role given to spirituality by these fathers. Their stories illustrate the issues for consideration and interpretation of their significance within each participant’s own frame of reference.

2.3.4 Interview Schedule

The approved schedule of questions began with an explanation to each respondent at the interview to reassure participants that they will not be pressured to participate beyond their comfort zone. This interview posed no significant threat to the participant’s health or created any discomfort beyond the everyday as it engaged with normal conversations and situations. No respondent expressed reservations at any point during the interviews. The schedule of questions provides the basis for the data and analysis of this research project.

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1. Could you please tell me your occupation? How long have you been doing that, etc?

2. Could you please tell me your partner status? How long have you been partnered etc?

3. Do you have a background in religious bodies? Is this an ongoing aspect of your life? What form does it take now?

4. Do you have difficulty in expressing spiritual or religious experiences? Do you think men in general have difficulty in expressing spiritual or religious experiences? Do men have more difficulty in expressing spiritual or religious experiences?

5. Now I would like to ask you about the birth of your last child? Describe your reaction to finding out that you were expecting to be a father? (There may be more than one occasion)

6. Can you describe whether your reaction and preparation was different from your partner and/or spouse?

7. In what ways did you prepare your self for pending birth experience(s)?

8. Describe how you decided about being present at the birth(s) of your child?

9. Describe what happened during the birth(s) and any reactions you had at the time?

10. Has this experience changed your outlook on life? In what manner has the experience changed your outlook on life?

11. Have you compared this experience of being present at the birth of your child with something else?
12. Were there any groups that you joined in preparation for the pending birth? Describe the role they played in helping you understand and appreciate the birth of your child?

13. Were there any groups that you joined related to the birth of your child? Describe the role they played in helping you understand and appreciate the birth of your child?

14. Were you looking for any dimensions of your birthing experience in addition to practical advice and preparation in these groups? How would you describe that dimension? Did any of the groups bring you close to that dimension? Would you describe any group as involving any spiritual or religious dimension which enabled you to better appreciate the experience of the birth(s)? If so, which were the most helpful and supportive of your religious/spiritual quest during this time?

15. What resources or services did you pay for in preparation for the pending birth? Such as private health care, books, media, maternity products, etc? Describe the role they played in helping you understand and appreciate the birth of your child?

16. What resources or services did you pay for after the birth of your child? Such as medical, counselling, child development, books, media, etc? Describe the role they played in helping you understand and appreciate the birth of your child?

17. Were you looking for any dimensions of your experience in addition to practical advice and preparation you paid for in preparation for the birth? How would you describe that dimension? Would you describe any resource or service as involving any spiritual or religious dimension which enabled you to better appreciate the experience of the birth(s)? If so, which were the most helpful and supportive of your religious/spiritual quest during this time?
18. How often and to whom did you share the story of the birth of your child? If so, who were the most helpful and supportive of your religious/spiritual quest during this time?

19. Has the story of the birth undergone much change in the retelling?

20. Has the spiritual and religious content increased or decreased with time?

21. How did you commemorate and record, if at all, the significance of the experience(s)?

22. Was there any spiritual/religious content of these commemorations? If so, what? Did you make any specialised or personalised addition to the standard practices of commemoration? What did you/your partner create?

23. Did you think that your partnership status had an impact on your experience?

24. Is the spiritual and/or religious more or less important as a result of having experienced the birth of your child?

Each interview was fully transcribed and collated with each line allocated a number. These numbers are used to reference specific quotes from the interviews.
2.4 Part Two: An Autoethnographic Study of Fathers’ Lived Experience

The application of autoethnography is the second method used in this study. As a researcher, I drew on my own experience to emphasise the ways in which I interacted with the experiences researched and, in this way, connected my insights as a practical theologian to this cultural social context. The issue to consider was not so much what effect my identity had on the research process but rather what I could bring to the research data to make sense of them in the light of my own story. This method enabled me to present how my self story was available to interpret the role I attribute to spirituality in a postmodern milieu. The resultant reappraisal and conceptual framework for religious pastoral practitioners both requires – and emerges from – the corroborative text of the fathers’ stories.

The researcher is a primary tool in qualitative method and reflectivity is the key dynamic not just as a tool but as an integral part of what is the researched social reality.147 Reflectivity as critical self-reflection throughout the research process suggests that all research is, to some extent, autobiography.148 It is assumed that researchers both influence – and are influenced by – the process of engaging in research.149 Therefore, the study of spirituality is self-implicating because the researcher cares personally about the matters researched, which can be dangerous to the researcher, leading to methodological narcissism.150 The extent to which personal involvement is allowed to shape one’s research is an unavoidable challenge in the study of spirituality.151 I argue that it is necessary at times as a heuristic device to use the researcher’s own experience to invite a deeper understanding of the phenomenon described.152 Recognition of the researcher can be a bridge instrument to illuminate research. Further, there is

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147 Swinton & Mowat, p. 59.
148 ibid., p. 60.
149 ibid., p. 60.
152 ibid., p. 54.
no reason to suppose that this intersubjectivity cannot occur at the point of data collection as well as at the point of writing. The methodological question is how to effectively conceal and disclose the researcher’s self in practical theology.\(^{153}\) It requires researchers to be transparent as to who they are and the particular approaches they bring to a study. Yet the limits of the researcher as author need to be delineated if the research is not to merely colonise others’ lived experience. Just as literary rhetorical methodologies allow readers to suggest deeper understandings of the text than the author may have envisioned, the task of qualitative research incorporates the same potential when receiving the stories of respondents.\(^{154}\)

There is a need to take account of gender, which is more than adding one more category of analysis.\(^{155}\) It means taking account, reflectively, of the gender of the researcher, as well as that of the researched, and of the two in interaction. As well, a critical examination of gender differentiation as a researcher enters into sociological analysis and the routine assumptions that may underlie the breaking down of data. Above all, it involves devising modes of sociological inquiry which may begin to capture the lives of those who are often hidden, for example, servants and wives. Gender, when it is taken into account, is usually in relation to women. To ignore the question of gender is not treating men as normal subjects of research.\(^{156}\) Taking gender into account is taking men into account. It is important as a male researcher – when taking gender into account – not to dismiss the historical and continuing domination of male narratives in social endeavour. This is not justified, even if women in sociology have – at times – ignored gender or treated it as a one-sided question of women in society.\(^{157}\) This is one challenge of examining male spirituality when fathers are present at the birth of their children. Yet men have access to male behaviour and thought that women do not.\(^{158}\)

\(^{153}\) ibid., pp. 57–58.
\(^{154}\) ibid., pp. 55–67.
\(^{155}\) Morgan, p. 94.
\(^{156}\) ibid., pp. 94–95.
\(^{157}\) ibid., p. 95.
\(^{158}\) Pease, p. 147.
In addition, my role as researcher and priest was not passive but an active reference point for the research process and analysis. The stories of the fathers are, in part, recognised as being also my story. My self-story as researcher and priest contributed to the research data whereby researcher and respondent found a conversation for which they had both been waiting. The encounter, in its pastoral dimensions, reveals a reality of mutuality between researcher and respondent. This self-story does not need to be bracketed from the research but instead can provide the methodological pivot for making sense of the data. In our postmodern milieu the reflective turn in social sciences is accepted and it is no longer assumed that researchers can remain objective. Self-implication may be a problem, but the postmodern approach allows boundaries to be blurred so that people’s lived experience is affirmed as intensely personal and totally subjective.\(^{159}\) In particular, applying an analysis informed by the researcher’s self-story provides an authoritative voice for others when researching religious or spiritual experience.

As a researcher I am inviting readers to engage not only in the textual representation of the respondents but also in the researcher’s own critical response to their own lived experience, as one who is both father and priest. The researcher’s self-narratives have the potential for criticism, and indeed also sociocultural criticism, when the narratives are located within larger more macrolevel sociocultural political spaces as will be offered in my understanding of our postmodern milieu. In so doing, the basis for a critical reappraisal of religious practitioners is provided.

Autoethnography was the method employed to offer a distinctive framework for responding to the postmodern milieu in the argument. Here the researcher draws on their own experiences to emphasise the ways in which they interact with the culture being researched in order to connect the personal to the cultural social context. This method is presented to explicate the role I attribute to contemporary spirituality. The fourfold schema presented by Swinton and

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\(^{159}\) Schneiders, p. 20.
Mowat allows data to be interpreted by the researcher as a practical theologian.160

1. Current Praxis - identifying a practice or a situation, such as the role of spirituality in birth experiences, that requires reflection and critical challenge in order to describe what is going on.

2. Cultural / Contextual analysis – applying qualitative research methods to extract the complex matrix of meanings within the situation as narrated by the fathers to this researcher in what is going on.

3. Theological Reflection – critical reflection on the practices from the perspective of critical faithfulness by the researcher as priest and practical theologian.

4. Formulating Revised Practice – to produce new and challenging forms of praxis for those religious practitioners who encounter fathers in such circumstances.

Hermeneutics is the process of interpretation through which my role as researcher and priest divulges the argument. One task of hermeneutics is to identify different factors – including epistemological, sociological, cultural and linguistic – that condition this process of interpretation because language shapes a person’s seeing and through it their self understanding and understanding of their world.161 The hermeneutical task in Chapter Four is the presentation of what this researcher regards as noteworthy in the fathers’ stories as to the role of spirituality therein. In Chapter Five I deal with the art of understanding the broader significance of their stories, providing a fourfold schema for interpreting our postmodern milieu. This provides a fundamental grid that allows exponents of practical theology to make sense of our lived experience. In doing so, the second part of the methodology is used to frame and interpret the role given to

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160 Swinton & Mowat, p. 95.
161 S. Gallagher, *Hermeneutics and Education*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1992, p. 6. He presents four hermeneutical approaches: Conservative hermeneutics, Moderate hermeneutics, Radical hermeneutics and Critical hermeneutics; the approach in this thesis is best described in Gallagher’s scheme as Moderate Hermeneutics.
spirituality by these fathers that resulted from use of the first part of the methodology to provide an essential reappraisal for such encounters by religious practitioners.

2.4.1 The Priest as Researcher

It is important to note the pastoral mode that accompanied my role as researcher. Pruyser makes the point that vocations such as the priesthood – whose practitioners, like all other professional workers – possess a body of theoretical and practical knowledge that is uniquely their own, evolved over time by themselves and their forebears. The issue in pastoral practice is often to discern what aspect of the professional body of knowledge will be prioritised in the presenting circumstance. There are other points of contact that may be considered, such as male patterns of friendship, which will not be addressed in this argument.

People may turn to priests out of expediency, cultural heritage or economic constraints but this does not discount the recognition that a unique body of knowledge is on offer from their religious and spiritual heritage. They present an extensive range of the resources people discern when they bring significant experiences before a priest. What is true for the priest should also be true for the person seeking their help, so they are equal participants in a communion that transcends all partitions and divisions.

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163 ibid., p. 15.
165 Pruyser, p. 45.
166 ibid., p. 47. People have traditionally sought ministers because they seek religious and spiritual counsel. He presents guidelines for what pastoral diagnosis involves.
167 ibid., p. 134.
This commitment to practical theology emerges from an embodying form of knowledge, from the life of both the researching author and the research subject. In many ways, the researcher's practical theology is mirrored in the respondent's experiences and vice versa. Such research informs the role which practical theology plays in how a religious practitioner as a representative of the Church might live today. It is research that moves from individual narrative to exploring what it means for the community of God, sited in the world, to act and speak Christ.

While I accept that it is not the norm to perceive the relationship between researcher and respondent as a pastoral encounter with the researcher operating as a priest, I suggest that there are two explanatory factors.

1. It was apparent to all fathers that their story, in some ways, was my story; this was both the personal motivation for the research, and, in part, a significant aspect of the freedom they brought to their participation in the research. It is argued that what was presented in the research process by the fathers was, in part, a response to this synergy between their story and the sense of my own story.

2. It was not apparent at the time, but emergent in reflection on the data. The research was conducted with awareness prior to the interview that I was a religious practitioner. This emerged directly in conversation or through the setting of the interview in the office of a building which is part of a church setting religious building. The intention of the research was not imbued in the context of my pastoral practice, however the content and responses were shaped and informed by my identity as a pastoral practitioner. My role as researcher enabled this synergy to take a specific form whereby respondents voiced appreciation for the unique opportunity the research provided for them to articulate their lived experience. The implication was that the research process had been the only such context they had found in

168 Taylor, p. 3.
which to tell their story, to fulfil a need for corroboration of their story which previously had been unmet. Therefore, the exploration of the role of spirituality in their experience ensured that my vocation as priest was an active part of the research process. Again, the issue is not so much how the researcher affects the data extracted, even given the importance of this dynamic to the integrity of qualitative research. In telling their stories as they related to the role given to spirituality there was an affirmation that their stories were my story and therefore my story as priest was part of making sense of their stories. Thus, my self-story was a legitimate contribution to the research process.

In bringing my self-story as a key player in the development of the research data I concur with van Manen who argues that research on humans’ identity is phenomenological (how one orients to lived experience) and hermeneutical (how one interprets the texts of life) when one reflects on textual experiences.\(^{169}\) This approach provides a path for the researcher and respondents to learn from each other in phenomenological research.\(^{170}\) It does so by allowing both to question the way they experience the world and thereby map and resource the way each will continue to outwork lived experience.\(^{171}\) In addressing our experience, it provides me with a structural analysis in Chapter Four of what is most common, most familiar, and most self-evident to both researcher and respondent to construct an evocative and animating description.\(^{172}\) Following van Manen I have, in this research:\(^{173}\)

- turned to the phenomenon of fathers’ stories of birth as an interest of the researcher and as an expression of his ongoing commitment to the world

\(^{169}\) van Manen, p. 4.
\(^{170}\) ibid., p. 5.
\(^{172}\) van Manen, p. 19.
• investigated experiences as the researcher and respondents lived them through the telling of stories rather than as they may have conceptualised them

• reflected, together with the respondents, on the essential themes which characterise the phenomenon

• described the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting

• maintained a strong orientating pedagogical relation to the phenomenon that researcher and respondent may learn from this lived experience

• balanced the research context by considering both parts and whole

Subjectivity and objectivity are not mutually exclusive. The researcher is orientated to the object that stands before them while the subjective indicates that this orientation is shaped in a unique and personal way. It allows the researcher’s implicit understandings of the social world to scrutinise and be scrutinised. Based upon writing and rewriting the stories of these respondents, in Chapter Five the researcher is comprehended as a scholar presenting his account and particular framework for understanding the emerging data in their social context. Through my own self-story I make a legitimate contribution to the dialectic of this research process and the description that emerged to evoke and animate the lived experiences shared by the researcher and respondents.

2.4.2 The Priest as the Locus of Research

The final analysis of this research is an attempt to see the self as others might in order to explain things from the inside in the mode of autoethnography. This is a recent genre in education presented here as a critical personal narrative. Autoethnography is a genre of writing in which authors draw on

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174 ibid., p. 20.
175 ibid., p. 27.
their own lived experiences, connecting the personal to the cultural and placing the self and others within our postmodern social context. In doing so, researchers seek to transcend the binary split between the self and the social implicit in most research methodologies.177 In writing themselves into their own work as major characters, autoethnographers challenge the accepted views about silent authorship where the researcher’s voice is not included in the presentation of findings.178 It is an analytical personal account of the workings of social reality. As an emergent method, it propels the researcher to draw on their own experiences to extend the understanding of a particular discipline or culture. In this approach greater emphasis is placed on the ways in which a researcher interacts with the culture being researched.

Autoethnography is the chosen method to contribute my self-story as part of the research data. It is about the researcher as a priest, who is part of a group or culture. In this case, those who share with him the common language, values, habits, activities, beliefs, of being present at the birth of his children as he reflects on the role of spirituality in religion, gender and other relevant shared experiences. Yes, the self as the only data source must lead to mistrust of the self as a research vehicle.179 However, autoethnography need not be limited to only the self as data because people do not accumulate their experiences in a social vacuum, nor was this the case in this research.180 An important corrective is the respondents’ stories as constant markers, as presented in Chapter Four, so that the self is not the only – or even the main – source of data. In applying this method, the researcher acknowledges that the introduction of the first person in research text is a postmodern response in which researchers are seeking to integrate scholarly and personal voices in their textual representations.181 Such research is a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context, serving as both method and text.182

177 Reed-Danahay, p. 10.
178 Holt, p. 4.
179 ibid., p. 14.
180 ibid., p. 16.
181 Maguire, p. 1.
182 Reed-Danahay, p. 1.
Social researchers more and more are mining their own lives, their own experiences. The assertion is that your lived experience as data is not just about emotions but about social construction, meaning making and spirituality in a postmodern milieu. This approach has been previously applied to stories of birth by Katz Rothman. Previously in her work on home birthing she did not draw on her own experiences, relying instead on the traditional silent or absent research author. But her recent writing is a form of ethnography, not just a memoir, but a treatment of her own life and lived experience as part of the data.

This authoring of self into a research text does blur the boundaries between self and other, subject and object, which both vexes, and serves various functions. As argued above, to avoid this is to miss an essential part of the research process. In this research, my role as priest whose story was mirrored in the stories of these fathers was not anonymous but an unavoidable aspect of the research process. If this approach is perhaps self-indulgent, there is also recognition that dialogue between research subject and researcher was conducted as part of the socially embedded meaning-making process, which this research records in the texts of the stories. For the researcher is both a social being and an actor learning to read the word and world with a critical perceptive. This is not to preclude the question of whose stories are deemed plausible. Who gets to speak and be recognised after all? The researcher self is

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186 ibid., p. 2.

187 ibid., p. 1.

188 ibid., p. 2.
not separate or given priority over the lived self.\textsuperscript{189} As Gallagher asks, to what extent can one validly reproduce the object of an interpretation?\textsuperscript{190} The textual site provides insight into lived experience that is shared by the researcher and respondents. To what extent does this learning merely assimilate or reproduce predominant social narrative – or does it also provide a pathway for hermeneutics to transform our social milieu?\textsuperscript{191} My experience as a researcher who is both father and priest was creative, pedagogical and therapeutic in dealing with the social consequences of respondents’ stories. The role of spirituality did not just decode a sense of truth in a text but also provided a transformative activity to allow both trust and suspicion.\textsuperscript{192} The freedom that the respondents found in seeking out this researcher to process their lived experience is consistent with the ironic detachment that people are able to bring to truth and meaning in our society.\textsuperscript{193}

I am inviting readers to engage not only in the textual representation of the respondents but also in the researcher’s own critical response to their own lived experience, as one who is both father and priest.\textsuperscript{194} Therefore as a “blurred genre” autoethnography has much to offer researchers as part of the postmodern reflective approach that seeks to meet the other rather than merely study the other, especially if autoethnography allows the reader to understand the larger social formations and historical processes that inform the narratives of the respondents.\textsuperscript{195}

\textbf{2.4.3 Research as Pastoral Encounter}

Understanding the research in this project as taking part in a reflective fieldwork role is locating the self in relation to ambiguous and shifting

\textsuperscript{189} ibid., p. 4.
\textsuperscript{190} Gallagher, pp. 12–15.
\textsuperscript{191} ibid., pp. 15–19.
\textsuperscript{192} ibid., pp. 19–23.
\textsuperscript{194} Maguire, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{195} ibid., p. 9.
One of the questions implied in qualitative research is whether it is better to study a group as an outsider or as an insider. Such categories as insider and outsider in the research process are themselves socially constructed and constantly in flux. The pertinent question is for what groups and contexts are identifications and interactions important for the researcher? Use of this method implies acceptance of the existence of an acknowledged reflexive turn to self in social sciences by which it is no longer assumed that researchers can remain objective. In particular, applying an analysis informed by the researcher’s self-story as an insider enables use of an authoritative voice for others when researching religious or spiritual experience. In Chapter Five I present a critical reflection on birth stories as an insider. In the main the researcher’s preexisting ideas and biases are treated with suspicion as negative qualities of researcher subjectivity and this has informed the first part of my methodology as applied in Chapter Four. The recognition that one’s religious identity as a researcher enables a range of permutations of partial insider, partial outsider, complete insider and complete outsider offers a spectrum of vantage points over and above the binary mediation between social science and religious experience.

It is not argued that the most important role as researcher was my religious identity as a priest. Different identities matter at different stages of the research process as they are mutually constructed with their research participants. Which of our identities were important for the participants may be difficult to discern or not explicitly alluded to in the research data. Yet this is not sufficient to discount the role my self-story as priest researcher could have contributed to my analysis of the research data. There was strong evidence through many of the fathers’ stories in Chapter Four that the participants related to the researcher spiritually rather than merely based on other social

197 ibid., p. 5.
198 ibid., p. 4.
199 ibid., p. 11.
categories. The interview did not just facilitate access to the respondent’s story but actually provided a way of completing the story. As I am a researcher priest, instead of just immersing me in their world, they also immersed themselves in my world, a pastoral world. For the respondents the interview itself was a pastoral instrument for meaning making, a midwife for expressing, decoding, even birthing, a range of issues uniquely attached to their lived experience as fathers.

It is on this basis that the research process was approached as a pastoral encounter with decisive lessons to be learnt by reflective theological practitioners. In my having applied these binary methods, the texts and corresponding commentaries generated on the role given to spirituality will provide an essential reappraisal for encounters by religious practitioners in our current postmodern milieu. Such action research allows the documentation of latent and developing layers of meaning and social possibilities. It is modified action research because it was generated by the pastoral encounter and interpreted with theological reflection. In it I not only sought to gain new knowledge but also to enable new and transformative modes of action for pastoral practice. Further, I sought to challenge and transform current pastoral practice.

In order to advance this project, a number of conceptual and theoretical matters will be explained in the next chapter to define the particular approach I adopted for this argument to such matters as modernity and postmodernity, religion and spirituality, and their relationship to matters of gender. The assumption is that the method presented means that my own story does not need to be bracketed from the research but instead provides many vantage points from which to make sense of the data, and allowance is made for the fact that the boundaries are blurred, shifting and ambiguous. My own story can be the methodological pivot for making sense of the data.

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201 ibid., p. 15.
203 Swinton & Mowat, p. 255.
204 ibid., p. 256.
Chapter Three: Practical Theology and the Study of Spirituality

In this chapter I examine the literature that frames a practical theological study of spirituality and fathers in a postmodern milieu. There are two distinct aspects to the review. In the first part of the chapter I will examine the literature on spirituality to answer the question of why it is a significant category for encapsulating pivotal experiences, such as those described by fathers present at the birth of their children?

A premise of the argument is that spirituality has emerged as a separate, though still related, category from religion. The antecedents to this development can be traced to the rise of modernism and its universalising approach to religion. This does not deny that there are premodern precedents to the concept of spirituality. Rather, the argument presumes the postmodern scrutiny of the modernist ideal so that the roles of religion and spirituality are now significantly different. In rehearsing the different manifestations that modernism and postmodernism bring to the realm of religion, an appreciation of why the role of spirituality has developed its current place is confirmed. The postmodern reflexive turn to self is central in that it posits all explanations of reality as social constructs. Thus, all explanations of reality concern beliefs, not just in a traditional religious sense but encompassing the whole gamut of life experiences – both communal and individual – effectively fragmenting, dissipating and democratising the religious impetus. It is this democratisation of religion that provides the soil from which the role of spirituality now finds itself outworking. Accordingly, this requires that religious practitioners accommodate and reorientate their practice.

In a review of the literature I have described the role of spirituality which acts as a precursor to the presentation of a definition of spirituality which I have used in this research project. For the purposes of this study I argue for the following working definition.
Spirituality describes religious-type experiences that occur in nonreligious settings, though not necessarily limited to those that function as transcendent referents, which enable individuals to further their lived experience.

This means that the study is not an exhaustive study of spirituality but one in which I sought to examine it outside religious settings. By presenting this definition, critical assessment can reveal how spirituality is being applied to patterns of meaning and purpose associated with pivotal experiences.

In the second part of the chapter I put forward the view that the fathers’ birth stories can be read as examples of spiritual experiences. I argue, based on the fathers’ descriptions, that their stories represent case studies in the role of spirituality, whereby the birth experience can be read as a social mechanism and process, which are utilised to supply meaning and purpose to further their lived experience. Moreover, it provides the background for accepting how, in contact between fathers with such experiences and exponents of practical theology, the role which spirituality now plays in contemporary society must be navigated.

3.1 Part One: Theoretical Footholds for Studying Spirituality

Traditionally, exploring the meaning and transcendent significance of an experience for a person or community was treated within a community’s religious beliefs and practices. In this research I wished to examine the role of spirituality and the extent to which it has become the language of individuals and communities for the processing of significant and transcendent experience. I will argue that spirituality currently provides an interpretive overlay in the study of religion, which describes lived experience for Western society, including that in

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Australia. Therefore, conceptual work on the role of religion needs to be established as a platform for a definition of spirituality for the ensuing exploration of fathers’ experience of the birth of their children.

3.1.1 The Study of Religion

A discussion on the nature of religion as applied in this study will provide the framework which is essential for the argument. The social is an emergent reality, and the sociological study of practical theology is a certain variety of communication. A common thread through many definitions of religion is that it is primarily about something beyond the normal, the everyday, the perceptible, and that somehow this radically other fundamentally conditions human existence. The categories immanence and transcendence provide a helpful basis for explicating this central religious dichotomy. The immanent describes the whole of perceptible reality and all the meaning communicable among human beings. The transcendent serves to give the immanent whole its meaningful context. The central religious paradox lies in the fact that the transcendent can be communicated in immanent terms only and thus communication based on meaning is always immanent, even when the subject of communication is transcendent. Bert expressed this ambiguity when asked to delineate the religious from other experiences.

I don’t know if I have had religious experiences as such. I’ve had experiences in my life which I think have been significant. [343–344]

The process and experience of birth as parts of perceptible reality can be the objects of a religious study because participants may utilise them to establish and nourish the sacred in a range of patterns.

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“Many sociological definitions of religion operate with a basic dichotomy such as profane/sacred (Durkheim), natural/supernatural (Parsons), nomos/cosmos (Berger), and empirical/super-empirical (Robertson). Others speak about religion as dealing with ‘ultimatw’ problems (Yinger) or a ‘general ... uniquely realistic’ order of existence (Geertz), implicitly defining it by contrast to a more proximate and equivocal domain.”

208 ibid., pp. 5–6.
The study of practical theology enables us to identify where the immanent and transcendent cohere and overlap in both a formal and informal sense. In it are described the beliefs and practices that give meaning and purpose to individual and community life. Religion thus defined encompasses rituals and values which form and inform individuals and communities of their connection to surrounding realities, including responding to those realities, which may transcend their everyday experience. A narrow definition of religion describes its formal organisation of the dialectic between immanence and transcendence which particular societies encourage, such as public worship, formal rites of passage and observance of clear ethical rules.

As well as formal patterns, societies’ religious beliefs and practices are developed by nonformal social factors. It is important to examine these as distinct social aspects and patterns of religious identity. Practical theologians are able to identify the social factors that inform and broaden the development of religious beliefs and practices. These may involve simply being born in England rather than India. Important immediate factors include: whether one is located in a rural or urban setting; the diversified ethos of the community in which one resides; the life cycle; what constitutes one's cultural background; and what are one's socioeconomic origins and aspirations. Important broader factors include media, globalisation, consumerism, cyberspace and entertainment. These and other social factors such as gender, class, and wealth – or lack of it – interact to form and inform the religious beliefs and practices of individuals and communities.

Religion is one of the sources of human identity in the sense that many humans locate themselves in relation to absolute notions of time, history and ultimately sovereign powers such as gods, spirits and supernatural forces. This involves more than measuring people’s involvement with commitment to particular groups or organisations or belief systems. Following the cultural turn in sociology with its focus on meaning and less on political and economic factors,

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the amount of research into the diversity of religious resources on which social collectivities can draw in the continuous negotiation of its identity in relation to other collectivities has increased\textsuperscript{210}

A study which is focused merely on the formal expressions of religion, though valid, presents only one aspect of the role of religion. Birth may be studied as religious in this narrow sense if those involved advocate it can be associated with an essential or normative transcendent experience with symbols, rituals and behaviours which point beyond it to the sacred. In this sense the process and experience of birth are not commonly situated in a formal religious context, though this is not true of all non-Western cultures. Therefore, a study of birth is unlikely to provide a normative path into understanding formal religious patterns.

Using a view in which religion is identified as one of the comprehensive sources of human identity, one is able to identify the nonformal religious social patterns. \textit{Religion} is inclusive of all beliefs and practices from football to socialism, from church to atheism, birth to death. To limit the study of practical theology to formal social expressions betrays the marginalisation of religion in our secular post-Enlightenment traditions where religion is merely one well of human knowledge – often assumed to be an increasingly less significant well at that. Religion is communication that incorporates the broadest and most inclusive range including speech, ritual, myth, sacred scripture, mystical insight, wisdom, ecstatic trance, or any number of variations and combinations of these – including experiences of birth or gendered embodiment.\textsuperscript{211} In this sense, our immanent experience is religious not because there is a special form of \textit{religious} communication – rather, it is all latent with transcendent potential insofar as it becomes a potential solution to those very core problems of life in the immanent world. Just as anything can be commodified or politicised, so everything can be sacralised.\textsuperscript{212} The social process of sacralisation transforms the ordinary into something special by associating it with the presence or action of God, spirit or a

\textsuperscript{210} ibid., p. 144.
\textsuperscript{211} Beyer, p. 6.
universal power, or with states of peace, contentment and joy. As a phenomenological approach it is used in studies of the social construction of reality, multiple levels of reality and signals of transcendence. Birth stories are religious in the sense that they are expressions of lived experience that is latent with such potential, perhaps – it could be suggested – more so than other patterns of experience.

This approach to religion would enable a study of the religious aspects of birth to be conducted. Though it provides a conceptual framework for studying nonformal religious experience such as birth, it is not sufficient of itself to explain why spirituality is important. It may be the case that spirituality merely encapsulates such nonformal religious patterns. However, I argue that the role of spirituality is more than an interchangeable synonym for the nonformal aspects of religion described above. Spirituality involves more than the absence of formal religious contexts and patterns. Spirituality is a positive affirmation separate or discontinuous from, or in addition to, religious understandings. A premise of the project is that spirituality has emerged as a category separate from religion though still related to it. What, then, provides the basis for explicating such a view of spirituality?

3.1.2 Modernism’s Impact on Religion

The rise of modernism is regarded as a prerequisite for the current view of spirituality examined in this argument. This expansion of modernism spawned a tendency, practically unique in the history of humankind, to the development of universal, worldwide institutions and symbolic frameworks and systems. It emerged first in Europe and later expanded to the rest of the world. Modernism rejected difference as evil or faulty and sought instead the one best strain of wheat, the one best form of nation state, the one best culture and the one best

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212 ibid., p. 102.
and only true religion.\textsuperscript{216} The imposition on others of the religion of the
dominating society was part of the process of empire building and expansion.
This did not give rise to a single civilisation, or to one institutional pattern, but
to the development of several modern civilisations – or at least, civilisation
patterns sharing many common characteristics – but also evincing among
themselves great differences.\textsuperscript{217}

How does modernism view the role of religion? The beginning of the modern
period has been characterised as the turn to subject and away from metaphysics
or traditional authorities. A new era, the modern era, inaugurated the process of
regarding human reason and experience as the foundations of all knowledge
including religious construction. In this era epistemology became the centre of
philosophy, replacing cosmology and metaphysics.\textsuperscript{218} It is the age of scepticism,
reductionism, individual autonomy, and the flight from traditional authority.\textsuperscript{219}
No longer was revelation, mythology or religion sufficient for understanding our
place in the world. Sometimes reference is made to the period before the
Enlightenment as being premodern.\textsuperscript{220} Modern science was one of the key forces
that dissolved the premodern religious worldview. The birth of empirical method
and scientific knowledge now relegated these to mythological status. It brought
a new worldview in which human beings came to have an even more central

\textsuperscript{216} G.D. Bouma, “Theology in Post-Modernity: The Social Context of Reflecting on Experiences of
God”, Department of Anthropology and Sociology Working Paper, Monash University, Working
Paper, Vol. 6, No. 92, 1992a, p. 10. He argues that Christianity has reflected this modernity
as it has attempted to develop systems of universally valid theology, uniform liturgy, and the
conversion of the world to Christianity and ecumenism.

\textsuperscript{217} Eisenstadt, 1987, pp. 1–5.

\textsuperscript{218} R. Rorty (Ed.), The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method, Chicago,
University of Chicago, 1967.

\textsuperscript{219} J. Stout, The Flight from Authority, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.

\textsuperscript{220} Giddens, 1991, pp. 15–21. He would not describe his work as expressing postmodernism. He
contrasts this period of history prior to the rise of the Western scientific method as
traditional. In traditional society relationships of kith and kin are explicitly responsible for
transferring what is constitutive in their society, whereas in posttraditional societies
individuals form their own tradition via cultural reflectivity. Thus understood, premodern
refers to the seeking of knowledge beyond the rational; modern to a desire to hold knowledge
in the structure of human rationality (with or without God); and postmodernism questions the
possibility of such knowledge.
place than before, arguably taking the place once occupied by God and religion.\textsuperscript{221}

Christian churches have been the dominant organisational expressions of religion in Australia and have exhibited the classic tendencies of modernism in their construction of religion.\textsuperscript{222} When the First Fleet arrived, only Anglicans could offer religious services and everyone had to adhere or miss out. Upon this basis a religious diversity evolved that reflected the trajectory of modernism in other Western societies.\textsuperscript{223} In modernism, individuals became increasingly free to pursue their happiness. All humans are born equal with equal rights; a birthright bestowed by nature rather than religion. Therefore, individuals are able to free themselves from the obligations of religious institutions and make their own decisions about what they believe and practise. This freedom also fuelled voluntary associations such as emerging sports clubs. It reflected a new pattern for communal life that was informed by personal choice, preference and compatibility. The parochial church with its set territory to oversee had its geopolitical character gradually infused and overtaken by this voluntary association. Religious institutions have responded in a variety of ways to the challenge of modernism.\textsuperscript{224} By the development of buildings, clergy and stipend arrangements early Australians sought to provide organisational infrastructure to respond to and support religious life in the midst of a society increasingly shaped by emerging modes of voluntary association. When Tom, as a child, expressed a desire to attend Sunday school he illustrated this change from religious observance as social expectation to something pursued voluntarily by those who have an interest, whatever their age!

I remember asking her whether I could go to Sunday school. She was a bit shocked, and said, “Yes, of course.” [2091–2092]


The result of this historical process is that religious life in Australia is fragmented with active participation in formally organised religion declining.\textsuperscript{225} No group is able to provide an all-embracing overarching community of meaning for society – let alone for many of its adherents.

For all its comforts, conveniences and medical benefits, modernism has failed to deliver a world of peace, freedom, and fulfilment.\textsuperscript{226} Relying on trust in instrumental rationality, we sought to turn our backs on our embarrassing superstitious, communal anti-individual premodern heritage and progress to a higher plane. Thus economics was seen as the driving force of human activities and materialism its outcome. Modernism stripped down the meaning of life to a struggle between the human mind and the rest of the natural world.

3.1.3 Postmodernism’s Scrutiny of the Modernist Ideal

There is an ongoing debate as to what is the most appropriate mode of describing the current situation and the vast range of responses to modernism. Attempts to find the best terminology to describe our current state have led us to ask whether it is \textit{post} or \textit{high} or \textit{late} modernism – descriptions which are not decisive, nor without insight, but the issue raises the question as to the extent to which the present situation is one of continuity with, or change of direction away from modernism. Jameson decisively criticised the notion that postmodernism follows modernism.\textsuperscript{227} It is better, then, to grasp for this argument \textit{postmodernism} not as style but rather as a cultural dominant viewpoint, a conception, which allows for the presence and coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate to it features. What contributed to the collapse of the modern ideal?

Historically the imperialist wars culminating in the cataclysmic horrors of World War I & II highlighted the destructive forces unleashed by competing monolithic worldviews. A body of literature analysing modernism emerged in

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{225} ibid., pp. 22–23.
  \item \textsuperscript{227} Jameson, pp. 55–56.
\end{itemize}
the later part of the twentieth century, though some of the seeds for this were located in antecedents dating back to thinkers such as Nietzsche in the nineteenth century. This body of literature, under the heading of postmodernism, offers ways to describe and analyse religious beliefs and practices. Postmodernists rejected traditional epistemological frameworks out of which modern progressive movements such as Marxism emerged (including many modern forms of Christianity).\textsuperscript{228} The religious landscape is in a process of being deregulated. The process of secularisation that accompanied modernism often leads to the mistaking of the deregulation of religion for the decline of religion. Noting the falling rates of membership in, adherence to, and social influence of, conventional institutional religion in Western societies, the assumption was and still is easily drawn that religious life is contracting. Instead, religion is being restructured out of fixed identifiable institutional forms to include a vast diversity fuelled in myriad ways, and spirituality is one of the pivots around which this restructuring of religion is expressed.

Derrida was a key figure in the development of postmodern thought even though he was unsympathetic to it as a designation.\textsuperscript{229} He assumes that the truth of this world is not determinable using logicentric presuppositions and methods.\textsuperscript{230} He developed the notion of \textit{difference} into an antimetaphysical view of language, thought and the world.\textsuperscript{231} If the nature of being is differential and not determinable as a presence that can be precisely named by ideal theoretical categories, then the method that describes it accurately must itself be, to a certain extent, indeterminate, differential, contingent, practical and so on.\textsuperscript{232} Everything is exactly the same but also slightly different.\textsuperscript{233} Derrida draws our attention to the fact that we can never step outside discourse, representation and rhetoric.\textsuperscript{234} It seems no less true that we can never step outside our historical

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{231} J. Derrida, \textit{Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs}, Evanston, North Western University Press, 1967b, pp. 129–160.
\item \textsuperscript{232} Ryan, p. 68.
\item \textsuperscript{233} Spretnak, pp. 233–244.
\item \textsuperscript{234} Ryan, p. 80.
\end{itemize}
and social positioning, our codes of thought. What this suggests is that an important arena of work would be the boundary or margin where the conceptual and anecdotal meet, where philosophy and sociology converge, offering us insights into our lived experience. It is, as Derrida puts it, a question of style. Hence meaning and consciousness do not exist outside language. There is no central or transcendent signifier (for example, God, History, Man, Reason) outside the invented language system of differences. I would argue that Derrida’s denial of transcendent signifiers and the affirmation of self-referential discourse provide much of the philosophical grounding for the usage of spirituality that has emerged.

Foucault in his books on madness, medicine, knowledge, punishment and sexuality based on an analysis of modernism argued that truth claims act as covers for oppression and domination. Foucault’s strategy for resisting oppression was in stark contrast to that employed by previous generations. Thinkers steeped in the assumptions of Christianity and the eighteenth century Enlightenment had typically appealed to universal categories in order to overthrow tyranny. The French Revolution’s Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789), for example, had insisted that the aim of every political association was to defend the natural, inalienable, and sacred rights of man. Foucault questioned the very existence of rights which are natural, inalienable and sacred. Foucault was influenced by Nietzsche’s attack on the notion of universal norms, with its corollary – that one has to create one’s own norms. Since individuals have no obligation to conform to a pattern set in metaphysics, they are free to fashion themselves in whatever way they choose,

235 M. Foucault, Madness and Civilisation: The History of Insanity in the Age of Unreason, New York, Vintage Books 1961, pp. 18–19. Those who did not conform to the conventional notion of what was rational were labelled as mad, a supposedly value-neutral term, and then marginalised through incarceration – all in the name of Reason.
for one's nature and one's values are not given, they are invented. Foucault
concluded that the moral and social truths invoked in order to label the deviant
were mere fictions.\textsuperscript{240} The noble \textit{truths} trumpeted by the Enlightenment were
employed to legitimise the exercise of domination, not to prepare the way to a
more humane, rational, benign and liberal society.\textsuperscript{241}

Foucault unmasked the universal norm as nothing more than a tool of
oppression being wielded by the powerful. Applying these insights to the realm
of religion has resulted in a devastating analysis of religion as imposed reality
contrasting a need for people to find their own discourse in such matters rather
than relying on traditional authorities. The current role of spirituality is
significantly fertilised by Foucault’s work.

Lyotard’s contribution to the examination of modernism’s legacy begins with
defining postmodernism as \textit{incredulity toward metanarratives}.\textsuperscript{242} This
incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences – but that
progress, in turn, presupposes it. The obsolescence of the metanarrative
apparatus of legitimation corresponds with the crisis of metaphysical philosophy
and the university institution, which in the past relied on it. The narrative
function is losing its heroes, its dangers, its voyagers, and its great goal. It is
being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements of denotative,
prescriptive and descriptive.\textsuperscript{243} We are no longer able to resort to grand
narratives as the primary source of meaning and significance.

Lyotard’s project consists of moving to the other side of what reason requires
– order, consistency, predictability and so on.\textsuperscript{244} From this perspective, living
reasonably requires less consistency than flexibility, less ability to remain the
same in different situations, more capacity to change and assume distinct roles
as coding to the requirements of each new context. Lyotard’s analysis is an

\textsuperscript{240} Foucault, 1961, pp. 18–19.
\textsuperscript{241} ibid., pp. 18–19.
\textsuperscript{242} J.F. Lyotard, \textit{The Postmodern Condition}, Minneapolis, University of Minneapolis, 1984,
pp. 7–10.
\textsuperscript{243} ibid., pp. 7–10.
\textsuperscript{244} Ryan, p. 86.
important agent in the fragmentation of religion as a universalising metanarrative and provides a case for casting spirituality in the role of an example of his affirmation that rationality can emerge only from below.

Baudrillard’s premise is that the referents of representational systems, especially of language, cannot be determined outside representational systems. At no point does a sign exchange itself for a referent or a meaning that is not itself in some way bound up with representation. Representation does not come after objectivity or meaning as something added on to it. The designation by the human mind of a domain of objectivity requires representation. Equally, the condition of ideality or meaning is representation. Linguistic representation is made up of a system of difference whereby each substantive term is constituted through its interrelations with all other terms in the system. Given that language is inseparable from its pragmatic context, the possibility of indeterminacy in the designation of objectivity and the communication of meaning can never be fully purged. Language units refer to each other with the users of language allowing it to function as referring to things or ideas. Thus, in reality, there is a circulation of signs rather than a one-to-one correspondence between signs and things. Stable positions of power or discourse can no longer be determined; all is merely the vertigo of interpretation. On this basis, Baudrillard argues that models, including religion, are more determining of reality than they are representations of reality.

When the real is no longer what it used to be nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity. There is an escalation of the true, of the lived experience’ a resurrection of the figurative where the object and substance have disappeared.

This emphasis on lived experience as the simulation of reality is a fundamental emphasis of Baudrillard. I would argue that much current use of spirituality has a corollary to his notion of lived experience as an affirmation of

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245 ibid., pp. 87–88.
simulated reality. Spirituality has inhabited the space left by religion’s move from reality to nostalgia.

Not all are convinced of postmodernism’s reservations of modernism. Habermas seeks to buttress against the total dismantling of modernism. People considered themselves modern during the eighth century under Charlemagne, in the twelfth century as well as the late seventeenth century in France. The term *modern* appeared and reappeared exactly during those periods in Europe when consciousness of a new epoch formed itself through a renewed relationship to the ancients, whenever antiquity was considered a model to be recovered through some kind of imitation. What is modern now is not related to what is past but is an abstract relation to the past as something *new*, which may be outmoded by something which is in a sense more stylish. Habermas notes that one cannot easily conjure up by magic the compelling beliefs that command authority. Is it feeble to hold onto the intentions of the Enlightenment and to declare that the project of modernism is dead? Habermas fears that ideas of antimodernism, together with an additional touch of premodernism, are acting against the project of modernism. Instead of giving up on modernism and its project, the challenge is to learn from the mistakes of those extravagant programmes which have sought to negate modernism. Habermas provides a corrective balance to those who would insist that the postmodern appraisal replaces modernism. Just as the postmodern impact is not the end of medicine and the birth of alternative therapies, neither is it the end of religion and the birth of spirituality. The contribution of modernism in religion is not easily dismissed by current affirmations of spirituality. Whatever role the respondent fathers gave to spirituality there was still currency in identifying their religious affiliations in modes that would still have been familiar to people in the nineteenth century.

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248 ibid., pp. 345–346. He makes this charge with reference to Daniel Bell to highlight the inadequate denunciation of postmodernity by neo-conservatives.
Daniel Bell argues that the way forward is religion.249 The forces of modernism, such as the principle of unlimited self-realisation, the demand for authentic experience, and subjectivism of hyperstimulated sensitivity have become dominant, unleashing hedonistic motives irreconcilable with the discipline of professional life in society. Though modernism is dominant, it is dead. Religious faith tied to a faith in tradition will provide individuals with clearly defined identities with existential security.250 There may be evidence in America that religion (and spirituality in its diffuse forms) is still able to provide for existential security but this is not obviously the case in other Western societies.251 I would argue that where such dynamics exist in Australian society, be they the Exclusive Brethren praying for the former Prime Minister, John Howard, or Hillsong252 inviting prominent politicians to its platform, such reassertions of religion are better received through the prism of the postmodern misgiving of universalising modernism.

Frankel acknowledges rejecting the political illusions of so-called grand narratives, the postmodern antiprophecies can only prophesy the end of modernism, but they do not know – and generally do not care – where it is now heading whether this destination is religious or not.253 Replacing political economy with culture as the key category has led to mass depoliticisation, a move from radical politics to popular culture, deradicalising political and cultural life. He argues that just as individual acts of sabotage by angry or alienated workers have never overthrown capitalism, so too postmodernism which has no agendas for the future – hence no form of organisational activity to realise its values – will never be overthrown by disaffected detractors. The result is that postmodernism’s proponents’ preoccupation with culture means that they have

250 E. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, London, Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1959. He argues that Bell underestimates the sense in which the individual is a social construction who is but one performer in the ongoing social interactions that constitute everyday life.
251 Collins, pp. 9–10.
252 Large Pentecostal church in Australia now with international locations such as London.
yet to provide a detailed political and economic analysis of it.254 One cannot live by culture alone. Postmodernism has become popular in part because it fits in with the anti-utopian sentiments of the present period. Grand narratives have been replaced with the truth that there is no truth and absolute principle with the assertion that everything is relative. Perhaps the most useful contribution made by postmodernism is a scrutiny of notions such as progress, myths and images and texts, which has helped to debunk or challenge simplistic or limited visions of society and culture.

Frankel’s challenge to construct postmodern politics – and not just another version of modern politics – translates equally to the role of – religion. As a by-product of the postmodern inspection of modernism, is the current role of spirituality merely to provide symbolic acts of sabotage expressing a similar retreat from religious analysis? Is the current use of spirituality a mask for the lack of critical impetus that the domain of religion has found easier to accommodate? This will depend upon what the current role of spirituality actually evokes in comparison to the traditional role of religion.

3.1.4 Outworking of Modernity and Postmodernity in Religion

As there are many versions of modernism, so there are diverse traditions of postmodernism. Some are more benign or helpful than others in how they relate postmodernism to spirituality and religion. One reading of postmodernism is to view it as the transition currently underway to create a passage beyond the failed assumptions of modernism.255 Another more limited meaning of postmodernism with a wider currency is a mode of cultural analysis that seeks to reveal the cultural construction of concepts people assume to be natural or universal. Proponents of this postmodernism seek to deconstruct such influential concepts as Marxism, God, nature, gender, ethnicity, and so forth, in order to break the grip of their control on our thoughts and action.256

255 Spretnak, pp. 4–5.
256 ibid., p. 5.
It is possible to differentiate modernism and postmodernism as mindsets in contrast to modernity and postmodernity as lifestyles.\textsuperscript{257} Modernism and postmodernism as intellectual movements are expressed in a range of areas such as art, architecture, and literature including writing on practical theology. Modernity still describes aspects of our culture as lived experience even if modernism as an intellectual movement may have waned and fragmented. The assumption of the proponents of this argument is that postmodernism’s analysis has confirmed this fragmentation of the modernist ideal. There is no longer one foundational theory of society but there are a number of takes of the same view with each aware of the limits of its own view.\textsuperscript{258} As such postmodernism is a concept that helps us to understand the social change that has fragmented the role of religion in society.\textsuperscript{259} Conversely, postmodernity describes our culture as lived experience, in the shadow of postmodernism’s examination of modernism. The focus of this study is an examination of the emerging role of spirituality as one aspect of lived experience in postmodernity.

Therefore, this study is not an exploration of the theoretical mindsets involved in either modernism or postmodernism but an exploration of our culture’s lived experience. However, rehearsing aspects of the interplay between modernism and postmodernism mindsets as conceptual, and in part enacted, polarities in Western societies has been an important preliminary step, if in this thesis I am to define – and provide an analysis of – the current role of spirituality. Just as the postmodern discussion described above was shown to fertilise the soil that promotes growth of the current role of spirituality, so also will the following descriptions of the outworkings of modernity and postmodernity.

The worldview of modernity is inclined towards the abstract, monistic, deductive, and ahistorical and is intimately bound up with deference to authority. The postmodern deconstruction of the worldview of modernity has


emphasised the concrete, pluralistic, inductive, historical and sceptical, and is intimately bound up with deference to experience. Postmodernity’s impact is to fragment modernity’s power of foundationalism and its supporting metanarratives. The modernist tendency to foundationalism absolutises worldviews whether they are political, social or religious. Such absolutism based in modernity can be seen as contributing as a source to most inhuman atrocities from Nazism and Stalinism to the indigenous Stolen Generation.

At the very least, the postmodern appreciation of diversity is a deconstruction of conformity to metanarratives, which are now understood as power projections. Several streams such as architecture, art, literature, philosophy, linguistics, literary criticism, psychology and cultural history fed the postmodern backlash to modernity. On television, the technique of quick cut editing has produced a barrage of clashing incongruous moving images that fragment meaning in commercials and music videos. A sense of detachment and shallow engagement dominates the postmodern aesthetics because groundlessness is the only constant recognised by this sensibility. The world is considered to be a repressive labyrinth of social production, a construction of pseudoselves who are pushed and pulled by cultural dynamics and subtly diffused regimes of power. Values and ethics are deemed arbitrary, as is history, which is viewed as another’s self serving selection of facts. Rejecting metanarratives, all human existence is culturally created and determined in particular localised circumstances, that is, all knowledge is situated in culture. Even particularised meaning is regarded as relative and temporary, a permutation within our invented language systems – merely signifiers referring to other signifiers.

Postmodernity advocates that a person is free of having to give their allegiance to one, none or more than one metanarrative and is able to access those worldviews from the smorgasbord on offer that make sense or work for them. Often it is a matter of adding layers upon layers rather than trying for

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congruence and logic. At times incongruent beliefs and practices are embraced with surprisingly little disquiet for people, for instance, reading one's horoscopes while being a scientist or a minister of religion. The concept of spirituality can be seen to have made it easier for people to encapsulate responding to these dynamics than to religion.

In the religious sphere, the modern religious organisations built to serve the edifice of Christendom lost their potency. The notion that one needed to be converted to the truth was suffocating instead of liberating. The resultant fragmentation of truth legitimated the relative merits of different worldviews being introduced as a positive pathway. In experiencing our differences, we encounter our truth. The decline in Australia of church numbers in the last thirty years perhaps is an indicator of this fragmentation. This is not unique to Christian churches but was also emulated among the political left as belief in an all-embracing philosophy of life declined in the face of consumer and market driven worldviews.

The process of formation in modernity and postmodernity for individuals and communities can be delineated across the various aspects of society including its role in religion. For example in Australia, as elsewhere in Western societies, in the past two hundred years, one could have asked the question, “What are the measurable building blocks of the construction of Christian adherence?” Whether Protestant or Catholic there was a similar construction path. It involved a mixture of baptism, confirmation, first communion, Sunday school, religious instruction at school, possible attendance at a church-based primary or secondary educational institution, marriage in a church, and with the birth of children the process repeated itself, culminating in a funeral in a church conducted by a minister of religion. Each tradition had variations on how they delivered, and the relative effectiveness of their religious and spirituality construction. This path is clearly overlaid with the concepts and expectations of modernism. From the 1945 postwar period until the latter part of last century,

261 Spretnak, pp. 13–16;
this modern construction of religion has fragmented. The statistical increase in marriages and funerals performed by Civil Celebrants is a clear sign of this process. The religious pathway outlined above may still exist in some larger churches or church-based schools, but it is no longer a society-wide narrative. What, if anything, has supplanted the language of religious formation? Is this one role which spirituality plays in a postmodern milieu? The emergence of spirituality is, in part, a reaction to the forces of conformity often associated—fairly or unfairly—with religion.

Research by Heelas and Woodhead has provided significant data on the relationship between religion and spirituality. They examined whether there is a spiritual revolution underway whereby those with spiritualities that engage with deeper personal lived experience fare better than do those with religious allegiances that demand conformity to metanarratives. The result is that conformity to external obligations has become less important than sensitivity to inner life and well-being as lived experience. Because of this cultural-wide turn to subjective life, they highlight the difficulties which traditional religious bodies will have in encouraging the role of spirituality rooted in lived experience. So though I agree—as is reflected in this study—that there has been a massive turn to the subjective in our cultural language, this turn has not resulted in a massive transferring from life as religion to subjective life spirituality. Rather, it has changed how those with religious identity understand their allegiances utilising spirituality for lived experience. This applies also to those who would acknowledge a role for spirituality who have no active religious allegiances. In the following section I will explicate this under the heading of “The Postmodern Reflectivity”.

The view behind this argument is that our times can be understood as postmodern, and that lived experience in a postmodern milieu reacts to, and engages with, the current roles of religion and spirituality. Therefore, the study

264 ibid., p. 145.
of spirituality is a study in the postmodern out workings that inform any corresponding formative experiences. “What role does spirituality play?” in lived experience is a legitimate question which I sought to answer in this study.

3.1.5 The Postmodern Reflex: Reflectivity

The foregoing discussion confirms that postmodernity is inclined to present matters of meaning and formation in a fragmented and differentiated manner, often expressed in competing and contradicting patterns. The postmodern includes much of what has been traditionally identified as organised religion in Australia. It includes also such religious traditions as Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism. However, it incorporates also, in the study of practical theology and spirituality, phenomena not previously identified as realms of religious and spirituality construction such as gym attendance, tribalism such as football following, marking of personal milestones, and so on. For instance, Hughes and Black, in a study on how Australians seek peace and well-being, concluded that many people find their sense of peace and well-being in the common activities of life.265 These include activities such as looking after children, making homes pleasant places in which to live, listening to music, or taking a holiday by the sea. One is no longer able to presume that people feel the need for further sources of peace and well-being of a traditional religious nature. This is not to say that people wish to deny the existence of God or life after death, but rather that they are indicating that their sense of peace and well-being has much more to do with life here and now than with a religious framework that transcends death.

Following Baudrillard’s view, lived experience is compensation or mere referent for the loss of access to what is real and represents escalated investment in simulations to carry meaning, providing a hyper-real dynamic to experiences.266 This is based on the concept of reflectivity and its accompanying

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266 Baudrillard, p. 13.
shift in public psychology, which is the mind's ability to see itself, and to see itself seeing itself.\textsuperscript{267}

This recognition involves two of the main keys to postmodern thought: the admission that all explanations of reality are themselves constructions – human, useful, but not perfect – and the ability to ‘step out’ of reality constructs and see them as such.\textsuperscript{268}

This stepping out is the characteristic action of the postmodern era.\textsuperscript{269} As we let go of the modern era's idea of progress where everything gets better, the postmodern idea of ever-increasing reflectivity takes precedence. Therefore, all of postmodernity – in fact – can be summarised as looking critically at beliefs – including one's own.\textsuperscript{270} Postmodern reflectivity is central inasmuch as it posits all explanations of reality as social constructs. Thus, all explanations of reality are about looking at beliefs, not just in a traditional religious sense but encompassing the whole gamut of life experiences, both communal and individual, effectively fragmenting, dissipating and democratising the religious impetus.

Story is central to the search for meaning in postmodernity analogous to the role that abstract thinking has played in modernity, even if the reports of the death of the ongoing presence of metanarratives has been exaggerated.\textsuperscript{271} Yes, we live in times with cultural pressures that erode and strip away the place of metanarratives, yet I am not arguing for the death of metanarratives. Our modern milieu does not so much deny metanarratives but rather brings scepticism to our experience of them. The burden of proof has shifted from those who would deny a metanarrative to those who would propose a metanarrative. It is this dialectic that I have in mind when this argument poses the question of how we make sense of our lived experience in a metanarrative vacuum.

\textsuperscript{268} ibid., p. 255.
\textsuperscript{269} ibid., p. 256.
\textsuperscript{270} Bouma, 1992b, pp. 4–5.
Any creation of a specialised system of purely religious communication runs the risk of making religion generally relevant in comparatively few circumstances. The concept of spirituality has emerged as a significant construct to form and inform not just the nonformal religious beliefs and practices of individuals and communities but potentially any lived experience that is invested with meaningful significance. There is a sense in which organised religion is inclined to assume a comprehensive mandate, yet the recent growth of spirituality in Australia is neither sponsored – nor encouraged – by traditional religious organisations such as the Christian church.

This dynamic of reflectivity provides the setting from which the role of spirituality now finds itself outworking. A study of practical theology in the context of this argument, then, is an exploration of the experiences of people – in particular, fathers present at the birth of their children – who in their lived experiences understand them utilising the language of spirituality. These birth experiences often are analogous to extreme sports or pursuits and as such can be likened to examples of hyper-reality. This usage may, or may not, engage with transcendent referents – but as case studies they involve examining life-shaping and meaning-making pivotal experiences. In this study of practical theology, the issue is not to prove what reality is but to describe the manner in which men utilise such lived experiences to shape and express their spirituality in a postmodern milieu.

3.1.6 The Conceiving of Spirituality

A review of the literature describing the role of spirituality is a precursor to presenting the definition of spirituality that I will use in this argument. I will confirm that spirituality is in vogue, and explain why it is important to study and understand this phenomenon.

It is important to acknowledge that the concept of spirituality has not been embraced without hesitation from some quarters. Wuthnow argues that democratisation has sponsored new forms of religious populism as a corrective to
institutional religion. Spirituality can be seen as no more than stressing the emotional and intuitive aspects of human nature in contrast to intellectual and analytical processes. James argues that the word spirituality has problematical overtones, suggesting inwards and private faith, almost something not to be taken seriously. This is not to deny critical voices but it is not the approach of this argument.

The antecedent usages of the word spirituality highlight that the concept has changed with its philosophical and social settings. Flew compares the contemporary use of spirituality with its historical origins, in which spiritual was understood as being synonymous with religious, which in Europe was equivalent to Christianity. Within the Christian tradition, it was a theological rather than an anthropological or sociological concept. Spirituality was metaphysical affirmation describing the divine access and presence in human and ecclesial identity and action. Since ceasing to believe in such a God in his teens, Flew consequently regards himself as having not had a spiritual life. The development that gave rise to modernism and its universalising approach to religion neither made redundant premodern views of spirituality nor blocked their carryover into modernism as an echo of past understandings. This notion of spirituality as a divine signifier did not end with modernism. Yes, there were differing models and emphases but I argue that its transcendent content was an approach that was shared in part, if not wholly, across the differing Christian traditions. There are still Christian expressions the users of which would be passionately averse to using the concept of spirituality in any other manner. I argue that, over time, this specific premodern understanding of spirituality has

been diluted within – if not lost from – society, predominately remaining in the domain of particular Christian traditions. Any researcher needs to comprehend this major shift in Western theology’s understanding of spirituality.²⁷⁸

1. It no longer is exclusively associated with one Christian or religious tradition.

2. It no longer prescribes dogmatic principles for life.

3. It no longer describes the perfect life but draws attention to what makes for human growth.

4. It no longer prescribes ethical behaviour or divides it between sacred and secular.

In recent times spirituality has developed into a broader universal code word for the search of direction at time of crisis.²⁷⁹ In secular society, it has become a cipher for the discovery and recovery of a lost dimension. Spirituality is not something apart or added on to life, but is rather something which permeates all human activities and experiences.²⁸⁰ Spirituality can be described as a process of transformation and growth, an organic and dynamic part of human development, of both individuals and society. It encapsulates the exploration of becoming human, attempting to grow in sensitivity to self, others, nonhuman creation, to God or nontheistic traditions. It can also describe the way in which a person understands and lives within their historical context, such as a father (or mother), and place this within the loftiest scope of religion, philosophy or ethics.

If I am to employ the concept of spirituality then the challenge is to situate the concept in our own milieu. There is a danger in remaining with a generic definition of spirituality as it denies the specific religious, historical and

²⁷⁷ Flew, p. 31.
²⁸⁰ ibid., pp. 5–6.
philosophical referents that condition how a person understands spiritual experience. For instance, in a Christian context it is informed by the view that anyone is capable of relationship with God and this is not lived out in isolation but in a community of believers. As Rose found, spirituality and religiosity are employed with considerable ambivalence and tolerance. Nonetheless, spirituality was almost unanimously thought to be about forms of religious experience. There appears to be an underlying accord concerning what might, and might not, be prerequisite for what is entailed in spirituality. What might not be a prerequisite is affiliation to a particular religion. What seem to be prerequisites are three criteria:

1. Some form of continued reverential experience of the numinous or the ultimate though spirituality does not have to be religious.

2. Some type of maintained effort regarding practice such as living by a particular convention.

3. A life imbued with love that is filled with altruistic activities and loving kindness.

Rose’s insights are relevant to this study because they indicate that religious types of experiences inform, but do not exhaust, the meaning of the concept of spirituality. However, it highlights the need for religious practitioners to reappraise both the role of spirituality and their response to those who evoke it in their pastoral practice.

The current desire for spirituality is a search for meaning and understanding of the self, which is not exhausted by scientific materialism, self-seeking individualism or hedonistic consumerism. Neither is it exhausted by religion

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282 ibid., p. 40.
284 ibid., p. 203.
285 ibid., p. 204.
286 Page, pp. 4–5.
which is waning, while spirituality is increasing, its prominence. Why do people identify themselves as spiritual but not religious? In part it is furthered by the new intensity of consumerism? It has culminated in the rise of a spirituality movement with a focus on individuals’ interior experiences often to the detriment of public life of work and politics. The religious is located in prescribed structured social processes, such as attending church, and is contrasted with the profane experiences such as vocation or family life. In contrast, spirituality is evoked from any experience of being alive.

People say that what we’re all seeking is a meaning for life. I don’t think that’s what we’re really seeking. I think that what we’re seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences of being alive on the purely physical plane will have resonance within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive.

The distinction between religious and profane is blurred. Spirituality refers to the experiential encounter and relationship with otherness, with powers, forces and being beyond everyday life. This is not to deny that religion refers to more socially organised and structured ways of being spiritual. The spiritual and religious dimensions of life are often shared and (re)created through the telling of, and listening to, simple stories. If one is to identify the role of spirituality this can be done by exploring those moments when a person feels most alive, such as being present at the birth of your children and the stories they tell of such lived experience.

Religion and spirituality both relate to dimensions of human life that intersect with, but point beyond the ordinary and the material. This ‘more than’ quality is often expressed as being the source of all

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292 ibid., p. 15
293 ibid., p. 26.
that, most powerful, ultimately important, extending in time from before to after the now, ultimate life force, centre of the universe. 294

Spirituality involves those experiences, things, ideas, actions and beliefs that give life meaning in the broadest sense. 295 This enables one to identify the sacred in the realm of either spirituality or religion. 296 When applied by groups of people to objects, places, times, ideas or practices, the ordinary is invested with the sacred.

The spiritual refers to an experiential journey of encounter and relationship with otherness – power, forces and beings beyond the scope of everyday life – whether located beyond, beside or within. To be spiritual is to be open to the ‘more than’ in life, to expect to encounter it and to nurture a relationship with it. 297

Bouma argues that spirituality is often undertaken alone and engages aspects of life external to the day-to-day engagement in tangible time and space. 298 He acknowledges that no human activity persists through time, even a very short time, without becoming socially organised. 299 Religion, for Bouma, refers to socially organised aspects of our spiritual life, which are expressed in culturally formed ways. 300 He acknowledges that religion has been used to include much of what we now refer to by the word spirituality and on this basis Bouma uses it to inform his descriptions of religion.

The term 'religion' is now used primarily to refer to social organisations such as churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, ashrams – denominations that enable and promote the practice of a particular form of spirituality and religious experience. The fact that, as social organisations, religions involve politics, power struggles, and problematic relations with power structures of society explains part of the ambivalence many feel towards religion,
preferring the seeming freedom, spontaneity and life of spirituality.\textsuperscript{301}

Religions have developed a diverse range of overlapping practices over time accompanied by social structures and hierarchies, which promote and sustain their distinctive form of spirituality.\textsuperscript{302} As organisations, they have relationship with the social landscape including other organisations and cultures within the society to which they belong. This organisational character is sometimes regarded as the source of interference with, and frustration of the essential purposes of a religion. Some, such as Drane, wonder whether the church in Western society is in a spiritual crisis or is even unspiritual because it has become irrelevant to personal meaning,\textsuperscript{303} and is seen as having been overtaken by, or stuck in, a modernist \textit{McDonaldization} of its religious communities overvaluing predictability, efficiency and control to the detriment of engaging with lived experience.\textsuperscript{304} A similar demarcation between the institutional practices and allegiances of the church and what is the daily experience of people is evident in Australian society.\textsuperscript{305} In contrast to spirituality which may be pursued an individual, religions are essentially social in character.\textsuperscript{306} While religions have established patterns, spirituality can be flexible – at least initially, until it is organised and socially developed whereupon it may take on a more religious character.

The contemporary usage of \textit{spirituality} as a term and what it entails is seen as an expression of postmodernity as a lifestyle rooted in the ideas of postmodernism. Unlike religion which prescribes beliefs and practices, spirituality in postmodernity enables choice and multiplicities of expression. Chatters describes this as the smorgasbord aspect of the contemporary

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\textsuperscript{301} ibid., p. 388. Religion in past epochs at best accommodated but commonly suppressed and repressed alternative spiritualities that sponsored alternative religious life. Religion in this sense is constructed out of people's spiritualities.
\textsuperscript{302} Bouma, 2003, p. 626.
\textsuperscript{303} Drane, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{304} ibid., p. 32.
\textsuperscript{305} Bouma, 1999, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{306} Bouma, 2003, p. 626.
\end{flushright}
spirituality syndrome.\textsuperscript{307} She argues that spiritualities are the result of postmodernity’s availability of other ways of being, including ethical and secular processes.\textsuperscript{308} Because spirituality is not to be identified or contained in religion, as the fact of its ready availability directs otherwise, it is a solvent of all that makes us invisible to one another, all that eradicates shadows.\textsuperscript{309} This regeneration comes through in a variety of modes such as music, art, nature and includes religious life.

Smith suggests that this unsympathetic reading of religion and the role of postmodern thinking has exaggerated its distance from spirituality.\textsuperscript{310} He contends that the notion that spirituality and religion can be isolated, analysed or defined is a Western construct with dualistic emphasis.\textsuperscript{311} He advocates Ken Wilbur’s holistic view where the primary elements of both religion and spirituality are their capacity to translate and transform.\textsuperscript{312} On the one hand, they translate feelings, thinking, and behaviour into meaning, providing legitimacy to one’s beliefs and worldview. On the other hand, they transform by actualising higher forms of consciousness, giving authenticity to one’s beliefs and worldview.

Spirituality has emerged as its own area of interdisciplinary study within practical theology to interpret, in order to make sense of, Christian lived experience.\textsuperscript{313} Exponents of the discipline understand that spirituality can express theology as well as be a critical discourse of theology.\textsuperscript{314} A study of spirituality, however, does not require a religious out working before it can be studied. A study of practical theology includes the study of phenomena prior to

\textsuperscript{308} ibid., pp. 20–21.
\textsuperscript{309} ibid., pp. 17–20.
\textsuperscript{311} ibid., p. 14.
\textsuperscript{312} ibid., pp. 15–16.
\textsuperscript{313} Schneiders, pp. 5–7. She asserts it now has its own discourse (ongoing conversations about a common interest), field (an open space where activities take place) and discipline (the teaching, learning, research and study). Lescher & Liebert, p. 35; Berling, pp. 35–52.
its religious galvanisation, if indeed that is the fully realised spectrum of its role. This study of spirituality is a study of experiences that possess a character of “more than” or “aliveness” that encapsulates the aforementioned notions of spirituality. It is within this context that the current attention being paid to the concept of spirituality is worth examining. Why, in vernacular use, is spirituality so much in vogue? What are we to make of it? Spiritualities seem to be more private, personal, subject to choice, not totalising, inclusive rather than exclusive, expressible in a wide diversity of ways, at different times and in different seasons. In what sense does the contemporary range of experiences provide a basis for locating expressions of spirituality? Therefore, if birth experiences are vehicles or opportunities for the participant’s spirituality to be formed and nourished then one may – in time – be able to identify social patterns that support them.

An essential aspect of this project is the conviction that in the roles of religious practitioners and the communities they represent, we are able to contribute practical theology in a manner that addresses the emerging role accorded to spirituality. This will necessarily impact on the process of training and developing religious practitioners as well as reshape the communities they represent.\textsuperscript{315} The theoretical way forward is to accept \textit{postmodern} as a provisional description of our present cultural circumstances whatever may be the social forces generating chaos and discontinuity confronting the pursuit of making meaning.\textsuperscript{316}

3.1.7 The Emergence of Spirituality in Contemporary Australia

The role of spirituality is shaped by changes in Australian society and culture.\textsuperscript{317} Compared with the nineteenth century, the religious nature of

\textsuperscript{314} Schneiders, p. 12. That is why she suggests spirituality belongs to religious or theological faculties rather than to the humanities.
\textsuperscript{315} Drane, pp. 12–13.
\textsuperscript{316} ibid., p. 22.
\textsuperscript{317} Bouma, 2000, p. 400.
Australia has evolved from clearly defined badges of tribal loyalty.\textsuperscript{318} Research in spirituality has focused on US populations\textsuperscript{319} with a Christian emphasis where it is prevalent in signposting beliefs and behaviour in contrast to Australia where it is not as dominant a concept.\textsuperscript{320} Bouma highlights the fact that, apart from what is commonly constructed as \textit{indigenous spiritualities}, most spirituality has been imported via immigration.\textsuperscript{321}

While Australia’s deep Aboriginal origins have been largely ignored, they remain present and active. While British in modern origin, Australian society is not British. While heavily overlaid with substantial European migration, it is not European. While deeply allied to the USA in foreign policy and subject to massive cultural injection from the USA, it is not American. While close to Asia, it is not Asian. On the other hand Australia is one of the most advanced multicultural societies and has seen itself as secular for decades. Australia can be seen as a postmodern, secular and multicultural society.\textsuperscript{322}

As such, Australia provides a context which is different from that of any of its forbears for the production of religious belief and practice, a different context for the enactment of spirituality. Dan articulates the emerging differentiation n between religion and spirituality.

\begin{quote}
Spiritually – yeah, it is important, not religiously, no. [672]
\end{quote}

Replacing the dialectic between secularism’s triumph and a conviction that religion will persist is a new reading of the relationship between society and religion. Bouma argues that the secular, postmodern and post-Christendom


\textsuperscript{319} Collins, pp. 9–10.


\textsuperscript{322} Bouma, 2006, p. 3.
society is currently not antireligious or irreligious as it was in the 20th century.\textsuperscript{323} The result is that Australian religion and spirituality currently express tentative curious exploration involving listening, attending, venturing with the whole person and being true to one’s person.\textsuperscript{324} The substantial majority of Australians continue to identify with religious groups, though this is less tied to formal organisations, allowing the pursuit of multiple religious identities and increasing interest in spirituality.\textsuperscript{325} Data indicate that two in three adults rate a desire for a spiritual life as very important or an important guide for their lives.\textsuperscript{326} The notion of a growing spiritual supermarket where people shop to suit their spiritual and religious needs may not be as advanced as it is in other realms of contemporary life such as cuisine.\textsuperscript{327} Does this confirm that Australians less readily inherit and embrace new belief systems than they do new commercial practices?

Tacey is ebullient in his conviction that Australia is more spiritual and religious than first impressions reveal and that a new diffuse form of spirituality, different from religiosity is emerging.\textsuperscript{328} He highlights that quintessential Australian factors are at work, such as Aboriginal spirituality of place, experience of nature and landscape, and concern about the environmental emergency. He notes a form of hagiography also is contributing, such as popular life history and story telling, biography and autobiography. In addition, other influences such as arts and literature, public interest in Eastern religions,

\textsuperscript{323} ibid., p. 1; Davie, pp. 166–170.
\textsuperscript{324} W.C. Roof, \textit{Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion}, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999, pp. 3–10. Similarly, Roof highlights how religious change has affected the United States in the post-war era. Polls indicating that 94% of people still believe in God, with 90% praying to God on a fairly regular basis, and 9 out 10 claiming religious affiliation and a greater proportion of regular religious attendance as compared with other Western countries, obscure the shifts occurring in the meaning of everyday religious life. The move is not a loss of faith but a more open, questing mood of engagement. The result is a reflective spirituality.

\textsuperscript{325} Bouma, 2006, p. 85.
\textsuperscript{327} Hughes, Black & Kaldor, pp. 16–17.
progressives in the churches, therapeutic and health professions, human
resources industry leadership, women’s spiritual movement, and a generalised
hunger for personal and cultural development are all contributing to the
spiritual reenchantment of Australian society. Tacey asserts that religion and
spirituality are going their separate ways. As Eckersley corroborates,
spirituality emerges when it has limited influence from religious institutional
agendas. Further, spirituality allows all to have faith – even those who do not
have the belief that religion requires. Despite doubts as to the extent of either
the stated demise of religion or his view that the metaphysical framework is the
primary reason for its decline, Tacey’s assertion that spirituality provides a new
growing and vibrant consciousness for engaging the sacred in Australian society
seems at least to resonate at a popular level. The emerging role of spirituality
is attributed to the democratisation of the religious impulse whereby the sacred
is found everywhere, not just in religious traditions. Tacey is optimistic as to
the value of studying spirituality as lived experience because its role is growing
ever stronger while religion as external precepts undergoes further retreat and
marginalisation. He regards spirituality as a panacea for many of the afflictions
of Western society such as depression, suicide and addiction.

In contrast to Tacey, Hugh Mackay is more circumspective of the alleged
growing spiritual and religious momentum arguing, rather, that Australia is at a
crossroads. One of the factors he identifies as contributing to a sense of
disappointment among Australians is something he calls the values gap about
issues common to living in Western societies – the gap between the values
Australians claim to espouse and the way they actually lead their lives.

332 Tacey, 2006, p. 4.
334 ibid., p. 3.
People will commonly say, ‘I want to simplify my life but it seems to becoming more complicated, I want to slow down but everything keeps speeding up, I believe I should spend more time with the people I love but I seem to spend less, I want my children to have a free and innocent childhood but childhood seems to be increasingly subject to stress, schedules and structures’.  

Australians are in a period of disengagement focusing on local, immediate and personal agendas with indications that they are becoming more self-centred, less compassionate and more concerned about things they can control. The implication of this disengagement is that as people focus more on personal agendas, they do indeed begin to feel more cheerful and optimistic. Corresponding to this is a renewed process of adaptation. Adaptation is not the same thing as acceptance, though it is hard to tell the difference. Part of this adaptation is increased willingness to explore and rediscover spiritual resources to cope with the values gap. This is different from the renewed voice of religious, social and cultural fundamentalist regulation, which wants to control not its own life but those of other people. Such people seek to impose control artificially. They rely on the modernist heritage, in which somehow government, family, religious bodies, welfare agencies, and other societal institutions are expected to exert social control as if it were the nineteenth century. The turn to spirituality may form part of this adaptation and what supports this view will be a question for the data.

Singleton, Mason and Webber interviewed young Australians in order to define the role of spirituality. Their research was focused on personal stories as the means of how they understand and shape their way of life. Researching with this approach they found that some used traditional forms while others used a smorgasbord approach – but actually categorising the various dimensions

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336 ibid., p. 8.
337 ibid., pp. 7–10.
was not an easy task. They confirmed that when young people involved themselves in the dominant religious tradition, Christian churches, spirituality referred to the personal dimension of faith. However, Webber confirms that young people have declining interest in traditional religious patterns. This trend is balanced by indications that young people have an increased interest in alternative forms of spirituality. Many young people are rejecting religions that are absolute and authoritarian but are still seeking a sense of belonging and a purpose in life. In the case of those connected with religious institutions, they will continue their commitments.

Singleton, Mason, and Webber argued that spirituality is more than practices, beliefs and experiences and includes a way of making sense of life that is grounded in some form of experience, including the transcendent, using narratives to elicit their understandings. They argue for neither an exhaustive nor an essential definition of spirituality, but for one that states what spirituality means in their research project. They define spirituality as a “conscious way of life based on a transcendent referent.”

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their values, practices and commitments. Therefore, spirituality will include a way of making sense of life that may be based on traditional or alternative forms of religion, or one that does not draw on one source but on an eclectic smorgasbord blend of traditional and secular resources.

Their quantitative and qualitative research reveals three main strands in spirituality among young Australians.

1. The role of traditional approaches sourced in the mainline world religious traditions is still a strong factor. It is primarily Christian (43%) but does include other expressions such Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism (6%).

2. The presence of nontraditional pathways is a significant minority drawn from among the occult, New Age or detached elements of Eastern spiritual practices (17%).

3. In contrast to those approaches, they describe a humanist view in which they affirm human experience and human reason (31%).

They concluded that spirituality in all its varieties was given a low priority. This is not to dismiss those within all three major strands who were concerned about the role of spirituality. This concurs with my argued view that spirituality can be overstated in its importance but that this does not discount the insights

345 ibid., p. 250.
“Transcendent means here a reality (in the subjective sense) which is beyond the individual, either in the sense of something supernatural/religious/other-worldly or in the sense of ethical ideal towards which a person strives to shape their conduct, even when this ideal has no explicit religious foundation. At its simplest, it may just be the endeavour to live a decent life or to emulate an admired person.”

346 ibid., p. 251. In addition, some possible meanings of spirituality which are not included:
- all human activity
- all relational consciousness
- aesthetic awareness in to narrow a focus
- mere opinions on religious issues without practical outworkings

The absence of views on spirituality where one might have expected their presence is worth describing.
- A consciously secular way of life which denies the spiritual
- A completely unreflective way of life
- A self-focused way of life

347 ibid., pp. 150–151.
its role provides into people’s lived experience or the impact it has on the reshaping of pastoral encounters by religious practitioners.

Whatever the ongoing ambivalence towards the religious and the new openness to the spiritual in Australia it is not necessarily linked to secularism as once may have been argued. Bouma argues that the secular nature of Australian society promotes a new impetus for religion and spirituality. Societies that embrace the secular open themselves to a wide range of possibilities including the religious and spiritual. Bouma concludes that postmodern secular societies like Australia are characterised not by irreligion and disbelief, but by a rise in spiritualities not controlled by religious organisation.

Following Fenn and others, I characterise a secular society as one in which the religious and spiritual have moved much out from the monopolistic control of religious organisations to become freely available in many forms, locations, times and fashions. Whereas in modernity religion and spirituality were controlled and dispensed by certain organisations – churches, synagogues, temples, mosques – now the spiritual is out there, freely available, and uncontrolled. In postmodernity the religious and spiritual hyper-differentiation now is appearing in a richer diversity of forms.

People construct and reconstruct religious/spiritual identities rather than maintain an identity with a particular religious organisation into which they had been born or converted. My argument thus far is that religious and spiritual construction now is markedly different in Australia from what it was for previous generations. Prior to offering a definition of spirituality for this study, the foregoing rehearsal of the emergence of spirituality in the Australian religious landscape highlights three themes in the religious marketplace most pertinent to this study.

348 Bouma, 2001, p. 2. Bouma argues that the Australian Census illustrates how fewer Australians are saying that they have no religion and more Australians are making responses that do not fit preexisting categories.
350 Bouma, 2001, p. 5.
1. There are indicators showing that many Australians are taking little, or no, interest in religion and are shedding religious identity. It was expected that some of the fathers in this study would reflect this view, though that is not to deny that they may have expressed religious-type experiences.

2. Many Australians are still attracted to the sense of certainty and strength of identity generated by adhering to one form of religious expression. Often this is understood as a form of protest or retreat from the growing diversification, fragmentation and pluralism in Australian society. It would be expected that some of the fathers in this study perceived ongoing religious affiliation as an important element of making sense of their experience.

3. A significant minority of Australians wish to explore the variety of religious and spiritual options available. The willingness to experiment and tailor one’s spiritual and religious needs to suit runs contrary to previous patterns of how the Churches, as representatives of the dominant religious tradition in Australia, constructed participation. The churches traditionally have required Australians to become members before allowing them to explore what they have to offer. This group of Australians rejects the notion of exclusive allegiance as the path to spiritual and religious fulfilment. It was anticipated that some fathers would reflect an exploratory approach to making sense of their experience.

In this study I sought to analyse the degree to which fathers in Australia are participating in navigating these spiritual and religious crossroads, or to discover whether, in fact, they remain indifferent to the emerging role of spirituality.

3.1.8 A Definition of Spirituality

My assumption in this study was that spirituality is currently a term much in vogue used to describe a range of experiences. The particular question is
whether or not fathers present at the birth of their children understand themselves to be involved in a spiritual experience. I utilised the fathers’ experiences to explore the contemporary role of spirituality.

Taking into account the postmodern background and its emerging role in Australian society it is important to define what was being examined as spirituality. By establishing a definition, critical assessment can occur as to how spirituality is being applied to patterns of meaning and purpose associated with pivotal experiences. For the purposes of this study, my working definition can be succinctly put in this form.

Spirituality describes religious-type experiences that occur in nonreligious settings, though not necessarily limited to those that function as transcendent referents, which enable individuals to further their lived experience.

This means that the study is not an exhaustive study of spirituality but one in which I sought to examine it outside religious settings. This is not to diminish my role as a priest researcher, for whatever insights were gathered will have application for the ongoing role of religious practitioners within their ecclesial practice. The category of spirituality does include the daily lived experiences of those with religious allegiance including appropriating beliefs about the divine, the process of transforming one’s life and the journey of self-transcendence. However, it currently identifies more than those with explicit religious practices but not necessarily so. I chose birth as a setting where spirituality is commonly understood as a life-sustaining phenomenon, experienced uniquely by each participant, occurring throughout a person’s life and which provides meaning for their life.352 When the data are critically presented it will be argued that the fathers’ stories represent case studies in the role of spirituality, whereby the birth experience can be read as a social mechanism and process which is utilised to supply meaning and purpose to further their lived experience. This is not to say that religious participation is not part of what may inform a father’s

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spirituality. Such a focus and the working definition I have presented acknowledge that some experiences are religious but are not invalidated in not finding a religious context. Moreover, religious-type experiences do not need to be an affirmation of religious inclinations. A person’s spirituality may not undergird their religious outworkings but instead may inform why any such religious outworkings are absent or muted. Furthermore, a person’s spirituality may, or may not, involve affirmation of transcendent referents. An avenue of inquiry that will be ongoing is to explain what role spirituality can play whether close to, or distanced from, religious settings.

Spirituality thus defined in this research will reverse the traditional trajectory of practical theology with ramifications for the pastoral practice of religious practitioners in their public and ecclesial roles. Instead of priority being given to ecclesial practice as a mode to be translated into the public sphere, the role of spirituality ensures that practical theology will require pastoral encounters in ecclesial settings to take account of pastoral encounters in nonreligious settings. Priority will also be given to pastoral encounters in nonecclesial settings so to recast and recalibrate pastoral practice.

Approached in this manner, spirituality is now a main focus of practical theology. Spirituality becomes a conduit between the traditional focus of pastoral and practical theology, between ecclesial practice and public theology. It contributes to pastoral encounters, whether in the public space or in ecclesial settings, as they meet human needs and support aspirations to elicit the divine horizon. As in this research I examined the practice of pastoral ministry in nonreligious contexts it will also provide social imperatives for pastoral encounters within ecclesial settings. To avoid these lessons is to risk disconnecting religious practitioners not only from the society to which they belong but also the religious bodies they seek to serve.

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3.2 Part Two: Theoretical Safeguards for Studying Fathers and Spirituality

In this part of this chapter I address key proximate issues related to the study of fathers. Feminist studies highlighting entrenched masculine patterns of alienation and marginalisation of women’s experiences have guided this study on the role, behaviours and attitudes of men in our society historically and in their current outworking. A review of the feminist literature that informs this argument will be presented. I will advocate a nonessentialist social reading of masculine identity as a basis for exploring the role of spirituality and a rehearsal of the relevant feminist literature on the role of spirituality will be offered.

In this study I have drawn on feminist approaches to qualitative research and I argue that these present an analogous pathway for exploring and describing masculine gendered experiences, and will provide a basis from which to draw out from the study of fathers’ experiences the significant social patterns that affect the role of spirituality. Nonetheless, these contributions were approached through the prism of a feminist research methodology, as this informed this study of fathers. I have developed a case for utilising feminist research methodology and applying it to masculine studies and argue that this feminist methodology can be applied in the study of fathers’ stories of birth experiences. I have drawn on the insights of feminist literature, which not only highlight the obstacles involved but also present a vision of what it would look like for men to deconstruct inherited social conventions of domination. This will permit me to provide descriptions of concrete, historical and particular experiences of men in categories defined by men for men, whereby a profile may emerge to give content to men’s experience and its out workings in spirituality. This is not to assert that men have the capacity to transcend such dominating patterns, but I argue that it does present a case in point, where this may be undergoing renegotiation and reorientation. Therefore this study has provided an opportunity to describe and analyse the renegotiation of masculine identity – though not without the constant vigilant awareness of corrective feminist literature. This protects any affirmation of masculine identity and its out workings in spirituality from being a covert reaffirmation of the gender division and its corresponding dominance of men over women.
I have not sought in this project to rehearse the full range of gender studies as they developed out of premodern societies into modernism and postmodernism. However, it is important for this thesis that I explain the approach I will take to masculine identity, as this will shape the viewpoint that is presented in the research by men’s lived experience as fathers present at the birth of their children.

3.2.1 Feminist Studies and their Influence on Masculine Identity

A study of practical theology requires a framework for interpreting masculine gender and its out workings as a basis for validating and explicating the experiences that the fathers describe. Piccone highlights, in her review of masculine literature, how burdensome and challenging research on the male gender is in comparison to the female gender Steinberg, Kruckman and Steinberg reiterate that research on men is less common in regard to their role as fathers. Graham highlights the difficulties of transcending androcentric views in the church and its pastoral practice.

I begun my own academic career by considering the difference gender makes to the practice of pastoral care. An examination of how the pastoral needs of women were represented in the pastoral-care literature of the twentieth century led me to conclude that much of the field was contaminated by sexism and clericalism.

Researchers conducting feminist studies have noted that the roles, behaviours and attitudes of men in our society, both historically and in their current outworking, are acknowledged as foundational imperatives. A male researcher who embarked on an exploration of spirituality among males present at the birth of their children would be open to the charge of being naive if his research were not first related to feminist thinking. Certainly, it would be

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inadequate research if the one conducting it did not expect to discern aspects of patriarchal and phallocentric patterns, even when seeking to isolate male experience, especially in an area such as birth stories. For instance, Ned (a participant in this research), despite his awareness of such issues, still felt that the birth neglected and compromised his value as a male.

One thing – this is an emotional thing – there is too little understanding on the impact of a father. There is a lot of focus on the mother. [1338–1339]

One using this argument is admitting that few aspects of the human condition are basic in the ontological or transhistorical sense. Premodern societies provided an essentialist basis for gender differentiation based on religious or physiological grounds. In contrast, modernism relies on notions of history, cultural specificity and variability, and the essentially conventional nature of social and political life in explaining gender issues. There is an ongoing paradox whereby the essentially conventional nature of sociopolitical arrangements and their representations of traditional patterns of gender differentiation continue, while new conventions – such as egalitarianism – fuel the emerging renegotiation of gender relations. Further, the received and emerging gender conventions can be read as essentially arbitrary.

One key feminist critique closely associates masculinity with the exploitative rape of nature, the manipulative and destructive aspects of analytical science and technology, and the militaristic megalomania of competitive political powers. Masculinity is associated with a falsely praised objectivity which masters and dominates, an instrumental attitude, a cold blooded, calculating rationality which artificially separates the different spheres of individual and global human experience. This view is consistent with the use of medical process which treats pregnancy as a problem that needs to be overcome. Instead of being the human norm for everything, this masculine ideal advocates a phallocentric view of gender and is a deformation of being human. Although men may not

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358 Di Stefano, pp. 63–64.
359 ibid., p. 64.
conform to this as individuals, the negative effects of this ideal shape and pervade our culture and human spirituality. This is not to say that to be male is to be exploitative, but to be male in our social settings is known to be exploitative.

Western feminism eventually was able to deconstruct the presumably fixed and universal association between femininity and reproduction. The concept of gender has made it possible for feminists to simultaneously explain and delegitimise the presumed homology between biology and social sex differences. Thus, the fixed and universal association between masculinity and reproduction as mutually exclusive can be renegotiated. The issue has now moved to identifying the salient differences that divide and distinguish men and women, which makes them part of some larger humanistic whole rather than defining the essential characteristic of gender differentiation. Just as Western feminism made possible the feminist identification and analysis of gender, so also masculine studies enabled the study of male identity not just as dominant conventions but as an explication of new patterns of gender differentiation. It is the contention of my argument that fathers’ recent phenomenon of being present at the birth of their children can be read as an example of this renegotiation.

This is neither to understate the fact or the extent of present gender differentiation nor to assert some unifying common androgyne or gynogeny. Social research on gender confirms that men and women in contemporary Western societies are differently constituted as modern human subjects in that they inhabit, experience and construct a sociopolitical world in different and often incommensurable ways. Heretofore suppressed feminine dimensions of public and private life were infused with phallocentric interests. That which has passed as gender neutral vocabulary of reason, morality, cognitive development, autonomy, justice, history, theory, progress and enlightenment is imbued with masculine meaning. A case in point is the medicalisation of the birth process under the categories of health and science. Western medicine has focused on the

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360 King, p. 31.
361 Di Stefano, pp. 64–67.
material dimensions rather than the holistic needs of a person such as encapsulated by the role of spirituality.  

Cross-cultural research on gender reveals that the foregoing patterns of domination and subsummation are nearly universal features of all human societies. On the other hand, the actual contents of gender definitions have an astonishingly wide-ranging cross-cultural variability and it is not always that difference translates into inequality. The good news is that these findings have helped destabilise domestic notions of difference that construct and impinge on the life chances of women and men. The bad news is that gender seems to be a stubbornly ubiquitous feature of culture, which is more of an obstacle to achieving parity between the sexes than many had previously imagined. Questions of how basic gender differences are find little respite.

I will argue that the foregoing framing does encompass the necessary breadth required to enable the fathers’ stories to be documented as a valid starting point for understanding the role and nature of masculine identity and, in particular, its outworking in spirituality. The fact that one gender is giving birth and another is the observer of this experience means that the current insolubility of the problem of gender differentiation is accepted for the purposes of this argument. However, this study is not an attempt to resolve either the nature or extent of gender differentiation. Such an approach is used to seek to describe and provide insights into the issues of masculine identity as these are self-described by men in the context of a newly emerged social convention, namely being present at the birth of their children.

For the starting point of this study I took it that gender differentiation inhabits the arenas of culture, social structure and subjectivity to produce a world that is simultaneously gender divided (masculine versus feminine) and gender dominated (masculine). Gender as a product of, and contributor to, modernist discourse is about conventional forms of meaning, practice and

363 Di Stefano, pp. 64–67.
representation and not at all about foundations, whether natural or
metaphysical. Modernism seeks to subsume women under universal and
dominant conventions, which often – it can be argued – are little more than
covert masculine conventions. Postmodernism has not necessarily been seen as
an antidote to the entrenching conventions of modernism.365 For the time being,
postmodernism is as entrenched in the dilemmas of difference as are the
modernist and antimodernist alternatives.366 It is not the view in this argument
that this is essentially so, but it would be naïve not to expect the presence of men
at birth to bring with it negative echoes of modern social conventions in regard to
gender difference, so that the birth ceases to be entirely about women and
becomes more about men. Therefore, affirming the experiences of fathers as a
legitimate – yet only a partial – description is a protective framework from
reading the stories in a male-domineering trajectory. Positively, the fathers’
stories can be read as encouraging gender patterns of mutual identification and
affirmation.367 By no means is this to be taken for granted, or the most likely
outcome, but it is one possible outcome. I do not want to overstate the degree of
renegotiation that may be recurring – but I do want to identify the extent to
which it is utilised in fathers’ view of spirituality.

Therefore, a nonessentialist understanding of gender is offered to validate
why men’s gendered experience should be taken as a basis for describing
spirituality. For instance, if it is essential for masculinity that men be the
providers for women, then fathers’ experience while present at the birth of their
children needs to be correlated to this foundational masculine characteristic.
The task in such an approach is to describe and explain the extent to which
men’s experience mirrored, or differed from, this fundamental masculine quality.
In contrast, I argue in this study that it is a different matter to describe how
men’s experience shapes and informs received traditions – including being a

364 ibid., pp. 64–67.
365 ibid., pp. 75–78
366 ibid., pp. 75–78.
367 I.M. Young, “The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference”, in Nicholson, L.J.
provider with current experiences that qualify and redefine masculine identity, such as contexts wherein women are the providers.

Indeed, I argue that this emerging pattern of fathers being present at the birth of their children presents experiences of engagement that are embryonic attempts to renegotiate previous gender polarities. This is not to deny that, in this social context, there will be ongoing echoes of previously entrenched gender divisions and gender-dominated (masculine) patterns. Patently, I would expect these to be ongoing expressions. However, my purpose in this study is to present the emerging new social convention as a renegotiation consistent with other renegotiations infused by postmodernity, rather than to argue how previous discussions of gender division and domination apply to this new circumstance. The role of spirituality in this gender renegotiation is an important new social resource which is available to describe pivotal, or life-shaping experiences.

3.2.2 Feminist Studies and the Role of Spirituality

The focus of this study is the role of spirituality for men. The literature on female spirituality perspectives is abundant, but research in male spirituality has been limited in both quantity and scope. As has already been shown earlier in this chapter, I believe not only that feminist insights can provide analogous insights for masculine studies but that it is important that any such study should begin with these insights as this will minimise the projection of previous gender divisions and domination whether fuelled by premodern essentialism, modernity’s gendered conventions or postmodernity’s celebration of

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difference.  Many of the fathers, such as Bart, corroborated the view that men are somehow duller in expressing religion and spirituality.

Yes, men in general do because a lot of men – not all men – have difficulty expressing emotion on any level, and so certainly translating that to spirituality is even... harder. [1445–1447]

Therefore, it will be important in the argument to rehearse some of the relevant feminist literature on the role of spirituality as a factor in gender differentiation.

Some research suggests that women are more religious and spiritual than men. Religious identification and the practice of religion and spirituality are different. Women are more likely to attend church, read the Scriptures, pray, consider religion important as a source for responding to today’s problems, and believe in the afterlife. Why is this? Are women more submissive, passive and nurturing than men? Is it natural or learned behaviour? Which comes first: religiosity or feminine nurturing? Some suggest that this is based in the gender division of labour between the household and workplace, though some of this research is inconclusive. There has been a decline of women’s religiosity which may be explained by their disillusionment with male-dominated mainstream religions. This gender religious phenomenon is sometimes

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Bem, pp. 80–81. Gender polarisation describes the manner in which social life is organised around the male-female distinction over and above biological essentialism and androcentrism. It does so by defining the scripts for being male and female and any divergence is regarded as problematical.


Renzetti & Curran, pp. 308–311. It is interesting that some research indicates that men who exhibit similar nurturing traits are more likely to be religious.
attributed to the observation that female fertility religions have been supplanted by patriarchal images of God in some religions.\textsuperscript{372}

Fertility is the one undisputed power that has always been acknowledged of females in the arts and religion.\textsuperscript{373} However, by the late twentieth century, fertility – with the impact of overpopulation and birth control – has lost its primacy and has ceased to be an irrefutable human value. In addition, the place of men has changed in the face of technological advance and the resultant disenfranchisement of men from their traditional social roles.

Again, it is important in drawing on feminist literature not to assume that men will indeed utilise their experience to renegotiate or refashion the role of spirituality. As Conn has argued, religion has been masculinised and therefore has suppressed women’s spirituality conforming it into a passive role.\textsuperscript{374} She advocates that any response needs to be concrete, historical, and particular, and to work with categories defined by women for women. In this study, insofar as I am aware of masculine dominating social narratives, I will apply this approach to men’s experience whereby men are allowed to describe concrete, historical and particular experiences in categories defined by men for men, whereby a profile may emerge to give content to men’s experience and its out workings in spirituality. It will not be assumed that the fathers, by definition, can transcend masculine identity in its modern form as fundamentally dominating – especially


1. The most conservative and reactionary see feminist women and the abandonment of traditional gender roles as the central problem.
2. The mythic-poetic sees the core problem as being the loss of archetypal masculinity which men once possessed but modern culture seldom affirms.
3. Men’s liberationists begin with the feminist examination of males and build from there.

Therefore it would be proper to expect that these three approaches would emerge in the fathers’ birth stories. Some men may be present to reaffirm the traditional role of women as nurturers, or they may be lost in a masculine void, just as some may be attempting to reconstruct their male identity in response to the views of the women in their life. More so, one would anticipate – as was the case in a combination of the above responses – if the threefold schema carries any weight.

\textsuperscript{373} Spretnak, pp. 115–116. Spretnak employs the anthropological study by Peggy Reeves Sanday (\textit{Female Power and Male Dominance: On Origins of Sexual Inequality}, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981) to compare and contrast the difference in religious and gender issues.

through its outworking in capitalism – but neither does this preclude describing aspects of the birth process, which allow males and females to renegotiate inherited social conventions on gender differentiation as expressed via notions of spirituality. As Culbertson has argued, the aim is to unite men with other groups of people who feel powerless, in order to challenge the exploitation of masculine hegemony, and encourage them – whether they are willing to engage feminist thinking or not – to address their own deficiencies.\textsuperscript{375} If men can break free from such inherited social conventions then feminist literature provides the litmus test as to whether or not these self-descriptions are more than covert reaffirmations of dominance in a changing postmodern milieu. In so doing, feminist literature describes how it might look for men to deconstruct inherited social conventions of domination.

\subsection{Masculine Studies and the Role of Spirituality}

There have been masculine studies on the role of spirituality, but I argue that some of these have – and indeed properly so – been a reaction to feminist studies.\textsuperscript{376} Twenty years ago studies on the relationship between gender and religion were scarce, and what studies there were tended to focus on women.\textsuperscript{377} In the previous section, I argued that it is in attending to the particular embodiment of masculinity that a basis for the resultant role of spirituality can be presented.\textsuperscript{378} It will be shown that there is a growing literature on

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{375} Culbertson, 2002, p. 226.
\item \textsuperscript{377} S.B. Boyd, W.M. Longwood & M.W. Muesse (Eds.), \textit{Redeeming Men: Religion and Masculinities}, Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 1996, pp. xiii–xv. They argue that in an approach to masculinity one needs to comprehend that there is a diversity of masculinities. There are not only competing but also overlapping viewpoints.
\item \textsuperscript{378} Connell, p. 64.
\end{itemize}
masculinity and many of the authors have addressed the role of spirituality, presenting the full spectrum of possibilities.\textsuperscript{379}

The initial men’s movements were understated in the role they gave spirituality in part because it was nascent in its use. The first modern Western men’s movements were intended as counterparts to women’s consciousness-raising groups, where men were encouraged to listen to women rather than to dominate them, explore the political underpinning of their marriages and relationships, and to explore the link between machismo and violence. A reaction against such feminisation of the male identity emerged encouraging a return to traditional hunter and warrior inclinations.\textsuperscript{380} Religious approaches, such as Promise Keepers, have also emerged. This is a response to men’s failures to fulfil their roles as husbands, fathers and moral leaders, which have led to the breakdown of family values and society.\textsuperscript{381} Promise Keepers blame the societal changes following the Industrial Revolution, when men were separated from their families and isolated in offices and factories, for these failures. With men out of the picture, women became the primary providers of moral and spiritual leadership in the home and the driving force in churches.

Clearly, those who would affirm spirituality often have a strong religious approach reflecting traditional understandings of its role. This is not to suggest that those who do so are unaware of the gender issues or parallel emerging use of spirituality or what it represents. For instance, Balswick, writing from a Christian viewpoint, argues that there are not two different social standards of spirituality, one for males and one for females.\textsuperscript{382} He argues that there is a difference in their spiritualities.\textsuperscript{383} Women experience spirituality in close and harmonious relationships with God and others. Their spirituality is gauged on

\textsuperscript{379} Thompson Jr & Remmes, pp. 521–533.
\textsuperscript{381} ibid., p. 39. It is too easy to vilify this phenomenon without appreciating that its construction and socio-political agenda are foreign to Australian society.
\textsuperscript{382} Balswick, 1992, p. 120. He has sought to measure inexpressiveness and how it relates to male identity. J. Balswick, \textit{The Inexpressive Male}, Massachusetts, Lexington Books, 1988, pp. 99–100. He has sought to measure inexpressiveness and how it relates to male identity.
\textsuperscript{383} ibid., pp. 124–129.
the basis of being in relationship rather than in terms of doing, expressed in the
spiritual disciplines of meditation and devotion, and active fellowship with
others, particularly women. He argues that men’s spirituality is experienced in
holding to, and acting upon, right values and beliefs. Men gauge their
spirituality on the basis of understanding and knowledge, accomplishments and
activities. He argues that traditional expectations of men denied expression of
those feelings of love, tenderness, sorrow, grief or hurt. Inexpressiveness is a
stereotypical male characteristic. This inexpressiveness contributes to men’s
poorer overall health and causes them to resort to violent forms of
communication. Some men believe that they have no feelings to express –
though most men are verbally inexpressive because they believe it is the way
men should be. Theoretical explanations for this inexpressiveness rest upon role
expectations, lack of reward and even punishment for male expressiveness,
males’ relationship to power, complementary reaction to female over
expressiveness, homophobia, evolutionary different roles and responsibilities,
genetic differences, and so on.

On the one hand, an argument is made that men’s lives are constructed to
minimise the possibility of spiritual experience. For instance, Culbertson
proposes twelve stumbling blocks that inhibit the development of a healthy
spirituality in men within the Christian tradition. Dittes suggests the usual
assumption of some literature is that there is something wrong with men.
Men are – and should not be – controlling and dominating, preoccupied with
performance and competition, over intellectualising and under feeling, defensive
and withholding, workaholic, narcissistic, disconnected. Men should be – and
are not – expressive of feelings, sensitive, vulnerable, caring about relationships,
wanting to make commitments, willing to stop and ask for directions. As for
spirituality or religion, the usual verdict is that men lack it and should acquire
it. Ray provides an example of this viewpoint.

385 Balswick, 1992, pp. 69–70.
388 Dittes, pp. vii–ix.
I would perceive spirituality or religion, it is a very personal experience. Men are less inclined to put that sort of information out and feel more exposed in doing so. [809–811]

On the other hand, an argument is made that men are fundamentally religious and spiritual and it is a matter of accepting it. For instance, Dittes argues that men’s lives are not the object of reform but are re-deemed, to deem men’s lives – as they are – to be significant, authentic, noble, sensitively and constructively responsive to the ebbs and flows of human destiny.389

In a word, men are deemed here to be religious. To be masculine is to be spiritual. The typical man, the typical male behaviour, expresses a profoundly and robustly religious attitude. Whether or not he thinks of himself as religious, whether or not he wants to think of himself as religious, however he spends his Friday evenings or Sunday mornings, the typical man, this book proposes, is religious in the plainest and most elementary sense of the word. He intuits and trusts that life has a meaning and destiny that lies beyond, elusively but reliably, its presently visible boundaries.390

Men are not victims of a testosterone overdose, moral defectiveness, abusers of others, afflicted with fragile egos that compel belligerence.391 Such diagnosis may be accurate of individual men or even all men on occasions, but – like dismissing the prophet or saint for his neuroses – this is to miss the main point. The religious motif best gives meaning to what can otherwise be described as aloofness and withholding, relentless drivenness, impatience, anger, depression and the stubborn refusal to stop and ask for directions. In describing experiences that men have which include the latent possibility of renegotiating masculine identity it is fair, then, to expect that they will have religious content and that any such renegotiations are more likely to be expressed under the heading of spirituality than religion. This accords with my definition of spirituality whereby religious-type experiences – whatever negative baggage concerning the content of masculinity they may carry – can occur in nonreligious settings, enabling men to further their lived experience, including such baggage

389 ibid., pp. vii–ix.
390 ibid., p. ix.
391 ibid., p. ix.
inculcated in the received religious frameworks but which now are being renegotiated under the banner of spirituality.

In this review I have provided examples of both a growing literature on the masculinity of, and at the same increasing attention to, the role of spirituality. It is my the conviction in this argument that it is possible to draw out a role of spirituality that does not merely rehearse previous patterns of gender differentiation while understanding that there is a level of gender division. This gives spirituality a role by which a man – intellectually, emotionally, and physically – relates to that which is ultimately real and worthwhile for him.

3.2.4 Studies on the Role of Fathers in the Birth Process

In the premodern period, birth was an exclusively female experience. During the modern era and the development of the medical model, it has been primarily a scientific experience. I argue that in postmodernity birth is no longer a production line but a consumer experience increasingly made available to men. Steinberg, Kruckman and Steinberg in their transnational study argue that men’s roles in the family are changing and that the experience of being present at the birth of their children is part of that process. The opportunity to conduct such research is furthered by the vast increase in the number of men actually attending births. For instance, Russell notes that in 1962 a survey indicated only 0.7% of men attended births whereas currently it is at least 93% with those who are absent almost exclusively men not in a close relationship with the baby’s mother – only fathers who have no contact the prime exceptions – and rare for a father to intentionally avoid attending.

Johnson notes that the attendance of male partners during the birth process is a relatively modern phenomenon. Indeed, until the sixteenth century men

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392 Nelson, pp. 8–9.
393 ibid., p. 21.
394 Steinberg, Kruckman & Steinberg, pp. 1266–1267.
397 Johnson, pp. 165–166.
were actually forbidden by custom and law to observe the delivery process in England. Labour was viewed as something to be endured by women under the control of other experienced women, with men almost totally excluded. During the 1970s it became fashionable for men to attend the birth. It started out as a movement among middle class couples and now has permeated downwards as the rule rather than the exception. The issue of whether or not husbands are present at the birth is increasingly linked to whether or not their wives want them there. In some cases the women warm to the idea over the length of the pregnancy. Clearly, women initially found it easier than men to see the advantages of the father's presence at the birth. Even men who had thought that they would leave have stayed as the drama unfolded. Of the 74% of fathers who eventually stayed for the delivery, in every case they were pleased to have done so – but most agreed that it was much more of an experience than they had anticipated. Many men who had suggested that they would leave when the blood and gore began in earnest, actually were caught up in the moment and found themselves at the action end of the bed. Rhett (a participant in this study) encapsulated how the moment created a courage to engage with the full messiness of the birth process.

Funny – I was thinking of being down the front end, but I ended up being down the birth end. [3030–3031]

Feminist research has provided the original template for studies on birth stories. Oakley's pioneering qualitative research in the stories of women and their birth provides a necessary starting point for accessing the stories of fathers. As she asked the mothers to describe their experiences in their own words, so also here in this research the opportunity was given to fathers to describe, in

398 S. Johansen, “Before the Waiting Room: Northern Middle-Class Men, Pregnancy and Birth in Antebellum America”, *Gender & History*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1995, pp. 183–200. There is historical evidence that the male and female spheres were not always clearly separated in traditional societies. Johansen illustrates that there was male involvement in pregnancy and birth during the nineteenth century. While historically pregnancy was considered strictly the female's domain, the correspondence and diaries suggest that in the nineteenth century, men became more involved in the private sphere of pregnancy and birth. This increased role is illustrated by the men's discussions of birth control, family size, and their presence in the birthing room.

their own words, the meaning of the experience. Further, Oakley in her research includes references to males’ experiences and the impact these are perceived to have had on them.\(^{400}\) Her study in mothers’ experiences parallels many of the responses that the fathers gave in this research.\(^{401}\) She also included mothers’ thoughts and reactions to the presence of fathers at birth.\(^{402}\) Clearly, the mothers understood that birth is an extraordinary event not just for themselves but for the fathers as well. Her analysis is clear in highlighting how difficult it is to escape feminist issues in any effort to access male stories of spirituality that arise from being present at the birth of their children. It takes two to make a baby, after which fathers are – biologically speaking – unnecessary.\(^{403}\) For Oakley the problem for men is how to share in the experience, for the seed that started the process is lost inside a foreign body.\(^{404}\) She argues that the moment is not sustained, time becomes tidy again and routines restrain the father. He has become a parent – but in everyday terms, this has so much less meaning for

\(^{400}\) ibid., p. 1.
\(^{401}\) ibid., p. 95.
\(^{402}\) ibid., pp. 200–201. The following quotations indicate the range of responses from mothers as to the presence of fathers at the birth.

Juliet Morley, 28-year-old Rebat e Officer, comments on her husband’s desire to be present at the birth.

“That was one thing that I particularly noticed... whether the husband should be at the birth. This chap had been at his wife’s birth (sic) and he was saying how wonderful it was to be there when this new thing came into the world. Well, I found that almost discordant because I think it’s here already. I don’t think of it starting when it’s born.”

Nina Brady, 28-year-old shop assistant, notes her husband’s spiritual response to the new responsibility.

“He’s worried, he goes down here on his knees every night praying. Now you might think he’s some kind of fanatic, he’s not. He’s worried that something might happen to me or the baby – that it might not be normal or something... He talks about it: he says everything will be all right with God’s help and praying...”

Nicola Bell, 24-year-old contract supervisor, noted her husband’s first reaction was, “You’ll have to have another one!”

“I think the emotional side rather than the physical side... but I thought the blood and stuff would put me off... I suppose I just felt emotional at the time. It was like seeing a good film: you want to see it again.”

Lily Mitchell, 29-year-old civil servant, commenting on her husband.

“He just can’t get over the experience. He said, “You just felt so much closer to the baby.”... I said to him, “How do you feel about being there?” and he said, “Oh it was great!” He said it was one of the most fantastic experiences he has ever had in his life. He says that it was just something you couldn’t find words for. He said you just had to be there to understand.”

\(^{403}\) ibid., p. 198.
\(^{404}\) ibid., p. 198.
him than it has for his wife, the course of whose life is altered forever.\textsuperscript{405} Even if this study does not replicate such findings, Oakley’s feminist insights provide a counterbalance to ensure that the male interpretation is not the last unquestioned word. Nonetheless, the purpose of this research is to provide a context within which to draw from their narratives a distinctly male understanding of the birth experience.

Seel highlights that since 1945 the number of women wanting their husbands to be present at the birth increased more rapidly than the number of men who actually attended.\textsuperscript{406} The momentum has clearly come from women rather than being imposed by men – which is another factor that minimises the risk of a masculine methodology disembodying the stories. This suggests that men followed women into the delivery room, at their behest. I would argue that this might also indicate medical reluctance to encourage male participation and potential interference. This trend is paralleled in the moving of birth from the home to the hospital, from an environment women controlled to a foreign one.

Lewis notes that in 1960, 60% of Nottingham births were in the home and men attended 13% of these.\textsuperscript{407} In 1980 only 2% of births were in the home and 84% of men attended their wives’ labour.

Why did this draw in the involvement of men and not women companions as is traditional?\textsuperscript{408} For Seel, this reflects the changing dislocated patterns of family life that have emerged. Initially men’s role was as husband, not father, there to coach, guide and manage his wife’s labour. Studies affirmed the supporting, coaching role whereby women with husbands present reported less pain and needing less medication. Men’s and women’s accounts of the procedures during labour suggest that the father becomes part of the medical team.\textsuperscript{409} Men seem to find the birth disturbing, even traumatic, but are unlikely to admit to such feelings. Unless there is medical complication, the vast majority

\begin{footnotes}
\item[406] Seel, pp. 49–50.
\item[407] Lewis, p. 61.
\item[408] Seel, p. 52.
\item[409] Lewis, pp. 64–71.
\end{footnotes}
of men recall the event in glowing terms. Birth is a symbolic climax of shared pregnancy and bonds the marriage.

Stories about birth experiences can be seen as providing an understanding of our bodies and their relation to gender differentiation. Nettleton and Watson argue that the focus on the body in their work is the concern for how people experience their bodies and, in particular, how they articulate their experiences. At childbirth, there are both feminine and masculine experiences and stories of embodiment which can be articulated. Childbirth stories are more than the story of what happens to the woman’s or child’s body.

There is growing change of role from husband to father present at the birth. Fewer men are willing or able to act only as labour companions. She is becoming a mother but he is becoming a father. Men increasingly express the view that the emotional experience is what counts. There has been a move from being there for their wives to being there for themselves. For Seel, one way of understanding the presence of men at birth is that it is ritual declaration of paternity. It was not until the hospitalisation of the birth process that women perceived that medical treatments, interventions and procedures were carried out without their full knowledge and consent. Men relate the three main motivations for birth attendance as supporting their partner, curiosity and cultural pressure. Men initially feel confident in fulfilling this support role but often find it more arduous than anticipated and become fearful of the outcome. Many men find the experience to be anxiety provoking, especially witnessing their partner in pain, which can compromise their ability to offer support.

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411 ibid., p. 8.
412 Seel, pp. 57–61.
413 ibid., p. 72.
414 Odent, pp. 104–108.
prenatal expectations of their role compared with their perceptions as fathers after the birth. The need to support their partner may be the first time they have had this sort of emotional and physical responsibility. Further, the male is supporting the very person on whom he himself relies for support in other stressful situations. Claims that men’s attendance improves women’s labour, the health of mother and child, and the marital relationship have been made on the basis of relatively little systematic or conclusive evidence. There is a growing body of evidence that females appreciate the presence of their partners, and consider that such attendance is support enough despite men’s deficiencies in dealing with the situation.

There are a small number of relatively recent studies which have been concerned with men’s own experience. There is some research on the difference that having a child makes to what you value and appreciate. For instance, Quinn notes how the birth of his child changed his perception of Christmas, with the result that as a former agnostic Catholic he found that he was less offended by the clichés, commercialism and festivities associated with Christmas than prior to the birth of his child. For instance, Heath has demonstrated that fathers outranked nonfathers in measures of maturity, mental and physical health, competency, personal, interpersonal, and vocational adjustment. For Johnson there are relatively few comparable instances of such dramatic role changes in modern society, occurring with little apparent negotiation with the relevant role partners.

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423 Chandler & Field, pp 17–24; Steinberg, Kruckman & Steinberg, pp. 10–17.
425 Heath, pp 265–278.
426 Johnson, p. 168.
Almost total exclusion has been replaced by almost total inclusion for the male partners, while female family members have suffered the reverse situation. The understanding of birth as a purely female and domestic ‘setting’ has given way to an understanding of childbirth as further sanctification of the marital relationship in a technical institutional setting, and from a risky and frequently distressing event to one that is anticipated to be relatively safe and rewarding.427

Johnson contacted fifty-three males within one week after they had attended a normal birth.428 A thematic phenomenological analysis was used focusing on the way in which men sought to give meaning to this experience and expectations relating to their own role in the labour ward. The reaction to the birth is often recorded as “Very emotional”.429 The overwhelming memory from the birth was frequently reported as the pain endured by their partner, cutting the umbilical cord or the baby’s physical appearance.

Men were asked why they thought they were present.430 The two main responses were support (29 – 70.7%) and bonding (7 – 17.2%), while the rest did not know why they were present. Over half of the men (24 – 54%) stated that they felt pressure to be present at the birth.431 Men do seem to be unprepared for the role, with the midwife not actually seen as the best person to prepare them.432 Most research in the presence of men at birth relates to the effect on the mother and child.433 This research indicates that in terms of male role expectation there are considerable ambivalence and confusion on the part of some men toward the whole experience. This is due to the lack of clear tasks for them, with the midwife playing a key role in setting the parameters. Although the fathers expected to be central to the support of their partner, this was not the common experience – especially in responding to any pain experienced by the

427 ibid., p. 168.
428 ibid., p. 168.
429 ibid., pp. 170–173.
430 ibid., pp. 173–175.
431 ibid., pp. 175–176.
432 ibid., pp. 176–177.
433 ibid., pp. 177–180.
mother. Towards the end of the labour, the father’s focus shifted from the mother to the baby.

Another matter that will minimise the risk of a masculine methodology disembodying the stories will be the gender view of the pain involved. Gillian and Williams draw on the insight that culture shapes not only the meanings and interpretation we attribute to pain, but also the responses to it which we fashion. Not all social or cultural groups respond to pain in the same way. Their cultural background can largely influence how people perceive and respond to pain. For instance, how and whether people communicate their pain to health professionals can be influenced by cultural factors. The study of pain and gender is a neglected example of study of the embodiment of gender experience. Accounting for gender differences in morbidity and mortality involves more than biological differences, including theories involving sex roles and the cultural socialisation of males and females as possible explanations.

In their qualitative study, Gillian and Williams sought to discern not why women are able to cope better than men with pain, but also why people hold these views and the explanations they use to support them. Childbirth is regarded as the worst possible pain. Both men and women expressed the notion that the combination of female biology and reproductive role served to equip females with a natural capacity to endure pain.

In contrast to these biological capacities of females were the socialisation deficiencies that males experienced in their upbringing which actively discouraged acknowledgment of pain. The result was that the stoicism encouraged in men portrays pain as abnormal and outside their expectations – the net result being that they are less able to deal with it. Pain tends to make male bodies dys-appear in contrast to females’ natural expectations.

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435 ibid., pp. 204–206.
People in pain need to find meaning and legitimacy for their symptoms. Pain is more than a psychological symptom. It is an experience culturally shaped by the individual’s worldview, requiring an approach which encapsulates its physical and emotional, biological and cultural – even spiritual and existential – dimensions. Issues of gender mesh closely with these arguments. Whilst findings from experimental research indicate that women have lower pain thresholds, the results from Gillian and Williams suggest a very different picture. Female socialisation encourages caring for others and the development of imagination and empathy for human pain, suffering and distress. In addition, women’s ontological security and sense of identity may be less threatened by admission of being in pain, whereas for men the psychological structure of masculinity is predisposed to inhibit the admission of vulnerability. The attribution of differential capacities for experiencing, understanding and responding to pain is primarily linked to gender differentiated processes of socialisation and emotion management. In other words, this – in turn – draws attention to the various ways in which embodiment may be different for males and females.

Burgess highlights the recent change of circumstances by which fathers are able to see the living image of their children on a television screen within a few weeks of conception. She argues that such advances are fundamentally altering their experience of pregnancy and drawing them into that previously exclusive female miracle long before they decide to – or not to – enter the labour ward. This is not to suggest that the experiences of pregnancy and birth are the same for women and men. What is emerging is that they are not as different as once was thought. The nature of fathering is not fixed and inevitable but characterised by flexibility and adaptation. As Alan, a father of two and a participant in this study describes:

440 ibid., p. 101.
When you actually see this physical child being born it’s just an amazing experience, and it changes your life for ever. I remember seeing a tuft of hair, the first thing I ever saw of him, and then quickly he followed out.

Russell found that those fathers who were most participative in care giving were more likely to have attended prenatal classes and the birth of their children. Whether this indicates a causal link between attending the birth and participation may be debated, but there is at least a positive relationship.

Yogman, Cooley and Kindlon review the literature about the developing relationship of a father with his offspring. They argue that the evidence demonstrates the diversity of the father – infant relationship across species and cultures. Studies have established that pregnancy represents a normative psychological crisis for women, and some indicate that this is an important psychological event for men as well, in that they are likely to rework significant relationships and events from their early life. In other studies, it was shown that as many as 65% of men complained of similar physical symptoms to those of pregnant women. The similarity of emotional responses persists during the perinatal period. Fathers’ descriptions of their feelings after having witnessed their child’s birth were almost identical to those of mothers: extreme elation, relief that the baby was healthy, feelings of pride and increased self-esteem, and feelings of closeness when the babies opened their eyes. As well, men share the lows or postpartum blues. Just as early contact with newborns influence maternal bonding, so with paternal bonding.

For Siedler, feminism has challenged men to develop more involved and personal relationships with their children. This, in part, is due to a perceived decline in maternal nurturance and professionalisation of motherhood arising from the prevalence of childcare services. Women were disempowered and

441 Russell, pp. 72–73.
443 ibid., p. 55.
dispossessed of their own insight and understanding as they were encouraged to rely on experts who knew best. For instance, birth was no longer a natural event but a technological event in which a woman’s body was seen as interference in the medical problem of getting the baby out, and breast-feeding was discouraged for a period. By the 1980s women refused to accept the passivity that medicine had imposed and insisted on active birth. As a result, birth became an experience within a relationship in which men were learning to participate, rather than a medical event from which they were excluded as passive observers. Attendance at birth has been a powerful experience for men.

It is only in the last ten years that efforts to relate men’s experience to their understanding of spirituality and religion have been made and ceased to be a novelty. This is not to say that there is no precedent for theological reflection – as O’Neal described in 1979.

Seeing one’s child come alive qualifies as a sacred/human encounter meriting theological reflection. 445

For instance, Rabinowitz and Cochran446 were regarded as adventurous in 1994 when they included a chapter on men’s spirituality when their book was reviewed in 1996.447 Since then research in men’s studies has commonly included reference to male spirituality. Studies on the impact on relationships of men involved in spirituality groups are emerging.448 There is a need for further research into males and the role they give to spirituality. In this study I have sought to further this task.

445 O’Neal, p. 211. He describes three insights that emerged from the experience.
   1. Immortality through Self-Extension: He describes the realisation that his individuality now included both the mother and the newly born child.
   2. Intimacy as “Being-With”: Sharing the birth experience especially as his wife bore the pain and effort, heightened the intimacy with his wife as co-creators.
   3. Grace and Responsibility: Concern for the health of his child whereby her arrival moved him beyond relief to a profound sense of thankfulness for an undeserved gift, a profound sense of grace, a gift to treasure but to share.


Chapter Four: The Fathers’ Stories Presented and Analysed

In this chapter I describe and analyse the stories of the fathers under three distinct headings. As argued in Chapter Three, the redrawn boundary between spirituality and religion has enabled the location of the sacred in ideas of personal spirituality as opposed to organised religion.\(^{449}\) To this end, only one father identified the experience as religious.\(^{450}\) The argument in this chapter is that there are significant commonalities in the understanding of the respondents concerning the nature of spirituality and the questions this poses as to what it tells us about Australian society. I will provide a rationale for this pattern and posit some inferences as to the role of spirituality in Australian society. A generic profile of the common issues and responses will be developed. This is not to say that all fathers experienced every aspect or that they experienced them as being equally important. Rather, the aim is to present a profile that will enable me to ask why these features are present and what they tell us about society.

A key explanatory concept, self-authenticating ritual, will be presented through which I will analyse the role of spirituality and argue that this is a characteristic expression of the postmodern milieu. In the first part of this chapter I will examine the shape of such self-authenticating rituals where the fathers with an active religious affiliation express their spirituality, providing a different outworking of postmodernity for them. In the second part of this chapter, I will examine the shape of such self-authenticating rituals where the fathers without an active religious affiliation express their spirituality, also providing a different outworking of postmodernity for them. In the third part of this chapter, I will argue that such self-authenticating rituals are muted for those who did not express their lived birth experience as spiritual. For these fathers, postmodern out workings other than self-authenticating rituals are prominent.

\(^{449}\) Beckford, p. 72.
4.1 Part One: Birth Depicted as a Spiritual Experience (within a Religious Affiliation)

The schema for organising the data in this chapter will be under thematic headings. In the first part of this chapter I will examine and analyse the experiences of those fathers who attended the birth of their children, bringing with them an active religious heritage or affiliation, and who reported that this was a spiritual experience. In doing so, an analysis will be presented qualifying the significance and extent of spirituality’s role in our society. Three quarters of the fathers described the experience as being spiritual in some manner. However, a diversity of understandings and out workings of the role of spirituality was evident in the fathers’ stories. Twelve respondents with an active religious affiliation participated in twenty-five births. In the following part I will describe and analyse the experiences of those who did so without an active religious participation or heritage.

What emerges from the fathers’ stories is an understanding of spirituality consistent with their current religious affiliation and participation but one that primarily has nontranscendent out workings. On the one hand it could be argued that there is little which is distinctive about the role of spirituality as it contains what would have been expressed as a religious outlook in previous ages. On the other hand, what is distinctive about the role of spirituality is in the realm of rituals. I argue that these take a particular postmodern form, which I describe as *self-authenticating rituals*.

4.1.1 Religious Heritage and Participation

The interviews did not provide a specific measure for what constituted religious affiliation and participation. In terms of religious affiliation, the analogy was similar to what occurs during the Australian Census when respondents are required to describe their religious identity. The substantial majority of Australians continue to identify with a Christian practice and the

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450 Bert’s story will be examined in Chapter Four in part three under the heading of those whose experiences were not spiritual yet had religious consequences for them.
respondents followed this pattern. It is a legitimate question to ask whether Australia really is as religious as tabulated in the Census data – but this will not be directly addressed in the argument. Australian religious expression needs to be assessed in its own right as well as examined from other perspectives, whether they be similar or dissimilar. Rather than trying to explain the Census data away it is preferable to see them as another case for asserting that Australian religious identity has its own reference points. Nonetheless, the respondents fitted this established pattern in the Australian Census in willingly identifying their religious identity. Neither did the interviews provide a specific measure of religious participation.

The social location of the religious and spiritual in Australian society may have moved from powerful organisations, which have become marginal and private in society, to the personal sphere. Levi-Strauss was pivotal in bringing the French term *bricolage* into the discourse of the social sciences. It describes the process of making creative and resourceful use of whatever diverse and even contradictory cultural materials are at hand (regardless of their original purpose) as part of making sense of one’s life. This cultural *bricolage* or smorgasbord is now regarded as indicative of postmodern approach to society. Purists may decry the blending and mixing of different religious traditions but such *bricolage*, piecing together of cultural elements drawn from a variety of sources, as argued in the previous chapter, is to be expected in a postmodern milieu. My findings in this study mirror those of Heelas and Woodhead who found scant evidence of postmodern *bricolage*. Even if a case can be made that compared to other Western societies such as the UK and USA, Australians are less tied to formal organisations, more willing to adopt multiple religious identities and indicate an increasing interest in spirituality, this was not the dominant pattern expressed by the fathers with little inclination to this end recorded in the interviews. Instead, as was the case in the study by Heelas and

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452 ibid., p. 127.
454 ibid., p. 211.
455 Heelas & Woodhead, pp. 1–11.
Woodhead (2005), the fathers either gravitated to traditional religious approaches or infused their religious allegiances with an emphasis on lived experience – such as birth – as the focus of their spirituality. The respondents understood religious participation in traditional organisational forms even if they deviated from them to a greater or lesser extent. Their lived experience was seen as an outworking of their religious heritage and current participation. It confirmed their religious identity insofar as the experience of birth involved communal, cultural, ethical and emotional narratives which – Hervieu-Leger argues – constitute the social building blocks of religious affiliation. As in the case of Heelas and Woodhead, there was scarce evidence of a spiritual revolution, with no father – as a result of the birth experience – reconsidering his religious affiliation or participation other than through the wear and tear of lifestyle changes that accompany the arrival of children. The clearest stated impact was on less regularity of attendance or, alternatively, a desire to reenergise regular attendance. In line with our definition of spirituality, the respondents saw the spiritual nature of their experience as consistent with their religious affiliations and participation. Fathers were inclined in the first place to carry over their understanding of spirituality into the perceived nonreligious sphere of birth. Thereupon they found ways to carry the birth experience, to varying degrees, back into their religious life. The fathers who experienced the birth as a spiritual experience exhibited a commitment to nesting this in their religious understanding and practice. For instance, Rhett highlighted the unexpected role his religious heritage played in the birth experience.

Yes, though not the process of the birth but in appreciating the birth. If you had asked me that beforehand I would have said no, no way. [3120–312]

The respondents’ affiliation and participation were drawn mainly, with some exceptions, from the common Christian traditions available in Australia, though there were three respondents who expressed a strong Christian affiliation whose

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current participation was intermittent or low. All the respondents traced their religious allegiance and participation to their childhood – even in those cases where their families of origin did not have active religious participation. The default was forms of active participation in the traditional practices of church such as Ned described.

I was raised Anglican. I used to go to church regularly with Sunday school and then to a Church of England Grammar School (Mentone). I used to belong to a church youth group (Wesleyan Methodist), the Christian Knights, who taught Christian values. [1160–1162]

This was the minimum level of participation with a number of candidates adding significant other dynamics including training for a priestly vocation, as Rod indicated.

Also at one stage I was training in a religious order for ordination, but I terminated that about ten years ago. Just simply an ordinary lay Catholic parishioner of a parish. [995–997]

The two respondents who expressed allegiances and participation to belief systems other than Christian ones did so from a background of a similar involvement in a Christian heritage. During their adult years, they had transferred a significant level of participation to their current non-Christian allegiance. Though not expressed explicitly the view was that a process of conversion explained their change in religious loyalties as Paul illustrates.

Yes – endless. I did both practice daily including in cathedrals and as a subject of academic study... I can be reasonably dogmatic about that. It is a miracle I ever recovered a spiritual life. (2079–2082)

However, both presented this not just as a conversion but also as a development of their spirituality and the opportunity to express what had been discouraged in their Christian participation. Rick described this sense of multiple identities even while affirming his current religious participation as radically different from his religious heritage when discussing the appropriate ritual celebration of the birth.
We are still wondering about the traditional celebrations with my wife being Catholic and me being Baptist, there is a ritual in both traditions so it is something we are still considering. It’s a point of seeing some value in it. [788–791]

This was the only sort of bricolage to which any of the fathers attested when they described their religious heritage and related this to their current, sometimes different, religious participation. The notion is very much of layers building on layers rather than the more traditional form of conversion where past life is denied and rejected. This pattern was attested as a common approach to religious heritage and affiliation even though it was their own explicit experience in only some cases. Even though the fathers did not witness to the more evocative forms of mix and match bricolage which is typical of postmodernity approaches to meaning and purposive, I would argue that adding layers to previous understandings without resolving issues of incongruity is itself a form, admittedly a less radical one, of such bricolage. The replacement of developmental or lifelong formation in a religious tradition with the freedom to add different or tangential overlays was present in the fathers’ stories to some degree confirming to some extent how they understood their religious identity in a postmodern milieu, with the role of spirituality being one significant reinforcing factor.

4.1.2 What is Spirituality?

What understanding of spirituality did the fathers express? My analysis of these fathers’ stories indicates four predominant understandings of spirituality.

1. Spirituality understood as a physical experience.

2. Spirituality understood as the process of connecting one’s religious outlook to a specific experience.

3. Spirituality understood as a transcendent experience.

4. Spirituality understood as a nontranscendent reality.
In the main, for each participant his experience was an extension of his previous religious heritage. It was a religious-type experience in a nonreligious setting. For some the experience was transcendent in nature. For others it was nontranscendent – more in the vein of personal development. Often the two strands were interwoven, such as in the case of Tom.

I have always had a belief that there’s God, there is a spiritual Being. If not being a regular churchgoer, whatever the phrase is – I have always had that belief, even as a child. Because there are too many unexplained reasons. Evolution is a great theory but there is such an amazing chain of events. How could all of that happen without there being some sort of master of it all? The birth reinforces that... While the birthing process was happening and I was feeling fearful and not being able to control the situation, I remember praying making everything okay. Asking, requiring, hoping for help... We would seem, compared to a lot of people, extremely prepared – but there is nothing you can do to prepare for it and whatever may happen. I often think of tragedies – my wife’s brother had one of their twins die. If you do it again you take all those risks. (2233–2245)

In the first instance, spirituality was understood as a physical experience. Fathers commonly described what was happening to their bodies as the birth process reached its climax. Ron’s response was a typical one.

An overwhelming sense of elation and awe, and relief that it all went well. The feelings were ones that I had not experienced before. (181–182)

The physical expressions were not all so dramatic, but the physicality of the experience was one location of the spiritual – such as Ron further explains.

Not just intellectually amazing and stimulating but emotionally and physically my whole being felt different, changed and affected. (223–224)

In the second instance spirituality was the process of connecting one’s religious outlook to a specific experience. Initially this involved a demarcation indicating that the experience was not religious in nature. The fathers differed in what they described by this reaction. On the one hand, the underlying
assumption is that it was not an experience controlled by religion even if it was to be framed by religious insights. On the other hand, it was a reflection on the nature of the birth process involving everyday-type lived experience as opposed to religion, which was seen to focus on the domain of cosmic or extraordinary experience. Mal exemplifies the fathers’ experience differentiating this spiritual experience from a religious one.

Spirituality was different than (sic) religion. Religion for me at Sunday school was learning who was David’s father and how many colours were on Joseph’s coat, whatever, who begat who (sic), how many books in the bible. I remember getting Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress for being top of the Sunday school. There wasn’t sense though of the little things. I don’t know whether you have seen the film Wings of Desire by Wim Wenders... I just like the concept of spirituality of light coming down through leaves onto your face. Just the simple things, and I never had a sense that they were spiritual and I think I missed out on all that. I thought it had to be a thunderbolt or had to be through a prayer or genuflecting in front of Mary. That it had to have physical structure around it or something before I could do that. Now I have a bit more of a sense of these other things that could be spiritual. (2857–2868)

The experience may not have been religious per se, however even as one who readily admits he was less regular in his current religious participation, Mal depicts the spiritual nature of the experience as relating his religious outlook on life to this specific unique lived experience. Fathers such as Mal indicate that the spiritual is the mode of language that those with religious affiliation and participation utilise to express the application of their religious heritage to a specific experience. Interpreting it, giving it due meaning and celebrating it. A spiritual experience is the active religious individual making religious sense of pivotal experiences away from the commonly accepted natural domains of religious affiliation. What was rare, though not without mention, was the extent to which fathers expressed a desire to escape to more traditional forms of fatherhood and male typologies. Ned most clearly stated, with a degree of regret and frustration, what fatherhood now entails and what it once might have looked like:
My outlook on life has become more focused on the kids because I have no choice, but I have been forced into thinking those sort (sic) of things. I do look forward to the time I can jump in the car and go fishing with a mate for the weekend – again. The more children you have the more control you lose over your life. The more you have it ingrained into the family lifestyle. I still tried to maintain some sort of independence such as riding my bike – this has had to go. [1264–1270]

This is not to say that masculine patterns of clinging to autonomy, control and the priority of male roles and pursuits were not present, implied and discerned in the stories – but rather that they were at best muted or submerged.

This brings us to the third instance, spirituality as a transcendent experience. Most respondents attested to the uniqueness of the experience – thus fathers included transcendent aspects to its content. They witnessed to a breaking into their ordered worlds by another reality, as exemplified by Ron.

The only way I could describe it is in terms of other euphoric experiences that have not been contrived, in the sense that I have not brought them. They have been brought onto me in a way I could not control – yeah, a spiritual experience. A high that can’t be reproduced by anything but {which} has affinity with other sorts of highs. And a high that I was completely lucid and able to respond to in a completely rational way as opposed to drugs. Very, very different – and intensely spiritual in a way that only the word *spiritual* sums up. [217–213]

The birth experience was a reality that required religious framing and the spiritual was the mode for undertaking such a process. Often religious language was explicitly drawn on to explain best the impact of the experience as exemplified by Len.

At the end of the day it is a miracle the way it all happens and you want to be part of it. (1392–1393)

This is not to say that fathers such as Len saw the transcendent as common or even as an everyday occurrence, but the birth experience provided an opportunity to put all the pieces together. On the one hand, regarding the births
as the greatest gifts that nature could bestow, while on the other inferring that some transcendent reality held it all together. The possibility of aligning oneself with such transcendence was one meaning of spirituality evoked by the experiences of these respondents. Each was mainly a private experience, though some sought social partners to corroborate their experiences – as did Ron. And having those discussions with people who I had never had those discussions with before, but suddenly they are, they resonate, they have had the same experience as you. [217–223]

In the fourth instance, spirituality was also understood as a nontranscendent reality. The spiritual in the birth process described a sense of how this world – for them – is coherent, consistent and integrated. There were degrees to which these fathers responded to the natural processes without evoking or directing one to a transcendent referent. In such instances the birth was described not as an other-worldly experience but as a fully realised this-worldly experience. It was a repeated theme to utilise the spiritual to describe such a nontranscendent approach, but only one father with an active religious participation exclusively presented his experience in this manner. Rick was one of the fathers who had changed his active religious participation from a Christian to a Yoga tradition, and one outworking of this was that, for him, the spiritual now unilaterally described only the nontranscendent process.

The spiritual and religious dimension was very helpful because it seemed to describe my experience of what I was feeling and seeing. That there is an energetic link between the baby and its parents, particularly the mother... The discussion was up front about our interconnectedness. It was not doctrinal – I guess I am talking about philosophy in a spiritual context, whereas religion typically has a doctrine. What we were discussing could form asides that could be spliced into any religious framework... It ties to what we believe – that the soul is a pretty important thing, and if a soul chooses us we ought to give that soul the best possible body for its genetic make up for it to utilise. (748–758)

457 Others expressed the common frustration of men at their inability to express these and other aspects of spirituality, and this will discussed later.
The religious itself was taken to be nontranscendent in nature and therefore any application of this was to be nontranscendent. Despite this nontranscendent outlook, the understanding of spirituality as the application of a religious outlook to a specific experience remains, in Rick’s case, heightened in that birth itself was regarded as a normative site for his nontranscendent view of the world, which is a contrast with the expectations of the other religiously active Christian fathers.

In terms of the transcendent and nontranscendent understanding of spirituality, one father expressed both aspects sequentially over the course of his initial and ensuing birth experiences. Paul was reared in a strong Christian heritage which, as an adult, he rejected taking on a secular outlook. During this time, he became the father of two boys. In between their births and the next one, Paul had undergone a series of significant life changes including embracing Siddha Yoga a significantly different religious tradition from his original Christian heritage. As a result, the birth of his third baby changed his outlook more because it was, in some very important way for him, spiritually uplifting.

There was some part of me that was definitely elevated and sort of raised up in a way that was not temporary. It was not a moment’s rush of excitement or moment’s rush of pleasure or pride—though all those things happened. It was something like a change of state or a change of beliefs somewhere. [1845–1849]

This experience led to an acknowledgement of sadness that the spiritual had not been as prominent an aspect of his reflections on the earlier births. The first two births had been perceived as being explicitly nontranscendent and nonspiritual. For Paul, the wisdom of age has helped him move from practical issues to settling into ruminating on new life. As a medical practitioner with responsibility for sick children this-worldly concerns have not disappeared. From his reflections on his vocational experience he discerns a beautiful rage for life, which makes him stand back and admire. When he contrasts his views with those of older people he finds that they often just give up on life. However, these
intense nontranscendent reflections required – for Paul – transcendent referents, almost a corrective transcendent imperative.

People seek the comfort of staying with the practical because I think people are a little scared of the enormity of what is happening. I think it is so big that people break it up into little issues like what is the best position... There is a new life coming in and you have just done the biggest thing that any human being has ever done on this planet ever since human beings evolved... The main game is that there is this baby with this tremendous rage to be alive. You are creating a new life and whatever you think is God, it has a lot to do with that potentially for you. People just don’t want to go there. [2006–2016]

In the face of this intensity focusing on practical things, often complicit with medical practitioners, this is an avoidance strategy from transcendent realities. For Paul, creating a new life draws one into whatever one thinks is God. What is the source for life and its vibrant character?

What is it that I am valuing? I think it is very good to reflect on who am I and why is it important for this baby to have me as a father? What is it that I teach? What is it that I value? What is it that they will see? Not in a precious sense... I think that as years pass I find the birth of the children something more to contemplate even more than I did actually. [1990–1993]

This interweaving of the nontranscendent and transcendent was characteristic. Not all fathers equally expressed the birth as transcendent or nontranscendent and yes, fathers expressed preferences or differently weighted these aspects in their stories at different points. However, this interweaving of the transcendent and nontranscendent content of their experience is a key aspect of their understanding of the spiritual.

In summary, the foregoing analysis of the fathers’ stories explicates the four predominant understandings of spirituality as physical experience, connecting one’s religious outlook to a specific experience, as transcendent and as

458 The secular nature of his views concerning these two births will be explored in part three of this chapter.
nontranscendent experiences, which will be the basis for further critical examination of the role of spirituality in a postmodern milieu

4.1.3 Excursus: The Role of Medicalisation

The clearest issue that drew out the different understandings of spirituality was the fathers’ responses to the medicalisation of the birth process. As Koenig acknowledges, spirituality is important in the medical process when evoking the sacred.\textsuperscript{459} For fathers with an active religious participation this issue was not defining of their view of spirituality but was a context for describing the extent to which they utilised spirituality to express transcendent or nontranscendent aspects of spirituality.\textsuperscript{460} There was Ron, who described the different approaches to, and experiences of, the medical process in the two births of which he spoke without any reference to a spiritual aspect of the experiences.

The first time round I felt like I was in fact giving birth to the child because my wife was in so much pain and there was a feeling of being totally out of control. [191–193]

The result was simply to move from an old school obstetrician to a female gynaecologist, which neither added to, nor detracted from, the spiritual experience. In expressing the feeling that he felt like an appendage, this was neither a function of the medical practitioner involved nor did it diminish the birth as a unique mountain top experience. It was different in that he was familiar, and more comfortable, with the medical processes. I would argue that it was not the birth experience that was restrained but rather his sense of masculinity. As the medical procedures were less critical, therefore the need to be an active protector and advocate for his wife was absent.

Conversely, for Tom the medical experience greatly contributed to reflections on the nontranscendent aspects of the experience. During the first birth at a


\textsuperscript{460} In the next part we will explore how this is central to the view of spirituality of those fathers without an active religious affiliation for whom it was a defining and potent opportunity for viewing the role of spirituality.
birthing centre, his wife tore badly, lost a lot of blood and required about 20 stitches. It was scary to the point at which his son was unconscious for about half an hour and his wife was asking,

Where is my baby? Is it dead? [2165–2166]

As a result, they arranged for her baby to be induced in a hospital rather than the birthing rooms. The clinical environment was shocking and upsetting for his wife even though the care was better. The pain was more intense though shorter in duration. This time Tom was able to cut the cord and hold the baby, who was all creamy and beautiful and not the bloody mess the baby had appeared to be in the previous birth. Tom’s reflection initially focused on the genetic dimensions much more than on the medical environment so that there is so much more than the doctors controlling the birth process. The role of medical practitioners was placed in a larger frame, a transcendent one.

It is not just that you have sex therefore you have a child. The whole deal of falling pregnant and conception is all truly amazing. I probably haven’t expressed this at all yet. It’s definitely got something to do with God. How and where that comes from I don’t know why. It’s not just biological and there it happens. [2194–2200]

The final feeling in both births when the babies emerged was an enormous amount of relief accompanied by happiness, almost euphoria. Tom is aware of some transcendent dynamics for explicating the way things work and the larger cosmic forces at play. However, his main focus is on the nontranscendent dynamics he experienced rather than seeking recourse to a transcendent aspect.

There is a sort of divine or spiritual or something intervention at every step. Whether you conceive or you don’t conceive. It starts right there, the amazing amount of permutations and combinations... The whole thing has God-like presence to the whole process. Friends who I talked to about it have come to the same sort of conclusion and head nodding. You ask whether it was genetic or environment? Well, the older you get the more you realise its genetic. Environment has got nothing to do with it! There is so much more controlling the birth process than the doctors. This is more than what you are capable of doing. [200–2205]
In contrast, Al’s experience of medicalisation drew him to a transcendent aspect. Their baby arrived six weeks prematurely. Moreover, there were some ongoing problems with being premature, such as a lung disease, so that their son was wired up to all sorts of machines which meant that he was in hospital for three weeks before they could bring him home.

As soon as he was born we knew he was in trouble... The surge of love that I had for him was something that I have never experienced before. It was beyond the love for my wife. It was of a very, very different nature. I still wouldn’t be able to describe it. I just recognise it as quite distinct and different to (sic) what I had experienced as love. Of course, do whatever it takes to get this kid well. [2310–2316]

Al, as a minister of religion, used this experience regularly in preaching to bring alive the insight he gained into the fatherhood of God and the example of Jesus’ atoning love in laying down his life for us.

There is some contrast between this view and that of those fathers with an active religious affiliation in a non-Christian tradition in the extent to which medicalisation informed their understanding of the spiritual dimension of the occasion. The medical process was the crucial factor in the spiritual content of the experience. Rick expressed repeated frustration at the interventions of medical practitioners, not so much in terms of their medical decisions but because of their personal response to his role and viewpoint and the inference that he was in the way. These fathers’ approach to birth was as much an expression of their spirituality as anything else in a similar manner to those respondents in the next part of the chapter who, although they had no active religious life, attested to birth as a spiritual experience:

As one with a background in electronics the issue of induction was helpful: one magnetic field can induce another. In our philosophy the idea is that consciousness induces consciousness as long as you have a brain to develop. If the conscious is not trying to induce, or is pretty remote, then what develops could be inhibited for quite a while until it finds its own way. [762–766]
Rick’s nontranscendent religious outlook informed and shaped the medical experience mainly in a detrimental fashion. They had initially planned to have a home birth, but the ultrasound indicated a breech position that required a Caesarean delivery. Their thorough birth plan was upset by the anaesthetist’s concern to remove Rick’s influence. His response was to rely on his spiritual approach.

I then had to do, back when I was a Christian, what would have been a very deep prayer – but in this circumstance it was getting in touch with my deeper character, and finding that strength for my wife and baby’s sake. (711–713)

It could be argued that Rick’s description need not deny his experience was transcendent. The point to note is that he used this experience to contrast an outlook that he clearly thought was transcendent for a spiritual and this worldly one.

Whereas for Paul, even though the medical process was purely incidental to the spiritual aspects of the experience, the births of his first two children were unusual as both were born at home and he was the delivering doctor. In part, this was to ensure that as a male he could be present. The home birth was not his idea but his wife’s, because they were a bit afraid of the hospital with its lack of control and the sheer scariness of the scrubbed corridors. It felt like an awful place to try to do something which fundamentally was not a medical thing.

Because the sons were born at home and I had such a major instrumental role, I felt like I was doing a lot of rushing around. I did not have the opportunity to be quite so free just to experience my own feelings. Curiously enough, having them at home was much more burdensome from that point of view. [1834–1838]

However, it was very demanding on Paul, as the midwife did not get there in time. As a result, given that he delivered the boys at home, he had little opportunity to experience his own feelings. However, it was such practical concerns rather than medicalisation as such that were regarded as inhibiting the experience.
One of the things I do remember about the boys being born was that for me there was never a great anxiety about it. I never thought they might die or something terrible might happen. Never approached childbirth with any of them as “this is a medical situation, a potential drama or potential death.” Even though I know that from my own education, I never had a real sense of that. [1838–1842]

The contrast from the homebirths meant that Paul loved the hospital and would heartily recommend that course for anyone – in significant part because it actually allowed him time and space to generate his own reaction. Paul believes that people quite happily gravitate to, and content themselves with, the mundane and avoid deeper reflection. Paradoxically, the hospital may have fostered a deeper reflection in his case but he argues the overbearing focus on infant mortality fosters a process of trivialisation. This is because it delivers power to the medical profession and encourages the preoccupation with the practicalities of the birth process and less attention on the deeper reflection of such live experience.

There is irony about how most people describe what kept them in the practical – medical practitioners. I think it is – there is this preoccupation and relationship with those type (sic) of people. [2012–2014]

The medicalisation was instrumental in enabling the spiritual aspect and its transcendent character to emerge. Paul was the only father who suggested this viewpoint and it makes sense to understand this as unique to his vocation as a medical doctor. However, he does establish the point that medicalisation – though predominantly regarded as distracting from the spiritual aspect of the experience – can be seen as providing a pathway for the spiritual. In fact, without the medicalisation of the birth process and its accompanying lessening of the risk of mortality ensuring the safety of mother and child, it is unlikely that fathers would – even now – be invited into the birth experience.
4.1.4 What is the Role of Spirituality? Animating Religious Outlooks

What roles did the fathers give spirituality in explicating their birth experiences? My analysis of the stories of these fathers indicates three predominant roles for spirituality in bringing their religious heritage to bear on their lived experience. There was a range of responses that indicated that spirituality enabled the fathers to express what was consistent with their religious affiliation and participation.

1. To express immediate access to the transcendent.

2. To express how the divine breaks into their day-to-day experience in matter-of-fact ways.

3. To describe the support the fathers received for the spiritual aspect from like-minded people.

There was a range of themes worth noting whereby spirituality was seen as a pathway by which they could bring their religious understanding and practice to the birth experience, to frame it and give it meaning.

The first theme was the role of spirituality to express immediate access to the transcendent. Prayer is recognised as having a positive effect in medical matters either as a relaxant, placebo, expression of positive emotions or as a channel for the transcendent. The role of prayer to connect us to transcendent realities was one common mode that fathers mentioned. Ron described his experience as follows.

Certainly I was conscious of prayer, praying prayers of thankfulness – and prior – so the child and mother would arrive safely. After the safe arrival praying prayers of thanksgiving. They were not liturgical prayers but prayers that spilled out of my mouth almost without control. It was dialogue with God that was not particularly controllable, but because of the momentum of the occasion. [277–282]

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Clearly, this was not just the prayer of a desperate man, though there were some examples of that among the fathers. Issues of safety and control were common, indicating men who felt out of their depth. What are we to make of this role for spirituality? At one level, it affirms the place of the religious heritage which men bring to significant lived experience. On another level, a feminist viewpoint may question why men turn to a transcendent deity when faced with powerlessness. The clear pattern was that spirituality’s role was to connect the fathers to a bigger picture and even to a transcendent perspective.462

The second theme worth noting was that fathers used the role of spirituality to express how the divine breaks into their day-to-day experience in matter-of-fact ways. Spirituality was given a role to identify agents of the divine as transcendent. For instance for Rod, spirituality was more than describing certain values, though it did include this. Nor was it just a radical divine intervention in view. Rather, both people and institutions could be seen as agents of the transcendent.

I am always conscious that what we value is what we pay for. We pay for a doctor, but for me it is the pastoral care. What comes to mind is that you can go to the hospital and get duck on the menu and people choose hospitals based on the menu. I was quite clear with Anna that we were not going to a hotel but a place with good care. And underlying that care, for me, in my religious thinking is that it’s got to be based on some pastoral orientation, and that would fit in with the Mercy {Hospital}, though it might not be what is found at another denominational or secular hospital. [1065–1071]

In choosing a hospital with an implicit Catholic ethos, Rod believed that he could discern presence of this ethos and this was an important value. Yes, in part, it was about congruent values – but it also is a statement about what brings transcendent alignment. Locating the transcendent in the birth was locating the birth in an institution whose staff advocated for the transcendent. The Catholic heritage of the hospital embodied all things expected of it. For Rod,

it informed all the staff, resulting in a feeling that they were all supporting the spiritual aspects of the experience, including its transcendent qualities.

This role of spirituality as transcendent framing of ethos, morals and a way of life is not restricted to the birth experience but is an ongoing resource. As Ned described it, the spiritual was not cosmic per se, or even just the personal potency of being able to produce an offspring. It affirmed a broad cultural value to his religious heritage as something worth passing on and contributing to the shaping of his children as a matter of course.

I have looked at the religious side of things as something necessary culturally and morally to be able to guide the kids into the future as I was as a child. I want to provide them with that. I see that as an important part of their growing up. I haven't been hit with a bolt of lightning that God has made this possible, therefore I should give thanks. (1328–1332)

This transcendent role of spirituality leads one to relate one’s day-to-day lived experiences to a bigger reality. It is about living congruently with this bigger reality rather than living expecting the transcendent to jump out from behind every bush, even if it is an experience as unique as birth.

The third theme related to the role which spirituality played in describing the support the fathers received for the spiritual aspect from like-minded people. In the first instance, many fathers – such as Paul – expressed the absence of such spiritual opportunity:

In terms of seeing it as a spiritual moment for me – no I don’t recall that anybody that sought contact with me, or asked that question, with the idea it would be good for me to talk about. [1953–1955]

A number of fathers, such as Hal, affirmed their religious community as a prime, if not lone, source of emotional support.

In terms of emotional support there has not been too much – besides the church – who have been fantastic in terms of community support and practical care. Child care was always difficult. [2673–2675]
For fathers with an active traditional religious affiliation its role was not substituted, and rarely supplemented, by what might be considered more contemporary forms of social support that have emerged in our society. By this I refer to types of short-term or task-orientated support groups such as men’s groups or counselling.\textsuperscript{463} Their absence for these fathers does not deny that this social feature is important. However, their absence may insinuate that fathers with an active religious heritage are more inclined to seek positive support for their spiritual experience along traditional religious lines. Such short-term communal spiritual support was not completely absent, but was very much an isolated experience, with Ryan providing the primary example. He did not find paid counselling very productive, instead it was his theological studies tutorial group that provided one of the key communal supports for their spiritual journey as a couple, especially one facing the possibility of infertility.

There were some who I shared the spiritual side with more than others. For some people who had been through the journey with us, the infertility and fertility journey, that spiritual aspect was more obvious because we had not told everyone that we had been trying... The essay I did explored infertility in the OT and fertility too. I wrote a long lament about barrenness which I shared with some of the family in particular. So some people had shared that journey with us of the emotional spiritual sense, and so were there in a deeper sense than most people and were able to share in the joy of fulfilment of that. [3226–3233]

Other than traditional religious communities, the support of family was a significant resource – but unlike Ryan’s story, it was not normally couched in spiritual terms. The only other key communal support attributed to spirituality was in relation to other men. Fathers did express a felt need for opportunity to relate their spiritual experience with other men. Even though the most responsive was their religious affiliated community, it did not always provide sufficient depth of reflection, as Paul described.

One of the things that has occurred to me as I have talked to you is that to talk to other men is something I would really like to do. I

\textsuperscript{463} I describe this process of finding social contexts for support and expression as temporary communal allegiances, which are explored more fully in Chapter Five.
felt I could not have easily talked to a woman at the time or before, immediately after, and got a sense of real understanding of what it was really like. I just feel like men have to share their experiences a lot more. [2073–2076]

The interview itself became a significant means of expressing the absence of such communal spiritual facilitation to enable men to affirm the spiritual content of the experience.

In summary, the foregoing analysis of the fathers’ stories explicates the three predominant roles for spirituality whereby they expressed immediate access to the transcendent, how the divine breaks into their day-to-day experience in matter-of-fact ways and the support they received from like-minded people.

4.1.5 What is the Role of Spirituality? Reshaping Religious Outlooks

Just as spirituality was utilised to express their religious heritage, a range of responses were given to the role of spirituality whereby fathers sought to reshape their religious outlook as a result of their experiences. The fathers were not just the receivers of experience that was framed in a spiritual manner but were participants in an experience that empowered them to be agents of learning, analysis and new insights into their religious heritage. My analysis of the fathers’ stories indicates four themes worth noting whereby spirituality encapsulated the pathway which relates the birth experience to their religious heritage.

1. A way of describing the theological enrichment of their religious affiliation and participation.

2. A way of relating and interpreting the impact of the experience on their new found status as fathers and the accompanying new challenges that arose from this point in their life cycle.

3. A way of relating their experience to their religious practices.

4. A way of relating to their religious contexts in order to arrange the religious celebration of the birth.
The first role of spirituality was understood by fathers as a way of describing the theological enrichment of their religious affiliation and participation. Though by no means a dominant theme, a number of fathers indicated that the birth experience generated a significant deepening and broadening of their understanding of God. The role of spirituality, affirming theological insights, illustrated direct parallels in the birth experience in the concepts of father, family and parent as applied to God by fathers such as Ron.

It has certainly added or changed how I understand the metaphors I use for God, e.g. father, parent, God’s children, etc., have different, enlarged and enriched meanings for me now. [324–326]

For other fathers, the birth generated new levels of appreciation as regards the theological origin of life and its nature as a divine gift – as Rod acknowledged:

Probably increases, which is what I expect. It’s a bit like just – yes, you know it intellectually that a baby is special, that it is God’s gift. In my thinking, it’s not just a bundle of cells and sort of DNA running around. But that is a head thing – but this is seeing it happen. (1097–1100)

In addition, references to such transcendent referents as miracles, divine acknowledgement, enabled the fathers to relate the spiritual element in the birth to their religious heritage.

The second role given to spirituality was to relate and interpret the impact of the experience on their newfound status as fathers – and the accompanying new challenges that arise from this point in their life cycle. Spirituality’s role identified these issues of masculinity, to announce their import and to celebrate them. Its role helped the fathers to make sense of their experience as men very much aware that the transcendent aspect, though it enhanced, also left a legacy of reflection and reinvention. For instance, Ryan expressed this impact on his religious outlook as one of loss as well as transition – not just for himself but also for his wife.
The shifts in role we have both experienced have been very significant and not well recognised, either by the church or society or friends... The relationship she and I have has changed as a result of that. I don’t often have places to process that, compare it with others, though I do a bit of that at times with friends – but there is no liturgical ritual recognition of that transition other than that it is fantastic that a baby has been born. My wife has given up her whole life and I have given up some stuff too. There is no recognition at a personal, family or church level that a phase of life has ended. I was reflecting on our wedding, where all the excitement was in the formation of a new partnership but at the same time I lost my place as a single young man. There was lament there for me which was glossed over. It was fantastic and new, but I lost freedoms I had beforehand which are rightly glossed over – but they are still a loss. (3259–3269)

The actual impact of now being a father was a spiritual reality as much as a practical and economic one. The result was to bring a new approach to life and its responsibilities as a male, husband and father. Mal understood the birth experience in a transcendent frame and jokingly welcomed the opportunity to swap notes with divinity about his experience.

There is a sense of the once you have a child that you... suddenly you are not the centre of the universe any more. Not that you ever were – but there is that sense as a single person, and maybe more from a male perspective, the notion that I look after me and then everybody else gets looked after that way. Certainly there is someone else there that you would forgo your life for, or forgo bodily parts for, or what else it would be. There is that sense within marriage as well. The coming of someone dependent on you. Suddenly there is that sense too of this new presence in the room, that was quite powerful as well. Suddenly there was someone else there as well as me, my wife, doctor and nurses. Certainly I would like to talk to the engineers who designed the birthing process – there may be some simpler ways to go about it. Zips or Teflon tubing that slips and slides really easily that doesn’t expand or tear. (2842–2853)

The third role given by the fathers to spirituality was relating their experience to their religious practices. As indicated in Chapter Two, the demarcation of spirituality from religion, as a separate and yet related area of their lived experience, enabled a number of fathers to give spirituality a role and
context within which to analyse, reframe and reevaluate their religious affiliation. As argued earlier in this chapter, the spiritual experience of the birth at many points was an outworking of their religious heritage and current participation, nonetheless the role of spirituality was not merely a religion lived out but also the religion reshaped, reinvigorated and refined by this new perspective. Many of the fathers recast their evaluation of their church through the eyes of their children, what they want their church experience to be for them. Mal confessed that his attendance waxed and waned even though his wife had reinvigorated her religious participation after the birth of the last child, which highlighted not this dialectic between spirituality and religion but the primacy that spirituality had for many fathers when incorporating this experience into their religious participation.

I would say, in retrospect, that the actual spiritual side of things has actually increased. The sense of spirituality as compared to religiousness, if there is such a term, is probably highlighted. The absolute intensity of the experience – and again, because we are discussing this and at some sort of length, it stirs up things in me and it is very powerful. And again it is one of the most powerful experiences that I have had. There is no doubt about that. It hasn’t necessarily had a link with the structural religious side of Catholicism. I don’t believe that it has strengthened that necessarily. (2836–2842)

This is not to say that the dialectic between spirituality and religion was expressed problematically or antithetically. As Mal expressed it, the terms of engagement framed his religious affiliation, giving priority very much to the role of spirituality. As such, the role of spirituality was a means of maintaining autonomy and setting limits on the role religion might play in their lived experience. This was not limited to just the religious sphere but affirmed by fathers as flowing into other parts of their life, as Rick indicated:

They are inseparable in that it is what I expected. I have definitely grown spiritually. My ability to relate validly with other people in general has been a help, say, in this job where I have moved from repairing a lot of machinery to now where I am relating to a lot of people. Well, thank you – it has been nice to revisit and bring some it to consciousness via some of your questions. (793–797)
However, from the point of view of this study clearly some fathers utilised the role of spirituality to express and affirm more than what they understood their religious affiliation could provide in the light of the birth experience. Rick indicates that the interview itself provided further context for reflection on, and reinvention of, the birth experience’s effect on his religious affiliation. Some fathers indicated that new religious practices were added to their repertoire as an expression of the role of spirituality newly discovered from this significant lived experience. Ryan highlights how this can be seen to supplement, or provide authentic reinvigoration of, their religious affiliation.

For instance, we don’t get to morning church as much as we used to. It has made us more aware of modelling in everyday life and spiritual ways and what we want spirituality for our son has developed. So we started a family prayer before the meal which we would normally do in a very shorthand way. Those spiritual rituals have become more relevant for us now that we are in this space. [3253–3258]

_Spirituality_ described both the period of higher intensity around the birth and an ongoing urge to pass a sense of this to the children within the role of their family, and brought a critical eye to the place of children in their church services. This was not a conversation in isolation but provided a platform for further discussion to relate the spiritual and the religious properly, as Ron affirmed.

I had jumped through the wardrobe (smiling) out the other side and I couldn’t go back. The Narnia reference indicates how this was essential to the discussions I had, having been brought up in the context of the church, and my Christian faith, they were all frameworks that made sense of the birth and those experiences. What were most helpful were people’s personal testimonies, their experiences recounted best helped me make religious and spiritual sense of the experience. (251–255)

The fourth, and perhaps most striking, role was the approach the fathers brought to their religious contexts in arranging the celebration of the birth. Those fathers who regarded this experience as spiritual and did so with an active religious participation were not willing to be merely passive recipients from their religious heritage, reenacting the prescribed religious rituals for celebration.
The role of spirituality described the active role they desired in constructing and enacting the religious celebration of the spiritual aspect of the birth experience. The results were that all the rituals of celebrating were tailored with the fathers as active agents in all cases. The range of tailoring stretched from a minimal personalising to a radical customising of the form and content. Regardless of the level of tailoring, no testimony was given to resistance from the religious body and its practitioners as to this dynamic. True, it is hard to discern reluctance, as the only descriptions available in the study were the requests of the fathers who reported that they were unilaterally accepted if not welcomed. The extent to which the religious bodies and practitioners encourage and welcome this mode of tailoring can be assessed only in part – and it is not possible to comment on whether or not this acceptance and welcome were forthcoming only when requested. Simply, the question of whether or not religious bodies and practitioners welcome this new role of spirituality that seeks, and even demands, aspects of tailoring was absent. However, there was a range of stories by the fathers as to how they were able to tailor the ritual celebration relating to the birth of their children. At one end of the scale was Ned, who was invited to tailor but who insisted on receiving the traditional prescribed package.

We had the kids baptised because I thought that was important. I was not that interested in customising. The minister got the godparents in and discussed what was involved and I appreciated that. I am not big on naming ceremonies or celebrant marriages. [1315–1317]

Implied in Ned’s response is a typology of male behaviour that regards such matters as belonging to a female domain. The encouragement to tailor the celebration to express their sense of spirituality was not immediately obvious to some fathers, and so some expressions were more timid than they otherwise might have been. Hal – due, in part, to his wife’s traditional viewpoint – did not realise the scope available for personalisation until the second child. The tailoring was low key but significant.

We got it the second time and we did play some songs and music that has started to become part of our little family routine. We did
try to get some symbol from my family back in WA, but they arrived late. So if anyone is looking for some dried wheat, come and see me. The christening has been a big thing for us and ongoing growth of the family has been a big thing for us – but the actual birth was not the pinnacle, rather the beginning of the journey. [2695–2700]

The key aspect of the tailoring seemed to be the opportunity to participate in a ritual that was meaningful and congruent with their spiritual outlook. The issue was not that the religious setting was foreign to this concern, but rather that it maximised the opportunity for their own spirituality to be expressed, often – as in Hal’s case – in very hands-on manner.

The baptism was tailored a little bit with choice of hymns and readings, but we were happy to have the standard and so were not frustrated at that. If we had said to our minister that we were really keen, I am sure he would have said, “You really keen, go for it!”... when it came to the time I was happy to let the minister do it. I think he was aware and sensitive to work with us. [3243–3248]

However, the anxiety of having the traditional religious rituals and settings overwhelm the occasion for celebration was not an uncommon theme. Rhett was keen to find contexts in which to describe and discuss the spiritual dimensions of the birth experience. The baptism ritual was one of the few opportunities, so the thought that the process would be swamped was clear, even if did not eventuate as his experience.

It was part of the normal service and I remember thinking beforehand that I was nervous about doing it that way. In hindsight I was really happy we did it that way. For me the meaning changed during the service, it became broader. Beforehand it was about starting her life, and then ‘cause there were people there at the service who did not know us, even though there were friends there and some others with different religious viewpoints... but during the service I realised that the people there were just as excited as we were and in some cases more than some of our friends ‘cause we all shared this common belief. [3095–3105]

Rhett was a little disappointed at not being able to tailor the service further, but the celebration transcended both the religious setting and their fears. For some fathers there was also a sense that the religious setting was not the whole
story relating to spiritual celebration of the birth. Ryan expressed an awareness of parallel rituals celebrated by those in their religious community.

We had friends who kept the afterbirth and buried it in a ceremony in their front yard and I was present at that. That was very interesting, but we didn’t do that. It was very interesting to see that tangible spiritual connection which was physical and spiritual. For us, we were invited due to the eclampsia to donate the afterbirth to a study and so we were happy for that to be part of the process for us. (3236–3241)

In the main, the fathers either did not push or maximise the opportunity for tailoring. There were contexts where permission to tailor was unexpected, gratefully received and more intrusive as in Rod’s case. The parish priest was amenable to allowing a high degree of tailoring of the service in response to Rod’s sensibilities, but it underwent a number of drafts to ensure that negative reactions which might filter back to the priest’s superiors were kept to a minimum.

That required a little bit of work because I was not prepared, though Anna was a bit more resigned to it, to simply have the package rite, “Here is the rite of baptism, here is what you say.” Well frankly, there is no point mentioning Satan because he means nothing to me or the congregation. I took the time to rewrite and that was quite good. In saying, “Here is the standard,” “Good – I will rewrite it to make it meaningful.” [1107–1112]

The most radical form of tailoring was Tom’s story where an external Celebrant was engaged to generate an alternative service in place of one provided by their religious association to maximise the significance of the occasion undiluted by traditional prescriptions.

We customised it for ourselves. There was this woman who conducted this ceremony. It was a public ceremony where you invited friends and family. [2223–2224]

Some of the traditional customs were followed, such as having godparents, but tailored innovations, such as a signing ceremony as a kind of announcement of the baby’s existence, were also included. This imperative for personalising
and customising the ritual was also evident in those fathers involved in religious traditions other than Christian, with many of the similar dynamics. The experience of Paul is emblematic, as he changed his spiritual approach between his children. The result is that Paul's experience is an indication that the tailoring dynamic goes beyond those who have a religious affiliation.

I did all sorts of rituals with the boys. Including burying the placenta under a tree that people talk about. [2026–2027]

However, his reflections on his past ritual celebrations paled without his current religious outlook that provides spiritual potency to him. Clearly, tailoring a ritual is, of itself, no guarantee of ongoing meaning and spiritual relevance. To what extent this is an outworking of personalised rituals is worth further examination. If rituals are not prescribed then they can also become outdated – not over a long time but within a short time span of years, as Paul indicates.

I actually found that those rituals did not mean anything to me. They were bereft of any current significance for me. I am not sure I have contact with any rituals that would be meaningful for me. First time I went through rituals that were old English rituals that were derived from old wives’ tales. They were from some culture I did not feel any contact with. [2028–2032]

In addition to the actual content of the ritual, familiarity was a qualifying factor that affected the need for tailoring. Paul, raised an Anglican and now an adherent of Siddha Yoga, attests to embracing rituals that once would have been unfamiliar, readily accepting them as appropriate to their situation with minimum recourse to customising them.

Yes – we certainly have done what would be evanescent rituals. Like doing particular prayers if you like, with various people as they turn up, who share our religious background. None of which is designed for this purpose. I know of no prayers in our tradition that are actually for this – you can do certain mantras that are for the beginning of things which we thought appropriate. We did things like that. Because it is a sort of New Age-y religion it does not have those traditions... We shot our bolt with the marriage ceremony which went on for about twelve hours. We had run out of steam by
the time we had got to having babies. I am a bit sorry we haven’t replicated that with our daughter as we are both passionate about ritual. I know people do naming ceremonies but we did not do one for us. [2034–2044]

This role of spirituality – to customise and personalise religious celebrations in order to provide affirmation for the spiritual dynamic of the experience – is a pivotal characteristic of postmodern approaches to religious life. I describe this dynamic as self-authenticating rituals. Explaining why this occurs and what it tells us about our society is an important exercise for understanding the role of spirituality.

In summary, the analysis of the fathers’ stories explicates four roles whereby spirituality enabled the birth experience to be brought back to their religious heritage as theological enrichment, in their new status as fathers, impacting their religious practices and shaping the religious celebration of the birth.

4.1.6 Excursus: Masculinity and Fatherhood

All the fathers with an active religious heritage accepted that men, for various reasons, were less inclined to engage in spiritual issues – however, nearly all these fathers believed that this did not wholly apply to them. Some fathers expressed a capacity to overcome this, while other fathers thought it was not generic, but rather dependent on the particular men and women – whether or not they were able to discuss spiritual matters. One reason why fathers with an active religious heritage so readily understood their experience as spiritual despite perceived gender factors was related directly to their religious affiliation. Hal explicitly alludes to what many fathers with an active heritage believed about their approach to spirituality based on gender.

I know people from a broad aspect of society, so there are patches of men who don’t have this problem. They tend to be part of the church or past members of religious orders and they are better at expressing emotion and/or their spirituality. Having said that, I have met a lot of men who aren’t good at doing it – even some good friends of mine. [2596–2600]
This viewpoint in part explains why they believed that gender was a limited factor in their case and the confidence they felt in describing their experience as spiritual. However, this confidence as males to express their experience as spiritual, due in significant part to their religious affiliations, was contrasted with repeated testimony from these fathers indicating that they appreciated the interview because it was one of the few occasions – or the only occasion – on which they could discuss the spiritual aspects of becoming a father. In effect, the fathers valued their capacity as men, men with religious affiliations uninhibited in their expression of the spiritual, but who – in the main – found few avenues (as many bemoaned in the interviews) to undertake such conversations. Thus they were grateful that the research context provided a rare platform, as Rod expressed it:

Males should be encouraged – not that they need it because they can live with out it – {in} all the wonderful benefits of having a child and exploring it more deeply. Rather than let the little one grow to five years and finding that things have been lost or not fully taken advantage of. You go to the birth and discuss things because you want to deepen what’s there now. So thank you. [1143–1147]

If gender did not mainly inhibit such discussion about the spiritual aspects of becoming a father, then what explains the lack of active expression? In the first place, the uniqueness and novelty of becoming a father by definition left the fathers floundering for a frame of reference. The fathers’ stories indicate a degree to which they underestimated an aspect of the birth experience that was assumed prior to their attending births, which was that birth is primarily an experience of the mother. She is the key active agent. Repeatedly, the fathers metaphorically stood back in awe at witnessing their wives becoming mothers – as Mal indicated:

But as for life changing, it changed my relationship with my wife, there was another member of our family, another link to the future, another link with the past in a sense, gave me a sense of moving up a generation. Probably didn’t hit me straight away, but some of the links with my father and things like that appeared as well. Definitely it was life changing. The whole concept of new life and
being part of that process and seeing my wife produce a new life from her body was pretty amazing stuff. [2782–2788]

Our cultural narratives and support structures still focus on the mothers as the prime agents. This is not to dispute the ongoing necessity for this, but it explains why the fathers found it difficult to continue a narrative about the impact of birth beyond limited opportunities. Accompanying a singular appreciation of their wives becoming mothers was the fathers’ overwhelming introduction to fatherhood. This transformation into the status of fatherhood was without reference points, as Ron expressed it:

It is incredibly dependent on you, and yet at the same time part of you, and yet it is not you, it’s something other than you – something else has been brought into your world from outside of the room and that’s incredible. [200–202]

Becoming a father was part of this spiritual experience for which they found themselves inadequately prepared, with few avenues through which to process it. Though some fathers couched this impact in traditional terms – such as “another mouth to feed”, in the main Ron’s comments focusing on the nurturing role of fatherhood were common, if not predominant. It was not just the novelty of being present but also that new modes of caring and sharing that the role of fatherhood now thrust on these men were also being renegotiated. Fatherhood’s very uniqueness left few analogous pathways for framing this complex new status. Further, the radical contrast with their own fathers, who in the main reflected a more traditional view of fatherhood as provider and enforcer, was embodied in the stark pioneering experience of being present at the birth. To the extent that their religious heritage was an available reference point, largely it described the role that spirituality played for the fathers. It connected the fathers to their religious heritage but, in the main, it provided few avenues for reflecting and processing the experience. So though they personally felt adequate to express the spiritual aspect, this yearning for expression in the main was unrealised. It was not that the fathers felt as though they had missed their opportunity and it was now lost forever, as Paul testified.
I was very conscious of all that I would teach him would be my example. I felt this infusion, the desire to be a much more whole human being myself, partly for his sake, but partly these little eyes were looking at me expecting something. I realised I expect something too. I felt really strongly motivated to meet his expectations, or the way I understood his expectations of me as a man. I became a lot more bold in the sort of decisions I was prepared to take having been a quite a reticent person. I think it was the first born child that changed me from that. He was a big change for me. I become much more interested in my own life.

[1854–1862]

There was a strong sense that this was part of a longer developmental process requiring ongoing attention.

In the second place the fathers, in understanding the experience as spiritual, were utilising an available frame of reference. The form whereby this was made available was in the religious commemorations of the birth. These celebrations were framed by their religious affiliation, not just as passive recipients but as active agents in both the nature and shape of the ritual. The clearest expression of their spirituality was in the manner in which they utilised the rituals of their religious heritage. The manner in which they did this is essential to the argument of this thesis. I will argue that what they participated in can best be described under the heading of self-authenticating ritual. This approach to ritual is shaped by postmodern dynamics of which fathers’ presence at the birth of their children is a case in point. This is a key concept to understand the role of spirituality in the fathers with an active religious affiliation to explain what their experience tells us about our society.

4.1.7 Why is it like this?

Spirituality as an Antidote to Metanarrative Amnesia

Having presented above a profile drawn from fathers with an active religious affiliation on the nature and role of spirituality what I will argue in this section is for an approach that makes sense of this profile consistent with this argument that their stories reflect their participation in a postmodern milieu. The manner in which this was realised was through the ritual that accompanied, expressed
and interpreted their lived experience. The key concept I will propose in order to interpret and interrogate the extent to which the respondents’ stories explain the significance of spirituality for Australian society will be *self-authenticating rituals*.

The continuing assumption of the argument is that the underlying general trends in social change suggest that these times are postmodern. In postmodernity, we perceive life as narratives, and the major issues involve the definition of personal roles and the construction of stories that give purpose and shape to social existence. For instance, in the Australian context, La Chappelle argues that rituals and community – and, by implication, our spirituality – emerged out of our relationship with a particular place on earth. Likewise, specifically in this study the stories of fathers present at the birth of their children enable us to explain the nature and role of spirituality in Australian society.

Established social patterns – such as the family structure or lifelong loyalty to the same workplace or religious heritage – are supplanted by social patterns and rituals affected by the voluntary realm of taste, choice and preference. Anderson suggests that research often focuses on the individual's thought process, but there is no suggestion that we construct our world all by ourselves. Reality construction is a process. Some of these constructs are tenacious but they are still only temporary manifestations of a dynamic flow of thoughts which are difficult to map or describe in their entirety. The individual autonomy and individualism of the modern era have given way to the

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464 Anderson, 1990, p. 67. This thesis is rooted in the axiomatic view attested by other writers such as M. McCarthy, “Spirituality in a Postmodern Era”, in J. Woodward & S. Pattison (Eds.), *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2000, pp. 193–194, that spirituality is enormously popular in no small part due to our current postmodern milieu which has analysed universalising tendencies inherited from modernism and replaced them with an emphasis on relativity and particularity.


468 ibid., p. 68.
self-authenticating and self-serving experience. This is not to say that it is selfish or motivated only by self-interest.

As a result, this study enables an examination of the extent to which spirituality is a buffer between the need to locate and relate oneself to transcendent reality and postmodernity’s affirmation of metanarrative vacuums. The evidence in this first part of the chapter of the respondent fathers who claimed the experience as spiritual, including the described roles they gave to spirituality, indicate that the majority did so based on the implicit echoes of the metanarrative of their religious heritage or their explicit participation in their current religious affiliations. Clearly, the majority of the fathers understood the experience as spiritual due, in significant part, to an outworking of their religious heritage and current participation. Is this merely a premodern or modern aftershock? It is a legitimate question whether or not these fathers reflect patterns consistent with understandings of postmodernity. However, I argue that the manner in which the fathers drew on their religious heritage and then enacted it confirm that spirituality as applied in the stories of the fathers is an outworking of postmodernity and can therefore inform us how our society constructs meaning and purpose for its members. The fathers in this part of the chapter reflect a rebuttal of the individual autonomy and individualism of the modern era, instead affirming self-authenticating and self-serving experience, most easily identified in their approach to religious celebrations, which were neither selfish nor motivated merely by self-interest.

In this section, I will argue that those fathers with an active religious heritage provide insight into how our society in a postmodern milieu enables meaning and purpose to be nurtured and affirmed insofar as spirituality is given a prominent role, especially as they ritualistically enact this meaning and purpose. The nature of rituals is no longer accepted as given, but is created by reference to one’s own world, in other words a form of acknowledgment of postmodernity’s inclination towards metanarrative vacuum. This self-interest in our postmodern milieu is a dynamic producing self-authenticating rituals. It describes the scope of one’s world rather than any rampant solipsism. It invokes
more than whether or not there is room for others in one's world. The size of one's self-interest encompasses individuality, family allegiances, neighbourhood, workplace, global concerns and so on, including one’s religious affiliation.

Describing the content of one's self-interest is dynamic and can tend to the reductionist or expansionist.\textsuperscript{469} The rituals that construct one's self-interest are one aspect of how postmodernity utilises spirituality. Just as the self authenticates ritual, it can be shown that rituals authenticate individuals and communities. Rituals both express and construct such processes. How faith finds new forms, how spirituality finds new modes of expression, within postmodern conditions, cannot be predicted. The point is not prediction but the tracing of trends, the mapping of everyday experiences and patterns. Human beings construct their identities and pattern their dreams using whatever resources – including spiritual – are available, for self and social understanding.

Any theoretical framing must not only elucidate how an active religious heritage frames the role of spirituality in a postmodern milieu but it must also go some way to explain why those with an active religious heritage gravitated to this study. In so doing it will inform the answer to the question as to why and how, in a society where metanarrative vacuums are normative, religious heritage is activated by the concept of spirituality. In part, a redefinition of the role of religion and its out workings through spirituality are an aspect of our postmodern milieu.

In order to address these questions I begin with the approach of Hervieu-Leger who employs the concept of memory and enables us to evaluate the role and impact of religious heritage so characteristic of the fathers’ stories in this part of the chapter. The notion of tradition as ritual forming emerges as a specific form of believing where the chain of memory makes the believer a member of a community, a community which gathers past, present and future members.\textsuperscript{470} This collective memory or tradition becomes the basis of the

\textsuperscript{469} Anderson, 1990, p. 68.

Hervieu-Leger argues that modern societies are less religious than those of former times not because they are increasingly rational or secular but because they are less capable of maintaining memory, which lies at the heart of the religious experience.471 The corollary is that the greater the extent to which religious heritage and affiliation provide active access to such religious memory the more readily individuals will be able to correlate their lived experience to their religious heritage.472 Houtman and Aupers identify that there is a process of detraditionalisation due to diminished participation in religious heritage, which in part stimulates the turn to spirituality.473

The emergence of spirituality is not so much a disappearance of religion but a relocation of the sacred understood as a this-worldly experience rather than a turn to secularism. This, in part, explains why it was that fathers with an active religious affiliation gravitated to this study from the posters placed in childcare centres and the ensuing snowballing process, and expressed such appreciation for the role which their participation in this study played in sustaining their religious memory. Further, the fact that the role of spirituality as a correlating process is uniquely a characteristic of our postmodern milieu was most apparent at the point when they utilised the religious celebrations of their lived experience. Though modern societies are corrosive of traditional forms of religion, often supported by the hard evidence showing a decline in religious activity, at the same time modern societies open up spaces and sectors that only religion can fill.474 Modern individuals are encouraged to seek answers, to find solutions, make progress and aspire to expand the notion of human fulfilment. Hence, the paradox of modernity which simultaneously both removes the need for, and sense of, religion (amnesia) and – by promoting human aspiration –

472 ibid., p. 125.
474 Hervieu-Leger, 2000, p. 91.
enables it to stay in touch with the religious through the need for a religious future.475

This precisely describes the role that spirituality enacted in the fathers with an active religious affiliation who affirmed birth as spiritual. Hervieu-Leger seeks to answer the question of how modern societies can overcome their amnesia and stay in touch with the forms of religion that are necessary to sustain identity.476 In part, the answer that emerges from the fathers in this part of the chapter is to maintain an active religious affiliation, which – as she has strongly presented – is the very thing that modernity has eroded as a resource in our postmodern milieu. Whether spirituality can provide a buffer from such erosion is debatable but it is part of the infrastructure of contemporary identity formation of those with an active religious heritage.

In this context, in their religious celebrations the fathers were not just reenacting their religious traditions but investing in their religious heritage. The primacy given to ritual in this part of the chapter is consistent with the view of writers such as Driver who present rituals as an essential aspect of the human condition, lived experience, whereby the question is not whether humans will choose to ritualise but when, how, where and why.477 Therefore, rituals are not religious per se but religion is one expression of ritual. The extent to which there is a renewed interest in the fact that rituals are prevalent in all societies highlights the fact that they are intimately linked to social process.478

What role does ritual play in the chain of memory? Hervieu-Leger, in calling for a removal of a common misunderstanding that religious tradition is bound up with a view of society as continuity and conformity, suggests that societies in which religious tradition plays a vital role are not static or impervious to change.479 The present role of spirituality is an aspect of changing patterns of

475 ibid., p. 149.
476 ibid., pp. 166–167.
478 ibid., p. 10.
479 ibid., p. 87.
society. What tradition, and – more specifically – religious heritage which is its
code of meanings, brings about is a world of collective meaning in which
day-to-day experience is related to an immutable, necessary order that preexists
both individuals and groups. Religious heritage confers transcendent authority
on the past. Thus, what comes from the past is constituted as tradition only
insofar as it constitutes a title of authority in the present. What establishes
social authority is the demonstration of continuity, such as the fathers in this
part of the chapter gave in their religious celebrations. However, the social
mechanisms regulating the dynamics of social relations whereby a society
creates itself and creates its own history mean that religious heritage is not
simply a repetition of the past in the present. Instead, spirituality is a social
mechanism which creates its own history in the stories of the fathers rather than
merely repeating religious heritage. As witnessed in this first part of the
chapter, this new history is most visibly accessed via the rituals that celebrated
the births, rituals that are not merely a repeat of their religious heritage but
have their own history insofar as the fathers tailored and customised them, that
is, what I describe in this argument as self-authenticating rituals.

Hervieu-Léger asks whether or not the creative dynamic of religious heritage,
which inaugurates change by invoking continuity, still has relevance in a society
where change is valued for itself, and where reference to tradition plays only an
ancillary role in society’s production and legitimisation of norms, values and
symbols proposed for acceptance and credence by the individual or group.
This process is mirrored in Australian society even in contexts where the chain of
memory may be expected to be strong such as in schools with a strong religious
heritage. What is there for religion to do in modern societies except play a
subsidiary cultural and symbolic role? Is it not bound to be marginalised, be
seen as having little real significance except as folklore? The pathway out of

480 ibid., p. 88.
481 ibid., p. 86.
482 ibid., p. 89.
483 K. Engebretson, “Expressions of Religiosity and Spirituality among Australian 14 Year Olds”,
“Drifting from the mainstream: the religious identity of Australian core Catholic Youth”,
such dilemmas is presented in this part of the chapter as the concept of spirituality and the role which spirituality played in the framing and understanding of the fathers of their lived experience at the birth of their children. The fact that fathers with an active religious heritage gravitated to this study both affirms the particular place of spirituality for those with an active religious memory and also raises questions concerning the extent to which spirituality is similarly available to those without such active religious memory. To the extent that spirituality describes a positive and active dynamic for those with an active religious heritage, it would seem reasonable to expect that this may not be translated to those without such an active religious memory.

Drawing on Hervieu-Leger’s view of religious memory, this is what I will argue in the following two parts of this chapter where the limits of the role of spirituality and the temptation to overstate them become apparent.

Hervieu-Leger’s approach enables religion to be more than a residual facet of culture. Rather, the religious productions of modernity indicate that religion and modernity are not mutually exclusive. Religion retains a creative potential within modernity. Modernity has not done away with the need for individuals and society to believe. The question of meaning comes to the fore in a society expressed by autonomous individualism, high mobility and the remoteness of social relations which characterise modernity. This is the domain that encapsulates the role of spirituality. The extent to which the fathers in their stories are correlating their lived experience to their active religious heritage describes a primary role of spirituality in a postmodern milieu.

For Hervieu-Leger, by placing tradition and chain of belief at the centre of the question of religion, the future of religion is immediately associated with the problem of collective memory. Yet one of the chief characteristics of modern societies is that they are no longer societies of memory, and as such are not ordered with a view to reproducing what is inherited. Modern societies erode

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485 ibid., pp. 96–97.
486 ibid., pp. 123–124.
social, cultural and psychological continuity. They are societies of change as opposed to being societies of memory. Though there may be an antithesis between religion and modernity based on rationalisation this is not necessarily the case with memory. Viewed in the light of this part of the chapter, the fathers represent a contrary dynamic in that they represent a significant minority who are active in sustaining the chain of memory. We see that spirituality is one of the pathways in which memory is sustained for those with an active religious heritage, and self-authenticating rituals is a means by which this can be seen to be enacted. As Driver argues, ritualisation is a way, an experimental way, of going from the inchoate to the expressive, from the strictly pragmatic to the communicative. It is the source of speech, religion, culture and ethics whereby rituals which emerge from ritualising behaviour are not so much invented by humans, but rather humans are invented by rituals. It is affirmed and manifested in the essentially religious act of recalling a past which provides meaning to the present and encompasses the future.

The practice of anamnesis, of recalling to memory of the past, is most often observed as a rite. What characterises a religious rite in relation to other forms of social ritualisation is that the regular repetition of a ritually set pattern of word and gesture exists in order to mark the passage of times (as well as the transience of each individual life incorporated in the chain) with the recall of foundational events that enabled the chain to form and/or affirm its power to persist through whatever vicissitude has, will still, come to threaten it.

Such an understanding properly framed the fathers’ stories as they ritually celebrated the birth of their children. As Driver highlights, the normative specific to religious memory with regard to experience of the present is intrinsic within the structure of the religious group. It acquires substance in the unequal relationship between ordinary dependent participants, in such

487 ibid., pp. 141–142.
488 Driver, p. 31.
489 ibid., p. 125.
490 ibid., p. 125.
491 ibid., p. 126.
remembrance to the authorised architects of the collective memory. The extent to which the fathers tailored or customised the celebration rituals in a self-authenticating manner is evidence of the renegotiation of this power relationship, but also contains distancing from the sources of authorised memory. The fathers’ stories are cases in point as to how, in postmodernity, authorised memory develops and is passed on in different ways. It legitimates itself differently in accordance with the type of religious sociality proper to the group in question, and the type of domination that prevails. The management of memory differs whether it is a church, a sect or mystical group. The controlled mobilisation by a religious establishment differs from the charismatic mobilisation of memory initiated by a prophet. Nevertheless, in all instances the recognised ability to expound the true memory of the group establishes the core of religious power. In participating in the chain of memory via self-authenticating ritual, what is true memory for the fathers became open for renegotiation and diluted insofar as it was seen as continuation of their spiritual chain of memory rather than continuity and future expression of their religious memory. The outcome was that the emotional intensity and symbolic richness in the ritual evocation of the chain may have varied considerably, in the same way as does the degree of explicitness and formality of shared beliefs in the community of the faithful in which the chain is actualised. Nevertheless, this dialectic, which one can see as tradition in the act of becoming itself, constitutes the central dynamic of religion. In the ritual application of their spirituality via the self-authenticating process, the fathers actively participated in this dialectic as it contends with modernity’s normative affirmation and disconnection of religious memory in the metanarrative vacuum of our postmodern milieu.

Hervieu-Leger argues that in postmodernity, the rise of the religious does not necessarily give rise to religion. This opens up theoretically limitless
possibilities for inventing, patching together and playing with systems of meaning that are capable of establishing tradition. Effectively, this rules out the possibility of religion being able to impose itself in and on society. The fathers with an active religious affiliation understood and acted out of a sense of being religiously begotten. However, in activating this via a self-authenticating process – such as is enacted in celebration rituals – what remains is not necessarily a momentum for propagating religious memory. The self-authenticating process, insofar as it draws on its religious heritage, brings it into the present – but insofar as it expresses the spiritual memory of the fathers’ lived experience, it questions the extent of future religious memory. What helps form people such as local communities, churches and associations in matters of religion may have grown weaker, but families have compensated by increasing the intimacy of their life together. So reading the fathers’ lived experience in the light of her understanding of religious tradition in posttraditional societies highlights and explains why it was that those with the grammar and syntax of an active religious affiliation and participation were enabled both to gravitate disproportionately to this research and also to be the most able to correlate their lived experience through the role of spirituality.

Based on Hervieu-Leger’s theoretical critique of the role of religion in postmodernity, the question becomes, “What is the impact of this radical deinstitutionalisation of religion?” The problem for religious institutions is how to preserve and transmit a tradition when it is thought of, even by believers, not as a sacred trust but as an ethico-cultural heritage, a fund of memory and reservoir of signs at the disposal of individuals – what I have described as the self-authenticating process. In terms of this thesis, can the role of spirituality preserve and transmit a religious heritage? Not insofar as the stories of the fathers are merely correlation of their lived experience to their religious heritage, active or not. As indicated above, the fathers do correlate their lived experience to their religious heritage but they have also brought something to their religious

497 ibid., p. 167.
heritage via the role of spirituality in the manner in which they enacted ritual in a postmodern milieu.

In the next section I will frame and examine the scope of spirituality to preserve and transmit religious heritage. It necessarily involves a discussion around the function, meaning and purpose of enacted rituals in practical theology, not just religious reenactments but those that involve a self-authenticating process.

4.1.8 What does Spirituality tell us about Society? Self-Authenticating Rituals

The meaningful practice of worship in religious communities requires understanding where it came from (history of liturgy), what it means (theology) and how it operates in our current context (symbol and ritual).\(^{500}\) In addition to the traditional historical and theological areas of liturgical study, which have been the main focus for training religious practitioners, practical theology relates to lived experience by expanding liturgical studies to include the whole spectrum of human symbolic events and ritual activity. The underlying premise is that ritual is a primary mode for learning faith, for ritual is most fully engaged in the religious message.\(^{501}\) As the means by which one enmeshes into a religious identity, therefore, rituals are an important influence in shaping faith, character and consciousness. Succinctly put, it is through ritual that we learn to become Christians or members of any other religious and even nonreligious tradition. A ritual is moral territory, whether secular or religious, marking the boundary at which wilderness, moral desert or profane life stop.\(^{502}\)

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\(^{499}\) Hervieu-Leger, 2000, p. 168.


\(^{502}\) Driver, p. 47.
This solace in ritual reminds individuals of an underlying (cosmic) order but also establishes it, reflecting and putting this order in place.\textsuperscript{503} Ritual not only orders to fix social life but also to restore it when it has been lost.\textsuperscript{504} It teaches us to seek a created order in the world, a shared understanding of the world, and in some cases encompasses a relation of transcendence to the behaviours and norms inculcated.\textsuperscript{505} Ritual fosters and deepens community by bringing people together physically and uniting them emotionally.\textsuperscript{506} Ritual activity is playful and imaginative because it exists as if it stands outside the structures of society, existing in the mode of play and is neither here nor there, so is liminal in nature.\textsuperscript{507} This does not deny that post-Enlightenment societies can portray ritual as boring and as diminishing lived experience. However, our postmodern milieu also allows for imaginative rituals, in which people can experiment with both ideal order and ideal freedom releasing feelings of love and participation in the process.\textsuperscript{508}

For people to maximise the outcome of a profound spiritual experience, rituals provide integrative modes of identifying with – and connecting to – the new experience.\textsuperscript{509} These rituals help people to learn to act differently and serve as a paradigm for all significant actions. Ritual actions consolidate the community, which instils a deeper sense of belonging and a way to tell the story of how new experience affected them. Ritual provides experiential validation of the spiritual event, in both a deconstructive and reconstructive manner.\textsuperscript{510} This is accompanied by rhetoric to provide an interpretive system, offering guidance and meaning to the person. Roles undergo review, change and consolidation in the process of such a momentous event as birth. The rituals of religion seek to

\textsuperscript{503} ibid., p. 133.
\textsuperscript{504} ibid., p. 137.
\textsuperscript{505} ibid., p. 147.
\textsuperscript{506} ibid., p. 152.
\textsuperscript{507} ibid., p. 159. Driver distinguishes between shamanic ritual as performative power and priestly ritual as static symbol. The shaman invokes manifests and elicits transformation; the priest represents, interprets and conserves the social shape. He argues that Western society is overly priestly in emphasis. A corrective is required to a performative approach which allows ritual as transformation to emerge (pp. 76–77)
\textsuperscript{508} ibid., p. 164.
\textsuperscript{509} Rambo, 1993, p. 103.
connect one to the essence of life and any transcendent dimension and
spirituality are the avenues through which people discover, conserve and
rediscover the sacred. 511 The birth of a first child is now more than ever an
interaction of family pathology and personality characteristics performed in a
metanarrative vacuum. There is a clear deconstruction of the modernist medical
paradigm where doctor and nurse know best. Spirituality preserves and
enhances autonomy in the medical process when much of a patient’s life is
directed by experts. 512

One example of this is how self-authenticating and self-serving experience
shapes the rituals involved in birth. Having decided the approach one will take
for the birth there are rituals of involvement and absence such as attending the
ultrasound as part of confirming the baby’s healthy development. For instance,
it is a common ritual to accompany the birth of a first child with renovations of
one's home. Who will attend the birth and mapping out what they will do and
not do is a precise ritual. These rituals map the scope of one’s self-interest.

Rituals that merely reenact tradition will not preserve and transmit the
religious heritage to a new generation. Something else needs to occur.
Participants need to bring something back to the tradition. For instance,
Heimbrock draws on European experience of young people to show that while
their interest in traditional churches is subsiding, in contrast there is a
sustained and increasing interest in religion as resacralisation in postmodern
societies. 513 This return to the sacred takes the form of a search through cult,
auratic places, rituals and sacramental activities. 514

In positing the notion of self-authenticating rituals, I am arguing that
religious heritage can collaborate in preserving and transmitting itself insofar as

510 K. Engebretson, “Young People, Culture, and Spirituality: Some Implications for Ministry”,
511 van Dierendonck & Mohan, p. 228.
513 H. Heimbrock, “Beyond Secularization: Experiences of the sacred in childhood and
adolescence as a challenge for RE development theory”, British Journal of Religious
those participating in the celebrating ritual are able to so shape, negotiate, personalise and tailor the ritual. As Groome asserts, ritual is an essential part of representing stories and the Christian process of knowing God.515 This is abundantly illustrated by the stories of the fathers with an active religious affiliation, who were empowered by their understanding of spirituality to engage in ritual making that was not just a continuity or reenactment of their religious heritage but a personal reshaping of it, whereby the rituals were correlated to their understanding of their spirituality as evoked by the lived experience of the birth. This encapsulates the concept of self-authenticating rituals.

How do such self-authenticating rituals preserve religious heritage? Fenn provides a framework for demarcating the extent to which spirituality enables this process to occur. He starts with the line between the sacred and mundane, or profane, because it reinforces the normative boundaries of societies and separates the conceivable from the inconceivable, the knowable from the impenetrably mysterious, the possible from the impossible, and the uncertain from the likely.516 Thus, shrines and saints, creeds and doctrines mark the boundary between the truly human and the subhuman or animal, between the social and the merely natural. The Sacred (capital S) is inevitably subversive as it involves the excluded possibility: indefinite, elusive, evanescent, undetermined and yet potentially immediate, constraining, revelatory and disruptive. Wherever the Sacred is brought under the auspices of religion, possibilities that had been put beyond the pale of experience are rediscovered. The role of spirituality perceived by the fathers in this part of the chapter is consistent with Fenn’s explication of the Sacred.

The sacred (the institutionalised Sacred) consists of a fragile set of symbolic defences that mimic the entire range of possibility with a substitute and counterfeit pantheon of possibilities.517 It offers a form of service that claims to

514 ibid., p. 120.
be perfect freedom and a form of renunciation that promises to give the faithful the consummation of every desire. Thus, the sacred is a way of finding a safe place and time for the special graces, the charisma, of intimate, intense and enduring but evanescent and distant relationships. The religious heritage and affiliations expressed by the fathers in the first part of the chapter are consistent with Fenn’s explication of the sacred.

Though we live in a secularised society, spirituality is not regarded as an optional extra whether a person is early or later in their life cycle. Fenn argues that secularisation is not opposed to the Sacred but, in fact, as secular society opens itself to the wide range of postmodernity’s possibilities it is wholly open to the Sacred. The process of secularisation destroys the distinction between the sacred and the profane enabling all social life to be understood as inherently or inevitably religious. This relates to the argument of this thesis in that the concept of spirituality insofar as it is the application of the characteristics of religious-type experiences to those experiences that occur in nonreligious settings, though not necessarily limited to those that function as transcendent referents, enables individuals to further their lived experience.

Fenn understands rituals as employed to create, defend, eventually to channel and to control the innermost selves of individuals. The nature of contemporary society in its postmodern guise, insofar as it reflects a fragmented and ever changing interface, ensures that traditional rituals have developed shorter life spans while competing with new rituals that incorporate both neglected ancient rituals and contemporary innovations based on attracting a new audience. This is well documented in the exponential rise of civil celebrants administering what was previously the exclusive ritual domain of national religious institutions. Fenn describes this dialectic as follows.

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519 Fenn, 2001a, p. 5.
520 ibid., p. 13.
522 ibid., pp. 148–150.
The introduction of new liturgies that seek to mine the past is thus a dramatization of the need to make up for lost time in a society that expands the range of social interaction and personal experience well beyond the conventional or institutionalized limits.  

For Fenn, rituals no longer establish a temporal matrix but become instances of locating oneself in a time and place. To the extent that a person, in this instance a father with an active religious affiliation, negotiates this dialectic between reenacting and reshaping rituals in order to apply them to his lived experience I argue that he is engaging in the process of self-authenticating rituals and preserving their religious heritage. Though the origin of the rituals was not in dispute, the authority for the negotiation from those fathers about to participate in them is primarily located in those who are to undergo them rather than in the institution or celebrant overseeing the ritual. This is not to say that the fathers extended the freedom to its fullest extent in order to enact self-authenticating rituals in celebrating the birth of their children. No father sought to enact a completely new ritual that he expected to be granted equal status with the received rituals of his religious heritage. Nor did the fathers require a complete denial of the authority of their religious heritage in providing such self-authenticating rituals in order to assert their sense of permission to reshape the received rituals. That is to misunderstand the dialectic process of retrieving and reshaping the received ritual traditions. The focus on lived experience enacted in self-authenticating rituals gives people a voice they do not otherwise have in the practices of traditional religion.

This is a very different role from that played by rituals in the preservation of religious heritage. Therefore, the role of institutional religious practitioners has changed in a postmodern milieu from one understood as the primary sources and producers of ritual into that of facilitators helping to engender and interpret the use of both inherited rituals and the self-authenticating rituals that emerge from lived experience. To experience our postmodern milieu involves participation

\[\text{523} \text{ ibid., p. 38.} \]
\[\text{524} \text{ ibid., p. 39.} \]
\[\text{525} \text{ Usher & Edwards, 1994, p. 199.} \]
and immersion in its images. It is to recognise that lived experience is not a
direct representation of the world but is itself a construct, the outcome of
discursive practices.\(^{526}\) The self-authenticating process enables people to tailor
and customise rituals to create personal autonomy and the search for meaning so
that they may value themselves more fully, challenge the barriers erected by
traditional practices and raise critical awareness of the operation of power in the
social formation.\(^{527}\) Taken to its logical extreme, there is no global universal
knowledge, only local, particular knowledges.\(^{528}\) The *disinterested* producer of
knowledge is no more. In the postmodern moment we are all producers of
knowledges, we are all producers of rituals in participation and immersion which
is the self-authenticating process. Lived experience is not a given but is
constantly constructed and reconstructed. The diversity of experience is
recognised and its articulation asserted. The enacting of rituals is not simply the
domain of the institutionally credentialed.\(^{529}\) Everyone, in different degrees and
to differing extents, is able to enact rituals through a self-authenticating process.
Rituals – by refusing to demarcate between the psychological, socio-political and
material worlds – keep religion from retreating into metaphysics.\(^{530}\) Rituals are
not above time but subject to time, belong to human history and are transformed
by the histories to which they belong.\(^{531}\) Rituals change in a developmental and
educational manner in that we learn how to do it next time.\(^{532}\) Therefore, a vast
array of ritual expressions can be made available from the dramatic arts to story
telling.\(^{533}\)

In the case of the respondent fathers’ stories, the process of self-
authenticating rituals can be summarised as follows. The fathers’ spirituality
offered them the possibility to reshape the rituals of their religious heritage in
the light of their lived experience. The fathers did so according to their own

\(^{526}\) ibid., p. 201.
\(^{527}\) ibid., p. 203.
\(^{528}\) ibid., p. 198.
\(^{529}\) ibid., p. 212.
\(^{530}\) Driver, p. 173.
\(^{531}\) ibid., p. 184.
\(^{532}\) ibid., p. 188.
\(^{533}\) Drane, pp. 85–154.
particular weighting of the four understandings of spirituality highlighted by their stories earlier in this chapter. The unique combination of four factors describing the nature of spirituality informed the process by which each father shaped the religious celebration. Each father also sought to honour the chain of memory contained in his religious heritage as indicated by the three modes that their religious affiliation of each father brought to bear on his lived experience as an expression of his understanding of spirituality. Finally, the ritual enacting of religious celebration was a means for all of the fathers of enacting their spirituality as a result of their lived experience in the chain of belief.

Though self-authenticating ritual is the starting point for analysing the postmodern milieu of the fathers’ lived experience, I would argue that other postmodern out workings corroborate and inform the fathers’ correlating of their lived experience to self-authenticating rituals both as an expression and a realisation of their spirituality. These other out workings of postmodernity prevail upon fathers so that they gravitate towards such self-authenticating rituals. I will present a further three out workings in Chapter Five, which in other circumstances may be the starting point for understanding people’s lived experience in a postmodern milieu. In this case, I argue that these contribute to an understanding of the centrality of self-authenticating ritual for fathers with an active religious heritage.
4.2 Part Two: Birth Depicted as a Spiritual Experience (Without a Religious Affiliation)

In the second part of this chapter I will describe and analyse the experiences of those fathers without an active religious affiliation or participation who reported that being present at the birth of their children was a spiritual experience. Three of the respondents who expressed the birth as a spiritual experience formed this category. Unlike in the preceding part of the chapter, the approach to the data takes the form of case studies because of the small number of respondents who fit this pattern. The following three respondents participated in six births and indicated that all were spiritual experiences – but this is not to say that all were positive or creative, for they also evoked elements of crisis and disruption. Though the data may be presented as separate case studies this does not indicate three different ways in which spirituality is utilised by those who do not have an active religious affiliation or participation. Rather, these case studies provide a window into the distinct pathway that informed their particular expression of the nature and role of spirituality in this process. The argument in this part of the chapter is that there are significant commonalities amongst these respondents in their understanding of the nature of spirituality and in the questions they pose as to what it tells us about Australian society. That such alternative spiritual beliefs and practices may not feature prominently among Australians does not discount the role spirituality plays in making sense of their lived experience. The key themes with which spirituality was seen to contend surround the role of medical interference and/or intervention, and a view of natural birth. What emerges from the stories is a strong nontranscendent or imminent understanding of spirituality. Of particular interest is the type of self-authenticating rituals these fathers utilised to enact their spirituality. In this second part of the chapter I will provide a rationale for this pattern and posit some inferences as to the role of spirituality in Australian, specifically non-indigenous, society.

4.2.1 Case Study One: Dan

Dan received religious education at school and church but was clear that he had no current religious affiliation. He acknowledged his own deficiency as well as that of men in general who lack the ability to express religious or spiritual feelings. Dan expected the birth to be a spiritual experience even if it turned out to be one which was very different from the ecstatic event he anticipated. The extent to which this desire for a spiritual experience was read back into the story through the prism of the interview questions in order to express those elements which he was to identify as having been absent is difficult to ascertain. His story affirms the power of spirituality to encapsulate significant lived experience even in negative circumstances.

Dan’s story provides a case in point of someone trying to make sense of the process of medical intervention surrounding birth, and in particular the clinical and life threatening aspect of the experience. This was compounded in that the births of both of his children were surrounded by significant medical issues. The first birth involving a Caesarean delivery was unsatisfactory for him because the medical staff instructed him to stay with his wife rather than with the arriving baby. The result was a less than satisfactory and anticlimatic experience.

The experience of being present at the birth was diminished due to the level of medical intervention. I felt like I missed out. I had been told by friends how it was the most amazing experience when they were born naturally and they rave on about all those emotions they had. When my son was born I really didn’t feel any emotion because he was booked in for a Caesar... It’s been a bit of a let down, though I was amazed – but not to the extent that people raved about it, it was so clinical and structured. [596–604]

The second birth was even more traumatic requiring the couple to consider termination due to the life-threatening possibilities and numerous intrusive medical tests. Even though the second birth was natural, the ongoing medical dramas had only just receded after eight months. His involvement in the research was in no small part an attempt to process and compensate for what was missing and cleanse himself of the dark aspects of the experience including
processing the spiritual aspect. I did not regard it as coincidental that he
presented himself to participate in the research as part of a process of closure.

He got a clean bill of health last Monday and it felt to an extent like
it was the end of the birth process. [677–679]

Despite Dan not directly aware that I was a priest, though it may have come
to his attention, the interview resembled a form of confessional with
pseudocounselling overtones. Participating in the research was clearly seen by
Dan as an avenue to express and process what he was not able to generate or felt
was made unavailable to him in his circumstances.

What was it that Dan understood to be the role of spirituality? Dan’s
expectations of the birth experience were exceedingly high. He was anticipating
an uplifting and ecstatic experience which would sustain and inspire him. These
aspects were by no means totally absent from his story. However, the overriding
focus of his story was on what was diminished or absent. The spiritual was
located very much as part of the process of failure and loss. There were three
aspects to his view of spirituality. In the first place, the impact of medicalisation
which denied them an experience of birth as a natural process had generated a
sense of loss.

There is such a difference between a Caesar and natural birth. There is so much medical intervention with a Caesar it can't be
spiritually as good an experience. Both were fantastic experiences but they were long journeys. [672–675]

He found that the spiritual was associated not so much with the euphoria but
with the pain and frustration. Nothing had prepared him for such an experience
of spirituality, which took more the form of endurance than celebration.

If anything it has probably decreased a little bit... I think it was
just time, time healing the wounds so to speak. [659–661]

His view of spirituality sees it as representing larger forces that were beyond
his control. However, his experience of them was not as benefactor, which is
what he hoped for, but as one helpless and impotent. These larger forces view the spiritual as expressing natural processes rather than evoking or directing one to a transcendent referent. He did not want an otherworldly experience but a fully realised this worldly experience. He did not want an experience of failure and loss but of uplifting and euphoria. Both were spiritual, but one was desired and the other endured.

In the second place, the birth exposed his inadequacy as a male to express matters of meaning making and life crisis. Dan gave a very clear indication of his view that as a man he felt deficient in such matters compared with women.

Do you think it will ever change, that men will be able to talk like women talk? [679]

What did he want to talk about? The research interview was an expression of some aspects of the matters he wished to ventilate. The birth process had indicated his lack of opportunity as well as personal capacity to respond to the spiritual aspect of pain and loss. This included what he perceived to be preferential treatment of females, which accentuated such feelings of inadequacy. Such social processes, from his point of view, were colluding in the diminution of the experience.

My wife had a lot of counselling but it was never offered to me, and it was only when I mentioned it to her that she said that she would talk to them and organise it. It was all weighted towards her – perhaps because she was there all the time. [630–633]

One may be harsh and regard Dan as a recalcitrant male who has had the opportunity to renegotiate gender patterns and stereotypes but instead turned the birth experience into another phallocentric episode. I do not wish to deny that this element may be at work, but I do wish to suggest that there is an aspirational aspect implied throughout the story that expresses a desire for a better way for himself as a male in facing the larger forces of life. Dan realised that he required more, but was unsure what to do to procure access to this extra dimension. The birth may not have been the only event that would have trapped
Dan in this sense of inadequacy and need for more, but it was participating in the birth process that allowed this reflective process – including any level of masculine renegotiation – to occur. The absence of a positive experience and trying to recover from such a sense of loss form one of the roles which Dan gives to his spiritual experience. In describing a process of grief for what he missed, for fate’s hand in imposing this set of experiences on him, and in acknowledging his own lack of grammar and syntax to express his feelings Dan does not retreat but affirms the concept of spirituality as encapsulating a felt need for such pivotal experiences to deliver more than just outcomes – he needed also a sense of meaning for lived experience. As Bouma describes it, he wanted a spiritual experience that delivered a ‘more than’ quality, more than what you get in the course of living. Dan clearly wanted the spiritual aspects, and the experience that he did not have access to them, confirmed. In addition, it was clear that he did not see religion as a pathway for addressing this, as seen in his resistance to family pressure to have the children christened.

So there was a lot of pressure from my side of the family to get the baby baptised or christened. Like it is our decision, our choice, so we communicated that they had to pull their head (sic) in. [651–653]

Dan’s experience of spirituality as the awareness of absence did not require transcendent qualities. It is not directly stated, but one reason why religion was rejected was the inference it is something transcendent by definition and therefore not something to be appropriated as a result. The implicit suggestion from Dan is that spirituality is utilised precisely because it does not reference transcendent characteristics. For Dan it was not the absence of transcendent experience that was bemoaned but very much the lack of a this-worldly access to the larger forces that celebrate our lived experience, and sense of failure and loss at the negative outworking of these larger forces that impinge upon our lived experiences. The nature of these forces was a mixture of natural ways of the world, such as the gynaecological mechanics of birth, and their socially constructed interplay – such as gender issues.

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4.2.2 Case Study Two: Ray

Ray's upbringing was informed by agnostic parents with an atheistic focus, though his wife's parents continue an active religious participation. He believed that men were not able to express matters of personal meaning in relation to spirituality or religion as eloquently or comfortably as women because, in general, men were reluctant to reveal their inadequacies though he did not apply this to himself. Ray expected the birth to be a spiritual experience and prepared accordingly. There is no sense in which the spiritual was read back into the experience via the research interview, though this does not deny the possibility that the nature of the spiritual was confirmed and elaborated by the preparation, birth and its aftermath including the interview. Similar to Dan, for Ray a key aspect of the spiritual was defined by a concern to minimise medical intervention. Ray, as an ancillary medical practitioner, was clear about what would enhance the spiritual dimension in the birth process – the lack of medical interference. Clearly, his vocation and accompanying training led him to an important worldview that informed his approach and understanding of the role of the spiritual in the birth experience. This aspect was intentionally included in the preparation for the birth experience whereby they attended not only the normal prenatal classes provided by the Birth Centre but also an extra birth workshop. This focused on a holistic approach addressing the physical, mental and emotional aspects that were important in fostering the spiritual aspects of the experience.

I would say that some of the preparation had a metaphysical or spiritual sense but not with a particularly religious – not sort of attached to any deity whatever. I found that quite helpful. [913–915]

Ray directly states that religion is something transcendent by definition and therefore not something to be appropriated as a result. For him, spirituality is utilised precisely because it does not reference transcendent characteristics. This spiritual preparation may have not had explicit religious aspects, but clearly spoke out of a philosophy of life that affirmed that our bodies innately know what they should be doing as opposed to a medical model. In other words,
spirituality was a nontranscendent reality. This spiritual understanding was utilised to minimise the medicalisation of the birth process.

The disease mongering that the conventional medical system has foisted upon us has turned birth into a disease or event that you manage rather than the idea that the less you interfere the more favourable the outcome. [829–832]

This overriding theme that spirituality is not associated with the transcendent but an instinctive natural accord consistently informs his understanding. The fact that the births were natural despite doubts at some points as to whether they would require medical intervention was clearly the most spiritual dynamic of the experience.

For me in terms of the spiritual, gave me a very profound experience that there is an extension of that innate intelligence, there has got to be some sort of universal intelligence. I don’t have any other experience that compares to that. [886–889]

Ray understood the spiritual aspect not only as unique but also as one that encapsulated a realised outworking of his understanding of the nature of life in this world. The extent to which his vocational training as a chiropractor had created this worldview or confirmed other influences that formed it is unclear, but its focus on the sense that all things work together unless you interfere with them, that one should work with nature not against it and locate oneself in the flow of natural workings is strongly implied in his story.

From the overall how do you view the world perspective, I guess intellectually I have developed ideas, though I don’t have a religious aspect. I guess I recognise that you look at the organisation of the planets, and the way the body works, there is some intelligence that a reductionist approach, that we are just a bunch of chemical reactions, does not ring true to me. Seeing that whole birth process and how beautifully everything went together to give this perfect little human being I think it was pretty powerful reassurance, no ... a powerful piece of information that made that sense stronger for me. [850–857]
The fact that both of Ray’s birth experiences actually fitted this view of all things working to natural balance explains the ongoing criticism of instrumental medical science that the experience enabled. It all worked out the way they planned and hoped for so that spirituality was utilised to justify their criticism of medical practice and religious approaches ensuring the level of fulfilment he felt they received from the experience. Renegotiation of gender or of the place of medical instrumentality or of the place of a religious outlook were not required as the experience was seen as being a triumph of their outlook on life. The opportunity to participate in this research was a confirming both of the spiritual aspect of the experience and of his worldview.

What is the understanding of spirituality presented in Ray’s experience? In the first place, the contrast with religion is important.

For me the spiritual part of it I am more open to. Find a lot more value in it. Previously I don’t think I had a place for it other than as an intellectual exercise. And I always found traditional religions a little bit irritating and the role they have in society, which I think they have abused to a large degree. Since I have had the kids I have been a lot more understanding of that (spiritual aspect). That for lots of reasons people have to have more meaning in their life that adds a layer of meaning that you don’t get from anywhere else. So I guess it has changed my world view in that way quite a bit. [977–983]

Insofar as the birth experience brought a “more than” aspect to his lived experience this was not transcendent in dynamic or content.

We did not have them christened or anything like that. We specifically decided not to do anything that was not meaningful for us. [963–964]

Ray was not seeking an otherworldly experience but one that made sense of his “this worldly” experience. Religion in some way was presented as a contrast because, for Ray, it necessarily evoked transcendence – whereas spirituality did not necessarily require such correlatives. This is not to confuse this with a form of antideistic secularism but to see it as being more like a nontheistic or naturalistic view of meaning for lived experience.
I would certainly say the spiritual aspects have increased. I would not say it has a religious aspect in the way I would define religion for me. But the spiritual side of it, I think, has got a bit bigger as I got more time to reflect on the context and put it into context, and see how it is not just this stand alone miracle – the beginning of part of a process miraculous all the way along. And I think some level of spiritual understanding is a more elegant and realistic representation of how things work than just the biochemistry and physiology of it. I think that bit does do something for me, but I think it is a very limited perspective of it. [941–947]

The extent to which the experience was renegotiation of worldview or gender issues was clearly limited as the experience confirmed previously held commitments. It was understood that they were active partners in the experience so they prepared before entering the birth process. In Ray’s story, the “innate universal natural intelligence” was the true midwife and he and his wife were instruments of it. There was little sense that gender issues needed attention. What informed this view? The pivotal factor seems to be Ray’s ancillary medical role as a chiropractor

It is stuff I am pretty passionate about and I appreciated the opportunity to talk about it. [983–984]

His vocation embodies a philosophy of the body which affirms that its natural workings do inform and confirm his experience of attending the birth. The people whom he regarded as most sympathetic to his experience were fellow chiropractors who shared a similar philosophy of the body and its workings.

The most supportive and affirming of this spiritual dimension have been other chiropractors and their spouses. [921–923]

Unlike Dan, who encountered a crisis and disappointment which brought some level of criticism to his own view, the successful enactment of the births in which he participated confirmed Ray’s worldview, his gender relations, his vocation and therefore his livelihood. The larger forces of life, the innate intelligence of the universe, were on their side and the birth outcomes were testimony to this and realisation of the role given to spirituality in their
philosophy of life. Spirituality could be read in Ray’s situation at best as an underlying philosophy that informs and fosters the lived experience that the births exemplified or at worst as self-justification of lifestyle, philosophy and vocational choice based merely on the luck of the birth draw.

4.2.3 Case Study Three: Bart

Bart initially stated that he had no past or ongoing religious affiliation, though he did acknowledge having attended a Sunday school and Church youth group. He felt able to express spiritual and religious experiences, though he agreed that a lot of men do have difficulties because they struggle with expressing emotion on any level. Bart consistently read his birth experiences through the prism of his understanding of spirituality. Though his experience was shaped by an apprehension about intruding medical processes, this was not the overriding concern. The focus of the experience was not the medical process involved but its spiritual meaning which was applied to both births, accepting that there were differences in the manner of each birth which did shape some aspects of his response. Unlike Dan, who had only an intrusive experience, and Ray who had only a positive experience, Bart’s first birth as a Caesar involved significant medical intervention – whereas the second birth was a completely natural birth. Nonetheless, Bart’s approach enabled both to be regarded as spiritually significant despite the differences in the birth mechanics. What provided the antecedents for this outlook was not completely clear, but the manner in which he approached the births and how he processed them were regarded as clear out workings of the role of spirituality in his world view, which was made clear throughout the interview. Bart was in no doubt that the experiences were unique and life defining.

Pretty much stand alone. You think about most special days in your life and it is way up there. The other really special day was getting married. Getting a new job is more ego than anything. Birth and getting married was all about connection. [1531–1533]

He was clear that the experiences were spiritual in nature and sought to prepare himself accordingly. To this end, he participated in a birthing workshop
in addition to the Birth Centre prenatal classes. This was an important enabler for the spiritual nature of the experience in acknowledging the availability of multiple approaches and pathways into the experience. The effect of this was not so much to provide a range of choices but to affirm their choice of spirituality as legitimate and relevant to their birth process.

There were at least 20 couples if not more. It was a fantastic experience for us, it was a very empowering experience for us. It took away a lot of the fear. Also put us in touch on how this was going to be a beautiful thing. But it was our birth experience and not so much a clinical doctor sort of thing – which it kind of started to feel a bit like that. Also there were so many different ways people had come to think about their birth and wanting to experience the birth process. It was great to share that. To know that there is (sic) so many different ways and thinking about it. [1452–1459]

Their view of the medical profession contrasted with his own perceived approach to the experience. The preparations also provided a range of resources and practices which he employed to shape and enhance the spiritual aspect of the impending experience.

The birth workshop leader provided some meditation-type tapes, relaxation tapes. There were four of them. One was focused on the mother, one on the father, etc. About getting in touch – not just the father relaxing but relaxing and getting in touch with the baby. Very much about setting time aside, conscious of the space and environment around you and thinking about the connection between the two of you. [1554–1559]

These techniques were found helpful because they were congruent with their current worldview. They enabled the ‘more than’ aspect of the desired experience to be realised consistent with their spiritual outlook. What is the understanding of spirituality expressed by Bart’s experience? The description of the birth workshop clearly describes what was spiritual about the birth experience.

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536 Bart expressed it under the concept of wonderment. “My sons’ birth and years after was all about wonderment.” [1521–1522]
We were looking for someone to tell us that it was our experience. This was not what we were hearing from the medical profession. This was not about medical procedure and doing it in a way that was risk free. In contrast, for us it was about an incredibly powerful emotional, spiritual experience like which there is nothing else. Not the prenatal classes which were about the practical side of things. The birth workshop was very much about that end of it... It was about emotional stuff, it was about togetherness, it was about empowerment, it was about believing in yourself. All of that.

His view of spirituality was intensely nontranscendent, focusing on their current lived experience as conceived and practised by them, as a couple. It could be read as narcissistic in tone, which may indicate one of the natural out workings of nontranscendent spirituality. This prejudicial reading asserts that the transcendent brings authentic and unselfish spirituality. However, a more generous reading is to hear Bart’s view of togetherness as exemplified in his current relationship with his wife. He is describing his lived experience and projecting it to the coming new arrivals, preparing both them and themselves for their life together. On the other hand, through the preparation, in part, they sought to make their spirituality portable and not reliant on any outcomes in the birth. It identified those moments and criteria that would define whether the experience was fulfilling or diminished under the concept of togetherness. Despite the births being different in terms of the required medical intervention, the spiritual outcome was equally affirmed. The philosophy he saw undergirding medical intervention did not infiltrate the experience as a spiritual experience.

It was all about being together and really close. A really wonderful experience and it was that sort of stuff – without the workshop we might’ve let them take him. We might have gone, “You’re the doctor, you know best.” 1489–1492

Even when the second birth followed a different path and was more natural, there was no disavowal of the previous birth’s spiritual content and replacement of the second birth as more fully a realisation of their spirituality. Both births were regarded on a par as far as a spiritual experience was concerned.
Once again it just felt like everybody vanished and we got time to be together and really make that moment special. [1518–1520]

If anything in the interview, Bart indicated that the reverse had been the case with the higher medical involvement in the first birth sustaining a higher spiritual esteem. Perhaps this can be explained by a compensating dynamic keen to resist medical practices as parts of a foreign philosophical body that was not required in the second birth leading to feelings of let down. The dominant meaning of spirituality that carried itself through both births was the concept of connection.

For the spirituality stuff for me it is about the spirituality within all of us. The sense of people belonging to each other and community, all that sort of stuff, overlap in so many different ways. The birth experience, yes, but it is more now that we have got children. They have got to have a place in this world. I want that place to be a really wonderful place. It means making sure that we are all connected and really supportive in an important way. We have continued to build these special relationships. [1630–1637]

This connection was an expression of human identity available to all if they so chose as he had. Again, the suggestion can be made that this nontranscendent emphasis on spirituality is little more than a self-referential philosophy of lived experience – but there was some evidence that his view of spirituality required more than self-justification of lifestyle and philosophical worldview.

Anything to do with children, birth and loss – strikes a cord to me like never before. Whether it is in the newspaper, TV or friend talking – stuff that would have just gone past me without a blink, really hits me now on an emotional level it never did before. [1527–1530]

The experience may not have been transcendent but it did affect Bart in a manner that called for him to transcend his own circumstances. The clearest expression of this was in the rituals and symbols enacted to celebrate the births.
Once we started thinking about the things that are special in our lives, the sea came into to it which was a powerful symbology and we wanted to articulate. The sea is really good because it is all about intermingling. You and I, but it all comes together and especially that bit of pouring back into the ocean. That was really nice. This whole thing about people being too much wrapped up in themselves today. Back to we are all part of this big picture thing. [1621–1621]

The sources for this view of connectedness were not stated. They certainly precede the actual birth experiences in the story and clearly inform the spiritual role consistently through both birth stories. In contrast to Ray and Dan, there was no reference to religion as transcendent adversary fuelling a contrast with their “this-worldly” spiritual understanding. The shadow of religion was not signposted by any stated departure from transcendent understandings, but in a positive emulation of religious rituals enacted by the couple. An involved unique ritual congruent with their philosophical worldview was constructed utilising a symbology of togetherness and enacted to celebrate the birth of their children.

Nine months after the birth... we held it for friends and family together. With my first son it was down at my wife’s parents’ beach side place. We spent a lot of time down there and we also got married down there so there was a lot of connection for us. We have a friend who is a celebrant who helped us... We put together the words and asked four couples to be special people in our son’s life. We chose them on the basis of aspects of themselves they could bring to his life. What we asked everybody to do as part of the occasion was to think about their contribution to his life in a conscious way... Whether it is things you do or just being around... The symbology of that is that we got an urn. We got people to use a cup to dip into the sea and pour it into the urn. Everybody – including our son – poured a cup into the urn. And then my wife and I and our son took the urn and poured it back into the sea. It was the symbology of everybody being part of his life and him bringing his own stuff. We had a cup for people who had passed on or were not able to be present for the day. And pouring back into the sea was our son going to contribute back into the world in a wonderful way and be part of the whole thing. [1585–1601]

This ritual embodied and declared their spirituality in quasi-mystical humanist terms. The role of the celebrant and its growing place in ritual
celebration in our society in part explains the quasi-religious pattern of the celebration. Any inclination to typecast this ritual as a pale shadow of religious parallels is to be resisted. The couple were not reacting to religious paradigms – rather, they were asserting what is important to them. They were not evoking a secularist antireligion narrative but rather availing themselves of the emerging freedoms of expression that our society provides for the making and sustaining of meaning that a more religious past age discouraged. Rather than noting the religious parallels, the analysis should be of the ritual and its outworking. How resilient was this ritual? It seems that when it was applied at the second birth it was not such an effective experience.

For our second son we did the same thing. It was a very similar process. We thought about having a different process using some different symbology but it was such a nice process the first time so we wanted to replicate again. But it didn’t, for me, have the same special qualities that our first son’s did. It did have special qualities about it but life was a lot more complicated and it just got compressed. We did not do it down at my in-laws’ beach side place. We did it at home. The day was bad. The water jug leaked. That was at a time for me when a whole lot of stuff with work was going on... I am really disappointed I wasn’t in the right space for that day. We still had special people for us on that day. The whole thing was an expression of the spiritual significance of the births... That specialness that is within each of us that is out there and comes together through things that we do and the relationships that we build. We wanted people to identify at that level... Not in an external – it was very much about internal and bringing it back into people and thinking about what they are doing in their lives. Hard to articulate some of that stuff – thus the use of symbology. [1602–1617]

There was a contrast between the two births and the two ritual celebrations. Bart was able to sustain his view of spirituality and apply it to the differing circumstances – whereas in the celebrations it was harder to sustain the intensity and sense of fulfilment for both occasions. Their finite resources and circumstances were regarded as the source of this disappointment, yet it further testifies to the nontranscendent understanding of spirituality. It is religious ritual serving a person’s spirituality rather than serving a religious tradition. The only authority for the ritual is their applied resources. The burden of
authority for others is outsourced via religious affiliation. Taking such personal responsibility is a natural aspect of such nontranscendent spirituality and insofar as the ritual and its meaning were their construction and possession it is not surprising to note a feeling of strain and burden expressed in the story.

In a sense, his participation in the research seemed an intentional way of not only declaring a sort of ‘amen’ to the spiritual dimension of his birth experience but also sharing the burden of their ritualised spirituality. It may be too strong to assert, but togetherness needs a certain threshold of social content to be sustained. I was an active part of acknowledging and confirming the spiritual dimension. Why such a formal signposting? In part, I represented an extension of togetherness. Any answer to this question is conjecture – but clearly, the fact this was an aspect of the interview provided direct access to his understanding of the role of spirituality.

This interview has picked the path really well. The things that I wanted to say but had forgotten came up and brought it up. There are things that I wanted to talk about I did talk about. Thank you. [1639–1641]

As a religious practitioner it may be too self-serving to indicate that a nontranscendent spirituality of togetherness naturally creates social religious imperatives. Rather in line with Bouma’s insight that no human activity persists through time, even a very short time, it should be no surprise to see the spiritual evoke aspirations to be socially organised, both formally and informally as religion has become in our society.537

4.2.4 Why is it like this? Nascent Memories for Metanarrative Vacuums

The fathers in this second part of the chapter who understood their lived experience as spiritual did so understanding its role as a nontranscendent category whose critical role was focused both on the medicalisation of the birth process and a distancing, denying or rejection of traditional religious rituals for the celebration of the births. Spirituality with this nontranscendent content was

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537 Bouma, 2000, p. 389.
an expressive category rather than a transforming one, affirming their current understanding of themselves – a projecting of self rather than the realisation of a new self. The reason why it is like this is that transcendent narratives have actually been discredited and replaced by nontranscendent referents to describe spirituality. For these fathers the prominence of spirituality is not about resurgence for transcendence but more encapsulates the aspirational content for their lived experience. The role of spirituality addressed the disadvantages experienced by men – the barriers to accessing and expressing that which was deepest and most vulnerable in them and the obstacles which prevent men in Western societies from accessing and developing vocabulary to express their spirituality. As such, spirituality was as much used as an awareness of the absence of the “more than” aspect of life and confirming traditional male gender stereotypes as to their inadequacy when it comes to expressing the meaning in relation to lived experience. What gender renegotiation is present did not lead to spiritual exploration. None of these fathers found the experience changed their spiritual outlook in terms of renegotiating the nature or possibility of the transcendent in their life. Spirituality merely connected them to previous nontranscendent outlooks which focused on the this-worldly quality of life and the affirmation of the present state of their relationships. For these men the spiritual refers not so much to the religious but to other patterns such as personal outlooks and counselling. For these men the prominence of spirituality is as much a testimony to the difficulties and obstacles that men in our society have to face when attempting to access renegotiation and to substitute transcendent vocabulary.

In this part of the chapter, the respondent fathers provided a window into what happens when you have no active religious heritage to frame your spiritual experiences. In the first part of the chapter, I argued that spirituality was the path by which those with an active religious affiliation were enabled to frame their lived experience. This was clearly enacted in the self-authenticating rituals that these fathers tailored and customised for the religious celebrations of the birth of their children. The theoretical framework provided by Hervieu-Leger enables us to understand such ritual enacting not so much as preserving and
transmitting their religious heritage but, through the role of spirituality, as reshaping their current religious affiliation. What happens to lived experience that is regarded as spiritual without reference to memories generated by religious tradition? Alternatively, as Fenn would pose, what happens to those for whom secularity has opened the possibilities of spiritual experience without a Sacred or sacred framework?538 Clearly, the stories of the fathers in this part of the chapter show that they were, to varying degree, aware of the role of ritual. In contrast to the experiences of those outlined in the previous part of the chapter, ritual was not a predominant theme for fathers without an active religious affiliation who understood their lived experience as spiritual.

I do not want to overstate the commonalities among these three fathers. In terms of their ritual response, it is imprecise how one would isolate or remove any ongoing impact of a traditional Christian memory chain of belief. Each of these fathers in various ways indicated an awareness of such influences and pressures whether stemming from their now discounted early religious formation (Dan and Ray), present links to Christian rituals through their partners and family (Dan and Ray) or a rejection of emulating Christian rituals (Dan, Ray and Bart). Each in their own way provided alternative ritual celebrations of the birth. I would argue that Dan and Ray presented rituals that were low key, taking the form of ritual mementos (birth notices, photographs, charitable donations to the hospital, front pages of the newspaper). In fact, explicitly a rejection of the Christian reenactments was the focus rather than replacing or providing alternative ritual celebration. These ritual mementos, though unique enactments, were muted and disproportionate to the active spirituality which, the fathers believed, was present in their experience. In contrast, Bart was the most courageous by seeking to create and enact a ritual that was uniquely expressive of his spirituality and thus the fullest expression of the self-authenticating ritual process for fathers without an active religious heritage. It may be instructive that he confessed it difficult to sustain its past intensity for their celebration of the birth of their second child.

538 Fenn, 2001a, p. 5.
Despite the fathers described in this second part of this chapter understanding their lived experience as spiritual, there is a clear difference in their stories from those of the fathers dealt with in the first part of the chapter who had an active religious affiliation. As argued in the previous part drawing on the work of Hervieu-Leger, the presence of an active community memory chain of belief was the prime context for those fathers to enact self-authenticating rituals. I argued that this enabled spirituality to be the pathway, drawing on Fenn, to correlate between the Sacred and sacred. In part, this is because many fathers either affirmed – or did not reject – transcendent expressions in their spirituality and were able, in the main, to draw positively on their religious affiliation to frame – as I argued – in self-authenticating manner, their birth celebrations as ongoing expressions of belonging to religious communities with memories of belief. I argued that this is indicative of how spirituality is understood and expressed for those who draw on an active religious heritage in our current postmodern milieu. Clearly, this does not apply to the fathers in the second part of this chapter who are without an active religious affiliation.

The types of rituals and the struggle to enact them tell us a story which is different from the one in the previous part about our postmodern milieu. Whether it was birth notices which were grudgingly accepted as a low form of celebration, or low-key novel rituals such as celebratory front pages of the newspaper or self created rituals by the seaside, I concur that the birth celebrations attested by fathers in this part of the chapter are not different in kind but congruent expressions of the self-authenticating process. The fathers were all insistent that any ritual expressions which they created enacted their own spirituality as opposed to merely re-enacting or repeating common rituals.

As Eliade suggests, these fathers follow modernity’s determination to regard itself purely as historical, living in a desacralised world.539 Despite this, spirituality can be seen as contributing to the reenchantment of secular

society. Insofar as these fathers understood their experience as spiritual, despite having no active religious affiliation, the nontranscendent content best sees them as engaging in sacred as opposed to Sacred correlation of their lived experience.

Though this group represents only a small proportion of the respondents, the extent to which spirituality will continue to be a significant social pathway for framing lived experience for these fathers, in contrast to those associated with an active religious chain of memory, provide a unique insight as to the alternative birth celebrations which have emerged in the past and may emerge in the future. The fathers in second part of the chapter provide sufficient indication that self-authenticating rituals will be an important means of enacting their spirituality whether it is in the form of ongoing rejection (Dan) and disinterest in traditional religious re-enactments (Ray) or the creative spirit that asserts itself of its own accord (Bart). What was absent from each of these fathers was a positive memory chain of spirituality. If the emergent context for self-authenticating rituals is not to be an active religious heritage then what will provide the impetus for such fathers to enact their spirituality?

In describing the presence of self-authenticating rituals, I am also utilising the stories of these fathers to inform us about the nature of society and its approach to rituals that are post-Christian in nature and which arise from a society that generates rituals not from a universalising religious institution but from allowing the promotion and transmission of lived experience in new ritual forms that express their spirituality without reference to a religious heritage. What will be the building blocks for rituals if not a traditional religious heritage? Here reference to other characteristics of out workings of our postmodern milieu is required which will be presented in Chapter Five. Though the fathers in this second part of this chapter reflect a small proportion of the respondents, the argument is that self-authenticating ritual with increasing flexibility will become

541 Fenn, 2001a, p. 5.
predominant in Western societies, similar in manner to those which have been created for marriages and funerals in the last 30 years.

4.2.5 What does Spirituality tell us about Society? Nascent Self-Authenticating Rituals

These fathers confirm that regardless of their lack of active religious heritage, humans are involved in a continual quest of world construction and reconstruction in order to generate meaning and purpose, to maintain psychological equilibrium and assure continuity.542 Birth is one avenue to experience the sacred and otherworldly, and this experience was often described in religious-type language as a defining moment, the greatest experience of their lives, and this informed the role they gave spirituality.543 Neither is this an esoteric question with little social impact.

As argued, the ways in which people socially prepare and inform their meaning have changed significantly in a postmodern milieu. There has been a move from a modern practice – whereby our society had set and universalising patterns of meaning formation and ritual reenactment associated with the religious life to identify the Sacred – to a situation wherein what is now required for those who are outside religious affiliation is to access other resources that relate to out workings of postmodernity to identify the sacred.544

The fathers in this second part of the chapter represent that group of people in our society who wish to enact ritually what is spiritually meaningful without reference to the traditional religious resources on which people previously relied. As Angel argues it is not the religious institutions that create this need for ritual expression, rather human beings will fulfil themselves with out training, discipline and habituation in ritualist sacralism, symbolical representations of how they understand and draw meaning from their lived experience.545

542 Rambo, 1993, pp. 56–57.
543 ibid., pp. 44–45. Momentous experience can often be an important factor to consider in the process of spiritual or religious change conversion such as near death or near life experiences.
544 Fenn, 2001a, p. 5.
fathers in this part of the chapter provide a case study in how this is enacted in a society where the chain of religious memory is unavailable, broken or rejected.

As Gillis asserts, we now depend on families to do the symbolic work that used to be accomplished by religious and communal institutions. He describes a personal instance drawing on the tragic death of his son in an airplane accident. Not having a religious affiliation meant his family had to create and perform rituals to commemorate their son. However, the rituals seemed to heighten the pain and fracture their remaining family relationships until the first anniversary, when they cooked their deceased son’s favourite recipe and they were able to express their thoughts and feelings in a healing manner. The result was that new rituals replaced the old ones in a collaborative and creative effort that he, as a male, found liberating. He argues that what is different today is that now families are the custodians and creators of their own myths, rituals and images. The three fathers in this second part of the chapter are examples of this process. Their stories not only attest to this self-authenticating process but also beg the question, “What other social resources are in place to enact such rituals?” The ritual urge is definitely present in these stories, however, they also attest that the strain is too great on themselves and immediate family is insufficient to realise this urge. Needless to say, autonomous spiritual subjects, who construct their own religious identity through peculiar patterns of practices create not only new questions for social analysis, but also new social patterns of ongoing spiritual activity. True, the evidence in this part of the chapter is that there are no predominant patterns of ritual response to be discerned from those fathers without a religious heritage.

If it is not traditional religious narratives that inform these and future fathers in the ritual expression of their spiritual experience then what are the building blocks for self-authenticating ritual? I would argue that testifying to a vivid spiritual experience requires other active social partners in order for

547 ibid., p. x.
548 ibid., pp. x–xi.
549 ibid., p. xi.
meaningful and sustainable self-authenticating rituals to be enacted. In describing these social factors I argue that the extent to which spirituality will be a prime pathway for ritually expressing lived experience depends on that which we are about to see in Australian society – the continued emergence of two parallel movements. On one hand, continued locating of spirituality in traditional communities with active chains of religious memory to activate associated rituals accompanied by a self-authenticating dynamic. On the other hand, we will see new social resources and service providers emerge to facilitate the production of new forms of self-authenticating rituals. These two parallel patterns are analogous to the social experience illustrated by what is already occurring in our society in relation to marriages and funerals.

550 ibid., p. xvii.
4.3 Part Three: When Birth is not Depicted as a Spiritual Experience

In this third part of the chapter I will describe and analyse the stories of those fathers who stated that being present at the birth of their children was not a spiritual experience regardless — or in spite of — whether it was accompanied by an active religious heritage or current participation. Insofar as I explore in this study whether or not the birth process was a spiritual experience for fathers, an appropriate course of analysis is to pose the question why some fathers did not find that this was the case, and what we learn from their approach. Six respondents who participated in eleven births and who did not want to describe the births as spiritual experiences fitted this pattern. Unlike in the preceding parts of the chapter, my approach to the data will take the form of two composite case studies. The argument in the third part of this chapter is that these two composite case studies provide two distinct modes for understanding the avoidance of spirituality as a concept in the birth experience stories of these fathers. There is an implied understanding of the role of spirituality, and the answers to questions this poses as to what it tells us about Australian society will add to the argument of this research. The key themes gather around traditional religious beliefs, secularisation theory and their description of spirituality. Four respondents who participated in seven births understood their experience as a secular one, while two respondents who participated in four births understood their experience in traditional theological terms.

4.3.1 Case Study: A Secular Experience

Four respondents presented their experience as being fundamentally secular. This is not to say that there were not secular aspects for any other fathers, but only that for these four it was the dominant narrative. Though similar to the nontranscendent spirituality expressed by the three respondents in the second

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551 Paul’s story is included both here and in part one of Chapter Four as his first two children were presented in a manner that denied the spiritual — but by the time of his third child he had undergone a form of religious conversion including embracing the concept of spirituality to make sense of his experience. His experience is therefore included in both this part of the chapter and in part one. Also, Al was a seventh respondent — but that was because he was delayed from attending the birth because the delivery happened very quickly otherwise his story is represented in part one of the chapter.
part of the chapter, the key difference is an explicit refusal to use the concept of spirituality. These fathers constitute those who are explicitly nonreligious, the now ex-religious and those undecided about this aspect of life.\textsuperscript{552} On the one hand, for Ed the reason was religious affiliation; participation had never been, and was not currently, relevant as an approach for him, and therefore his experience is presented without recourse to such concepts. Instead, he utilised secular narratives to give content to his experience. On the other hand, both Bert and Paul had a significant religious heritage which they had rejected as a result of negative experiences in their formative years. Instead, they approached their experience being aware that they had departed from such religious or spiritual approaches and sought to describe their experience utilising alternative secular narratives in their place. Sam had been inducted into a religious affiliation which he does not now practice and whose tenets he does not necessarily believe, and which is now so dormant that he is not sure what would even constitute a religious experience. These four respondents can be seen to represent a commitment to secular narratives in both their more traditional forms as well as some newly emerging patterns. The reliance on secular themes and the absence of spiritual experience in no way diminishes or detracts from the uniqueness or impact of the births, such as for Ed.

A sense of it being unique and pivotal. [55]

It completely changed Bert’s outlook.

I don’t think anything compares. I have done quite a bit, I have done a lot of travelling, and few different jobs but it is all superficial. I have been successful at sports but this sort of rates number one. Getting married is a nice thing to do but it pales into insignificance. [402–404]

Moreover, Sam gave it the highest honour in comparing it to a sporting triumph.

\textsuperscript{552} Mason, Singleton & Webber, 2007a, pp. 159–160.
When Carlton, won the 1979 grand final...! It is like no other experience I have ever had and it gets better every day.[2499–2500]

Paul’s experiences with his first two children were significantly different from that which he had with his later child after he had taken on a significant religious affiliation in a religious tradition which he saw as a preferable alternative to his heritage. Though they had been completely different experiences, nonetheless the unique impact of each was not in question.

With the boys, in particular the first, I had a very powerful reaction, not at the instant of his being born but that evening. [1849–1850]

Neither can it be attributed to a lack of expressiveness on matters spiritual based on gender. Though all acknowledged that men in general, and in their circle of friends, were deficient in both their ability and willingness to express such religious or spiritual matters, both Ed and Bert were adamant that they did not regard themselves as being constrained in this manner if they had an inclination to choose such forms of expression. Sam and Paul were less confident to deny totally this mirroring of the stereotype that men in general have difficulty in expressing a broad range of things such as anger and rage to feelings and emotions – though only in some instances – while women seem more readily able to express these emotive aspects. Of course, one cannot discount that these respondents are deluding themselves; however, this is not what they presented in their interviews which corroborated their affirmation. All were able to affirm that their experience had made them more tolerant of the religious or spiritual even if they did not want to appropriate it. For instance, Ed found a new openness to different approaches to life.

It has helped me appreciate that there is a whole range of responses, from being deeply religious, from being radical, to separating, drinking heaps, doing whatever, etc, as an outworking of those pressures. It is a tough time. [140–46]

For Bert the birth experience led to discussions with friends whose experiences had included an explicit religious and spiritual dimension. This
raised the question of what spiritual options were possible and the realisation for Bert that he had become more tolerant and, if anything, more favourably inclined so as not to rule out the spiritual or religious.

It might be the next sort of road that I am headed for. (435)

Sam acknowledged that religion has more to offer than he has previously appreciated but, despite this, when describing the significance of the experience he did so without recourse to it.

I don’t disregard religion. I do contemplate sometimes thinking on things day to day. You know, what’s it all about? I don’t get entrenched in deep theology. I always marvel at the process of the child’s development, and our girl growing and developing personality and all those sort of things. The interaction that is developing and growing her and other people, especially her and her parents. I have always marvelled at life and I guess now I just appreciate it more. (2585–2590)

If the experience was not spiritual but secular, what shape did it take? Ed was sent overseas by his workplace for a 12-week professional development course six months after the birth of his first child, which brought a fresh realisation of the implications of that life-changing event he had experienced fuelling a desire to be more aware of communal responsibilities and contributions. For Ed the experience was placed within a personal development life plan and resulted in a new commitment to the greater human good.

I now find I have a greater awareness of doing more things out of a sense of doing stuff for a group, e.g. in work it has helped me be more concerned of (sic) contributing for the betterment of my team and company per se than as an outworking of being ambitious for myself. If I had not had children the desire to contribute broadly, such as to this type of research, would have been left to others. Overall a stronger community feel – though not religious now though they may come later. [48–54]

This greater good should not be overstated as Ed’s outlook was still very much personally focused.
I agree, the basic premises of life, be they spiritual or nonspiritual, are fundamentally the same issues that people who are more spiritual talk about. With the arrival of our twins my wife and I sat down and did our life plan to retirement. The financial impact was significant, but I have a much more detailed life plan than I thought I would have had [150–153]

Ed fits the pattern of a traditional secular theory whose proponents would argue that people in society are moving away from the need for religion and are able to find alternative ways of ordering and giving meaning to their lived experience.

Bert put the experience down more to good management than fate or other forces. The experience drew Bert back to what he could, and should, do now that he has become a father.

Just having children changed my outlook – we are not here for any other purpose than to protect our babies until they can protect themselves. [399–400]

Bert fits the pattern advocated by writers such as Fenn of the new possibilities that the secular nature of society provides, including religious and spiritual outlets. Bert does not need to deny this to affirm the nonspiritual nature of his lived experience.

From Paul’s point of view, it was very uncool in the 1970s and 1980s to talk about religion because of his involvement in therapy and encounter groups. Their focus tended to be directed towards teasing out and analysing any problems in the birth process while providing male bonding as a means of support and affirmation.

I was, in particular, in a men’s group – which was a typical 80’s thing to do. It was a very important part of the group to talk about things like birth. So whether I could say it was supportive I don’t know, but there was a lot of opportunity to tell how I felt about it at that time. I don’t belong to those sort of things now. I had been in that for five years before the first boy was born. It was really good,

553 Fenn, 2001a, p. 5.
especially if the other men had had similar sorts of experiences such as having children... I found it formed quite a close bond among me and some of the other fathers... We had some shared experience that formed our identity. There is this wonderful photo of all the men in the men’s group who had children. We are all standing in a line, spontaneously gathered for a photo, deliberately looking macho. I look at that and I do think we were there for each other when the babies came. It was good, something we could feel proud of. [1958–1971]

Paul fits the pattern of one who has seized the possibilities opened up by secular society; like Bert’s, his reaction is in line with Fenn’s view of how the Sacred and sacred are now available in Western society. He did not denigrate or deny the validity of his secular experience once he had embraced a religious and spiritual frame for interpreting his lived experience. They are just different modes rather than alien or irreconcilable modes of responding to lived experience.

Whatever else the experience was in terms of family and others who were involved, first and foremost for Sam it was a personal euphoric experience which, as a pivotal high point, has sustained and inspired him.

We wanted people to be involved, we wanted the family to be involved and be part of it. I suppose that moment was ours. There will be a lot of things that obviously not wanting to happen, we know what happened on that day, how we felt towards each event even if can’t exactly recall now to this day. We know there was a storm, lightning, light bulbs – that was fantastic. [2578–2582]

Sam epitomises the key theme present in the stories of all of these fathers who interpreted their lived experience within nontranscendent frames of reference. Such this-worldly focus was a recurring theme without recourse to religious or spiritual narratives. The clearest symbols expressing their secular outlook were the forms of celebrations undertaken. Ed bought a painting to commemorate each child, Bert bought a couple of bottles of Grange with their names on them to open on their 21st birthday, Paul buried the placenta under a tree, while Sam videoed the birth and drank champagne.
What understanding, if any, of spirituality did they express? For Ed his secular perspective meant that there was no affirmation of spiritual content – though the experience did bring some level of reflection on meaning and purpose in life as an expression of universal human questions.

There was a feeling that millions and billions of people have been through this before. So why isn't the magic answer 42? Why isn't it always the same?... I reflected a lot on this – quite a bit – why people don't have all the answers. At the same time there were people who responded by asserting that they knew the answer and they were going to tell me – my line to them was, “You know the answer? You tell me. Please don’t be upset if I don’t accept it!” [71–92]

There was a cultural bricolage effect at work whereby other concepts, in this case a literature reference, were utilised to frame the out workings of the experience. One could argue that this is an expression of spirituality; however, Ed himself did not attribute this to spirituality. It cannot be assumed that all meaning making and reflection is best understood as a spiritual endeavour. A case may be argued, but Ed’s own testimony suggests otherwise.

For Bert the spiritual was equated with whether or not he would return to the religion of his parents. A big part of this is related to the renewed relationship with his parents, in particular, his father. While rejecting a return to his parents’ religiosity nonetheless Bert recognised a new impetus of seeking and travelling down a path that may include some form of return to active participation in a religious community.

It is more important having experienced the birth, but with the story still to unfold in my mind. We got not to make a decision but find a path. What do we do? (514–515)

Bert saw the experience more as enlightenment whereby doors that were previously closed are now possibly opening.

554 ibid., p. 5.
They have been opened up for a lot of other people along the way, so you're just heading to this door, and I am sure there are other doors I will reach. (471–473)

The spiritual in a sense is presented by Bert as a return to the religion of his youth. Bert was the only respondent who even suggested the possibility that his birth experience would realign his religious affiliation and participation. At that point, it could be argued that we are discussing family reconciliation rather than secularism and religion. I do not want to deny that this may be the dominant motif; nonetheless, the manner in which Bert expressed this struggle does align his experience with the current patterns in our secular society. A secular outlook does not necessarily preclude recourse to spiritual or even religious approaches, as Fenn has argued.555

Paul engaged in a range of rituals. Many of these rituals were borrowed from alternative religious or folk wisdom traditions without any sense of having to engage with their view of the world.

I actually found that those rituals did not mean anything to me. They were bereft of any current significance for me. I am not sure I have contact with any rituals that would be meaningful for me. The first time I went through rituals that were old English rituals that were derived from old wives’ tales. They were from some culture I did not feel any contact with. [2027–2033]

The spiritual for Paul was identified with the religion of his youth but – ironically – not the alternative sources of ritual that he enacted. He is either unaware of, or never acknowledges, the fact that these rituals have their own religious or spiritual content and outlook. He enacted them as a secular person. Previously, Paul might have been treated as a traitor to the secularist cause to rid our society of religious superstition. Why would a medical doctor with a secular mindset trained in the best modernist scientific traditions draw on contradictory superstitions? This ability to generate bricolage and mix metaphors being either unaware of, or ignoring the contradictions is a key feature of the postmodern milieu. Fenn’s approach, as previously outlined in
part two of this chapter provides at least one way to understand why a scientist would read their stars, which is that the process of secularisation is opening up its world to present us with a range of possibilities.\textsuperscript{556} It also highlights the role of ritual as important for human meaning making. What enabled Paul to hold these contradictions together, as I have argued in this thesis, was not critical thinking but the process of self-authenticating rituals. He invested in himself the authority for the rituals and, though in hindsight he is dismissive of the actual rituals which he self-authenticated, there is no criticism directed towards his right so to engage in such ritual making.

For Sam the spiritual was represented by his in-laws’ religious participation. As a result, he was aware that his wife’s grandmother prayed for them and he acceded to their request that their child should be christened.

I was not against it. If you want to do it then that’s fine. No. I suppose, as Austin Powers would say, ’It’s not my bag, baby!’ I did not really get involved. We went along to the prechristening meeting and they spoke about church community and so forth. I didn’t feel uncomfortable about it. It wasn’t really, I had no intention of making that part of her life – but if she wants to, so be it. [2561–2566]

The spiritual is synonymous with religious practice in Sam’s mind. These four respondents with a secular approach to the birth experience were inclined, in the main, to describe the spiritual in terms of organised religious participation. At no point did they, in their personal reflections as to the meaning and significance of the experience, seek the spiritual as a heading. As seen in the previous part of this chapter, other respondents started from a secular viewpoint but were clear that this was a spiritual experience. The result is an illustration of two forms of nontranscendent understanding of the experience: one in which spirituality is appropriated, and the other wherein it is rejected.

\textsuperscript{555} ibid., p. 5.
\textsuperscript{556} ibid., p. 5.
I would argue that Ed exemplifies the traditional secular view of religion as essentially redundant or irrelevant to Western society. Paul is able to deny the role of religion while embracing a range of contradictory rituals in a bricolage manner while somehow extricating them from their religious and spiritual heritage. As for Sam, he exemplifies the lost grammar and syntax that results from dormant religious practice in our secular society. Bert exemplifies a recent view in secular society whereby religion and spirituality are regarded as possible valid responses in Western society. I do not wish to overstate the contrast, but rather to suggest that their stories give a fourfold shape to the ongoing role of secular narratives in spirituality. People in our secular society have advocated an approach to powerful experiences in which recourse to religious or spiritual concepts is denied. Those who are formed by such a worldview and philosophy will not likely be able suddenly to access the grammar and syntax of religious or spiritual narratives. Those who have reacted to the negative legacy – both personal and societal – provided by the secular censure of religion will reject the appropriation of religious and spiritual narratives even if these are available to them. At the point of the birth experiences, both Ed and Bert meet as they travel from different directions to refuse reliance on spirituality to express their pivotal experience. Sam is almost a disengaged bystander in spiritual or religious discourses, while Paul utilised ritual forms without engaging in the heritage that generated them. It is more than a transcendent or nontranscendent conception of spirituality being rejected – it is the actual need for such a concept. However, as noted, all found a new open mindedness – if not quite an inclination to participate in – matters spiritual which they saw as consistent with their own outlook. This corroborates Tacey’s view that those upholding secular narratives are at a loss as to how to respond to the emerging role of spirituality.557

4.3.2 Case Study: A Theological Experience

Two respondents denied that their experience was spiritual without denying that the spiritual was an aspect of their lives. For them the spiritual was shaped

557 Tacey, 2004, p. 3.
in accordance with their theological convictions, which dictated where the divine presence was to be located and identified. The spiritual remained the domain of traditional transcendent referents of their theology, which provided the authority for their religious affiliation and participation: a spirituality bounded by traditional Christian theology defying postmodern narratives and asserting definite claims as to the nature of God and human development.\textsuperscript{558} The result was a reluctance to engage in the current usage of spirituality as exemplified by the respondents whose stories are examined in part one and two of this chapter. This is not to say that there were not theological aspects for any other fathers – but only that, for these two, it was the dominant narrative. Pat was raised in a family with a high level of religious affiliation and participation which he still personally maintained. Liam was also raised in a religious family but had undergone a conversion as an adolescent as a Hindu to the Christian faith and is now a religious practitioner in his new religion. These two respondents can be seen to represent a commitment to theological narratives in their more traditional forms. Though similar to the transcendent spirituality expressed by the respondents in part one of this chapter, the key difference in the beliefs of these two is a traditional theological understanding of the concept of spirituality. Previous theological understandings and experiences formed the primary prism for making sense of their lives. This is not to say that, for them, the birth experience was theological as such – but that in their stories birth is not primarily a theological experience because the theological is located in other domains. The birth experience could be related to this theological outlook, but of itself it was not a fundamental theological event and therefore was not able to be seen as a spiritual experience. Of course, just as other respondents testified to many practices and beliefs under the heading of spirituality, so too these two respondents were not opposed to utilising the spiritual to describe some of their beliefs and practices before and after the birth process. However, their understanding of the spiritual clearly reflected a more traditional theological content which suggested that the spiritual was an outworking of a transcendent

theological outlook. The theological was primary in their religious outlook to the point that even though the birth was significant for them it was secondary to their primary religious outlook.

What then did these respondents make of their experience? Pat would not say it changed his outlook on life, even though he felt incredibly privileged and richer for being there.

I think it is an incredibly miraculous type of thing. [1705]

Pointedly, he would not describe it as the greatest thing he had ever seen. Clearly, other miracles had primacy in this regard such as the acts of God resulting in conversion and salvation. The miraculous was not some throw-away allusion but drawn from a more traditional view as God’s intervention in human and natural affairs. Likewise, Liam downplayed the impact of the experience. Prior to his interview Liam had not shared any of the spiritual aspects of the experience, instead focusing on the physical aspects of the story. Though other friends, some of whom were – and others of whom were not – Christians, did describe the birth as a spiritual experience, Liam was clear this was not his experience.

During the birth there was no spiritual vision or enlightenment other than a sense of being grateful. [2911–2912]

The birth was not comparable to other profound experiences that generated his deep theological conviction such as expressed in his conversion.

What understanding of the spiritual did they express in their experience? The question at stake is, “What is the appropriate manner of identifying the divine presence and activity?” There were three themes informing this role of spirituality. In the first place, spirituality was tallying one’s experience to what one already knew through current religious affiliation and participation. Of course, all the respondents could be read as expressing their previously held convictions in their experience. However, these respondents – in denying that the experience was spiritual – were positing that the divine presence is more
apparent in other contexts. Their understanding explains that true spirituality lies in belonging to their religious tradition, which is the appropriate gatekeeper to transcendent realities. For instance, reliance on the authorising role of a traditional religious practitioner to identify the divine was a repeated theme for Pat.

If anyone was to draw that sort of thing out of me it would be Mike (a long-time friend and now Anglican priest). He, for me, often is the person who will ask, “Where was God there?” Yes, it is – and always will be – welcome. He is often the reflector of what I should be thinking or should be aware of. [1731–1734]

Left to his own discernment, Pat’s scientific disposition tends to inform him, leaving the religious dynamic unexamined.

I can step away from, say, the birth thing and see it as just a big laboratory animal!... It is good to hear my priest mate talking about the preciousness of it. (1731–1740)

Similarly, for Liam this time of uncertainty required that he align his experience to his previously held theology, curtailing other possible responses or understandings. To this end, active trusting in God’s transcendent provision over his affairs was primary.

Ready to accept whatever God provided. During this critical hour he was also considering how he would deal with it if the child was lost and support his wife. (2897–2910)

In the second place, spirituality referred to traditional theological understandings of the transcendent divine presence in human affairs. The birth was a spiritual experience to the extent that it was a direct explication of one’s theology, a metaphysical affirmation of God’s transcendent nature and workings. For Pat, the birth experience provides evidence of such theological reflection.

I think it makes me more aware of the whole dynamics of the Christian doctrine of father God, and the parental nature of God. It makes me far more aware of that when I see my own children. I think of the forgiving nature of God, of a parent. The desire to make peace. If I have been angry with the children or realised that I have
dealt unfairly with the child, I feel a huge need to admit that to the child. I see that as a similar dynamic to God. [1764–1769]

Likewise, for Liam the issue of spirituality is directly related to his theological tradition which identifies the presence and action of God as the transcendent author of our world and its processes. The birth portrays this active metaphysic.

I think for me, the greatest spiritual experience was the scientific knowledge of what is going on within the mother during those nine months. I guess if there is one verse of Scripture it is... ‘How wonderfully and fearfully you have made me and woven me in my mother’s womb’, one of the Psalms. It sort spelt out the fact of this wonder sort of points you back to God and asks, “Where do we come from? How are we made?” That sort of stuff. It is more related to the knowledge of the bible rather than any particularly religious instruction I got in school. (2964–2970)

Thirdly, the spiritual relates to the practices that outwork their theology. This theology is more than a cognitive framework, it is a metaphysical mindset activated by the traditional media such as the bible, prayer and church. For Pat, the religious commemoration of the births posed theological questions as to what would be the best circumstance for the children to enter into their own relationship with a transcendent God.

With all of them we had prayed within our churches of the joy of this new child... I personally did not want him to be baptised as an infant because I wanted him to have knowledge that he was making that commitment – even if he only had a minor understanding of him entering and being part of a new family. [1756–1761]

The prayers of thanksgiving were part of the process of preparation whereby his children in their own religious affiliation and participation would finally gain access to God and entrance to the community of God’s people.

For Liam the most spiritual time was the conception and the pregnancy when the baby was developing in the womb. The overriding sense of having no control to increase the amazing development as seen in the scans or take care of the
child while inside his wife was more inspiring than the delivery. The key expression was Liam's praying right through the pregnancy that the child would be a healthy child and would learn to love God and give God due prominence in his or her life. Moreover, when the baby came out he prayed over the baby and dedicated the baby to God that she might love God even more than he has managed.

We are planning to commemorate, but I must admit I don't place much importance on it because the most spiritual experience for me was taking the baby in my hand, praying for the baby when the baby was born. That was an intensely spiritual thing. At the same time I realise we are part of a community, a worshipping community, and this is not an individual experience, and as a result of that we will have a thanksgiving service in our church and that is really to incorporate our community and to be grateful to the community for their support. [2451–2451]

Therefore, the birth was not a spiritual experience because it was not a primary experience for establishing their religious tradition, it was not essential for understanding the nature of God and was not a normative practice of their religion. The experience was spiritual only to the extent to which the birth generated reference to such primary theological experience, confirmed theological understandings and the normative practice of their religion.

In terms of the process of self-authenticating ritual both Pat and Liam showed complete disinterest in tailoring or customising the religious rituals that were on offer from their religious affiliation or finding alternative ones. These fathers were all insistent that any ritual expressions to be enacted should reflect their theological convictions rather than merely re-enact or repeat common rituals. Though they did place themselves in a critical role in terms of the timing and weight they gave such rituals, they did not engage at all in any self-authenticating process to shape their ritual enactment. Within their theological frame of reference ritual was demoted as a primary source of transcendent connection, something to return to only when such transcendent business was completed if such rituals were to be more than lip service or a mere reenactments.
Their method of theological reflection was to question whether the divine presence is better accessed in contexts other than birth. Implied in this theological outlook is a form of disapproval of secular philosophy. It is not so much a direct rebuttal but more an affirmation that the basic nontranscendent nonmetaphysical assumptions are irrelevant and illegitimate if one entrusts oneself to a traditional approach to theology and religion, including in its understanding the role of spirituality in the course of human experience.

4.3.3 Why is it like this? The Absence of a Spirituality-Shaped Hole

The respondents in this part of the chapter indicate the ongoing impact of traditional secular theory. On the one side is the secularist mindset that denies or rejects the transcendent narratives of religion. On the other side is a traditional religious activity insisting that there is an ongoing access to transcendent referents. Both extremes of this polarity indicate a reluctant acceptance of the emerging role of spirituality. The manner by which such people socially prepare and inform their meaning has not changed in that the secular approach is the result of minimum exposure to, or rejection of, a religious outlook – while those affirming the traditional religious approach have participated in the traditional formative affiliation and participation of organised religious life.

The fathers in this third part of the chapter represent that group of people in our society who ritually enact what is meaningful without reference to spirituality. As noted by Angel, human beings will seek – without training – discipline and habituation in ritualist sacramalism, symbolical representations of how they understand and draw meaning from their lived experience, so it is not surprising that despite the disavowal of the spiritual these fathers still gave some weight to the role of ritual in framing their lived experience.\textsuperscript{559} In the first part of this chapter, the fathers’ stories are evidence of the ongoing role of the training of consciousness through ritual and mythological tradition to a system of dogma, chain of religious memory, which has rendered the two independent

\textsuperscript{559} Angel, pp. 216–218.
processes of specific sociopolitical and metaphysical indoctrination on the one hand, and training in the intuition of the sacred on the other. The fathers in the second part of the chapter provide a case study in how this is enacted in a society where the chain of religious memory is unavailable, broken or rejected.

Yes, as Angel affirms, many people experience the sacredness of life in rare and special moments – but is this necessarily done so under the concept of spirituality? Accordingly, in this part of the chapter we have stories where spirituality is expressly shunned as a concept for interpreting lived experience. These fathers rehearse the battle lines of secular theory. Neither polarity has realised the fears of the other in these respondents. The secularists are not soulless materialists and the religious are not fundamentalists.

The fathers in this part of the chapter provide the basis for an examination of the understanding and role of spirituality. On the one hand those fathers who deny the role of spirituality on the same basis as religion as being contrary to rationality and scientific worldview provide a legitimate alternative pathway to the fathers in the previous two parts of this chapter. Likewise, for those fathers in this part of the chapter who assert the place of the transcendent in their lived experience, this is based on traditional theological understanding. In so doing both these sets of fathers in this part of the chapter pose the question, “How important and essential is spirituality for interpreting and giving meaning to lived experience?” Moreover, they draw attention to the voices of those who denounce the understanding and role of spirituality.

4.3.4 What does Spirituality tells us about Society?
Selling Spirituality
The fathers in this part of the chapter raise the extent to which the understanding and role given to spirituality overstates its importance for interpreting and giving meaning to lived experience. The question can legitimately be posed as to whether spirituality has really become a dominant narrative for framing people’s lived experience.

In this section, I will present the theoretical critique by Carrette and King, who are informed by their resistance to neoliberal market approach to globalisation and how it frames cultural expression. They seek to challenge the commodification of life and disrupt the domestication of diverse cultural traditions, practices and communities in terms of increasingly homogenised, sanitised and socially pacifying conception of spirituality.\textsuperscript{561} In particular, they posit the popular concept of spirituality that it tends to displace questions of social justice, framed increasingly by the individualistic and corporatist values of consumer society. The results are an accommodating orientation and a dousing of socially transformative dimensions by locating current spirituality in privatised and conformist space. In a way, this is not foreign to traditional secular theory debates where proponents of both religion and secular approaches argued that each was prone, or more prone, to serve the dominant social narratives of their day.

Carrette and King note the explosion of interest in popular literature on mind, body and spirit, and that personal development under the heading of spirituality has been appropriated in education, bereavement and addiction counselling, psychotherapy nursing, corporate and by management consultants.\textsuperscript{562} From this point of view, the result is that spirituality has replaced religion as old allegiances and social identities are transformed by modernity. It is celebrated by those disillusioned by traditional institutional religions and seen as a better way for appropriating this old religious wisdom unencumbered by institutional religious forms. However, Carrette and King believe that the real question is not what real spirituality is but who benefits from particular constructions of spirituality.\textsuperscript{563} They argue that the issue is not the outworking of spirituality not from an individual viewpoint but from a sociopolitical approach.\textsuperscript{564} There is no religious world that exists in isolation from the social, political and economic world, therefore the ethical and religious

\textsuperscript{562} ibid., p. 1.
\textsuperscript{563} ibid., p. 3.
\textsuperscript{564} ibid., p. 4. They suggest that these insights stem from the philosopher William James.
should not be subsumed under what they consider a current overriding neoliberal economic agenda where deregulation of markets has been replicated in the cultural domain. It is not so much that true or real spirituality is lost but that the individualistic and corporatist means of accessing spirituality, which promote consumerism and corporate capitalism as the dominant cultural narratives, instil an accommodating orientation into the current understanding and role of spirituality.\textsuperscript{565} Such a focus for spirituality brings a terminal danger to religion, fundamentally reducing it to no more than a service sector to the global civilisation, religion as mere repairman to the damage wrought by neoliberal market economic philosophies, completely denying it any possibility of bringing a critical voice that would shape our societies for the better. Insofar as spirituality is located in privatised and conformist space, any religious life subsumed under, or linked to it is denuded of any socially transformative dimensions. The result is the commodification of spirituality, whereby buildings used for purposes of religion, ideas and claims are now drafted into the service of individual and corporate profit and capitalist way of life.\textsuperscript{566} It may not be possible so clearly to separate spirituality from economic questions, but neither should it be fundamentally shaped by them.\textsuperscript{567}

This is not to say that traditional religious perspectives through history have transcended regular accusations of serving the dominant social narratives. The question posed by Carrette and King is, “To what extent are the current understanding and role of spirituality denying religion’s ability to effect social transformation in our postmodern milieu?” Are Carrette and King overstating the extent to which religion has been subsumed under the heading of spirituality in the service of global corporate capitalism and consumerism?\textsuperscript{568} I would argue that this is the case. However, this is not to deny their insight that the current understanding and role given to spirituality do lack social analysis and transformative dynamics. The stories of the respondents who attested to the life changing spirituality of their lived experience seem to have been primarily

\textsuperscript{565} ibid., p. 5.
\textsuperscript{566} ibid., p. 15.
\textsuperscript{567} ibid., p. 17.
personally bearing few signs of social examination and transformation on any level beyond their current outlooks and allegiances. As a life-changing spiritual experience there are scant life-changing sociopolitical dimensions noted according to the fourfold scheme presented by Carrette and King.569 To this extent, their claim that the secularist censure offered by Marx – that religion is the opiate of the people – needs to be applied to the new form of religion as spirituality.570

Why then is spirituality so popular? Its vague and ambiguous content functions as a brand label for the search for meaning, values, transcendence, hope and connectedness in our postmodern milieu.571 In contrast to organised religion, its personal search for meaning and wholeness compartmentalises questions of human values into an identifiable market space.572 This ambiguity allows it to cover a multitude of ideological sins and the ongoing reference to transcendence is merely an internalised self-transcendence meeting individual needs or self-interest rather than one shaped towards society.573 Certainly, the stories of the fathers in the second part of this chapter provide some evidence of this approach.

Thus, for Carrette and King, current modes of spirituality embody the privatisation of religion as a message of self-discovery.574 They counter the view in which religion is emphasised only as orientated towards institutional allegiances and is somehow less than good, while spirituality is given an individual orientation.575 Such a view of spirituality in its privatised psychological form is not a cure for our sense of social isolation and

568 ibid., pp. 20–21. They posit eight features for such capitalist spiritualities.
569 ibid., pp. 17–20. They posit four types of spiritualities responding to capitalism.
570 ibid., pp. 23–24. Though they also acknowledge that an alternative analysis could be sourced in historic religion's own concern for ethical reflection whence a socially transforming approach to religion traditionally emerged.
571 ibid., p. 32.
573 ibid., pp. 44–50.
574 ibid., p. 54.
575 ibid., p. 252.
disconnectedness but part of the problem. Psychology as totalising discourse of human life aids capitalism to measure and organise people according to type and abilities to produce an efficient society. Psychology has an explanation for everything because it locates the source of everything in the self. This increasing emphasis on the self-importance of individuality devalues embodied communities.

I would argue that Carrette and King overestimate what sort of communal identity is possible in a postmodern milieu while underestimating how the nature of community has fundamentally changed. Yes, spirituality may be a sedative for people seeking to cope with an oppressive and difficult world all the while hiding its allegiance to the capitalist world and avoiding questions of social justice – but can this really be overcome by recovering the social dimensions of forgotten religions as they suggest?

Their pejorative conclusion is that spirituality has become the primary means facilitating the corporate takeover of religion. Spirituality is selling the capital of old religion in a consumerist age. However, in their disavowal of spirituality the stories of fathers in this part of the chapter pose the question whether one can too easily overestimate the range and scale of spirituality’s role in our society. Their discussion may be correct – but is spirituality really the most potent agent realising this collusion with neoliberal market forces, or just one expression of the social and economic forces at work?

Our identity is increasingly expressed under the concept of branding, which began as a trademark of quality, then moved to encapsulate aspirational lifestyle values, to the present where brands and lifestyle are seamlessly merged. To that extent, the birth process has been so branded. Yes, business can co-opt

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576 Carrette & King, p. 58.
577 ibid., p. 62.
578 ibid., pp. 64–65. The theoretical contributions of William James and Abraham Maslow are central in this development which has turned religion into a psychological experience.
579 ibid., p. 84.
580 ibid., p. 85.
581 ibid., p. 123.
582 ibid., p. 124.
religious traditions and practices, can emulate religious leaders and organisations but to what extent in the birth process has there been an active collusion in a neoliberal grand plan? To what extent is spirituality utilised in the birth process for economic efficiency? At this point, the stories of fathers in earlier parts of the chapter evidence no overt coercion or economic incentives to dissuade them from their rejection of spirituality.

This is not to deny the role religion can play. Resistance is not futile but requires an affirmation of religion as a critical agent of the dominant narratives including the secular confines of religion. This resistance is more than a return to the old – but it is open to new – discursive formations of the spiritual, which is not blinded by the modernist separation of the religious from the secular.

Whether one wishes to tear down the structures of capitalism or simply limit the impact of an unrestrained market on societies and communities, one cannot expect to develop an ideological challenge to neoliberalism by constructing a similarly materialistic and economically orientated heresy – that is by appealing to a worldview that also accepts ‘the disenchantment of the world’... In the context of the dominance of the materialist ideology of capitalism in modern western societies, what we need today are ‘spiritual atheisms’ for our time, and the world’s religious traditions provide the richest intellectual examples we have of humanity’s collective effort to make sense of life, community and ethics. The emergence of new forms of engaged spirituality grounded in an awareness of our mutual interdependence, the need for social justice and economically sustainable lifestyles, may yet prove our best hope for resisting the capitalist excesses of neoliberalism and developing a sense of solidarity and global citizenship in an increasingly precarious world. Our futures may depend on it.

The stories of the fathers in this part of the chapter affirm the extent to which both religion and secular approaches can socially transform – or not – by the limitations that spirituality propagates. I would concur that Carrette and King make a case why spirituality in its contemporary guise may be limited in being

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583 ibid., p. 137.
584 ibid., p. 177.
585 ibid., p. 180.
an agent for social change. However, the fathers’ stories in the previous two parts of the chapters indicate that religion is not privileged over spirituality in its impact for social transformation. Just as it is too easy to overstate the impact of spirituality as an agent of social transformation, Carrette and King have not made the case why religion or secularity continues to be just as limited in their effectiveness in Western societies. The stories of the fathers in this chapter reveal neither a rampant commodification of spirituality as the opiate of the people nor an attempt at social transformation via access to the great religious traditions. In fact, Carrette and King are open to the criticism that they underestimate the intentional noncritical and nonsocially transforming dynamics of religion, as they apply their criticisms to the role of spirituality in our current postmodern milieu. As argued in the previous two parts of this chapter, the process of self-authenticating rituals is not retreatist but understood within ritual theory as itself world shaping and engaging.

Now that I have presented the research data under an additional three headings in this chapter the issue that still requires further elucidation is what this tells about the role of religious practitioners in a postmodern milieu. The stories of the fathers indeed provide an understanding of their view of spirituality and the role they appropriated. Is there a way of approaching the data to shape the practical theology armed with which a religious practitioner may best pastorally encounter people in our postmodern milieu? The contribution of this thesis is to describe a fourfold set of social factors that enables such an approach to the data. This fourfold schema is not found in the data, though it was projected in the interview. It is offered out of the relationship that was established between the respondents and me as researcher and priest.

1. Self-Authenticating Rituals can become the patterns of behaviour and ritual wherewith we construct our own reality and meaning in a metanarrative vacuum. They require the practical theologian to move from a being a definitive conduit of the transcendent to a resource for

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586 ibid., p. 182.
people’s ritualisation of lived experience as people construct their own reality and meaning in a metanarrative vacuum.

2. Human Interest Stories where truth is accessed through and in stories whereby the turn to subject no longer supports metanarrative. This requires the practical theologian to approach their encounter with people not so much as keepers of the transcendent truth but as one who appreciates the basis of mutuality that emerges from sharing lived experiences where truth is accessed in and through stories because the turn to subject no longer supports metanarrative.

3. Consumer Identity where capitalism has provided the buying power which underpins the availability of diversity and difference. This requires the practical theologian to compete for access to people’s transcendent chain of memory in a spiritual economy as opposed to a regulated, state sponsored or centralised religious world which has allowed the emergence of the spirituality as a way of interpreting lived experience.

4. Temporary Communal Allegiances where belonging to a group activity involves people in belonging to a variety of overlapping and separate communities. They require the practical theologian to recognise occasional sharing of lived experience is a valid communal encounter with their transcendent chain of memory. This is the case even without evidence or the expectation of a discernable journey into the community chain of belief they represent because belonging to a group activity is characterised by transitory and passing allegiances involving a person belonging to many such communities.

My self-story as a priest and its encounter with the respondents’ lived experience is connected via our shared human-interest story, a form of consumer identity that can be taken to the market place so appropriate service providers and resources can be accessed. This builds on ongoing social relationships by
adding access to temporary communal allegiances in order to frame and support our lived experience. How this should inform the training and formation of priests and other reflective practitioners demands further research and analysis. What would enable those traditional religious bodies to recalibrate their religious practitioners to engage with people’s shared experience awaits further critical research. Currently traditional religious resources still predominate in the realm of birth. It is yet to be established whether they will give way to alternative or parallel pastoral practitioners as represented by the rise of civil celebrants in other areas of lived experience such as marriages and funerals. In the following chapter I argue for this fourfold theoretical framework as essential for pastoral encounters in our current postmodern milieu.
Chapter Five: Practical Theology for Times of Metanarrative Vacuum

In this chapter I describe and analyse what I made of the stories of these fathers, taking into account my particular framework for understanding our postmodern milieu, specifically how my own self-story as a researcher is able to inform their stories. These encounters not only inform what is required of the priest as a practical theologian in their social encounters but also help define the very nature of the social landscape in which they operate in the following three ways:

1. They show that spirituality is perspicuous for understanding fathers’ lived experience.

2. They elucidate how the research process shaped the role of the researcher as priest to generate unique and distinct data.

3. They tell us the nature of our social milieu and the need to reshape pastoral ministry in the light of these phenomena.

The argument hinges on the fact that the respondents and the researcher engaged in a dialectical relationship. This shaped not only the fathers’ telling of their stories, clearly framing their content and mode as noted in Chapter Four, but also interfaced with the story and role of the researcher. In part the research data emerged from an implicit understanding that their stories were my story, given that each was telling his own story to a researcher who not only shared his story but who was also a priest. It was clear that the respondents – to varying extents – were not only aware of this but in part contributed their stories in response to this aspect of the researcher’s approach. In this chapter I do not evaluate the impact my identity had on the research process because this was enunciated and tabled as part of the methodological considerations in conducting this qualitative research. Rather, the focus is on what I can bring to the
research data to make sense of them in the light of my own story based on the method of autoethnography as presented in Chapter Two.

In doing so, in this chapter I draw together and build on the three texts and three corresponding commentaries that make sense of the role given to spirituality by these fathers.\textsuperscript{587} The assertion is that such lived experience as presented by the fathers and mirrored in my own self-story is contextualised in my understanding of our postmodern milieu.

1. The stories of the fathers as text provide the commentary in Chapters Four. Their stories illustrate the issues for consideration and interpretation of their significance within their own frame of reference.

2. The researcher as priest is another text implied throughout the thesis. My self-story shaped and interpreted the commentary on the fathers’ texts on the role of spirituality through each part of Chapter Four, in particular in the emphasis on self-authenticating rituals.

3. The researcher as scholar is another text. The analysis of our postmodern milieu is offered in this chapter as a fourfold schema in order to make sense of our culture through the prism of the stories of these fathers.

Grounded in this relationship between researcher and respondent I will bring a theoretical framework, which has shaped my self-story to explicate the role I attribute to spirituality in a postmodern milieu in the research data.

\section*{5.1 Self Story as Postmodern Reading}

An essential aspect of the analysis of the data in Chapter Four has been the concept of self-authenticating ritual. It was argued that this approach to ritualising the role of spirituality for the respondents is an important concept for presenting the lived experience of fathers as a distinctive outworking of our postmodern milieu. The ritual celebration of their lived experience described as

\footnote{Gallagher, p. 8.}
self-authenticating rituals was of direct interest to the researcher as a priest. When answering the questions posed by the researcher, they were not only responding to the neutral interest of a researcher, they were also responding to the active interest of the priest conducting the research, including availing themselves of the presence of the researcher as priest to express, process and connect their lived experiences to those social processes with which priests, as representatives of a chain of memory that facilitates meaning making for lived experience, are entrusted in our social setting. There was repeated affirmation of this opportunity to engage with a priest in the research context to articulate thoughts and responses hitherto left unsaid and unexplored, as exemplified by Rod.

I guess I told you about my half-written – my diary – but also I have half-written my recollections of being in the parish. Why I wanted her to be baptised, which I did not get a chance to say in the ceremony. I guess I would be strongly supportive of opportunities and sorry that I have not made them myself. Males should be encouraged – not that they need it, because they can live without it – but all the wonderful benefits of having a child and exploring it more deeply. [1140–1145]

In this chapter, I wish to present a further three out workings in addition to self-authenticating rituals to generate a fourfold framework for understanding the challenges for religious practitioners in our postmodern milieu. These inform my self-story and frame the role of spirituality in the stories of the fathers.

1. Human-Interest Stories

2. Consumer Identity

3. Temporary Communal Allegiances

In describing these concepts, the stories of these fathers inform us about the nature of society and its approach to rituals that are post-Christian and postmodern in nature. This research understands my self story and each respondent’s lived experience as a human-interest story, a form of consumer identity that can be taken to the market place so appropriate service providers
and resources can be procured and access to relevant temporary communal allegiances gained for celebrating our lived experience. With self-authenticating rituals, this completes a fourfold schema.

Further, these four theoretical pivots uniquely frame and interpret our current social processes as they pertain to spirituality and the challenges they present to practical theologians. Not only do these four pivots make sense of the role of spirituality in our current milieu but also they offer a theoretical basis to frame and inform the differing social processes religious practitioners are required to take into account if they are to respond and deliver their distinctive contribution. As Drane advocates there needs to be a return to practical theology if religious practitioners are to engage with people’s lived theology.588 The presentation of this fourfold schema requires a decisive and fundamental reappraisal for religious practitioners in their pastoral encounters with those who share their lived experience. My contention in this chapter is that for religious practitioners to ignore or underestimate the role of spirituality and the social patterns of our times, is to fundamentally misread and disconnect them from the society to which they wish to contribute their practical theology.

5.2 Human-Interest Story

An important unexpected aspect of the encounters with the fathers who volunteered for this research was the extent to which many participated out of a need to tell their stories. It was assumed in the preconception of this research that fathers would want to tell their stories because they were important to them.

The quality of our life is significantly influenced by the kind of stories we tell. Those stories we most internalise most deeply confirm us in who we are and what we might become. We become the story we tell.589

588 Drane, p. 54.
In addition, those who granted the ethical approval for this research noted that telling their stories might evoke complex and unresolved aspects of the experience. What was not anticipated was the possibility that fathers would be motivated by, or take up the opportunity within, the research process to attend to unfulfilled or unresolved aspects of this lived experience. There is a difference between wanting to share your story and sharing your story as part of addressing lived experience, as Bert indicates.

I think, in retelling it, it has become more important because you’re looking for a little bit more significance out of it. The questions that I did not have time to answer before – I am looking for more time to answer {now}. [487–489]

Yes, in another context with another practitioner, the exchange of stories between father and researcher may have had therapeutic dimensions – but as a priest, what were predominant for me were the pastoral dimensions. The mechanism by which these were activated was the opportunity for the fathers to tell their stories to someone. Not only “someone” – but someone who, for whatever reason, was vitally interested in hearing them. The research data indeed describe how the participants understood their lived experience, but also they, in themselves, constituted another form for continuing this lived experience. The research process not only provided a further legitimisation of their lived experience often previously unavailable to them but, in many cases, it also extended the process of making sense of their lived experience. The question this poses is not, “Why did those fathers seek this form of outlet?” but rather, “What can we learn about the pastoral encounters that allowed these fathers voluntarily to engage in this research process with the aim of processing their lived experience?” From the viewpoint of this researcher these pastoral encounters with the fathers posed the question of how telling their stories to me helps to explain the nature of interpersonal encounter for religious practitioners in our postmodern milieu.

The concept I present for making sense of such encounters is contained under the heading of human-interest story, understood as the process of describing lived
experience in a metanarrative vacuum. In the context of this argument to classify an episode as having the character of a human-interest story is to give a broader cultural and philosophical prism for its interpretation. What validates one's story in a postmodern milieu characterised by the erosion of metanarratives is the story itself. However, the story itself is not sufficient unless it is told. Not just told but also shared in a context where it is of interest. The clearest analogy of this is the way that media present complex issues via a particular person's story. Each father was telling his story to confirm its interest to someone who thought it interesting. It was not a journalist but a researcher and priest who shared their interesting stories.

When the fathers told their stories to the researcher, they were received by him as a form of human-interest story. In a premodern setting this encounter would have been between an official Religious representative whose purpose was to aid, maybe to force, the father to fit their lived experience into the dominant metaphysical schema. Likewise, in a modern setting this encounter would have been between a Religious representative whose purpose was to ensure that the fathers fitted their lived experience into the all encompassing metanarrative they represent or persuade them to do this. In both these approaches, the role of the pastoral encounter does not require focus on any shared aspects but on the need for congruence with the mindset of, and validation by, the religious practitioner. How does one express the meaning and significance of a human-interest story in the presence of a priest – an Anglican one who was himself a father – in our postmodern milieu? If there is no metanarrative audience what validates a story in our society? The question posed to this researcher is, “How does one describe the role of spirituality found in the research process with such human-interest stories in our postmodern milieu?”

The extent to which the fathers were sharing their lived experiences with this researcher and priest as stories of interest, not primarily to access

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metanarratives but to express and frame this-worldly narratives, epitomises the role of spirituality has in our postmodern milieu as a mode of helping men operate in a society with metanarrative vacuums. In part, the researcher understood that self-authenticating rituals were a congruent outcome for such stories of interest. An interesting human story is required as content upon which to construct self-authenticating rituals. The key role of religious practitioners in pastoral encounters with lived experience in a postmodern milieu is to receive human-interest stories and to validate their interest in sharing in the stories. The actual human encounter becomes the context for such validation. This allows religious practitioners both access to, and contribute to the meaning of, lived experience. For human-interest stories to be a legitimate mode for describing pastoral encounters in our postmodern milieu the task is to provide a theoretical underpinning, which would aid religious practitioners’ engagement with lived experiences such as those shared by the fathers in this study.

What do I mean when I describe human-interest stories as *lived experience offered in a metanarrative vacuum*? The postmodern incredulity about grand narratives decentres knowledge resulting in a valuing of different sources and forms of knowledge.\(^{591}\) It is the view of this researcher that storytelling as a mode of engagement is endemic in all forms of communication in a postmodern milieu.\(^{592}\) The human-interest story reflects its modernist heritage in its turn to the experiential human subject. However, this turn to subject is no longer necessarily serving a metanarrative be it religious or secular. The same human-interest story can work to undermine or support a worldview. A story of conversion can function as an affirmation of religious identity and proof of its bankruptcy. Stories of spiritual experience with, and without, a religious heritage can be viewed as an amalgam of human-interest stories insofar as they

\(^{591}\) Usher, Bryant & Johnston, p. 9.

\(^{592}\) A. Singleton, “The Importance of Narrative in Negotiating Otherworldly Experiences: The Case of Speaking in Tongues”, *Narrative Inquiry*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2002, p. 352. He examines the ways in the social practice of storytelling enables narrators to manage and negotiate the actual and potential audience reaction to hearing about otherworldly experiences.
are not seeking a metanarrative audience, otherwise preexisting religious and secular presuppositions predominate – as seen in part three of Chapter Four.

Philosophically the idea of metanarrative vacuum is rooted in Nietzsche’s insistence that there is no Author, in effect, that God is dead.\textsuperscript{593} Derrida reads this as meaning that God is no longer the centre of the system of philosophy, which Nietzsche is rejecting. As Derrida asserts, everything should be regarded as a trace of something that is no longer there, which is gradually erased or concealed by later marks. A parallel is worth noting between this insight and high energy physics and astronomy, where matter has ceased to be but now happens. Moreover, if history has no beginning or origin, it does not have an end either.\textsuperscript{594} What Derrida seeks to show is that there is a more historical understanding of our knowledge as a series of incomplete stories.\textsuperscript{595} Derrida brings out the fact that there are alternative or competing accounts of the tradition from its inception, because he thinks that explicit recognition of the incomplete, nonnecessary character of any one account will have desirable political effects – including in pastoral encounters.\textsuperscript{596} The extent to which the fathers sought resolution or fulfilment through sharing their human-interest stories with the researcher as priest prescribes their lived experience, insofar as it was spiritual, as incomplete and nonnecessary in character whether they possessed an active religious heritage or not. Ron corroborated this towards the end of our interview.

It’s actually about the making sense of it. It is a reflecting back on it so that the ‘ah hahness’ of it all has been enhanced. [309–310]

Foucault uses the same premises to conclude that Author, like Reader, is the name of a subject position within language, or, more specifically, within a text (or textual ideology).\textsuperscript{597} By declaring the death of the author, Foucault is

\begin{enumerate}
\item ibid., p. 226.
\item J. Derrida, \textit{Khora}, Paris, Galilee, 1993, pp. 15–16.
\item Zuckert, pp. 235–236.
\item Foucault, 1966, p. 141.
\end{enumerate}
deconstructing the idea that the author is the origin of something original, and replacing it with the idea that the author is the product or function of writing, of the text, of a story. The author is decentred, shown to be only a part of the structure, a subject position, and not the centre. The censorship of what constitutes valid religious and spirituality stories is broken. The writing, the text and the story themselves are able to provide their own authoring mandate separate from any other constructed intent or social expectations. The concept of human-interest story embodies this self-authoring dynamic. How do you avoid your story vanishing without a Derridian trace? It is by living out a Foucault-like human-interest story in your historical context. The fathers were not looking for the priest to author but to facilitate or be present, to receive and share, while the fathers self-authored – as indicated by Rick’s concluding remark to the researcher.

Well, thank you. It has been nice to revisit and bring some of it to consciousness via some of your questions. [796–797]

The fathers, in telling their story to a researcher and priest, sought a form of solace, self-expression and self-authoring. This parallels the view of Giddens, who posits a sphere of personal life based on pure relationship, where external criteria have become resolved and the relationship exists solely for whatever rewards it can deliver, for instance the institution of marriage. These offer the opportunity for the development of trust based on voluntary commitments and an intensified intimacy at levels often lacking in traditional contexts, for instance, marriages. Pure relationship is a key environment for building the reflectivity project of the self. However, the pure relationship contains internal tensions and contradictions because – by definition – it is a social relation, which can be terminated at will, sustained only insofar as it generates sufficient psychic returns for each individual. It demands commitment while at the same time is transitory in nature. The pastoral encounter as human-interest story in a metanarrative vacuum encountering the lived experience of the fathers contained many of these characteristics of pure relationship.

The postmodern turn from institutions and nearer to individuals and individual experience requires that people activate meaning out of pastoral encounters. Hoover, drawing on Giddens, argues that contemporary life is rooted in the quest of the reflective self and this struggle was attested by many of the fathers.

‘Giddens holds that it is a consequence of late modernity that individuals find themselves in a position of focusing more and more on identity as primary concern, and the identity of the ‘self’ and the perfection of a meaningful self underlies much of contemporary human consciousness. The project is further reflexive in that so much of social and institutional life has been laid bare by Enlightenment rationalism and consequences in science and education. People have ‘peered behind the curtain’ at the inner working of social life and political institutions, and feel newly empowered to make their own meanings and to do so in a self-conscious and autonomous way. The field of cultural possibilities to which they turn for resources for this quest is no longer limited to formal setting such as church, school, or family; it now includes commodified and popular-cultural sources.  

There is a growing diverse range of spiritual material now available in a plethora of social outlets including practical theology. How does one access such resources? One outcome of this is that most of this material and these experiences can be described as commodified, that is, they involve the market to form and shape value and experience which preempts the next heading Consumer Identity. Another outcome is that much of this material is popular culture as opposed to high culture. People in a postmodern milieu are driven by an innate awareness of metanarrative vacuums characteristic of our cultural setting to make a meaningful and plausible account of their lives. The symbols and artefacts of culture are the raw materials through which this is done and the media are at least significant – if not the most significant – source. The result is that religion and culture are not as separate as once thought. More and more commodified, mediated, religious material is circulating. Autonomous, religiously questing individuals increasingly turn to those sources for material

600 ibid., p. 304.
meaningful to their construction of self. Further, what they are constructing is described as plausible narratives of the self.\textsuperscript{602} These are self-descriptions that make sense, embed people in social life and at the same time describe their social and cultural aspirations, providing grounding in space, time, experience and history. Cultural practice, symbols and artefacts become touchstones, decorations and illustration for these narratives. They provide many of the symbols, metaphors and terms of reference out of which these meaningful accounts of the self are constructed.\textsuperscript{603} I argue that the encounter of father and researcher priest followed such forms often under the classification of spirituality. In part one of Chapter Four those fathers with an active religious heritage indicated interest in reaching out beyond their religious chain of memory to the extent to which they customised and tailored celebratory rituals in a self-authenticating process. Those fathers in part two of Chapter Four without such a Sacred/sacred canopy have a different pathway for expressing their spirituality. For all such fathers who shared their interesting stories with an interested researcher priest, in receiving and sharing, I participated in their meaning making, in their spirituality.

The researcher as priest extended the process of making sense of their lived experience not so much because I was regarded as an authentic metanarrative custodian but as one whose role is to receive their stories and acknowledge them as lived experiences, human-interest stories. Theologians who maintain their privilege as metanarrative keepers on behalf of their religious chain of memory to those outside their institutional allegiances will not be allowed to participate in the process of human-interest stories and will be excluded from validating their lived experiences.

This assumes that the authority of religious institutions over their own symbols is diminishing. As more and more symbolism moves into the repertoire of the cultural sphere, the historic links of those symbols with their histories are

\textsuperscript{601} ibid., pp. 304–305.
\textsuperscript{602} Singleton, 2001b, p. 122.
\textsuperscript{603} ibid., p. 122.
To the extent that succeeding generations are removed from traditional contexts of religious instruction, the meaning and significance of religious claims and symbols will further diminish. There is thus a kind of competition between the historic faiths and their claims on the one hand and the realm of popular culture and its claims on the other. This is not to return the dualism of sacred and secular, for the lines are blurred whereby secular practice is having religious significance. In sharing their human-interest stories as an aspect of the autonomous subject, religious expression becomes increasingly the product of individual biographies, patterned after similar human-interest stories as a form of spirituality. Tracing individual paths of biographical identity construction is done by studying the actual practices that are adopted to make sense of life as noted in their ritual celebrations. In this research, we see fathers seeking to use spirituality to fill the void previously inhabited by universalising religion for which secularists are still trying to provide substitutes.

The sense of metanarrative vacuum has not diminished the need for the fathers to prepare for this experience, share its story and encourage forms of narrative witness before, during and after what they will experience in the birth, enabling language transformation and biographical reconstruction. The research gave a context within which to express the spiritual significance of the birth. For these fathers the birth as lived experience involved at least a self-referential, perhaps at times narcissistic, though essentially this-worldly human-interest story in the presence of this researcher priest. The way they are recorded, the stories that are told after the birth, the spiritual ecstasy and the language requires the religious practitioner to encounter them as human-interest stories. As witnessed in this research, to understand practical theologians as bearers and receivers of human-interest stories does not necessarily undermine their contribution – but it does require them to engage those who live with metanarrative vacuums on an equal footing. For pastoral encounters outside their institutional allegiances, religious practitioners will need to affirm their own stories if they are to invite others ’ stories. Instead of

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merely advocating refuge in their authorising institutional religion, the offering of pastoral resources to live in and among times of metanarrative vacuum created by our postmodern milieu validates participants’ human-interest stories.

Without sharing this-worldly story, it is increasingly unlikely that a practical theologian can proceed to further engagement of the particular metanarrative vacuum with which a person is contending and to participate in a process wherein their metanarrative resources can become available to them. Of course, it does not follow that even when an encounter does take the form of human-interest stories participants will be compelled to seek out the religious practitioner’s metanarrative resources. The reasons for this lie in other social processes and are, as presented earlier, due in no small part to the impact of metanarrative vacuums on the chain of memory which a religious practitioner may advocate. To insist that a practical theologian should speak only to those who acknowledge the metanarrative authority of their chain of memory is to speak to those fathers in part three of Chapter Four who are already on your side or actively fighting against your side. As Drane contends, it is to absent oneself from those who are spiritually seeking.606 The notion of a human-interest story makes a primary calling of practical theologians in our current social milieu to listen to, and validate, live experience if the pastoral relationship is to address the metanarrative vacuums people confront in making sense of their lived experience.

The human-interest story is a fundamental mode of engagement if religious practitioners are to be practical theologians in our postmodern milieu. For democratisation and freedom to associate enables social movements hitherto oppressed and marginalised to find a voice, to gather and empower themselves according to their own agendas.607 In part, this is exemplified by fathers sharing their human-interest stories where once they were both excluded and silenced. This is also the case with what were formerly dominant metanarratives such as religion, which were silenced as other grand narratives became dominant. These

605 ibid., p. 137.
606 Drane, p. 74.
now can be legitimately voiced and socially expressed around events such as the
birth of children, not necessarily to reclaim the role of metanarratives but rather
to make sense of lived experience in a society that is characterised by a
metanarrative vacuum. Religious practitioners as practical theologians are not
so much custodians of metanarratives but mirrors, sounding boards or validators
of stories told in metanarrative vacuums. They are not primarily keepers of the
chain of memory, though this is latent and implied, but agents that in receiving
and validating interesting stories meaning can be associated with lived
experience even in a context characterised by metanarrative vacuum.

5.3 Consumer Identity

In seeking out this researcher, the fathers were activating a form of customer
relation, a customer archetype, to present and validate their lived experience.
This is part of their ongoing need for procuring appropriate service providers and
resources, which characterise living in our market place. Though there was no
financial exchange in the pastoral encounter between respondent and researcher
as priest, nonetheless I argue that the exchange was informed by market
narratives over access to and value of relevant cultural capital in a
metanarrative vacuum.

Initially the researcher was received as the customer or market researcher
seeking commodity from a specific individual. However this was not the only or
even predominant aspect for some of the fathers, instead the possibilities led to
their presenting themselves as active customers and consumers accessing a
preferred commodity they required to process their lived experience. The
encounter between the respondents and researcher alternated, some times in
parallel and in others simultaneously, whereby one was the consumer at some
points in the exchange while at others they were the commodity. In taking up
the opportunity to attend to unfulfilled or unresolved aspects, due in part to the
presence of the researcher priest, they responded to me not just as a researcher
or even as a metanarrative keeper, but also as a service provider with a range of

607 Usher, Bryant & Johnston, p. 22.
available materials and approaches. The mechanism by which this was activated was the opportunity for the fathers to present their stories not just to someone who shared them but to someone who could also validate their stories as human-interest stories.

The research data describe how the participants understood their lived experience, but the research process also constituted another resource continuing this lived experience. This provided not only a further legitimisation often previously unavailable to them but also, in many cases, extended the process of making sense of their lived experience – as Paul expressed it:

> What helped me most was that other people were prepared to see it as special. I really wanted people to acknowledge its specialness. [1919–1920]

The question this poses is not why fathers understood the research as another resource outlet but what we can learn about the pastoral encounter that allowed these fathers to engage voluntarily in this research process with the aim of processing their lived experience. From this researcher’s point of view, these pastoral encounters posed the question in what ways does procuring my distinct services explain the nature of interpersonal encounter for religious practitioners in our postmodern milieu.

The concept for making sense of such encounters is presented under the heading of consumer identity, understood as the mode of enriching trade for processing lived experience in a metanarrative vacuum. In the context of this argument to classify an episode as having the character of consumer identity is to give a broader cultural and philosophical prism for its interpretation. What constitutes relevant and potent commodities in a postmodern milieu characterised by the erosion of metanarratives is defined by the context and particular effect of specific providers. Not all commodities offered by providers are equal in this task but may be rated in a form of customer satisfaction. Fathers compared the outcome of the research process as a pastoral commodity with other potential or tried available options. The fathers brought a level of
discontent with previous providers who, they had expected, would have prepared and aided the processing of this lived experience, as Tom expressed it:

When you read those books you’re looking for other people’s stories and how it went for them. You are looking for more insight than just the practical. [2191–2192]

Nor is it suggested that the fathers necessarily were prioritising a religious practitioner as the preferred commodity for enhancing their lived experience. In many cases, the paucity of available social capital resulted in the researcher as priest being one of a limited range of acceptable outlets available to them for such unfinished business. When the pastoral encounter occurred, it emerged and became naturally present through the research process. Fathers readily reframed their identity from being the respondents (the researcher’s commodity) to that of consumer addressing spiritual business (researcher as consumable service provider) as Bart declares:

This interview has picked the path really well. The things that I wanted to say but had forgotten came up and brought it up. There are things that I wanted to talk about I did talk about. Thank you. [1639–1641]

As noted in the previous section, fathers expressed their thanks for a unique opportunity to present their particular stories. The argument here is that the research process involved procuring relevant competent professional services to enhance and enliven their lived experience, including – for some – addressing unresolved aspects of their stories. It was not a shopkeeper but a researcher and priest who confirmed the currency of their stories. The researcher received them initially as a form of commodification, but as a pastoral encounter crystallised I contributed my unique pastoral form of social capital as a religious practitioner.

The questions posed to this researcher are, “How does the commodification of spirituality found in the research process inform pastoral encounters in our postmodern milieu?” and “What allows religious practitioners to be relevant commodities for those who are enmeshed in consumer identity?” For consumer identity to be a legitimate category for describing pastoral encounters in our
postmodern milieu the task is to provide a theoretical underpinning, which would aid religious practitioners’ engagement with lived experiences such as those shared by the fathers in this study.

Though capitalism is a modernist construct, consumerism is its postmodern lovechild.\textsuperscript{608} The former describes a totalising means of production, the latter our access to the products of that production. Postmodernity may be capitalist, but it is capitalism with a new face.\textsuperscript{609} Bouma argues that, until recently, Australians were identified by a few totalising and exclusive categories: what they achieved, such as work; chose, such as a football team; or were born to; such as religion. Now identity is determined more by what Australians consume, religion and spirituality being two of the products available for identity consumption.\textsuperscript{610} What do I mean when I describe consumer identity as lived experience offered in a metanarrative vacuum? As capitalism has shifted its emphasis from production to consumption, the new middle classes are characterised by a concern for lifestyle.

In crude terms, and we would stress this is not an either/or situation, what we have witnessed is a reconfiguration... from the modern, the rational, the male, the producer, and the mass market, to the postmodern, desire, the marginised, the consumer and market niches.\textsuperscript{611}

To coin a phrase, \textit{I work in the means of production therefore I am} compared with \textit{I shop therefore I am}. Consumerism entered the picture when it became easy to \textit{shop}. This is easily illustrated. There is no comparison with previous times as to the number of people who are now able to travel overseas. Previously the only way you travelled, unless you were of aristocratic stock or wealthy, was if you were yoked to a process bigger than your own interests, such as soldier, public servant or priest. Travel is now available to individuals in Western societies as never before. The same goes for cuisine. In the not-too-distant past.

\textsuperscript{608} Crook, Pakulski & Waters, p. 131.
\textsuperscript{610} Bouma, 1999, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{611} Usher & Edwards, 1994, p. 186.
the most likely way one could have experienced different cuisine would have been if one were cooking it for one's lord and master! In contrast, we experience the privilege of being served diverse cuisine across the socioeconomic range, whether it is at McDonald's or in an elite French restaurant. Likewise, desire is not an indication of human lack which can be satisfied only by God – but is a self-generated, self-perceived need for new levels of consumption by the self. Active religious affiliation is not contained within the religious heritage in which a person is reared, but instead often involves choosing a different expression – as can be seen by the small sample in this study. This consumer mentality suggests a levelling of diverse religious traditions into becoming brand names selling essentially the same product with slightly different packaging. This discourages dialogue and exploration of the differences and similarities of religious traditions so an undifferentiated sense of the sacred is evoked.

Under the combined impact of globalising capitalism and the information technology revolution, individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices, including the source of meaning and experience, from among a diversity of options. Negotiation of lifestyle and identity becomes more important than merely learning and modelling set social roles. Just as the constraints that limited fathers’ access to being present at the birth of their children have been removed, so a corresponding need for a broad range of consumable resources to validate the difference which being there made to these fathers has arisen, which this research process inadvertently supplied. The researcher priest was not a metanarrative keeper but a consumable that validated the difference made to a father by being present at the birth. More so, religious practitioners competing as consumables must now transcend local supply. To this end, globalisation emerges as a process of greater interconnectedness involving new forms of consumable resources and levels of competition and fragmentation.

As Usher and Edwards argue, the significance of the postmodern milieu lies in the emphasis on consumption and the desire to consume beyond any notion of

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612 Ireland, pp. 97–98.
material need. The impact of modernity generated a process of disenchantment which postmodernity, in part, has sought to reverse – including in the form of mass marketed personal spirituality. Therefore for Usher and Edwards, when consumption of goods and services becomes a matter of meaning, those with the necessary cultural and economic capital no longer consume for the sake of utility alone but to signify difference, to say something about themselves and to identify themselves in relation to others. A desirable lifestyle is no longer about consuming in order to be the same as others but rather about consuming in order to be different. In other words, it is difference, rather than goods and services per se, that is consumed. This approach encourages people to engage in life by seeing everything in instrumental terms, including God and religion, as things to be consumed.

The individual needs autonomy, self definition, authentic life and personal development and these are all translated into the need to possess and consume market offered goods. Consumer identity disempowers, even desacralises, the modernist expert in order to empower the participant. Today there is choice available to couples on how and who can better serve the birth experience. Everything from hospitals to midwife centres to home births is on the market. The basis of this choice will reflect different and sometimes competing religious worldviews. Everyone is different and one is allowed to tailor this formative experience. Everyone from those with fundamentalist tendencies who know what they want and everyone else should share this view, to those who want the best even if they do not know what that exactly looks like. Practical theologians are but one more commodity that processes lived experience. However, the basis


614 Usher & Edwards, 1994, p. 188. They argue that at this point experience collapses into consumption, with an increased emphasis on the consumer as the primary focus of analysis.


616 Usher, Bryant & Johnston, p. 5.


of this is not their traditional role as metanarrative custodians. Spirituality in a postmodern milieu with, and without, an active religious heritage occurs in a consumer context because capitalism has provided the buying power, which underpins the availability of diversity and difference. Seeking out the researcher and priest empowered the fathers’ capacity to affirm their difference, and spirituality is one potent expression.

The vast majority of religious practitioners either began their vocation when Australia was known as a regulated religious economy and/or were trained by those who still knew that Australia. Some may argue that in that schema any otherworldly dynamic generated over and above institutional religion’s contribution to a coherent society was regarded as an optional, even unwelcome, bonus. For most of Australia’s history, religious institutions could expect that people would serve their interests. Nevertheless, this has fragmented in the last generation. Consumer dynamics require that a religious or spiritual option have more than organisational coherence. Personal satisfaction with a product supplants acceptance of religion on its own terms. Therefore, spirituality in this postmodern milieu will find communal experience that is transitory with a preponderance to rent rather than own. It allows people the freedom to broaden their identity and more importantly, it allows people to possess and develop multiple identities. For a religious practitioner to remain rooted in a past regulated religious economy may not be foolhardy but greatly diminishes any realistic likelihood of engagement.

If religious practitioners continue to identify religion and spirituality in their traditional institutional forms, then consumerism must be an erosive force. In postmodernity, spirituality is best understood as a cultural resource rather than as a social institution. One is less likely to be a religious dweller and more a spiritual seeker. Consumer choices are made using skills acquired in the general consumer marketplace, but the nature of these can vary from the shallow and

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superficial to the seriously considered. Fun and fundamentalism appear as extreme points on a continuum of such choices.

For religious practitioners to be successful consumables enlivening lived experience requires acceptance that contemporary life is increasingly structured around consumption. People establish significant boundaries and build bridges through consuming. To address lived experience bemoaning the absence of religious understanding of human nature is misguided. For consumer identity allows all providers to compete, be they researchers or religious practitioners. Yes, the market principle is promoted in areas of society previously considered immune from economy such as health, education and religion. The kind of society that emerges not only has markets but also is a market. Thus, the market becomes, in the language of new capitalism, a metaphor for the whole of life. Fathers with, and without, an active religious heritage are a market waiting to be serviced. The research process in part serviced my own story, and my own story and role as priest in part serviced the respondents. The traditional role of religious practitioners as authorised representatives of the metanarrative chain of memory is fundamentally changed by consumer identity and market principle. On the one hand, it undermines previously held market dominance while on the other it again represents it as a market option in a society. Participants responded to the researcher as priest not to further their interpersonal networks but, as they attested, as consumers availing themselves of the benefits offered by practical theology to enliven their lived experience. It was by no means predetermined that this would be the outcome, for there is always risk in consuming that it will disappoint or be an inappropriate consumable for this point in time in their lives. Not all consumables are equal. In the first instance, the structure of the research process allowed a consumer exchange, but it was I, the researcher as priest, who inadvertently offered my practical theology as a consumable in the research process that enabled the respondents to attest to their involvement as enhancing their lived experience.

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621 Crook, Pakulski & Waters, p. 132.
623 Heslam, p. 12.
As a practical theologian, the concept of consumer identity fundamentally framed the nature of the exchange that took place in the research process. Consumer identity challenges who is in control in the pastoral encounter. Traditionally the religious practitioner not only assumed, but also engaged, people as the determining authority. In contrast, religious practitioners –, when functioning as healthcare professionals – should begin with a basic understanding of a participant’s spiritual needs, resources and preferences and not prescribe spiritual practices nor urge him/her to relinquish beliefs and practices. Likewise in the research process, I was not a metanarrative custodian that enabled respondents to enliven their lived experience. It was as a practitioner of religion as a consumable commodity that I sponsored this pastoral encounter. Again, to insist that practical theologians engage only with those who acknowledge their metanarrative authority is to speak to those fathers in part three of Chapter Four who were already on my side or actively fighting against my side.

The notion of consumer identity calls practical theologians in our current social milieu to act as consumables for the benefit of the lived experience if the pastoral relationship is to address the metanarrative vacuums people confront in furthering their lived experience. To resist understanding the role of practical theologian as a consumable is not to affirm the place of metanarratives in an ongoing chain of memory but to exclude oneself from pastorally encountering people who would enliven their lived experience. Consumer identity is a fundamental mode of engagement if religious practitioners are to be practical theologians in our postmodern milieu.

Yes, the research process with its imprecise availability for processing lived experience indicates that the fathers have a limited sense of easily realising their consumer identity in religion and spirituality, however this is not the end of the matter but the beginning. If consumer identity is a mode of postmodernity, there will be a growth in more outlets and avenues similar to the path of celebrations.

of marriages and births. These were initially enacted by self-authenticating processes fermented by customising and tailoring the rituals prior to what is now a fully fragmented and diversified range of offerings of the order previously known in religious ceremonies. If consumer identity is a powerful dynamic in the postmodern milieu then I argue that this will emerge as a market with service providers who will enable choice and diversity that specifically relate to a particular person’s spiritual understanding of their lived experience. Practical theologians will necessarily be located within such emerging competition. As witnessed in this research, to understand religious practitioners as consumables does not necessarily corrupt their contribution but it does change the modes of encounter wherein they make their contribution. If they are pastorally to engage people outside their institutional allegiances then religious practitioners will need to affirm that their availability is what the customer wants in terms of spirituality and religion in contrast to merely advocating the case of their authorising institutional religion.

5.4 Temporary Communal Allegiances

The negotiation of lifestyle and identity is not only a concern of individuals or merely a market exchange. As noted in the previous chapter the birth of a child seems to be one of the key moments when people revisit and reengage with their family personality characteristics, foibles and communal allegiances. Who, other than the spouse, will be the support person? Will s/he be a family member or a friend? Who will provide an interpretive community for the birth as lived experience? The common absence of either – for example, a grandmother – from the birth perhaps is an indication of the fragmentation in which couples communally construct this significant event.

For a father to be present at the birth of his child involves intermingling within a complex web of relations, often unfamiliar, based mainly on the medical process. The pattern of letting the scientists dictate how it should happen, though fragmented, means that they still exert control. Which hospital will
provide the right ethos and responsive medical personnel? In which form of prenatal class should couples enrol? This latter, especially, entails bonds and forms of belonging to group activity characterised by transitory relations. The hospital staff is, in effect, contracted or rented for the occasion. This is contrasted with belonging to a village where your lifelong peers and village appointed midwives are involved. Couples are arbitrarily brought together to attend birthing classes as extra communal events on top of other communal processes. In the birthing class, there is anxiety about maintaining appearances and secrets management such as striving to appear to be suitable parents, gender issues balancing protector and nurturer archetypes, socioeconomic status, discussions, and so on. After the birth, there may be reunions between the couples and visits to the staff but there is usually no ongoing communal process as people return to their other, separate, worlds. Such temporary associations are symptomatic in a postmodern milieu. The role of skilled people as advocates and the interpersonal strategies they apply can be pivotal in the processing and changing of people through lived experience.625

In addition to the foregoing, it is my contention that a form of communal bond was created between the researcher and each respondent for the duration of the interview. How does one describe the bond that emerged between researcher and respondent? What measure of the appeal was talking to a father who had travelled this road before them and who was seeking to offer wisdom for their experience? Was it limited to my role as researcher or did it extend to my role as priest? What does it teach about the nature of community in our cultural setting? In what way can this bond refashion the relationships between religious practitioners and those whom they pastorally encounter? What form of practical theology serves such circumstances?

The concept for making sense of such relational encounters is presented under the heading of temporary communal allegiances, understood as the transitional patterns of sharing lived experience in a metanarrative vacuum. In the context of this argument to designate an episode as having the character of a

625 Rambo, 1993, p. 76.
temporary communal allegiance is to give a broader cultural and philosophical prism for its interpretation. This describes the fathers’ experience of community when group activity is characterised by belonging to a multitude of transitory allegiances in addition to ongoing, often fragmented, traditional communal relationships of family and friends. This does not negate a reliance on traditional communal support structures, which overlap and continue in parallel, with some fathers relying on this form of interpretive community only, as exemplified by Len.

Hardly at all. I tend – I am a very reserved person. Anything that has happened in my life of significance I don’t really tell people about it. I keep it to myself. Dwell on it myself. I don’t go round telling people this and that, what I achieved, etc. I bottle it up myself and I just think of the memories. Only close family and that is about it. (1403–1406)

The following criteria or indicators encapsulate the notion of temporary communal allegiances. At some point, temporary communal allegiances can make the transition to become part of the ongoing communal fabric of a person, such as family and friends.

1. Temporary refers to the fixed or limited tenure of association. People approach such social contexts with an attitude of time constraint and the likelihood that something else will emerge or replace the current social contract. There is a definite beginning to the association and a clear end or time frame envisaged. It requires a portion of time, be it in a lump sum or regular payments such as weekly, fortnightly or monthly. Often there is a clearly defined future, and I posit not much beyond twelve months, as well as a more nebulous sense that the present social contracts are impermanent. This applies to social relationships in previously unimagined ways, such as workplaces, place of residence, relationships, and church affiliation, and so on. The time frame can depend – though it is not essential that it should – on the intensity of the shared experience.
2. *Communal* alludes to various commitments of individual autonomy that create proportional investment in social commitments. It is an investment of oneself but one with limits. It revolves around shared tasks with a specific outworking shaping the nature of the association. This provides purpose or a context within which to engage in various levels of intimacy. Who can belong to an interpretive community is as open as the permutations and combinations of recognisable shared lived experience. It is community in a new guise, adding to a form of society conceptualised as a system of roles regulated and coordinated by institutions with one consisting of personal networks informed by access to a global society.626

3. *Allegiances* indicate that the participants expect outcomes from their association. They involve a willingness to work with people who were previously unknown to them, often with minimal scope for developing broader or deeper relationships, based on the role or expertise such people may bring to the encounter. This willingness to work with strangers to achieve outcomes for one’s lived experience is indicative of our postmodern milieu. In some situations, it is normative to seek strangers rather than those who know us. People – when accessing therapeutic services, such as marriage counselling – commonly transfer these roles to strangers. Allegiances in this context define the criteria for our commitments. These predominantly form around the outcomes desired for one’s own world whether defined broadly or narrowly. The availability of community is not sufficient unless it is actualised by its participants. Again, a legitimate outcome of an association is serving a person’s lived experience including his/her spirituality.

The most common attribution of a temporary communal allegiance described by the respondents during the lead up to the birth process was the prenatal classes, the coming together of strangers for a fixed time with a particular

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626 Ireland, pp. 97–98.
purpose – to negotiate and process life changing lived experiences.627 These educational courses, in providing merely knowledge about the physical processes, muted the fathers’ participation in a community of learners – evoking criticism of both the control and content of curricula.628 In relying on such prenatal classes to provide the necessary interpretive community, for the most part, these were regarded as deficient in delivering the hoped for communal support for which their lived experience had generated a need – as Rhett exemplified.

Mmm, the natal classes were meant to teach and prepare for the birth and afterwards – but we did not find that. We wanted more, but couldn’t find anything. They were okay but there was nothing really fantastic about them...We were definitely looking for more than the practical advice. (3063–3067)

As indicated, another strand of temporary communal allegiances was the role the researcher as priest contributed which, though initially unexpected, was a common response as remarked by Paul.

I would have liked to have had the opportunity to talk about how it was for me when my other kids were born. I don’t think I have ever done that. Even talking to you now might be the first in 21 years. I don’t actually recall ever having a conversation of what it was like. Not from the level of an emotional response or spiritual response. [1889–1893]

The questions posed to this researcher are, “How can one describe the role of spirituality found in the research process with such marks of temporary communal allegiance to explain our postmodern milieu?” and, “Why does one find a bond of meaning and significance through temporal communal allegiance with a priest?” If temporary communal allegiance is a legitimate mode for describing our postmodern milieu it is important to provide a theoretical underpinning in order to discern its role in lived experience.

627 B. Enzner-Probst, “Waiting for Delivery: Counseling Pregnant Women as an Issue for the Church”, International Journal of Practical Theology, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2004, pp. 185–201. She highlights the fact that women themselves await relevant resources for preparing them for birth from mainstream religious providers such as the Christian church.

A relevant contrast is found in premodern patterns such as belonging to a nomadic tribe or village. Essentially this refers to the construction of community from a sacred canopy such as the dreamtime stories of Aboriginal spirituality or the recent attempts at philosophical and religious construction in classical and medieval traditions.\textsuperscript{629} In the case of the modern era, it is belonging to a movement that seeks to shape society such as a mainline church or political party. Traditional communities were a direct expression of the metanarrative commitments of that society. The fragmentation of communal experience and its corresponding loss of control direct individuals’ concerns in group activities, as a form of compensation and security, to maintaining appearances and secrets management. This is a significant move from premodern concepts of losing face and shame, which were supplanted by the modernist social contract for negotiating communal exchanges. The aim of modern communal allegiance is to control and shape one’s context according to a unilateral vision of the common good as a secular form of metanarrative. The notion of premodern community is sometimes mere sentiment for a bygone era or prejudicial preference for the superiority of modern forms. This is not the case, nor is it helpful to imply that the postmodern milieu is likewise superior or inferior to premodern or modern communal dynamics. Simply, premodern and modern are terms that describe and identify different communal, social and cultural contexts within which people have interpreted their shared lived experience.\textsuperscript{630} The schema of researcher, groups of strangers, family and friends for understanding community need not take our critical attention at this point other than to observe that one distinguishing feature of communal life in a postmodern milieu is the awareness of such multiplicity and multilayered forms of community.

What do I mean when I describe temporary communal allegiances’ identity as lived experience offered in a metanarrative vacuum? People believe that they can belong simultaneously – however they conceive them – to premodern, modern and postmodern cultural expressions of community. It is not

fundamentally individualistic. Rather, people still seek community – but informed by a turn to subject, fuelled by the power of the globalising market and secured by the participant. The notion of voluntary association has become dominant with increased mobility and the emergence of multiple and overlapping communal allegiances that value minimal hindrances to commitment beyond one’s comfort zones. Communal allegiances in postmodernity freely allow people to explore diverse religious expressions and worldviews including secularist outlooks. This works simultaneously at global and local levels as mutually dependent. The result of this is that privatised religion and spirituality not only continue to increase, but do so in myriad pluralistic directions across a full range of possibilities from superficial asceticism to devoted liberality, from committed sectarianism to piecemeal smorgasbord, in a diverse range of temporary communal allegiances. For example, Hervieu-Leger argues that the parish civilisation of the Catholic religious spatiality epitomised the notion of gaining hold over territory. This contrasts with the sect where only believers who reach acceptable standards of belief and practice are brought together. Modernity enabled, with the development of mobility, deterritorialisation for religious communities. Correspondingly, our postmodern milieu enables access to religion and spirituality to interpret lived experience beyond traditional forms of community. Interpretive communities can now transcend geographical and cultural boundaries and exist for a set time and place.

Most relationships in history have been face-to-face. It has been only recently that communication can be split from co-presence. For most of human history, in most places in the world, people have lived relatively settled and local lives with little mobility. Therefore, they did not have extensive contact with others who were distant from them. Until the middle of the nineteenth century,

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630 Lyon, 1994, pp. 73–84.
632 Beyer, pp. 93–94.
communication and transportation were still one. That is to say, a message could not be delivered unless someone actually carried it. In modern technological societies where there is no need for someone to carry the message, most relationships are no longer face-to-face. In a postmodern milieu, traditional face-to-face relations are limited – if not problematical – as the primary basis for community. Historically, in Australia the religious communal chain of memory has also been based on an institutionalism that was informed by a coherent sense of territorial communal presence. Geographical disembodiment can be a source of grief, but there are new bonds of opportunity that it creates. Distance is required as well as immediacy to produce social relations. Anonymity is a positive value for engagement in social processes, including religious and spirituality participation. We have not only geographical distance but also psychological distance which enables people to inhabit multiple and parallel social relationships, belonging to traditional communities of family and friends at the same time as participating in temporary communal allegiances across the boundaries of geography and social context.

If people will not primarily locate themselves and their lived experience in traditional geographical religious communities, how will practical theology be made available? My argument is that temporary communal allegiances continue to provide pathways for pastoral encounters, and there is a form of practical theology for bonds to be created around the sharing of lived experience in order that an interpretive community can be instigated. Therefore, people may make sense of community in a cultural setting characterised by metanarrative vacuum by retaining what is a basic ground of the identity of each of us as a consumer. It is different pastoral ministry from traditional parish ministry in its need-led theology and practice located in an ideal religious community. The bond that occurred between the researcher as priest and respondents is practical theology deterritorialised from its communal chain of memory. The fathers accessed this

635 Young, pp. 313–317.
636 ibid., pp. 22–23.
637 Swinton & Mowat, p. 156. They highlight the scarcity of qualitative research conducted on what chaplains do and why they do it.
638 ibid., p. 190.
as a form of chaplaincy, a bond based on a temporary communal allegiance in order that lived experience previously disembodied would find an interpretive community, a community of two, respondent and researcher as priest. It is the religious practitioner as chaplain, moving from being a religious carer (representing a particular faith community) to a spiritual carer (addressing spiritual concerns as an aspect of universal human need) who allows a wider view of pastoral care. Religious practitioners may still need to function in community with traditional geography. However, the new communal imperative for practical theology is to learn to establish bonds based on shared lived experience.

Insofar as pastoral encounters remain within the communal chain of memory, religious practitioners’ focus is to realise a form of ideal community where one formulates a representation of a whole, a totality, a metaphysic that plays down and/or denies difference. Community is characterised by transparency to one another, relationships of mutual identification, social closeness and comfort. It mediates difference between subjects via the chain of memory that gives birth to, and sustains, that community. If there is contention about the controlling chain of memory then this ideal community fragments and frustrates the interpretive role of the community. This is the traditional communal domain of religious practitioners and continues to be the predominate model of pastoral encounter.

If, in the pastoral encounter, religious practitioners bring the communal chain of memory as ideal community then this will tend to suppress differences or implicitly exclude from their groups persons with whom they do not identify. It is community in the shadow of modernity. Temporary communal allegiances do not transcend such dynamics but highlight their insufficiency in a postmodern milieu.

The nature of the pastoral encounter in the research was not, nor was it intended to be, a fully realised ideal community but a temporary communal

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639 ibid., pp. 162–164.
640 Young, pp. 300–303.
641 ibid., pp. 300–303.
allegiance. Yes, in part the bond between the fathers and the researcher was ideal based in our shared lived experience; their story was my story. As a temporary phenomenon, its shared dynamic did not evoke the shadow of permanence. Their story did not need to lead to their inhabiting my story. As a community, there was no controlling chain of memory. My community did not need to become their community. As an allegiance, I was a consumable among others. My services did not have precedence over other service provision. In this way, as a temporary communal allegiance, the pastoral encounter enabled a form of emancipation, a celebration of difference. An understanding of social relations without domination in which persons live together in relations of mediation among strangers with whom they are not in ideal community.

Most people would probably think that prenatal classes are mostly for women – who play the leading role in this drama! Fathers and their needs, if indeed they attended prenatal classes at all, would formerly have been afterthoughts. One outcome from the presence of fathers at the birth of their children is that expectations, as corroborated from the men who attended them in this research, are significantly on the increase. Insofar as the respondents sought an interpretive community from the prenatal classes, as learners they made their choice based on their desires of self-expression and individuality. In our postmodern cultural setting, such approaches are no longer automatically considered perverse and noneducational. I argue that the prenatal classes failed to provide the interpretive community fathers wanted because their role in the group was to receive what they did not want. Further, the prenatal classes served a form of modernist medical metanarrative where a community gathered to receive a canon of knowledge from authoritative experts. This is not an illegitimate form of community but neither is it the only form of community. Not all temporary communal allegiances are equal.

Why did the majority of the fathers not seek alternative or supplementary interpretive communities? The positive nature of the experience, however

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642 Derrida, 1967a, pp. 12–87. He criticises the metaphysic of presence that community demands.
643 Young, pp. 300–303.
unsetting, did not generate a sufficient sense of crisis or dissatisfaction or the need to reevaluate their masculinity, and thus it did not prompt the fathers to seek out structured group support.644 In the context of making sense of lived experience, temporary communal allegiances need to provide for learning, which becomes or serves experience, with such lived experience as the source rather than the raw material of knowledge, experienced as pleasurable and valued for itself.645 If a temporary communal allegiance does not exist to respond to perceived lived experience then participants will disengage.

In contrast, the research process became a temporary communal allegiance because the respondents were sufficiently free now that the drama of the birth was safely in the past to focus on their lived experience. Traditionally the religious practitioner engaged people as a representative of a community of metanarrative keepers in a chain of memory. Belonging to such a community and accessing its religious practitioners were interchangeable. In the research process I was not a metanarrative custodian but a nonaligned practical theologian, bonded to the respondents to process their lived experience. The rise of the religious practitioner as community maker or chaplain requires a form of community attuned to a cultural setting characterised by metanarrative vacuum. In order for someone outside to access the practical theology of a community with a religious chain of memory, a temporary communal allegiance is now required. Again, to insist that a religious practitioner function only as a metanarrative custodian of their communal chain of memory of origin is – pastorally – to speak to those fathers in part three of Chapter Four who are already on your side or actively fighting against your side.

The notion of temporary communal allegiance constitutes a primary calling to practical theologians in our current social milieu to function as nonaligned interpretive community makers bonding with those with lived experience so that through the pastoral relationship they are able to address the metanarrative vacuums people confront in making sense of their lived experience. It is a form

of ecclesial mission and missiological ecclesiology. It is ecclesial mission because religious practitioners still represent an ecclesial chain of memory. It is missiological ecclesiology because they are required to innovate and contribute new contexts for pastoral encounter outside the traditional ecclesial forms. Chaplaincy embodies, locates and makes known the chain of memory of which they are custodians. To resist the understanding of the role of religious practitioner as a nonaligned interpretive community maker is not to affirm the place of metanarratives in an ongoing chain of memory but to exclude oneself from bonding with people seeking to make sense of their lived experience in our postmodern milieu characterised by metanarrative vacuum. Temporary communal allegiances are fundamental modes of bonding if religious practitioners are to be practical theologians beyond their chain of memory community in our postmodern milieu.

5.5 Self-Authenticating Rituals Revisited

At the risk of placing too much weight on the relationship between the researcher as priest and the respondents, how – in our postmodern milieu – can such a limited encounter unlock such complexity for practical theology? Did the focus on spirituality lead the respondents to merely colonise their experiences or provide a particular shape to their participation? Is it enough that respondents attest to pastoral encounter? I argue that the research prodded, awoke and evoked a presumed nascent ongoing chain of memory, pastoral encounter. To this end, I will draw on the pioneering work of Turner and its application by Schwalbe to further justify the treatment of the research process as a significant aspect of the findings and reiterate why religious practitioners must take into account rituals in community making if they are to contribute their practical theology in a metanarrative vacuum.

Turner utilises the Latin term *communitas* to distinguish it from the realm of common living.\(^646\) This provides the interpretive framework for evaluating the

\(^{645}\) Usher, Bryant & Johnston, p. 120.

role of rituals that emerge out of this-worldly lived experience. Further, Schwalbe argues the concept of \textit{communitas} encapsulates both more or less than community in the rituals created in our cultural setting.\textsuperscript{648} It is not community in its traditional forms nor is it inconsequential encounter that amounts to nothing. In this context, the birth as lived experience can be presented as an expression of \textit{communitas}. Further, Schwalbe’s use of men’s experience during retreats where they purposefully engage in dormant or avoided behaviour – such as talking about their feelings – is analogous to the responses the fathers provided in the research process.\textsuperscript{649} As Turner argues, and as is apparent in the stories of the respondents, what demarcates \textit{communitas} are the rites of passage that emerge to give recognition to lived experience.\textsuperscript{650} Such rites of passage correspond to what the fathers in this study sought to create in what I described as \textit{self-authenticating rituals}. Though the men on retreat did sometimes establish serious friendship and networks of support, the men did not enter into relations of material dependence upon each other, live in close proximity to each other, work together, or interact on a daily basis. Usually the men who met at gatherings and in support groups went home to their separate lives.

Schwalbe demonstrates how the rituals the men at retreats shared enabled them to connect to each other in an intimate way without having to get to know each other personally. It was thus not an ideal community they created.\textsuperscript{651} As at the men’s retreats described by Schwalbe a range of rituals has been developed that enable the participants to create a sense of sacred space, to express their spirituality, so too the fathers found a similar sacred space in the interviews in which they were enabled to describe the births which they had attended as lived experience.\textsuperscript{652} One of the research findings indicates that the key moment where

\textsuperscript{647} ibid., pp. 96–97. In his study of tribal rituals he presents the type of social relations which emerge in liminal experiences such as birth.


\textsuperscript{649} ibid., pp. 76–77.

\textsuperscript{650} Turner, pp. 128–129.

\textsuperscript{651} ibid., p. 87.

their lived experience was addressed by practical theology was when they were empowered to engage in self-authenticating rituals in the birth celebrations. What generates rituals in a postmodern milieu characterised by the erosion of metanarratives is the role of the celebrant. This celebrant, in most cases was a religious practitioner – but not necessarily so, who facilitated a moment of communitas as a facilitator of self-authenticating rituals to celebrate the birth.

Likewise, the type of communal bond created between the fathers and the researcher as priest is not community but more akin to a moment of communitas. It is worth correlating and contrasting Schwalbe’s application of Turner’s three categories of communitas with the responses of fathers to the prenatal classes, to support my contention that the research process witnessed pastoral encounters.653

1. Spontaneous or existential communitas is the result of direct relationship outside the bounds of social structure. When fathers began attending the birth of their children the community patterns that emerged were outside the norm of social patterns. The fathers’ expectations were that prenatal classes would provide communitas. This failed hope was brought to the research process, which in some cases provided experience of communitas not procured from any other setting.

2. Normative communitas results when the spontaneous develops its own structure to ensure that the effects can be relied upon. Through the development of prenatal classes and postbirth support groups people seek to ensure normative patterns of support for communitas to occur. The respondents attested to the need and its lack of fulfilment except from family or friends and, to some extent, for those who accessed their religious affiliation, through those classes. The absence of such social resources framed the research process as a form of pastoral encounter and communitas for respondents.

653 ibid., pp. 73–74.
3. Ideological *communitas* describes the patterns used to foster it, such as sharing stories, poems, enacting rituals, forming clans, chanting, dance and special forms of self-revealing talk. The measure of a successful gathering was related to the intensity of the emotions generated. The fathers’ common experience was incongruity between the emotional intensity of the birth experience and the relative low emotional intensity of the prenatal groups. This was contrasted by the fathers who were able to enact self-authenticating rituals and any moment of *communitas* in the research process.

It was not presence of strangers at prenatal classes or the unknown researcher as priest that was problematic but rather the content and form of the encounter. As Schwalbe illustrates, men do not always manage to establish *communitas*.654

Ritual is different from routine. Routine is the repetition of a behavioural pattern, like brushing one’s teeth every night before bed. Ritual involves the symbolic enactment of values, beliefs, or feelings. It is a way of making external, visible, and public things that are normally internal, invisible, and private. By doing this, members of a community create a shared reality, reaffirm their common embrace of certain beliefs and values, and thereby keep the community alive.655

Likewise, there was no guarantee that the research process would be expected to generate a moment of *communitas*. The frustration of respondents at the limited opportunities to reflect upon and make sense of their lived experience underpins both the manner in which the fathers approached the research process and what emerged for them. They came aware – to varying degrees – of the paucity of social opportunities to reflect on their lived experience, projecting a hope not so much for community as for meaningful encounter, a sense of *communitas*. Did they expect this to be found in the research process? Maybe – and maybe not – however, either way they attested to its role in making sense of their lived experience of the birth. The role of spirituality and its affirmation in

654 ibid., p. 96.
the research process became one pathway available to them, which many appreciated. I would argue that the fathers’ positive response to the research process was not that I was a religious practitioner but that I was one who offered a form of practical theology which took its frame of reference from our shared lived experience.

What do I mean when I describe self-authenticating rituals as lived experience generated in a metanarrative vacuum? Any insistence on participating in a religious chain of memory by a religious practitioner as celebrant pastorally engages only those who belong to the same metanarrative community of origin – which is to speak only to those fathers in part three of Chapter Four who are already on your side or actively fighting against your side.

The notion of self-authenticating rituals appeals principally to practical theologians as ritual makers so that the pastoral relationship is able to address the metanarrative vacuums people confront in seeking to celebrate their lived experience. To resist understanding the role of religious practitioner as a celebrant is not to affirm the place of metanarratives in an ongoing chain of memory but to exclude oneself from bonding with people seeking to make sense of their lived experience in our postmodern milieu. Self-authenticating ritual must become a fundamental mode of pastoral encounter and bonding if religious practitioners are to be practical theologians beyond their chain of memory community in our postmodern milieu.

5.6 Lessons for Practical Theologians in Ecclesial Settings

My four theoretical pivots define key postmodern characteristics and challenges for pastoral practice by religious practitioners in the public domain. In fact, the best place for practical theology is in the public space for this is where human needs and aspirations can be given their broadest social parameters in order to approach the divine horizon.656 Practical theology allows religious practitioners to hold together the public and private, the ecclesial and

655 Ibid., p. 81.
656 Graham, 2008, p. 16.
nonecclesial dimensions of pastoral encounters by embracing the wider political, cultural and economic dynamics at work in pastoral encounters. In doing so, as evidenced in this study, it provides the basis for bridging the distinction between traditional pastoral theology with its primary concern in ecclesial practice among those who adhere to the chain of memory and the broader concerns of practical theology. To infer that religious practitioners first and foremost bring their ecclesial practices into the public domain is to misunderstand the relevance of my framework. It is not just fathers who have been impacted by the four postmodern pivots described above but also the chain of memory from which religious practitioners operate. It is not just fathers’ social contexts but how the chain of memory is shaped and reshaped by social factors. My postmodern characterisation of the public space requires not only new modes of engagement for religious practitioners but for priority to be given to bringing them into the everyday pastoral encounters of ecclesial life.

The role of spirituality observed in those with an active religious heritage gives no basis to presume that those in the chain of memory are exempt from making sense of their lived experience in a metanarrative vacuum. To view the role of religious practitioners as merely reclaiming the role of metanarratives in the ecclesial chain of memory is to risk disconnecting them from the lived experience of those to whom they are called to minister.

However, further work is required to determine how best to offer the Christian resources that religious practitioners embody. Culbertson, in presenting a cross-section of lived experiences from men, accepts that there are many voices not yet heard – and he does so with the presumption that they are looking for the right vantage point from which to speak out safely. In this research I address one sample of these unheard voices. Religious practitioners who do not engage in the idiom of spirituality will not create platforms within ecclesial settings which will enable people to express their lived experience but will instead continue men’s isolation.

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657 ibid., p. 13.
We men who are changing need to remain in dialogue with the church about these critical issues of masculine identities. However much we need to withdraw to do our work with each other, we must also take care not to withdraw so far from the church as a whole that we lose touch with it, or it with us.660

This study is evidence of spirituality’s power to make meaning and effect transformation in nonreligious contexts. The role of spirituality is one of the social factors making porous the traditionally impermeable divide between pastoral and practical theology. In so doing, its ramifications for the practice of pastoral ministry by religious practitioners includes the fact that they must take into account not only public pastoral encounters but also those within ecclesial settings. To do otherwise is to minimise the transformational dimension of practical theology.661 Hence my four theoretical postmodern outworkings for religious practitioners aid ecclesial pastoral ministry. This is not to say that my fourfold framework is secondary to pastoral practice within ecclesial settings – to the contrary. They describe the patterns required to span the divisions between traditional ecclesial and broader public contexts where theological reflection operates, for example in social contexts such as industry, community development, education, public policy and – in the case of this research – the birth process.662

The ecclesial chain of memory as a structured social gathering requires bridges and devices that allow religious practitioners to step out of their ecclesial confines. Communitas is the modality that allows lived experience to be expressed in mutuality.663 The structure of the ecclesial chain of memory requires the application of my four theoretical pivots to ensure an antistructure of mutuality, and freedom from inhibiting and obstructing social patterns in religious practitioners’ pastoral encounters. Unless men talk to each other not only about the obvious things that men talk about – sports, cars, work,

658 ibid., p. 15.
660 ibid., p. 270.
relationships – but also about matters that men do not freely discuss, then no room will allowed for men’s lived experience to be voiced and supported.  

Likewise, there was no guarantee that the ecclesial chain of memory would generate *communitas*. The frustration of those who find only limited opportunities to reflect upon, and make sense of, lived experience is equally a characteristic of ecclesial members’ lived experience because they are not immune from the challenges of metanarrative vacuum in our cultural setting. Ecclesial practice does provide varying degrees of social opportunities to reflect on lived experience which religious practitioners can utilise for meaningful pastoral encounters, a sense of *communitas*. The role of spirituality and its affirmation in the research process indicate a valid pathway for pastoral engagements that link public and ecclesial practice. This is so for both public pastoral encounters and ecclesial practice.

Of course it is possible to belong to an ecclesial chain of memory and be unaware of, or resistant to, the need to grasp the challenge of metanarrative vacuums in our cultural setting. As evidenced in this study, if this is the case it may follow that such people in these situations are also those who deny or diminish the role of spirituality for interpreting and making sense of their lived experience.

If religious practitioners are also to be effective practical theologians within their own ecclesial chain of memory then these four theoretical pivots must be a fundamental mode of engagement. Based on the analysis of the fathers’ lived experience, each of my four postmodern theoretical pivots contributes to pastoral practice in traditional ecclesial settings.

1. **Self-Authenticating Rituals and Ecclesial Rituals**: The emerging role of self-authenticating rituals is pivotal in celebrating one’s sense of reality, rather than being constrained to any particular ecclesial
heritage. As keepers of the chain of memory religious practitioners are ritual makers who pastorally arrange ecclesially-oriented signposts for lived experience. They need to be aware of the potential of compliant subversion of authorised ecclesial rituals because they allow and encourage the possibility of adaptations and modifications for ritualising lived experience. Otherwise the risk is that spirituality becomes the experience of unexpressed and unrealised longing. Those who resist embracing the role of religious practitioner as a user-friendly celebrant do not inscribe metanarrative content into liturgy but pastorally exclude themselves from collaborating in members’ lived experience. Ritual that emerges from sharing stories and expresses a person’s spirituality requires communitas, people who will listen in order that those who receive pastoral care can be themselves, and that they can transform themselves.665 Without tailoring the received liturgical practices, I contend that such pastoral inflexibility for practical theologians acts as a disincentive for members to ritually correlate their lived experience to the ecclesial chain of metanarrative memory. Of course, it does not follow that meaning attributed to the rituals will necessarily describe the metanarrative content represented by the religious practitioner.

2. Human-Interest Stories and Ecclesial Stories: The importance of human-interest stories makes it a primary calling for religious practitioners to generate pastoral encounters within the ecclesial chain of memory through and in stories so as not to pastorally disassociate from ecclesial members’ lived experience. As keepers of the chain of memory religious practitioners are reactivating agents receiving and validating interesting stories which pastorally require the association of meaning and lived experience. Insofar as there is a yearning for mutual encounter in pastoral practice, affirming the role of human-interest stories fills the void of social anonymity. Without a

665 ibid., pp. 56–58.
connection based on a shared this-worldly story, I contend that there is insufficient pastoral context within which to offer metanarrative resources that sustain members in the ecclesial chain of memory. Of course, it does not follow that even when a pastoral encounter does evoke the form of human-interest stories participants will be compelled to accept the religious practitioner’s metanarrative templates.

3. **Consumer Identity and Ecclesial Product:** Religious practitioners’ ecclesial nomenclature is no different from other modes of product branding which operate as a vehicle of consumer need. As keepers of the chain of memory they are supply agents who pastorally deliver spiritual resources. It is to be expected that ecclesial members treat, to varying degrees, their ecclesial practices as commodities and products. Religious practitioners need to be aware in their pastoral encounters – even within the boundaries of the ecclesial chain of memory – of potential market competitors, outlets and avenues that provide spiritual capital for lived experience. Without providing spiritual resources based on sufficient levels of choice and diversity, I contend that there is insufficient pastoral allure to motivate desire for metanarrative resources. Of course, it does not follow that even when – in a pastoral encounter – products are endorsed, participants will feel obliged to accept the religious practitioner’s metanarrative terms.

4. **Temporary Communal Allegiances and Ecclesial Congregating:** An ecclesial chain of memory is no different from other modes of association, and operates to connect and disconnect depending on levels of social congruence. As keepers of the chain of memory religious practitioners are ecclesial community makers who pastorally preside over amenable company for the sharing of lived experience. They need to be aware, even within the boundaries of the ecclesial chain of memory, of alternative and parallel belonging that distracts from – and attracts towards – other social contexts for interpreting lived experience. I contend that there is too much pastoral transition for
practical theologians to maintain a comprehensive metanarrative interpretive site without recognising that the sharing of lived experience in transitory settings is normative for belonging. Of course, it does not follow that even when a pastoral encounter generates mutual comfort participants will be bound by regular devotion to the religious practitioner's metanarrative social alignments.
Conclusion

6.1 Summary of the Thesis

This study shows that the current role of spirituality mainly describes this-worldly patterns and commitments rather than transcendent experiences as in traditional religious communities. What the current usage tells us about society is that the significance and impact of spirituality as universal phenomena are overstated.

I do not want to overstate – while concurrently making a case for the actual sense in which they alluded to – the extent to which fathers in this study consciously utilised the social resources of human-interest story, consumer identity and temporary communal allegiances to enact their spirituality in self-authenticating rituals. Yes, some fathers provided evidence of wanting to frame their lived experience as a human-interest story, especially as they shared it in the initial flush of euphoria. But more expressed frustrations in finding suitable contexts in which to tell their story. Nor was there abundant evidence of fathers exercising their consumer identity to purchase resources and access service providers let alone those specifically related to enlivening their spirituality. There was some evidence of the formation of temporary communal allegiances to enable and shape spiritual understanding, but this was mainly in relation to the types of prenatal classes which couples chose to attend. Otherwise, no father formed a temporary communal allegiance for the express purpose of spiritually framing his lived experience before, during or after attending a birth (perhaps with the exception of one who sought counselling), though some availed themselves of preexisting allegiances. The predominant pattern was fathers bemoaning the absence of opportunity in prenatal classes as temporary communal allegiances to interpret this life changing experience spiritually. Otherwise, all the respondents predominantly avoided examining – or relied on immediate family as audience before whom they could enact – their spiritual understanding. The respondent fathers confirm many of the patterns
illustrated in the reviewed literature about how men form and utilise, or underutilise, bonds and groups to explore and develop religious and spiritual understandings of important moments in their life. In their preference for relying on family and friends, the fathers reflect results of studies which show that most people can define precisely a group of about three to seven very close friends to whom they turn in times of distress; as well as a group of about 15 who provide sympathy and support; and a wider circle of about 35 friends who represent their personal community.666

Spirituality has numerous important roles to play in our understanding and affirmation of the role of fathers in the birth process. The respondents followed one of three patterns.

1. Those with an active religious heritage understood the role of spirituality as the means by which they sustained and promoted their active religious affiliation. The clearest expression of this was the freedom fathers brought to the birth celebrations in the form of self-authenticating rituals by which they enacted their spirituality to connect it to the religious chain of memory to which they belonged.

2. Those without an active religious affiliation understood the role of spirituality as having a nontranscendent content. It was an expressive category rather than a transforming one, affirming their current understanding of themselves – a projecting of self rather than the realisation of a new self.

3. Those who denied the importance of spirituality, whether with an active religious affiliation or reacting from a secularist viewpoint, expressed a disapproval of the concept framed as embodying individualistic and corporatist consumer values. Spirituality contributes to the limiting of both religious and secular approaches to socially transform either the person or how the experience is perceived – or not to transform.

Nonetheless a distinctive finding of this study is that fathers both with – and without – an active religious heritage, did apply self-authenticating rituals to their lived experience to express their spirituality. In terms of fathers without an active religious affiliation, in part two of Chapter Four, an argument was offered that we are observing the beginning of a greater turn to self-authenticating rituals. This is based on understanding their lived experience, fuelled by human-interest stories which can be taken to the market place so that appropriate service providers and resources can be procured and interpretive temporary communal allegiances can be formed to celebrate their shared lived experience. My expectation is that if the predominating this-worldly form of spirituality that the respondents brought to their lived experiences is to find outlets for self-authenticating rituals then they will be served by celebrants in a similar manner to what has arisen in marriages and funerals. Traditional religious practitioners will need to find ways of relating practical theology to people’s lived experience in a similar path to how the participants responded the opportunity presented to them to access a researcher priest because they were interested in the research topic. The argument is that they will be able to do so only if they apply themselves informed by the fourfold schema outlined. This schema becomes an interpretive key for understanding pastoral encounters in our current postmodern social setting.

I have utilised the role of spirituality given by the fathers as a basis for my interpretive self-story, through which I aim to make sense of our postmodern milieu. The introduction of the first person in research text is a postmodern reflectivity by which scholars are seeking to integrate scholarly and personal voices in researchers’ textual representations. This form of self-narrative placed my self within a social context, serving as both a method and a text. This autoethnography allowed a genre of writing in which I draw on my own lived experiences, connect the personal to the cultural and place the self and others within our social context. I explored the intersections of gender and voice, multiple identities and selfhood, transcending the binary split between the self and the social.
In response to the fathers’ stories I posited four characteristics of postmodern social patterns as a framework for contextualising their stories as a pathway into describing how spirituality contributes to meaning, purpose and furthering of their lived experience as indicative of our postmodern times. A number of imperatives emerged from these theoretical pivots which religious practitioners must take on board if they are to contribute their practical theology to people in our cultural setting.

1. **Self-Authenticating Rituals**: which are the patterns of behaviour and ritual whereby we construct our own reality and meaning in a metanarrative vacuum. Fundamentally, the practical theologian must bring shared lived experience as a resource for the benefit of those outside their chain of memory if the pastoral encounter is to address the metanarrative vacuum people confront in making sense of their lived experience.

2. **Human-Interest Stories**: are where truth is accessed through and in stories whereby the turn to subject no longer supports metanarrative. Fundamentally, the practical theologian must now listen to and validate their stories for those outside their chain of memory if the pastoral relationship is to address the metanarrative vacuum which people confront in making sense of their lived experience.

3. **Consumer Identity**: is where capitalism has provided the buying power which underpins the availability of diversity and difference. Fundamentally, the practical theologian must present himself/herself as a consumable for the benefit of those outside their chain of memory if the pastoral encounter is to address the metanarrative vacuum people confront in making sense of their lived experience.

4. **Temporary Communal Allegiances**: where belonging to group activity is characterised by transitory allegiances involving a person belonging to many such communities. Fundamentally, the practical theologian must present himself/herself as a nonaligned community maker bonding with
lived experience for the benefit of those outside their chain of memory if the pastoral encounter is to address the metanarrative vacuums people confront in making sense of their lived experience.

The exchange between the researcher as priest and the respondents is a potent catalyst for reformulating practical theology in a postmodern milieu. Though I do not want to overstate the bond – while concurrently asserting there was a significant depth of connection – that was created between respondent and the researcher as priest, I do want to emphasise that it is a template for how religious practitioners will need to offer their practical theology, especially in relation to the ritual celebration of birth and its associated lived experiences.

The unavoidable conclusion is that reappraisal is essential for encounters by religious practitioners in our current postmodern milieu. If they are to engage people outside their institutional chain of memory communities then a form of practical theology must be offered that takes seriously the fourfold theoretical characteristics of our postmodern milieu as I have described them above. This will affect both the training of practical theologians to read the times and also to fashion practical theological content that will resonate with the spiritual lived experience of people in our cultural setting. This does not necessarily require avant-garde offerings, as there is evidence in Australia that religious practitioners need to find ways of re-offering traditional spiritual practices such as prayer.\(^ {667} \)

As a result of undertaking this study I attest that utilising spirituality is one conduit for such encounters. Nonetheless, any reappraisal will require more than dressing up traditional practices in the language of spirituality.

### 6.2 Limitations of the Thesis

The thesis is not an exhaustive study of spirituality from a theological viewpoint but from one where I sought to examine its role as described by the respondents. This is not to say that theological analysis is not important or

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necessary to critically assess how helpful spirituality as a concept is for informing Christianity’s—or other religions’—traditions and practices. Nor is the thesis an exhaustive study of how effective applying spirituality to lived experience is in generating religious allegiances or allegiances that benefit ecclesial chains of memory in particular, or society in general. Nor, in this research do I describe or analyse the experiences of fathers who saw the research topic as a futile and destructive exercise.

As a grounded study, it begins with stories of a small sample of men’s lived experience. Therefore, the hypothesis that I generated from the data can be regarded as only provisional in regard to generalisability relating to the findings on the role of spirituality, the nature of our social settings and the challenges for practical theologians. Further, the sample of men shared a range of common socioeconomic characteristics such as being reasonably well educated, all working people, with middle-class aspirations and achievements—in other words, a group with many homogenous features. Insofar as in the thesis I am trying to describe the nature of our social setting and its challenges for religious practitioners, their representations of the society to which they belong are as valid as those of any others who belong to Australian society. However, it is a valid question to ponder whether or not a different view would have emerged if the respondents had included Aboriginals, Chinese, African or any other nationalities that form a part of Australian society. In the same vein, given that the fathers in the sample shared stories of healthy babies, it is a valid limitation of the study to suggest that a different view of society and their lived experience may have been posited if the respondents had described tragedies—such as a stillbirth or obvious deformity—at the birth of their children. The extent to which such fathers would have perceived the births as “spiritual experiences” in those circumstances is not addressed in the thesis.

Nonetheless, I would insist that such limitations do not discount what is described by the respondents. Though this thesis cannot be claimed as a basis for ruling out either other possible descriptions of fathers’ lived experience, or the possibility of different hypotheses being offered for making sense of lived
experience in our current milieu, in my argument I rightly assume that the described lived experiences of these fathers can, and needs to, be taken seriously – as was the case. Spirituality is the way of describing these postmodern patterns, but there may be other windows into how this works in other societies. I have given due attention to this study of the experiences of fathers who have attended the birth of their children and how these may be indicative of patterns in Australia. These experiences furnish distinct and unique theoretical pivots for understanding how fathers in particular, and projecting how others in general, approach the role of spirituality in our society. Even if spirituality has a different or limited role in how people understand their lived experience, on the basis of my fourfold schema, my argument provides insight into, and critical understanding of, social patterns. The four theoretical pivots offered, frame and inform the differing social processes which religious practitioners are required to take into account when they encounter and respond to people’s – both those who are within the ecclesial chain of memory and those who are not – lived experience and deliver their distinctive contribution.

6.3 Implications of the Thesis

Firstly, consideration should be given to making the role of spirituality prominent in prenatal classes as this would prepare and assist to increase the awareness of mothers and fathers in their pending experience of being present at the birth of their children. The need of better supports for fathers is accepted, but the need to include spirituality is one implication that emerges from this thesis.\textsuperscript{668} This will require a critical reappraisal of the educational mode and content of the classes to reflect the fourfold characteristics of our postmodern milieu.

Secondly, the process of self-authenticating rituals requires a recalibration for religious practitioners to avoid their stifling fathers with an active religious affiliation in their own framing and interpreting of their lived experience and instead to encourage them by the provision of pastoral wisdom sensitive to the

\textsuperscript{668} Friedewald, Fletcher & Fairbairn, p. 16.
issues of gender, masculinity and spirituality for engaging in the recently
established practice in this Australia of fathers attending the birth of their
children. In their role of practical theologians as ritual makers, religious
practitioners have been known to collude in the oppression of people by forcing
them to accept the ritual norms of the particular communal chain of memory
which they represent. Such an approach betrays the dynamic invitational
opportunities which practical theologians might not otherwise have been given,
and which the new openness to spirituality provides when related to liminal
lived experiences such as birth. The emerging role of spirituality allows practical
theologians to approach people’s lived experience based on dialogue and shared
experiences. The issue is not just which ritual to use but understanding why a
ritual is the most appropriate form of practical theology for those meeting
religious practitioners. The range of tailoring of ritual amongst the participants
in this research stretched from a minimal personalising to a radical customising
of both the form and content. Regardless of the level of tailoring, no testimony
was given to resistance from the religious body and its practitioners as to this
dynamic. True, it is hard to discern reluctance, as the only descriptions available
to the study were the requests of the fathers who reported that they were
unilaterally accepted if not welcomed. To what extent the religious bodies and
practitioners encourage and welcome this mode of tailoring is possible to assess
only in part — but it is not possible to comment on whether this was volunteered
or forthcoming only when requested. Simply, the question of whether religious
bodies and practitioners welcome this new role of spirituality that seeks, and
even demands, aspects of tailoring was absent. However, there was a range of
stories related by the fathers as to how they were able to tailor the ritual
celebrations relating to the birth of their children.

Thirdly, the process of formulating self-authenticating rituals requires the
fostering of appropriate ritual resources for those fathers without a religious
affiliation within which to frame and interpret their lived experience. With the
enabling of self-authenticating rituals I expect that the divide between those
fathers with, and without, an active religious affiliation will blur over time as
has occurred in marriage and funeral ceremonies. There is a need to develop a
set of pastoral guidelines and questions to offer fathers making sense of lived experience. One of the implications for pastoral ministry practice is that of the practical theologian conceived of as midwife or animator of lived experience, whose active listening or conversation with a goal provides further insight into the nature of pastoral encounters and enhances the possibility of a deepening engagement with the communal chain of memory which the religious practitioner represents. In a sense practical theology requires a new form of religious awareness that is uniquely found when you go to the margins, and rites of passage are constructed to affirm people. In this regard religious practitioners share the challenges of other service-oriented professions in contributing their role in social transformation, seeing as our postmodern milieu requires practitioners of service-orientated professions to be trained in interpretive encounters.\textsuperscript{669} Practical theology, with its interdisciplinary approach, is well placed to inform religious practitioners and enable them to engage with the complexity of people and a society that accepts the growing awareness of the interdependence of biological, psychological, spiritual and social factors.\textsuperscript{670} Practical theology allows for collaborative, person-centred, constructive and transformative encounters for religious practitioners.\textsuperscript{671}

What would enable traditional ecclesial bodies to recalibrate their religious practitioners to engage with people’s shared experience awaits further critical research. Kamya and O’Brien are convinced that those responsible for future professional formation will need to prefer an emphasis on practical theology because – as I have argued as a result of this research – religious practitioners in our postmodern milieu unavoidably must bring an interpretive approach when meeting people’s lived experience.


\textsuperscript{670} Kamya & O’Brien, pp. 21–22. They highlight that any professional educators who wish to relate themselves to our postmodern milieu must prioritise practical theology as a preferred method.

\textsuperscript{671} ibid., pp. 23–24.
1. The communal setting of practical theology assumes that a community of learners which includes the religious practitioner is created by such pastoral encounters.672

2. Practical theology allows religious practitioners to access and integrate the life-giving stories and rituals that inspire and transform our lived experience.673

3. By developing an interprofessional approach practical theology transforms the vocational trajectory of religious practitioners.674

Currently, traditional religious resources in the realm of birth still predominantly emphasise initiation into a religious heritage. It is yet to be established whether this will give way to alternative or parallel pastoral practitioners as represented by the rise of civil celebrants in other areas of lived experience such as marriages and funerals. In the meantime there is a need to develop resources that may be offered in such pastoral encounters for both religious practitioners and those facilitating prenatal classes.

1. Such preparatory and liturgical resources will need to vary according to the three pathways by which fathers come to spirituality: active religious heritage, no active religious heritage and those who would deny or diminish the spiritual.

2. Any resources for prenatal classes as interpretive communities must be appropriate for men as well as women and include: a checklist of practical issues for men, such as discussion questions, and recommendations for ongoing support,

3. Online availability is a mode that would make them accessible to even more if men are reticent to attend prenatal classes.

672 ibid., pp. 26–27.
673 ibid., p. 28.
674 ibid., p. 28.
6.4 A Way Forward for Practical Theology

What do I advocate in my thesis as the way forward for pastoral practice by practical theologians in Australia? More broadly, insofar as my four theoretical pivots relate to other Western societies — and in the shadow of globalisation indeed to any society — what do I advocate in my thesis as the way forward for pastoral practice by practical theologians both within and beyond Australia?

For this research I took my working definition for practical theology from Swinton and Mowat.

Practical Theology is critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God's redemptive practices in, to and for the world.675

As a result of my argument this definition needs to be expanded in a manner that better corresponds to the role given to spirituality as described by the fathers in their lived experience. The reason is that this definition still betrays a proclivity for locating practical theology within the ecclesial chain of memory. Their definition implies a logical priority and sequence for understanding practical theology as stemming from ecclesial practice. As argued, the traditional view of pastoral theology has been ecclesialcentric and continues to corral the formation of religious practitioners in their pastoral practice. In this thesis I advocate a thorough reevaluation of traditional definitions of pastoral theology such as those presented by Lapsley.

The study of all aspects of care of persons in the church, in a context of theological inquiry, including implications from other branches of theology.676

His definition is not wrong in what it asserts is important about pastoral practice in the ecclesial chain of memory but is deficient in what it fails to signpost as to the importance of nonecclesial theological reflection. I do not wish

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675 Swinton & Mowat, p. 6.
to suggest that Swinton and Mowat replicate this ecclesial predisposition, to the contrary, my argument builds on their critical reappraisal of traditional pastoral theology. However, I bring to fruition their insights with an enhanced definition of practical theology for religious practitioners.

Practical Theology is critical, *theological reflection on the practices of the world as they interact with the practices of the Church* and (italics mine) *theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world*, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God’s redemptive practices in, to and for the world.

This is not a criticism of Swinton and Mowat’s findings as what I have offered is naturally implied in their work and in my thesis I ensure that it is explicit. My definition encapsulates the role that religious practitioners are required to play in their pastoral encounters within and beyond ecclesial settings. My enhanced definition offers a new way forward for understanding and preparing candidates or clergy for pastoral practice. It does not prioritise ecclesial settings as the prime verifier of pastoral practice. It requires practical theologians to highlight pathways for those whom they pastorally encounter to participate in the divine horizon which are not restricted to ecclesial settings. It requires practical theologians to expand their modes for correlating lived experience to those both within and outside ecclesial settings. To this end, my fourfold schema provides modes for practical theologians in their pastoral encounters in order for them to be bridges between a person’s lived experience and a social setting characterised by metanarrative vacuum.

My definition relies on the need for a pastoral practice of mutuality which theological reflection as a method promotes and requires. The various stories of the fathers engaging with their religious heritage encountered through a variety of religious practitioners become distinct windows into the different aspects of pastoral encounter. Each is informative without being comprehensive. I argue

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for the recognition that pastoral encounters require new modes of mutuality for, and between, lived experience in the world and lived experience in ecclesial settings. As Graham attests:

Another respect in which pastoral studies and practical theology “goes public” and that reflects the way in which pastoral care and ministry takes place in a secular as well as exclusively ecclesial context, and the way in which practical theology entails more than the propagation of “hints and helps” for the ordained clergy.677

This new way of forming practical theologians which focuses on reflective practice that affirms mutuality is inclined to be suspicious of the traditional role of religious practitioners as keepers of a chain of ecclesial memory. Institutionalisation of religious practitioners and ecclesiastical dominance will limit the amount and quality of pastoral encounters. The way forward for practical theology is for religious practitioners to subordinate this clericalcentric inclination insofar as it continues to attest to an ecclesialcentric view of pastoral encounter. All the while highlighting a new indispensability for religious practitioners who are able to correlate their practical theology to those in nonecclesial settings, be they members of the ecclesial chain of memory or not, in order to address their lived experience in a metanarrative vacuum. A case in point in the study was such a bridging role enacted by religious practitioners between self-authenticating rituals and ecclesial rituals. As well as responding to our social settings characterised by metanarrative vacuum, in my enhanced definition I also take into account our social setting epitomised by the shift to post-Christendom expressions of the chain of memory. How pastoral encounter impacts on religious practitioners in an ecclesial setting characterised by post-Christendom is an overlapping but distinct area of further study. The foregoing description of the need for a reworked dialectic between an anticlerical corrective and clerical indispensability informs my way forward for practical theology, irrespective of the extent to which the notion of post-Christendom is relied upon.

677 ibid., p. 13.
Furthermore, what is required is a significant reevaluation of theological training and education in forming religious practitioners. The basis of Christian practical theology can no longer be primarily reliant on the foundational documents, church history and systematics. Theological education with this focus will attend to only one aspect of practical theology: *theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world*. Theological education that trains and forms scholar priests is not the only pattern of pastoral practice or as important as it was in traditional pastoral theology, and may even be a hindrance or obstacle to pastorally enabling people to correlate their lived experience in a metanarrative vacuum to the practical theology offered by religious practitioners on behalf of their ecclesial chain of memory. This is not to discount the ongoing role of religious practitioners to represent their ecclesial chain of memory in such areas as advocating the ecclesial rituals that express its view of the divine horizon.

My enhanced definition also requires forming religious practitioners in the new modes of pastoral encounter. For example, it may not require learning less Greek translation, but it may require an understanding that the study of Greek does not primarily provide foundations for a metanarrative but provides a context for reflective practice that is characterised by mutuality and genuine concern for the other rather than promoting one’s own metanarrative interests through the instrumentality of expertise in Greek. Instead of theological education first and foremost grounding religious practitioners in the reality of their metanarrative, training and formation should equally prepare practical theologians to engage the lived experience of people characterised by metanarrative vacuum whatever the location of pastoral encounter – be that context ecclesial or not. Learning Greek as *theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world* and learning reflective practice as *theological reflection on the practices of the world as they interact with the practices of the Church* are at least equal concerns. A case can be presented that the pendulum needs to swing further towards an emphasis on reflective practice if Christian practical theology is to be made available to people’s lived experience in a social setting characterised by metanarrative
vacuum. I appreciate that this may be contentious and a minority view. However, it is the natural culmination of the argument as encapsulated in my enhanced definition to prefer the chronological priority given to theological reflection on the practices of the world as they interact with the practices of the Church. Giving secondary emphasis to theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world is an essential corrective against ecclesialcentric clericalism and the basis for a broader way forward for training in practical theology. The difference between maintaining a balance amid these two approaches or reversing which has prior emphasis is contentious and is an area requiring further research and study.

In the first chapter I presented four questions which I proposed to address in this thesis. The implications of these questions for pastoral encounter and practical theology are now evident.

- How does ritual take shape in our current milieu? This requires religious practitioners to engage in people’s lived experience to enable people to ritually express their view of the divine horizon even if it involves a critical relationship to the ecclesial rituals which the religious practitioners represent.

- How do people convey what is important to them? This requires pastoral practice which encourages story telling of lived experience, which may – or may not – be ecclesially sanctioned as pivotal for encapsulating the divine horizon.

- What modes of exchange inform encounters? Those that require pastoral encounter characterised by mutuality and fostered by reflective pastoral practice such as is expressed in my fourfold theoretical schema.

- Whom do people invite to share their lived experience? Those whom they believe value their lived experience and affirm their efforts to correlate them to the divine horizon – or not – whichever the case may be.
What have I learnt as a practical theologian from undertaking this study? As I reflect upon my own formation and theological education as a priest this study has prompted a critical reevaluation. It has helped me appreciate the foundations provided by my training as a scholar priest who is called to represent and serve my ecclesial chain of memory: *theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world*. On the other hand, it has highlighted the inadequacies of my theological education. The affirmation of ecclesial pastoral practice was given higher esteem both in terms of the amount of time and the priority accorded to it. The antidote is reflective practice that takes seriously the turn to self in the social sciences that requires a refashioning of the role of practical theologians: *theological reflection on the practices of the world as they interact with the practices of the Church*. In hindsight it is clearer that this was absent from – or a minor component of – my theological education, if not actively discouraged. Further, I suggest that it commonly continues to be a secondary or minor concern – if indeed it is not totally absent from, present-day theological education. Concern for reclaiming and maintaining the historic traces of the institutional forms of the ecclesial chain of memory are pressing – if not explicit, presenting – issues in the selection, training and professional advancement of religious practitioners.

Theological education that does not extend beyond its traditional ecclesial focus will disengage religious practitioners from an essential aspect of practical theology: *theological reflection on the practices of the world as they interact with the practices of the Church*. This requires a broader view of religious practitioners as they represent their ecclesial chain of memory in their pastoral encounters. It demands additional training and formation in pastoral practice such as being reflective ritual makers who enable those whom they pastorally encounter to express their view of the divine horizon. In this context of shared lived experience characterised by mutuality, the contribution of practical theology can be offered. The concept of spirituality as presented in this thesis is one handle for grasping this broader way forward for practical theology. For religious practitioners to ignore, or underestimate, the role of spirituality and the social patterns of our times is to fundamentally misread and disconnect
themselves from the society to whom they wish to contribute their practical theology. Therefore formation of religious practitioners must include reflective practice based on: narrative theology, case study, awareness of postmodern themes and critical analysis, role-awareness and mutuality.
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<td>Woolmington, J.</td>
<td>Religion in Early Australia: The Problem of Church and State</td>
<td>Stanmore, Cassell, 1976</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Appendix

Advertising Posters for the Research Project

Are you a father whose child is now under 2 years old?

Do you want to tell your story of the birth of your child?

Please Call Con Apokis 0411 274 467

This is a research project (The Experience of Fathers Present at the Birth of their Children) which has received ethics approval from The Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans at Monash University.
Explanatory Statement to Participants,

My name is Con Apokis and I am doing research under the supervision of Professor Gary D Bouma, in the School of Politics and Social Inquiry towards a PhD at Monash University.

The aim of this research is to record the stories of fathers present at the birth of their children. I hope this study will provide an understanding of how fathers experience and express what is important to them. I am interested in how fathers understand profound experiences and whether they apply spirituality or religion to interpret and explain them.

I am seeking men between the age of 25 and 50 to share their stories. They will be men who have experienced at first hand the birth of their child within the last two years. I would like the interviews to be audio taped. If you agree to talk to me, we will set up a time and place that suits you.

We know that sometimes the birth process does not go smoothly. The sensitivity of this situation will be respected. In particular where a birth has been problematic, even leading to a difficult outcome. Each person’s story has the potential to leave an important legacy for other fathers and fathers to be. In each case the depth of feeling will be cared for and if you should experience any emotional difficulty or distress we will discontinue the research. If you so choose we can continue at a pace which meets your desire to tell your story. In such circumstances referral to appropriate counselling services will be available.

No findings, which could easily identify any individual participant, will be published. The anonymity of your participation is assured by our procedure in which all names and other identifying information will be changed or omitted from the final report. Access to the data is restricted to my supervisor and myself. The information will be stored for five years by the chief investigator as prescribed by university regulations.

Participation in this research is conducted on a voluntary basis. You may withdraw your consent at any time. You may also refuse to answer particular questions, or terminate your participation at any time. Withdrawing from the project or refusing to answer question will not affect the way are treated by the co-investigator. A report summarising the results will be available to participants on request.

If you have any queries regarding the research or would like to be informed of the aggregate research findings, please contact Professor Gary Bouma at the School of Political and Social Inquiry, Monash University, Clayton: (03) 9905 2982.

You can complain about the study if you do not like something about it. To complain about the study, you need to telephone 9905 2052. You can then ask to speak to the secretary of the Human Ethics Committee and tell him or her that the number of the project is 2002/135. You could also write to the secretary. That person's address is:

   The Secretary  
   The Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans  
   PO Box No 3A  
   Monash University  
   Victoria 3800  
   Telephone (03) 9905 2052  Fax (03) 9905 1420  
   Email: SCERH@adm.monash.edu.au

Thank you for your participation.

Con Apokis
Informed Consent Form  

Project Title: The Experience of Fathers Present at the Birth of their Children

I agree to take part in the above Monash University research project. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I keep for my records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to:

- be interviewed by the researcher
- allow the interview to be audiotaped
- make myself available for a further interview should that be required

I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party

Signature....................................................... Date.............................................
17 April 2002

Prof. Gary Bouma  
School of Political & Social Inquiry  
Clayton Campus

Con Apokis  
School of Political & Social Inquiry  
Clayton Campus

Re: Project 2002/135 - The experience of fathers present at the birth of their children

The above submission was approved by the Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans at meeting B2/2002 on 16 April 2002 provided that the following matters are satisfactorily addressed:

- The poster suggests that the researcher is only attempting to recruit fathers of living children. Both the answer to question 14 a and the Explanatory Statement suggest that is not necessarily so. If the researcher is going to recruit fathers of children who have not lived, does he feel that he has the necessary qualifications and experience to deal with some of the issues that may arise out of his interviews with them? Counselling services for bereaved parents and other parents whose child’s birth has not necessarily resulted in the expected happy outcome, are very specialised. Is the researcher confident that he is aware of the appropriate counselling services for any fathers who fall into any of those categories and that he would be able to assist men in accessing them if the need arose? The committee would appreciate a list of the counselling services that the researcher has in mind to refer people to if required.

- There are some minor mistakes in the Explanatory Statement that need to be corrected.

The project is approved as submitted for a three year period and this approval is only valid whilst you hold a position at Monash University. You should notify the Committee immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project. Changes to the existing protocol require the submission and approval of an amendment. Substantial variations may require a new application. Please quote the project number above in any further correspondence and include it in the complaints clause which may be expressed more formally if appropriate:

You can complain about the study if you don’t like something about it. To complain about the study, you need to phone 9905 2052. You can then ask to speak to the secretary of the Human Ethics Committee and tell him or her that the number of the project is 2002/135. You could also write to the secretary. That person’s address is:

- The Secretary
- The Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans
- PO Box No 3A
- Monash University
- Victoria 3800
- Telephone (03) 9905 2052 Fax (03) 9905 1420
- Email: SCERH@adm.monah.edu.au

Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of annual progress reports and a termination report. Please ensure that the Committee is provided with a report annually, at the conclusion of the project and if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion. The report form is available at http://www.monash.edu.au/resgrant/human-ethics/forms-reports/index.html.
The Chief Investigators of approved projects are responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years. You are requested to comply with this requirement.

Ann Michael
Human Ethics Officer
Standing Committee on Ethics
In Research Involving Humans
13 May 2002

Prof. Gary Bouma  Con Apokis
School of Political & Social Inquiry  School of Political & Social Inquiry
Clayton Campus  Clayton Campus

Re: Project 2002/135 - The experience of fathers present at the birth of their children

Thank you for the final copy of your Explanatory Statement as requested by the Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans.

This is to advise that the amendments have been approved and the project may proceed according to the approval as given on 16 April 2002.

Ann Michael
Human Ethics Officer
Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans