Living Between

Exploring a Framework of Spirituality for Students and Teachers in Catholic Schools

By

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Abstract

This thesis examines the changing relationship between religion and spirituality in a post-Christian society and the implications for religious education in Australian Catholic schools. It presents a framework of spirituality for teachers and students that holds in tension the human and the divine, exploring four paradigmatic human experiences as revelatory.

A teacher’s role is influenced by both internal and external accountabilities. The internal accountabilities are those beliefs about students and learning that inform teachers’ aims for students and the pedagogical choices they make each day to progress student learning. That teacher beliefs about students affect student outcomes is well researched in maths and literacy. An area that has not been widely researched is the impact of teacher beliefs about spirituality and religion and beliefs about students’ spirituality on religious education pedagogy.

This research employs dual methodology: systematic and empirical research in an empirical research cycle. Eleven teachers from three Catholic primary schools in the Melbourne Archdiocese are interviewed about their beliefs about spirituality and the spirituality of their students. They are also asked to describe a successful lesson in religious education and to consider their influence on students. The qualitative data is analysed through the lens of a theoretical framework of spirituality that is developed by the researcher. By analysing concrete experiences and using theoretical concepts the framework aims to capture the totality of different experiences of spirituality in a coherent, exhaustive and recognizable model.

The two dimensional framework specifically addresses Christian spirituality, represented by intersecting axes of the human and Transcendent dimensions. The intersection creates four paradigms that illuminate the liminal spaces of encounter and human questing; of ‘living between,’ where spirituality is highlighted: Vulnerability, Responsibility, Commitment and Fulfilment. The framework is a heuristic intended for teacher professional learning, creating opportunity for dialogue between the formal theology of the research and the embedded theology or beliefs operating in the context of teaching and learning. By tapping into
existential questions the framework also engages teachers in a process of recontextualising the insights of Christian spirituality for their context.

This research confirms the framework as a comprehensive model for spirituality and a professional dialogue tool. It also provides a theoretical lens through which to make theological, pedagogical and strategic recommendations around religious education for Catholic schools in Australia.
Declaration of Originality

I declare the word length of this thesis is 96,500 words, excluding bibliography; thereby not exceeding the 100,000 word maximum length specified in the regulations.

I declare the bibliography and format is consistent with the requirements of the Turabian style required by University of Divinity.

Institutional Review Process

Human Research Ethics Committee approval was received on 20 October 2015. Permission to conduct research in Melbourne Catholic schools was granted by the Director of Catholic Education Melbourne, Mr. Stephen Elder, on July 15 2015.

Statement of Originality

I hereby certify that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution, and affirm that to the best of my knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signed  Rina Madden

Date  14 January 2019.
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Catholic education, particularly religious education, has been an integral part of my entire life firstly as a student, then a teacher and more recently a curriculum writer and teacher educator. I consider being involved in religious education to be a great privilege and it has energized me throughout my career. The framework of spirituality for teachers and students in Catholic schools presented in this thesis is not only a culmination of my on-going learning as a religious educator, but presents a way forward that holds many possibilities.

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I hope that this research will contribute to a broader conversation about religious education in Catholic schools for the flourishing of all students.
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Chapter 1  
Introduction and Context

Introduction

Next year, a new group of five to six-year-old children will enter a Catholic primary school to which their parents have elected to send them for a variety of reasons and at some burden of expense to themselves when compared with enrolment in the state public education system. Why parents choose a Catholic school is not the subject of this thesis; however there are increasingly few who in doing so expressly wish for a partnership with the school in the formation of faith for their children which involves active participation in a faith community.¹ For many of these students therefore, their first contact with religion will occur in the school environment. Their teachers have chosen to teach in a Catholic school for a variety of reasons and bring to their teaching and learning a diverse range of understandings about and commitment to the Catholic faith. It falls to the Catholic school community to engage this diverse group in a common educational project illuminated by God’s vision for the world and under the banner of an increasingly beleaguered Catholic Church publicly discredited by its criminal neglect of some in its care.² In an era coined as post-Christian³ it is an interesting time to be publicly affiliated with religious institutions and a time ripe for self-reflection on what it means to be Catholic today and for a renewal of Catholic identity. This process of self-reflection has begun with Catholic school communities through the


introduction of the Enhancing Catholic Identity Project (ECSIP). The ECSIP data analysis reveals there is work to be done around approaches to religious education in Catholic schools. My research has been undertaken to build on the work of ECSIP with my thesis framed by the question: What are teachers’ expectations of and beliefs about their students as spiritual beings and how does this influence their pedagogy in religious education? How Catholic schools in the Australian context promote and develop a community of learners who are open to and engage with religious world views in a post-Christian world is the subject of this thesis. The thesis proposes that grappling with understandings of spirituality is key to engaging students in religious education. In the process of the research I develop a theoretical construct which is a comprehensive, coherent and relatable theological framework of Christian spirituality; one that examines paradigmatic experiences of ‘living between’ as windows into the spiritual. It is a useful analysis tool through which to make sense of the data from this research, and it is also a reflection and professional dialogue tool for teachers.

In this introductory chapter I place my research in the broader context of the historical development of Catholic schooling in Australia, with a focus on Melbourne in particular, noting the changing approaches to religious education as they occur. I identify some of the cultural, philosophical and sociological trends impacting approaches to religious education in Catholic schools and note the growing influence of spirituality. The following presents the context of the Catholic school and religious education in Australia firstly through a historical and sociological lens. Next I unpack some of the contextual influences from a cultural and philosophical perspective. I then relate the origins of the research question to the data emerging from the ECSIP research. In a final section of this chapter, I outline the structure of the thesis.

**The Catholic School in Australia: A Historical and Sociological Perspective**

In this section I briefly outline some of the pertinent episodes in the relatively short history of Catholic education in Australia that may shed light on how religious education in Catholic

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schools is understood today. It serves to paint a picture of the culture in Catholic schools and some of the influences on teachers’ self-understanding as religious educators.

Catholic Primary schools in the Melbourne Archdiocese have been established since the 1840s. They were set up originally in reaction to the establishment of a largely Anglican Church controlled system of schooling which excluded Catholics from accessing education due to the political and social antipathy felt towards the Irish by the English governing class. The purpose of these schools was “to assist members of the Catholic community, which included the poorer members of the population, to take up responsible positions and improve their civic status.”

Archbishop Vaughan arrived from Ireland to the colony of New South Wales in 1873 and became interested in the question of education. He and his fellow bishops produced a Joint Pastoral in 1879 demonstrating a holistic and visionary concept for the establishment of separate schools for Catholics based on the understanding that a religious education was more than religious instruction that could be added on to a secular curriculum or taught separately; rather religion was to be seen as integral to all aspects of teaching and learning. This understanding of religious education was to remain the ideal throughout the history of Catholic Education and is still reflected powerfully in the current framework for teaching and learning by Catholic Education Melbourne, *Horizons of Hope*: “Catholic educators invite students to make sense of their world and their lives within a faith community that is faithful to the mission of Jesus.”

However, the ideal was less evident in the practice at the time which reflected the instructional method common to the era, of rote learning based on the use of a catechism as the sole text for instruction. The move to secularize the schooling system in the colony began almost immediately after the

9 Rummery, “The Development of the Concept of Religious Education in Catholic Schools,” 305.
establishment of Catholic schools, culminating in the Common Schools Act 1862 and the Education Act of 1872 which called for free, compulsory and secular education, decimating Catholic school enrolments for a time. However, the commitment to a separate Catholic education system remained.

Funding for buildings and finding staff to make the long and arduous journey to the colony continued to be a struggle throughout the founding years of Catholic education with Catholic faith communities invariably making a substantial contribution to support a separate education system. Overcrowded classrooms often populated by the poorest in the community, stressed and under-resourced nuns and brothers assisted by dedicated lay teachers who were insufficiently remunerated characterised the Catholic education system in the early 1900’s. During this period approved catechisms were still the sole form of instructional text, while the vision for Catholic schooling was maintained as providing a “religious atmosphere in which secular subjects are seen and interpreted.”

Over the past sixty years, the Catholic school system has seen the rapid withdrawal of the ordained sisters and brothers who formed until the late 1950’s the majority of the teaching staff in Catholic schools. The visible and pervasive presence of staff dedicated to a life of faith infused the curriculum with religious significance without necessarily making particular reference to it. While it cannot be said that this example was uniformly positive for all students, overall the religious identity of the school was reflected in its programs across the curriculum simply through the self-understanding and faith witness of the teachers in the system. A close connection between school and parish was encouraged by the parish priest who was often actively teaching in the schools, while parents of students also had a close connection to parish as a matter of cultural imperative if not through active faith commitment. As the withdrawal of the religious staff from the schools increased in the 1960’s, an increased need for formal training for lay religious educators arose, with lay teachers attending Saturday classes conducted by local priests. An influx from the newly arrived migrant population during the 50’s and 60’s who were in large part Catholic meant that Catholic schools were experiencing enormous changes with few resources. The migrant

10 Rummery, “The Development of the Concept of Religious Education in Catholic Schools,” 309.
population would change the face of the predominantly Irish Catholicism of Australia to a multi-cultural experience of European Catholic and Orthodox influences. Catholic education continues to adapt today incorporating Asian and sub continental Catholic influences as well as an increasing enrolment of non-Catholic students.\textsuperscript{12} Throughout this time teaching styles remained largely instructional with rote learning and use of the catechism, however an Australian catechism was introduced in 1963 which also had a teacher’s handbook that recommended the use of the bible.\textsuperscript{13} This heralded a new approach to religious ‘instruction’ which was soon to undergo more rapid changes following on from Vatican II.

Despite the economic struggles of financing a rapidly expanding Catholic education system without receiving government assistance and with the added pressure of less ‘free’ labour provided by the religious, the ideal of educating students in a system that would serve to illuminate the whole of school life with a sense of a Catholic ethos remained a driving goal, demanding stoicism and loyalty from the whole Catholic community. Increased Catholic political action in the 1970’s saw “significant changes to government policy in respect to non-government schools”\textsuperscript{14} which secured significant government funding for the Catholic school system. The assurance of ongoing government support allowed for future planning and development of the Catholic education system, gave scope for improved and expanded teacher training facilities and for the first time, parity of wages with government teachers for lay teachers in Catholic schools. During the 1970s relationships between teachers and students radically altered as the cultural changes of postmodernism (see below) impacted the way traditional institutions such as schools were understood and the way pedagogy was enacted. Vatican II’s challenging vision of a Church open to the world also began to gain traction at this time and the two factors combined to encourage more open discussion in religious education and a focus on engaging students in their life events and concerns. In 1979 the Catholic Education Office Melbourne published the Guidelines for Religious

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\textsuperscript{13} Rummery, “The Development of the Concept of Religious Education in Catholic Schools,” 315.

\textsuperscript{14} Rogan, A Short History of Catholic Education Archdiocese, 84.
\end{center}
Education. The Guidelines included material to deepen teacher knowledge of the tradition and detailed lesson plans that proposed a kerygmatic approach to religious education. The Guidelines were expanded and used extensively for the next fifteen years, providing a variety of suggestions for discussion points and student activities for teachers as they tried to engage an ever more widely diverse group of students. At this time, Catholic schools were keenly aware and proud of the distinctive nature of the pastoral care they offered to students as part of a Catholic community, however, the ideal of a religious perspective being engaged in secular subject areas throughout the curriculum was no longer an area of focus or concern for teachers. During the 1980’s, a decade when education became fixated on cognitive and assessable outcomes, there was increasing debate about whether a kerygmatic, catechetical or cognitive approach was the most effective methodology for religious education.\textsuperscript{15}

In Melbourne, Catholic education reached a high point in the late 1990’s when its rate of new enrolments outstripped those of the state schools as indicated by the National Catholic Education Commission Report on School Enrolments in Catholic Schools: “The annual percentage change in the school-age population of Australia from 1990 to 2000 shows that the rate of growth for Catholic schools was faster than for Government schools but slower than for Anglican and other non-government schools.”\textsuperscript{16} However, after 1996 this rate of enrolment growth has slightly slowed. While Catholic schools have never attracted more than 65% of the possible number of Catholic students, it is now the case that “the majority of students from Catholic families attend government schools. The proportion of students from Catholic families in Catholic schools is 43.7% for primary and 45% for secondary although the proportions vary across states.”\textsuperscript{17} At the same time the proportion of non-Catholic students has risen significantly in recent years with 18% of students nominating as non-Catholic in 1996.\textsuperscript{18} Catholic school population mirrors the broader impact of recent societal changes, including greater diversity in faith traditions and those of no faith tradition.

\textsuperscript{16} National Commission, “Report on Enrolment Trends.”
\textsuperscript{17} National Commission, “Report on Enrolment Trends.”
\textsuperscript{18} National Commission, “Report on Enrolment Trends.”
represented in Australian society. While Christianity is still the predominant religious affiliation reported in the Australian Census statistics of 2016 with 52%, the proportion of people reporting to be affiliated with a religion other than Christianity has increased rapidly in the last 25 years to 8.2% in 2016. Young adults (aged 18-34 years) were more likely to report not having a religion (39%) and were more likely to be affiliated with religions other than Christianity (12%) than other adults. Victoria had the highest proportion reporting an affiliation with a religion other than Christianity. While this indicates about half of the population in Australia is affiliated with Christianity, a closer look at what religious affiliation means for people’s orientation to life is explored in the Wellbeing and Security Survey. In their analysis of the survey, the authors Kaldor, Hughes and Black reveal that “although 46% of adults in Australia believe that ‘there is something beyond this life that makes sense of it all’, 18% of the population disagree with this proposition and a further 36% are uncertain.” This would indicate that affiliation with a tradition does not necessarily indicate it is actively used to make meaning of life.

These statistics are indicative of the range of attitudes experienced in the Catholic school today in the parent, student and teacher/leader population. The Religious Education Guidelines had not been without critics and responding to a new conservatism in the Church and a perceived lack of teacher expertise in religious education, in 1998 the then Archbishop Pell initiated the development of a series of textbooks for each level of schooling which spoke directly to students. The To Know, Worship and Love (KWL) texts

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21 Kaldor, Hughes and Black, Spirit Matters, 15.


were mandated to be used in all Catholic primary and secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne with each student requested to purchase their own copy so as to be available for parents and so broaden its impact. The Catholic Education Office of Melbourne created the Religious Education Curriculum Framework to support teachers using the texts to address the rapidly diversifying nature of the classroom as described above. With greater insights into the hermeneutic condition of religious education\(^\text{24}\) afforded by engagement with ECSIP, these frameworks were renewed in 2017 and now encourage teachers to use a hermeneutic-communicative\(^\text{25}\) approach to religious education adapted for the Melbourne context as "Pedagogy of Encounter."\(^\text{26}\) Schools are currently being supported with professional learning through Catholic Education Melbourne to explore their pedagogy and develop their practice in religious education in light of the Pedagogy of Encounter while the texts remain mandated.

The statistics and short history above combine to give a sense of the Catholic school system in Australia as one which has been shaped by its struggle to exist. It has gained a strong sense of commitment from its struggles and developed insights into religious education as it embraces the growing diversity of its communities. Never a major player in the public domain and in the past looked upon as having an illegitimate claim on government education resources, the Catholic education system has consistently worked to gain public recognition as a provider of excellent educational service and success for its students while remaining faithful to its Catholic ethos and vision for a religious education that permeates the whole of the curriculum.


Gradually, as the funding of Catholic schools has become almost totally reliant on the Government, an uneasy partnership is evolving, with accountability to Government curriculum requirements and government registration for teachers shaping the structures and processes, the curriculum content, the standards and even the language in Catholic schools. In the midst of this relatively new ‘harmonious’ partnership and accountability and in the throes of changing cultural dynamics, a search to renew Catholic identity and support teachers in their role as Catholic educators takes place. As it gains greater confidence in its identity, the Catholic education system may begin to contribute from its experience and Christian world-view to the broader conversation around teaching and learning, student wellbeing and identity formation. This thesis aims to deepen the self-understanding of religious educators and further illuminate the role of religious education in Catholic schools today, engendering confidence in teachers’ ability to contribute a unique perspective to these conversations.

The Catholic School in Australia: A Philosophical and Cultural Perspective

Postmodernism

One of the most pervasive influences affecting education and religion in the West has been postmodernism. Embracing uncertainty and questioning everything, postmodernism is noted for detraditionalising, pluralising and individualising tendencies. Postmodernism’s most renowned figure, Jean-François Lyotard, offers an insight into the experience of the postmodern which is pertinent to this thesis: “Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives.” The narratives of modernity sought to


give certainty, meaning and clear direction to different strata of the population through ideological “pillars”\textsuperscript{30} which supported particular visions for and methods towards progress. They became self enclosed systems with their own truth claims or metanarratives which, in the event of technological advances and global economic forces, came under pressure and destabilised, fragmenting the frameworks people use to make meaning. The variety of perspectives on reality available to people to make sense of their world today creates dilemmas of choice and legitimacy as they seek to construct meaning and identity apart from the once traditionally authenticated sources. The reaction of incredulity mentioned by Lyotard can be interpreted as disbelief that the metanarratives once so trusted are now found to be flawed or lacking authority. Incredulity can also be seen as an attitude of suspicion which works as a protective mechanism for the individual when sorting through the myriad available options to select from in constructing his or her identity. This is often demonstrated as a kind of hesitation to commit lest the path chosen proves to be unsound, or is exhibited in a general attitude of cynicism.

In the West, incredulity is becoming the hallmark of attitudes towards major public institutions,\textsuperscript{31} not least churches and more recently political parties.\textsuperscript{32} Not only are the truth-claims of these institutions being deconstructed, but also their absolutizing tendencies, enabling the emergence of new structures and new ways to make meaning.\textsuperscript{33} Lieven Boeve explores the question of dealing with faith in God in the postmodern context. He holds that the postmodern era has fostered sensitivity to the plurality of narratives that exist, not only in the world but within each individual. Far from interpreting incredulity as scepticism which leads to destruction and disintegration, Boeve’s writing implies the postmodern condition of incredulity can be seen more in terms of wonder at the discovery of an otherness within each individual that exceeds the boundaries of a single narrative. For Boeve, the deconstruction of metanarratives offers an ‘interruption’ of meaning and fosters

\textsuperscript{30} Boeve, \textit{Interrupting Tradition}, 42.

\textsuperscript{31} Lieven Boeve indicates that the metanarrative currently escaping such incredulity would seem to be the narrative of the market. Boeve, \textit{Interrupting Tradition}, 74.

\textsuperscript{32} Political parties in Australia are not immune to the effects of de-traditionalisation as evidenced by the recent flourishing of independents outperforming the traditional party candidates.

a “postmodern critical consciousness, which consists in our reference to irreducible otherness and our ultimate witness to that otherness.”\(^{34}\) He holds that the postmodern context serves to highlight the particularity of the Christian understanding of reality. That particularity – the Christian narrative – is an open narrative whose liberating power lies in “witnessing to the other who challenges and calls us to openness.”\(^{35}\) The Christian narrative in this sense is one that opens closed ways of seeing and transforms them to openness to God. It is indeed a narrative that can speak to this disruptive age. In the words of Boeve: “Every age is in search of a new and appropriate form with which it can continue to recount the open narrative of Jesus Christ to future generations.”\(^{36}\) For teachers the challenge is to find new language and images that, alongside those from the tradition, will bring alive the significance of the Christian narrative with and for this generation. It is the ambition of this thesis to contribute to this search through highlighting spirituality as speaking to the experiences of today. This is explored further in the next section.

**Existentialism and Spirituality**

The personal and the existential are also a feature of the postmodern experience. Influenced by the Romantic Movement which was itself a reaction against the Enlightenment rationalist tendencies, the existential movement embraces the notion of an embodied, subjective experiencing as a way of understanding the self. Existentialism holds that reality resides not in the object of cognitive or rational thinking but that it is ‘immediately experienced’ in the state of being.\(^{37}\) The criticism of objectivity as the only or best way of understanding reality is continued in the work of Martin Buber\(^{38}\) and thinkers

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\(^{34}\) Boeve, *Interrupting Tradition*, 91.

\(^{35}\) Boeve, *Interrupting Tradition*, 120.

\(^{36}\) Boeve, *Interrupting Tradition*, 142.


such as Emmanuel Levinas.\textsuperscript{39} In the writings of Levinas, building on Buber’s work, relationality and dialogue become the way of experiencing the inexhaustible nature of reality as encountered face-to-face in the Other. For Levinas, “To have meaning is to be situated relative to an absolute, that is, to come from that alterity that is not absorbed in its being perceived.”\textsuperscript{40} It is this understanding of meaning making that ideally shapes religious education today as a dialogical process. The infinite nature of the Other encountered in relationship is explored within the framework of spirituality developed in this thesis and is an area identified in the research as requiring more focussed awareness in the teaching of religious education. Existential experiences are liminal experiences; times when life encounters difference in a way that opens questions of meaning and eternal value. These are spaces where the infinite meets the finite and grace reveals the “elusive God who always beckons further.”\textsuperscript{41}

The existential uncertainty in the wake of the loss of the truth claims inherent in metanarratives (detraditionalisation) and the subsequent need for individuals to construct their own identity (individualisation) in the face of myriad options (pluralisation) brings into focus the role of spirituality. The spiritual quest is often typified as the radical questioning and constant search for answers to the questions of life and ultimacy that may or may not involve a religious connection. The postmodern condition with its suspicion of tradition would seem to encourage an untethering of this quest from religious traditions. Spirituality is experiencing a surge of interest attracting research in the fields of education, psychology and wellbeing\textsuperscript{42} and this is explored in Chapter 2. However, the focus in this introductory chapter is to identify important trends in the cultural context that frame how teachers may understand themselves, what they believe about their students and their role as religious


\textsuperscript{40} Levinas, \textit{Totality and Infinity}, 97.

\textsuperscript{41} Boeve, \textit{Interrupting Tradition}, 106.

\textsuperscript{42} Kaldor, Hughes and Black have analysed how Australians make sense of life, comparing ways people use religious, alternative spiritual and secular frameworks to do this. They find 33% use spiritual but not religious frameworks, while a further 27% are uncertain about ‘the beyond’. Kaldor, Hughes and Black, \textit{Spirit Matters}, 13.
educators. Spirituality’s rise in popularity must exert a subtle influence on all of these beliefs. Houtman and Aupers speak of “The Spiritual Turn”\(^43\) in relation to the spread of post-Christian spirituality as connected to posttraditionalism.\(^44\) For Houtman and Aupers the spiritual turn denotes a turning inward of individuals to discover or rediscover within the deeper layers of the self a sacred dimension. This ‘sacralisation’ of the self appeals on many levels to the research fields of psychology and wellbeing, and also characterizes a romantic tendency in some authors in the area of children’s spirituality.\(^45\) It will also be found to influence teachers in this research as to how they understand their students’ spirituality. It is to clarify understandings around spirituality with teachers that this research has developed a framework of spirituality; a framework that employs existential questions and opens up existential moments as paradigms where encounter and revelation can be experienced. The framework seeks to take hold of the energy created by the spiritual turn today, providing the springboard into discovery or deepening appreciation of Christian traditions with teachers and students.

**The Catholic School in Australia: Vatican II and Religious Education**

A strength of the Catholic system of education over its short lifetime in Australia (less than two hundred years) has been the sense of its mission which articulates an understanding of the educational purpose of the school as spiritual as well as cognitive and physical. This ideal was established from its inception by Archbishop Vaughan and has remained a driving force. In 1965, Vatican II released *Gravissimum Educationis* which clearly articulates in aspirational and inspired language the broader mission of the Catholic school as an ecclesial institution.


\(^{44}\) The authors maintain a reticence to say posttraditionalism, which is the result of the detraditionalising pressure of postmodernism, is actually causally linked to the rise in post-Christian spirituality. Houtman and Aupers, “The Spiritual Turn,” 310.

It links the Catholic educational project with a clear vision for the future transformation of culture which lies at the heart of the mission of the Church.

No less than other schools does the Catholic school pursue cultural goals and the human formation of youth. But its proper function is to create for the school community a special atmosphere animated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity, to help youth grow according to the new creatures they were made through baptism as they develop their own personalities, and finally to order the whole of human culture to the news of salvation so that the knowledge the students gradually acquire of the world, life and man is illumined by faith.46

This language expresses a holistic approach through an appeal to a vision of the human that encompasses an understanding of the interconnectedness of all humanity and the common good. This was later in 1997 reaffirmed in The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium which expresses the Christian anthropology underpinning the Catholic school pedagogy: “The person of each individual human being, in his or her material and spiritual needs, is at the heart of Christ’s teaching: this is why the promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic school.”47 This document was influential in Catholic schools in Melbourne, being referred to in vision and mission statements and also guiding Catholic Education Melbourne in its formulation of teaching and learning frameworks for the Archdiocese. The document goes on to say that “In the Catholic school prime responsibility for creating this unique Christian school climate rests with the teachers, as individuals and as a community. Teaching has an extraordinary moral depth and is one of man’s most excellent and creative activities, for the teacher does not write on inanimate material, but on the very spirits of human beings.”48 Gravissimum Educationis and The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium shifted the emphasis on the identity of the Catholic school from being an institution delivering education to being an educational community.


48 The Catholic School on the Threshold (1997), n. 19.
With this change comes a challenge to focus on the relationships built within that community and the theological underpinnings of the community building process. Teachers are highly attuned to their role as community builders connected to the Church community as will be discovered in the data in Chapter 5. This thesis touches on the question of how the teacher is supported in his/ her work by the parish faith community and the wider Church.

The next and final section which establishes the context of this thesis explores the most recent impact on the cultural context of Catholic schools in Melbourne, the Enhancing Catholic school Identity Project. I connect the origins of my research question to the data coming from this project.

The Catholic School in Australia: Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project

The Catholic education system, through the cultural and philosophical forces and rapid societal changes explored above, has in the 90’s and early 2,000’s identified the need to clearly articulate its identity. Anecdotally, the attraction of Catholic education for parents of other faith and no faith traditions was its pastoral care and the ‘feel’ of the school which was welcoming and personal. Anecdotally, parents felt it was important that their children had the opportunity to engage in discussion and reflection on values in their lives and that the Catholic school offered this opportunity in their curriculum. This reflected well on the Catholic system, as was evidenced by enrolment rates (see above) that for a time outstripped those of Government schools. 49 However, the ethos was difficult to capture in its essence and harder yet to measure; or to formulate intentional processes that might

49 However, in 2005 a National Framework for Values Education was introduced in government schools which responded to the growing awareness and concern about how students acquire values and how they discern and make sense of values promoted in the public domain. This initiative focussed on developing a values ethos in government schools which articulated values in all areas of the curriculum and focused on student wellbeing. This initiative, combined with an improved leadership and accountability culture may account for government schools’ improved enrolment and retention rates in recent times. Australian Government, Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools, accessed 13 November 2018, http://www.curriculum.edu.au/values/val_national_framework_for_values_education,8757.html.
improve it. One of the most important influences on the language and self-understanding of Catholic schools in recent years has been the Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project (ECSIP). Through the new concepts introduced in the project and the commitment of Catholic Education Melbourne to resource schools to engage with the research, this project has been able to create a new language and new thinking around how to notice and name schools’ Catholic identity. Catholic schools in Melbourne are regularly using the research and its processes to grapple with what it means to be a Catholic school today and how best to engage students with Catholic traditions as they construct their identity.

My research inquires into the self-understanding of teachers in Catholic primary schools as a critical influence on their pedagogy. It asks the question: How do teachers’ beliefs about students’ spirituality impact their pedagogy? This question emerges from the findings of the Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project (ECSIP); a project initiated by the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria in partnership with Katolieke Universiteit Leuven in 2006 to develop and refine empirical survey instruments that analysed, described and suggested ways for enhancing Catholic schools’ identity. ECSIP is now a methodology applied extensively in Catholic schools in Australia and Flanders as well as being trialled in many other parts of the world. It is having a profound effect on the language used to describe Catholic identity and religious education in Catholic schools and is a critical factor in describing the context of this research. The data from the Post-Critical Belief (PCB) Scale, one of the three scales used in ECSIP, reveals information about ways people deal with belief content, or religious concepts such as a Transcendent being. Based on a concept by David Wulff, the scale describes four ways: Literal belief, Post-critical belief, Relativism and External Critique. The first two indicate belief, while the latter two reject belief (External Critique), or hesitate to commit to a particular belief (Relativism).

The Victorian primary school data reveals an overall support of a non-literal believing style with over 85% of both the adults and children in primary schools favouring Post-critical belief. Yet within the data there is a firm minority tendency towards literal belief revealed especially in the student data, with 85.7% of students in primary schools supporting a literal


believing style, while only 36.5% of adults do so. That the students in primary schools reveal such a strong inclination towards literal belief has been argued as being due to their concrete stage of cognitive development, if one holds with Piaget’s cognitive theory. Or it may be argued that students in years 5-6 are at the mythic-literal stage of belief, if one holds with Fowler’s theory of faith development and so are drawn to those answers in the surveys that resonate with this stage. However, neither of these stage theories accounts for the equally high student results of 87.2% favouring a post-critical belief style. This may be an indication that the students are merely agreeing to those survey questions on the PCB scale that describe belief and that the students are not making finer distinctions in their answers. However, these explanations of the tension raised by the data are inconclusive, especially in the face of the decline in both believing styles, Literal and Post-critical, described in the data for secondary school students. This data points to concerns over how belief is talked about, modelled, experienced and explored in religious education in primary schools. It raises the questions: How do teachers talk about belief in God or the Transcendent? What do they believe about the sacred or the spiritual? How do teachers understand their role in religious education? How do teachers’ self-understandings and beliefs impact students’ self-understanding and other outcomes in religious education? What do teachers believe about their students’ abilities, dispositions and spirituality that might impact the way they approach religious education? These questions are all explored in this thesis.

In order to make sense of the data emerging from the research around teacher beliefs about spirituality, I developed a comprehensive, coherent and relatable theological framework of Christian spirituality which is briefly outlined below.

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The Thesis Question and a Framework of Spirituality

Teaching is a complex task that requires self-awareness and reflexivity. A critical aspect of professional development is to become aware of the tacit beliefs and assumptions that teachers operate from. In essence this research project not only sets out to identify what teachers’ tacit beliefs about student’s spirituality are, but also to offer participants an opportunity to reflect more deeply about their beliefs about students and to clarify their self-understanding as religious educators through the use of a framework of spirituality developed as integral to this research project. As indicated above, the PCB data demonstrated that overwhelmingly the adults and students in a Catholic primary school community profess religious belief, with the PCB data indicating 81% of adults and 86.8% of students rejecting external critique, or atheism. To explore and clarify how belief and its close relation spirituality is communicated and experienced in a primary school community my research has interviewed eleven teachers from three Catholic primary schools individually and in focus groups about their beliefs and pedagogy in religious education. In order to clarify my own understandings of spirituality and to make sense of the data I developed a theoretical framework of spirituality which was used to analyse the interview data. After their individual interviews, the framework was shared with the teachers, who in focus group interviews identified it as a practical theological tool for teacher development and a religious education curriculum audit tool.

The framework of spirituality developed in this research builds on the understanding that while spirituality is an ineffable, intangible quality that cannot be measured, it must be understood as critical to religious education, opening a conversation about transformation that animates a new self-understanding in encountering the Other. Religious education as a spiritual endeavour acknowledges the tension between knowing and unknowing that plays out in the Apophatic and Kataphatic theological traditions; a tension which has been incorporated into the framework. The framework of spirituality addresses teachers of religious education in Catholic schools and assumes a level of openness to a Christian religious world-view; an assumption justified by the above mentioned PCB data. Through the use of the framework of spirituality as an analysis tool some recommendations for teacher professional learning emerged that may contribute to a more vibrant, dialogical and considered approach to religious education; an approach that resonates with the vision for
religious education proposed by Archbishop Vaughan at the inception of Catholic education in Australia in 1879 as integral to all aspects of pedagogy in a Catholic school.

The Structure and Summary of the Thesis

This thesis draws heavily on the theologians and researchers connected with Leuven University; authors such as Pollefeyt, Boeve, Bouwens, Dillen, Hutsebaut and Wulff feature throughout this research. It also mines the wisdom of Vatican II documents and the theology of Rahner, Chauvet and Chrétien. It engages with the philosophy of Levinas and Ricœur, touching on Buber and Bakhtin. It also draws on the practical wisdom of educators such as Timperley, Brookfield, Vygotsky, Cameron and Nye. I am indebted to their thinking and those of numerous others on which my research builds.

The following outlines the structure of this thesis, summarising each of the 6 chapters that make up this work.

Chapter 1 describes a broad historical, sociological, philosophical and pedagogical context for Catholic schools in Australia and in particular, Melbourne as one which is influenced by postmodern attitudes and post-Christian worldviews, with a rise of interest in spirituality while traditional religious affiliations are on the wane. It shows the history of the Catholic school system as one marked by struggle for survival, acceptance and recognition, but committed to its mission and now poised to contribute a Catholic perspective to public debate on education. This chapter illuminates the research question driving the thesis, one around teacher beliefs about students’ spirituality as an important question arising from the ECSIP data. It describes the vital connection between spirituality, existential encounter and questing and religion as a way of recontextualising Christian traditions with students in religious education. It also outlines the structure of the thesis.

In Chapter 2 the literature is reviewed pertaining to three areas critical to the research inquiry which are summarised below.

*Teacher Development theory:* The literature reveals an importance on exploring the impact of teachers’ beliefs about their students and about teaching and learning on student outcomes. There is general agreement in the literature that while teacher beliefs and expectations are tacit and often difficult to bring to speech, they are highly influential in
shaping the professional decisions teachers make in the classroom every day. Research indicates that the use of heuristics which cue prior knowledge and create dissonance, the creation of conditions for self-reflection and collegial dialogue and offering extended opportunities for learning, are all successful strategies in teacher professional development and surface tacit beliefs that may otherwise hinder change in practice. My research, tapping into teacher professional learning theory, devises a heuristic for use with teachers in their reflection on professional practice in religious education.

*Spirituality and religion*: These terms are closely linked historically and conceptually. The literature suggests a growing tendency to separate spirituality from religion, as more empirical research from health sciences explores a ‘secular’ sense of spirituality and its links with wellbeing and behavioural outcomes, such as resilience, happiness and positive values formation. The literature indicates a possible problem in reconciling those methodologies that assume the human person is universally measurable with theistic approaches that assume each person is made in the image of God – able to participate in divine life. Teachers are influenced by the popular tendency reflected in the literature to see spirituality as distinct from religion. A survey of Christian theology of revelation and the dialogical principle of Vatican II offer a perspective on religion as spirituality with implications for how teachers understand the human person and their intentions for students in religious education in Catholic schools.

*Spirituality and education*: Spirituality, in much of the literature, is presented as integral to educational theories that address the self-understanding and identity construction of the student. The literature suggests that spirituality can be understood in either developmental or non-developmental terms. In this chapter I explore developmental theory through research into stage theory and process theory, including a hermeneutic-communicative approach; while non-developmental theory takes in the ‘spiritual child movement’ identified in the literature as a waning, though still potent influence. The extent to which teachers understand the role of spiritual development in religious education assists them to address the complexity of the content and the learning process in religious education and to embrace the diversity students bring to the learning.

**Chapter 3** describes the framework of spirituality that is the most significant contribution of this research. It is a two dimensional framework that builds on the definition of spirituality
which emerged from the literature review, a definition that describes spirituality as ‘living in the between’:

Spirituality is the human experience of living in the relationship between the divine and the human: between ultimate concerns and the here and now, between call and response, between belonging and distantiation, between unknowing and knowing. It is in these liminal spaces where human limits are reached and self-transcendence is invoked that the spirit flourishes and humanity comes to fullness. The framework of spirituality is a practical theological tool which explores spirituality as the intersection between two dimensions: the human and the divine. From the combination of the two dimensions four paradigms of human experiencing and questing emerge: Vulnerability, Responsibility, Fulfilment and Commitment. Each of these paradigmatic experiences is opened in dialogue with Christian theology. By tapping into existential experiences of encountering otherness and the process of human questing, the framework engages teachers in recontextualising the insights and wisdom of the Christian spiritual heritage for their context.

Chapter 4 presents the methodology of the research. It is a dual methodology employing both empirical and systematic approaches in an empirical research cycle. The methodology is explained with reference to theory, theology and ethical concerns. Methods of participant selection, data collection and interview questions are outlined and researcher reflexivity and technique in conducting interviews are discussed. This chapter also gives an overview of the qualitative approach taken in analysing the data. The analysis uses two methodologies, firstly using a grounded approach identifying emerging themes which are coded through the use of NVivo 11, a research tool for text based data. A second method codes the data in NVivo through the lens of the four paradigms of the framework of spirituality and comparisons between the two analyses are made. The methodology complies with Human Research Ethics Guidelines of the University of Divinity and received approval from the University’s Human Research Ethics Committee and complies with Catholic Education Melbourne’s ethics guidelines.

Chapter 5 presents the research data and its analysis. In summary the data indicated that overall the eleven teachers interviewed were very positive about the role of spirituality and its importance in education. All participants understood themselves as spiritual beings and
were able to identify many spiritual experiences in their lives and all but one identified their students as inherently spiritual beings. The terms spiritual, religious, beliefs and faith were used at times interchangeably. All participants were able to talk confidently about student spirituality and rated themselves as either confident or very confident to talk with students about spirituality, many affirming that this happens almost daily at school. Teachers were divided in their ideas on spirituality as age related, with many teachers finding this difficult to answer. There was general agreement that life experience was a stronger factor in developing spirituality rather than age alone; however participants observed that broader life experience often came with age.

Coding against the four paradigms of the framework revealed an emphasis on Kataphatic theology in teacher understandings of their own spirituality, their students’ spirituality and in what they attended to in their religious education lessons. The Fulfilment paradigm showed the greatest congruence between teacher beliefs about their own and students’ spirituality and their pedagogic practice. A significant finding showed that none of the participants identified student spirituality in terms of Apophatic theology and the two quadrants at the Apophatic end of the axis were under-represented in terms of descriptions of lessons, teacher and student spirituality. An overwhelming majority (nine) of the religious education lessons described by teachers held elements of alignment with the Commitment paradigm highlighting the importance participants placed on the aspect of their role that informs about and creates a sense of belonging to the Catholic tradition. A few important remarks from teachers indicated a discomfort with this role and raised a question about full and free participation of students and the need for dialogue around ‘coming to faith’ in religious education.

Finally, in the school based focus group conversations the participants agreed the framework gave them an opportunity to reflect on spirituality as integral to religious education, opening an understanding of their role as religious educators to include the notion of grappling with existential questions in light of the offerings of the tradition. Teachers suggested that the framework could also be used to audit their classroom practice and their implementation of the religious education curriculum.

In Chapter 6 conclusions are drawn from the data in relation to the three areas of the literature and recommendations are made. This chapter explores the theological,
pedagogical and strategic challenges raised by the evidence and makes tentative recommendations addressing each area. In brief the challenges raised are: theological – a conflation of beliefs about student wellbeing and student spirituality resulting in an imbalance between Kataphatic and Apophatic theology in religious education; pedagogical – tension between developmental and non-developmental beliefs about student spirituality and lack of clarity about the role of the emotions in spirituality and engagement in religious education; strategic – the perception of teaching as predominantly responsive to external accountabilities and the impact of this on teacher professional learning approaches in religious education. The chapter discusses the limitations and challenges of the research and identifies future areas of inquiry and ways of operationalising the framework.

**Conclusion**

In Chapter 1 the research question was introduced and set within the historical and current contexts of Australian Catholic education, noting especially the tensions around developing a consistent understanding of religious education pedagogy. It was revealed that throughout its short history Catholic education has sought to establish itself as a system offering the wisdom and spirituality of the Christian traditions across all curriculum areas and in the fabric of the student learning experience. Philosophical and cultural trends of postmodernism, individualism and the rejection of Christianity in the West were explored in relation to the assumptions underlying the research question. The critical role of the Enhancing Catholic Identity Project in Catholic education in Australia today and its influence in shaping the research question were noted. Finally, the structure and outline of the thesis was presented.

The next chapter begins an in depth review of the literature addressing the three areas critical to the research: teacher development theory, spirituality and religion, spirituality and education.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In Chapter 1 the broad context of Catholic education was described through a historical lens and then by highlighting the impact of cultural, philosophical and sociological shifts on Catholic education. It has identified Catholic education in Australia as a system that has fought to maintain its place and identity over its short history and is now engaged in clarifying its purpose and realising its unique contribution to Australian education and society. In Chapter 2, the context of the research question is illuminated further through reviewing some of the most significant research and writing on spirituality and religious education in recent years. There are three assumptions underlying the research question: What are teachers’ expectations of and beliefs about their students as spiritual beings and how does this influence their pedagogy in religious education? These three assumptions are: that teacher beliefs about students impact student outcomes in religious education; that spirituality and religion are deeply connected historically and conceptually; and that spirituality is at the core of religious education, connecting religious understanding and knowing with self-understanding and being. It is the belief of this researcher that critically reflecting on beliefs and assumptions about spirituality and children’s spirituality in particular supports teachers of religious education to accommodate the cultural shift to the personal and existential as noted in Chapter 1. The literature review will identify the importance of an approach to religious education that addresses the student as subject in the process of learning. This chapter surveys literature around the research question and the three assumptions underlying the question shape the examination of the literature, which is presented in three parts:

- Teacher development theory: in particular research into impacting teacher beliefs and identity
- Spirituality and religion: the concept of spirituality in relation to religion, how it is currently perceived and its implications for religious education
• Spirituality and education: the child as spiritual subject and spiritual development theory

A summary of the literature findings in each area is presented below:

**Teacher Development Theory:** A focus of research in teacher professional learning theory over the last decade has seen a shift from what teachers need to know to how teachers learn. The literature reveals an importance on exploring the impact of teachers’ beliefs about their students and about teaching and learning on student outcomes. There is general agreement in the literature that while teacher beliefs and expectations are tacit and often difficult to bring to speech, they are highly influential in shaping the professional decisions teachers make in the classroom every day. Research indicates that the use of heuristics which cue prior knowledge and create dissonance, the creation of conditions for self-reflection and collegial dialogue and offering extended opportunities for learning, are successful strategies in teacher professional development, surfacing tacit beliefs that may otherwise hinder change in practice. There is little in the literature that specifically addresses either teacher development theory in the context of religious education or the impact of teacher beliefs about student’s spirituality on their pedagogy, however, where it is identified it builds on the strategies above. My research, tapping into teacher professional learning theory, devises a heuristic for use with teachers in their reflection on professional practice in religious education (Chapter 3 and Chapter 4).

**Spirituality and Religion** are closely linked historically and conceptually. The literature suggests a growing tendency to separate spirituality from religion, as more empirical research from health sciences explores a ‘secular’ sense of spirituality and its links with wellbeing and behavioural outcomes, such as resilience, happiness and positive values formation. The literature indicates a possible problem in reconciling those methodologies that assume the human person is universally measurable with theistic approaches that assume each person is made in the image of God – able to participate in divine life. Teachers are influenced by the popular tendency reflected in the literature to see spirituality as distinct from religion. A survey of Christian theology of revelation and the dialogical principle of Vatican II offer a perspective on religion as spirituality. This has implications for how teachers understand the human person and their intentions for students in religious education (Chapter 5).
**Spirituality and Education:** Spirituality, in much of the literature, is presented as integral to educational theories that address the self-understanding and identity construction of the student. The literature suggests that spirituality can be understood in either developmental or non-developmental terms. The literature explores developmental theory through research into stage theory and process theory, including a hermeneutic-communicative approach; while non-developmental theory takes in the ‘spiritual child movement’ identified in the literature as a waning, though still potent influence. The extent to which teachers understand the role of spiritual development in religious education assists them to address the complexity of the content and the learning process in religious education and to embrace the diversity students bring to the learning (Chapter 6).

**Teacher Development Theory**

The teachers have to develop their spirituality, I suppose what I’m trying to say, before they can become good at imparting that or helping their students too - and just luckily for me I’ve been at the right schools where that has been of high importance to principals. And then finding the right consultants for us to work with because, unless ... I would have stuck myself in the seventies and eighties I suppose...and not gone any further, I’m guessing, unless I had had this chance to unpack my spirituality as an adult and as a teacher. (Teacher interview Chapter 5)

In this quote, the teacher has identified some of the elements of sound professional learning theory reflected in the literature: awareness of self as a learner, the impact of reflecting on one’s spiritual and personal identity as a teacher, the use of an external voice or theory to promote awareness, and the role of school leadership in supporting ongoing professional development. These elements are also reflected in the discussion of the literature below.

**Teacher Identity and Reflective Practice**

The “end of the master narratives”\(^1\) of the modern era has led to a turn to the subjective in many fields of human endeavour, reflected in an enchantment with the personal, the

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\(^1\) This phrase was introduced by Jean Francois Lyotard as a way of describing the so-called post-modern era and is referred to in Didier Pollefeyt, “Belgium: the Hermeneutic-Communicative Model a Feasible Option?,” in *How Teachers in Europe Teach Religion: An International Empirical Study in 16 Countries*, ed. Hans-Georg Ziebertz and Ulrich Riegel (Berlin: LIT-Verlag, 2009), 32.
particular and the local, resulting in increased plurality and complexity.\(^2\) Research in the field of education has not escaped this trend with a focus on identity formation both for students and teachers. Investigating teacher education trends, Rodgers and Scott\(^3\) note over the past decade research has revealed the complexity of the role of the teacher and the importance of understanding teacher identity formation; of taking into account their beliefs, personal narratives and unspoken attitudes and world-views. They identify a shift in the focus of research from what teachers need to know to how they learn to teach. Rodgers and Scott trace the rise of teacher education programs that promote teacher self-awareness. These programs had in common that they “... valued close observation of and inquiry into children’s learning as well as the world around them and recognized the role that the teacher’s perceptions and preconceptions played in learning to see children and their learning.”\(^4\) Reviewing the literature,\(^5\) Rodgers and Scott identified that personal and social orientations, that is their identity, colour what teachers pay attention to in the classroom and in their practice as well as influencing their ability to critically reflect on their learning needs and the needs of their students. Identity formation is at the heart of both student and teacher learning and Rogers and Scott have summed up four understandings that underpin current conceptions of identity:

1. that identity is dependent upon and formed within multiple contexts which bring social, cultural, political, and historical forces to bear upon that formation;
2. that identity is formed in relationship with others and involves emotions;
3. that identity


\(^4\) Rodgers and Scott, “The Development of the Personal Self and Professional Identity in Learning to Teach,” 744.

is shifting, unstable, and multiple; and, (4) that identity involves the construction and reconstruction of meaning through stories over time.\(^6\)

Teachers may shift in how they understand themselves and their role through addressing the four understandings – reflecting on the contexts, relationships, emotions and stories that shape them. Rogers and Scott identify that while context and relationships form external aspects of identity formation, these must be held in tension with the internal aspects of stories and emotions. In this sometimes uneasy encounter between internal and external forces, the teacher makes meaning, surfaces tacit beliefs and is challenged to new awareness of her identity. In exploring research into teacher beliefs, Jeppe Skott\(^7\) has unpacked the methodological problems of linking beliefs to practice and notes the difficulty researchers have in differentiating beliefs from attitudes and other affective attributes. Despite noting this confusion of terms, his conclusions concur with Rodgers and Scott that research into teacher beliefs is opening up new understandings of the teacher’s role and insights into ways teachers make pedagogical choices. John Hattie\(^8\) and Helen Timperley\(^9\) have each presented persuasive research which link teachers’ beliefs and expectations of their students to student outcomes. Their research grows out of the work of Jerome Bruner who maintains that teacher language and methodology in the classroom is “a direct reflection of the beliefs and assumptions the teacher holds about the learner.”\(^10\)

Despite teacher expertise, knowledge or communication skills, the beliefs and assumptions held by a teacher about their students is often perceived by the student and impacts self-efficacy and outcomes. In order for teachers to develop their expertise underlying beliefs must be addressed. Timperley’s research has synthesised evidence from hundreds of research

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\(^6\) Rodgers and Scott, “The Development of the Personal Self and Professional Identity in Learning to Teach,” 2.


projects focusing on teacher development in New Zealand, Australia, Britain and America to make recommendations around best practice in teacher development. She identifies the importance of reflecting on tacit beliefs if teachers are to understand their own motivation and build awareness of their practice and its impact:

Tacit knowledge is built up over time and embedded in personal experience. It is accepted because it is known to work, but it can be a deterrent to creating change because it is often unexamined and unquestioned. Because an individual’s educational values and beliefs are nested in a complex web of social and cultural history, challenge inevitably creates issues of identity, personal dissonance, and motivation. To overcome the obstacle to changing and improving practice, Timperley identifies three processes that were found to help teachers examine and question their beliefs and values: cuing prior knowledge, developing awareness of new information and creating dissonance. These processes are embedded in the Action Research Cycle for teacher professional learning developed by Helen Timperley as a result of her research. This cycle involves 5 progressive movements: a) reflection on practice, informed by theory, research and student feedback (which often creates dissonance); b) identifying both student and teacher learning needs based on the reflections; c) designing targeted tasks and learning experiences; d) teaching actions; e) reflecting on student evidence to identify the impact of changed actions. These actions are used over successive cycles to heighten teacher self-awareness and reflection on practice. Creating dissonance is also identified by John Loughran as an important element of teacher learning in What Expert Teachers Do. He highlights the importance of teachers to be learners of their profession through exploration and experimentation which involves challenge and uncertainty. He states: “Learning to be comfortable with uncertainty is then part of what it means to become a learner of teaching and is at the heart of that which supports the development of pedagogical expertise.”

Being drawn into uncertainty through the creation of dissonance necessarily shakes

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11 Timperley et al., Teacher Professional Learning and Development, 13.
12 Timperley et al., Teacher Professional Learning and Development, 1.
14 Loughran, What Expert Teachers Do, 39.
teachers’ beliefs about how to teach and what a teacher is called to be; it begins to bring into question what the goals of learning are. From uncertainty new questions arise leading to the possibility of growth. Teacher development processes with an emphasis on collegiality, reflection on practice and professional dialogue that is student focussed and research informed have also been advocated by authors Brookfield and Fisher. Brookfield in his research into effective adult education methods identifies professional dialogue as one of the most important factors in transforming and improving practice. He describes four complementary lenses through which adult learners can view their practice and identity: the adult learner’s autobiography or their voice, colleague’s perceptions, engagement with theory, and feedback on practice through student’s eyes. The voices of the self, colleagues and students are all present, while the voice of the ‘other’, which may provide an external lens, is represented in research, theory, heuristics, or an external expert. Each of the four voices carries equal weight in the professional dialogue. This model, like that of Timperley is grounded in extended opportunities for dialogue to bring to speech tacit beliefs that may hinder change. Fisher too proposes dialogue as a powerful model for learning as it promotes inquiry and curiosity through the surfacing of problems and the use of open ended questions. He notes that dialogue “builds intelligence, expands consciousness and provides a model for productive human relationships.” While his focus is not solely on teacher learning, he advocates a community approach to inquiry learning which includes teachers, students and parents in dialogue. The aspect of community becomes a focus in the next section which explores literature around the theological dimension of dialogue and community as pertaining to teacher professional learning in Catholic schools.

17 Brookfield, Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher, 61-78.
Teacher Identity and Dialogue

The above literature agrees that teachers learn skills, develop their identity and transform their practice when they are able to surface and challenge their tacit beliefs about themselves as teachers, how they understand teaching and learning and how they understand their learners. The strategies identified can be summed up as engaging teachers in critical self-reflection and professional dialogue as a community of learners. In a Catholic school context, both dialogue and community are concepts that hold theological dimensions; dimensions which in Melbourne Catholic schools have been clearly articulated in their Educational Framework: Horizons of Hope.\(^\text{19}\) Therefore, in Catholic schools the opportunity for reflection and dialogue ideally engages teachers with a theological dimension. This dimension is described in the research by Helen Cameron, Bhatti, Duce, Sweeney and Watkins.\(^\text{20}\) In their work, they advocate a Theological Action Research approach (TAR). Similarities can be drawn between the Timperley action research cycle and TAR, which uses the movements of Learning, Action, Experience and Reflection. The difference Cameron stresses is that theology is an integral part of each of these movements. She understands that the group involved in this research approach is a faith-led Christian community who gather “as persons seeking together.”\(^\text{21}\) As with Timperley’s action research cycle, TAR is also committed to open dialogue where inviting and valuing a diversity of views and voices is seen as a strength. One of the characteristic features of TAR is an understanding of theology as expressed in four interrelated voices, offering insight into the complexity and dynamics of theological reflection processes. These four voices: Normative, Espoused, Formal and Operant theology,\(^\text{22}\) have a distinct role in dialogue. The Espoused and Operant theologies of practitioners have their own authority and have a role in challenging, forming and informing the Normative and Formal theologies of the ‘professional’ theologians and vice versa. It is a useful tool to analyse the theologies brought

\(^{19}\) Melbourne, “Catholic Education Melbourne Learning and Teaching.”


\(^{21}\) Cameron, *Talking About God in Practice*, 57.

\(^{22}\) Cameron, *Talking About God in Practice*, 54.
into conversation and helps to challenge tacit beliefs and to bring to speech unarticulated theologies. The notion of community is also critical to theological reflection in the TAR approach. Focused on the transformation of the participants, the community is seen by Cameron as already a community of faith in action with both implicit and explicit theologies operating. The community is transformed in part “through the empowerment of discovering and forming a language for the often hidden depths of what we do.”23 The context of a Catholic school offers the opportunity to surface new understandings and language about God’s self-communication in that school faith community. Jacques Haers24 writing from a Christian perspective about religious education emphasizes the importance of relationships and conversation or dialogue as the basis for the school as a “community of discernment.”25 Such a community would support teachers who he sees as often vulnerable people who are grappling with their identity and challenges to their authority. He suggests “authority comes from the teacher’s capacity to listen, so as to allow for a community of learning and from the teacher’s willingness to provide space for creativity and concrete attempts to build life-worthy communities.”26 Teachers here are seen as important building blocks for the creation of a learning community. While he does not attempt to establish a teacher development theory, he names a particular role for ‘direction staff’ or leadership. He highlights the importance that “direction staff become aware of their beliefs and consciously articulate their faith”27 in order that they better discern what’s at stake in the school community and actively promote the building of the community. He sees leadership as playing a vital role in setting the agenda for school community discussions about “what is important and worthwhile in human life and about how these important elements may be achieved.”28 This is a spiritual agenda which, Haers maintains, creates a space for a religious education where “not only the pupils are educated, but the teachers and the direction staff

23 Cameron, Talking About God in Practice, 58.
26 Haers, “Religious Education as Conversation,” 323.
27 Haers, “Religious Education as Conversation,” 327.
are educated as well.\textsuperscript{29} However, this is not easily achieved as identified by Roz Sunley\textsuperscript{30} who claims that spirituality is rarely at the centre of conversations in education and states several reasons which will resonate with teachers as they grapple with the deeper questions around the goals of education and their role:

It (spirituality) is contentious in its definition, obscure in its language and lacks confidence in its operation. It is not easily measurable and it provides little impact to those who see education in more prosaic terms. In a world of economism, it appears to add little of economic benefit. In short, it requires people of conviction and of passion to insist on its place in education. In a society that is increasingly ‘risk averse’ the idea of promoting a domain of human development that cannot readily be identified or measured requires true conviction.\textsuperscript{31}

Sunley names true conviction as the key element to grappling with the spiritual dimension in teacher development conversations. While this element may not be uniformly found across all staff at Catholic schools, it needs a core group, specifically leaders, as Haers suggests, to be so convinced that they confidently keep spirituality on the teacher learning agenda. The way in which this agenda is proposed and supported is at the heart of the teacher development theories discussed.

In conclusion, research into teacher professional learning theory from within a theological framework or outside it acknowledges that it is vital to knowledge and skill development that teachers are supported by leadership in schools who offer the opportunity to build ongoing professional relationships in a community of inquiry and give quality time for teachers to critically reflect on their beliefs and practice in dialogue. This critical reflection is informed by theory and student voice in the form of learning artefacts and feedback. Specifically in the Catholic context, the Catholic intellectual and spiritual traditions, as well as its lived practice in the school community are vital sources for the teacher reflection action cycle where theology is part of every phase. Bringing to speech the internal aspects of identity formation – beliefs and emotions, and external aspects – context and

\textsuperscript{29} Haers, “Religious Education as Conversation,” 334.


\textsuperscript{31} Sunley, “Relating to the Spiritual in the Classroom,” 797.
relationships, is in itself a spiritual exercise when approached with sincerity and the highest intentions motivated by a clear vision for the spiritual development of students.

The following section discusses the literature which explores the connections and disconnections between spirituality and religion and how they impact on each other in the rapidly changing perceptions of the postmodern era.

**Spirituality and Religion**

In this section, I will not attempt to define spirituality, nor list the many definitions of spirituality which abound in the literature. I will rather look at the ways in which researchers have begun their search for definitions and how they approach the task of defining so elusive a concept. From a historical, philosophical, psychological and social sciences approach to a theological investigation, there are a vast range of elements to be considered that inform an understanding of spirituality such as data sources, methodologies and interpretations. I look for any recurring themes and draw connections where I can to gain some clarity around religion and spirituality and how they relate to each other.

**Spiritual but not Religious**

I don’t think spirituality and religion are necessarily one and the same. So I think you could still be a spiritual person. So I would say that I am... a spiritual person, but I might not necessarily be religious in that I go to church every Sunday or I pray every night before dinner, or pray at home. (Teacher interview Chapter 5)

The above quote from a teacher in this study highlights the division of terms between spirituality and religion that is also found in the literature. Teachers of religious education are charged with offering a spiritual as well as religious education, without clarity about how to engage their students. ‘The spiritual turn’\(^{32}\) is a phrase used by European researchers Houtman and Aupers to describe the growing interest in spirituality in Western countries. They note that while the notion of religion is always contextual and changing, it has undergone more rapid change in the past decades and during this time the interest in spirituality has grown beyond the boundaries of religion. The interest in spirituality is

\(^{32}\) For a thorough treatment of the more recent enchantment with the spiritual see Houtman and Aupers, “The Spiritual Turn and the Decline of Tradition: The Spread of Post-Christian Spirituality in 14 Western Countries, 1981–2000.”
evident across many disciplines: education, psychology and the health sciences, as well as philosophy and theology. Taking a historical and Christian perspective, Sandra Schneiders, professor emerita Berkeley, gives a full account of the development of spirituality from the time when it was an area of purely Catholic theological interest to its current expansion across multiple disciplines. In her article she notes: “Even those who know that the term is historically Catholic do not seem to feel that it belongs to Catholicism or that to discuss spirituality is to appear on Catholic turf or to accept Catholic ground rules.” Untied from theology or religion, spirituality becomes “a veritable baggy monster containing a multitude of activities and expectations,” as each academic field, using different methodologies pursues different questions. These questions are shaped by the theories, traditions and research from within their discipline, as noted by Eugene Roehlkepartain and editors in the preface of the Handbook of Spiritual Development. The editors highlight the difficulty in comparing works from different fields of research: “Yet, this area of inquiry lacks a cohesive, established base of foundational theory or research. Scholars tend to work within their own discipline and in relative isolation, disconnected from each other and lacking easy access to theory and research in other disciplines, traditions and cultures.” With a plethora of starting points and methodologies as well as a variety of interpretations about how the end point of the spiritual quest is conceived by the various disciplines, it is beyond the scope of this paper to give an overview. This has already been done in a full and comprehensive way by David Moberg in “Expanding Horizons for Spirituality Research.” In his work Moberg pleads for a multi-disciplinary approach to the study of spirituality. Borgman, in his essay

36 Roehlkepartain, The Handbook of Spiritual Development, xiii.
entitled *Bridging the Gap* has identified one source of confusion in coming to grips with spirituality – the gap between theory and practice. After explaining the implications of the divide, he concludes that starting first “not with theory and academicians, but in places where children and adolescents are served, with the teachers and workers who lead them,” may help bridge the gap between scholars and practitioners. The call for an interdisciplinary approach is echoed by David Perrin and David Tracey. David Perrin has investigated the major differences between the horizons of meaning assumed in the approaches of Christian Spirituality and the Human Sciences: “There is a *leap of understanding* from a positivistic world view to a theotic world view in Christian spirituality that is not explicitly shared by the human sciences” (italics in the text). Despite this leap required, Perrin holds that in allowing the different horizons of the human sciences and Christian spirituality to come together in a hermeneutic approach which recognizes a plurality of perspectives, understanding of the deeper dimensions of human life can be enriched. This approach allows for multiple levels of analysis and information sources as noted by Zinnbauer and Pargament. They write of the dangers in ignoring these levels and sources when trying to define spirituality and religiousness and the confusion that results – confusion such as occurs when attempting to compare the internal and external phenomena of either religion or spirituality. Patrick Laude raises this confusion in his article “Spirituality in a Postmodern Age.” He holds that “spiritual realization is never a collective

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39 Borgman, “Bridging the Gap,” 442.


41 Note David Tracy’s observation: “Neither theology nor science really has anything to fear from a future collaboration which recognizes the autonomy and the mutual interrelatedness of these two sorely needed conversation partners for our critical present and future.” Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology*, 99.


phenomenon; it is always as it were situated within an individual consciousness that surrenders and abandons itself, and thereby transcends itself.\textsuperscript{45} The notion of spirituality as a private and personal pursuit that critically examines human experience is one that resonates with a cultural focus on the psychology of the individual and personal wellbeing and happiness, while religion is more often associated with an external form, and by inference a hollower concept than spirituality.

The following discussion concerns itself with the measurable and observable aspects of spirituality from a sociological perspective using survey data on spirituality and religion that indicates the two terms are diverging.

Philip Sheldrake, in his overview of spirituality as a social and cultural phenomenon agrees with Houtman and Aupers in describing the current era as having “a fascination with ‘spirituality,’ often contrasted favourably with ‘religion.’”\textsuperscript{46} The distinction between spirituality and religion and the favouring of spirituality over religion is reflected in survey data gathered and used by researchers in the health and human development fields, including business systems and churches which document a trend of rising interest in spirituality alongside a fall in attendance at traditional churches.\textsuperscript{47} Australian data gathered for the Catholic Bishop’s pastoral planning office\textsuperscript{48} indicates Catholic churches are both ageing and emptying. Meanwhile, interest in spirituality is anecdotally increasing as indicated in Zinnbauer and other’s study of the American spiritual scene\textsuperscript{49} and is also noted in the reflection on the Australian cultural experience in David Tacey’s popular books on

\textsuperscript{45} Laude, “Spirituality in a Postmodern Age,” 55.

\textsuperscript{46} Philip Sheldrake, \textit{Spirituality: A Brief History}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 3.

\textsuperscript{47} For a European perspective see: David Voas, “The Rise and Fall of Fuzzy Fidelity in Europe,” \textit{European Sociological Review} 25, no. 2 (2009).


spirituality, psychology and culture.\textsuperscript{50} In an Australian national study of spirituality “The Spirit of Generation Y”\textsuperscript{51} conducted by researchers from Australian Catholic University, Monash University and the Christian Research Association, young people were surveyed and interviewed about their world views, spiritual and religious concerns. The separation between religion and spirituality was inherent in the questions asked. Almost half of Australian young people surveyed between the ages of 13 and 24 did not belong to or identify with any religion or denomination; about 41% were engaged with the 3 major types of spirituality and only 17% of those with Christianity, while 19% held that there is very little truth in any religion. While these figures are ten years old, the trend away from religious association and commitment in Australia is revealed.

However, in the Gen Y group only 17% definitively declared they did not believe in God. These young people grapple with the questions of God and ultimate things in the absence of religious traditions which seemingly do not appeal as partners in this search. Data shows that for young people spirituality is perceived as not necessarily tied to a particular religious world view and is understood as connected with identity formation and meaning making, effecting fulfilment and personal wellbeing. In \emph{Putting Life Together} Philip Hughes, senior research officer of the Christian Research Association reflects on the Generation Y research above. He notes that: “For young people, spirituality was not necessarily about a world beyond or being in touch with God. It was found partly in the confidence that life could be enjoyed, but found more in the authenticity of the self, in being true to oneself.”\textsuperscript{52} A focus on spirituality as it affects wellbeing was further researched by Hughes, Kaldor and Black\textsuperscript{53} in a national sample of Australians surveying how they approach making sense of life and its ultimate significance. The research categorised approaches to making meaning that ranged from religious, alternative spiritual and the mainly secular, with the latter group having the youngest age profile. Teachers in Australian Catholic schools experience this diversity in

\textsuperscript{50} Tacey, \textit{The Spirituality Revolution}, and Tacey, \textit{Reenchantment: The New Australian Spirituality}.


\textsuperscript{52} Philip Hughes, \textit{Putting Life Together: Findings from Australian Youth Spirituality Research} (Fairfield, Victoria: Fairfield Press, 2007), 68.

\textsuperscript{53} Kaldor, Hughes, and Black, \textit{Spirit Matters}. 
their classrooms and are challenged to demonstrate ways religion, and the Catholic tradition in particular, can be a viable partner for students in their spiritual quest for identity, meaning and human flourishing. This is a more difficult task than ever when Catholic religion has become tainted as a discredited and untrustworthy institution following the disclosures of the Melbourne Archdiocese’s inadequate response to sexual abuse victims.\textsuperscript{54}

In summing up, the literature reflects a growing tendency to separate spirituality from religion with a trend among younger generations to attribute positive values to spirituality – as dynamic and responsive and to see religion in a more negative light – as static and dogmatic. Research indicates a danger in separating the terms but that spirituality is more often associated with individual consciousness and interiority while religion has to do with a collective experience, more often characterised as external. However, the literature indicates these distinctions result from confusing the levels and sources of data and analysis used in the research and that interior and exterior phenomena are apparent in both spirituality and religion.

The following discussion explores spirituality as deeply connected with religion drawing particularly on the fields of psychology and health.

**Religious Spirituality**

Then I suppose in my mind I’m getting … I sort of … what’s the word, substitute spirituality and religiosity as the same word. In my own mind I don’t really separate them, but I know that you can be spiritual without being religious, so in my own mind they are sort of synonyms. (Teacher interview Chapter 5)

This quote from a participant in the research indicates that for some religion and spirituality are not viewed separately. Despite the trends noted above, religion and spirituality maintain close ties in both meaning and effects. Psychologists Robert Emmons and Raymond Paloutzian\textsuperscript{55} working in the sub-field of psychology of religion trace progress in their field over the past twenty five years. They note that: “Agreement on the meaning of spirituality


and religion is in short supply, as the religious landscape in the broader culture and in psychology is changing with a new breed of spirituality that is often distinct from traditional concepts of religion. As they trace the development of research in the psychology of personality and religion, they note that while there is still confusion over the conceptualising of the two terms, they agree that there has been a move to distinguish between the spiritual and the religious. They note that with an increasing range of experiences being articulated as spiritual, there has been a tendency to remove a transcendent reference point. They name three distinct types of spirituality: religious, natural and humanistic, identifying religious spirituality as one that maintains the connection between human experience and the transcendent or divine. In their view, the psychology of religion as a field of study seeks to standardize measures of religiousness, however, they use the term religion and spirituality interchangeably throughout. Emmons and Paloutzian highlight developments in understanding the connection between the emotions and religious and spiritual experiences as a rich field of research in psychology. Their focus is on wellbeing and the positive physical and psychological health outcomes that meet psychometric and predictive values. Emmons and Paloutzian point to new ‘units of analysis’ or concepts that are being used to examine religiousness and spirituality in people’s lives: Spiritual Transcendence, Ultimate Concerns, and Spiritual Transformation. These concepts are labels for the purposes of trying to measure objectively the impact on the quality of life of participants in a variety of studies that refer to both spirituality and religion. The studies however, do not try to define the sacred or distinguish between religion and spirituality.

57 An interesting set of tables which pick out a selection of definitions of religiousness and spirituality in the literature over the past 50 years highlighting the overlap in terms can be found in Zinnbauer and Pargament, “Religiousness and Spirituality,” 23.
Peter Hill, together with colleagues Pargament, Hood, McCullough, Swyers, Larson and Zinnbauer published a comprehensive discussion of the task of conceptualising religion and spirituality.\(^{61}\) In this seminal work they point to recent research using methodologies as various as national surveys,\(^{62}\) group surveys\(^{63}\) and content analyses.\(^{64}\) Many of the findings indicate there is greater overlap in ways people understand spirituality and religion than there is difference. Hill cautions against two dangers suggested by the research. Firstly he warns against a growing tendency to polarise the terms – identifying religion with institutionalisation and spirituality with personalisation, and even associating religion with ‘bad’ and spirituality with ‘good.’ Secondly he cautions researchers to beware of losing the connection with the sacred in defining spirituality. He holds that the sacred is at the heart of spirituality and that without this deep connection commonly described spiritual pursuits “are not spiritualities at all, just strongly held ideologies or highly elaborated lifestyles.”\(^{65}\) Some of the lifestyle options he goes on to name are veganism, gardening or music as ways of enacting a ‘spiritual life’ that often lack reference to the sacred. Hill points to a long held common understanding that the sense of the sacred is central to both religious and spiritual experience by referring to Durkheim. Emile Durkheim, the French sociologist, in his 1912 classic text *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*\(^{66}\) explores religion as an essentially social function where each society defines the sacred in its own particular way. Peter Hill proposes a working definition for spirituality: “The feelings, thoughts, experiences and behaviours that arise from a search for the sacred.”\(^{67}\) He goes on to say that religion has the


\(^{64}\) Zinnbauer, Pargament and Scott, “The Emerging Meanings of Religiousness and Spirituality: Problems and Prospects.”


same definition as spirituality with the additional criterion that the search is validated and supported by a group or community. In this understanding, it is the context of the search that makes the difference between spirituality and religion. Searching for identity, belonging and wellbeing may not constitute a sacred quest however they are typically part of the spiritual dimension that can contribute to an understanding of the sacred for a religious group. The common ground between religion and spirituality as defined by Hill, are the notions of the sacred and the importance of the search. This is also the conclusion arrived at by Zinnbauer and Pargament\textsuperscript{68} in their comprehensive summary of the quest to define the two terms and clarify how they relate to each other. In their chapter Zinnbauer et al.\textsuperscript{69} present an argument for seeing spirituality as the broader construct of the two, saying that both are involved in a pursuit of the sacred, but the context for this pursuit is narrower when defined by particular religious traditions. Pargament\textsuperscript{70} argues for religiousness as the broader construct as it can be seen to address a wider range of goals, such as physical health, wellbeing, self- development and community pursued through sacred means. The satisfaction of basic needs through religious adherence which initiates people into sacred pathways may facilitate the pursuit of higher spiritual goals. Note that Pargament uses the term ‘religiousness’ which focuses attention on the interior effects of religion on the individual and not ‘religion’ which tends to conjure the imagery of external structure, dogma and systems. Religiousness in this definition is thereby interested and involved in all aspects of human endeavour, assisting people to find and integrate the sacred into their everyday pursuits. In this definition strong connections to a Christian theological position can be made. The sacred here is a means, rather than an end. Spirituality, in this view is the narrower concept, defined as a pursuit of the sacred which may involve either religious or secular pathways, but the sacred is the sole goal. At the same time Pargament stresses the integrated nature of spirituality and religion: “Spirituality is the core function of religion….It

\textsuperscript{68} Zinnbauer and Pargament, “Religiousness and Spirituality,” 33-34.

\textsuperscript{69} Zinnbauer and Pargament, “Religiousness and Spirituality,” 35-36.

\textsuperscript{70} Zinnbauer and Pargament, “Religiousness and Spirituality,” 36-37.
alone addresses the discovery, conservation and transformation of the most ultimate of all concerns, the sacred.”

In summary, the mode of the social and health sciences as seen above now contributes to generating the questions that shape understandings of spirituality, religiousness and the sacred. No longer necessarily grounded in Christian theology and its language and markers, spirituality has become a comprehensive and pervasive concept to study and at the same time a confusing and diverse one. A more popular and recent tendency to separate the terms can be seen particularly within sociological and cultural studies, while a convergence of meanings is more continuous with research historically in the field of psychology of religion and health sciences. The above literature uses knowledge shaped by rational systems and theory based on abstractions from reflection on observations of human experience and historical investigation to arrive at definitions and functions of religion and spirituality. It arrives at two criteria for definitions of religion and spirituality: the human quest for meaning that lies at the heart of human identity and impacts wellbeing; and the sacred or transcendent, which remains undefined, yet as connected with the human quest for meaning adds a critical dimension to how we understand the human condition. The literature insists the two are and should remain connected if the significance of the quest is not to be lost and the spiritual dimension of the human person is to be acknowledged.

However, the issue at the heart of the research is philosophical and theological, as well as practical: Why do people feel a call to question the meaning and purpose of life – to grapple with the questions: ‘who am I and why am I here?’ The ‘why’ question calls for a belief in the significance of our lives, even before we can name it. To ponder from where the quest arises is to begin to consider a ground of meaning outside ourselves – to ask: Who or what calls me to question? Is this the sacred? These questions have a long tradition of being grappled with and religions have each developed their particular ways of dealing with them. To the extent religions walk alongside people as they grapple with these questions, religion and spirituality are united. Christian theology, from a perspective of ‘faith seeking understanding’ addresses these questions and how to live in the reality of the tensions from which the questions arise.

Spirituality and Christianity

I suppose in our society today it’s very hard to be a spiritual or religious person. Umm... I suppose it can be easy to pretend like you’re not. Um, I suppose often you can be afraid of the judgements particularly with things that are going on in the church. (Teacher interview Chapter 5)

I think there are different elements that make us up... but I also believe we have a spiritual domain and I think that is the core (of) who we are and so it can’t be ignored. (Teacher interview Chapter 5)

The quotes above from research participants reflect teachers’ acknowledgment of the urgency of the spiritual quest and how religion can support or hinder it. I acknowledge here the impact of the sexual abuse scandal world-wide and in the Melbourne Archdiocese in particular and the crisis of faith it has ignited; shattering people’s lives, devaluing the voice of the Church in the wider community and undermining trust in religion more broadly.

Christian spirituality has a long history of saints and mystics whose experiences form a body of works that shape a tradition of spirituality as interpreting the lived experience of God’s self-revelation, or in Sandra Schneiders’ terms: “the expansion of our understanding of the God-human relationship”72 and how that is concretely lived out. Schneiders describes Christian spirituality as an existential phenomenon essentially rooted in faith, making it a religious experience. Schneiders traces the history of Catholic spiritual theology as a pursuit of an interior life aimed at perfection, usually that of nuns, monks and mystics. This understanding of spirituality was called into question in the mid twentieth century as elitist and too focused on a stage approach to attaining perfection.73 She identifies three ways of looking at Christian spirituality: historically, theologically and anthropologically. Schneiders notes that: “Christian spirituality anthropologically approached has become public discourse, both culturally and academically, and is learning to participate in a conversation it does not totally control, without losing or diminishing its specifically Christian identity.”74

This section of the chapter examines the anthropological turn in Christian spiritual theology which influences how spirituality is embraced today, looking at Christian spirituality through

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the lens of Vatican II. This Council (1963-1965) was a watershed event for the Catholic Church, marking a new openness to the world and existential human experience, addressing all people in their context. Fifty years after the Council the context in the Western societies has continued to evolve and has been described as de-traditionalising, individualising and pluralising.\(^{75}\) As discussed in Chapter 1, this is an era enchanted with the personal, the local, the individual and the spiritual, no single narrative can hold meaning for all in the fragmenting societies of today; indeed each individual has plural narratives to hold together. In this context, Vatican II theology, with its existential flavour and focus on human experience and religious encounter is a spiritual text for the postmodern world. The following section examines the relationship between theology and spirituality, dealing with some of the positive ways the Catholic Church seeks to address the world today, reappropriating spiritual or religious experience especially in its most fundamental theology – revelation.

**Christian Spirituality and Theology**

Catholic theologian Karl Rahner, a powerful influence on the second Vatican Council,\(^{76}\) is an architect of Christian anthropology\(^{77}\) and was foundational in re-orienting the church from an ecclesial focus to a Christocentric focus. Joseph Wong in his study of Rahner’s Christology explains Rahner’s anthropology: “As self-transcendence is a human being’s most basic characteristic, a human being truly realizes himself when he gives himself away into the

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incomprehensible mystery of God.” Rahner grants this graced characteristic to every person, hence the famed ‘Anonymous Christian’. Rahner writes eloquently of the human person as experiencing the Mystery of God in moments of encounter, often using the term ‘mystery’ for God to emphasise the inherent unavailability of a full understanding of God. At the same time he focuses on the ordinary experience of God found in the every day. For Rahner the core identity of the human person is inextricably bound up with a consciousness of God often tacitly experienced in the questions or the mystery of their own existence: “The simple and honestly accepted everyday life contains in itself the eternal and the silent mystery, which we call God and his secret grace, especially when this life remains the everyday ... Wherever people are; there they are creatures who unlock the hidden depths of reality in their free, responsible actions.” He seeks to challenge the understanding of spiritual experience as connected almost exclusively with ascetic practices and dramatic conversion events usually in relation to lives of saints, often nuns, monks and mystics. Rahner does not separate spirituality from theology, seeing them as co-dependent. While his spiritual writings are concerned more directly with religious experience itself, his theology maintains a deep connection to the existential spiritual experience. Michael Walsh, in his analysis of the relationship between Rahner’s spirituality and his theology identifies one of Rahner’s contributions to theology as the development of the notion of a mutual or reciprocal relationship between spirituality and theology. He sums up Rahner’s position: “… the proper realm of spirituality must be a constitutive part of those elements on which theological reflection is based ... At the same time the reflection of spiritual theology must be incorporated into the data on which a dogmatic theology bases its own


proper reflection.” While not directly attributable to Rahner, this quote from *Dei Verbum* reflects the reciprocity of spirituality and theology:

> For there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts (see Luke, 2:19, 51) through a penetrating understanding of the spiritual realities which they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through Episcopal succession the sure gift of truth. 

The concept of tradition is here described as engaging a hermeneutical or interpretive process which opens it to growth and change, validating the spiritual experiences of believers as one of the voices in the process. The process involves engaging a dialogue between spiritual experience, tradition and the context to make meaning, under the working of the Holy Spirit. Rahner and the spirit of Vatican II reconnected the Church and theology with its spiritual core – encounter with Christ. Vatican II positioned the church as more humble and open to the world and human experience, eminently visible today in the person of Pope Francis.

**Revelation and Dialogue *Ad extra***

The method or the way the Church offers itself and engages the world is as important as the meaning it proposes. Vatican II promoted new connections between Christian theology and the global context, forming new expressions of faith relevant to common experience, in a language that used “interiority words,” such as those that open *Gaudium et Spes:* “Joy and hope, grief and anguish ...” Distinguished Jesuit scholar and priest, John O’Malley, in his analysis of the language and style of the documents coming from Vatican II identifies

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significant discontinuities with previous councils which indicate a change of heart and direction for the Church. O’Malley holds that Vatican II describes a Catholicism which is invitational, inclusive, dynamic, transformative, and open to otherness and that these elements “indicate a model of spirituality.”86 A model of spirituality or religion that focuses on openness to the other, openness to change and dynamic in its openness to the questions of meaning in the everyday lives of people is still a contested area87 creating tension experienced by many Catholic religious educators and leaders as they try to hold together the often diverse views of their parish priest, the wider faith community and the students and families in the school community.

Flanders theologian Lieven Boeve addresses the mode in which the Church engages the world in his essay on Christian faith in Flanders “Interrupting Tradition.”88 He puts forward a case that every new context challenges the Christian tradition to recontextualise – that is to read the signs of the times and reanimate Catholic faith in relation to contemporary human experience. He points out that the Christian tradition is one that historically has always interrupted its context and must deliberately maintain its interruptive nature even to the point of interrupting itself, thereby maintaining the Christian narrative as open: “… it would seem possible to maintain theologically that the Christian narrative can only be authentic when it structures itself as an open narrative: a narrative that allows itself to be interrupted time and again by a God who gets involved in history but does not let Godself be captured by it.”89 He goes on to explore the implications of an open Christian narrative in his discussion of Apophatic theology and its “potential to provide the Christian narrative today with cultural plausibility.”90 He holds that without certainty in a ‘safe’ God, the Christian story remains open, recontextualising and seeking truth; in constant dialogue with a world which is doing the same. In his later work Theology at the Crossroads of University, Church and Society Boeve analyses the role theology plays in universities, society and the Church.


88 Boeve, Interrupting Tradition.

89 Boeve, Interrupting Tradition, 106-107.

90 Boeve, Interrupting Tradition, 160.
through a series of articles. He argues that the work of theology is to point to God’s self-revelation today and to interpret Christian faith through dialogue with the world, a spiritual agenda set by Vatican II that brings human experience into focus in theology. In chapter 1 he takes as his foundation *Dei Verbum* which presents revelation as “God’s dialogue with people and history.” In the spirit of dialogue which embraces difference, Boeve takes on a sparring partner in the form of the writings of Joseph Ratzinger to highlight the important watershed moments in the development of *Dei Verbum* as well as areas of continuing tension such as that of the dialogical principle. For Boeve, this principle is at the heart of Vatican II theology and Christian faith itself. The dialogical principle is where: “In a mutually critical and enriching dialogue, continuity and discontinuity, harmony and conflict, identity and otherness are held together in a dynamic relationship.” In chapter 9 Boeve emphasises the importance of difference in dialogue when he explores the role of Catholic religious education. He advocates starting from a stance of “reflective qualitative plurality” that permits Catholic theology to speak with more than one voice. This stance also offers the opportunity to examine Christian faith in relation to other worldviews and religions. Through this dialogical method, students “learn to live and think their faith … without falling into relativism or neo-traditionalism.” The offer of a theology of a dialogical God elevates the importance of dialogical method in Catholic education which can appeal to communities and individuals as they reflect on and construct their spiritual identity amidst a plurality of options.

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92 Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum*, n. 2.


97 Boeve, *Theology at the Crossroads*, 212.
Revelation and Dialogue Ad intra

While Boeve deals with the methodology used by the Church in engaging and developing its faith traditions in and with the world, Australian theologian Gerald O’Collins, in his work on Revelation deals with understanding being a person of faith in the Church. Boeve is interested in illuminating a theology of revelation in relation to philosophy, sociology, ecclesiology and missiology, seeking to engage a diverse audience. O’Collins on the other hand focusses on examining a theology of revelation from a Christocentric focus for an audience of the faithful. Both offer important perspectives on current interpretations of spirituality. O’Collins distinguishes between the first or “the primary sense” of revelation by which is understood the personal I-Thou encounter, and “the secondary sense” which refers to statements about what can be known about God and about people emerging from that experience. For O’Collins, the first is a relational idea and the second a cognitive idea, however, the two are interrelated. As God speaks and the person listens, an event or encounter occurs that for O’Collins resembles love in its anticipation of response. O’Collins uses John Newman to help describe what happens in an experience of revelation: “persons influence us, voices melt us, looks subdue us, deeds inflame us.” These everyday mediations of the divine call us to a response of faith, anticipating the acknowledgement of the experience as revelation. O’Collins considers the question of whether humans are predisposed to hearing God or experiencing the presence of God. In exploring this question he refers to Gaudium et Spes and its method of correlation which maintains that God’s self-revelation corresponds to a person’s deepest questions: “God alone who created human beings in his own image and redeemed them from sin, offers the fullest answer to


99 He states: “...one does not have to be a Catholic to appreciate the Catholic offer of meaning.” Boeve, Theology at the Crossroads, 39.

100 O’Collins, Revelation, 12-18.

101 O’Collins, Revelation, 14-15.


103 O’Collins insists one is to understand experiencing as interpreted, not immediate. See Gerald O’Collins, Rethinking Fundamental Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 49-50.
these questions.”104 For O’Collins, there is no revelation without a faith response: “The very language of revelation implies reception and the establishment of a reciprocal relationship.”105 O’Collins builds on a Rahnerian understanding of graced predisposition106 to explain that in the event of revelation, not only is something of God disclosed, but the person is revealed to herself in a new way, a transformation that radically alters the person. O’Collins notes that what is needed here to clarify this circular argument is a fleshed out theology of human faith “which would set out the internal and external factors involved in coming to the faith by which one accepts the self-revelation of God.”107 At this point, opportunity for dialogue with other faith traditions to illuminate the intriguing and foundational question of coming to faith might be deemed appropriate in the spirit of Vatican II; however, O’Collins does not invite such a dialogue. O’Collin’s work focuses the Christian faithfulls’ attention on the ongoing questions arising from the experience of encounter or revelation at the heart of Christianity and illuminates the complexity of grappling with “the living reality of a personal encounter with God.”108 The shape of such encounters are the ‘something’ that Catholic schools are charged with providing opportunities for reflection on and dialogue about, for as Rahner’s popular saying goes: “The devout Christian of the future will either be a ‘mystic,’ one who has experienced ‘something,’ or he will cease to be anything at all.”109 O’Collins’ discussion of revelation contributes a rich voice to the dialogue.

Bert Roebben in his book *Seeking Sense in the City*110 explores the role of religion and religious community in the search for meaning and personal identity. As a professor of

107 O’Collins, *Revelation*, 78.
110 Bert Roebben, *Seeking Sense in the City: European Perspectives on Religious Education* (Berlin: LIT-Verlag, 2009).
religious education and theology at the Catholic University of Dortmund, Roebben is interested in how Christianity can be effectively communicated in a western culture which he names as highly individualistic, where each person is free to search for their own meaning without constraints. He questions the viability of such a search in the face of individualising, pluralising and de-tradionalising cultural forces.\textsuperscript{111} Roebben asks: “Is the substantial role of religion (searching for meaning of experience) at all possible without being anchored in a community of faith?”\textsuperscript{112} He goes on to say that the cultural forces named place a burden on individuals to self-actualize\textsuperscript{113} at the same time as it disconnects them from traditions whose wisdom could support their spiritual search and challenge them to transcend their initial questions (see the discussion of Pargament above). He calls this the “myth of self-actualisation.” Roebben re-appropriates spirituality for a \textit{true} (my italics) religion which he describes as taking “a position in the tension between existential self-management and ultimate perspective or the tension between individualization of meaning and the awareness of its ultimate non-availability.”\textsuperscript{114} He identifies the role of \textit{true} religion as confirming human questing, cultivating the search for the sacred and making available the wisdom and grace of Christianity to bring the sacred near.\textsuperscript{115} To the extent that teachers

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\begin{enumerate}[\textsuperscript{111}]
\item Refer to Chapter 1 regarding these terms.
\item Roebben, \textit{Seeking Sense in the City}, 80.
\item Roebben, \textit{Seeking Sense in the City}, 81. The historical development of the term self-actualisation and its relationship with religion is traced in Itai Ivtzan et al., “Linking Religion and Spirituality with Psychological Well-Being: Examining Self-Actualisation, Meaning in Life, and Personal Growth Initiative,” \textit{Journal of Religion and Health} 52, no. 3 (2013): 920. The authors indicate it is a term that occurs at the top of a psychological progression described by psychologist Abraham Maslow more than sixty years ago as a hierarchy of needs. A self-actualising person is said to be more fully functioning and have a more fulfilling life that another at any other stage. It has entered the language of what it means to be fully human and can be seen as one of the influences in the trend towards individualisation in western society. When religion is seen as an outward expression of beliefs, as something that the individual needs to conform to, it takes on a negative connotation, as hindering the process of self-actualisation leading to a possible rejection of religion.
\item Roebben, \textit{Seeking Sense in the City}, 81.
\item In relation to the notion of bringing the sacred near, French philosopher Paul Ricoeur talks about revitalising the tradition by reclaiming the power and mystery of encounter with the spiritual: “In truth without the cosmos and the sacredness of vital nature, the word itself becomes abstract and cerebral.” Paul Ricoeur,
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understand the role of religion in this light the Catholic educational project offers students support in their spiritual quest of identity formation as well as opportunities to explore or deepen connections to Christian traditions.

In conclusion, Christian theologians today are challenged to illuminate spiritual experience – the personal spiritual quest for fulfilment and meaning, while at the same time expressing its universal significance and connections with the sacred, the everyday and others. Vatican II, a vital if not uncontested event in the ongoing tradition of the Catholic Church, proposes two elements critical to Christian spirituality: an understanding of revelation as dynamic and dialogical and an understanding of the human person as open to God’s self-communication. This opens the Church as an institution to understand itself as an evolving and recontextualising tradition which is as much of this world as pointing beyond it. It is in the dialogical space, a space of uncertainty and openness that spirituality lives. I would like then to put forward my explanation of spirituality grounded in the dialogical principle:

**Spirituality is the human experience of living in the relationship between the divine and the human: between ultimate concerns and the here and now, between the call and the response, between belonging and distantiating, between unknowing and knowing.**

In light of this understanding of spirituality, I attempt to support spiritual reflection with teachers by developing a heuristic that explores a Christian understanding of spirituality in a two dimensional framework where dialogue is both the method and the valued outcome (Chapter 3); a heuristic that engages the Vatican II understanding of the human person as open to a self-communicating God and that addresses the context of a pluralising, personalising post-Christian society.

The next section deals with the literature around spirituality and how it is conceived of and applied in education.

**Spirituality and Education**

I think that ... I think that, given time and opportunities, students become more confident in discussing their thoughts and their feelings - about God and everything

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else. And so if that’s given, then I think you do see that development. (Teacher interview Chapter 5)

I’ve met children who, you know, just have this ... internal sense of who they are, or what type of person they want to be, or ... or their feelings about God. (Teacher interview Chapter 5)

The teachers in my research were unanimous in their conviction that spirituality is important in education, although, as reflected in the two quotes above, they were divided about whether spirituality is developmental or non-developmental. A review of the current educational guidelines for the Victorian Curriculum\textsuperscript{116} suggest that attention to spirituality or spiritual-like attributes is critical for the development of the human person, but these guidelines are unclear as to what that means in terms of curriculum development or student learning pathways. The \textit{Australian National Framework for Learning in the Early Years} specifically names spirituality as an aspect of development to be addressed, however, it also develops no clarity around the term or how it is to be developed.\textsuperscript{117} Catholic schools have a compelling mission to grapple with spirituality and its role in education and have the support of Church teaching to help illuminate what a spiritual education might mean. In the recent Vatican document on education, the Congregation for Catholic Education proposed a dialogic approach for its schools as they embark on their mission: “At the root of Catholic education is our Christian spiritual heritage, which is part of a constant dialogue with the cultural heritage and the conquests of science; Catholic schools and universities are educational communities where learning thrives on the integration between research, etc.

\textsuperscript{116} Melbourne University’s Patrick Griffin has developed thinking around 21\textsuperscript{st} Century Skills that is the basis for the four general capabilities which are integrated across all areas of learning in the 2017 iteration of the Victorian Curriculum. The capabilities address intercultural understandings; personal and social dispositions and awarenesses; critical and creative thinking skills and processes; and ethical sensibilities. Connections can be made between aspects of the capabilities and notions of spirituality. See especially Mark Wilson et al., “Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills,” ed. Patrick Griffin, Esther Care, and Barry McGraw. (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012), accessed 15 November 2018. http://webg.bjypc.edu.cn/dx/upload/resources/file/2014/07/28/6197.pdf#page=18.

thinking and life experience.”\textsuperscript{118} In the renewed Religious Education Framework for Melbourne Catholic schools, spirituality is at the core of the educational experience for students as schools strive to create “… a context in which each student is invited to look at life in a way that encourages appreciation and gratitude, inquiry and critical thinking, where the Catholic Tradition holds an explicit, preferred and robust place.”\textsuperscript{119} How teachers interpret this aspiration for their practice is the work of ongoing engagement of schools in action research around the implementation of the Religious Education Curriculum Framework 2018.\textsuperscript{120}

As in the teacher quotes above, the literature is also divided as to whether spirituality can be understood in developmental terms, either relating to stage theory or process theory; or in non-developmental terms. Stage theory tends to focus on age related predictions; it is structural and hierarchical and tends to focus more on the cognitive. Process theory involves a socio-cultural model that includes contextual and relational impacts on spiritual development and is fluid and dynamic. Non-developmental theory explores descriptions of children’s mystical insights and spiritual sensitivities and identifies themes, often in therapeutic terms. The following discussion explores the literature in relation to the two theoretical positions.

**Spirituality as Developmental: Stage Theory**

Developmental models are those that build on and scaffold existing bases and aim for progression from lower to higher order thinking or understanding and from less to greater complexity and skills. Developmental models are popular with educationalists as such models help them identify clear goals and stages through which to promote student development to attain the end goal. It is appealing to have descriptions of student capabilities at different ages and such descriptions may inform the behavioural patterns


\textsuperscript{119} Catholic Education Melbourne, “Religious Education Curriculum Framework.”

\textsuperscript{120} Catholic Education Melbourne, “Religious Education Curriculum Framework.”
teachers begin to look for and identify in their lessons. Applied to spiritual development, this sort of progression could imply a linear trajectory such as described in James Fowler’s seminal work *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. The end of the linear progression for Fowler is a “universalising faith stage” where the person “has assented to a radical decentration from the self” and is able to empty the self of all self interest in response to the radical love of God. He goes on to describe it as the working of grace and a type of conversion experience. In his later text, Fowler expands on this stage, explaining that it is “not an estate to be attained or a stage to be realized. Rather it is a way of being and moving, a way of being on pilgrimage.” When spirituality is described as an end, the different means to that end may be narrowed by its definition. While Fowler’s later development of the universalising faith stage is less achievement oriented, his earlier work has become a standard which continues to influence how teachers conceive of spirituality and faith and therefore approach religious education in Catholic schools. Working from within a Christian theological perspective, Fowler assumes that people are inherently religious, which is not far from the claims of theological anthropology (see previous section). Grounded in the eight ages and phases of

121 Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*.


123 Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, 56.

124 Antoon Vergote a psychologist of religion looks at the division between the religious and the secular, not from a philosophical or theological standpoint but from his field of psychology and uncovers some basic assumptions in his Epilogue to the work “Belief and Unbelief.” He points out that there are basically two opposite suppositions at work when considering religion: The first is that religion is an aberrant approach to life and therefore “religious belief is considered to be the phenomenon which requires a psychological explanation.” The second supposition holds that people are inherently religious beings, a supposition that Vergote claims Fowler assumes in his writings and for which Vergote criticizes him. He refers to Fowler’s psychology of faith development as: “decorous optimism attractive for people preoccupied with the positive influence of religion on society.” Antoon Vergote, “Epilogue,” in Jozef Corveleyen and Dirk Hutsebaut, eds., *Belief and Unbelief: Psychological Perspectives* (Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi, 1994), 233-234.

development theory of Erik Erikson,\textsuperscript{126} the cognitive developmental stages of Piaget\textsuperscript{127} and the life cycle journey approach of Daniel Levinson,\textsuperscript{128} Fowler develops his own seven stages of faith based on interviews with adults. While his research is about adult faith development, his early stages deal with young children and adolescent stages. Fowler stresses that his stages “... describe a general pattern of development in faith. These stages, which try to describe uniform and predictable ways of being in faith, are not primarily matters of the contents of faith.”\textsuperscript{129} (Italics are in the text). By focussing on cognitive development rather than content, Fowler is liberating his theory from the idea of indoctrination, or stages of initiation into a particular religious community. I will describe briefly the three stages dealing with school age young people. Fowler’s third stage, the ‘mythic-literal’ stage of faith, is one that he associates with children of primary school age, from six to pre-adolescence. He finds in this stage that children do not construct a sense of self through reflectiveness or meta-cognition; rather they rely on the stories, rules and values of their family and or community to appropriate literally their community’s beliefs. When teachers’ expectations of their students are influenced by this description, it may impede student spiritual development, artificially keeping students at a literal belief stage.\textsuperscript{130} In his next stage, usually experienced in early adolescence, Fowler describes a stage of ‘synthetic conventional’ faith. At this stage the adolescent is no longer limited to the constraints of manipulating concrete operations and begins to construct ideals, becoming self-conscious and able to synthesize disparate perspectives, values and beliefs. This synthesis while deeply held, is tacit and not yet an object of critical reflection and inquiry. Critical reflection occurs at the next stage, that of ‘individual-reflective’ faith. Of the seven stages, these three stages describing the development of faith in school children beg some questions when one considers the growing research into children’s spirituality and its attention on children’s own perspectives.


\textsuperscript{127} Piaget, \textit{The Child and Reality: Problems of Genetic Psychology}.

\textsuperscript{128} Daniel Levinson, \textit{The Season’s of Man’s Life} (New York: Knopf, 1978).

\textsuperscript{129} Fowler, \textit{Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian}, 40.

\textsuperscript{130} For a discussion of the disconnection between teacher and student believing styles in Victorian Catholic schools and the questions this raises see: Pollefeyt and Bouwens, \textit{Identity in Dialogue}, 301.
Gareth Matthews, who works in philosophizing with children, rejects a stage approach because it underestimates the capabilities of children. He holds that in his experience “children’s contributions may be quite as valuable as any we adults have to offer.”

Leuven theologian and author Annemie Dillen, too, critiques stage theory in spiritual development: “Classical developmental psychology tends to see children in terms of ‘not-yet’, in terms of the aim of development.” If, as in Fowler’s theory, the mature adult religious stage is the apex of achievement and the end of the journey so-to-speak, then anything less is seen in terms of deficit. Dillen goes on to explain that when children are treated with a deficit approach, the main focus of interaction with them is to attend to their lack of competencies or responsibilities. In this way, Dillen notes, it might be labelled as ‘adultism’ which “… holds that children should be treated differently because they are not adults, even in those instances where age is not a decisive factor.”

Adultism prevents children being taken seriously and may also prevent their full contribution to the religious community. David Hay presents a similar objection when he says: “The major problem is their (developmental theories) narrowness, coming near to dissolving religion into reason and therefore childhood spirituality into nothing more than a form of immaturity or inadequacy.” The critique of stage theory is also taken up by psychologist of religion, Dirk Hutsebaut who writes: “One should question some fundamental assumptions of linear models and certainly the definition of the last and highest stage.” He goes on to say there is value in using the different stages as options, but not as being necessarily related to each other linearly.

In closing then, stage theory is an important model in that it proposes to teachers that children’s spirituality or faith can be developed and is not simply a private sphere outside


133 Dillen, “Between Heroism and Deficit,” 63.


their influence. It alerts teachers to the descriptions of different spiritual stages and possibilities which they are able to support and develop in their students. However, if the linear trajectory is held too literally, stage theory has its short comings. For some teachers it may encourage them to passively accept the stage the child is at and decline to actively engage students in deepening their spiritual potential, perhaps in the belief they are not ‘ready’ intellectually or capable to embark on the next stage. Another effect may be that teachers consider children’s stages to be inferior and not take them seriously or recognize their contributions and possibilities, holding back growth. It may prevent teachers from granting them full participation in the faith community.

**Spirituality as Developmental: Process Theory**

Organised around constructive developmental theory, process theory acknowledges the contextual and relational impacts on identity and spiritual development. A process model, unlike stage theory does not assume that learning waits on development or maturity; rather that learning impacts development and even precedes it, leading the way. Models such as the Zone of Proximal Development by Vygotsky\(^\text{137}\) are influential in considering learning and development in education today. In his learning theory, Vygotsky describes the social aspect of learning: “Human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them.”\(^\text{138}\) This dynamic and communal aspect of learning is one that is critical when considering spiritual development. The process by which students are invited to grow into the intellectual life of their faith community is also a spiritual growth that is heavily influenced (and may be constrained) by the quality of the community language, ideas and aspirations that are brought to the dialogue.\(^\text{139}\)

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\(^{139}\) For more about ways understanding is constrained and influenced by the borders of contextual factors, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern McGee, (1986; repr., Austin: University of Texas, 2013). Communitarian philosophies of learning are also an
may take the form of a search for purpose, meaning, connection and contribution, results in the development of a personal spiritual identity.”\textsuperscript{140} They go on to suggest this search is intrinsic to all humans and experienced and shaped in community. While Templeton and Eccles propose this search as a universal human propensity to develop a spiritual identity, they do not attend to the attributes of the ‘something’ which is greater than the self, or describe the resulting spirituality. The process understanding of spiritual development focusses on the search, rather than the end goal. The following two methods discussed below, are both process oriented and are chosen for illustration and analysis because they are both pedagogical approaches commonly used in Victorian Catholic schools.

**Hermeneutic-Communicative Model**

The search for meaning and the resulting identity construction as the process of religious education is the subject of empirical research undertaken extensively in the Netherlands and Belgium through Leuven University, under the direction of Didier Pollefeyt.\textsuperscript{141} The research highlights the importance of understanding the social context for Religious Education and the need to open up multiple interpretations through an engaging educational process that unpacks theological content with open questions concerning human experience. Academic research and writing from Catholic University Leuven reflects a strong emphasis on the heritage of the Second Vatican Council and its theological focus on reading and interpreting the signs of the times and the hermeneutic processes this involves. The hermeneutic-communicative model\textsuperscript{142} currently shaping religious education pedagogy in Flanders “enables children to learn to know the Catholic tradition and to ask critical

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\textsuperscript{141} The following article gives a full account of the faculty’s developing interest: Annemie Dillen, “Hermeneutics in Real Life: Practical Theology in Flanders (Belgium),” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 12 (2008).

\textsuperscript{142} Pollefeyt, “Belgium: the Hermeneutic-Communicative Model a Feasible Option?”
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questions that deepen their insight and their engagement.” Its aim is “to help people construct their life stories, to build their identities in relation to and in confrontation with sources from their traditions and contemporary experiences, and to do so with others.” In his work *The Difference of Alterity*, Pollefeyt grounds the hermeneutic-communicative model in the concept of the human person as a hermeneutical being: that is a seeker of meaning and an interpreter or translator. In his essay *The Lustre of Life* Pollefeyt expands on the notion of the hermeneutical being, describing “the nature of man as a ‘fragile hermeneutical space.’” Pollefeyt explains the anthropology underpinning the hermeneutic-communicative concept of religious education where the human person is:

...a ‘life-filled’ ‘image of God’, is receptive and has the ability to be creative in the development of his or her own life. It means that not everything about being human is or can be predetermined... (The person is) a ‘fragile hermeneutical space’. The essence of a human being consists of a radical openness to reality, an essential indeterminateness, an ability to transcend his or her own reality.

A shift in anthropological understanding lies at the heart of the shift in religious pedagogy for Pollefeyt. He notes that in the past it was assumed that the best way of understanding being human was in essence religious, leading to a mono-correlative approach to religious education. In this approach, Pollefeyt explains, human experience revealed the true meaning of tradition and the Christian tradition illuminated the true meaning of human experience. Christianity and human experience were structurally connected. It closed the opportunity for meaning making as the answers to life’s questions became predictably trite.

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144 Dillen, “Hermeneutics in Real Life: Practical Theology in Flanders (Belgium),” 377-378.


148 Pollefeyt identifies that this approach was influenced by the correlation theology of Paul Tillich in the late 1950’s. Pollefeyt, “The Difference of Alterity: A Religious Pedagogy for an Interreligious and Interideological World,” 307-309.
simplistic references to Christianity. A hermeneutic-communicative approach acknowledges there are many ways to interpret human reality and while human experience can correlate with Christian traditions, it does not necessarily have to do so. This allows for a less predictable learning arc in religious education and greater engagement, encouraging diverse and critical thinking; however, it relies heavily on the teacher to be a living “Christian correlation”\textsuperscript{149} or witness in the process through their personal testimony. The hermeneutic-communicative model links strongly with current educational philosophy that is influential in the Australian secular context and practiced by teachers in Catholic schools. The approach emphasizes the relational character of learning through the constructivist philosophy of teaching and learning.\textsuperscript{150} For constructivists, as for those subscribing to the hermeneutic-communicative model: “human knowledge and thought are themselves ... fundamentally cultural, deriving their distinctive properties from the natural social activity of language, discourse and other cultural forms.”\textsuperscript{151} However, there is a danger in adopting a constructivist approach that there be complacency around thinking humans are able to construct autonomously their own reality or truth. As hermeneutical beings engaged in making meaning from birth, language that shapes thought begins the process of forming and informing the hermeneutical space that continually evolves with each relationship and experience. The Catholic academic and theological tradition offers a particular perspective in approaching constructivist philosophy of education that avoids relativism and calls both teachers and students to be endlessly responsive to the “irreducible relationship”\textsuperscript{152} with the other which may open encounter with the transcendent Other. The hermeneutic-communicative model designs powerful learning experiences which focus on reflecting on and building the identity of the learner. Learner identity in turn impacts the knowledge created in a reciprocal relationship. It is an identity building and meaning making process

\textsuperscript{149} Pollefeyt, “The Difference of Alterity,” 311.


\textsuperscript{152} Levinas, \textit{Totality and Infinity, an Essay on Exteriority}, 79.
that skills the student to deal with diversity and “is like a thought experiment: it challenges young people to reconsider their own stories from a different angle, from the possibility of ‘it could be otherwise.’”153 In practice, constructivist and hermeneutic approaches both call for a learning centred approach rather than a teaching centred approach, shifting the focus from effective teaching to effective learning. It places the teacher as a co-learner in the learning process as well as a facilitator of learning.

The teacher brings a level of awareness of what’s at stake in the dialogue to the hermeneutical interplay which teaches students “to deal with freedom of choice ... to deconstruct the truth and then reconstruct a view of life with the building blocks of experience and tradition, in confrontation with the teacher’s personal, Christian synthesis of faith.”154 The teacher is a critical player in the dialogue, presenting the Christian tradition as open and itself plural, while also introducing other faith traditions to stimulate a multiplicity of connections between theology, human experiences and other world views. The initial stimulus is generated from the students themselves, ensuring the relevance of the dialogue and the engagement of the students. The role of the teacher is described by Pollefeyt as threefold: as a witness to the faith, a specialist in the Christian and other religious traditions, and a moderator155 which allows the voices of all to be heard and to gather from the student voice, that which will powerfully engage learning. This daunting role description is one which requires ongoing professional dialogue to support the teacher’s development and spiritual identity.

The hermeneutic-communicative model challenges and encourages students and teachers to be open to multi-correlative meanings that emerge in dialogue with human experience, the Christian tradition and other world views. It challenges teachers to be in touch with their own as well as their students’ fragile hermeneutical space, the spiritual space of the human being where God’s self-communication is encountered sometimes as an intimate knowing in the everyday, sometimes as an interruption in otherness and mystery. For Pollefeyt, this God comes from elsewhere (autrement qu’être in the words of Emmanuel Levinas). The

153 Roebben, Seeking Sense in the City, 116.


intellectual community that nurtures such dialogue must set a high value on critical thinking and ongoing professional learning for teachers in order to grapple with the demands of such a model. It must also be committed to providing a safe space where the fragility of the person is acknowledged and respected in the work of identity construction and in grappling with faith seeking understanding. The learning community must maintain openness to and awareness of the encounter which is at the heart of revelation and the core of the spiritual experience of being human.

**Shared Christian Praxis**

The Shared Christian Praxis model is one promoted and devised by Thomas Groome who is based in Boston University and has found favour in some of the Victorian Dioceses. It too is a process model of religious education and Groome points out the critical need to set the methodology on firm anthropological foundations describing a ‘Catholic anthropology’ the defining character of which is ‘realistic optimism.’\(^ {156}\) He enlarges on this with ten ‘aspects’ which make up his picture of a Catholic Christian which “suggest the contours of the ‘dwelling’ that a Catholic Christian anthropology understands as the ‘home’ of a human being.”\(^ {157}\) These ten aspects which are a reflection of the biblical foundations of Catholic aspirations such as ‘essentially good and dignified’ and ‘partner in community,’ combine to describe a ‘humanitas anthropology’ which for Groome “gives an overall sense of who we are.”\(^ {158}\) The ‘we’ indicates that Groome is clear his audience is a committed Christian community who agree internally with his vision of humanity and the world. His five step method relies heavily on the role of the teacher to “cooperate as the resource person and question raiser, as guide and coach, as companion and friend, and to see to it that learners have vital access to the knowledge, wisdom, and aesthetic of the sciences, humanities and arts.”\(^ {159}\) No less a daunting role description than that of the hermeneutic-communicative method above, Groome goes on to describe the need for teachers’ commitment to treat


\(^ {157}\) Groome, *Educating for Life*, 74.

\(^ {158}\) Groome, *Educating for Life*, 74.

\(^ {159}\) Groome, *Educating for Life*, 104.
their students as active agents in their learning and to educate them to live in ‘right relationship.’ At the heart of Groome’s philosophy of religious education is his belief that people should be enculturated into the faith, that is to say, the faith should be taught through the practices of the faithful.\textsuperscript{160} This principle of ‘shared praxis’ firmly situates the believer in a community of faith, informed by Scripture and tradition, and in conversation with the contemporary world. The role of the faith community in shaping religious identity includes engaging with its symbols, stories and images. Similar to a Shared Christian Praxis model is that proposed by Karen-Marie Yust. She explores the role of the faith community and holds that: “For children to develop a ... relationship with the images and characters of their faith tradition, they must see these images and characters frequently.”\textsuperscript{161} Yust is describing a pre-catechetical space that may or may not provide the impetus for a child to request membership of the faith community. The religious community she describes is one culture in what she terms a ‘bicultural’\textsuperscript{162} world that children live in. This world is often set over-against the local culture of friendships (outside of the religious community), networks and daily city life. For Yust, the cultivation of religious identity is one that requires intentional encounters with religious practices and with adult role models of faith. She notes: “Children probe the authenticity of adult spirituality, much as they test the sincerity of parental ultimatums.”\textsuperscript{163} Yust maintains that if adults cannot express the power of spirituality to shape their lives, children are likely to become indifferent. Her educative model is one of socialisation into a ‘second’ culture and to “embrace a bicultural identity.”\textsuperscript{164}

While Yust embeds her approach within the classic divide between secular and sacred worlds by seeking a friendly détente, Groome attempts to bridge the divide through


\textsuperscript{162} Yust, Real Kids, Real Faith, 28.

\textsuperscript{163} Yust, Real Kids, Real Faith, 40.

\textsuperscript{164} Yust, Real Kids, Real Faith, 32.
including both worlds in the conversation with students and their issues and experiences.
He presents a more formative approach which risks promoting a kerygmatic dialogue. The hermeneutic-communicative model identifies not two, but multiple world views, embracing the dialogical principle of Vatican II. It acknowledges truth in other traditions, and seeks to illuminate the experiences of spiritual encounter in the world, in the Christian and other faith communities and in the other, through dialogue. In each process approach the interplay between context and intent will determine the learning experience. It is apparent that Groome and Yust presume an active and supportive faith community as the learning context which includes parents. Their intent is to offer students an authentic experience of belonging to a Christian faith community through engagement with the faith community and in experiencing the symbols and rituals of the tradition. This may assist students in their religious identity construction encouraging them to adopt – if not the religion – at least its values. The hermeneutic-communicative model assumes a context inclusive of difference and diversity: students of no faith, other faiths and a range of Christian faith profiles. The intention is to offer students a dynamic experience of dialogue and meaning making with the Christian tradition as a privileged partner as they construct their faith identity. Through the dialogue there is a possibility of shaping the emerging faith tradition and its impact in the world. Catholic schools must seek to understand their own context and clarify their intentions for students in determining the most appropriate learning experiences in religious education.

In summary then, process theory is a dynamic understanding of religious education where the teacher plays an active role, as does the community of students and their worlds. In the methods discussed above, the teacher is a critical ingredient, holding the key to creating an environment where each learner is heard, respected and nurtured as individuals and as contributors to a learning and faith community. In the process, students are invited to contribute to a hope-filled future. However, in the case of the hermeneutic-communicative model, the dialogical character of the Christian faith is acknowledged as the ground of radical openness to the other and the source of recontextualisation of the tradition itself.

165 Kerygmatic dialogue is the over-eagerness “to communicate and promote a Catholic point of view... (where) little attention is paid to differing points of view, religious beliefs or cultural practices” that are present. Pollefeyt and Bouwens, Identity in Dialogue, 274-278.
Overall, developmental theory has found favour with researchers of children’s spirituality and teachers of religious education following in the footsteps of cognitive psychology and expanding it with communitarian, constructivist and hermeneutic philosophies of learning. In a Catholic school context, developmental theory and in particular, process theories of spiritual development have focussed on ways spiritual identity is formed, attending to the experiences of grappling with questions of ultimacy informed by the Christian spiritual tradition.

**Spirituality as Non-Developmental**

While many of the understandings of children’s spirituality in the following discussion are about the child’s innate spirituality, this is not necessarily contrary to the developmental understandings discussed above. In fact the understandings revealed in the following discussion concur with understandings of children’s spirituality in general and are not to be seen as excluding any concept of spirituality as able to grow or develop. This section merely highlights a different approach to understanding children’s spirituality both methodologically – being more empirically focussed on children’s experiences and voice than theory; and educatively – using terms of nurturing rather than development.

Children’s spirituality may be seen as beginning with conversion in a way not directly related to human development, as discussed by Borgman\(^\text{166}\) where he notes particular religious traditions mark the beginning of spiritual life through ritual and special acknowledgement of a conversion experience. Spirituality may also be understood as inherent which may be observed in children at play or with peers in unstructured experiences, as discussed by Ratcliffe and Nye\(^\text{167}\), Hay and Nye\(^\text{168}\) and through personal interviews and children’s drawings in Robert Coles’ seminal work “The Spiritual Life of Children.”\(^\text{169}\) Coles as a psychiatrist affirms humanity’s spiritual nature or anthropology: “Our rock-bottom nature, I

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166 Borgman, “Bridging the Gap: From Social Science to Congregations, Researchers to Practitioners,” 438.
169 Coles, The Spiritual Life of Children.
would argue, is not psychological. It is ultimately spiritual.”\textsuperscript{170} While this spiritual nature is not necessarily developmental in character, Coles indicates that through self-awareness and reflection it can be enhanced. A non-developmental understanding of children’s spirituality can lead to either romanticising or essentialising the child on the basis of their spirituality, or deeply appreciating and respecting the child as spiritual and able to illuminate adult spiritual understandings. These alternatives are discussed below.

**Romanticising the Child**

Often when the child is held to have a ‘special’ quality or attribute that endears him or her to God, the description of their spirituality takes on moral overtones of ‘purity’ and innocence, as not yet despoiled by sin, indeed as little angels. John Wall\textsuperscript{171} takes up this idea of childhood and its impact in Christian ethics, tracing the ideas of Rousseau\textsuperscript{172} and Schleiermacher\textsuperscript{173} and their continuing influence today: “In effect, Rousseau takes the early Christian view of childhood simplicity and infuses it with the Enlightenment individualism. This allows him to add the notion that children’s natural potential is not just a model for adult society but its very wellspring of justice and renewal.”\textsuperscript{174} In effect the child becomes a highly romanticised version of the best of ‘natural’ humanity as originally intended and an ever-present reminder of the goodness to which it is never possible to return. Wall identifies Schleiermacher as looking “to childhood for the concrete experience of divine love and grace.”\textsuperscript{175} In this romantic notion of the child, something of a unique connection to God is irretrievably lost when innocence is lost. Wall poses an alternative to adults forlornly attempting to protect their children from a corrupt world; proposing that adults should instead assist children to realize “their own creative powers within the fundamentally

\textsuperscript{170} Coles, *The Spiritual Life of Children*, 278.


\textsuperscript{174} Wall, “Childism and the Ethics of Responsibility,” 244-245.

\textsuperscript{175} Wall, “Childism and the Ethics of Responsibility,” 247.
broken human situation.”

Annemie Dillen has addressed the subject of reifying a child’s innocence in a rich discussion aptly titled: *Neither Angels nor Devils*. Here she examines the trend in modern western cultures to set children apart in institutions such as schools and day care in order to care for them in ways that protect them in their perceived vulnerability and at times in ways that sacralises their innocence, turning them into saints. Dillen calls this “pedagogisation.” She enlarges this theme as she explores the challenges to researching children’s spirituality, identifying that often the child’s voice is either neglected, or only the positive attributes of the child are taken into account. Dillen proposes that in neither of these approaches is the child is being taken seriously as a spiritual being.

Spirituality as inherent is discussed by Scarlett in addressing the ‘Spiritual Child’ movement of the past twenty years. He understands that this movement in many ways was a reaction against a perceived too cognitive approach to children’s spirituality in developmental theories, holding that this movement directs the focus to a biological capacity for spirituality. Scarlett maintains that there is an acknowledged cognitive element in being able to step back and be aware of spiritual experience, “this ability is present at very young ages, as young as 4 by some accounts, but certainly by 6.” He criticizes the approach for being unable to address the question of how the innate capacities mentioned

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179 Dillen, “Neither Angels, nor Devils,” 196. This term can refer to treating children as blank sheets or as morally immature with a tendency towards sin and needing socialisation.
180 Dillen, “Between Heroism and Deficit.”
are to be developed, due to the passive and private nature of the innate spiritual qualities. David Hay proposes that spiritual or religious knowing is a different way of knowing, where spiritual awareness, which is more sensory than cognitive, is enhanced through ritual, symbol and contemplation or meditation. He notes: “Such (spiritual) awareness appears to be an extremely subtle and delicate phenomenon, but one which I have been claiming is rooted in our biological make-up.” The tendency to see spirituality as innate in children makes for a more organic and holistic aesthetic with the language of spiritual education couched in terms of nourishment and nurture, often set against specific teaching methodologies; characterising curricula in educational settings as hostile to the growth of spiritual awareness. Hay advises: “The task of nourishing spirituality is one of releasing, not constricting, children’s understanding and imagination.” The implication being that a traditional educational context restricts spiritual growth. Relational consciousness, a universal human trait which Hay and Nye name is at the heart of spiritual awareness, is able to be nurtured by enlightened teachers who have four main responsibilities: helping children to stay open-minded, exploring new perspectives, encouraging personal awareness, and being herself aware of all dimensions of spirituality. These roles may appear to be less demanding than those described for teachers engaged in the process approach above, however, they indicate a personal disposition which is important for teachers to demonstrate if they are to effectively draw out children’s innate spirituality and are indeed foundational to teaching a process approach as well.

Dillen explores the common use of scripture passages referring to children as influencing the perception of the child as: “powerless, weak, dependent, in need of care, open to others and to transcendence and trusting.” She goes on to say that often these characteristics are held up as an example for adult spirituality, which presents a limited concept of spirituality as well as of children. However, she holds that it is not easy to apply New

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Testament texts about children to the context of today. She advocates a ‘resistant reading’ technique, confronting the texts with the idea of the ‘competent child.’ Dillen shows how Mark 10:14-15 is often used to promote an understanding of children as privileged in their relationship with Jesus. In her words, it essentialises the notion of a child as passive and naturally attracted to the notion of the Kingdom of God. Dillen mentions some alternative readings of this scripture passage which can illuminate the vulnerability and innocence of children, without limiting them to this single expression of spirituality.

In summary, children are often pigeon holed as vulnerable, innocent and having – through their unique openness – a ‘special’ relationship with God. When teachers romanticise or essentialise the child and seek to protect their innocence, they are prevented from appreciating the full depth of the child’s competencies and may often be fearful of trespassing into the domain of the ‘special’ and private relationship the child is assumed to have with God. It gives teachers no opportunity then to actively develop their competencies or open new spiritual experiences with the child. The alternative is to respect the child as a child, acknowledging they are somewhere between a saint and a sinner, as are we all.

**Respecting the Child**

The literature reflects a reaction against the notion of childhood as an inferior stage and equally against notions of the child as romantic ideal. Respecting the child as child is a theme that is apparent in much of the literature which takes a theological stance. Piercing the private nature of children’s spirituality is the subject of psychologist and educationalist Tobin Hart who interviews children, parents and adults in his research. He holds that adults often make assumptions about children as unable to enter into ‘God-talk’ and thereby miss discovering children’s innate spirituality. Contrary to the idea of spirituality

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being a quest for meaning as identified in the sections above, Hart proposes that: “spirituality lives beyond the rational and beyond thoughts about God.” 190 He explains that unless adults are aware of their own spirituality, they may be unable to recognize it in children. It is through moments of revelation in conversation with children, or observing children that adults are able to learn about the spirituality of the child, which is demonstrated in five innate capacities: wonder, wondering, wisdom, the meeting between you and me, seeing the invisible. 191 Hart puts forward the view that spirituality is able to be developed. For Hart it is a process that naturally “unfolds in the direction of love and wisdom.” 192 He describes his book as an offering of prayer for spiritual nourishment and should be read as an inspirational and inspired work, which, like the work of Robert Coles 193 demonstrates a disposition of openness to learning from children’s spirituality. This disposition is one also reflected in the work of Annemie Dillen. Her writing deals with both parent-child and teacher-child relationships and the reciprocal nature of these. She proposes that we must take children seriously 194 and respect them and the competencies they already demonstrate. She argues that just as with sexism and racism, “adultism entails an arbitrary judgment about difference.” 195 In her view children are not completely different from adults and she seeks to strike a balance in approaching the spirituality of children; a balance between inviting and listening to the voices of children, seeing them as guides and teachers; and caring for them by giving some “religious and spiritual input, ideas and practices they learn from others.” 196 Dillen develops this theme in her discussion of empowering children in the context of nurturing children’s spirituality. 197 She holds that...

193 Coles, The Spiritual Life of Children.
195 Dillen, “Children between Liberation and Care,” 240.
196 Dillen, “Children between Liberation and Care,” 248.
“nurturing children’s spirituality is aimed at empowering children and thus at stimulating the ‘power within’ children.”

This means the teacher stimulates the student’s inner strength and helps them to express their insights and experiences and find ways of accessing their inner resources in difficult times. She also encourages teachers to share power in a ‘power with’ approach that is heavily reliant on positive and trusting teacher student relationships, where mutual respect is key.

Catholic theologian Karl Rahner has devoted serious theological attention to a theology of childhood which still serves as one of the few works to do so in his Ideas for a Theology of Childhood. For Rahner, childhood is not just a phase of life. By measuring children in relation to the span of life, children will always be regarded as ‘not-yet adults.’ However, the end point of life varies for each individual. Rahner points out that we are actually all becoming, equally, yet in children can be seen a greater proportion of the becomingness.

For Rahner, the child represents openness and possibility: “Childhood is openness. Human childhood is infinite openness. The mature childhood of the adult is the attitude in which we bravely and trustfully maintain an infinite openness in all circumstances and despite the experiences of life which seem to invite us to close ourselves.”

In Rahner’s understanding, childhood is not something we lose as an adult, but continue to hold within ourselves and treasure as a source of openness and renewal, coexisting as a perspective within the adult frame. Children’s spirituality is openness, one which as Hinsdale notes is a window into relationship with God: “The infinite openness of childhood is the promise of

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the eschatological future that is the gift of God.” Protestant theologian Jensen has also developed a theology of childhood in which he highlights the vulnerability of children as “a fact of the God-given relatedness into which all persons are born.” He proposes that while children are vulnerable, this should not afford an opportunity to belittle them or ignore their contribution to adult lives and learning. He acknowledges “children already are fully alive, fully present, fully endowed with promise in God’s world.” Like Rahner, he neither identifies children as exactly the same as adults, nor describes them as so very different: “To be a child then, is to begin this course of life – nothing more, nothing less.”

In summary, the literature demonstrates the child as a spiritual being is one to be listened to and respected and who may even serve as a teacher and guide for adult spirituality. The infinite openness of the fragile hermeneutical space of which Pollefeyt speaks is one where God’s self-communication occurs and the infinite possibility of human life is revealed. This openness defines human spirituality whether adult or child and each person as a spiritual being deserves to be approached with awe, humility and wonder as approaching sacred ground. It is important for human wellbeing and fulfilment that spirituality be attended to – in therapeutic terms nourished and nurtured, or – in educative terms developed, built on and led out for fullness of life. If teachers reflect on how they perceive children’s spirituality, they may be encouraged to identify which of the above approaches most influence their pedagogical choices in religious education and at the same time be open to the impact of their students’ spirituality on them.

Conclusion

The above discussion has highlighted the difficulty of a researcher wishing to say anything about spirituality. Spirituality is an important point of intersection for cross-disciplinary and inter-faith dialogue about human wellbeing and fulfilment, bridging the divide between the


203 Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability*, 49.

204 Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability*, 122.

205 Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability*, 43.
theoretical and practical. From a Christian perspective, spirituality is at the core of the theology of revelation and how the Church engages with the world. It is at the nexus of religious education theory and praxis and a vital element of teacher professional learning in a Catholic school context. Christian spirituality for today is grounded in the dialogical principle of Vatican II theology and the hermeneutical principle of a Christian anthropology. The following themes have emerged from the discussion of the literature.

Throughout the discussion, the influence of the anthropological turn of the context – as one enchanted by the spiritual, the local, the individual and the personal has been identified. The impact of this context is a focus on identity formation as a spiritual and religious pursuit, and also as an educative goal, for both teachers and students. It also impacts teacher professional learning theory with an emphasis on developing teachers’ self-understanding as spiritual guides and leaders as religious educators. The context also produces a new awareness of a tension between a religious spirituality and a non-religious spirituality. For teachers in a Catholic school context this tension challenges them to understand the power dynamics in the classroom and balance their voice, the voice of the Catholic tradition and student’s voices in a respectful power sharing approach.

The leap of faith needed to grapple with spirituality from a religious perspective has come to the fore in each section of the literature. A qualitative difference in understanding the nature of the human person has been identified, impacting the approaches and conclusions of research into spirituality. Understanding the human person as a spiritual being, one made in the image of a relational and dialogical God has implications for educative approaches in religious education. A hermeneutic-communicative approach in religious education may address spiritual development for students that takes into account the pluralising, individualising and de-traditionalising context in Melbourne Catholic schools, while

206 Catholic Education Melbourne has adapted the Hermeneutic-Communicative Model in its ‘Pedagogy of Encounter’ as described in its Religious Education Curriculum Framework 2018. The Pedagogy of Encounter is described in five movements which teachers can dip in and out of as they design an inquiry with and for students in religious education. Each movement is encapsulated by a leading question:

- ‘What do you think and sense?’
- ‘What do others think and why do they think that?’
- ‘What do the Catholic traditions think and teach?’
offering students the wisdom and richness of Christian spirituality in a multi-correlational approach to learning. The need at the same time to maintain a focus on the questions of faith from faith which grapple with the experiences of encounter, revelation and transformation has also been put forward and these questions form an integral part of the dialogue at the heart of spiritual development.

Spirituality has been identified throughout the literature as engaging two elements, questing and the sacred. It focuses human questioning on the ‘why’ not the ‘what.’ To ask ‘what’ about the nature of the human person risks closing down the fragile hermeneutical space – the space that questions, wonders and challenges us to transcend what we can grasp. To ask ‘why’ reveals belief in the significance of life even before it can be named. To ask ‘why’ is to encounter otherness and glimpse the sacred which is transformative.

Spirituality is far from being an individual quest and community plays an important role in creating the space for the dialogue of such spiritual questing and exploration of the sacred for students and teachers who, together with parents form a faith and learning community. While being far from a definition, I have come to understand spirituality as experiencing the liminal spaces that provoke the ‘why’ questions of life:

> Spirituality is the human experience of living in the relationship between Transcendence and immanence: between unknowing and knowing, between the call and the response, between belonging and distantiation, between ultimate concerns and the here and now.

Throughout this chapter, the vital role of teachers and leaders in Catholic schools has been emphasised in developing student spirituality. In the next chapter I use the definition of spirituality to devise a two dimensional framework of Christian spirituality which attends to

- ‘How am I called into a deeper relationship with God/ others?’
- ‘What do I think and sense now and why?’

the four tensions in the definition. The theoretical framework is designed as a heuristic to engage teachers in self-reflection and professional dialogue around spirituality for themselves, their practice and their students, bringing a critical awareness of Catholic spiritual identity into the dialogue between theory and practice with a view to enriching student’s education.
Chapter 3
A Two Dimensional Framework of Spirituality

Introduction

In Chapter 2, the discussion of the literature identified three critical issues relating to spirituality which affect teachers of religious education in Catholic schools today: the changing and contested relationship between religion and spirituality, the lack of clarity around spiritual development in education and the importance of on-going teacher development around spirituality.

Firstly, the importance of spirituality for today’s context and its changing definition in relation to religion was revealed in the literature. Enchantment with the personal, the particular and the local, resulting in increased plurality and complexity, has seen an increase in interest in spirituality in Western society, even as it is increasingly perceived to be separate from religion. The discussion in chapter two identified that despite transitioning to a post-Christian society, “we are very far from settling into a comfortable unbelief.” In the writings of Vatican II the foundations of a spiritually focussed Church can be found, a Church conscious of its role as witness to the Christ of encounter as a personal, existential phenomenon in the world. Such encounters are events which respond to the questions and the situations of the times in a way that realizes the Gospel. True to the dialogical principle of Vatican II (Chapter 2) Pope Francis strongly advocates building a culture of encounter, not as a Church renewal, but as a spiritual renewal for humanity. This appeal opens opportunities for teachers of religious education in Catholic schools to find new ways to engage their students in a Gospel that responds to the individualising and pluralising trends in society so students can “learn to live and think their faith ... without falling into relativism

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or neo-traditionalism.”

Christian spirituality offers much to understanding the human condition, offering a vision for a flourishing world, but often remains locked in ‘ad intra’ conversations of questions from faith to faith. Such conversations may not tap into the world of students. The focus of the framework of spirituality devised in this research is to support teachers to seek out opportunities for dialogue with secular perspectives and other religious traditions, expanding students’ horizons to point to the transformative power of the spiritual in human experience.

Secondly, in the previous chapter, spirituality was seen to be regarded as important in education and development, both in secular and religious educational literature. However, there were conflicting understandings about what spirituality in education means and how to develop the spiritual dimension with students. Confusion in the literature does not help clarify teacher decision making around how best to promote students’ spiritual development. A hermeneutic-communicative approach (Leuven) or a pedagogy of encounter approach (Catholic Education Melbourne) to engaging students in religious education was discussed in the chapter and found to use dialogue processes that enabled spiritual development, while acknowledging the power of the spirit at work in the dynamics of the dialogue itself. The framework of spirituality presented below encourages a process approach in its focus on existential questions to engage students in a dialogue between faith and life. However this places a demand on the role of the teacher which requires a supportive intellectual and faith community that is prepared to invest time in their people at the coal face and prepared to enact an open, responsive and flexible ecclesiology.

This then leads to the third critical issue noted in chapter two, which is the extent to which spirituality is acknowledged as important for teachers’ professional self-understanding. On-going professional development that requires teachers to grapple with their tacit beliefs was found in the literature to be crucial, requiring a pro-active whole school community approach to engaging teachers in dialogue around their own spirituality and their beliefs about students’ spirituality. Teachers of religious education in Catholic schools have an almost unique opportunity to engage students in the critical conversations that support them to construct their identity, while at the same time constructing teachers’ own identity

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3 Boeve, *Theology at the Crossroads*, 212.
as spiritual beings and professionals. Finding new ways to support teachers to reflect on and grow in their skills, knowledge and self-understanding as religious educators is vital to ensure quality religious education for their students.

Chapter 3 presents a two dimensional framework of spirituality that addresses the above three issues arising from chapter two. The framework is a reflective tool that can be used in teacher professional development which explores and clarifies understandings of spirituality and religion in a post-Christian culture. Through professional dialogue processes, the framework uncovers teachers’ assumptions and tacitly held beliefs about student spirituality, thereby illuminating the research question: What are teachers’ expectations of and beliefs about their students as spiritual beings and how does this influence their pedagogy in religious education? The framework builds on the definition of spirituality which emerged at the end of the last chapter, a definition that describes spirituality as ‘living in the between’:

Spirituality is the human experience of living in the relationship between the divine and the human: between ultimate concerns and the here and now, between call and response, between belonging and distantiation, between unknowing and knowing. It is in these liminal spaces where human limits are reached and self-transcendence is invoked that the spirit flourishes and humanity comes to fullness. By tapping into existential experiences of encounter and human questing the framework engages teachers in a process of recontextualising the insights and wisdom of the Christian spiritual heritage for their context.

In this chapter the process of the development of the framework is related. This is followed by an explanation of the theory underpinning the two dimensions of the framework. Each paradigm is then presented three ways:

- As a teacher reflection exercise and professional dialogue process
- In relation to the framework’s two dimensions
- In terms of implications for curriculum and pedagogy

Two Dimensional Framework of Spirituality

The framework of spirituality is a practical theological tool which explores spirituality as the intersection between two dimensions: the human and the divine. From the combination of
the two dimensions four paradigms of human experiencing and questing emerge: Vulnerability, Responsibility, Fulfilment and Commitment. (See figure 1 below).

Figure 1 Two Dimensional Framework of Spirituality

Each of the four paradigms has its own descriptor and teacher dialogue process which is included in the explanations below. The framework promotes teacher self-reflection and professional dialogue around their identity and expectations as religious educators in Catholic schools and their beliefs about the spiritual identity of their students. Consistent with rigorous teacher professional development theory, the framework provides teachers with a clear theoretical voice in professional dialogue alongside their own narrative,

4 Diagram graphics created in consultation with Anita Traa Designs

5 See the discussion in Chapter 2, especially Brookfield, Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher.
students’ feedback and the voices of their colleagues. The framework as a heuristic is intended to create dissonance,\(^6\) or uncertainty\(^7\) to stimulate an examination of teachers’ tacit beliefs and assumptions about students’ spirituality and teaching and learning in religious education. It forms an integral component of this research project as part of an Action Research Cycle (Chapter 4) which addresses the research question: What are teachers’ expectations of and beliefs about their students as spiritual beings and how does this influence their pedagogy in religious education? The framework aims to nourish deeper awareness of and understanding about teachers’ and students’ spirituality, promoting critical examination of and stimulating new possibilities for teaching approaches in religious education. It promotes a process or hermeneutical approach to spiritual development in its focus on existential questions, dialogue and human experience.

**Developing the Framework: Using Dual Methodology**

The research question driving the development of the framework is: “What are teachers’ expectations of and beliefs about their students as spiritual beings and how does this influence their pedagogy in religious education?” My work with teachers of religious education in Catholic schools over many years has given me a sense of their needs in relation to developing their understanding of Christian theology and grappling with the ways Christian theology can contribute to conversations about contemporary issues. My experience was consistent with questions raised by the Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project\(^8\) around how teachers were engaging students in religious education (Chapter 1). This reflection began the process of identifying spirituality as the critical connection in an engaging religious education pedagogy which led to the development of the framework presented here. The framework describes spirituality in terms of human experience which is easily interpreted in multiple faith traditions and settings, however, in terms of addressing teacher needs identified above the framework has been illuminated only by Christian theology. Opportunities to explore the quadrants from multiple faith perspectives may be a way of extending the framework for the future. The dual methodology used to develop the

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\(^6\) Timperley et al., *Teacher Professional Learning and Development*, 13.


framework, using both systematic and empirical research in an empirical research cycle is outlined in detail in Chapter 4. In brief, the methodology employs systematic research methodology to synthesize theological concepts in the literature to inform the conceptual framework of the two dimensions and the four paradigms of spirituality which is developed here. Empirical data from exploratory informal interviews with six Catholic primary school teachers gave insights which led to the development of the paradigms. These responses are not part of the formal research data discussed later. The teachers were asked about how they understood spirituality and that of their students, and how they approached learning and teaching in religious education. The teachers’ responses revealed themes and understandings that reflected existential experiences and made tenuous connections to the Christian spiritual heritage. Their responses also indicated teachers were reticent, even apprehensive, about referring to spiritual experience with students. It seemed that teachers were more comfortable with allowing Australian Government wellbeing programs such as You Can Do It\(^9\) and Bounce Back\(^10\) to be the catalyst for opening conversations with students around their feelings and how to be, and be with others.\(^11\) The researcher identified a need to deepen understandings about spirituality, create awareness of the connections between spirituality, religion, personal and communal life experience and pedagogy and to highlight spirituality’s role in student identity construction. When embarking on this formal research process, through systematic research, it became evident that the literature itself presents a confusing picture of what is a complex and nebulous concept, one which is becoming increasingly viewed as separate from religion (Chapter 2). Through an empirical research cycle (Chapter 4) data from formal teacher interviews and focus group discussions combined with systematic data to inform the theoretical framework. This combination of analysing concrete experiences and using theoretical concepts aimed to capture the totality.


\(^11\) These programs, with behavioural psychology as their base, create agendas where teachers address ethical and personal development concerns without reference to a spiritual or religious perspective.
of different experiences of spirituality in a coherent, exhaustive and recognizable model. Inspiration for a visual representation came from David Wulff’s typology of the four different ways people deal with belief content\textsuperscript{12} and Dirk Hutsebaut’s Post Critical Belief scale\textsuperscript{13} which operationalizes it. Originally the two dimensions were conceived as having a Likert scale attached to operationalize the framework. However, in using the framework with teachers in the Empirical Research Cycle methodology of this research (Chapter 4) researcher observation and teacher feedback (Chapter 5) enabled a revision of the way in which the paradigms are presented. The feedback from participants in the research made it clear that a teacher dialogue process was needed to engage with the framework in a collegial approach. This feedback was used to focus on the professional dialogue processes presented below. The professional dialogue process for each paradigm is presented in a boxed text corresponding to the shade of the paradigm as displayed on the framework diagram and introduces the discussion of each paradigm.

Two Dimensions: Theological and Anthropological

Teaching is not reducible to maieutics; it comes from the exterior and brings me more than I contain. (Levinas)\textsuperscript{14} Levinas here proposes teaching as encounter where the Other is revealed, extending and transforming the self. This quote sets the tone for the following discussion of the framework highlighting the qualitative difference in teaching made by welcoming the Other who is “independent of my initiative and my power.”\textsuperscript{15} Spirituality is this qualitative difference, operating in the dialogue between teacher and student, between student and student, and between teacher and teacher in the learning.

The two dimensional framework developed, holds in tension the relationship central to spirituality – the relation between the human and the divine. These two dimensions are integral to the theology of revelation as identified by Australian theologian Gerald O’Collins.


\textsuperscript{14} Levinas, \textit{Totality and Infinity}, 51.

\textsuperscript{15} Levinas, \textit{Totality and Infinity}, 51.
For O’Collins, there is no revelation without a human response: “The very language of revelation implies reception and the establishment of a reciprocal relationship.”\textsuperscript{16} O’Collins builds on a Rahnerian understanding of graced predisposition\textsuperscript{17} to explain that in the event of revelation, not only is something of God disclosed, but the person is revealed to herself in a new way, a transformation that radically alters the person (Chapter 2). The questions of identity therefore intersect with the questions of God. There is a danger in using an axis conceptually in that it has a tendency to polarize the opposite ends, which may lend itself to reductionism. However, an axis is also continuous; holding the two understandings in each axis joined in tension and this is what must be emphasised when coming to terms with the framework. The vertical axis is presented as holding together the two ways the Transcendent is apprehended in classical theology: the Kataphatic and Apophatic traditions. This is the axis Intimacy – Otherness. The Horizontal axis presents the anthropological dimension and represents the classical psychological tension between the passive and active human dispositions. This is the axis Receptive – Responsive. The intersection of the two axes creates four quadrants, identified as paradigms of spirituality or ways of perceiving and naming the Transcendent in human experience.

**The Vertical Axis**

In the diagram above, the vertical axis refers to two ways of apprehending the Transcendent: Intimacy – Otherness, representing the Kataphatic and Apophatic traditions. In his article on Pseudo-Dionysius, the early 5\textsuperscript{th} to 6\textsuperscript{th} century unknown Christian philosopher who influenced the Christian spiritual tradition through his treatise *Mystica Theologia*, author Sheldon-Williams gives a succinct account of the tension between the Apophatic and Kataphatic traditions with which Pseudo-Dionysius grappled:

> God as the absolutely transcendent and unparticipated Unity beyond being, is unknowable and unutterable; and yet he is the source of all being, and indeed the being of all being, and therefore everything can be said of him, for everything participates in his being; and because everything participates in him, everything

\textsuperscript{16} O’Collins, *Revelation*, 77.

\textsuperscript{17} For elaboration on this term see Rahner’s notion of ‘supernatural existential’ in Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 126-133.
aspires to fulfil its being in the nature in which it participates, which is the Divine Nature.\textsuperscript{18}

Here a Kataphatic understanding of the intimate involvement of God in creation, grapples with the otherness of the absolute transcendence of the Apophatic, the author’s ‘and yet’ expressing the paradoxical relationship. The Kataphatic tradition identifies human experience as mediating experience of God, an experience which can be positively connected to and identified. Gerald O’Collins, in his work \textit{Re-thinking Fundamental Theology}\textsuperscript{19} unpacks what is meant by ‘experience’ in relation to revelation. He argues that experience is the medium through which we can know anything, including the Transcendent.\textsuperscript{20} The intimacy with which the human participates in the divine is referred to in the theology of covenantal relationship and relational theology\textsuperscript{21} and is often described in prayer practices and spiritual direction\textsuperscript{22} which involve a ‘drawing near’ to God. In this tradition, it is acknowledged that God’s omnipresence invites limitless expressions about God. While these expressions will always fall short, nonetheless we are compelled to try by the glimpses we have of the divine nature revealed in the everyday and which invite us into union with the divine.

At the other end of the axis Denys Turner in \textit{The Darkness of God}, describes the Apophatic tradition as precisely God hidden from experience, a negative or ‘unexperience’ of God. He refers to the medieval mystics such as Julian of Norwich, John of the Cross and the author of \textit{The Cloud of Unknowing} who lose their sense of self, but are unable to say what that experience is, other than to use metaphors of darkness and light.\textsuperscript{23} The absolute otherness of God can shock, holding us at once enthralled and mute, constantly drawn by the

\textsuperscript{18} Inglis Sheldon-Williams, “The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy of Pseudo-Dionysius—Part I,” \textit{The Downside Review} 82, no. 269 (1964): 293.

\textsuperscript{19} O’Collins, \textit{Rethinking Fundamental Theology}.

\textsuperscript{20} O’Collins, \textit{Rethinking Fundamental Theology}, 37-55.

\textsuperscript{21} For a full treatment of relational theology see Jacques Haers and Peter De Mey, eds., \textit{Theology and Conversation: Towards a Relational Theology} (Leuven: Peeters,2003).


transcendent and yet despairing of our inadequacies before the unknowable. Through the religious language, stories, rituals and symbols of a God of Otherness the liminal experiences of unknowing, of interruption and of paradox are introduced and experienced. These experiences are termed ‘boundary experiences’ by Boeve and are not only restricted to religious settings, but are “… radical events that tend to erupt dramatically, tearing open and shaking our existing narratives, identity constructions and certitudes.” These events can bring into question the very nature of truth.

The traditional Christian belief that the truth lies, not within, but ‘out there’ as an objective, if ever unattainably different reality, affirms its ‘otherness’ and frees truth seeking from forms of universality and abstract principles. Such a concept of truth doubts if there can be life without difference, without the otherness of the Other to bring perspective to the experience of living. While the primordial experience of transcendence can be said to be trans-cultural and above religious expression which, for many today, is the appeal of spirituality over religion, it is impossible to examine and define an ‘essence’ of spiritual experience unclad in language and historical or religious context. The very nature of truth’s contingency and particularity is the power and the paradox of the Apophatic and makes it an appropriate theology appealing to a postmodern sensibility. The Apophatic tradition is applied in this contemporary sense by Lieven Boeve (Chapter 2) and in his essay *The End of Conversation in Theology* where he states: “Of course God has revealed Godself as an “other for us” but could only do so because God is other than us. At the same time, God enables and escapes all God-language.” It is in the particularity of the Christ event that the tension between the Apophatic and Kataphatic is constantly opened up to question and to the possibility of inexhaustible meaning. In the incarnation the infinite is shown in the finite, without being constrained by it.

This axis asks: In what way is the Transcendent experienced? Is it apprehended as beyond knowing, as supernatural mystery and absolute Other encountered unexpectedly –

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sometimes as interruption, as emptiness or loss, sometimes as darkness or confusion? Or is the Transcendent apprehended as intimacy and connectedness, experienced naturally and continuously in the totality of life, mediated by sign, symbol and relationships? Is the Transcendent apprehended through isolated and unpredictable events which can be profound, even ecstatic, but ultimately beyond human understanding; or is the Transcendent apprehended through a continual integration of meaning over time? While these questions present an either/or scenario, the axis acknowledges both ends of the spectrum are held in tension. It is this tension that keeps open the Christian narrative and invites engagement for teachers and students with both the Apophatic and Kataphatic theological traditions.

**The Horizontal Axis**

The horizontal axis refers to the disposition of the self in life experiences: Receptive – Responsive. It concerns the ways in which persons process, engage in and emphasize their experiences. The categories of receptive and responsive commonly arise in psychological studies of personality such as the classical Jungian attitude types: introversion and extraversion. This is noted by psychologist James Barber: “In nearly every study of personality, some form of the active-passive contrast is critical; the general tendency to act or be acted upon is evident in such concepts as dominance-submission, extraversion-introversion, aggression-timidity, attack-defence, fight-flight...” While the category of passive can be interpreted in many ways, in this model, passive is taken to mean a more open disposition, one that receives and reflects, waits, listens and watches. Gerald O’Collins,

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27 For theology of correlation see: Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 6, 232.


in his discussion of the human person at the heart of revelation highlights the active and passive aspects of human experience as explored in philosophy. He notes that there are

... two opposite tendencies in philosophy which, respectively, emphasize unilaterally the active and passive dimensions of experience: On the one hand, idealism in its various forms highlights the activity of the human spirit. On the other hand, empirical strains of philosophy tend to underline one-sidedly the passive aspects of human experience. Any balanced approach should refuse to follow either trend and absolutize the active or the passive side of experience.\(^{30}\)

The use of an axis may tend to separate the extremes of human disposition as either receptive and radically open or responsive and moved to action, however, the axis also represents a continuum which holds the two ends in tension, acknowledging the connection between one’s receptivity and responsivity, even that one is dependent on the other and the two are closely interrelated. However, for many people there is a tendency for one to dominate.

The horizontal axis asks the questions: How is the person disposed to experience life? Is a person more receptive with a radical openness in their disposition towards life or is the person more energised to be responsive and active? Is there a heightened awareness, reflexivity and a listening attitude leading to self-reflection; or is there a movement beyond the self, even a displacement of self, with a focus on responding and taking action?

The two axes: Intimacy – Otherness and Receptive – Responsive combine to form the four paradigms of spirituality: Vulnerability, Responsibility, Fulfilment and Commitment.

It is important to note that this framework does not identify a normative position; rather it is discursive and exploratory, proposing that attention to all four paradigms is important for a full appreciation of spirituality. In saying this, it is vital to keep in mind that the four quadrants presented below are theoretical constructions and in reality, people will always experience a mixture of all four paradigms throughout their life. As theoretical constructions, they may serve the purpose of linking experience with concepts in new ways to generate deeper understanding of spirituality.

\(^{30}\) O’Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology*, 46.
Four Paradigms

The four paradigms are presented as imaginative springboards. Van Manen in his writing on phenomenology explores Italian philosopher Agamben’s fascination for the paradigm as a powerful tool for meaning-making. He explains: “What makes a paradigm so interesting is that it does what concepts, generalizations, ordinary analogies or metaphors cannot do: makes the singular knowable.”

A paradigm makes possible new connections and deeper understanding through an example which links an idea with a phenomenon. In a post-Christian context where religion and God are becoming increasingly esoteric concepts, bringing God into learning conversations in an open, apt and intriguing way can feel unfamiliar for teachers and students alike. In exploring these paradigms, each grounded in human experience and the existential questions of life, teachers may find support to bridge the gap between the theoretical and the practical, between the ideal and experience. Each paradigm presents opportunities for teachers to explore liminal spaces, the spaces of ‘living in the between’ where the confronting questions of life arise and the heart is engaged to find the profound mystery at the centre. This section presents four paradigms as ideas of spirituality described in human experiences. Each paradigm is presented in three sections:

- As a teacher reflection exercise and professional dialogue process presented in boxed text
- In relation to the framework’s two dimensions
- In terms of implications for curriculum and pedagogy

In the first section each paradigm is introduced through a teacher professional dialogue process, presented in the boxed text preceding the discussion of each paradigm. The process was developed through the empirical research cycle as discussed above; being refined through teacher feedback in the focus group discussion data set (Chapter 5). The boxed text shows a process developed to create an opportunity for teachers to engage collegially with each paradigm at three levels: a personal existential level, a broader social level and a theological level. The example from a current newspaper article in each paradigm serves to connect the paradigm to the broader social level and can be substituted

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for other examples from the social sphere or other current issues or articles by those leading the process. The questions in the process at each level brings the conversation back to the professional level by asking what this might mean for students and asking teachers to make the connection between their thinking and their approach to teaching and learning.

In the second section describing each paradigm, the two dimensions are combined to interpret the human experience as spiritual. The paradigmatic experience is then more fully explored using a multi-discipline approach with insights from a variety of fields such as psychology, sociology, philosophy, theology and ecclesiology.

In the third section particular concepts and suggested lines of inquiry into curriculum areas arising from each paradigm are identified for teacher consideration. This section also discusses implications for the learning environment and pedagogy arising from the perspective of each paradigm.
Vulnerability

Teacher Professional Dialogue Process

Consider a time when you have felt vulnerable. What occurred? How did you feel? What impact did it have on you/ others? In small groups, please share what you are comfortable with from your experience.

What insights did your conversation reveal? What was surprising? What does it make you wonder about? How might your students experience vulnerability? How might this relate to questions of God and religion?

A newspaper article reveals a tragic story: “‘Sometimes we have no answers and there is nothing.’ That is what Danielle and Darryl Squires were told by doctors just moments after their three-year-old daughter Monique was diagnosed with incurable brain cancer.” (The Age newspaper 17 April 2018, p. 4).

This article highlights the experience of the Squires family who have had their faith in science and doctors shattered and feel they have no place left to turn. At times like these when our normal take on reality is turned upside down, we are confronted by our helplessness and vulnerability as we try to make sense of our experience. It often prompts the question “What is truth?” or “What sort of God ...?” and “Who can I trust?” Experiences of vulnerability create disruption in self-understanding and we are left feeling exposed, powerless and even despairing. Feelings of vulnerability undermine a sense of trust or identity. Trust in others is not easy to develop in a cultural context that idealizes self-reliance, scientific objectivity and certainty. Moments of vulnerability open us to the contingency of our lives, orienting us to our own dependence and finitude. These moments bring us to the limits of knowledge as we live in the tension between knowing and what is known by other than reason; facing emptiness, uncertainty and doubt. Our vulnerability heightens awareness of the incomprehensible, of mystery and of the infinite.

Spirituality as Vulnerability is to be utterly open to mystery and otherness, to be overcome by a different way of knowing and to relinquish control, even as the self faces crisis or darkness. It is to experience a shock of encounter that unravels the core of self-affirmation to the point where one’s sense of self faces its limits – a self stripped bare. It is to be moved to self-effacement, placing trust and dependence in the Other; a God whose otherness “... exceeds our grasp, a God whom we can know only when we abandon our efforts to impose directions on how that God ought to be.” Faith itself is an elusive and vulnerable process opening us to receive grace from a God of love beyond knowing who we can only hope accompanies us in mystery, uncertainty, even in emptiness and abandonment.

What from the above connects with your thinking? What extends your thinking about vulnerability? What challenges your thinking about spirituality? How might you raise this with students?

In Relation to the Two Dimensions

Figure 2 Vulnerability Paradigm

The Vulnerability quadrant is formed at the intersection of the axes: Otherness/Receptive. In this quadrant, located at the Apophatic end of the axis, the experience of the transcendent is one of difference and otherness which interrupts and enters our space as contrary to what is known or expected, often experienced as singular, spontaneous and ineffable events.\(^3\) At the receptive end of the horizontal axis, the human disposition in this

\(^3\) The Pastoral Research Office in Australia published its September 2013 monthly online newsletter with details of the Religious Experience Research Centre data describing people’s religious experiences. This repository, now located at the University of Wales was started at Oxford in 1969 by Sir Alister Hardy and now holds over six thousand accounts of people’s religious experiences in response to the question: “Have you ever been aware of or influenced by a presence or power, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday self?” Bob Dixon, in his article commented that “only 22% of the accounts in the Hardy Archive use the word ‘God’ to describe the experience they have had. More often they claim that what they communicated with was ‘ineffable’, ‘unknowable’ or ‘indescribable.’” Robert Dixon, “Religious Experience of
quadrant is open and reflective. When the Receptive attitude is combined with encounter with Otherness there is produced a heightened awareness of our absolute dependence on an influence outside ourselves; a sense that we are not in control of life. In extreme experiences such as ecstasy or more commonly in suffering, grief or powerlessness, feelings of vulnerability shake self-sufficiency and shatter a sense of self, leaving us searching for an elusive foundation of trust. In the words of French philosopher Ricœur referring to Greek tragedy: “From this untimely irruption we await the shock capable of awakening our mistrust with respect not only to the illusions of the heart but also to the illusions born of the hubris of practical reason itself.”  

However, it is not only living with tragedy that makes us vulnerable. Spirituality as Vulnerability is to live in the tension between knowing and reaching the limits of knowing; to find ourselves having to ‘un-know’ or to redefine our identity or perspective. We are vulnerable when we encounter otherness and must come to terms with a new horizon that challenges us to let go what has gone before and embrace whatever comes. In times of vulnerability we can no longer trust in what we know and feel, or even trust in how we understand ourselves and the basic structure of reality as we have come to know it. It is to grapple with the existential questions: “What is truth? In whom do I trust?”

**Vulnerability: Seeking a Hidden God**

The discussion below briefly locates vulnerability in contemporary culture and further explores the paradigm as illuminated by selections from mystical theology.

Vulnerability is a human condition associated with the shock of uncertainty brought on by tragedy, disempowerment, suffering, fear and upheaval. Vulnerability can be positive as a catalyst for growth and change, increasing personal or systemic resilience by improving

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inner strength, competence, optimism, flexibility, and the ability to cope effectively when faced with adversity. While scientific knowledge and reason enhances a sense of control and mastery over human vulnerability, there are stages and conditions in life that remain vulnerable such as: childhood, times of self-doubt, illness or trauma, segments of society caught in cycles of poverty and powerlessness and indeed humankind itself at risk of self-destruction. The forces beyond one’s control can cover one with a sense of darkness and helplessness that is overwhelming. Death is the final and inevitable vulnerability that is a condition of life, yet ungraspable in its negation of life, setting one’s identity at naught. Neither proposing a cure for vulnerability nor presenting it as an ideal, Christian traditions offer another perspective to living with vulnerability, challenging Western societal ideals of independence and control.

Experiences of vulnerability resonate with the Apophatic and mystical traditions where what can be said about God is couched in terms of absence, darkness or a blinding light that is illuminating and at the same time inexplicable. In these accounts there is a quality of hiddenness which obscures, while at the same time makes more desirable the fragile experience of communion with the divine. God as Otherness is apprehended as beyond or outside human experience and emphasises the difference between God and humans. Craig Hinkson in his article which compares the theologies of Luther and Kierkegaard discusses the ineffable quality of the Transcendent: “The theologies of Kierkegaard and Luther begin with hiddenness as a necessary qualification of deity. Because God is transcendent and human reason is fallen, He cannot be directly known. To reveal himself, God must wrap himself in sensuous media that veil his deity while manifesting it.”

This hiddenness refutes even human concepts and symbols as noted in Mystica Theologia, the work of fifth-century Syrian monk Pseudo-Dionysius. His writing speaks of a knowledge of God by way of unknowing where “concepts and symbols lead one into a darkness which is an experience of God’s love and the soul is grasped by that love.”

Pseudo-Dionysius greatly influenced the

36 These factors of resilience were named across a range of fields from biology to psychology.


Catholic mystical and Eastern Orthodox Apophatic\textsuperscript{39} tradition which informs this quadrant. This tradition acknowledges that language itself is a limitation when apprehending the Transcendent. Knowing that it is not possible to talk about and therefore communicate the Transcendent in the linguistic, rational sense, this paradigm of spirituality embraces a different kind of knowing which undertakes to ‘un-know.’\textsuperscript{40} For John of the Cross the sixteenth century Spanish mystic, reflecting the writing of Pseudo-Dionysius, the way to God was through the ‘dark night’ beyond images and even thought. A caution in relation to ‘un-knowing’ is that it may have the effect of negating the function of the intellect as a medium for revelation, making fundamentalism an option. Examples of personal encounter with the Transcendent that leaves the recipient overwhelmed and deeply moved can be read in Augustine’s \textit{Confessions}: “You called to me; you cried aloud to me; you broke my barrier of deafness. You shone upon me; your radiance enveloped me; I drew breath and I gasp for your sweet odour. I tasted you, and now I hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am inflamed with love for your peace.”\textsuperscript{41} While this example may express a physical affirmation of union with God, it also expresses a vulnerability and lack of control which is consistent with other mystical writings. These writings concentrate on the personal transformative effects of the spiritual encounter, rather than the ultimate cause of it, emphasizing the otherness of God in relation to the self struggling to communicate the power of the mystery. St Teresa of Avila writes of the intensely personal and overwhelming effect of such an ineffable encounter: “Our Lord also uses other means of rousing the soul; for instance - when reciting vocal prayer, without seeking to penetrate the sense, a person may be seized with a delightful fervour, as if suddenly encompassed with a fragrance powerful enough to diffuse itself through all the senses.”\textsuperscript{42} Termed ‘kenotic’, these experiences are described in terms of emptying the self so as to become entirely receptive

\begin{itemize}
  \item [41] Augustine, \textit{Confessions}, trans. Albert Outler, (Harry Plantinga: \url{planting@cs.pitt.edu}), X. 27, accessed 16 November 2018, \url{https://www.ling.upenn.edu/courses/hum100/augustinconf.pdf}.
\end{itemize}
to divine will. Experiences such as these are unsettling, intense and spontaneous and seem foreign to contemporary sensibilities and post enlightenment thinking. Taken to extreme, mystical experience can lead to spiritual exhaustion as high levels of awareness and personal receptivity are hard to maintain. The experience of God’s silence or absence; or a discontinuing of intense personal encounter may also be difficult to understand and testing to endure, as revealed in the writings of the mystics.

Reports of intense mystical experiences tend to be relegated to the historical archives of the Church, with a more Kataphatic mysticism finding resonance with a modern sensibility such as found in the writings of Ignatius of Loyola, who brings to his spirituality a focus on the events of the life death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, the extraordinary experiences of the mystics explore the limits of human experiencing and knowing and grapple with the influence of the unknowable and of mystery. It engages us in the deconstruction of knowledge and the things we cannot know, reminding us that “we are not at the source of things, we do not have access to this source and we are not its master.”

The Apophatic tradition still has a vital role to play in the dialogue with Western postmodern culture, reminding the Church that the Christian God is one “… who exceeds our grasp, a God whom we can know only when we abandon our efforts to impose directions on how that God ought to be.”

The Apophatic and mystical traditions encourage the Church to pray; for in prayer we acknowledge that we are not self-sufficient and that we come with empty hands, even as we open ourselves to trust in a hidden God. A Church that aligns itself with the vulnerable is one that constantly grapples with its own assumptions about God and challenges the self-sufficiency with which it constructs its own narrative, holding that the God of the Christian story can never become a captive of that story.

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44 Lennan, *Risking the Church*, 241.

45 “In prayer we recall our utter dependence on God.” Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability*, 116.

Vulnerability Paradigm: Implications for Curriculum and Pedagogy

The following discussion identifies some opportunities this paradigm presents for teachers to raise awareness of the irreducible other with students. It is in meeting the limits experienced in vulnerability that a space of uncertainty and tension between knowing and unknowing is opened and the very nature of trust and faith become the focus of the dialogue between teachers and students. The paradigm of vulnerability operates in the receptive mode for learning which encourages self-reflection and openness. Questions can be raised around cultural values of individualism and self-sufficiency in relation to issues of interdependence and trust in others. This quadrant highlights the opportunity to pose questions about identity, God, trust and the reciprocal nature of faith and revelation (Chapter 2). It also leads to the deeper question of what it is to know, exploring the nature of scientific knowledge and religious knowledge. Human brokenness and the vulnerability of losing oneself in grief, suffering, abandonment, or ecstasy are all subjects for deep reflection and prayer. Young children are vulnerable in their powerlessness and often lack opportunity to voice their experiences of vulnerability. Opening up students’ feelings of loss, anxiety and confusion are sometimes the topics of wellbeing programs.\(^{47}\) While these secular programs focus on resilience and positive behavioural outcomes, they may move on to action too quickly and overshadow and minimize opportunities to be receptive to the legitimate vulnerabilities inherent in classroom learning situations and in the life experiences of the students. Adapting these programs to make connections to experiences of prayer and the Christian spiritual heritage can offer a depth of appreciation of vulnerability where the possibilities and paradoxes of a hidden God offer points of reference for exploring questions about life; points that are not easily reconciled, but precisely therefore, important to raise.

In opening up such a curriculum focus, teachers need to acknowledge their own vulnerability and that of their students. In his 2003 work *The Secret Spiritual World of Children* psychologist Robin Hart describes children as possessing rare spiritual insights. For Hart children’s naiveté, despite making them vulnerable, is the very condition which gives them insights into the Transcendent: “In spite of their naiveté in the ways of the world,


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children often show a remarkable capacity for cutting to the heart of the matter. While they may not have the language or the thinking capacity of an adult, they have the capacity to open to the deep currents of consciousness. Through that opening may come a still, small voice, a pearl of insight, or maybe an angel."\(^{48}\) While Hart’s expression may verge on romanticising the child (Chapter 2), his view acknowledges that even a young child can be a valid dialogue partner and from their vulnerability contribute to new insights for living. Teachers who share in vulnerability with their students establish a sense of trust in venturing into and leaving open the unanswerable. A learning community that makes it possible to hear even the most vulnerable of voices and is ready to live with the tension of uncertainty lays the foundations for a humble and open society and Church.

In summary, spirituality as vulnerability radically opens us to the shock of encounter with otherness, which frees us from the strain of mastery and control to consent to trust in the presence of a hidden God. For teachers this quadrant focusses attention on uncovering the still, small voices within, seeking truth that remains open and exploring a variety of ways of knowing that heighten awareness to the deeper currents of consciousness.

Responsibility

Teacher Professional Dialogue Process

Consider a time when you have felt called upon in a profound way. What occurred? How did you feel? What impact did it have on you/others? In small groups, please share what you are comfortable with from your experience.

What insights did your conversation reveal? What was surprising? What does it make you wonder about? How might your students experience a call to responsibility? How might this relate to questions of God and religion?

In an article about the impending New Caledonia vote on independence, French president Macron was quoted addressing the referendum: “We will not forget the pain of colonisation. We must recognise the place of each person, to look directly at each other.” (The Age, Monday May 7 2018 p. 15).

At certain times we are confronted by the other in our lives, in all their difference, called to acknowledge their situation and discern what it asks of us in response. Macron’s appeal to voters to face each person is an appeal which imbues each person with dignity as an individual within the global picture of society and history and which draws a response based not on ideology but on compassion. In a face to face encounter with the other, we are called on to respond in a local context such as family and interpersonal relationships or globally through political, economic or ecological actions. Heeding the call of ‘the other’ as we look directly at him/her, leads one to embrace an ethic of service and responsibility - not as a moral duty or obligation, but in a spirit of joy discovered in responding to the infinite possibility in the other encountered. In moments of encounter we ask “Who calls me? How must I respond?”

In the Catholic tradition the profound nature of encounter is grounded in a belief that the human person is made in the image of God. In the face of the other, one encounters God: the Other who “escapes my grasp by an essential dimension.” William Desmond expresses this encounter as a shock: “It is the shock of God that shakes us into seeing the face of the other as a reminder of the ethical service." Encounter with difference or otherness can shake us into awareness of the infinite unknown and profound dignity of the other, placing us in tension between call and response. Encounter calls us into a generous response of love: a response that puts the self entirely at the disposal of the other to the point of self-displacement. In this response we live the gift of love which has been freely given to us in God, confident that our response transcends what we give and holds eternal value. We choose responsibility as spirituality when we live with compassion, from a profound interest in the good of the other.

What connects with your thinking? What extends your thinking about responsibility? What challenges your thinking about spirituality? What might connect with students?

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In Relation to the Two Dimensions

Figure 3 Responsibility Paradigm
The Responsibility quadrant is formed by the intersection of the axes: Otherness/Responsive. As in the Vulnerability quadrant, in this quadrant the experience of the transcendent is one of interruption to what is known or expected, often experienced as singular and spontaneous events or encounters. Located at the responsive end of the horizontal axis, the self is disposed to be active and dynamic in this quadrant. When the responsive attitude is combined with encounter with Otherness, there is produced a moment of deliberation and choice leading to action. Experiencing a feeling of responsibility involves hearing a ‘call’ in encounter with another – a call that may shock, experienced in that moment’s hesitation when we look more closely at the other and ourselves and then freely respond to that call. Located in the Apophatic end of the axis, where the limitations of what can be said of God is acknowledged, the origin of the call and its address is characterised by its discontinuity and otherness; it is not easily harmonised or located as either internal or external to ourselves. French theologian Chrétien describes the call as an
“originary call that delivers us and sends us into the world ... perceived in our unavoidably belated response, through our own altered voice.”\textsuperscript{51} The experience of responsibility is to find a hidden strength in the self when interrupted by encounter with otherness which challenges and draws from us a response beyond our expectations that both informs our identity and transforms it. Through the initiative of the other our capacity to respond is freed. Spirituality as responsibility is to live in the tension between call and response, reaching the limits of our own abilities and transcending them. It is to grapple with the existential questions: “Who calls me?” and “How must I respond?”

\textbf{Responsibility: Encountering the Face of God}

The discussion below briefly locates the paradigm of responsibility in contemporary culture and further explores it as illuminated by selections from the writings of Emmanuel Levinas.\textsuperscript{52} Prompted by another’s need, feelings of responsibility tap into profound and innate notions of justice, empathy and right relationships. The responsibility to protect and intervene to ensure humanity abides by agreed rules of conduct and attains high goals of morality and justice is a praiseworthy objective attempted by the International Crisis Group.\textsuperscript{53} However, making decisions around justice, equality and responsibility for humanitarian intervention on a global scale is fraught with misinterpretation and fears of imperialism while the meaning of responsibility itself becomes clouded and obscured in the language of


\textsuperscript{52} Levinas has been selected as he writes extensively in relation to hermeneutics and ethics, both important concepts in this quadrant. Intense interest in the philosophy of Levinas and how it connects to Christian theology is highlighted through the writings of the Leuven group of scholars. Especially relevant in relation to Levinas is Didier Pollefeyt’s work on hermeneutics and religious education which is currently influencing the conversation around religious education in Australia. See Lombaerts and Pollefeyt, \textit{Hermeneutics and Religious Education}; See also Annemie Dillen and Didier Pollefeyt, eds., \textit{Children’s Voices: Children’s Perspectives in Ethics, Theology and Religious Education} (Leuven: Peeters,2010). Pollefeyt’s engagement with Levinas extends to his work on Holocaust theology and the theology of suffering: Didier Pollefeyt, \textit{Ethics and Theology After the Holocaust} (Leuven: Peeters, 2018).

competing rights. In the realm of business and marketing responsibility and freedom take on different meanings as conflicting interests come into play. The commercial focus of corporate bodies dictates responsibility to shareholder profits before all other priorities of morality or justice are discussed. In the final analysis to what norms of conduct can we be held responsible? The vision of justice at a social or universal level must grow out of a personal morality where people are able to reflect on what moves them to be responsible to and for one another. An ethics conceived from the starting point of the personal and the subjective, of motivation rather than outcomes, is what this paradigm proposes.

As in the paradigm of Vulnerability, Responsibility is located at the Apophatic end of the axis, which brings experiences of uncertainty and doubt, of unexpectedness and interruption to the notion of encounter with another who, in their difference calls us to make a response. The Transcendent is implicit, but ultimately unlocatable in the immediate experience of relationship as call from the other. ‘The Other’ (referring to the Transcendent Other and also to another person) is a term used by French philosopher Levinas. For Levinas, the Other who: “escapes my grasp by an essential dimension,” interrupts an individual through an infinite dimension in the person of the other. This infinite dimension is not to be interpreted as a simple correlation of the other as mediator of God, as if it were God who calls. As Levinas is at pains to point out: “The Other is not the incarnation of God, but precisely by his face, in which he is disincarnate, is the manifestation of the height in which God is revealed.” The call to respond, to engage in human relationship is for Levinas the defining sacred relation. It is a relationship which is itself the realization of infinity. The


55 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 39.

56 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 79.

57 “When man truly approaches the Other he is uprooted from history.” Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 52.
paradigm of Responsibility describes personal responsibility as engaging with the other in such a way that offers the self to another, while leaving the other irreducibly other, without attempting to make them the same as me. It puts the self entirely at the disposal of the other, to the point of self-displacement or “to the point of expiation.”

Spirituality as responsibility recognizes the reciprocal role of listening and responding. For Levinas the call of the other requires an ethical response that comes from a personal approach informed by moral conscience. From this response grows not only one’s identity and relationship with the other, but relationship with the Transcendent Other whose face is revealed. Levinas refers to the ability to hear this call as evidence of the Infinite within the finite, evidence of the solidarity of a humanity created in the image or face of God. It is this face which “opens the primordial discourse whose first word is obligation, which no ‘interiority’ permits avoiding.”

The risk of mutual exposure through deep listening occurs in unprotected encounter where the self and the other are mutually open as exemplified in the words used by Pope Francis in September 2016 in a homily at Santa Marta, where he extend “an invitation to work for ‘the culture of encounter’ in a simple way ‘as Jesus did’: not just seeing, but looking; not just hearing, but listening; not just passing people by, but stopping with them; not just saying ‘what a shame, poor people!’, but allowing yourself to be moved with compassion; and then to draw near, to touch and to say: ‘Do not weep’ and to give at least a drop of life.”

Spirituality as responsibility maintains a relentless focus on the reciprocity of the call from the other and the response it engenders. The focus on the


59 The term conscience is fraught with difficulty in the context of the discussion of selfhood and otherness and is explored by Paul Ricœur, Oneself as Another, 341-356.

60 “In this manner the subject - who in its soul, or rather in the (divine) soul of its soul, is already attuned to the others as its brothers.” Levinas, Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence, quoted in Burggraeve, “Fraternity, Equality, Freedom: On the Soul and the Extent of Our Responsibility,” 13. See also Paul Ricœur for his speculation on who might be the Other in Ricœur, Oneself as Another, 355.

61 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 201.

reciprocity of call and response distinguishes the response from the notion of ‘empty’ activism, in that it acknowledges that compassion is not a response that is self-generated. Chrétien (above) is clear in his theology that there is in the call a power that generates response, otherwise known as grace which recognizes our limits and rises above them. Compassion, hope, reconciliation and forgiveness are responses engendered through the grace present in the call heard and felt through encounter with the other. Pope Francis’ example is of a Church that actively listens and responds through God’s grace with compassion at a personal level to God’s call to solidarity, thereby building a just society.

Responsibility Paradigm: Implications for Curriculum and Pedagogy

The following discussion highlights some opportunities this paradigm presents for teachers to discover with students the profound nature of relationship. It is in a space of openness to the infinite within the other that the very nature of call and response is enabled to become not only the focus of the dialogue between teachers and students, but the foundation of the teacher student relationship. This quadrant highlights the opportunity to pose questions around the nature of human relationships, understandings of conscience and discernment, as well as notions of the good, justice and peace. It leads to exploring the deeper questions of human nature, self-sacrifice, freedom and responsibility, and of the foundations on which a just and equitable society can be built. It proposes teachers open up notions of vocation and ethics in dialogue with Christian anthropology, the lives of the Saints, Catholic Social Teaching and the Gospel vision for the Reign of God. Spirituality as responsibility challenges students to explore the limits of their own responses, critiquing their reflective processes and to consider the influence of others and their call. Students are invited to become active listeners from which to draw strength for responding with empathy and compassion.

While this quadrant takes an active stance, the paradigm highlights the need to hesitate and listen deeply, considering motivation before moving into response. In opening up this curriculum focus, teachers may consider ways to promote active listening and dialogue in the learning environment. Robert Coles, the American psychologist and writer on children’s spirituality, has spent thirty years listening to children and speaking with them. His work has contributed significantly to an understanding of the culture of children and reveals his own spirituality in the process: “Before I could let children teach me a few lessons, I had to look
inward and examine my own assumptions.” To open up spaces of self-examination and explore notions of conscience, an environment of deep listening where all voices are heard is vital and engenders a humble and fraternal approach to learning. Leuven scholar and writer in pastoral theology Annemie Dillen has analysed the power dynamics at play in the teacher student relationship in her work: *Empowering Children in Religious Education*. She identifies three stances: ‘power with,’ ‘power over’ and ‘power within.’ While ‘power over’ refers to a hierarchical top down approach in teacher student relationships, the ‘power with’ stance has a focus on building relationship, intimacy and trust as key elements in creating a positive learning environment. The ‘power within’ stance goes one step further, identifying that for education the highest aim is to awaken in students their own agency. To create an environment which promotes student agency and power within, teachers need to maintain a certain level of confidence in their own identity. As John Dupuche, Chair of the Catholic Interfaith Committee of Melbourne writes: “The act of listening to the other is an act of courage and confidence...This is possible only for those who are so confident that they can, without fear of losing their self-identity, listen to others proclaim their identity.” A learning community where otherness is responded to with compassion, and responsibility is fostered ensures these ideals can become the foundations for the classroom, wider society and the Church. Such a learning community takes seriously the notion that not charity but justice guides their ethical responses, and that their responses are possible only through the grace of God at the heart of the encounter with the other.

In summary, spirituality as responsibility is experienced in the moment of hesitation between call and response, where the power of the call transcends and transforms our response and our identity. It is to be an active member of a culture of encounter, where we go out to meet the other face to face, risking the shock of encounter with the Transcendent who draws from us an ethical response. For teachers this quadrant focusses attention on processes of discernment, skills of deep listening and of inviting experiences of otherness which can awaken responses of compassion, moving us to act for justice.

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63 Coles, *The Spiritual Life of Children*, Introduction, XV.

64 Dillen, “Empowering Children in Religious Education: Rethinking Power Dynamics.”

Fulfilment

Teacher Professional Dialogue Process

Consider a time when you experienced a sense of the rightness and fullness of life. What occurred? How did you feel? What impact did it have on you/ others? In small groups, please share what you are comfortable with from your experience.

What insights did your conversation reveal? What was surprising? What does it make you wonder about? How might your students experience fulfilment? How might this relate to questions of God and religion?

In an article on what inspires chefs to create their unique dishes, a Sydney restaurateur and chef, Martin Benn told reporter Dani Valent: “I carve out space to create. I don’t want to stop creating, it’s who I am. I want to explore every avenue I can.” The article lists many forms of inspiration: “Family histories, long walks, big chats, sketchbook scrawls that lie dormant for many years and then push to the surface. Connections to particular ingredients often hold the key, not just juicy fruit or vegetables with vim, but also a connection with those who grow them.” (The Age Epicure May 8 2018, p. 8)

In this article we see a person whose passion and creativity gives a sense of something deeper in their life and work. The offerings of life and culture such as food, art, nature, relationships, literature, music, are more than simple enjoyments for their own sake. They are the mediations through which truth, beauty and goodness can be found and human meaning and fulfilment experienced. Reflecting on what makes life worthwhile and what is valuable fuels the drive and passion to come to grips with the limits of life and creates a sense of the ‘more’ or the infinite which everyday experiences hint at. Living attuned to the inherent goodness and value of being opens us to see deeper meaning, to live with integrity and creativity and to find fulfilment.

In a Catholic understanding of revelation, the things of ultimate worth such as unity, the good, the beautiful and the true are all found in God, revealed through creation, relationships and especially in the person of Jesus Christ. Attentive to the experiences of everyday life, we discover a God so intimately involved in the world that God’s presence is imbued in all things. This God is both the source of the search for ultimate meaning and its fulfilment. Spirituality as Fulfilment can be described as an experience of the universal love of God found in the human experiences of creativity, passion and joy. As we glimpse the transformative effect of these experiences we are drawn to them. Such glimpses open us to experience life differently, newly appreciating the world and discerning God’s presence – the sacred – in the every day.

What connects with your thinking? What extends your thinking about fulfilment? What challenges your thinking? What might connect with students?

66 Professor of Philosophy at KU Leuven, William Desmond, in his work: Ethics and the Between, describes the ‘more’: “This ‘more’ means enigmatic otherness in inwardness itself: the very interiority of being is the coming to show of infinity, the transcending power of the being, the transcendence towards infinity of the human being.” Desmond, Ethics and the Between, 215.
In Relation to the Two Dimensions

**Figure 4 Fulfilment Paradigm**

The Fulfilment quadrant is formed at the intersection of the axes: Intimacy/Receptive. In this quadrant the experience of the transcendent is situated within the Kataphatic tradition. Here the transcendent is mediated by everyday life experiences, the created world, the self and others; apprehended as intimately involved in the world and life. In this quadrant on the horizontal axis, the self is disposed to be receptive, open to and reflecting on the totality of life in all its aspects discovering meaning, beauty and integrity. Combining an open and receptive human disposition with apprehension of the transcendent as intimately experienced in the everyday creates the paradigm of fulfilment, where growing awareness and appreciation of the beauty and power present in the everyday – in suffering as well as happiness – informs the natural process of life integration, the formation of personal values and a deeper connectedness to the source of all being at the heart of life. Levinas writes about the worth of one’s life: “Life is love of life, a relation with contents that are not my
being but are more dear than my being: thinking, eating, sleeping, reading, working, warming oneself in the sun.” It is in the enjoyment of the contents of everyday life as gifts from a creative and loving God that ultimate meaning and eternal significance can be found. Spirituality as Fulfilment receives the gift of life with awe and wonder; allowing a glimpse into a greater reality where finite limits are reached to reveal the infinite or the sacred. It is to grapple with the existential questions: “What is life? How can I find meaning?”

**Fulfilment: In Touch with the Grace of God**

The discussion below briefly locates the paradigm of fulfilment in contemporary culture and further explores it as illuminated by selections from the writings of Karl Rahner, William Desmond and Schleiermacher.

Altruism, joy, loving kindness, peace and harmony are all qualities sought after in an integrated and authentic life. In the field of positive psychology and also in marketing research and in the area of human resources, happiness and fulfilment are characterised by feelings of joy and pleasure, positive relationships and a sense of engagement, meaning and achievement. These qualities and outcomes are drivers of human behaviour which in individualistic cultures, research shows, may result in confusing hedonism with happiness.

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67 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 112.

68 Rahner is an important theologian of Vatican II. His correlational theology is the ground of his Kataphatic mysticism and highlights the importance he places on linking theology with spirituality. See Walsh, *The Heart of Christ in the Writings of Karl Rahner*; see also Karl Rahner, “The Spirituality of the Church of the Future,” in *Theological investigations*, trans. Edward Quinn, vol. 20 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1981); and Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 7.

69 Desmond, a Professor of Philosophy working at Katholieke Universiteit Leuven brings a contemporary view into play in this discussion with a focus on the relation between being and the good and what it means to have value, which is particularly pertinent in this quadrant.


71 "We find that individualism moderates the relationship between hedonism and happiness, such that hedonism is more strongly related to happiness in more individualistic cultures.” Mohsen Joshanloo and Aaron
In the name of fulfilment, Western consumerism creates an appetite for both goods and services that has become essential to the successful growth of western market economies and has impacted the ability of broader creation to flourish, producing “an epic extinction period.” At the same time the ennobling classical ideal of the world citizen is actively pursued by world organisations such as the United Nations, here described by Martha Nussbaum, philosopher and classicist: “However we divide our varied loyalties, we should still be sure that we recognize the worth of human life wherever it occurs and see ourselves as bound by common human abilities and problems to people who lie at a great distance from us.” Indeed this ideal is upheld by many who work to maintain the inviolability of the dignity and worth of the human person regardless of religious convictions or ethnicity. The values of secular humanism and its understanding of the good life and fulfilment, couched in terms of human rights or wellbeing, strongly reflect the influence of centuries of immersion in the Christian narrative and are strengthened when understood and interpreted within that context.

This quadrant is underpinned by Karl Rahner’s Kataphatic theology of the correlation between human life and God’s revelation: “No man can escape the fact ... that the grace of God is applied to him permanently and enduringly, and that thereby his existence in all its dimensions is constantly open to the infinite.” The mystery toward which humankind is oriented is experienced in everyday reality. However this mystery is not limited to human

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experience, even while being expressed through it. Rahner claims that “Whether he is consciously aware of it or not, whether he is open to this truth or suppresses it, man’s whole spiritual and intellectual existence is oriented towards a holy mystery which is the basis of his being.”\(^{76}\) For Rahner, self-discovery comes “to its own realization, as a beginning which is open to the absolute beginning of God,”\(^{77}\) thus transforming all aspects of life by the discovery of the infinite within the finite. In the words of Kearney such an orientation is “the holy thisness and thereness of our flesh and blood existence”\(^{78}\) (Italics in the text). The ‘thisness’ and ‘thereness’ proposed in this paradigm is the fullness of life experience as mediations of spirituality and God’s grace. Art, nature, relationships, literature, music, poetry, are offerings which enrich the self and the joy of living. Openness to life experiences, even those which are negative, such as suffering or loneliness, fuel the drive inward to make meaning and come to grips with the ‘more’ which life experiences hint at. Philosopher William Desmond in his work: *Ethics and the Between*, describes the ‘more’: “This ‘more’ means enigmatic otherness in inwardness itself: the very interiority of being is the coming to show of infinity, the transcending power of the being, the transcendence towards infinity of the human being.”\(^{79}\) Here Desmond is putting into words the enduring action of God’s grace which unfolds the present moment through the joy of being and simultaneously allows the being to be enriched as a coming to fullness of simply being that in and of itself is good. The space where this goodness is communicated is in the between of the here and now and ultimacy or transcendence. Spirituality as Fulfilment also finds resonance with the theology of Protestant theologian Schleiermacher (1768-1834). Schleiermacher, in his seminal work *Christian Faith* refers to a sense of ‘being there’ or of being conscious of the existence of all things finite held within the infinite: “The sum total of religion is to feel that, in its highest unity, all that moves us in feeling is one; to feel that aught single and particular is only possible by means of this unity; to feel, that is to say, that our being and living is a being and

\(^{76}\) Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol.7, 122.

\(^{77}\) Rahner, “Ideas for a Theology of Childhood,” 42.


\(^{79}\) Desmond, *Ethics and the Between*, 215.
living in and through God.” Intimacy with God is posited as the ultimate fulfilment and happiness.

Not to be reduced to the postmodern quest for affirmation and authenticity and programs of self-growth, nor to be mistaken for New Age pantheism and nature worship, the spiritual quest of enjoying fullness of life pursues a profounder happiness possible when in touch with a God of love who proclaims intimate involvement with humanity and who extends extravagant abundance in creation. A joyous Church is one that is able to communicate the depths of spiritual fulfilment available to all as found in the exhortation by Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*:

Perhaps the most exciting invitation is that of the prophet Zephaniah, who presents God with his people in the midst of a celebration overflowing with the joy of salvation. I find it thrilling to reread this text: “The Lord, your God is in your midst, a warrior who gives you the victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing, as on a day of festival” (3:17). This is the joy which we experience daily, amid the little things of life, as a response to the loving invitation of God our Father: “My child, treat yourself well, according to your means … Do not deprive yourself of the day’s enjoyment” (*Sir* 14:11, 14). What tender paternal love echoes in these words! 

**Fulfilment Paradigm: Implications for Curriculum and Pedagogy**

The experience of fulfilment is a positive one and thus easily brought to a learning conversation. Yet it is in a space of tension between ultimate concerns and the here and now that the problematic nature of living with integrity and living life to the full is enabled to become the focus of the dialogue between teachers and students. This quadrant takes a reflective and receptive stance, allowing students to contemplate the nature of good and evil, the nuances between happiness and joy, the implications of living from perceptions of scarcity or abundance. This paradigm raises questions about sustainability, stewardship of the earth, the meaning of life, justice, truth and beauty; grappling with how these contribute to fullness of life and the flourishing of the whole of creation. It leads to

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exploring the deeper questions of what is a good life, the meaning of suffering, and ideas of ultimate purpose. Contemplating experiences of wonder and awe opens a dialogue between the finite and the infinite, critiquing the superficial and disposable with the Gospel vision for the world. This quadrant, embedded in the Kataphatic tradition, makes positive affirmations about God, a God intimate with humanity and generous in creation. It proposes teachers open up the nature of happiness and wellbeing, of integrity and authenticity — not as resulting from personal striving, but in dialogue with the Christian notions of grace, joy, communion with God, God’s desire for creation and Sacramentality.

This quadrant places learning in a reflective mode, immersing students in and opening them to life experiences as spiritual. This mode allows time for impressions to grow, connections to the heart to be made and virtues and values to be formed. A strong focus on the affective domain makes possible connections between this paradigm and wellbeing programs,\(^8^2\) however, there is an alert for teachers in adopting secular wellbeing programs as uncritically aligned with religious education. Such alignment may position religion as a way of ensuring spiritual ‘health and wellbeing.’ Without a commitment to critical reflection on the particularity of any religious tradition, traditional religions and New Age spiritual alternatives may feature as equal options in a market place of ‘religions for wellbeing.’

Karen-Marie Yust, in her aptly titled work: God is Not Your Divine Butler and Therapist!\(^8^3\) highlights the dangers of a focus on a spirituality “which values the therapeutic benefits of happiness, security and goodness associated with religious adherence.”\(^8^4\) She points out the disservice many religious education programs do to students in ignoring the teaching of theological thinking. These programs instead lead students to “domesticate God in the images they perceive society values for healthy living.”\(^8^5\) A domesticated God no longer provides grounds for critiquing the society which has tamed that God for its own purposes.


\(^8^4\) Yust, “God Is Not Your Divine Butler and Therapist!,” 49.

\(^8^5\) Yust, “God Is Not Your Divine Butler and Therapist!,” 69.
In creating an environment where the pace of learning is reflective and radically open to experience, teachers grant students an opportunity to be in touch with the miracle of life and its intriguing author. One way of doing this is through Christian meditation which is finding its way into many Australian Catholic schools. Christian meditation practices emphasize the receptive stance that opens one to listen to the inner voice: “In contemplative prayer we seek to become the person we are called to be, not by thinking of God, but by being with God. Simply by being with God we are drawn into being the person God calls us to be.” Regular meditation helps children and is seen as a way to counter act a world perceived as fraught and over-stimulating. The Christian meditation website offers programs to help young people “relax, generate energy and confidence and become aware of their innate goodness ...” A concern is that these programs do not lose their grounding in the Christian experience of grace and fulfilment and ensure an understanding of a God who is intimately available in all experiences of life, not just the silent spaces. A learning community where the joy of living is acknowledged and celebrated as a gift of abundance from a gracious God creates openness to and awareness of goodness in oneself and others, building a well-spring of social capital for society and the Church.

In summary, spirituality as fulfilment expresses the joy and wellbeing of living life as gift. It acknowledges the world as sacred, imbued with the presence of God found in the everyday and intimately available in love. For teachers this quadrant focusses attention on the processes of reflection and grappling with ultimate concerns such as truth beauty love and the sacred, which open us to union with God, transforming meaning in life and our way of seeing the world.

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87 John Main, “Australian Christian Meditation Community.”
Commitment

Teacher Professional Dialogue Process

Consider a time when you experienced a sense of belonging and made a commitment. What occurred? How did you feel? What impact did it have on you/others? In small groups, please share what you are comfortable with from your experience.

What insights did your conversation reveal? What was surprising? What does it make you wonder about? How might your students experience fulfilment? How might this relate to questions of God and religion?

“Our parents each have nine siblings in their families. Most of them still live in Syria. A couple of them have had to migrate as refugees as the areas they lived in were unsafe. This is why it has been so important for us to be involved in #CookForSyria, the global fundraising initiative that began in the UK in 2016 to support UNICEF’s lifesaving work. It is an opportunity for the people in our industry to come together and cook the food we love and want to share with the world.” (The Age, Epicure, May 8 2018, p. 3)

In this article about a campaign for restaurants to support war-torn Syria, we see a real sense of commitment and belonging. The writers reveal a sense of purpose and of assurance that not only are they working together but that their participation brings about a sense of identity deeply inscribed in their being. To be able to identify with something or someone and feel you belong can be described as a basic human need. 88 To make a commitment is to know you have freely chosen a place within a larger story, within a collective identity that affirms and shapes your identity and your responses. In finding your place with and through community there is opportunity and support to expand self-understanding through belonging to a history and a future that reaches beyond your own life span and significance.

Through a sense of connectedness and commitment one freely takes on self-imposed limits to contribute fully with and for others, in a partnership, a family, a community or a nation. 89

In Catholic traditions, a sense of belonging as a “child of God” as a member of a family of faith connected bodily to Christ and to each other is fundamental to a Christian understanding of the human person and community. To make a commitment is to ask: Where do I belong? How can I contribute? Commitment to a religious community is to be brought into its “collective memory.” 90 In the case of the Christian tradition it is not only a collective memory of stories lives and teachings into which one is initiated; but also a sacramental experience founded on Christ. 91 In Eucharist, Christ’s presence is mediated through the actions and symbols of the everyday – of sharing bread and wine – expressing the joy of belonging to the larger story of humanity and commitment to a vision of a utopian future where all will share and eat. This celebration is a reminder of the profound change possible in human beings and in communities when they are in touch with God. Commitment to a sacramental community strengthens and supports a generous response to give oneself in service to and in open dialogue with others, living out the presence of God in the world.

What connects with your thinking? What extends your thinking about Commitment? What challenges your thinking about spirituality? How might this connect with students?


91 “In the life, death and destiny of Jesus of Nazareth we see in human terms what it means to be God.” Michael Himes, Doing the Truth in Love (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1995), 75.
In Relation to the Two Dimensions

Figure 5 Commitment Paradigm

The Commitment quadrant is formed at the intersection of the axes – Intimacy/Responsive. In this quadrant the experience of the transcendent is in the Kataphatic tradition, one of familiarity and intimacy, mediated by everyday life experiences of relationships and experiences of belonging and by participating meaningfully in the stories, symbols, rituals and actions that are handed on in either a family, community, religious or national setting. Situated at the responsive end of the horizontal axis, the paradigm of Commitment the human disposition is to be active and involved. When the responsive disposition is combined with apprehending the transcendent as intimately involved in community, relationships and experiences of belonging, there is produced a sense of coming to commitment to a partner, a group or a society and in doing so discovering or re-discovering a presence of God in the world. Indeed one’s response of commitment in God releases energy to participate fully and grow relationships with the passion born of conviction that can lead to social transformation. At times belonging to a group may involve an assigned
identity, such as being born into a religious or cultural tradition and at other times identity is freely chosen, working through an identity formation process which includes deliberation and choice, involving cathartic experiences of rejection, acceptance, initiation and transformation. In the final analysis an assigned identity may engender profound and formative feelings of belonging, but for commitment to occur, discernment and freedom are necessary. Spirituality as Commitment is to live in the tension between belonging and distantiation, living from within and stepping outside of a tradition or relationship, continually coming anew to commitment in God with a sense of integrity in one’s belonging and a conviction of one’s contribution to the order of things. It is to grapple with the existential questions: “Where do I belong? How can I contribute?”

**Commitment: Coming to Faith**

The discussion below briefly locates the paradigm of commitment in contemporary culture and further explores it as illuminated by selections from the writings of Gadamer\(^\text{92}\) and Chauvet.\(^\text{93}\)

At the heart of the experience of commitment are the formative and transformative experiences of belonging and renewal which release the passion, drive and energy needed to stand with conviction in one’s identity and beliefs. The experience of belonging is vital for self-understanding, providing a secure physical, spiritual and psychological space, which

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\(^\text{92}\) Gadamer’s work has been selected as his writing on hermeneutics is critical to understanding a hermeneutic-communicative approach to religious education as promoted by Didier Pollefeyt and taken up by Catholic Education Melbourne. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2\(^\text{nd}\) ed. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005); Pollefeyt, “The Difference of Alterity: A Religious Pedagogy for an Interreligious and Interideological World.” And Catholic Education Melbourne, “Religious Education Curriculum Framework.”

enables identity building. Psychologist Erik Erikson notes that: “Societies create the only conditions under which human growth is possible. They hold the promise of security, identity and integrity.”

To belong, to be part of a society, to be able to identify with and commit to something, to feel one is not alone, can be described as a basic human need. Belonging is an experience which informs the concept we have of ourselves and is consciously promoted within families and nations, within work and school settings, in religious and secular contexts. It impacts life satisfaction through the fostering of a sense of commitment and community. Especially among the young, the human need to belong operates as peer pressure where affirmation from the group imparts a sense of commitment and wellbeing, while exclusion becomes a source of identity crisis and even depression. Strong ethnic, religious, social and cultural ties can create resilient individuals; however, in belonging within a larger story or a collective identity, it is important to maintain a sense of freedom and individual identity separate from the group, making available a sense of self who can commit to and enrich and renew the group. This invariably brings to the fore a tension around the assigning of identity by the collective group and the role of choice in identity formation and commitment.

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94 Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 277.

95 Osterman, “Students' Need for Belonging in the School Community.”

96 Research undertaken in the Netherlands around the relevance of believing and belonging identifies the importance of belonging: “... we find that Catholics experience significant life satisfaction benefits compared to those who are not religious, and that only belonging plays a role in this association. Next to the beneficial effect of the structural aspect of belonging, which revolves around social ties, a cultural aspect of religious belonging appears to be salient, suggesting that an important life satisfaction advantage of religious communities lies in their ability to foster a sense of solidarity and commitment through a shared framework of meaning.” Josje ten Kate, Willem de Koster, and Jeroen van der Waal, “The Effect of Religiosity on Life Satisfaction in a Secularized Context: Assessing the Relevance of Believing and Belonging,” *Review of Religious Research* 59, no. 2 (2017): 138.

97 In exploring the relation between spirituality and identity formation, Templeton and Eccles distinguish between assigned versus chosen spiritual identity. They state: “Eriksonian theory suggests that a conscious evaluation of, and subsequent commitment to the religious group is key to the distinction between assigned versus chosen collective identities.” Templeton and Eccles, “The Relation between Spiritual Development and Identity Process,” 254.
Commitment is important for establishing a sense of community. A current western societal phenomenon is one of “belonging without believing,” where people come together to create a sense of community without committing to particular religious beliefs. These experiments are ongoing, but are proving to have little longevity as the bond of the group is weakened through lack of common conviction or a shared framework of meaning. The term may also describe those who are born into a religious tradition and who adhere, giving lip service as it were, without making a conscious commitment to the beliefs of that tradition. This is a decreasing phenomenon in a pluralistic society as it becomes more acceptable to openly leave one’s assigned religious tradition. Through enacting the dialogical principle of Vatican II (Chapter 2) that embraces the Church in the world, there is a possibility to engage the faithful in a process whereby the horizons of faith and the horizons of culture meet in a dynamic hermeneutical process, involving deliberation and discernment which enriches both personal self-understanding and commitment and supports the growth and development of the Church. This process of recontextualisation requires an ability to stand outside of the tradition as well as within it. German philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer in his work Truth and Method describes such a hermeneutic process as the interplay between a sense of belonging and a sense of alienation. In his philosophy of language, he puts forward a concept of ‘horizon’ as a form of historical consciousness or sense of belonging, framed within a broad horizon of language and tradition which is critical to enable dialogue and


99 Recontextualisation is a term used in the recommendations to Catholic schools from the Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project, describing an aspect of the normative position in the project: “It is important to support this (recontextualising subgroup’s) cultural analysis and theological position, and enable them to continue to foster the creative tension between faith and culture, between continuity and discontinuity, between past manifestations of Catholicism and eschatological promises.” Pollefeyt and Bouwens, Identity in Dialogue, 253, 254.

100 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 337, 358.
questioning. French philosopher Paul Ricoeur in his essays on hermeneutics and the human sciences refers to Gadamer’s notion of belonging as vital to identity and to make meaning and communicate: “The universal linguality of human experience … means that my belonging to a tradition or traditions passes through the interpretation of the signs, works and texts in which cultural heritages are inscribed and offer themselves to be deciphered.” There is implied in this definition an offering of one horizon to intersect with another. It is in this interplay of horizons that one’s own belonging is at the same time recognised, held to and offered for reflection and critique by what is alien or different. In this tension and interplay one’s sense of belonging and commitment is strengthened or altered. Through reflection and critique, or at times through catharsis a conviction or commitment emerges in response to the dynamic hermeneutical process. Indeed this process may be termed a ‘coming to faith.’

Gerald O’Collins, in *Re-thinking Fundamental Theology* puts forward a definition of tradition which stresses the human reality of community, shared language and experience where “in faith, the Christian community hands on the experience of divine self-revelation …” In the article, he describes tradition as “collective memory.” However, the Christian tradition is not only a collective memory of story, lives and teaching into which one is invited, but also a sacramental experience which is founded on the incarnation. French theologian Chauvet, writing post Vatican II, contends that at the heart of the sacramental experience is the final commitment of faith which is the offering of the self to take on a new


103 Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 247. Here Ricoeur talks about catharsis as practical wisdom which “disorients the gaze” and redirects action. Cathartic experience may also be understood in terms of the transformative process that is conversion, resulting in commitment.

104 O’Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology*. This work revised and brought up to date his seminal work *Fundamental Theology*.


identity, that of Christ. This is not a supernatural experience, but one which is firmly located
in the very reality of human nature: “On the basis of faith in the incarnation of God in Jesus,
Christians confess that they go to God not in spite of the heavy ambiguity of their humanity
but at the very core of it; not in spite of their bodies, of desire, of tradition, of culture, of
universe...but in their very bodies which through faith in Christ have become Temples of the
Holy Spirit; therefore not in spite of historical and social mediations but within them.”107
‘Temples of the Holy Spirit’ then becomes not an esoteric term, but one which translates
into participating in the vital, transformative energy of a community incorporated into the
body of Christ. Initiation into the sacraments is an opportunity to grapple with the choice of
committing one’s identity to that of Christ and all that implies for living. Coming to
commitment through actively contributing to the collective memory and sacramental
experiences of the faith community is a dynamic and continual becoming, which opens new
interpretations and expressions of the power of life and the spirit for both the faith
community and the individual.

**Commitment Paradigm: Implications for Curriculum and Pedagogy**

It is in the contested space between belonging and distantiation that the very nature of
coming to commitment and to faith can become the focus of dialogue between teachers
and students. This dialogue involves grappling with and communicating positions of values
and beliefs that are found in the classroom and society. This quadrant poses questions
about the role of society, networks, institutions and community. It leads to exploring
experiences of rejection and acceptance, of belonging and seeking, of decision-making and
discernment, of perspectives and prejudice. The paradigm of Commitment contends with
issues of freedom and choice, the power of persuasion and the tenacity of tribal loyalty and
it highlights the value of faithfulness. It proposes teachers open up the role of the Church in
the world and seek out witnesses to faith in the community, exploring initiation and
participation in authentic life-options in dialogue with understandings of Catholic
community and its response to the world, active discipleship and the sacramental life.

This quadrant takes an active stance in learning, focussing on the processes of discernment
and critical thinking involved in considering life options. In opening up this paradigm as a

curriculum focus, there is a tension felt by many teachers of religious education (Chapter 5), especially in the Catholic primary school sector, between wishing to engender authentic feelings of belonging to a faith community and opening critical conversations around Catholic faith and other faith traditions that allow for the freedom of choice critical to making a sincere commitment.108 In the interplay of horizons discussed above, there is an element of belonging required from which to be able to speak. This raises questions about what a very young student may be able to bring to a dialogue around faith commitment, with many adults denying a child’s ability to contribute; a term ‘adultism’ has been coined by Annemie Dillen109 to encapsulate this thinking (Chapter 2). This position is reflected in the statement by Gerard Hughes when he says: “Unless there is an acceptance stage, the child cannot learn to formulate questions because it will have nothing on which to base them.”110 Experience of young children and their perceptive and persistent questioning may lead one to agree with Dillen and to challenge Hughes’ statement. Colouring the larger picture of Catholic education in Melbourne is the close relationship between each primary school and its parish. Historically it has been an expectation that the school take responsibility for the formal education of the students into the initiation rites of the faith community. While the practice varies between different parishes, the teachers, especially of those year levels in which the sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist and Confirmation are celebrated for the first time, are required to prepare students for these sacraments as part of the religious education curriculum. This responsibility places an emphasis on the formation aspect of religious education which tends to position it as “a service to its own sub-cultural group.”111 This emphasis can create a top-down approach to initiation where the child becomes the object of initiation rather than the subject. That this is currently a problem for Catholic primary schools is demonstrated in the Enhancing Catholic School

111 Pollefeyt and Bouwens, Identity in Dialogue, 44.
Identity data for the Victoria scale.\textsuperscript{112} There is a need for a hermeneutical approach where knowledgeable and sensitive induction into a tradition proceeds with openness to challenge or even informed refusal of that tradition by students. A learning community where students learn to interpret traditions in their own right supports them to develop a robust and committed spirituality that responds to the context of today and finds new meaning and new structures for society and renews the Church for the future.

In summary, spirituality as commitment invites us to discover our identity and purpose through actively contributing to community; in the Christian context, a community which participates in the life of Christ, deriving its power, vision and faith from that source. For teachers this quadrant focuses attention on the processes of critically reflecting on, interpreting and responding to the offer to live as disciple of Christ.

**Conclusion**

Spirituality is an important point of intersection for cross-disciplinary and inter-faith dialogue about human wellbeing and fulfilment, bridging the divide between the theoretical and practical. From a Catholic perspective, spirituality is at the core of the theology of revelation and how the Church engages with the world. It is at the nexus of religious education theory and praxis and a vital element of teacher professional learning in a Catholic school context. Spirituality is grounded in the dialogical principle of Vatican II theology and the hermeneutical principle of a Christian anthropology.

This Chapter has presented a framework of Christian spirituality that incorporates the above themes into a coherent two dimensional structure which clarifies the concept of spirituality.

\textsuperscript{112} The Victoria Scale is an empirical instrument developed by Wim ter Horst and Chris Hermans which explores the way Catholic schools balance their Catholic identity with solidarity with the surrounding cultural climate. This scale is one of a series of empirical instruments used in the Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project. The Monologue school is one of four pedagogical options developed in the scale. This school type is identified by a tendency to promote only the Catholic tradition in isolation from the surrounding culture. The focus is on subsuming one’s identity into that of the community, quite unreflectively. In the data for Victorian Catholic schools “…almost half of the children in year 5 and 6 experience their school as Monological (48.5%), while the other half hesitates (19.6%) or denies this (31.9%) …” Pollefeyt and Bouwens, *Identity in Dialogue*, 166.
In this it is responding to the needs emerging from the investigation into the literature around spirituality in Chapter 2 that revealed confusion in methodological approaches and a plurality of spiritual claims and traditions. The framework in this Chapter proposed four paradigms which were presented three ways: as a teacher professional dialogue process, as an exploration of the concept illuminated by Christian theology, and as a discussion of the curriculum and pedagogical implications. The two dimensional framework presented in this chapter built on the definition of spirituality established in Chapter 2:

Spirituality is the human experience of living in the relationship between Transcendence and immanence: between ultimate concerns and the here and now, between the call and the response, between belonging and distantiation, between unknowing and knowing.

Each of the paradigms corresponds to one of the liminal spaces referred to. The paradigm of Vulnerability is the experience of living between knowing and unknowing, Responsibility is living between call and response, Fulfilment is the experience of living between ultimate concerns and the here and now, while Commitment is the experience of living between belonging and distantiation. In these liminal spaces existential questions arise which engage each person in a spiritual quest to reach the heart of the profound mystery at the centre of being human. The four paradigms were presented as theoretical constructs that together described a Christian spirituality; the intersection at its heart forming the Christian symbol of the cross— the intersection of the human and the divine in the incarnation. The vertical axis of the framework depicts the tension between the two ways the divine is apprehended in theology: through the Kataphatic and Apophatic traditions. This axis is described as:

Intimacy – Otherness. The horizontal axis, Responsive – Receptive holds in tension two ways human psychology categorizes the person: as active or as passive. The intersection of the two axes combine to create four quadrants or paradigms of spirituality: Vulnerability, Responsibility, Fulfilment and Commitment.

Each of the paradigms was presented positively, but each also held a risk which was discussed. Vulnerability, as open to mystery, could promote the need for trust in an external source to the detriment of the function of the intellect. Responsibility, dealing with response to encounter with otherness, risks falling into a humanist approach where activism takes on the world without a sense of the spirit moving. Fulfilment, highlighting the joy of living, could tend towards a reductionist approach stopping at self-affirmation and
Commitment, as dealing with the human need for a sense of belonging, risks the loss of a sense of empowerment in the quest to belong within a faith tradition; this then also risks inertia of the tradition itself. These risks or hesitations are frequently exemplified in the interview data (chapter 5) highlighting the importance of engagement with the framework as a way of raising awareness of the complexity of the tradition, the diverse correlations possible and the need for clear intentionality around the spiritual dimension when engaging students in learning in religious education.

**Figure 6 Two Dimensional Framework of Spirituality**

The framework, designed as a heuristic addresses teachers of religious education in Catholic schools, serves as a springboard for professional dialogue and self-reflection. It will support...
teachers who are charged with teaching religious education address students of Christian and other faith traditions who are at various stages of commitment, those who are searching for a faith identity and others who are disinterested or even hostile to religion. This framework takes seriously the complexity of this task and provides a practical tool stimulating further development around recontextualising religious education for the school and the future church. Each of the four paradigms of the framework is described using a dialogue process that orients it to its position on the framework, places it into a contemporary context and poses questions stimulating personal reflection and professional reflection. The dialogue process supports teachers to make explicit their assumptions and tacit beliefs around spirituality, thereby illuminating the research question: What are teachers’ expectations of and beliefs about their students as spiritual beings and how does this influence their pedagogy in religious education?

In Chapter 4, I describe the methodology used in the research which is a qualitative methodology, using an Empirical Research cycle referred to briefly above. The framework that has been presented in Chapter 3 is an integral part of the methodology. The research methodology incorporates the gathering of data from teachers of religious education in Catholic primary schools in two stages: firstly in the form of individual open ended interviews and secondly in the recording of focus group discussion that takes place after the participants have had an opportunity to engage with the framework. This methodology allows teachers firstly to share freely their thinking and insights around their own spirituality and their perceptions of students’ spirituality prior to engaging with the framework of spirituality; and then secondly to engage in focus group discussion after reflecting on it. Participants were finally invited to give feedback to inform the final iteration of the spirituality framework presented above. It can be noted here that research participants gave positive feedback about using the framework, identifying the framework’s potential for providing a lens through which to critique their practice and curriculum offerings, and as a springboard for religious education curriculum planning and development.
Chapter 4
Research Methodology

Introduction

The thrust of this research is to understand what teachers believe about spirituality – their own and that of their students, and how that might impact their approaches in religious education. In Chapter 2 the discussion of the literature revealed the complexity of the task of understanding spirituality in a post-Christian context. The literature further identified that the link between religion and spirituality is being eroded, which has implications for teachers of religious education. The discussion of the literature also examined teacher professional learning theory which over the last decade has seen a shift from what teachers need to know to how teachers learn, focusing on the impact of teachers’ beliefs about their students and about teaching and learning on student outcomes. The literature revealed general agreement that while teacher beliefs and expectations are tacit and often difficult to bring to speech, they are highly influential in shaping the professional decisions teachers make in the classroom every day. Research indicates that the use of heuristics is a successful strategy in teacher professional development when it: a) cues prior knowledge, b) creates dissonance and c) offers extended opportunities for learning through self-reflection and collegial dialogue. These three strategies were found in the literature to help surface tacit beliefs that may otherwise hinder change in practice. These three strategies informed the dialogue processes developed around each of the paradigms of the framework of spirituality and presented in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 described a two dimensional framework of spirituality which sought to provide a practical theological tool for teacher professional development in religious education and a resource for curriculum development and design at the local school level. The framework illuminated four paradigms of human experiencing with Christian theology through an exploration of the personal, cultural and theological dimensions. Because the framework was particularly identified as a theological tool for teachers, the chapter also discussed each paradigm of spirituality within a professional educational context highlighting possibilities for curriculum and implications for pedagogy. In this way the framework presented a
dialogue between the formal theology of the research with the embedded theology or beliefs operating in the context of teaching and learning. The framework as presented in Chapter 3 forms an integral part of the dual methodology in this research project as its construction is a result of systematic research and is also shaped by feedback in the empirical research component of the project.

A summary of the methodology is outlined in the paragraph below and then the organization of the chapter is presented, before the methodology and research design is explored in detail.

The dual nature of the methodology used in this research is one that reflects the difficulty that arises when researching practical theology: how to remain true to the autonomous or systematic nature of truth in theology while balancing it with the findings from qualitative research. An empirical research cycle informs the research design and is described in more detail in this chapter. In the empirical research, eleven participants from three different Catholic primary schools were individually interviewed on their understanding of spirituality and how they saw it impacting their practice. After personally reflecting on the framework of spirituality (Chapter 3), they engaged in school based focus group discussions around the framework and its implications. In the research design, the interview data was analysed qualitatively, using a grounded theory approach identifying themes informed by literature and then it was analysed a second time using the lens of the four paradigms of the framework. Comparing and contrasting the two qualitative analyses informed the final iteration of the framework and the dialogue processes for each paradigm. The comparison of the two analyses justified the framework as a suitable heuristic for teacher professional development. The analysis of the focus group discussions indicated possibilities for the use of the framework as a way forward in religious education, identified by participants. The analysis of the data is presented in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4 outlines the research design and describes how the research was conducted. This chapter begins with a statement about methodology in practical theology in relation to the research questions. Next it explores the dual methodology employed in the study: systematic and empirical research and the relationship between them in an empirical research cycle. Then each of the two methodologies is explained in turn with attention to a hermeneutical, participatory approach. The focus on dialogue in the methodology is
discussed with reference to theory, theology and ethical concerns. Methods of participant selection and data collection are then explained. The chapter ends with an overview of the qualitative approach taken in analysing the data, using emerging themes which are coded through the use of NVivo 11, a research tool for text based data. A second method of analysing the data coded in NVivo through the lens of the four paradigms of the framework of spirituality is also applied and comparisons between the two analyses are made. The methodology described below complies with Human Research Ethics Guidelines of the University of Divinity and received approval from the University’s Human Research Ethics Committee on October 20, 2015.

Theology and Qualitative Research

Kierkegaard says that a genius and an apostle are ‘qualitatively different.’ The former is pursuing an intellectual or aesthetic inquiry with the greatest distinction, the latter is on an errand: ‘No genius has an in order that; the Apostle has, absolutely and paradoxically, an in order that.”

I wish to acknowledge at the outset in my methodology, that I am on an errand in this research. I am seeking to find out more about, analyse and name teachers’ understanding of student spirituality ‘in order that’ their understanding of their role as teachers in a Catholic school may be enhanced, ‘in order that’ their students will experience the Catholic tradition as a viable option in their identity construction. The question this research addresses is: “What are teachers’ expectations of and beliefs about their students as spiritual beings and how does this influence their pedagogy in religious education?” It is a question that focusses on praxis – teachers’ self-understanding and pedagogy; yet at the same time the question addresses theory – spirituality and its relation to religion and religious education. In allowing the praxis and theory to interact and inform each other, this research uses a dual methodology involving both systematic and empirical research.

Bernard Lonergan in the introduction to his work Method in Theology, defines the task of theology as bringing culture and religion into a two way dialogue: “A theology mediates

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1 QSR International Pty Ltd., NVivo qualitative data analysis Software, (Version 11, 2016).
2 Coles, The Spiritual Life of Children, 8.
between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix.”\(^3\) While the research project involves the interpersonal level of teachers interacting with other teachers, their students and with text, it also addresses the broader context of the culture of teaching in a Catholic primary school and the significance and role of the Catholic spiritual tradition in that culture. This research project could therefore be described as ‘doing’ theology with teachers. There is a particular tension encountered in combining practical theology with qualitative research that is at the heart of this research project. It is a tension explored by Mowat and Swinton\(^4\) in their book on how qualitative research can be used in practical theology. The nature of revelation as truth not derived, gives it a privileged place in a dialogue between theology and any another discipline. In researching practical theology a difficulty arises in remaining true to the autonomous nature of truth in theology while balancing it with the findings from qualitative research. Data arising from empirical research must always be referred back to or acquire their significance from theology. Where theology perceives “truth and the grasping of truth is possible,”\(^5\) this is qualified by an acknowledgement that understanding of that truth is necessarily “emergent and dialectic rather than simply revealed and applied.”\(^6\) Mowat and Swinton put forward “a revised model of mutual critical correlation”\(^7\) where theology itself is open to challenge and interpretation while at the same time being given a privileged position. Theological research will always recognize the reality of God – this is the privilege it maintains. However, this does not mean that the research will not critique and challenge this reality or invite different interpretations which make new learning about this reality possible. This research project seeks to maintain a constructive dialogue between theology and empirical data by using a methodology that adopts an interpretative, hermeneutic approach influenced by the insights from Mowat and Swinton’s mutual critical correlation. The methodology uses both

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\(^5\) Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 77.

\(^6\) Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 82.

\(^7\) Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 88.
systematic research and qualitative analysis in an empirical research cycle, combining theory from theologian Hans Georg Ziebertz and educational researcher Helen Timperley which are explained in the following section.

**Dual Methodology in an Empirical Research Cycle**

The methodology employed in this research reflects the duality of working in the field of Practical Theology which involves both systematic research and empirical research. Using dual methodology acknowledges that “both theoretical knowledge gained by deduction and experience gained by induction are essential in order to make a well-founded decision.”

Part of the context of the research problem as discussed in chapter one and revealed in the literature search in Chapter 2 was the lack of an adequate definition of spirituality. This created a tension for the researcher around interpreting empirical data from the research in relation to a theological normative. While systematic research into spirituality enabled a theoretical framework to be developed, as described in chapter three, initial insights into the four paradigms of spirituality were informed by participant interviews and researcher reflection on these in light of ongoing systematic research. The development of this framework reflects what Hans Georg Ziebertz calls a theory based on “discursive normativity.” Theory based on discursive normativity is not presented as a closed paradigm, but is open to further development and correction from interaction with the area of practice. Such a theory as described by Ziebertz also offers multiple interpretations and entry points into the discussion of the norm proposed. Using a theoretical framework which is both a normative reference, but at the same time is open to interpretation and development through empirical research is reflective of an empirical research cycle where normativity plays a role in all phases. In this approach, normativity is expressed in a theory proposed as an offering to heighten awareness and make practice more conscious while at the same time practice has a “critical function, confronting the theological normative

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thoughts and its assumptions with new data.” The framework described in chapter 3 fills both these functions. For Ziebertz, the theory not only serves as a norm with which participants interact, it also reveals researcher decisions so that there is transparency in all phases of research; whether it is in the discovery phase where insights are constructed into theory, the justification of the theory by practitioners or the stage of applying theory into practice. However, the primary aim of discursive normativity as the name suggests, is to open up discussion. The success of the theoretical framework developed in this research will be judged on its ability to stimulate rich dialogue. Through qualitative analysis the theoretical framework can be judged as successful if participants: 1) recognize their practice in the paradigms, 2) understand the theory as theory in the two dimensions of the framework, 3) are able to relate their practice and this theory to one another. How participants are asked to engage with the theory and the questions which will direct the gathering of evidence are described later in the section on ‘Dialogue Reflection Cycle.’

**Methodology 1: Systematic Research: Creating a Theoretical Framework**

A systematic research methodology sifts and selects studies from the area of research to identify data from research and to sort it into ways that address the research questions. The methodology of systematic research and synthesis is more often used in medical research, being relatively new in the field of educational research. The research usually selects studies which have multiple data sets and synthesizes these. However, it is also possible to select studies that delve into concepts, such as in the case of theology. In this research project, the systematic research looks at literature from systematic theology and empirical research into children’s spirituality and religious education which address the research questions, identifying concepts that link from theology across fields other than theology. However, using research by psychologists and educationalists and placing it in dialogue with theology reflects the asymmetrical dialogue referred to by Swinton and Mowat discussed at the

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11 Hans-Georg Ziebertz indicates that normative theories do not aim to improve practice in a direct sense however, they may contribute towards a change in practice in the three ways named. Ziebertz, “Normativity and Empirical Research in Practical Theology,” 7.
beginning of this chapter. The reference point is necessarily theological when selecting concepts from the research to inform and support a theoretical framework describing a comprehensive Christian spirituality grounded in systematic theology. The researcher established an important criteria to select theological writings that resonated with Vatican II theology and spirituality as the most recent and powerful influence on Catholic thinking which responds to the hermeneutical and personal turn in the cultural context. The systematic research synthesizes concepts in the literature to inform the conceptual framework of the two dimensions and the four paradigms of spirituality which was presented in Chapter 3. However, this framework remained open to feedback within the course of the empirical research phase.

Methodology 2: Empirical Research Using Qualitative Method

The empirical research component of the dual methodology was undertaken to derive knowledge of teachers’ beliefs and understanding of spirituality – that of their own and that of their students. It sought to understand whether participants’ perception of spirituality and beliefs about student spirituality impacts their practice, whether it influences how they perceive the goals of religious education and how they might successfully plan for spiritual development in students. The process in gathering and analysing empirical data used a qualitative approach, underpinned by an understanding of hermeneutics. Dialogue is a critical ingredient of a hermeneutical approach, whether that dialogue takes place between people or with a text, both of which were used in this empirical research. Hermeneutics focuses on the phenomenon of the interplay between interpretation and self-interpretation; between coming to understanding of a thing, a concept, a text, another; and coming to self-understanding. Paul Ricœur refers to this in his work on interpretation as “the reciprocity between interpretation of the text and self-interpretation. This reciprocity is known by the name of the hermeneutical circle.”

12 Ricœur’s insights into the hermeneutical

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12 Ricœur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 165 - 168. Ricœur makes a distinction between interpretation of written text and spoken language in this chapter, however, he does refer to the hermeneutic circle as the triple reference...the I, the you and the it. The it being the subject or thing about which the discourse refers, which may be considered a text.
circle provided a guide for setting up dialogue processes in this research (see figure 7 below).

Using the principle of reciprocity in a hermeneutical circle is to ensure that each participant is given opportunity to articulate and refine their own sense or meaning in the interplay between a level of common understanding which enables apprehension of the matter and the misunderstandings created by various interpretations. A hermeneutical approach is not to be confused with a social constructivist approach where there is a belief in the multiplicity of perceptions which are equally valid truths; a relativism where “there is no single interpretive truth ... there are multiple interpretive communities, each with its own criteria for evaluating interpretations.” 13 In the methodology of this research there is a belief in striving to understand the complexity of a single truth which is multi-faceted, not able to be contained within one representation or in one paradigm. This was earlier described in the discussion of Mowat and Swinton’s revised model of “mutual critical correlation.” 14 In apprehending a multi-faceted complex truth, it is important that definitions are not reduced, but rather remain expressed in the subjects’ own voice. It is also critical to acknowledge that there is an on-going cycle at work in building up meaning through dialogue. Hence dialogue is at the heart of this research methodology. Seeking to open up the world of meaning in each participant in all its dynamic dimensions requires the researcher to be positioned as part of the hermeneutic circle and to be open to transformation as much as the other participants. In this way a hermeneutic approach requires a participatory research approach. Participatory research approaches, as described by Kemmis and McTaggart 15 reflect a focus on action that promotes human flourishing and inquiry. A participatory approach respects communal relationship and the unique contributions of each participant. This is best achieved in a ‘dialogue reflection cycle’ which is the methodology that has been developed for this research project and outlined below.


14 Swinton and Mowat, Practical Theology and Qualitative Research, 77.

Research Process: Dialogue Reflection Cycle

The structure of the dialogue reflection cycle is represented in the diagram below. The dialogue reflection cycle developed here has grown out of the Action Research Cycle developed by Helen Timperley in her work on teacher professional development. It is illustrated at the start of her magnum opus of 2007 which is a synthesis of studies of teacher professional learning research: *Teacher Professional Learning and Development: Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration*. Her cycle involves five collaborative dialogue steps which begins with a focus on student evidence, secondly taps into teachers’ own questions about and perceptions of effectiveness of their practice, thirdly moves to critical engagement with theory which informs new learning design, fourthly puts the designed action into practice, and lastly a reflective re-think about practice takes place where new questions arise before continuing the cycle again. Working in this way, where dialogue is key, creates opportunities for reflection and evaluation of practice, with teachers “accepting responsibility for the effect of their teaching, becoming more self-critical and taking greater agency.”

Timperley’s study shows the importance of placing teachers’ new learning back in their own contexts in order to deepen understanding. This is reflected in the fourth and fifth stages of her action research cycle. The cycle as adapted for this research is reduced to four steps. The four steps in the dialogue reflection cycle maintain a focus on questions which gather data around teachers’ personal opinions and attitudes, beliefs and practices and the changes they notice after engagement with theory. In my adaptation, a prolonged cycle or cycles of months to years in order to show change in teacher practice through reflection on student evidence over time is not practicable, but is anticipated for future research opportunities. The four steps are described below in detail with the questions which frame both the dialogue and reflection.

Stage 1 Interview Procedure

This is a 60 minute face to face interview with each teacher, which will be audio recorded and transcribed. These are sample informant interviews, searching for rich descriptions of

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16 Timperley et al., *Teacher Professional Learning and Development*. Facing page.

17 Timperley et al., *Teacher Professional Learning and Development*, 262.
teachers’ experiences and their own understanding of spirituality. In the interview, image cards\textsuperscript{18} are used as a prompt to aid communication. In the pack there are fifty cards, the size of playing cards with different images, including plain colours symbols and occasionally a word. This aid is aimed at helping participants feel at ease and give them something concrete around which to bring to speech abstract concepts of spirituality or their tacit beliefs. The interviews are semi-structured to allow thorough exploration of the concept of spirituality in the teachers’ own words. The researcher is disposed to be sympathetic to the subject, positioned as a colleague and an active listener, seeking to understand the following:

- How do you understand your own spirituality?
- What do you think about the spirituality of your students?
- Is spirituality age related (does it change and grow over time)?
- How would you rate your influence on student spirituality?
- How do you understand your role as teacher of RE? (Describe a lesson in RE where spirituality is highlighted).
- How important is spirituality in education generally?

**Stage 2 Engagement with Theory**

Participants read a short reading which describes four paradigms of spirituality based on a two dimensional framework which is described in Chapter 3. As a way of engaging with the framework, participants are asked to consider where they would place themselves on a Likert Scale in relation to the two dimensions of the framework which then locates them to varying degrees in relation to the four paradigms. There are reflection questions posed throughout the reading allowing them to enter a dialogue with the paradigms and descriptive indicators of practice for each paradigm. The reflection questions are posed below:

- How does dialogue and reflection on spirituality improve my knowledge and skills?
- How might it impact my practice?

Stage 3 Focus Group Discussion

The following outlines the procedure for setting up and conducting the focus group discussion at each of the participating schools.

A 60 minute school-based focus group discussion session follows the personal interviews within a few weeks of a reading around the framework of spirituality and the four paradigms being sent to participants. The focus group discussion is based around the following questions:

- How does dialogue and reflection on spirituality support the application of my learning in my teaching of Religious Education?
- How do I understand spirituality now?
- How do I understand my role as teacher of Religious Education?
- How might this framework inform my practice or be applied in my context?

Ground rules for the discussion are established such as: respecting confidentiality, freedom to stop discussion if discomfort is experienced, freedom to leave, freedom to not answer a question, honouring difference. The conversation is audio recorded and transcribed. The researcher is a participant observer in the dialogue, offering questions to continue the discussion, but allowing participants to take the lead in their remarks and following and building on each other’s conversation.

The transcripts of the initial interviews are handed back to the individuals. The teachers are given time to highlight links between their transcription and any of the paradigms as they remember it from their reading, using a colour-coded system. This ensures teachers have ownership of the analysis and it gives them the opportunity to tune in again to the subject under discussion. It guards against researcher misinterpretation of the subject’s responses with participant colour coding on their transcripts helping to verify or challenge the researcher’s analysis.

Stage 4 Reflection and Feedback

The following question is sent via email to the teachers for feedback two weeks after the dialogue session. This allows for any reflective thinking that may have distilled over time to be taken into account. The responses are analysed along with the dialogue session.
- Do you have any further thoughts on the discussion questions raised in the focus group discussion?
- Do you have any comments on the experience of participating in the research or suggestions to improve the framework itself?

**Figure 7 Dialogue Reflection Cycle**
Ethical Concerns Using Interviews and Dialogue in Research

In a qualitative approach to research, there is a focus on the role of the researcher and the ethical concerns in conducting the research when gathering empirical data. In the following discussion I consider the role of dialogue and the role of language in each of the stages of the dialogue cycle in turn, using the thinking of Bakhtin, Timperley and Brookfield. I outline the steps taken to maintain self-awareness as a researcher of human persons and highlight the complexity and sensitivity necessary to conduct this ethically.

Stage 1 Dialogue as a Locus of Change in Interviewing

The focus of the research is on change and transformation in teacher self-understanding brought about by dialogue. The work of Russian philosopher Bakhtin\(^\text{19}\) highlights the importance of social interaction and appreciation of difference in the learning process. He points out that once questions have been engaged in through an interview process, a change in consciousness will occur in the individual being questioned.\(^\text{20}\) The process of change is begun through the face to face encounter with the researcher’s questions. In the words of Bakhtin:

> The complex event of encountering and interacting with another’s word has been almost completely ignored by the corresponding human sciences (and above all by literary scholarship). Sciences of the spirit; their field of inquiry is not one but two ‘spirits’ (the studied and the person who studies, which must not be merged into one spirit). The real object of study is the interrelation and interaction of ‘spirits’.

\(^{21}\) The interrelation and interaction begins with the interview and requires the researcher to adopt a particular awareness of each ‘spirit’ involved, taking nothing for granted. Fontana and Frey in their exploration of the interview as a technique for qualitative research remind

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\(^{19}\) Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) puts forward a philosophy of dialogue without which, he argues, there can be no debate or independent thinking. Bakhtin takes away the emphasis in education from seeking a common understanding, synthesis and consensus and highlights instead the process of dialogue where individual personalities through their social interaction lead to strengthening identity and appreciation of the differences each offer to the learning. This is in keeping with a hermeneutic approach. See Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*.

\(^{20}\) Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 136.

\(^{21}\) Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 144.
readers: “We must remember that each individual has his or her own social history and an individual perspective on the world. Thus we cannot take our task for granted.”22 While the researcher is positioned as a listener, there is an awareness that a neutral, unbiased position is not possible and that as researchers we are “… becoming keenly attuned to the fact that in knowing others we come to know ourselves.”23 It is imperative that the researcher exercises critical self-reflexivity24 so that there are not glaring misconstructions in the interactions. The role of the researcher is to engage in a collaborative process, participating fully and open to transformation through honouring the different perspectives and the voice the teacher brings to the dialogue. In participatory interviewing the researcher and participants “collaborate to bring definitions into their own … the walls between researcher and researched are broken down … acting together to produce change in the world.”25 Although the researcher at this time is engaging in systematic research to construct a framework of spirituality, the knowledge and understanding of spirituality emerging through that systematic research cannot come to dominate either how the interview is conducted or what the researcher attends to in the analysis of the interview data.

For the tacit to be made explicit in the course of the interviews it is important to establish a trusting relationship between the participants and the researcher so that participants will feel comfortable to share their beliefs and their practice. Informed consent ensures that participants are treated ethically. The approval of the University of Divinity Higher Research Ethics Committee is made known to participants to ensure they are confident in the process. The Participant Informed Consent Form discloses all information needed for principals and teachers to make free choice regarding their participation in the research. At times participants may be confronted by an ethical dilemma: perhaps finding a discrepancy


24 Fontana and Frey, “The Interview,” 713.

between what they believe about students and about teaching and learning in Religious Education, and what they enact in the classroom. There may be a conflict between their beliefs and the culture of the school. This may lead to a fragmentation of teacher identity and highlights the importance of a sympathetic listener who understands and withholds judgement, and one who is in tune to the possibilities of the disconnects. In recognition of the possibility of experiencing distress, provision will be made to enable follow up to de-brief any sessions and also an invitation to contact a spiritual advisor will be offered if the participant should indicate a need.

In qualitative analysis of the interview data, it is important for the researcher to represent the multiple layers of the participant’s voice, to give a thick description of the thinking and realities. It is important therefore to pay attention to the paralinguistic cues as well as the spoken word – the grappling, the hesitations, the rewording and the silences, which fill out the meaning. The researcher makes notes during the interviews to record these cues and brings them to the work of analysis (Chapter 5). Confidence in the anonymity of the recording process plays an important part in allowing participants to frankly reveal their perceptions, and this is stressed at the outset in the informed consent and reiterated at the start of each interview. Adequate time allocation for the interview allows participants to explore their beliefs about spirituality and their multiple points of entry into it. Several follow up questions are kept in reserve in the semi-structured interview so that there are many prompts to ensure participants have every opportunity to bring to speech all their thinking.

**Stage 2 Internal Dialogue with the Framework**

A comprehensive theological framework which proposes Catholic spirituality in a quadrant heuristic was developed in chapter 3, using systematic research. As a heuristic it offers multiple perspectives and ways teachers can interact with it. It is presented tentatively and in a discursive way, not as a final word. Teachers are able to use this tool in self-reflection by using the Likert scale to rate themselves against the descriptions of the two dimensions which intersect and form the quadrants. In locating themselves on the framework teachers begin to enter into dialogue with the systematic theology of the framework itself and build on or contrast with their thinking which began in the interview. They then read through the
descriptions of each of the four paradigms and the possible indicators of practice, further engaging them in dialogue with Christian spirituality as it relates to their practice.

Educationalist and researcher Helen Timperley in her work with teachers in New Zealand found that teachers positioned themselves or aligned themselves within particular metaphors or paradigms which influenced how they then acted towards students. The Timperley research shows the importance of giving teachers the opportunity to critically reflect on the paradigms they use to make sense of their experiences and also to offer alternative paradigms which might create a cognitive dissonance. Based on this idea, the theoretical framework of spirituality (Chapter 3) may open up different ways of understanding students’ spirituality for teachers. In the second stage of the dialogue reflection cycle, teachers have an opportunity to critically reflect on their own paradigms of spirituality through the use of the paradigms in the framework. The framework offers a discursive normative, with which to interact. It is in the interaction between the framework and the researcher questions in the reflection paper building upon the initial responses to the interview questions that something new in practice may be anticipated. The teacher’s internal dialogue with the framework brings together the metaphoric language of paradigms of the framework and the concepts of spirituality in the teacher’s experience in classroom practice as discussed in the interviews. What is at work in this stage of the dialogue cycle is a bringing together of the language of education, human experience and theology in a cross-disciplinary conversation.

Carrie Doehring explores the impact of cross-disciplinary conversations. Doehring explains that by staying within the language of one discipline, concepts become closed and proposed paradigms can become less reflective of the complexity of human experience. Quoting Loder, Doehring argues for a bridging between conceptual and experiential or imaginative language, pointing to theology and psychology as possible avenues of encounter where concept and experience can meet to illuminate each other:

26 Timperley et al., Teacher Professional Learning and Development, Foreword: XVIII.

Looking at the interaction of conceptual and imaginative languages is part of bringing a ‘new hermeneutic’ to understanding theological studies and psychological studies as languages in the bridge discipline of pastoral psychology and theology ... In the new hermeneutic, the languages of psychology and theology ‘create linguistic worlds of meaning’ that continually allow ‘the truth of Being’ to emerge.28

In the present research, the task is to bring to speech, to uncover and bring to attention the tacit understandings or concepts about spirituality and the naming and attending to it in the everyday practices of the teacher. The theoretical framework is positioned as a textual partner in the dialogue, introducing cognitive dissonance or placing a conceptual framework over the participant’s own experiential language about spirituality which may help clarify the concept of spirituality. Teachers’ reflections about their practice in light of this dialogue constitute evidence to identify their change in thinking and their concerns about learning and teaching in Religious Education. These reflections are brought to light in the next phase of the research design.

Stage 3 Focus Group Discussion

The third stage of the dialogue reflection cycle gives teachers the opportunity to uncover and articulate teacher values and beliefs operating in relation to their role as teachers in a Catholic primary school. After bringing their thinking to the fore and articulating it through an interview, they engaged in dialogue with the text of a theoretical framework which in itself is presented as a discursive normative. In this third dialogue opportunity, participants come together as a group of professionals to contribute their thinking and experience, build on each other’s meaning, listen to each other’s interpretations and re-consider or strengthen their own thinking and self-understanding in dialogue with the theoretical framework. In participatory research methodology, the researcher is not positioned as an authority figure, rather as a participant, in a reciprocal relationship with other participants. As researcher I am able to be positioned as a participant observer due to my experience as a teacher, and an employee of Catholic Education Melbourne. This allows participants to see me as an ‘insider’ who understands their culture. Interpretation or analysis resides in the dynamics of dialogue which may reveal new insights into teacher understanding of

spirituality, new insights into the frame itself or new insights into teacher practice in Religious Education. In designing the dialogue opportunity in this way, the research methodology reflects a hermeneutical approach and the theory of Brookfield, Timperley and Ziebertz.

Stephen Brookfield in his research into effective adult education methods identifies professional dialogue as one of the most important factors in transforming and improving practice. He describes four complementary lenses through which adult learners can view their practice in order to improve. These are: the adult learner’s autobiography, colleague’s perceptions, engagement with theory, and feedback on practice through students’ eyes. The design of this research uses three of the four lenses Brookfield has identified in the method of the dialogue reflection cycle. In the first stage of the dialogue reflection cycle, the teachers’ interview offers an opportunity for them to tap into their own story. In the second stage, the theoretical framework provides them with the lens of theory through which to consider their practice, while in the third stage collegial dialogue offers them the lens of their colleagues through which to compare and contrast their thinking. The use of student evidence is the final critical lens that Brookfield names. This lens is anticipated in the focus group discussion, however it is not within the scope of this research to include students’ voice directly except as it is brought to the dialogue through teacher observation and reflection.

Ethical Concerns Using Qualitative Methodology in Analysis

In the following discussion I outline the steps taken as a researcher to ensure that the interpretative process used in analysing the empirical data is open to self-reflexivity and remains true to the intent and the voice of the participants. The data will be analysed using two methods: using a grounded theory approach and secondly using the four paradigms of the framework of spirituality as a normative coding system for analysing the interview material. Each of these methods is discussed theoretically below. Then the areas of particular concern and attention for the researcher in this research project are outlined in detail.

29 Brookfield, Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher, 61-78.
The Centrality of Interpretation

Qualitative data analysis for this research relies heavily on what the researcher notices and frames through the context of the research questions. In interpreting the information from interviews and dialogue, the researcher is engaged in what Kinchloe and McLaren describe as “the back and forth of studying parts in relation to the whole and the whole in relation to parts.” This back and forth motion seeks to identify not only the meaning made by participants, but what shapes meaning – be it historical, linguistic or social dynamics. From a hermeneutic perspective, the role of the researcher must be continually reflexive in order to look beyond the participants’ words and check in with the perception of ‘reality’ as interpreted by the researcher and as described by the participants. I have revealed through the theoretical framework in Chapter 3, the categories and concepts that through systematic research I found compelling and true. However, in order to address the challenge of staying open to hearing the outlying or different categories uncovered in the interviews and discussions, I will be firstly analysing the interviews using a grounded theory approach which codes for themes using the qualitative research tool NVivo to assist in data organization and coding hierarchies. A grounded theory approach “is a comparative method in which the researcher compares data with data, data with categories, and category with category.” The themes or categories arrived at must be true to the thick description of the thinking present in the participants’ voices, therefore it is important as noted above that the researcher withholds any pre-conceived ideas about spirituality during the first pass of analysis to attend carefully to what the participants are saying, withholding judgment, listening with empathy and seeking to be true to their understanding. The themes that are presented in the first instance in Chapter 5 are the themes that emerge from pulling together concepts in the language of the participants, analysing paralinguistic cues and interpreting responses using contextual knowledge of school culture. This technique, known


as content analysis or coding, can be applied with flexibility and allows fragments to be pieced together by the researcher in such a way as to form a comprehensive view of the shared experiences and thinking of the participants. Tim May,\textsuperscript{32} writing about social research, considers this approach consistent with hermeneutics in that it is possible to identify ways in which new meanings are developed.

**Using the Framework of Spirituality as Normative**

In order to verify the framework in the context of the research, the same interview data is then analysed again, coding for the concepts in the two dimensions and four paradigms of the framework as the normative premise. The framework as presented in Chapter 3 provides clear criteria for analysis, as it is itself a coding system, as described by the guide to the NVivo system: “A coding system is a means of reorganizing the data according to conceptual themes recognized by the researcher ... Codes can be derived from the informant’s stories, research questions and theoretical frameworks.”\textsuperscript{33} A coding approach depends on clearly defined concepts and the framework as developed in Chapter 3 provides a rich theoretical source to refer to when analysing the data. Checking the themes or codes between those emerging in the grounded approach and those identified from the framework as normative, will indicate ways the framework supports or challenges teacher understanding of spirituality and ways they seek to develop it in their students. Further codes identify the context or story of the different schools, the feelings and attitudes of the participants towards their role and spirituality, and the markers of change in thinking as self-identified by participants and identified by the researcher. Observations are charted to help build up a picture of the participant meanings being developed in relation to the framework such as: text search of frequently used words and how they map against the framework; identifying links between emotional reactions and particular sections of the paradigms or particular areas discussed; avoidance techniques observed or lack of vocabulary around


certain paradigms. Reference to the conditions under which the particular paradigms occur in the dialogue, and the connections or lack of connections made to practice will be central to building the analysis. Shifts in thinking may not be immediately apparent or identified by the participants at the time; therefore final feedback questions are emailed to participants after some time has elapsed to capture any additional reflections. This data contributes to the analysis process.

Particular areas of observation and focus for the researcher when analysing the data are described in detail as follows with this process producing the results discussed in Chapter 5.

**Analysing Professional Dialogue and Teacher Feedback**

The interviews will be transcribed and the researcher will identify: a) recurring themes in the language or images used to describe spirituality; b) observations of body language or hesitations; c) emotional reactions; d) links/ disconnects between teacher perception of their spirituality and how they perceive student spirituality; e) trends in descriptions of student spirituality of older and younger students; f) links between spirituality and pedagogy; g) links between teacher concepts of spirituality and the paradigms in the theological framework as reflected in the language used. Any trends across schools, disparities between schools, or between year levels taught will also be taken into consideration.

In the transcripts of professional dialogue and in the written feedback, the researcher will look for similarities and differences across and between schools and teachers for: A) changes in the language or images used to describe spirituality; B) observations of body language or hesitations; C) emotional reactions; D) recognition of their practice in the paradigms, (validity) E) understanding of the theory as theory of spirituality and the two dimensions on which the four paradigms are based, (reliability) F) ability to relate their practice and this theory to one another, (development) G) changes to teacher insights into student spirituality relating to the framework; H) changes to teacher insights into their pedagogy in Religious Education relating to the framework; I) recommendations for improvement to the framework; J) recommendations for its future use. Recommendations will be developed in light of the literature on theology of spirituality and teacher professional learning theory.
The theoretical framework is judged as successful if teachers: 1) recognize their practice in the paradigms, 2) understand the theory as theory, 3) are able to relate their practice and this theory to one another. The Likert scale in the teacher reflection paper gives an indication as to teacher alignment with any or all of the four paradigms on the theoretical framework. This can be cross referenced with their discussion in the professional dialogue session and analysis of interview transcripts.

It is not the place of this research to consider to what extent reflection using the framework impacts teacher practice. At this stage teachers use the framework as a reflection tool and give feedback on whether or not it extended, challenged or enhanced their thinking about their own and student’s spirituality and whether or not they can identify any implications for their classroom practice in Religious Education. With this feedback on the theological framework, changes are made to the framework and/ or the reflection process to ensure it is valid. In the future a longer-term action research cycle may document changes in practice resulting from the use of the revised theological framework.

**Processes and Methods of Participation Selection**

In this section, the details of the research design are described. These details comply with the Human Research Ethics Committee requirements of the University of Divinity.

No less than 8 and no more than 16 participants will ensure a sufficiently detailed account and analysis to enable others to determine whether the findings may be applicable to broader contexts. Purposive sampling is applied. The target population is specifically primary classroom teachers in Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne as the primary school data from the Enhancing Catholic Schools Identity Project gave rise to the research questions. The future implications from the research may impact pedagogy and therefore participating schools are selected by identifying those Catholic primary school in the Archdiocese of Melbourne who have indicated a goal around improving pedagogy in Religious Education in their School Improvement Plan. The principals of four of these schools are invited by a letter describing the aims of the project, to give permission for interested teachers to participate in the research. No less than three or more than four schools will be selected participate. Teachers will not need to be Catholic to participate; if they are employed as a classroom teacher in a Catholic primary school with responsibility
for teaching Religious Education and they have volunteered for the research, they will be included in the sample. If the teacher has no responsibility for teaching Religious Education, this would exclude them from participating.

The researcher will make a time to meet individually with the principals of the selected schools and ensure there is clarity around time commitment and voluntary participation of teachers. It will be important at this meeting to stress that teachers need to be able to freely elect to participate in the research. Classroom teachers in each of these schools are then invited to take part in the research, either through a briefing conducted by the researcher at a staff meeting to outline the aims of the research, or through written invitation to classroom teachers, via school email or school electronic noticeboard, to participate in the research project.

In consultation with the principal or deputy principal, a minimum of two, maximum of four teachers are chosen from these volunteers to participate in the research. It is important that the principal or deputy principal be involved in the selection of participants as practical issues such as timetabling of release time requires an organizational overview. In total, 3 hours will be required of each teacher.

- Participants will be required to participate in an interview conducted by the researcher for a maximum of 60 minutes.
- A reading outlining the theoretical framework will be sent to participants via email, which may take up to 45 minutes to read.
- This will be followed up with a professional dialogue session of those participating at the school, using the theoretical framework on spirituality and interview transcripts. This professional dialogue will take no more than 60 minutes.
- A further 15 minutes will be required for reflective feedback, no more than two weeks after the professional dialogue.

Participant Information and Consent Forms (PICF) will be made available to those teachers who volunteer to be part of the research from the selected schools. This form will be handed personally to the principal by the researcher during an informal information briefing with the principal at the selected schools. There are two options for making the PICF available to participants:
a) the forms are left with the principal who will call for volunteers and the researcher will come back after school hours to meet the volunteers and be available to answer questions and sign the forms

b) the researcher will arrange with the principal to hold a short briefing with staff at a pre-arranged staff meeting time to promote the research and ask for volunteers, making forms available and answering any questions. A participant can choose to withdraw up to four weeks after the date of the professional dialogue session. The participant’s data is then deleted and the participant informed of this.

**Conclusion**

Chapter 4 examined the ethical issues pertinent to the research and identified ways the researcher was aware of the ethical concerns of working with teachers in a Catholic system who are dealing with issues of faith and life and are expected to raise these issues with students. The chapter highlighted the challenging nature of collecting and analysing qualitative data and the need for researcher flexibility and reflexivity as well as a process orientation in the design of the research. The research design was described as using a dual methodology: using both systematic and empirical data. The systematic research component contributed to the development of a framework of spirituality. The framework however, remained open as a discursive normative which allowed for the empirical research component to inform the final version of the framework as presented in Chapter 3 and includes a practical teacher guided dialogue process for each of the four paradigms as a final refinement of the framework.

This chapter also described the research design and the process of data collection and analysis for this study. The research design gathered three data sets from participants: interviews, focus group discussions and written reflection. A qualitative approach to analysing the data was described as using grounded theory and coding in NVivo as a method of understanding concepts emerging from a close study of the empirical data and the relationships between the data sets. Firstly interviews will be analysed using grounded theory and then they will be compared with analysis through the four paradigms of the framework. This two fold approach will validate the researcher’s analysis and will indicate how effective the framework is as a normative tool. The focus group discussion data and
later written reflection data is additional information to help evaluate the success of the framework in relation to teacher development.

The participant selection described in the chapter used purposive sampling, based on teachers in Catholic primary schools who teach Religious Education. The interview questions were identified as chosen to give insight into the research questions and develop deeper understanding of the complexity of the teaching and learning of religious education and the pedagogical decisions teachers make each day in their role as religious educators. The framework’s role in the methodology was presented in the chapter as twofold – as being an integral part of both the process and the product of the research. Presented as a discursive normative it aims to promote teacher discussion and reflection to produce focus group data and feedback from participants for further development. The final iteration of the framework is presented in Chapter 3 which includes professional dialogue processes around each paradigm, developed through reflection on the dialogue and feedback.

In Chapter 5, the data is analysed in accordance with the methodology described above. Conclusions are drawn around teacher understanding of student spirituality, their pedagogical decisions and the use of the framework as a professional development tool and a practical theological instrument.
Chapter 5
Data Analysis

Introduction

This chapter draws on the methodology of Chapter 4 to analyse the data and discuss some of the issues raised by this analysis. Chapter 4 highlighted the dual methodology of this research and the interconnections between the empirical and systematic methods employed. It also clarified the theological imperative of the research – the ‘in order that’– which identifies the underlying theological imperative of the researcher to better understand the nexus between spirituality and religious education in order that students’ lives can be enriched and their learning experiences be enhanced by an offer of engagement with a dynamic and open Christian narrative. This imperative emerged from the literature review in Chapter 2 which revealed a cultural trend to separate spirituality from religion, locating spirituality in the relatively private sphere of immediate personal experience. In this sphere the particularity of religious confessionality can be either ignored or merged into the universality of often pre-reflective experiences. Religion, presented educationally as cut off from spirituality can be associated with a divisive role where a range of beliefs, ethics, symbols and narratives sit at times uncomfortably alongside largely humanist beliefs in a plural western society. The challenge for teachers of religious education in a Catholic school identified in Chapter 2 is to bring lived experience into dialogue with the Catholic tradition as well as other religious traditions. It is a task that challenges the widening gulf between spirituality and religion, offering students an opportunity to interpret experience through a religious perspective and in turn, re-interpret religious traditions through the lens of human experience.

In the process of the research, a combination of analysing concrete experiences and using theoretical concepts was used to capture the totality of different experiences of spirituality in a coherent, exhaustive and recognizable model, which was presented in Chapter 3. The framework presented two dimensions: a theological and anthropological dimension. The theological dimension, represented on the vertical axis, holds in tension the Kataphatic and Apophatic Christian theological traditions; while the horizontal axis holds in tension the
receptive and responsive modes of being. The intersection of the two axes produces four paradigms of human experiencing: Vulnerability, Responsibility, Commitment and Fulfilment. Each paradigm features existential questions and experiences which open liminal spaces, spaces of ‘living between’: between unknowing and knowing, between the call and the response, between belonging and distantiation, between ultimate concerns and the here and now. This framework of Christian spirituality is both the result of the empirical research cycle and an important component within the research design, being open to feedback from research participants which influenced both its final iteration and the formulation of the practical teacher professional dialogue tool for each paradigm.

The literature discussion in Chapter 2 revealed the critical influence on teacher pedagogical decision-making of their tacitly held beliefs about students. The research design described in Chapter 4 therefore sought to illuminate the question: ‘What do teachers believe about student spirituality and how does it impact their pedagogy?’ Through personal interviews of eleven Catholic primary school religious education teachers from three schools, the researcher explored six questions: How do you understand your own spirituality? How do you understand the spirituality of your students? Is spirituality age-related? How would you rate your influence on student spirituality? How do you understand your role as teacher of RE? Describe a lesson in RE where spirituality is highlighted. How important is spirituality in education generally? A second step in the research was that after engaging with the framework of spirituality as a reading with some reflective questions and locating themselves on the framework axes, the teachers were brought together in school-based focus group discussions around the framework and its possibilities for practice. Participants were given a final opportunity to send via email any final reflections about the framework, spirituality or the research in general. Chapter 4 also focused on the ethics of qualitative research and the critical role of reflexivity in the researcher in analysing the data. In order to make theoretical interpretations of the data, it is necessary to be true to the voices within the data and for the researcher to be aware of his or her biases when making connections between rich description, analysis and theory. Therefore the research design described in Chapter 4 incorporated two approaches to analysing the data. Firstly through a grounded approach, coding for themes using the qualitative research tool NVivo, and secondly coding through the lens of the framework paradigms developed in Chapter 3. Using grounded
methodology ensures that the researcher, as ethically responsible to the voice of the participants is not forcing interpretations of the data to fit with the framework, and allows themes to emerge independently of the framework categories. Through the second analysis correlations between the grounded approach themes and the framework categories serve to justify the framework as rigorous while revealing insights into the research data itself.

Chapter 5 below presents the data and its analysis and is organised in four sections. The first section analyses the 11 participants’ interview data through a grounded approach, identifying themes that emerge and these are discussed in relation to the literature on spirituality. In the second section, the same data is analysed through the lens of the framework and its implications for teacher practice are drawn out. This analysis is compared and contrasted to the themes identified in the grounded theory approach. In a third section, the participants from each school come together in a focus group discussion after engaging with the framework. These three discussion transcripts form the focus group data which is discussed and its impact on the final iteration of the framework is described. Further connections, observations and possibilities are drawn together in the conclusion.

**Summary of Findings**

A brief summary of the findings from the analysis is described below. Overall the eleven teachers interviewed were very positive about the role of spirituality and its importance in education. All participants understood themselves as spiritual beings and were able to identify many spiritual experiences in their lives and all but one identified their students as inherently spiritual beings. The terms ‘spiritual’, ‘religious’, ‘beliefs’ and ‘faith’ were often used interchangeably. All participants were able to talk confidently about student spirituality and rated themselves as either confident or very confident to talk with students about spirituality, many affirming that this happens almost daily at school. Teachers were divided in their ideas on spirituality as age related, with many teachers agreeing that life experience was a stronger factor in developing spirituality rather than age alone; however participants observed that broader life experience often came with age.

Given the small sample size, there were indications of congruence between what teachers believe about their own spirituality and their descriptions of religious lessons. However, congruence between what teachers believe about student spirituality and their lesson
descriptions was less clear. In the grounded theory approach to analysing the data six themes emerged which were reflective of the literature on spirituality. These themes were able to be clearly mapped against the framework, independently justifying the mapping of the data against framework paradigms. In the second analysis, coding against the four paradigms of the framework revealed an emphasis on Kataphatic theology in teacher understandings of their own spirituality, their students’ spirituality and in what they attended to in their religious education lessons. The Fulfilment paradigm showed the greatest congruence between teacher beliefs about their own and students’ spirituality and their pedagogic practice. Much of the language used in the strongly represented ‘Relationship with God’ theme aligned with the Fulfilment and Commitment paradigms, and served to emphasize that the participants are most comfortable with an understanding of God in the everyday. None of the participants identified student spirituality in terms of Apophatic theology, although five teachers understood their own spirituality in terms of either the Vulnerability or Responsibility paradigms, or both. The two quadrants at the Apophatic end of the axis were under-represented in terms of descriptions of lessons, teacher and student spirituality. There was also less fluency in the language used by participants in these quadrants and it was more difficult for the researcher to determine meaning. An overwhelming majority (nine) of the religious education lessons described by teachers held elements of alignment with the Commitment paradigm highlighting the importance participants placed on the aspect of their role that informs about and creates a sense of belonging to the Catholic tradition. This was reinforced by the ‘Connections to a religious tradition’ theme which emerged in the grounded analysis as strongly represented. A few important remarks from teachers indicated a discomfort with this role and raised a question about full and free participation of students and the need for dialogue around ‘coming to faith’ in religious education. The risk factor of each paradigm, described briefly in Chapter 3, assumed an important role in the analysis process, allowing discernment in the interpretation to reveal tensions for teachers in their approaches to religious education. By analysing elements of the paradigm and elements of risk, each paradigm produced an area of focus for teacher pedagogy.

Finally, in the school based focus group conversations the participants agreed the framework gave them an opportunity to reflect on spirituality as integral to religious
education, opening an understanding of their role as religious educators to include the notion of grappling with existential questions in light of the offerings of the tradition. Teachers suggested that the framework could be used to audit their classroom practice and their implementation of the religious education curriculum.

The following discussion reveals details about these findings and raises some of the implications for religious educators and Catholic education.

**Section One: Using a Grounded Theory Approach**

While the researcher is committed to the framework and its paradigms as capturing the totality of different experiences of spirituality in a coherent, exhaustive and recognizable model, it is important that the researcher remain open to interpreting the data independent of the framework, to ensure that coding is not skewed. In this section,¹ the teacher interview data is analysed using a grounded theory approach described in Chapter 4. The task of this analysis is to bring to speech, to uncover and bring to attention the tacit understandings or concepts about spirituality and the naming and attending to it revealed in the everyday practices of the teacher. Central to the methodology is the focus on using the participants’ terminology and identifying similarities in their language and concepts, and also discerning what terms and topics they avoid. The researcher is positioned as a participant observer and is reflective throughout the analysis of her own biases to ensure the analysis is true to the voices of the participants. The six concepts or themes that emerged were: Relationship with God, Connections to a religious tradition, Compassion, Wellbeing, Curiosity and Innocence. Each of these themes was noted through coding for meaning in each transcript using the NVivo program to highlight similarities in linguistic structures, conceptual descriptors and practices, cross-referenced with researcher observations of body language and hesitations noted in the transcripts. Critical to verifying the concepts identified was to show any connections between the concepts of spirituality the teachers identify in their description of student spirituality and the teachers’ descriptions of their lessons as addressing the spiritual dimension; for in describing their

¹ This section of the analysis was published prior to submission of the thesis in a modified version in 2017. See: Rina Madden, “Spirituality and Religious Education: Reflecting on Teacher Practice,” *Pacifica* 30, no. 3 (2017): 268-283.
practice the participants were able to expand on their meaning and illuminate in practical terms the most important elements of student spirituality. The researcher made the assumption that through the lens of their practice their own understanding of spirituality and that of their students' would be confirmed or challenged. The discussion below first touches on what teachers were saying about their own spirituality. This does not form a detailed part of this analysis, being attended to in greater detail in the second section of this chapter. Teacher description of the spirituality of their students is then discussed in relation to the themes identified, making connections with their lesson descriptions and highlighting relevant literature which serves to justify or challenge each theme.

**Introducing the Participants**

The participants were all teachers of religious education in three Catholic primary schools. The three schools were selected from different regions within the Archdiocese of Melbourne, reflecting different school profiles. The eleven participants, two of whom were male, were aged between twenty five and fifty four years of age. The ages were spread evenly across the range. The participants have been given code names and are briefly introduced here with a summary of their religious education lesson topic which they described as impacting student spirituality in the interview.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Code name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Teaching student level</th>
<th>Lesson Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>senior primary</td>
<td>using a video clip and class discussion to challenge student understandings about refugees and the need for hope in times of hardship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>middle primary</td>
<td>using a story book about accepting differences to understand human need for working together to benefit all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>middle primary</td>
<td>telling a personal story as an analogy of the Last Supper to empathize with and understand characters and link to Eucharist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agnes</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>junior primary</td>
<td>students doing a role play of a bible text to empathize and understand characters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>junior primary</td>
<td>taking students into a garden setting to extend and experience different ways of connecting with God</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**School A Profile:** mono-cultural school population with a high socio-economic profile

**School B Profile:** mono-cultural school population with a mid to low socio-economic profile

**School C profile:** multi-cultural school population and a low socio-economic profile

| Chris                  | 27  | junior primary         | using class discussions and a guest speaker from a Catholic organisation to explore the impact of personal choices on others |
| Colin                  | 31  | middle primary         | using student wonderings and questions to explore how the world works and human impact on environment |
| Claire                 | 54  | senior primary         | using different experiences and stories from other faiths to illuminate understandings about and make personal connections to Mary |

**Table 1: Introducing Participants in the Research**
In the discussion below, teachers were asked what their aims were for the students and how these aims related to spirituality. Their comments are used to give insight into how their lessons relate to what they are saying about spirituality. Generally it was found that there was not a clear sense of alignment between the lesson descriptions, the aims for the lessons and how teachers described student spirituality.

**Teacher Spirituality**

The results indicated that overall teachers described themselves as spiritual beings, with eight teachers having no hesitation in saying they thought about God or their spirituality often, even daily and that they felt they were very spiritual. Three of the eleven teachers initially declared they did not consider themselves as spiritual: “Umm ... not really, no. At school though, it’s something that obviously comes up in day to day. Not in my personal time though.” (Colin). Yet even those three participants were able to identify spiritual moments in their lives and had no hesitation in identifying their students as spiritual beings. There was evidence that participants were searching for words as they attempted to bring their ideas to speech: nervous laughter, long pauses, broken sentences and repetitions. Every teacher, when asked to rate themselves out of 10 in confidence to talk about spirituality with students, indicated they were confident with 82% rating themselves at or above 8 out of 10. Interestingly however, after the interview, when asked whether there were moments of difficulty or stress in the interview, more than half the teachers said it was harder than they had anticipated to talk about spirituality and that indeed it was something they rarely did. The difficulty in articulating spirituality becomes problematic in expressing aims for their lessons as indicated in the discussions below.

**Student Spirituality**

All but one participant described their students as spiritual, and they conducted their lessons on the premise that students were spiritual beings. In this they agree with researchers Scott and Magnuson who assume, in keeping with the general consensus of those writing in the field of spiritual development, “that spirituality is a normative human
phenomenon.”² Adam, departing from this premise said: “It seems a lot of students here aren’t driven by God or spirituality.” He elaborated on what he saw as the purpose of spirituality which was “to be one with God.” He felt this was something that could not be necessarily viewed as an attainment or an outcome of learning and it was this aspect that was hard to “impart to students.” He did not see that students were innately spiritual. In general, however, the teachers genuinely felt that spirituality was important in their own and students’ lives. All participants alike struggled to put into words how they viewed student spirituality, even more so than their own. Three of the participants felt that while spirituality was important and they were able to describe it in their students, they considered the word itself and the concept would not be known or understood by students and even that students would not be aware of their own spirituality. Raising awareness was something that these teachers resolved would benefit students to address in the future. More than half (six) of the participants indicated some hesitation in making general statements about their students. They believed each student would be as unique in their spirituality as they were in any other dimension of their lives and also felt that this was an area they could say little about, being private and hard to observe. When teachers were asked to describe students’ spirituality, six themes emerged from their interviews. These are discussed in order from those most frequently occurring to those least. Each theme is compared with how it played out in the lessons teachers described as addressing the spiritual dimension.

Teachers described student spirituality in up to three different ways each, reflecting an appreciation of the complexity of the concept and their struggle to express what for many of them was new thinking. This struggle was apparent in their hesitations and the provisional quality of many of their statements. The themes were: Relationship with God, Connections to a religious tradition, Compassion, Wellbeing, Curiosity, Innocence. These themes are a mixture of qualities of a person which teachers associate with spirituality, such as: compassion, curiosity and innocence; the outcomes or benefits of spirituality such as: wellbeing and connections to faith tradition; or an attempt to describe the essence of

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spirituality such as: relationship with God. The first theme, Relationship with God can be interpreted as the essence of spirituality based on Christian theology of revelation as described by Gerald O’Collins in his recent book, *Revelation*: “… an interpersonal encounter, event, or dialogue that takes place between the tripersonal God and those who experience *and in faith receive* the presence of the self-revealing God”\(^3\) (Italics in the text). The term ‘faith’ is significant in connection with spirituality and recurs throughout the interviews. The other five themes focus on the outcomes, results or benefits of spirituality. The lessons as described by teachers often addressed more than one theme. It is noteworthy that the lesson aims were not clearly articulated, and when asked, participants were not able to explain what made their lesson particularly successful in addressing the spiritual dimension.

**Theme 1: Relationship with God**

Almost half of the teachers (five of the eleven) named student spirituality as personal relationship with God in terms of ‘knowing they are loved by God,’ ‘talking to God’ and ‘being one with God.’ Beth wished to provide some rationalisation for how she assumes her students have relationship with God: “they know that they’re loved by God and they know that they can talk to God and they also know that God listens to them, they know that God knows them by name, so I’ll say that they have a relationship with God.” Amanda’s hesitation and surmising are indicative of many of the teachers when she attempts to generalise about her students’ spirituality: “They would use the word ‘love’ a lot to describe God and their spirituality, I think.”

In this theme, teachers demonstrate a sense of the close historical links between religion and spirituality in the way they readily name a Christian relational God. David Hay, in his seminal work with Rebecca Nye, *The Spirit of the Child* indicates that this could be problematic.\(^4\) He considers the West to be a post Christian society and understands the task ahead is to “map the geography of a novel spiritual terrain.”\(^5\) He looks for a language around spirituality that is beyond God-talk. These teachers, while not restricting their ideas


about student spirituality to God-talk, are using the language of the school’s religious identity to express how they understand their students’ spirituality. Rather than identifying new areas of language and behaviour that signify spirituality in their students, teachers are making connections to Christian spirituality and revelation. One caution to be had in regard to using the language only of Christianity, along with that expressed by Hay, is whether a phrase such as ‘relationship with God’ may go unexamined in a Catholic school, being almost so commonplace a phrase that it no longer has the power to convey the awesome spiritual nature of such an encounter in terms of revelation. In the lessons described by teachers there seems to be little that addresses the nature of this God, which might be one indication that this phrase remains unexamined and the complexity of its meaning untapped.

In the lesson accounts by teachers, two lessons had as their aim to increase student awareness of their relationship with God. One employed meditation while the other focused on offering students an opportunity to experience God in nature. Both these teachers had identified student spirituality in terms of relationship with God. Three others identified this theme in their students’ spirituality but did not identify it in their lesson aims.

**Theme 2: Connections to a Religious Tradition**

Four teachers named connections with or ties to religious traditions (including Sikh, Hindu and other Christian traditions) as evidence of students’ spirituality. Teachers identified religious beliefs that students learn about in school or from their families, such as connections to the stories of Jesus and “awareness of another being who we learn about.” Beth said: “They would link it (spirituality) with Church and prayer … at least I hope they would.” Colin noted: “But there are children who have a very literal belief in their spirituality who would umm … hear what’s being said in church or in prayer and they’d: ‘Yep that’s it, that’s what the bible says, that’s the fact.’”

The teachers’ comments reveal they acknowledge that the faith tradition of the school and families has a role to play in developing students’ spirituality, but they are not clear about the role of beliefs in spirituality. The language of religion, faith, beliefs and spirituality is here often used interchangeably revealing the close links between the four terms and the complexity of each of them. In this they reflect much of the literature about children’s
spirituality where spirituality and religion are closely linked historically and conceptually. At the same time the literature suggests a growing tendency to separate spirituality from religion. This has particular significance for teachers of religious education and how they understand the relationship between spirituality and religious education. In The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence, Scarlett takes pains to differentiate between the terms religion/spirituality and beliefs/faith: “The consequences of conflating faith and belief have been to marginalize religion and to dismiss spirituality as something less than rational.” He holds that faith, the individual’s response to the symbols of traditions enacted in living every day, should be central to any study of spirituality. This theme wrestles with nothing less than the core of faith: revelation. Gerald O’Collins, in his recent work makes the distinction between revelation as experiencing the self-revealing God in a relational sense; and revelation as propositional – divinely revealed truths that enrich our knowledge about God in a cognitive sense. This knowledge in turn influences our relationship with God. O’Collins holds that non-experienced revelation does not exist. The complexity of engaging with faith seeking understanding presents teachers with a conundrum as they grapple with their role in this. They feel loyalty to the task of imparting knowledge of the truths proposed by the Catholic faith tradition as they understand them, yet are committed to giving students the opportunity to respond freely in faith. This struggle is revealed in the comments of Claire, on relating the aim of her lesson in religious education: “yeah, I think for them to be critical thinkers, but still maintain I guess a belief or


7 Houtman and Aupers, “The Spiritual Turn and the Decline of Tradition.”


10 Scarlett, “Toward a Developmental Analysis of Religious and Spiritual Development,” 25.

11 O’Collins, Revelation, 10.
faith in whatever they choose to believe in. So I think that’s what we aim to do we sort of have a foundation of belief system for them, give them the skills to think critically and then let them choose.”

Beth, on developing awareness in her students indicates: “there are different people with different faiths, but still all have that vehicle to develop their spirituality, their spiritual side, if that makes sense. ... But I know that in a Catholic school that you sort of use, you know, the faith is a bit of vehicle there.” Using religion as a means to exploring and understanding spirituality, including the experiences of revelation and faith response is an excellent proposition and also allows for those of other faith traditions to bring in their experiences and questions. However, it should be noted that spirituality develops differently through the perspectives of different traditions. This reciprocity of spirituality with the particularity of different religious traditions is an important nuance that may be brought to light in further research.

Of eight lessons that were aimed at making connections to a religious tradition, seven lessons explored aspects of the Catholic tradition as a vehicle to develop personal responses and promote behavioural ideals such as the virtues of love, compassion and openness with a view to becoming a ‘better person.’ This related in two cases to relationship with God and in five cases to reflection on relationship with others. Only one lesson dealt with an aspect of the tradition to enable deeper understanding of an aspect of the Tradition, in particular the last Supper and the institution of Eucharist. The following dot points summarize the eight lesson topics:

- Holy week events imagined through the eyes of Jesus and evoking personal emotional engagement
- Bible stories and making links to students’ lives using a ‘hot seat’ strategy
- Bible story (Good Samaritan) and making links with saint (Mother Teresa) and a local vocational charity worker
- Connecting with God as creator found in nature
- Connecting with God in Christian meditation
- Understanding the role and person of Mary and other female figures in other traditions as linked to motherhood
• Understanding connections between the last supper event and Eucharist
• Links between personal actions and the season of Lent

In each of the eight lessons, the teachers described how they wished to elicit emotional engagement and responses from students however they did not articulate this in terms of a faith response. When teachers described their lessons they were asked about the link between spirituality and religion. Some of the comments indicate teachers were not confident to talk about religious truths: Alex notes: “But then I think some teachers hold themselves back from engaging in that conversation because they’re worried that: ‘I can’t impart the right information (laugh) I can’t tell you exactly what you need to hear.’” This comment reflects the need for teachers to clarify their intentions in religious education. Questions can be raised here how students learn about faith or beliefs. Only one of the lessons explicitly invited multiple perspectives on the correlation or connection being modelled between an element of the tradition and students’ feelings or experiences (the lesson on Mary). It is interesting to note that the tradition is often indeed simply a vehicle as stated by Beth above or a minor aim in these lessons for a broader aim around student behaviour and values.

**Theme 3: Compassion**

Four teachers understood their students’ spirituality through the ways students demonstrated compassion and empathy, caring and being considerate for others even when not initiated by whole group action or prompted by the teacher. Teachers described students in the following ways: “There is an innate willingness to help other people.” “They want to be good to everybody.” “They can definitely, they believe different things, but in their actions I guess, would be more where you’d see their spirituality, in the way they treat other people and interact with others.” “Perhaps living in ... you know it sounds like a cliché – but in the image of Jesus, being Jesus like, being Christ like and noticing that. Noticing when you have given someone a second chance or been tolerant or reached out. Yes, I think that’s what it means for them.”
Teachers are articulating the importance of another way of knowing, the knowing of the heart, rather than the head. They recognise here what researcher Robert Coles\(^\text{12}\) and others have recognised as the natural compassion of children that allows them to “experience a kind of direct empathetic interconnection with the world – deep empathy – and their compassion can arise very naturally.”\(^\text{13}\) While not overtly making a connection to theological anthropology, teachers are identifying an emphasis on relationship which English Christian theologian John Swinton holds is critical to spirituality. He notes that:

> ... awareness of the transcendent love of God is mediated through, and experienced in, temporal love, offered in loving relationships. It is therefore in the quality of our relationships, as opposed to the quantity of our intellect, that the image (of God) is restored. Consequently, all human persons can be seen to have spiritual potential.\(^\text{14}\)

While the Catholic tradition upholds the centrality of the love of one another, how this understanding or belief can inform and strengthen the innate quality of caring that teachers identify as spiritual in students is a connection mentioned only in Amanda’s lesson. This lesson’s aim was to have students increase their compassionate response to others through raising awareness of their being made in the image of God in the retelling of a personal story. The teacher wanted to help students understand her own faith position which was that in being compassionate they were enacting God’s love. This clear articulation of her own faith stance was the only example of a teacher revealing a personal faith position explicitly and in full awareness of what she was doing. This lesson aligned with Amanda’s own sense of students’ spirituality as strongly related to compassion. However, the other three teachers quoted above did not attend to this aspect in their lessons. Many lessons used compassion as a strategy, tapping into student’s empathy to make connections to others in stories, videos and biblical texts. But those lessons were not explicitly aimed at unpacking compassion as a mediation of God’s presence, or as a valued human response.

\(^{12}\) Coles, *The Spiritual Life of Children*.


Theme 4: Wellbeing

Three teachers identified spirituality as related to students’ self-awareness and wellbeing, their attitudes, personal beliefs and values. They used language such as: “being one with self,” and “if you dig deep enough, they have quite a solid sense of what they believe in …” “I think they do have an inner – and they know they have an inner spirituality.” “How they feel and what they value” “Spirituality, it is faith and can provide a great comfort.” “So I guess it (religious education) allows opportunities for, you know as I said before, for children to share their feelings to normalize, to normalize, what they feel or what they experience and know that it happens to a lot of people, but then spirituality just takes it that step further about what is the right response or what is the right way to frame it and even though it is tricky what can we do next?” “Part of being spiritual is … you’ve taken those lessons that have been taught to us, you know, through the Ten Commandments or through the bibles and how to behave and act. Spirituality is actually living those and believing.”

Teachers here are seeing spirituality in terms of its effects. This foray into wellbeing is one that is reflected strongly in the literature, especially in research into spirituality in the fields of health sciences, psychology and wellbeing. Teachers see spirituality as essential to a student’s self-esteem, self-efficacy, meaning making and identity construction leading to wellbeing. Teachers are reflecting on the power of spirituality as an inner resource which can lead to wellbeing outcomes. In doing this, they are combining it with the secular wellbeing agenda, perhaps mirroring some of the research that investigates religion from a biopsychological stance: “… religion is a broad umbrella for many human endeavours that may operate in multiple ways and at multiple levels as protective processes ….“ Religion can function to build resilience, establish behavioural norms and form personal values and this has been identified by teachers in this research in their descriptions of student spirituality. This function of religion is also born out in research by Philip Hughes with the

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15 Roehlkepartain et al., eds., The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence. This survey of the literature includes many references to the relationship between spirituality and well-being.

Australian Research Council that suggests that “how people nurture their spirits affects their overall wellbeing.”

Some aspects of every lesson teachers described asked students to make connections to their personal beliefs and values. This is an important and common strategy in learning and teaching to ensure students are personally engaged. However, five lessons focused particularly on the formation of student’s personal beliefs, values and behaviour.

- Adam’s lesson aimed at helping students understand the importance of hope in their lives
- Amy wanted students to see how people can work together to benefit the common good
- Colin described a lesson in a series on sustainability with a view to helping students see how the world works and how they could impact it for good
- Chris had an element in her lesson that touched on the impact of saints lives as models for personal decision making and behaviour
- Agnes, in a similar aim to Chris’s, used a bible text to help students make connections to personal behaviour choices

Of the above lessons, three made no particular reference to the tradition, while two were based in either biblical or liturgical references. The lessons modelled behavioural ideals, regardless of how those ideals were referenced. None of the lessons was aimed at unpacking how the human person is understood in theological terms and why the behavioural ideals proposed were preferred or what other options were available. At face value based only on the limited examples described, it may indicate that teachers are influenced by a ‘moralistic, therapeutic deism.’ This phrase, originally formulated by sociologist of religion Christian Smith was used by Karen-Marie Yust in her work: God is Not Your Divine Butler and Therapist! She discusses the simplistic and narcissistic views of God and religion that pervade the American culture she experiences. She identifies that in

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17 Kaldor, Hughes and Black, Spirit Matters, 3.
many religious education programs students are not challenged to engage in a robust
dialogue with different images of God and God’s desires for humanity, but are encouraged
to accept proposed moral norms under the guise of religion and to adhere to a belief system
that offers safety and certainty. While in this research teachers’ intuitive understanding of
spirituality as a potent force for wellbeing is not mistaken, how they approach this in lessons
such as above may need to be clarified and strengthened.

**Theme 5: Curiosity**

Three teachers described student spirituality as being demonstrated through questioning
and curiosity: “so there would be some who would question that and try to think of what ... 
what action they could take to be more like what the stories are telling us.” “They’re very
curious; you know they’re at that stage where they’re questioning: ‘well ... how could that
be?’ Which I think is good, it’s not showing that they don’t believe, but they’re actually
thinking about it.” “... there are a lot of questions but there are also a lot of acceptance of
the way things are, too, so I would say there is a combination of those in their spirituality.”

What sits under these observations are teachers identifying students as engaged in spiritual
questing. The spiritual nature of questioning or the transcendent nature of truth that drives
the questioning was hinted at by one teacher in his lesson description. Colin talked about
the possibility of searching into the nature of truth by promoting “the Big ‘what ifs’ that
cannot be easily answered and whose answers change over time.” However, the lesson he
described did not attend particularly to this aspect of questioning, focusing rather on the
impact of human actions on the world.

Like researchers Tobin Hart\footnote{Hart, *The Secret Spiritual World of Children*.} or Gareth Matthews,\footnote{Matthews, *Dialogues with Children*.} these teachers are seeing their
students as natural philosophers. They would agree with Hart’s observation that: “Even
young children have shown a capacity for thoughtful consideration of the ‘big questions’
(metaphysics), inquiring about proof and the source of knowledge (epistemology),
reasoning through problems (logic), questioning values (ethics), and reflecting on their own
identity in the world.” This aspect of spirituality is an important one to tap into in religious education as it lends itself to inquiry and dialogue, two spiritual and cognitive processes that are vital for engagement and development.

Questioning was mentioned as an important strategy in many of the lesson descriptions. Discussion and provocations were used in many lessons as strategies to engage the student both cognitively and emotionally, raising questions and promoting deeper thinking. However, no lessons were aimed at raising awareness of the theological nature of spiritual questing or the God of mystery the questions tend towards.

**Theme 6: Innocence**

One participant described student spirituality as innocent and unique to childhood. Beth says: “That’s part of what spirituality is, you can’t see it or touch it. They are so ready to believe in what’s not necessarily there … like the Tooth Fairy.” And again: “finding the wonder and awe in everything and … I think even as you get older, I don’t know why but you tend to lose that a little bit. Almost, maybe that comes with the innocence – you sort of lose your innocence …” While Beth speaks of students’ spirituality in this way, her lesson focused on student behaviour linked to Lent and did not reflect her beliefs about students.

Looking at spirituality as innate, as a precious and fragile quality is a myth according to Bruno Vanobbergen. He claims it is “the product of adults who envisage children like this. Adults get stuck in aesthetic clichés about childhood which inhibits the ability to see children and their life-worlds as they are.” He goes on to explain that this view can be interpreted as a reaction against the scientific approach of our culture and tends towards a romantic view that discourages deeper cognitive engagement with reality or critical cognitive approaches in religious education. While only one teacher in this study identified innocence with spirituality, the literature would indicate it is a more widespread understanding that

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24 Nye, *Children’s Spirituality*. 
is often associated with Fowler’s second and third of seven stages of faith: the intuitive / projective faith stage and the mythic / literal faith stage. A tendency to romanticize the innocence of childhood and claims for children’s special openness to God and spirituality are criticised by some authors, especially because it makes assumptions about children that stifles possibilities.

When teachers described a religious education lesson that impacted student spirituality, there was only one lesson that specifically addressed awe and wonder. Alex’s aim for the students was to provide an opportunity for students to experience God in the beauty of nature. In her description, she was open to allowing the moment to flow and was careful to not put particular constraints on students as to how they responded or what they described in their experiences. In this we see a more process oriented, rather than stage oriented approach to religious education. This lesson did not make assumptions about students or what stage of spiritual or faith development they were at, nor did it seek to limit potentials within students. This resonates with the research of Rebecca Nye who advocates an appreciation of ‘process’ in developing student spirituality. Her work focusses on spiritual practices which aim to enhance a sense of the sacred and to give students the opportunity and language to value and express their spirituality. Alex’s lesson reflected in part how she described student spirituality in that she identified the difficulty students had in tuning in to “what they’re thinking and feeling” and in giving students an opportunity to tune into awe and wonder, she was perhaps seeking to redress this lack. However, there is not a clear alignment between her beliefs about students’ spirituality and the lesson described.

Conclusion Section 1

This section of the analysis has drawn out six themes in teacher understanding of student spirituality: Relationship with God, Connections to a religious tradition, Compassion, Wellbeing, Curiosity, Innocence. In the discussion, these themes were related to the literature in children’s spirituality. The themes were also cross-referenced with the teacher

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26 Dillen, “Neither Angels, nor Devils: Theological Views on Children’s Responsibility.”

descriptions of their lessons, indicating that for many teachers what they believed about their students’ spirituality was not often reflected in their practice. The discussion of the responses indicates that for most of the participants, their beliefs about students’ spirituality are neither very clearly articulated nor does it form part of their express aims for religious education. Ten of eleven lessons described in the research were aimed at making direct connections with students’ lives to a few key elements of the Catholic religious tradition, often modelled and proposed by the teacher. These elements were usually confined to the use of popular scripture texts and key liturgical events. However, eight of the eleven teachers reflected an awareness of the fine balance they strove to maintain in their role as they articulated their hopes for their students in religious education:

Yeah, I think for them to be critical thinkers, but still maintain I guess, a belief or faith in whatever they choose to believe in. So I think that’s what we aim to do – we sort of have a foundation of belief system for them, give them the skills to think critically and then let them choose.

Underlying this teacher quote are a host of contingent factors and further questions which are not articulated and must be teased out in order for the role of the teacher in a Catholic school to be clarified and for a deeper understanding of the complex task of developing student spirituality and educating religiously to be understood. These factors will be explored in Chapter 6.

In using a grounded approach to analysis, it is important to use a frame of reference to justify the themes that emerge as concepts and to critique them, while the researcher remains free of pre-conceptions. Using this method may not be conducive to making generalisations or to noticing gaps in the data. In the discussion above, the literature was used as a frame of reference which has enabled to some extent a critique of the themes and to hint at deeper concerns and issues. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, the literature itself is unclear and at times contradictory on the subject of children’s spirituality and pedagogy. Despite these problems with the method, the analysis enabled rich descriptions of the data and a way of conceptualising responses that gave insights into teachers’ thinking around their own and students’ spirituality. It identified themes that emerged free of the pre-conceptions of the researcher. In the following section the themes are able to be mapped against the framework, thereby validating the researcher interpretations of the data against the framework. This impartiality is important to maintain as the integrity of
qualitative data interpretation hinges on the reflexivity of the researcher. It is through using the framework of spirituality as a lens of analysis in the following section that the nuances in the beliefs and practice described by participants can be highlighted, raising strengths, concerns and issues as the comprehensive nature of the four paradigms and their risks brings into discussion all aspects of spirituality whether named by the participants or overlooked by them.

Section Two: Using the Framework of Spirituality

In this section the four paradigms are used as a normative lens through which to analyse the participant interviews. Throughout the discussion, links will be made between the themes identified in the section above and the four paradigms of the framework: Vulnerability, Responsibility, Commitment and Fulfilment. This second approach to the analysis validates the framework as a way of understanding spirituality that posits new insights and illuminates concerning issues and questions around religious education. It highlights some of the possibilities of using the framework as a way of auditing religious education curriculum and pedagogy as well as its capacity to challenge and promote renewed practice in religious education.

In Chapter 3 in the discussion of the paradigms, a risk of each paradigm was described, where through the pressure of popular culture or common societal interpretations the particularity of a Christian spiritual understanding of human experiences was not in evidence. In the analysis below, these risk factors became an important nuance in the interpretation process, when often participant answers were more aligned with the risk of the paradigm, than the paradigms themselves. This revealed certain tensions for teachers in their approaches to religious education. In the focus group discussions, participants indicated it was easy to relate to the framework and could identify with one or more of the paradigms. The analysis of the interviews indicated that all participants correlated with one or more of the paradigms in their own spiritual understandings: two participants aligned with one of the paradigms, five aligned with two categories, and in the case of four participants, alignment with three paradigms could be identified in their responses. At this point it is important to note that there is no normative position on the framework, rather reference to all four paradigms is held to be important for a full and rich understanding of
Christian spirituality. The researcher was unable to identify elements from any single participant’s descriptions that aligned with all four quadrants. As a point of interest which supports the connection between teacher descriptions of spirituality (their own and students’) and the paradigms, a word frequency query was run on each of the paradigm nodes in NVivo. The top four words for each paradigm are listed in order of frequency below and can be seen to be reflective of the flavour of each of the paradigms. These results excluded the three most frequently used words which came up in every paradigm: think, know and spirituality. The words are also related to the themes identified in the first analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paradigms</th>
<th>Vulnerability</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Commitment</th>
<th>Fulfilment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Innocence</td>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>Links to Religious Tradition, Wellbeing</td>
<td>Curiosity, Wellbeing, Relationship with God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most</td>
<td>God, trust,</td>
<td>action, others,</td>
<td>family, love, Catholic, faith</td>
<td>feel, God, person, sense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>question, believe</td>
<td>help, live</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used Words</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Correlating Most Frequently Used Words with Dual Methodology

The table shows the themes from the first analysis method and the paradigms from the framework as they align through identifying the most frequently used words coded for each category. This table cannot be used as a definitive validation of the framework alone, given the small cohort in the research, however as stated above it is of interest to see a distinct congruence between the words teachers most often used in describing their spirituality, that of their students and their lessons with the tenor and intent of the paradigms. Already in this cursory foray into the participant language, we can see the most frequently used words can indicate either elements of the paradigms, or the risk factors alluded to in Chapter 3. It is by interpreting the whole of each participant’s interview, including their lesson descriptions that the meanings given to these terms by participants is able to be
evaluated in light of the paradigms. Links may be drawn between the ‘Innocence’ theme from the grounded analysis above and the Vulnerability paradigm, between the Responsibility paradigm and the ‘Compassion’ theme, between the ‘Connections to religious tradition’ and ‘Wellbeing’ themes and the Commitment paradigm, and the ‘Wellbeing,’ ‘Relationship with God’ and ‘Curiosity’ themes with the Fulfilment paradigm. These links will be further referred to in the discussion below.

Data Mapped against the Framework

When analysing more closely the personal interviews, it is seen that participants often described their spirituality in terms of the risks or hesitations of each paradigm alerted to in chapter 3, as well as naming aspects of the Christian spirituality described in each paradigm. Below are three tables, each of which summarises in dot points the spirituality of each paradigm and the risks of each of the paradigms. Table 3.1 identifies the alignments between the paradigms and how teachers described their spirituality, table 3.2 identifies the alignments between the paradigms and how teachers described student spirituality and table 3.3 identifies alignments between the paradigms and how participants described their religious education lesson aims. The frequency of references to each paradigm within all interviews is identified, noting ideas which are expressed sometimes in one phrase or at times in many sentences relating to the paradigm across all the questions of the interviews. The number of references made to the paradigm throughout the interview is an indicator of the importance the participant places on the paradigm, demonstrating the ease with which it is referred to and the consistency across the interview of reference to the same idea or sentiment.

Researcher judgments are made about the placement of references by contextualising the remarks in relation to what is disclosed within the whole of each interview. These interpretations also take into account the fluency with which each paradigm comes to speech for the participants, using researcher observation notes around body language, hesitations, lengthy pauses, nervous laughter and repetitions. Using NVivo the positive traits of the paradigm are coded separately from the risk factors. Also recorded is the number of sources (participants) the references come from. The total number of sources in the tables reflects that the same source can refer to an element from the paradigm and may also
demonstrate in separate remarks the risk factor of the paradigm. The tables also feature one quote from the data in each category as an example of the way participants expressed their understandings and beliefs and how the researcher interpreted them. While there is a danger in oversimplifying the complexity of the responses by narrowing it down to a single example, it serves to illustrate in the participant’s words one aspect of the paradigm and an aspect of the risks. Further examples are used and enlarged on in the discussion of the paradigms below the tables. A diagram combining all the data against the framework of spirituality is presented after the three tables, giving an overview of the data presented in the tables.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paradigm</th>
<th>Number of references across the interviews and number of sources</th>
<th>Risks of the paradigm</th>
<th>Number of ‘risk’ references across the interviews and number of sources</th>
<th>Total number of references</th>
<th>Total number of sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vulnerability:</strong> Open to mystery Grappling with unknowing Humble and trusting</td>
<td>6 references from 4 participants “Um, certainly near death, yeah, certainly near death, because of the whole unknown, what happens after death.”</td>
<td>Denying the function of the intellect Romanticising innocence and trustfulness</td>
<td>6 references from 4 participants “I guess I believe in the power of prayer and destiny I guess, as in you are you’re meant to have a certain path so you need to sort of trust in it too.”</td>
<td>12 references from 6 participants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responsibility:</strong> Open to difference and encounter with Otherness Non-judgemental Empathy and compassion</td>
<td>2 from 2 participants “forgiveness, love, compassion, that is sort of my moral compass”</td>
<td>Driven by idealism (eg: humanism) Focus on self-generated sense of duty or charity Empty activism</td>
<td>4 from 4 participants “so you want to improve your life…. and those people around you”</td>
<td>6 references from 4 participants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Commitment:</strong> Sense of belonging to something bigger Free response to contribute Interpretation of traditions: symbol, story, celebration</td>
<td>23 from 7 participants “but I suppose the traditions of that is a part of my story”</td>
<td>Loss of sense of self Limiting empowerment and freedom Tradition as meta-narrative, not open to interpretation</td>
<td>2 from 1 participant “it seems to be something that’s more ingrained in me because of the way that it’s run at school”</td>
<td>25 references from 8 participants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fulfilment:</strong> Joy of living Sense of the holy in the everyday Awareness of beauty, meaning and value in life</td>
<td>30 from 9 participants “around us constantly in the wonder and awe of the world”</td>
<td>Reduced to self – affirmation and positivity Too easy a correlation between the divine and the everyday Private interpretation, not open to critique</td>
<td>11 from 6 participants “I’m in a more direct relationship with God”</td>
<td>41 references from 10 participants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: Teacher Understandings of Their Spirituality
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paradigm</th>
<th>Number of references across the interviews</th>
<th>Risks of the paradigm</th>
<th>Number of references across the interviews</th>
<th>Total number of references Total number of sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vulnerability:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open to mystery</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Denying the function of the intellect - tendencies to fundamentalism and fatalism</td>
<td>2 from 1 participant “they are so much more ready to believe in things that they can’t see and touch”</td>
<td>2 references from 1 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grappling with unknowing</td>
<td></td>
<td>Romanticising innocence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humble and trusting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responsibility:</strong></td>
<td>1 from 1 participant “they have an innate willingness to help other people and so I think drawing on that, their acts of kindness”</td>
<td>Driven by idealism (eg: humanism) Focus on self-generated sense of duty or charity Empty activism</td>
<td>12 from 4 participants “That they feel proud of themselves that they feel they have learned something about themselves in perhaps reaching out to somebody else”</td>
<td>13 references from 4 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open to difference and encounter with Otherness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-judgemental Empathy and compassion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Commitment:</strong></td>
<td>5 from 5 participants “it (their spirituality) makes them more aware of giving and not just taking, sharing, of taking action and participating in the community.”</td>
<td>Loss of sense of self Limiting empowerment and freedom Tradition as metanarrative, not open to interpretation</td>
<td>3 from 3 participants “but I feel like a lot of their spirituality is only in the school, and the conversations they have about God could only be with me”</td>
<td>8 references from 8 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of belonging to something bigger</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free response to contribute</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation of traditions: symbol, story, celebration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fulfilment:</strong></td>
<td>13 from 8 participants “it (their spirituality) opens them up to more”</td>
<td>Reduced to self-affirmation, positivity and values Too easy a correlation between the divine and the everyday</td>
<td>10 from 7 participants “That they can be happy with who they are”</td>
<td>23 references from 9 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy of living</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of the holy in the everyday</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of beauty, meaning and value in life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2: Teacher Beliefs about Student Spirituality
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paradigm: Identifying elements</th>
<th>Number of references across the interviews</th>
<th>Risks of the paradigm: Identifying elements</th>
<th>Number of references across the interviews</th>
<th>Total number of references Total number of sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerability: Open to mystery Grappling with unknowing Humble and trusting</td>
<td>2 from 2 participants “how do they know God’s there, do you think God’s there, where is God?”</td>
<td>Risks: Denying the function of the intellect Romanticising innocence and trustfulness</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 from 2 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility: Open to difference and encounter with Otherness Non-judgemental Empathy and compassion</td>
<td>4 from 3 participants “And I wanted to sort of move away from that notion of giving to ‘the needy’ like things, or money”</td>
<td>Risks: Driven by idealism (eg: humanism) Focus on self-generated sense of duty or charity Empty activism</td>
<td>4 from 4 participants “My aim for them was to be able to see that they have a role in this world to help other people whether they realise it or not, and whether they’re religious or not”</td>
<td>8 references from 6 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment: Sense of belonging to something bigger Free response to contribute Interpretation of traditions: symbol, story, celebration</td>
<td>26 from 9 participants “if you’re a critical thinker you’re likely to have deeper faith and belief rather than just taking it at face value”</td>
<td>Risks: Loss of sense of self Limiting empowerment and freedom Tradition as meta-narrative, not open to interpretation</td>
<td>21 from 9 participants “But I know that in a catholic school that sort of use, you know, the faith is a bit of vehicle there”</td>
<td>47 references from 10 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulfilment: Joy of living Sense of the holy in the everyday Awareness of beauty, meaning and value in life</td>
<td>21 from 6 participants “making those connections with them, not for them, but with them. And it’s about awareness”</td>
<td>Risks: Reduced to self-affirmation and positivity Too easy a correlation between the divine and the everyday Private interpretation, not open to critique</td>
<td>8 from 6 participants “The behaviour management policy of the school is positive reinforcement and I find that that can tie in quite a lot with spirituality”</td>
<td>29 references from 9 participants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3: Teacher Descriptions of Lessons Addressing Spirituality
The diagram below compiles all the above data from tables 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3, mapping the interview responses to show the distribution against the framework from the three data sets: Teacher understanding of their own spirituality, teacher beliefs about student spirituality and teacher descriptions of religious education lessons that address spirituality. The outer shaded circle represents the risks of each paradigm.

Figure 8 Mapping Teacher Responses against a Framework of Spirituality
Discussion of Figure 8: The Framework of Spirituality as Normative

The following paragraph makes some general observations of the data in relation to the two axes of the framework. Using the two axes reveals insights into participants’ pedagogy and theology at a glance. The data relating to each paradigm is then discussed in detail.

The Two Axes of the Framework

In looking at the vertical axis, it is immediately clear that teachers are comfortable and confident with a Kataphatic theology that describes intimacy with God. Their understandings of their own and their students’ spirituality and the aims and descriptions of their RE lessons are heavily represented in both the Fulfilment and Commitment paradigms. While participants are also located in the risk of these two paradigms they are equally if not more conversant with the Christian spirituality expressed in the two paradigms themselves. Participants are fluent in describing intimacy with God in their lives through experiences in nature and relationships and indicate that they believe students have close relationship with God, as demonstrated by their relationships with others and their responses to the natural world. Their aims for lessons also focus on providing opportunities for students to develop their relationship with God, self and others. The paradigms of Responsibility and Vulnerability are less well represented and with few exceptions participants either failed to indicate any aspect of the paradigm or described the paradigm in terms of its risks. Apophatic theology as discussed in the literature in Chapter 2 holds important possibilities for dialogue with post-Christian culture acknowledging otherness and taking a more humble and open stance in the conversations about God, truth and knowledge and encounter. The data indicates such theological understandings may not feature prominently in the religious education of young students in these Melbourne Catholic primary schools, with a decided preference for focusing on Kataphatic theology and strategies around correlation, values and wellbeing.\textsuperscript{28}

In considering the horizontal axis, participants almost twice as frequently described their lessons and aims in terms of the responsive mode than the receptive mode. This may reflect

\textsuperscript{28} Links can be made here to the Enhancing Catholic School Identity Melbourne Scale data and this discussion will be taken up in Chapter 6.
the influence of long held understandings around child development theory which stresses
the need for students to be active in their learning. However, participants described active
learning more often as ‘taking action’ or applying learning in personal and communal
‘Christ-like’ behaviours and engaging in class based charitable works rather than describing
students actively learning through questioning and critical thinking; although this was
mentioned by two participants. Where lessons were coded as receptive, participants
described students reflecting, being given time to think and wonder and engaging in prayer
and meditation. Participants identified such activities as successful religious education
lessons; however they were not articulate in connecting these activities to specific aims or
intentions for their students.

It is at once apparent when looking at Figure 8 that participants were more fluent in their
descriptions and expressions of their own spirituality and their lessons than they were about
their student’s spirituality. This was true for all the paradigms, indicating that teachers have
rarely been asked to consider this dimension of their student’s learning and development
before. This is confirmed by four participants who wondered whether they really knew or
could know their students’ spirituality, or even whether the students had been introduced
to the term spirituality. It raises a question around the perception of spirituality in relation
to religion in education.

A detailed discussion of each paradigm in relation to responses and the implications for
teacher professional learning and practice follows. Each discussion firstly looks at what
participants are saying about their own spirituality in relation to the paradigm, then how
they describe student spirituality and finally how they describe their lesson and how that
relates to the paradigm. Participant quotes are used to demonstrate the alignment or
misalignment and the pauses are noted with ellipses as well as the ‘ums’ which have been
transcribed to give a feel for the manner in which the participants bring to speech their
understandings of spirituality.

The Vulnerability Paradigm

Combining Apophatic theological understandings with a receptive mode of experiencing,
spirituality as Vulnerability is not an aspect of spirituality much attended to according to the
data. No participants described their beliefs about student spirituality in terms that related
to this paradigm. The only mention of students’ spirituality in this quadrant linked to the risk of the Vulnerability paradigm: a romantic notion of the child as having a peculiar sensitivity for mystery, indeed for gullibility: “So even if I talk about things like Father Christmas, the Easter bunny, the tooth fairy, all of these different things ... they are so much more ready to believe in things that they can’t see and touch.” Connected with the theme of Innocence in the previous analysis, this participant expresses regret that students may lose their innocence as they gain knowledge which dispels wonder and awe. Another aspect of the risk of this paradigm – of denying the importance of seeking understanding in spirituality and faith matters is captured in another statement by the same participant: “… you sort of lose your innocence when you become more informed.” Believing that childhood is especially associated with spirituality and ought to be protected for as long as possible may discourage cognitive challenge in the curriculum and promote an understanding of spirituality as a fragile and immature form of religious understanding. Rather than protect the student from grappling with paradox and uncertainty, teachers are asked to remain open to students and to their own childhood, bringing their vulnerability to the learning as expressed by Rahner: “The mature childhood of the adult is the attitude in which we bravely and trustfully maintain an infinite openness in all circumstances and despite the experiences of life which seem to invite us to close ourselves.”

When asked about their own spirituality, four participants identified aspects of the Vulnerability paradigm describing grappling with the unknown and encountering mystery: “… and I constantly question my own beliefs. I have I guess, a sense of doubt.” Two of these participants struggled to share their meaning, elaborating in ways that may also reflect the risk of the paradigm such as falling back on the truism with a shy laugh: “Spirit works in mysterious ways and I don’t know what those ways are for what people, you know.” This remark can be interpreted as either dismissive of the challenge to continue to seek understanding, or as a reflection of humble openness to mystery. With some internal debate, I have placed it in the risk category of the paradigm, given the context of other comments from this participant. Two other participants demonstrated only the risk of the paradigm where an unquestioning faith stance undermines the role of the intellect,

conflating a fundamentalist\textsuperscript{30} trust in God’s omniscience with a fatalistic attitude to life’s vulnerable moments: “Trusting that God has a plan … we might not like it … but …” Taken in context of the whole interview this remark is reflective of a literal faith stance which demonstrates a reluctance to sit with paradox and ambiguity. Interpreting participants’ comments in the risk of this paradigm challenges me to clarify an understanding of mature trust in God which underpins this paradigm. A mature trust demonstrates assenting to trust in the truth of things that is not a static truth; understanding God as the truth of endless possibility. It can be illuminated by philosopher Paul Ricœur’s discussion about Gadamer’s sense of the relationship between play and truth, where we: “hand ourselves over, we abandon ourselves to the space of meaning.”\textsuperscript{31} Here the abandonment or trust is not to a predetermined future but to the reality of “a future horizon of undecided possibilities, something to fear and hope for; something unsettled.”\textsuperscript{32} Trust here implies a greater cognitive engagement and openness; it implies an assent given willingly but not easily. This nuance illuminates the tension between the paradigm and its risk and the importance of opening the discussion of an Apophatic theology. It also gives the researcher pause for thought at the arrogance of making assumptions about the participants of this research in such a sensitive and highly nuanced interpretative task. The researcher’s dilemma is reflective of teachers’ pedagogical decision-making involved in religious education lessons. How does one interpret the thinking and faith of others? How does one open a conversation about different ways of discerning ‘God’s plan’? How does one engage in the task of grappling with the subtle differences between fixed destiny and future hope that nevertheless respects a deep sense of trust in God? How does one begin to respectfully and sensitively challenge literal belief, whether that of teachers or students? These are the questions raised by this paradigm that are so valuable for the professional teaching community to engage in and become aware of. This paradigm promotes grappling with the

\textsuperscript{30} “For the fundamentalist, only that which exhibits supernatural and inexplicable validity can enjoy religious persuasiveness. The fundamentalist thus submits to this inexplicable and supernatural dimension.” Boeve, \textit{Interrupting Tradition}, 59.

\textsuperscript{31} Ricœur, \textit{Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences}, 187.

\textsuperscript{32} Ricœur, \textit{Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences}, 187.
complexity of thinking about and talking about faith and God through the human experience of trust.

The four participants who themselves were to some extent open to questioning their own beliefs did not identify this in lessons. Only two lessons hinted at this paradigm. One participant was able to identify the intense grappling with the mystery they invited students into, describing such questions for students as: “how do they know God’s there, do you think God’s there, where is God?” This indicated willingness on the part of the teacher to enter the unknown and to explore it with students without a clear path and answer. It was a rare example, with the only other participant talking about exploring “the big what ifs?” with students, but without supplying further details. Societal expectations are placed on teachers to be the source of knowledge and have ready answers which may make opening such conversations with students difficult. Spirituality as Vulnerability invites a tentative and exploratory language about God and mystery that keeps open the space for dialogue which can engage post-Christian culture in questions of ultimacy and truth. However, the data demonstrates that while four participants could be aligned with this paradigm, no participants described students’ spirituality as having openness to mystery. Even those participants who identify with this paradigm are themselves uncomfortable expressing this aspect of spirituality in lessons with only two aspects of lessons aligned to this paradigm.

The data indicates that while some teachers may themselves grapple with the questions of God, mystery and the unknown, this is mixed with expressions that tend toward literalism. From the data in Figure 8 the lack of representation in the Vulnerability quadrant is a strong indication that teachers in Catholic schools do not apprehend their students’ spirituality in terms of human vulnerability in encounter with otherness. The qualitative nature of the data in the language of the participants provides tangible examples that give further insights into the Enhancing Catholic School Identity data for the Post Critical Belief scale.33 The Post Critical Belief scale data shows adults in Catholic schools have a symbolic belief pattern, but their students demonstrate a more literal believing style. My research indicates that the adult symbolic belief style is not straight forwardly symbolic, rather mixed and interspersed with more literal and simplistic interpretations of faith and God. The data from this

33 Pollefeyt and Bouwens, Identity in Dialogue, 155-172.
paradigm indicates that teachers avoid raising complex questions about God with students and possibly avoid challenging literal belief in students. It raises a question around how to create a culture in Catholic learning communities that enables and even encourages teachers to voice their questions around the mystery and ambiguity of God, inviting them to practice grappling with faith openly and sensitively. The data from the Vulnerability quadrant brings to the fore the importance of supporting teachers to bring complexity to their religious education curriculum.

The Responsibility Paradigm

The Responsibility paradigm combines the responsive mode with the Apophatic theological mode – God in Otherness and Encounter. The data in this paradigm indicate participants identify more frequently in the risk area of the paradigm than in the paradigm itself when they express their own spirituality, their students’ spirituality and in how they describe their lessons. Participants were not fluent or expansive in the comments that linked with this paradigm, indicating that this aspect of spirituality is not one they readily identify with. Aligning with the paradigm, one participant described aspects of her spirituality in terms of responding to the otherness of others: “not judging others, mm, and I suppose not having great expectations on people, mm, because we will all react differently and I think that’s spirituality as well.” Another included a remark that can be loosely indicative of this paradigm’s understanding of compassion: “It’s also about human kindness (long pause).” These two instances are not strong or convincing alignments with the paradigm, but taken in context, they demonstrate a connection with the openness to difference and the responsiveness that underpin this paradigm. The responses by four participants predominantly described their spirituality in terms of living up to humanist ideals, such as: “So you want to improve your life ... and those people around you and to be supportive and to be a good person.” Spirituality in terms of humanistic idealism and good behaviour is also apparent in descriptions of student spirituality and strongly links with lesson descriptions.

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In relation to beliefs about students’ spirituality, while none of the participants described a sense of being called by the other to respond, one participant described students’ spirituality as demonstrating “an innate willingness to help other people and so I think drawing on that, their acts of kindness.” The ‘innate’ nature of the willingness to help can be interpreted as grace granted enabling response to the other with kindness and compassion. This is my interpretation of the only response that described student spirituality in ways relating to this paradigm. However, in other comments, this participant also demonstrated the risk of the paradigm, making up one of the four participants who did so. These four described students being motivated by a sense of duty with an emphasis on responding in the ‘right way’: “then spirituality just takes it that step further about what is the right response or what is the right way to frame it and even though it is tricky what can we do next?” And another example: “They want to be good to everybody. And that sounds very simple but it is not. It’s mm ... I think they want to do what is right. But also what makes them feel right.” Here the teachers are describing a focus on behaviour and a sense of duty. It is a different nuance of the Responsibility paradigm than that illuminated by Levinas which underpins this quadrant.

For Levinas the call of the other requires an ethical response that comes from a personal encounter informed by moral conscience. Levinas goes on to say that from this response grows not only one’s identity and relationship with the other, but relationship with the Transcendent Other whose face is revealed. Levinas refers to the ability to hear this call as evidence of the Infinite within the finite, evidence of the solidarity of a humanity created in the image or face of God. While participants struggle to express a spirituality that responds to others in encounter, there are hints: “So within their own world they’re very caring and concerned.” But the shift of focus from the other to the self is undeniable in the participants’ words which more often describe a self-initiated response and self-gratification

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35 The term conscience is fraught with difficulty in the context of the discussion of selfhood and otherness and is explored by Paul Ricoeur, Oneself as Another, 341-356.

36 “In this manner the subject - who in its soul, or rather in the (divine) soul of its soul, is already attuned to the others as its brothers.” Emmanuel Levinas, Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence, trans. Alphonso Lingis, (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), quoted in Burggraeve, “Fraternity, Equality, Freedom,” 13. See also Paul Ricoeur for his speculation on who might be the Other in: Ricoeur, Oneself as Another, 355.
resulting from action: “they feel proud of themselves, that they feel they have learned something about themselves in perhaps reaching out to somebody else.” In the following comment the call to action originates from the will, denying the importance of discernment and neglecting the reciprocity of the other in encounter: “(spirituality is) what you want to live by rather than what you actually believe in.” These responses are reflective of the risk of the paradigm, describing an over-reliance on behaviour alone as indicators of student spirituality. Current educational trends may be one influence on this trend towards the risk of the paradigm. The following discussion identifies some of these trends.

Student behaviour has become the litmus test for success in many areas of education including religious education. External teacher professional accountabilities which emphasise documenting student evidence of learning and identifying behavioural outcomes may be drawing participant responses to the risk of the paradigm. Evidence of learning in religious education cannot draw a direct line between beliefs and actions, however, the temptation of participants is to make that link: “they believe different things, but in their actions I guess, would be more where you’d see their spirituality.” For some participants this evidence of spirituality is described in terms of ‘helping’: “they’re considering others and how we can impact them and how we can help them.” For teachers who feel the pressures of external accountability, it can become the norm to set behavioural targets by which to judge not only the students’ spirituality, but also the effectiveness of the teaching or the school culture: “So if their spirituality is about compassion, love, the behaviour should sort of reflect that I think. Because it’s easy to say I believe this and that but when it comes down to it we’re not actually doing it or ....” Links can be drawn here to parts of the theme of ‘Wellbeing’ discussed in section one above, where some lesson aims were about instilling correct behaviour through examining models of ideal behaviour, often garnered from limited scripture texts.

In the lesson descriptors of the Responsibility paradigm, three participants described lessons that aimed at trying to move students beyond the notion of responding as giving money, donations or charity and beyond the notion of behaving in the ‘right’ way: “and it’s not their fault but they tend to sort of want to help the poor, help the needy. And it’s always you know, oh those people, the external people that don’t go to our school, and you know, are from another country.” The word ‘help’ also is one of the most frequently used words in this
paradigm (see table 2) and speaks to a way of understanding Christian ethical action that reinforces rather than challenges the social divide between the ‘helpers’ and the ‘helpless’ setting at a distance the individuality of the other and making the response a predictable one. But here we see the respondent’s growing awareness that what is missing is the moment of encounter; a moment that invites proximity to meet the otherness of the other and discern the call that generates their response. These three lessons attempted to move beyond a class or teacher initiated response of charity drives and raising money to engage students in critical thinking around ethics. On the other hand, four of the lessons had elements that focussed on translating stories, parables and experiences into ideals: “they did have this moment of – ‘that’s what it should be like, this is how we should live’ it is so ... that was so great to see in those kids.” The lessons concentrated on teacher initiated action: “I think when we take action (collecting for mini Vinnies) I think that’s when we help them develop that spirituality.” The risk of the paradigm is in evidence when teachers focus on generating idealism in lessons rather than unpacking moments of encounter in concrete existential situations. Inviting proximity\textsuperscript{37} to the other in religious education may lead to awakening the compassion that lies at the heart of this paradigm and opportunities to reflect on the grace and the freedom that empower acts of integrity and responsibility. The notion of proximity takes into account the integration of the body and spirit; that the human person responds physically and at times viscerally to the other in and through the body, moved by the spirit. These lessons made an attempt at proximity, with varying degrees of success.

The data indicates the paradigm of Responsibility – spirituality as experienced in encounter with otherness and responding to a call from the other – is not one that is familiar to teachers. Instead the risk of the paradigm – an understanding of spirituality as demonstrating humanistic ideals and conforming to approved behaviour – is emphasized in teaching and learning in religious education. This data supports and elaborates on the


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Enhancing Catholic School Identity Melbourne scale data which finds that Catholic schools tend to promote a Christian values education, focussing on a simplistic correlation between life and God that reduces the particularity of the Catholic tradition. My research raises questions about whether and how learning environments in Catholic schools provide environments that invite proximity to the other. Engaging with the paradigm of Responsibility identifies the importance of developing skills of listening and discernment, focusing on freedom of response and motivation rather than behavioural outcomes in the religious education curriculum. It highlights the need for personal engagement with the other – a spiritual focus that can only occur if the risk is taken to increase proximity to another’s reality and discern the spirit’s call to respond.

The Commitment Paradigm

In this quadrant a Kataphatic understanding of experiencing God in intimacy combines with responsiveness to describe a spirituality of Commitment. Participants were fluent in expressing their own spirituality in relation to this paradigm, with seven participants coded to align with this paradigm. Their comments described the impact of the Catholic tradition in their lives, their feelings of belonging to a community and to a family tradition which gave them a sense of identity. Some spoke of their appreciation of ritual as connection to others and God: “My own spirituality is that I am a part of something that’s a lot bigger than just me” And: “it’s part; it’s just part of my life. I was raised in a Catholic family but I saw that faith being lived out.” Another example: “but I think there was this bond and I think the day of the funeral really helped us to sort of have that connection, so it was related to Church” and: “I’ll say a little prayer in my head. I’ll just be like ... okay ... Just ... they’re the moments I think I feel connected.” It cannot be discounted that participants in their capacity as teachers in Catholic schools may be more conversant with the language expected of them around faith, sacraments, and the Tradition, and that therefore they are more fluent in their articulation in this paradigm. However, as they expressed their understandings of their spirituality, their examples were very personal and showed a genuine sense of belonging and commitment: “it really came back to my faith and things that I had been taught along the way or ... and I kind of believed them only because somebody told me that I should

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38 Polleeyt and Bouwens, Identity in Dialogue, 173-192.
believe them, and then when that kind of happened it was sort of like ‘oh, that’s my belief now too, because I’ve actually witnessed …’ you know … and I really get a sense of it whereas before it was just other people’s beliefs.” Only one participant expressed a view that demonstrated one of the risks of the Commitment paradigm – a loss of sense of self or empowerment: “part of our daily routine is to pray, so, you know praying twice a day and if I’m honest come Friday prayer sort of stops Saturday, Sunday.” In this quote is an indication of an identity at risk of fragmenting as the school culture is seen to dominate and demand a commitment this participant is not able to enter into whole heartedly. It raises questions around how open to difference and diversity Catholic school cultures are and how such views are invited into the open and brought into respectful dialogue.

While almost all of the participants described aspects of their own spirituality in terms of the Commitment paradigm, less than half (five) described aspects of their students’ spirituality in these terms, talking about: “living like Jesus,” “participating in community” and: “They would actually talk about the Holy Spirit and being one with God.” Noticeably there was not the fluency in the remarks compared with teachers expressing their own spirituality in this quadrant. Respondents were often hesitant, making speculative comments rather than clearly describing student spirituality. Three participants highlighted the risks of this paradigm in expressing their concern that students were only demonstrating an adherence to the dominant Catholic culture without a personal commitment: “Um, I wonder how much they may think about aspects of spirituality, aspects of faith, when it’s not instigated by other people. So, when it’s not sort of facilitated by a teacher or something else, how often they would actually think of different aspects. Um, yeah, what God actually means to them.” And another: “but I feel like a lot of their spirituality is only in the school, and the conversations they have about God could only be with me … maybe.” This raises a question about the extent to which students are empowered and open dialogue that is inclusive of diversity is fostered in religious education. In the grounded theory analysis the theme of ‘Connections to religious tradition’ was most aligned with the Commitment paradigm, identifying some tensions around how best Catholic schools may provide opportunity for free and personal response to the symbols of the tradition. As in the theme, the Commitment paradigm deals with the complexity of understanding a process of ‘coming to faith.’ Recalling the discussion on the theme in the previous section, the work of
Gerald O’Collins highlights a clarifying and useful distinction between revelation as experiencing the self-revealing God in a relational sense; and revelation as propositional ... divinely revealed truths that enrich our knowledge about God in a cognitive sense. This knowledge in turn influences our relationship with God. The highly complex task in religious education of offering students opportunities to grapple with both the cognitive and the relational or emotional sense of revelation is illuminated in the discussion of pedagogy in relation to this paradigm that follows.

Participants’ lesson descriptions were most frequently located in this quadrant with ten participants in total describing an aspect of lessons directed at instilling a sense of belonging to the tradition and participation in community, or supporting students to make a connection between their lives and the tradition. The responses were evenly spread across aligning with the Commitment paradigm and expressing the risks of the paradigm, with nine aspects of lessons identified in each. As in their descriptions of their own spirituality, participants were the most fluent in their descriptions of lessons in this paradigm, indicating a familiarity and level of confidence with the Kataphatic and action orientation of this quadrant. Aligning with the paradigm are comments that highlight the participant’s understanding of the importance of empowering students to interpret the tradition and make a personal commitment, such as: “That I (the teacher) can say ‘Well I believe in this and this is what it means to me,‘ and someone else will say ‘That’s what you might believe but for me, I disagree, this is my viewpoint.’ So giving children a voice to say that it’s okay not to be the same and believe the same as everybody else.” And another: “I think if you’re a critical thinker you’re likely to have deeper faith and belief rather than just taking it at face value. Because if you think about and question and wonder, it’s going to either validate your beliefs or not so they’ll (the students) have a deeper understanding and faith I think.” These remarks align with the Curiosity theme in the grounded approach where teachers are tapping into and encouraging the natural inquiry stance of students.

In the following two comments can be seen descriptions of student skills and teacher aims for students: “Well, using the bible for a start. Reading from the bible and actually getting the students to look at that.” And: “that they’re aware of the spirituality within them and

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39 O’Collins, Revelation: Towards a Christian Interpretation of God’s Self-Revelation in Jesus Christ, 10.
that it needs to be more than just words but actions and that they can be the people who take it out to the community.” These are skills needed to energise and reinvigorate the tradition going forward and while these teachers did not consciously state this in their intention for these lessons, both here describe positive practices that empower students to discern their commitment. On the other hand equally as often the descriptions of lessons indicated a pressure felt by teachers to ensure clear connections were made to the Catholic tradition, putting an emphasis on teachers modelling the correct correlation: “So we’re sort of expected to connect ... so social justice we were looking – you know leaders in social justice – but we connected it to scripture. So we try to sort of do that throughout, in all our learning.” Another example: “and I wanted them to say that we can do things for others, is what I was trying to get them to say, and they did say that, they came out with that and all sorts of beautiful ideas of things they could do, and we stuck them all on a cross – a big cross made out of paper.” Also: “... they were getting excited about helping others and relating that to being like Jesus.” A sometimes subtle, sometimes overt force is revealed in these statements which is shaping a mono-logical learning environment. Three lessons particularly identified learning about the liturgical season of Lent and another about the relationship between the Last Supper and Eucharist. Referring back to O’Collins’ two aspects of revelation discussed above, these lessons used the tradition as a vehicle for reinforcing propositions about God, without necessarily skilling students in understanding and interpreting the propositions. Only one lesson addressed a sacrament, describing the spiritual aspect of the lesson as making an emotional connection with an historical event – the Last Supper. Despite using the emotional connection as a way of engaging the students, this lesson neglected to draw attention to or invite interpretations around experiencing a relational and intimate God, the second of O’Collins’ aspects of revelation and an understanding that sits at the heart of sacramental understandings.

Some participant’s comments about lessons that linked to the Catholic tradition were formed as wonderings about their efficacy and the assumptions that participants themselves were making: “Umm, and they know that things are a gift from God, but ... I’m not so sure, but they wouldn’t know what the term (spirituality) meant or wouldn’t even know ... they would just kind have accepted that this is the way it is.” This participant is questioning whether students have been given the opportunity to freely make a
commitment or whether what is being demonstrated is a compliance with the dominant culture. The following comment reveals an assumption of a common faith basis to promote personal development: “But I know that in a catholic school that (you) sort of use, you know, the faith is a bit of vehicle there.” The common language that the ‘faith’ provides is dependent on the extent to which Catholic schools can communicate their Christian vision for human flourishing – a vision that is essentially spiritual – and how frequently and clearly learning goals are linked to the vision. These learning goals would be spiritual goals to do with the existential questions of human flourishing. Offering students an opportunity to ‘buy in’ to the vision promoted means there must be a fine balance present where diverse options and visions are brought into dialogue and students are given critical skills to discern their faith response – or a rejection of the vision. That lessons in the Commitment quadrant were as often reflective of the risk of the paradigm as located in the paradigm itself raises an alert around the importance of bringing to speech and clarifying understandings about both student spirituality and faith that teachers teach from. It highlights an issue around how teachers understand their complex role in a Catholic school: “I would inspire them and help them to make connections with, you know, what the Catholic faith says – what Scripture says to everyday life; to everyday behaviour.” This participant’s own commitment to the Catholic faith tradition is apparent, and while wishing to ‘inspire’ students is certainly an aim of religious education, the process of inspiration must be open to inviting other viewpoints and creating conditions and skills necessary for freedom of commitment.

While more than half the participants understood their spirituality in terms that related to this quadrant – as having a sense of belonging and participating in community – and just under half understood their students’ spirituality in these terms, the data reveals that the main focus of teaching and learning in religious education is directed to this paradigm, with ten of the eleven participants describing lessons that support students to make unilateral connections to an element of the tradition as their aim. That this can be problematic is confirmed by the Enhancing Catholic School Identity Victoria scale data around a monologue school culture40 which shows a tendency for either a monological culture or a kerygmatic dialogue culture in Victorian Catholic schools. However, in unpacking the comments above

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in this research, the complexity of the task of promoting a dialogue school culture as recommended by the Enhancing Catholic School Identity findings is illuminated. Privileging the Christian story while remaining open and sensitive to difference is the tricky balance teachers appear to be grappling with in their lessons in this paradigm. The monological tendencies of many of the lesson remarks in this quadrant may be a reflection of a subtle tension teachers feel to guide students to respond in ways that flatten out differences of belief and experiences within the class. A focus on sharing and examining a process of coming to faith may offer a spiritual dimension which personalises the learning experience for students in class and allows for difference. Teachers’ critical reflections and concerns indicate a need for professional discussion around the spiritual dimension of teaching and learning in religious education, including a greater discussion of the nature of revelation and understanding the process of freely ‘coming to faith’ in dialogue with the Catholic tradition and what this means for the role of the teacher.

The Fulfilment Paradigm

This paradigm is situated at the Kataphatic end of the vertical axis and the human mode is receptive, encouraging a reflective dynamic in the learning. Overall, the majority of participants understood their own and students’ spirituality in terms of the Fulfilment paradigm. This was the most densely represented paradigm with participants demonstrating fluency around expressing their own spirituality and that of their students. The number of lessons describing aspects of this paradigm of spirituality was only exceeded by the Commitment paradigm. Teachers described having a deep awareness of life, its joy and meaning, often using experiences in nature and personal relationships to describe their spirituality and intimacy with God: “It’s heightened awareness of things, spirituality is ... mm ... I think it’s having a sensitivity, or awareness of your own spirituality. I think (it) can raise your instincts about how to be in different situations, how to be sensitive, or how to notice beauty.” And: “It’s about those joyful moments or (being) touched by something.” Participants were able to express deep experiences that were concrete, shaping their meaning in vibrant language that conveyed a unique and personal connection to spirituality: “I think I just feel a sense of wholeness. I feel that ... I don’t want to say I’m not enough on my own. But I believe that I am my fullest when I acknowledge that I’m not on my own.” And again: “I think I probably get that most when I am in the natural environment. I also,
also, I think in extreme joyous times too – so celebrations or even milestones.” Some comments reflect the aspects of ultimacy and meaning connected with spirituality in the Fulfilment paradigm: “It comes back to the raw and basic qualities of what life truly means and is.” Reflection was frequently noted as an aspect of spirituality: “Whereas now I see a lot of beauty in the world. I can just be driving along and see something and I just think about God and this wonderful world and my relationship with God and with other people.” This extended to relationships as well: “I don’t know whether that (spirituality) comes down to this belief in this ‘ever forgiving’, you know, ‘ever forgiveness’ mentality that, regardless of what happens, I have that time to contemplate, time to rebuild.”

In the responses around their own spirituality half the participants used terms that also related to the risk of the paradigm, indicating a sometimes pantheistic understanding of nature and human experience: “everything happens for a reason and being a spiritual religious person I can put everything about (that) back on God” and: “God’s trying to teach me something maybe or maybe he’s trying to encourage me to become a more patient person, so I sort of, I don’t attribute things to good luck, I think God had his hand over me then.” These two comments reflect a readiness to jump quickly into simplistic explanations that effectively reduce God to a reflection of the self. There was also one expression of unmediated intimacy with God: “So maybe I just feel like I’m in a more direct relationship with God. I’ve cut out the middle man.” Such interpretations of intimacy with God risk the reduction of holy otherness to being the same as what is or can be known. Reducing connection with a relational God to a personal and private appropriation risks undermining the power and mystery of spirituality in this paradigm as described by Karl Rahner and discussed in Chapter 2: “The simple and honestly accepted everyday life contains in itself the eternal and the silent mystery, which we call God and his secret grace, especially when this life remains the everyday ... Wherever people are; there they are creatures who unlock the hidden depths of reality in their free, responsible actions.” Reality, which is everyday life in Rahner’s sense, opens out, extends and transforms, it does not close in on itself as described in some of the comments above.

Linked to the Wellbeing theme in the grounded analysis, a second aspect of risk in this paradigm is highlighted by another participant – that of using spirituality as a therapeutic resource or even tool: “I suppose I make it fit into my life, I don’t make my life fit into it ... (laugh) ... I’m not sure.” Another evaluates spirituality’s personal benefits, even while placing it at a distance: “I think that, for me it’s a struggle to find happiness all the time. And I think it’s something that’s important to have faith in the fact that you can work towards it and if you have beliefs, that’s definitely something that would, umm, that could help you find happiness.” Another participant describes spirituality in terms of positivity: “I think it’s, you know, interaction with other people, acceptance, um ... I think it’s confidence.” These examples confirm the risk of the paradigm where drawing direct connections between personal wellbeing and spirituality make it possible for spirituality to be used as a tool to assist in the development of a well-integrated personality. While this is indeed an important connection, the tendency in this thinking is to make spirituality a self-fulfilling and self-affirming process without the in-breaking of God’s grace from elsewhere. The even balance of risk aspects alongside elements of the paradigm across the teacher spirituality, student spirituality and lesson descriptions indicate spirituality as Fulfilment is the most popular expression of spirituality, but also the most easily hollowed out by popular culture. While the human experience of being part of the God’s created order with its cycles of birth and death, growth, fulfilment, joy and wonder is one that participants describe warmly, they are equally drawn to focus on personal and private self-affirmation, pantheism and mono-correlational explanations for God. The discussion around the language used in the theme ‘relationship with God’ in the grounded theory section reinforces these observations.

The majority of participants (eight) described their students’ spirituality in terms that aligned with this paradigm. They openly admired their students’ ability to appreciate through wonder and awe the beauty of the world: “for them that’s still very much a part of their life, finding the wonder and awe in everything.” They spoke of an internal force or energy and the very personal and sometimes private connection to God displayed by students: “I am amazed that there are ... you can see certain individuals, and young children and you can sometimes see just this internal force within them. And I do wonder sometimes

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42 See Yust, “God Is Not Your Divine Butler and Therapist!,” as discussed in Chapter 2.
that, you know ... is that God in them?” In the following comment student spirituality is understood as inherently reflective, highlighting ability for critical reflection and meaning making: “In some ways spirituality makes them reflect more. It makes them take a more cognitive approach to themselves and the environment around them.” The level of fluency when trying to describe student spirituality is noticeably less than in describing their own. This is an observation that applies across all the paradigms. Participants struggled to describe this elusive dimension in their students: “but if there’s a level of spirituality there which encompasses many values, morals, mm feelings, it opens them up to more, and again I keep going back to the energies, but you know you feel the energy, the – like energy – you feel the love, you feel the happiness you feel, mm, the openness.” The risk of the paradigm was almost as prevalent with seven participants describing aspects of student spirituality in terms of either unmediated intimacy: “I think, sometimes God just speaks in people without any form of formal education in it I guess.” Or in therapeutic terms: “So if they have their spirituality with them it can support them through the challenges of life. It’s always there, the door is always open, wherever you are – you can be one with God.” And again: “I think, you know ... to say ... you know ... that Jesus and God is always with you. So that you’ve always ... even if you are alone, you’re not lonely, so to speak.” The appeal of spiritual solace for students was one that came through strongly and one wonders whether this is more reflective of teacher spirituality than students’ spirituality: “Spirituality it is faith and it can provide a great comfort being a spiritual person and a great relief too so they (students) don’t feel just overburdened – and we all do.” When participants attribute to students their own understanding of spirituality they may underestimate and stifle student spiritual development.⁴³ Fulfilment, while being the most frequent descriptor is also the only paradigm where the language used to describe both student and teacher spirituality reflected very similar understandings focusing on the emotions, nature and wellbeing.

With the number of references second only to the Commitment quadrant, aspects of nine lesson descriptions connected with the Fulfilment quadrant. Of these, three participants described aspects that aligned with both the paradigm and the risk, three addressed aspects

of lessons entirely in the risk area of the paradigm, while three described aspects of lessons aligned with the paradigm. The lessons were on the whole not aimed necessarily at this paradigm that is – exploring the nature of a relational God through God’s creation. One of the reasons for the frequency of participant comments linking to elements of the paradigm may be because the nature of this quadrant connects with the emotions and concrete examples of life and nature that are common to good teaching and learning. Participants fluently described conditions for learning that enabled students to develop their spirituality, their comments couched in terms of what they believed about good teaching and learning practices generally: “Having the time or making the time to reflect upon that (spirituality) is so important. And I think it starts for any people, particularly children, I think it starts with that tuning in to how they feel. How they feel and what they value, what’s important to them.” A strong understanding of how to engage students in the learning comes through in this paradigm’s receptive and reflective mode: “You need to tap into that emotional aspect, because if it doesn’t switch on their emotions they’re generally not interested, it’s got to have something to do with them.” The emotions are seen by this participant as having an important, if unclear role in spiritual development. The connection between the emotions and learning is one which is well documented in the wellbeing sphere of educational literature, and is being investigated more widely in the literature on spirituality. In the lessons aligned with the quadrant, there was an emphasis on self-awareness and value sensing reflective of a non-developmental approach to religious education which understands spiritual growth in terms of nurture rather than development: “And that they’ve got time to stop and think. And yeah … (be) true and just to themselves …”

Reflected in some comments is an emphasis on the private and personal relationship with God that is at the heart of spirituality and lends itself to the notion of nurture rather than development: “… yes we belong to a community, but there is that intricate connection between you and God and that is your relationship and that can be nurtured.” Non-developmental understandings of spiritual development can contribute to a holistic and respectful relationship between teacher and student and spiritual growth (Chapter 2);

however in some of the lessons that indicated a non-developmental approach, participants described less than rigorous teaching and learning strategies. While teacher aims are clear, a non-developmental strategy such as this example of Christian meditation can be used with integrity: “My aim, um, is for them to be still and to be aware of God. Be aware of God with them. Looking at it another way, it’s building relationship with God. By sort of, you know, emphasising that aspect of listening rather than talking in a relationship. Even just the sitting and the being present with – and that mindfulness.” However, when lesson aims are unclear, such as: “… and I suppose I just asked them to trust me and to let us share this together and see where it leads us,” the risk of the paradigm becomes more pronounced with lessons that encourage uncritical self-affirmation and a non-cognitive approach.

The developmental approaches described in the lessons by participants utilized strategies of discussion, reflection and discernment; however, as with the non-developmental approach, there was a wide range in the level of rigour described when using these strategies. These lessons were also generally aimed at affirming the student and creating a positive self-image. A less critical and active role for the teacher is indicated by this participant’s description of an important strategy in religious education: “To reinforce that what they’re thinking, regardless of what they’re thinking is valid at that point in their life.” And another example implies religious education requires less rigour: “Whereas in RE when you have these discussions about what you think and feel, it’s okay to form those around opinions and stories. I think that’s what leads to their spirituality.” At the other end of the range, a greater awareness of the need to develop students’ critical thinking is seen as a way of building a resilient and confident student: “And I wonder how you build on that and give them the opportunity to explore that for themselves and to challenge that and to not necessarily just go along with what everybody’s saying because you know it might be different for them and they have to feel confident in having that voice.” And again an emphasis on developing student voice demonstrated in this remark: “It’s really about making those connections with them, not for them, but with them.”

The Fulfilment quadrant is the most strongly represented in the data. It indicates teachers’ familiarity and confidence with a Kataphatic theology of seeking intimacy with God experienced in the everyday, combined with a receptive and reflective mode of being which is most frequently associated with spirituality both in this research data and in the literature.
around children’s spirituality (Chapter 2). The data indicates that teachers believe their students’ spirituality is inherently caught up with emotions and they tap into student emotions to make deeper connections and more memorable links in learning and to highlight connections with a relational and accessible God. The data also indicates that teaching strategies are adopted that tie in with both non-developmental and developmental theories of learning and with a range of rigour and effectiveness. Often the aims for students are vaguely expressed as generalized intentions around developing positivity and affirming values. The data around the Fulfilment paradigm offers concrete examples that can elaborate on and help interpret the Enhancing Catholic School Identity Melbourne scale data.\textsuperscript{46} This data set finds that Catholic schools tend to promote a Christian values strategy, which “tries to link a generally shared awareness of a ‘good life’ to the Catholic faith as the fulfilment of this institution.”\textsuperscript{47} The Fulfilment paradigm data highlights the importance of teachers’ intentionality when engaging students’ emotions in learning as a spiritual enterprise. It indicates a need for Catholic schools to clearly articulate the Christian spiritual foundations of the vision for the ‘good life’ it intends students to reflect on, appreciate and realize.

\textbf{Conclusion Section 2}

In conclusion, the framework analysis identified the majority of responses related to Kataphatic theological understandings. The emphasis on the Kataphatic was representative across all the data in teacher spirituality, student spirituality and lesson descriptions. The qualitative data gave concrete and particular insights into how the process of learning in a religious education is understood and enacted in Catholic schools. By analysing the data through the framework, congruence between teacher spiritual understandings and lesson descriptions was identified with the data often reflecting the risk factors of the paradigms. In the tension between the paradigm and the risk of the paradigm when analysing lesson descriptions, a pedagogical focus for religious education emerged from each discussion. The four foci emerging from each paradigm highlight the importance of including greater

\textsuperscript{46} Pollefeyt and Bouwens, \textit{Identity in Dialogue}, 173-192.

\textsuperscript{47} Pollefeyt and Bouwens, \textit{Identity in Dialogue}, 186.
diversity, intentionality, complexity and proximity in student learning experiences in religious education.

Identified through the Commitment paradigm was the need for **Diversity**: Making connections to the Catholic faith tradition was named frequently in the lesson descriptions, however, the connections were most often initiated by the teacher and students were not offered an opportunity to interrogate the connections or to consider their own spiritual response. Greater inclusion of diverse ways of making connections will invite other faith perspectives and skill students in a variety of ways of interpreting scripture.

Identified through the Fulfilment paradigm was the need for **greater Intentionality**: Teachers were able to describe successful lessons in religious education, but were unclear about their own intentions for students’ spiritual development or why the lessons were successful. Greater intentionality around the use of the language of religion, faith, beliefs, values and spirituality may assist in illuminating the sense of the sacred in the everyday beyond equating it to positivity or pantheism.

Identified through the Vulnerability paradigm was a need for **Complexity**: Grappling with mystery and otherness are important aspects of coming to terms with the transcendence of the human spirit and an Apophatic theology. While some teachers indicated their appreciation of the impossible complexity of the spiritual dimension of the human person, they did not describe it in aspects of lessons or in students. Grappling with the complexity of placing trust in a hidden God and the vulnerability of being radically open to mystery may encourage greater richness in religious education.

Identified through the Responsibility paradigm was a need for **Proximity**: With a focus on self-initiated and idealistic activism, the data revealed a need for teachers to invite close encounters with the other, enabling proximity so that deep listening can occur, engendering compassion. Greater proximity enables a shift in focus from conforming to ‘good’ behaviour or humanist ideals to personal response in encounter with the other in real time and space. Proximity embraces a holistic account of the human person which integrates body and spirit.

These four foci: diversity, intentionality, complexity and proximity do not outline a radically new approach to teaching and learning in religious education. Indeed, they confirm the
emphasis on a hermeneutic-communicative approach to religious education recommended by the Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project and promoted through Catholic Education Melbourne’s Pedagogy of Encounter. What the four foci do however is begin to grapple with what these approaches demand of teachers in real terms, using concrete examples from the qualitative data to illuminate possibilities and identify pedagogical choices that teachers are faced with. It identifies specific strengths and challenges in pedagogy that highlight a way forward to strengthen religious education through a greater focus on diversity, intentionality, complexity and proximity in the planning and teaching of curriculum in Catholic schools.

Cultural Impacts on Pedagogy

In the interview data two questions were included to invite information around influences or impacts on teacher pedagogy that stem from beliefs about spirituality, but reach into cultural influences on pedagogy. The researcher asked participants if they thought spirituality was age related and they were also asked to talk about what they believed was their influence on student spirituality. The question relating spirituality to age produced unclear results, with the majority deciding that age was a factor, but only because it was related to experience, not to chronological age. Spirituality for participants is linked strongly to life experience which they considered was critical to student’s maturity and growth into adulthood. There was only one example of ‘adultism,’ with all other responses describing admiration for students’ awareness sensing and the confidence that they exhibited in themselves. Some mentioned that students had a definite faith stance early on and participants showed an appreciation for students’ curiosity and spiritual questing in asking deep questions about God and the world.

When asked about the extent of their influence on students’ spirituality, participants identified the role of the teacher and the school as being of primary importance – to the extent that some wondered whether it was only at school that spirituality would play an obvious role in students’ lives. Participants were deeply aware of the power of their witness on their students’ spirituality and expressed their concern that theirs may be the only model

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influencing students. This sheds light on the tension participants exhibited around their role as religious educators as discussed in the Commitment paradigm analysis. Some participants expressed their fear of imposing their own beliefs on their students. Only one participant was open about naming her own faith position clearly with students and allowing them to critique and question this stance. The notion of free choice in coming to a believing stance was seen as paramount by participants, however, this was not emphasised in the lesson descriptions. In relation to teaching strategy, teachers were mindful of inviting questions and ensuring students were able to express their opinions and beliefs, however, they were reticent about articulating their own beliefs. This hesitancy around sharing their own faith position lends another perspective to the complex discussion around agency and free will in coming to faith that was raised in relation to the Commitment paradigm.

**Section Three: Analysing School Focus Group Discussions**

Section three of this chapter addresses the second data set that reveals how teachers interacted with the framework and what their reactions were to the reading of the framework material. The participants were given a shortened version of the material contained in Chapter 3 and Likert scale questions around the framework’s two axes, using the questions described in Chapter 3. They then engaged in a school based focus group discussion with other participants in the research from their school and finally were asked to email any final reflections after this time. The discussion transcripts are below analysed for themes and to identify school cultural factors and trends and to give feedback on the success of the framework.

The three focus groups consisted of those teachers from each school who had participated in the initial interviews. School A had a group of the five teachers, school B had three participants and school C also had three participants. Discussions took place after the participants were given the framework of spirituality (Chapter 3) to read and engage with. They were asked in the reading to place themselves on a Likert scale on each arm of the axes, being asked to rate themselves about the extent to which (from 0-5) they felt drawn to or thought more frequently about God as Transcendent other, otherness, and mystery. Then on the vertical axis again, on the top half, the extent to which they felt drawn to or were comfortable with or related to God as intimacy, God in the everyday. On the horizontal
axis, they were asked on the right side of the horizontal axis, to locate themselves according to the extent to which they identified with receptivity, reflection and a more passive understanding of the self, and then on the left, the extent to which they identified with a more active, responsive understanding of self. See figure 9 below:

**Figure 9 Teacher Likert Scale Tool**
Participants were asked to draw the connections between their numerical values on the axes which produced a map of the spread of their spirituality across the framework. The participants drew by hand the lines that connected their placements on each axis which are difficult to reproduce in this format. Instead in the table below a numerical value is arrived at for each quadrant. This is done by multiplying the participants' number where they located themselves on the horizontal axis by the number they located themselves on in the vertical axis to get an area representation in each quadrant, eg: 3.5 on the horizontal for
receptive by 2 on the vertical for otherness gives a score in Vulnerability of 7. Some participants placed their value in the Likert scale at a fraction which is reflected in the scores below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code name of participant</th>
<th>Vulnerability</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Commitment</th>
<th>Fulfilment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agnes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becky</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belinda</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colin</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 Participants’ Self-Assessment

Note: The table shows the results of the participants’ locating themselves on the axes of the framework using a Likert scale 1-5 (see figure 9). The scores on each adjacent axis are multiplied to attain a result for each quadrant.

The table reflects the participants’ self-identification of placement on the framework that is consistent with the spread indicated in Figure 8, confirming the researcher’s interpretations of participants’ data. However it was found that by the participants mapping themselves on the axes using a Likert scale questionnaire relating to the theology and anthropology of the axes did not allow them to grapple in any great depth with the paradigms themselves, which were explained only briefly in the reading. The school focus group discussions were able to unpack in greater detail each of the paradigms. It alerted the researcher to the need for a dialogue tool which emphasised the paradigms, rather than the underlying theory as
described by the axes. As a result, the dialogue tools were developed and now precede the discussion of each paradigm in Chapter 3.

Prior to the focus group discussions, the participants were handed the transcripts of their interviews, to enable them to make connections between their interviews and the framework. The school focus groups were asked an open-ended question about what they thought about the framework and the paradigms. They were asked how they thought they might use it in their practice and finally they were asked for any suggestions for improvement. Overall their responses were very positive and could be grouped into insights around: understanding spirituality, critiquing the framework, teaching and learning in religious education, the role of the teacher. These responses are discussed below.

**Responding to the Framework: Deepening Understanding of Spirituality**

The focus group discussions allowed teachers to talk about the framework in an unstructured way where the researcher rarely intervened in the conversation, except to ask focusing questions. The interaction of the group allowed participants to build on each other’s comments and ideas, becoming whole heartedly involved in each other’s responses. Taking into account that the participants may have been kind to the researcher and reluctant to completely dismiss the framework openly to its creator, there was a level of honesty reflected in the comments that indicated the framework was generally well accepted and found useful. Especially significant were the comments that affirmed the framework’s aim to capture the totality of different experiences of spirituality in a coherent, exhaustive and recognizable model: “I thought all four areas really reflected the human person - that they were really true aspects of the human person or a way of being. So I thought sure ... you can’t be all of everything there, but I would imagine that people have different strengths and are stronger in some areas than others, but overall it captured all aspects of the human person.” It resonated with participants, giving shape and clarity to the notion of spirituality: “I think that statement (from the framework reading) that says: ‘This paper offers four paradigms of spirituality that interpret human experiences through a lens of Christian spirituality.’ I think that’s really strong and powerful, and reassuring. That this is what it is – it’s human experience. It’s not the right experience, or the wrong experience,
just human experience. I think that’s very powerful, I thought that when I read it actually.”

Participants had been given their transcripts to check against the quadrants in an effort to ensure the researcher was not misconstruing meaning. Participants agreed that they could locate themselves on the framework: “I found a lot of what I had said, so it was good we had the transcript, what I’d said in that did relate to certain quadrants in particular and very, very much so, like – really resonated with me in some areas.” The following participants came to understand a deeper connection between religion and spirituality: “What struck me was that I found it quite easy to talk about faith, but then talking about spirituality without faith in there, I really couldn’t do. That’s sort of an important part of it. That was the realization I got as I babbled along really.” And: “I think it’s good, it’s made me really question myself, question where I’m at for different things and my approach to things …. It’s good.”

There was also a growing awareness that this was new thinking for some of them: “Well, I know I’ve never been asked to think about this (students’ spirituality). On thinking about it I don’t know what they would say until I actually asked them. They could find it easier to answer than I did.” For others it broadened their awareness: “No I thought if anything it was inspiring or a bit encouraging me in other ways where I was a bit deficient.” And: “So it opened my mind to other ways of being a spiritual person or having spirituality.”

For one participant engaging with the framework opened up an opportunity to unpack the assumptions of the axes underpinning framework and also allowed the participant to examine his own stance honestly: “If you’re … Like you said there is an assumption that there is a strong belief on either side (of the vertical axis), or image of God. Whereas … I speak for myself, oh I probably speak for a few others … but like I mentioned in my interview, it’s not something I think of much in my day to day life. The other one (horizontal axis) is a bit easier … to give an accurate answer … but, the idea of how I see God is a bit of a tricky one to plot.” Using the framework was seen to invite diversity and acknowledge plurality as it does not assume a norm. This was noted by all three groups with questions such as: “I was looking at this and thinking is there a right spot to be? (laugh) Is this OK?” “What weighs more? What holds greater weight?” and “Is there an ideal stance on this?” Such comments may be a reflection of the format being similar to the Post Critical Belief scale with which Catholic schools in Victoria are familiar and which has a normative position.
Participants felt reassured when they could plot themselves freely: “I think that we should use it here as part of our professional learning. I think because a lot of the time we have dialogue about ‘the faith’ side of our faith and life inquiry it’s often that we’re sitting and it’s very quiet and no one’s really wanting to share – I think this has – this kind of opens up the conversation a bit more. I haven’t felt uncomfortable to share my experiences.”

Responding to the Framework: Critiquing the Framework

One group discussed ways to overcome the assumption underlying the framework’s vertical axis: that there is a God. This assumption was discussed in Chapter 3, where it was acknowledged that the framework presented spirituality from a Christian perspective only. The group’s interest in making it more accessible to those of other faith traditions is one which is interesting and pertinent to the plural context of Catholic schools in Melbourne and Australia’s multi-cultural society. Their discussion is indicative of the difficulty of removing the Christian foundation of the framework: “Or some people say ‘there’s something out there’... I would want a lot more than that ... but an awareness ... so whether there was a reference to other faith beliefs and their terminology. Even if it is Buddha, or anything like that that they could make a link with ... that this is what this is referring to, that this is another being another power, a higher authority or whatever. That might help them find a pathway through.” And: “Now I’m wondering what it would look like if we took God away from the description ... what would it look like? It would be a difficult thing to obviously write without using God ....” This group were attuned to the multi-faith population of their school and the youthfulness of their staff who may have found the assumption that spirituality is intricately connected with God confronting. Further discussion would have been fruitful and has echoed this researchers’ own grappling with ways to extend the framework to include multi-faith perspectives. Another school group was in direct contrast to this position and discussed whether the framework, rather than being less particular to the Christian tradition should actually be more specific: “Isn’t the focus or the purpose towards the end for teachers to become more knowledgeable and aware of what spirituality is in a Catholic tradition? So if they (the paradigm descriptions) are mixed (combining the Catholic perspective and the human experience) then it might be harder to see.” Others in the group responded: “You are saying make it so clear (laughs) so that it punches you in the
face...” And: “It’s not different to any other curriculum area really. You need to understand what you’re teaching – you need to know, you need to find out, you need your resources.” This group’s discussion was reflective of its school population which was a mono-cultural population in an affluent suburb with few ethnic variations and a predominantly, yet nominally Catholic population. Teachers here are interested in becoming clearer and more articulate about the particularity of the faith and how it can contribute to student learning: “I’d love at least to know my viewpoint on what I’m supposed to say when we start talking about the nitty gritty of being Catholics and God.” Such comments indicate the potential for a deeper discourse. The capacity of the framework to raise such issues in different settings makes it an important tool to illuminate a Catholic pedagogy and clarify school aims for religious education that responds to the local needs of teachers and students.

**Responding to the Framework: Insights into Pedagogy**

Participants described new insights into teaching and learning after engaging with the framework. This comment came about during discussion of the Vulnerability paradigm: “And also understanding that ... hang on it is possible to go there with children, but naming what the ‘there’ is through the four different locations on the paradigms.” This is a critical comment that demonstrates exactly the transformative effect possible when teachers are offered an opportunity to engage in self-reflection and dialogue around spirituality and the Christian spiritual tradition, particularly the Apophatic tradition. Teachers are very open to ‘going there’ with their students if they are given support and permission. In discussing the questions that focus each paradigm, participants found they were powerful provocations for learning that would invite student voice: “It (using the questions as curriculum foci) would be a really student centred curriculum then isn’t it? – which is fantastic. It really is about where they are and what they think and where they feel they belong. I like that – that it’s all about them.”

Participants also found they could identify an overall school strength or focus of teaching and learning in religious education on the framework. All three school focus groups identified the Commitment paradigm as an area they spent most of their energy and time on: “I would think in terms of our school, I think the Commitment paradigm would be ... I would hope that is where our students feel they are, because I think it’s a lot of ... there’s a
strong sense of community I think at our school.” “However, I felt that yes, there is a lot of ‘Where do I belong?’ and ‘How can I participate?’ in our curriculum at the moment.” And: “Maybe though we do sell the Commitment side of things through the school a lot more. But that what’s we try – we’re trying to get our parents – So maybe that’s why that one stands out a little bit more because that’s what we physically say to them ‘we all want you to belong, to be on the same path.’” This was also reflected in the data (Figure 8), with lessons most frequently focussing on the Commitment paradigm. Participants were also able to identify their teaching and learning strategies using the framework and to come to the realisation that they have as a school been heavily focussed in one area, perhaps to the detriment of other areas: “Yeah I need to go back to those (the horizontal anthropological axis) too ... I think we are quite responsive, aren’t we? We do think action is the way to go rather than deepening our thoughts.” “... and I wondered if our present RE curriculum sort of reinforces that (the Commitment paradigm)? In the activities we do and in our discussions?”

In discussing the vertical theological axis, the following exchange highlights a new self-awareness: “I think we do, I think that’s the God that I sort of try to deliver in my classroom. That he lives in all of us and we’re all responsible for spreading ... God. Like God is with us, is in us, is in your actions, is my actions, in what we say to each other.” Then another responds: “I think the mystery thing is really hard – I was going to say it is a mystery. If it is a mystery it’s hard to teach a mystery because it’s a mystery – I know that sounds really silly. It is a difficult one for an adult to get their head around it. They don’t need to either. I get that that it’s a mystery for us as well – not just for students.” This exchange illustrates the opportunity to examine biases in the teaching and learning of religious education opened by the framework. In a non-confrontational way teachers themselves are coming to terms with neglected aspects and new possibilities in religious education: “I think it could also be used as a – not an audit – but sort of an awareness of the different elements and to ensure that you are asking questions that are part of each of the areas.” Similarly this comment: “... this has opened my eyes to the – okay I could be focusing on these areas a little bit more with my children.” And: “I think I would like them (the questions in each paradigm) to be seen and used. I think they’re powerful questions for the children, for the teachers as well to inquire into.” The power of existential questions to open up the liminal spaces of
experiencing otherness appeals to teachers in the knowledge that it will engage their students. These questions change teachers’ relationship with curriculum, allowing the question to drive the learning, rather than content.

**Responding to the Framework: Reflecting on the Role of the Teacher**

The group discussions at each of the three schools came to terms with some of the deeper and more challenging aspects of teaching religious education. The Responsive/Receptive modes of the horizontal axis drew out some interesting insights into the cultural forces operating in the tensions of the role: “Well we’re responsive just by being part of this school and teachers in this community, to act out and to display and those sorts of things. That’s why even if you’re less inclined to be there, we’re driven from within and the nature of our jobs puts us in that (responsive) box a little bit more.” Another insight into the pressures teachers feel to perform correctly and have the right answers in religious education is found in this exchange from one group:

I think teachers need to be empowered that it’s okay to not know.

Like, being brave enough to do that.

But if a teacher’s not willing to think about themselves and pull themselves apart and think: ‘How much do I know, how much don’t I know?’ If they’re not in that place and they’re still thinking like an old fashioned teacher: ‘I must do this, I must have the answer,’ that’s where we’ve got the problem.

But ultimately we need to tie it into what does the Church say, what does our Catholic tradition say, what is that viewpoint. And it wouldn’t be just our school – it would be across every Catholic school ... that sense of ‘we need some direction.’ Because we’ve gone off on this path that we respect everyone’s opinion, and then our opinions change and then they develop and that’s part of it, but then ultimately we have the responsibility to say well this is what the Church says about that.

The conversation above reflects an ongoing tension in Catholic schools that is the catalyst for this thesis. This exchange identifies one of the cultural forces exerted on teachers especially deeply felt in the area of religious education. It surfaces the tension teachers feel to be faithful to their understanding of the Catholic tradition while at the same time attending to students’ questions, issues and feelings about themselves, others and the world. That these two things are not incompatible is demonstrated by the framework, the curriculum suggestions described in relation to each paradigm, and by some of the lessons participants described. Teachers in Catholic schools may interpret their role as advocating
for the Catholic Church which in the current context can be perceived to be a difficult task. They are charged with initiating dialogue that brings together insights from the Catholic tradition to illuminate issues that matter to students. That teachers feel ill prepared and under-resourced for this task is apparent through the focus group data above and through the data relating especially to the Commitment paradigm. The data also reveals they are committed and take their responsibility to both their students and the Church seriously. The very crux of the matter is to ensure that opportunity for rigorous professional dialogue is created which opens these tensions to scrutiny and makes them transparent, allowing new possibilities for teaching and learning in religious education to emerge. The framework presents such an opportunity.

**Conclusion**

The data in this research served two purposes: to illuminate the research question and to justify the framework. Each is summed up separately:

**Justifying the Framework**

In order to understand and evaluate what teachers report about what they believe about student spirituality, two ways of interpreting their responses were presented: a grounded theory approach and using a theological norm – the framework developed in Chapter 3 – against which to evaluate the meaning. The grounded analysis identified six themes which were compared to the literature. However, because the literature, as discussed in Chapter 2 revealed a multiplicity of understandings and a lack of clarity, the grounded theory, while illuminating the responses, was unable to critique the responses adequately and only hinted at some of the misapprehensions and underlying tensions in the participant responses. Analysis of the data using the framework identified that the six themes were able to be legitimately located on the four paradigms of the framework, thereby consolidating the success of the framework as an analysis tool and confirming the reflexivity of the researcher so important to qualitative data analysis. In the methodology of Chapter 4, the theoretical framework was said to be judged successful if teachers: 1) recognize their practice in the paradigms, 2) understand the theory as theory, 3) are able to relate their practice and this theory to one another. In the discussion above, all three conditions for success were
evident. Using the framework in collegial dialogue revealed insights to participants around their practice and supported new thinking around the theology of spirituality. Participants were also able to identify how their practice related to the theology in the framework. While not identifying a normative position within itself, the four paradigms describe a rigorous and comprehensive theory of spirituality that can clearly highlight what teachers are attending to or neglecting in religious education and reveal to teachers some of their tacit beliefs about spirituality. The framework is also able to identify specific examples of the risk of each paradigm of spirituality, inferring from the data the tensions at play that draw teachers away from the paradigms of spirituality into interpretations that risk reducing Christian spirituality’s dynamism and contribution to rigorous identity formation. These risk factors threaten the integrity of pedagogy in religious education and form an integral part of the analysis.

**Illuminating the Research Question**

The research question: “What are teachers’ expectations of and beliefs about their students as spiritual beings and how does this influence their pedagogy in religious education?” is illuminated by the data. With one exception, all participants strongly believed students are spiritual and all participants believed the spiritual dimension is an important aspect in the education of their students. Figure 8 shows that teachers believe students’ spirituality is found in a sense of joy in life and in being attuned to and aware of the holy in the everyday, through openness to beauty truth and meaning; and to a lesser extent through a sense of belonging and contributing actively to something greater than the self through an ongoing tradition involving story, symbol and ritual. They most confidently and fluently express lesson aims aligned with the paradigms of Commitment and Fulfilment, but in a way that as frequently reflects the risks of the paradigms as shown in Figure 8. There is a paucity of references aligned with the Vulnerability and Responsibility quadrants, whether about student spirituality, teacher spirituality or in lesson descriptions. This is also reflected in Table 4 which shows how teachers placed themselves on the two axes of the paradigms and the extent to which this correspondingly located them in the paradigms. The table shows a much greater representation in the Commitment and Fulfilment paradigms confirming the qualitative data analysis represented in Figure 8. This data highlights an imbalance in
understandings of God and spirituality; embracing the positive, the everyday and the intimate and neglecting mystery, the hidden and otherness. As indicated in the focus group discussions, the framework helps to identify whole school curriculum strengths, such as Commitment and Fulfilment and curriculum challenges, such as Responsibility and Vulnerability. It invites conversations about aspects of Christian theology that would otherwise not be explored. It highlights the need to open these areas of spirituality within the religious education curriculum, but also highlights the possibilities for change when teachers are given the opportunity to explore spirituality for themselves.

The participants in the research were overwhelmingly positive towards the idea of spirituality. This might be because they were invited to participate freely if they were interested. Only one participant openly admitted to not being spiritual, but was able to contribute fully to the interview and while struggling to find words, was able to express a viewpoint that was very positive about spirituality. In the question about spirituality’s importance to education, all participants revealed a profound and committed belief that this dimension of the human person was deeply involved in all learning. The framework gives them a language around how to put that into action by clarifying understandings of spirituality.

By identifying where teachers placed themselves on the framework (Table 4) and identifying where their remarks about their own spirituality, that of their students and how they described their lessons aligned or misaligned (Figure 8), it can be seen that alignment is more noticeable between teacher self-understanding of spirituality and their lesson aims than their beliefs about student spirituality and lesson descriptions. Three comments not included in this data reveal reluctance on the teacher’s part to make any specific statements about students’ spirituality. This is not only because they say they do not know, or are guessing, but because they consider students’ spirituality too personal and private to find out. This raises questions around how teachers interact with students in religious education and to what extent they create environments where student spirituality can be opened up and explored. From the data the question arises that if teacher beliefs about students’ spirituality are not the strongest influence on pedagogy, then what are the other factors? It seems clear that teachers are less certain about student spirituality than their own and this raises the vital concern around the extent to which student spirituality and the spiritual
dimension in learning is part of the professional learning agenda in schools. Working with
the framework analysis gives some insights into other factors such as assumptions teachers
make about how learning happens in religious education, their own role in the learning and
the environment for learning created by the school culture. To illuminate other factors
influencing pedagogical decision-making the following discussion focusses on two specific
questions included in the interviews that elicited further information.

Going Further

In conclusion, the data analysis surfaces two implicit beliefs influencing teacher pedagogy in
religious education:

- Firstly, teachers believe that spirituality for their students and themselves is vitally
  important to personal wellbeing and happiness. They believe student spirituality has
to do with relationship with God through experiences of fulfilment such as finding
meaning and purpose, awareness of beauty and nature, joy, relationships and living
a ‘good’ life. To a slightly lesser extent they also believe student spirituality has to do
with committing one’s identity to something bigger, participating in community and
connecting with a larger faith story. Teachers believe that student spirituality is
inherently tied to student wellbeing in the shape of positive self-esteem, emotional
maturity, positive social behaviours and community-mindedness. This can be seen in
the frequency of their comments around the paradigms of Fulfilment and
Commitment in Figure 8 and their self-identification in table 4 with the Kataphatic
end of the vertical axis, revealed in the higher scores around the Fulfilment and
Commitment paradigms.

- Secondly, teachers believe their primary role in religious education in a Catholic
school is to impart faithfully the content of the Catholic tradition. This can be seen in
the frequency of reference to the Commitment paradigm in lesson descriptions in
Figure 8 and the quality of the lessons described which frequently indicate a
monological approach in religious education. Some participants revealed practices
that reduce student agency in learning, while others hesitated to reveal a personal
stance for fear of influencing students spiritually.
The impact of teacher beliefs about student spirituality on their practice is not readily apparent. Many participants found it difficult to articulate their thinking around student spirituality and this may be related to their hesitation in articulating aims for students in religious education. Their reticence is an indication that spirituality is not a regular element in teacher professional discussion and consequently not a factor in planning and teaching of religious education.

These findings raise further questions: What external or internal conditions give rise to those expectations or beliefs? What does this mean for how pedagogy and religious education is understood and enacted in Catholic schools? How might schools redress the imbalance between Apophatic and Kataphatic theology in the perception of spirituality and in religious education pedagogy to enact a religious education that is spiritually grounded?

Throughout the analysis of the data, questions emerged which resulted in a pedagogical focus from each paradigm. These questions and foci will be explored in Chapter 6, illuminated by the three areas addressed in Chapter 2: Teacher professional development theory and its increasing focus on the identity of the teacher, the increasing separation between spirituality and religion, and developmental process theory as applied in religious education. Chapter 6 will also identify the limitations of the research and identify possibilities for future research. The capacity of the framework to raise issues of content as well as pedagogy, addressing the particularity of the Catholic tradition and also the learning process that is unique to a religious education, makes it an important new tool to stimulate professional dialogue and clarify Catholic school aims for religious education that respond to their local context. These possibilities will be enlarged on in the next chapter.
Chapter 6
Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

In Chapter 5, the data from teacher interviews was analysed using a grounded analysis approach to identify six themes: Relationship with God, Connections to a religious tradition, Compassion, Wellbeing, Curiosity and Innocence. The data was then analysed a second time through the lens of the four paradigms of spirituality in the framework developed in Chapter 3. This twofold analysis revealed alignments between the six themes of the grounded approach and the four paradigms providing assurance that the researcher interpretation of the qualitative data was consistent and accurate. Participants’ self-identification on the framework also aligned with the researcher analysis, confirming both the researcher interpretation of the data and the framework as a comprehensive and coherent account of spirituality recognizable by teachers. Feedback on the framework confirms it as a useful analysis tool which uncovers critical teacher beliefs about spirituality that impact on pedagogy; and as an audit tool for religious education curriculum through which teachers can reflect on and evaluate their practice. The data analysis through the framework in Chapter 5 raised questions of significance for the broader Catholic school culture which are discussed below.

In the main body of Chapter 6 the evidence of teacher beliefs about student spirituality is examined in relation to the three contextual areas impacting teacher pedagogy in religious education discussed in Chapter 2: spirituality and religion; spirituality and education; and spirituality and teacher development theory. This chapter explores the theological, pedagogical and strategic challenges raised by the evidence and makes tentative recommendations addressing each area. In brief the challenges raised are: theological – a conflation of beliefs about student wellbeing and student spirituality resulting in an imbalance between Kataphatic and Apophatic theology in religious education; pedagogical – tension between developmental and non-developmental beliefs about student spirituality and lack of clarity about the role of the emotions in spirituality and engagement in religious education; strategic – the perception of teaching as predominantly responsive to external...
accountabilities and its impact on teacher professional learning approaches in religious education. The chapter begins with a discussion of the limitations and challenges of the research. In a final section future areas of inquiry and ways of operationalising the framework will be explored, with a last word drawing the thesis to a close.

Limitations and Challenges of this Research

This research is an in depth study of spirituality as it intersects the fields of theology and education using a dual methodology with systematic research informing the analysis and conclusions of the empirical research. The study itself uses only a small sample size of eleven participants from three schools and while this provides a sufficiently detailed account and analysis to enable others to determine whether the findings may be applicable to broader contexts, it is at the same time a very limited snapshot. Throughout the data analysis in Chapter 5, areas of alignment between the empirical research results from this study and data from the Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project were able to be made and this has given this researcher confidence in the validity of the data and analysis to make some recommendations and draw important conclusions. However, these are made tentatively given the limitations discussed below.

Time: The research was designed as a limited study in the knowledge that teachers’ time is heavily committed and that it would be difficult to attract volunteers if the demands were too onerous. The principals of the three schools involved were generous in arranging release time for interviews and focus group discussions, which in the business of a school is not an insignificant commitment. Within the research design, again in deference to the time constraints, there is only one opportunity to engage with the framework in group dialogue which gives only a small indication of how teachers may use it and learn with it to develop their practice over time.

Bias: Principals who elected to put their school forward for the research were inclined to be already interested in religious education as an area for improvement in their school. This may result in a positive bias towards spirituality with teachers reflecting their schools’ focus and being more attuned to spirituality and religion in this study than in all other schools.

Reliability: Establishing a rapport with teachers as an interviewer and researcher and therefore encouraging open and honest responses was an important aspect of the research.
Allowing enough time beforehand and in the interview process to develop this rapport helped to elicit frank responses. The assurance of de-identification of data was also an important factor in promoting openness. The research design used open ended questions that allowed teachers to explore around the topic and the interview technique gave participants time to grapple with articulating their thoughts; both of which were important for reliable answers. However, it cannot be overlooked that in a Catholic school, teachers may feel pressure to be seen to comply with a religious perspective and respond positively about the importance and value of spirituality, even if that is not their personal stance. While compliance is not evident in the data, it is a possibility and may be revealed in subtle ways that the researcher remains open to in the interpretation and analysis process.

**Breadth:** A decided limitation of the research is that it uses only teachers’ voices and does not include the voices of students or leaders. Student reflections on their own spirituality and feedback on religious education lessons would have added a layer of insight and observation to compare with and illuminate the teacher responses. Interviewing school leaders may have broadened discussions on spirituality in school vision and teacher professional reflection and given new perspectives on the role of the teacher. Isolating teachers without including the views of the wider community of learners reduces the significance of the findings and the reach of the recommendations. It remains an option for a longitudinal study in the future.

**Recommendations**

Mindful of these limitations, the conclusions and recommendations below are earnest endeavours to infer the wider significance indicated by the results. These are arranged in the three areas addressed by the thesis: spirituality and religion, with theological recommendations, spirituality and education with pedagogical recommendations and spirituality in professional learning theory with strategic recommendations. The theological recommendations come out of reflection on the vertical axis of the framework of spirituality, while the pedagogical recommendations which focus on the importance of the role of dialogue in teaching and learning, emerge from reflecting on the horizontal axis of the framework.
Spirituality and Religion: Theological Recommendations

The question of this research focuses on the impact on pedagogy of teacher beliefs about their students’ spirituality. Because the nature of spirituality is historically and conceptually linked to religion, how teachers understand spirituality will also impact how religion is perceived and taught in Catholic schools. The complexity described in the literature regarding the nature of spirituality and its relationship with religion is reflected in participant responses in this research with teachers describing both a secular spirituality and a religious spirituality. This is not of itself problematic, if the two understandings of spirituality are brought into dialogue, however, and this is the crux of the thesis, the religious spiritualities described by participants in this research are tacit beliefs that are not openly or clearly communicated, while a secular approach to spirituality in the nature of student wellbeing and positive psychology is explicitly referred to. This clearly points to a need for teachers to bring their beliefs about spirituality to speech in a supportive but critically challenging professional learning environment. Some cultural issues that emerge from the evidence as deepening this complexity are discussed below.

Wellbeing and Spirituality

Both the Fulfilment and Commitment paradigms were strongly represented in the data, indicating participants identify with the Kataphatic theological tradition while the Vulnerability and Responsibility paradigms were sparsely represented, indicating the Apophatic tradition did not strongly inform teacher understanding of the spiritual dimension. The risks of the Fulfilment paradigm are in evidence, revealing tendencies towards a ‘secular’ sense of spirituality that removes the transcendent referent and focuses on wellbeing goals such as resilience, happiness and positive values formation. The Responsibility paradigm was minimally represented in the data, with those participants locating in the risk of the paradigm indicating a focus on behavioural outcomes for students. For these teachers spirituality is not necessarily tied to a religious world view, highlighting a possible problem in reconciling a Christian anthropology with those methodologies and subject areas that assume the human person is universally measurable as found in many psychology and wellbeing agendas. An emphasis on wellbeing in primary education coincides with growing interest in spirituality and creates a powerful influence on teacher
pedagogy in religious education, as indicated in the data above. The influence of wellbeing programs on teacher understanding of spirituality and therefore of how religion is understood and taught in Catholic schools is explained below.

**Kataphatic Theology: Deepening the Positive**

The anthropological turn, with its emphasis on the personal, the local and the existential increasingly promotes psychology and wellbeing as a way of understanding the human person. The more is revealed of the human person in these fields, the more they inform and renew the wisdom of theological traditions that have always sought to understand the human in light of the divine. From psychology and related fields repeated themes emerge about attributes of the human person integral to wellbeing that resonate with and help clarify a Christian anthropology. A fully integrated person can be described as one who is self-aware, otherness-aware, oriented actively to relationship and oriented reflectively to meaning. These four aspects integral to wellbeing are incorporated into the framework’s four quadrants of spirituality, linking Christian spirituality and wellbeing as important partners in human flourishing, each contributing from different perspectives. Student resilience and wellbeing are widely accepted as essential for both academic and social development with schools focusing attention on students’ wellbeing through establishing safe, supportive and respectful learning environments. Wellbeing can be observed in the confidence and emotional intelligence displayed by students and it is acknowledged that these capacities contribute to higher academic achievement and the creation of healthy relationships and responsible lifestyles. Over the past decade in all primary schools in Australia student wellbeing has become a curriculum subject area in itself where students learn about themselves as learners, their emotions and how to manage themselves socially in ways that lead to cooperative behaviours and form positive community values. Wellbeing programs are usually grounded in the relatively new branch of positive psychology that focuses on the creation of a satisfying life filled with meaning, pleasure, engagement, positive relationships and accomplishing goals. This focus on the positive is drawn through many aspects of school life including educational psychology, discipline policy, teacher student relationships and wellbeing programs themselves. It has enabled the creation of positive and affirming learning environments in schools, impacting across the whole education system in Australia. It has been a force for good in education and the following
hesitations expressed below must not be taken as criticism across the board, but as pertinent for Catholic schools in particular.

With the focus on positivity in all aspects of school life it is unsurprising that the evidence from this study indicates teachers are largely interpreting spirituality through the Fulfilment and Commitment paradigms. These quadrants engage a Kataphatic theology, a positive theology that emphasises an accessible and relational God. The image of an intimate, loving and affirming God aligns with wellbeing aims for a society and community that stresses cooperation and self affirmation. The themes of forgiveness and reconciliation, of cooperation and sharing, of finding satisfaction and peace through appreciating the beauty of the natural environment and in relationships with others are also neat and useful connections between an understanding of spirituality and wellbeing made by teachers in their religious education lessons. However in addressing these themes through a wellbeing lens, there is a temptation to anthropomorphize God or to neglect talk of God altogether. This can be seen in the data of the risk of the Fulfilment paradigm where six participants described aspects of lessons that reduced the notions of transformation to formation through self-affirmation and positivity. In these lessons teachers guided students to make easy correlations between the divine and their everyday experiences or allowed a fragile spirituality to develop through upholding a private interpretation that was difficult to open to critique. In such examples, the particularity of the language of sacrament, grace and the sacred is lost and a secular spirituality focussed on humanism is unwittingly promoted.

Teachers in the study see spirituality as essential to a student's self-esteem, self-efficacy, meaning making and identity construction leading to wellbeing. In doing this they reflect the power of spirituality as an inner resource which can lead to wellbeing outcomes. However, in combining spirituality with the secular wellbeing agenda, they often do so to the detriment of the particularity of religious education outcomes; and as one teacher remarked, without reference to spirituality itself.

Through deepening an understanding of Kataphatic theology, students and teachers can intentionally engage with a Rahnerian consciousness of God, raising awareness of the eternal value of the everyday and the silent mystery of grace known as God, Spirit, Jesus, the Transcendent Other, the sacred, the holy and other subtle words to express the spirit. Teachers need to be supported to talk about spirituality beyond wellbeing with students by
exploring the questions of existence that are bound up with the mystery at the heart of the
human person to help unlock the hidden depths of spirituality. Teachers can bring to the
conversation of wellbeing notions of spiritual wellbeing – a spirituality that acknowledges
the infinite possibility of the other and the grace that comes from elsewhere to create a
sense of self as deeply connected to self, others and the world.

- Teachers must be supported to clarify the differences between the positive
  psychology of wellbeing programs concerned with facilitating a good life and
  enabling self affirmation that are in essence formative; and the Catholic spiritual
  tradition which offers insights into truth and relational being that are potentially
  transformative. Without a critical lens on wellbeing agendas in Catholic primary
  schools, the trend towards a secularising pedagogy\(^1\) will continue and students will
  not be offered opportunities to see the world and themselves in a new light – the
  light of Christ.

Apophatic Theology: Addressing the Negative

The influence of positive psychology in schools’ wellbeing focus may also be a factor in the
underrepresentation in the Vulnerability paradigm. Moving on too quickly from negative
experiences and emotions may override receptivity to the legitimate vulnerabilities inherent
in classroom learning situations and in the life experiences of the students. Allowing
students and teachers the time to engage with the Apophatic theological tradition through
sitting with the unanswerable and the paradoxes of life is an important aspect of attending
to student and teacher spirituality. Being open to growth and making profound changes in
attitude and in self-identity often entails struggle and failure. Self-examination can take one
to emptiness and deep questioning, leading to a place of unknowing and uncertainty. It
brings to the conversation an aspect of the Christian vision for human flourishing which
includes happiness, but also suffering. By strengthening teacher understanding of the
Apophatic tradition a greater appreciation of the otherness of the God of the Christian
tradition and the infinite otherness and possibilities of their students will be encouraged in a
way that leaves open the questions of God, of suffering, evil and the human condition and

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\(^1\) This trend is reflected in the Enhancing Catholic School Project Colourful school data of the Victoria Scale. See Pollefeyt and Bouwens, *Identity in Dialogue*, 193-209.
invites all into a reflective space. Represented in the risk of the paradigm of Responsibility, four participants described aspects of lessons addressing such wellbeing goals as cooperation and building healthy relationships through the vehicle of a religious education which is reduced to instilling in students a ‘religious moral code.’ Here students are not challenged to engage in a robust dialogue with different images of God and God’s desires for humanity, but are encouraged to accept proposed moral norms under the guise of religion and to adhere to a belief system that offers safety and certainty. While in this research teachers’ intuitive understanding of spirituality as a potent force for wellbeing is not mistaken, they must be supported to move beyond ideals of behaviour to be open to grappling with the Apophatic dimension of Christian spirituality. This dimension emphasises the radical openness of the Christian story, one that uncomfortably overturns expectations and must remain open to renewed interpretation in each generation. This story challenges the notion of a safe and predictable God as well as challenging the ideal of a self in control of one’s life journey. By engaging with the theology of the Responsibility paradigm, a Levinasian sense of the Other can be brought to awareness where face to face encounter makes present irreducible otherness, calling into question the self in discerning the call to respond. Through engaging with this paradigm, teachers can offer students a language that expands the language of moral codes or charity to include the notions of justice and conscience as conditions of a spiritual consciousness which can ground responses of truth and relationship.

- Teachers engaging students with the paradigms of Vulnerability and Responsibility will be able to a dialogue between a God of Intimacy (which is more commonly understood) and a God of Otherness (which is often neglected according to this study). This dialogue can bring into sharp focus the complexity of the Christian spiritual tradition as radically new for this generation and open to transformation of its narrative and the narrative of the self.

**Encouraging Resilience in Faith**

Teachers in the study reveal a sense of the complexity and mystery of faith response as integral to the student’s identity and spiritual growth when they indicate a reluctance to intentionally influence student spirituality even while acknowledging that they highly value
it. However much it is valued, this thesis explores just what kind of spirituality and therefore what kind of religion and notions of faith are being communicated in religious education programs in Catholic primary schools. Both the literature and this research indicate there is a theological grey area for teachers around the process of the response of faith in revelation which is cognitive – revealed to the mind, and emotional – sealed in the heart by a source outside the self. How this source is apprehended and responded to are important questions of faith and spirituality that can be brought to attention by reflecting on the framework’s vertical axis and in particular the Apophatic theological tradition. Without open discussion or guidelines to assist teachers in coming to terms with questions of faith and revelation, the tendency reflected in this research is to ignore exploring a faith response as too private and esoteric to be made public, or to gloss over it with links to traditional and familiar language that has lost its power or relevance or to make links to unexplained religious concepts that are often assumed knowledge. A mature and resilient faith can be developed by building students’ competency to grapple with the deep questions of God and the myriad sources of revelation inherent in even the youngest of students’ experiences. By engaging with the language and concepts in the four paradigms of the framework teachers may feel more confident to bring faith understandings into dialogue through exploring the liminal spaces of living in the relationship between the divine and the human: between ultimate concerns and the here and now, between call and response, between belonging and distantiation, between unknowing and knowing. The existential questions identified in the four paradigms of the framework can act as springboards for awareness-raising around a spiritual perspective on reality that may challenge and delight students and perhaps trigger a faith response. Participants in the study identified these questions as powerful opportunities to engage students holistically in religious education.

**Balancing Theologies of Intimacy and Otherness**

As in other areas of human endeavour the educational field focuses increasingly on the personal, the psychological and the emotional. Religion taught in such a context carries a responsibility to reclaim an integrated understanding of body, mind and spirit in the human response of faith to God’s self-communication. In Catholic schools the use of positive psychology and wellbeing in learning programs and behavioural policy must be celebrated but also brought into dialogue with Christian theology in the spirit of the Vatican II spiritual
agenda of openness. In this dialogue the two aspects of spirituality – the human quest for meaning and the sacred – can be proposed as vitally and convincingly connected, ensuring the significance of the quest is not lost and the spiritual dimension of the human person is acknowledged as integral to human flourishing. A deeper understanding of the vertical axis of the framework which presents the tension between the Kataphatic and Apophatic theological traditions and their interconnectedness may illuminate all the quadrants in the framework and enable teachers to appreciate the sophistication of a religious tradition that is at home with a space of uncertainty and openness where the existential questions of life surface. Reflection on the Apophatic and Kataphatic traditions may support them to consider themselves and their students in light of the sacred, both the hidden sacred that stretches possibilities and confounds and humbles human knowing; and the sacred found in sublime intimacy that transforms everyday life into sacrament. Such an understanding of the sacred can then inform and illuminate all learning areas such as wellbeing, literature, science or history in a Catholic educational endeavour.

- It is recommended that teachers regularly reflect on the four paradigms in relation to the vertical axis of the framework to bring greater awareness of the complexity of the Christian theological traditions to their pedagogical choices in the classroom and to design learning in religious education that builds open-ended opportunities for freely sharing and exploring faith responses.

Spirituality and Education: Pedagogical Recommendations

A feature of the current Western cultural context is that theories are giving way to narratives as the dominant window into wisdom, while in politics ideals are conflated with personalities. No longer limited to gossip columns or talk back radio, the plethora of media options invite individuals to share their stories, their powerful emotions and their unique perspectives – seemingly free of editorial controls. How schools enter this space educationally is still being worked through, with the experience and purpose of learning becoming critically entwined with social and emotional dynamics. While it has always been the case, it is even clearer today that learning approaches must embrace intellectual and spiritual encounter as integrally connected through exploring the emotions and the existential. Spirituality in much of the literature is presented as integral to educational
theories that address the self-understanding and identity construction of the student, both in secular and religious educational settings. Spiritual development however, is still a grey area. This research reveals two out of three participants believe that student spirituality is an intangible quality related to human experience rather than age and also that they have rarely considered spirituality as an area to be specifically developed in a classroom setting. The inner or hidden quality of spirituality makes it a difficult area for teachers to attend to and the participants in this study demonstrate that while they acknowledge and value student spirituality, there is confusion as to how this quality can be developed and or nurtured. The frequency of comments in lesson descriptions relating to the Commitment and Responsibility paradigms were almost matched by the number of comments describing aspects of risks of the paradigms. In the Commitment paradigm, teachers described aspects of lessons that limited student empowerment and presented the tradition as a meta-narrative. In the Responsibility paradigm aspects of lessons described a focus on a self-generated sense of duty or charity, or presenting ideals such as humanism. These aspects are more attuned to developing ‘outer’ and more measurable and responsively oriented religious outcomes in education such as knowledge of the tradition or behaviour, without directly referring to ‘inner’ or receptive educational aims such as spirituality or self-understanding. The literature suggests that spirituality can be understood in either developmental or non-developmental terms. However, these are often differentiated through the use of language around outcomes and goals in the case of developmental understandings or therapeutic language which uses terms of nurturing and growth in the case of non-developmental approaches. Both approaches are pertinent and useful to teachers in their endeavour to provide an engaging model of religious education, yet teachers are drawn to the more measurable aims associated with a developmental approach to learning which allows them to develop observable outcomes and give clear feedback on progress, creating a sense of achievement for both students and teachers. The extent to which teachers understand the role of spiritual development in religious education assists them to address the complexity of the content and the learning process in religious education and to embrace the diversity students bring to the learning.

The discussion below presents the recommendation that spirituality be specifically addressed to engage students emotionally and cognitively through a developmental
approach which integrally connects intellectual and spiritual encounter, such as a hermeneutic-communicative model as described in Chapter 2.

**Spiritual Development as Possible**

As referred to above, aspects of many lessons described in this study reflect the risk of the Responsibility and Commitment paradigms, revealing teachers are confident to guide students to make at times limited and predictable connections between their lives and the Catholic tradition. In these lessons teachers focus on students as actively responding to religious content, but emphasising what is externally assessable through students’ behaviour or knowledge. The complexity of the content knowledge increases with a student’s age and therefore vaguely aligns with a ‘developmental’ model. At the same time participants express a fear of unduly influencing their students in the area of spirituality or faith, describing it as a critical aspect of a personal identity that is unique and already fully present even at a young age and that seemingly follows no particular process to mature, rather developing with life experience. This dilemma reveals the complexity of understanding spiritual development in religious education and highlights the tension between teacher understandings of religious education as developmental and non-developmental. In a few of the lesson descriptions, this tension was resolved by distinguishing religious education as having to do with developing knowledge and understanding of religious traditions, while remaining ambiguous as to the impact of this learning on the spiritual growth and identity of students. However, many of the lessons sought to engage students emotionally as well as cognitively; revealing that for teachers there is an implicit link between the emotions and spirituality.

How spirituality and the emotions are connected is an area that this study is not focussed on and is a critical area that requires further investigation, but the evidence from this research does indicate that teachers find it an important key to student engagement in religious education. In practice teachers are dedicated in all other subject areas to a developmental approach to learning with clear aims to engage students’ self-understanding and emotions to facilitate meaning-making and skill development. Progression of learning in such cases is not only reflected in increasing the amount and complexity of what a student knows, but how that knowledge impacts and develops his or her sense of self.
So unless you sort of choose to tap into their spirituality and making that emotive connection with them, I don’t think you’re bothering to tap into who they are. And I think that’s what learning is all about, making it realistic for them.

This participant’s quote aptly encapsulates the methodology of many educators regardless of subject matter who see the importance of developing cognitive, emotional and spiritual dimensions of students. There are three elements mentioned in this quote as critical to engagement in developmental learning: tapping into student identity or sense of self, making a connection to emotions or spirituality, and making content real or meaningful. Each of the elements builds on the other even while they are interdependent. It is important to investigate how teachers in this study are connecting the spiritual with the emotional and why it may not be working as an engagement strategy as well as it should in religious education.

Engagement is essential for learning and a key feature of engagement is meaningful content. Teachers are often given the responsibility of presenting content as meaningful and relevant for students and for many teachers this is critical to their role. While teachers must be aware of students’ interests and abilities in selecting appropriate content, the work of learning is for the student to make meaning of who he or she is in relation to the content. However, without an emotional connection to themselves or others in the learning – including the teacher, students are unlikely to take on the responsibility and generate the will required for the complex task of making meaning. Teachers in this study frequently and clearly identified the strategic use of an emotional ‘hook’ to engage students’ emotions to motivate active involvement in making meaning of the content in religious education, demonstrating their awareness of the importance of the emotions in learning. However, this emotional connection is better focused on the students themselves, rather than guiding or inviting an emotional connection to the content as was evidenced in the lesson descriptions. A sense of self as spiritual or others as spiritual may enable students to connect with religious content as relevant to who they are. By making student identity the focus of the lesson, the teacher can harness students’ self-awareness and their questions to generate emotional connectedness, enabling students to make meaning of themselves as subject. The religious content may then be positioned as a partner in the meaning making rather being the subject of the meaning being made.
When dealing with any aspect of learning in a Catholic school a sense of the spiritual or the sacred must be brought to awareness, made visible and communicated; in turn, this may resonate with an awareness in the student of a sense of self as spiritual, it may awaken in the student a sense of self as spiritual, or it may be rejected by the student as not relating to him or her at this stage, yet fostering critical reflection on his or her needs, feelings and aspirations. Teachers must be supported to be flexible and responsive, inviting any of these options and to focus learning in religious education on developing the emotional and spiritual awareness needed to build an integrated sense of identity which may or may not be religious. Teachers must be able to design learning for students in religious education that uses existential questions that go to the heart of student identity and ‘tap into who they are’, generating emotional awareness of themselves and what matters to them. At the same time teachers should feel confident that through a dialogue process spirituality can be developed.

- The framework of spirituality as a professional learning tool can engage teachers in dialogue and reflection on the paradigmatic spiritual experiences that engage the emotions together with a Christian theological perspective that is explained in Chapter 3. The framework may assist in expanding teacher awareness of the variety of spiritual experiences and the range of emotions that can be explored with students. It can support them to more confidently focus on the identity of the student as the subject of religious education and to look for ways to develop students’ sense of self and their emotional connectedness in order to develop their ability to make meaning and their ability to integrate their emotional, spiritual and cognitive responses.

**Dialogue as Method and Valued Outcome of Religious Education**

Dialogue is both a method and a valued outcome of religious education; one which is mentioned by teachers in the study as an approach to engaging students in religious education. It is important to uncover what underlying beliefs about spirituality influence how they use this methodology. The hermeneutic-communicative approach to religious education, advocated by Pollefeyt in the Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project is outlined in Chapter 2 and is interpreted by Catholic Education Melbourne in its Religious
Education Curriculum approach described in the Pedagogy of Encounter. Both approaches invite the teacher and student to be open to transformation through deep listening and encounter in dialogue where the issues in the lives of students, their self-understanding, elements of the Catholic tradition and other perspectives are brought together respectfully. In the case of Pedagogy of Encounter, five movements are described which teachers can dip in and out of as they design an inquiry with and for students in religious education. Each movement is encapsulated by a question. The five questions of the movement of the Pedagogy of Encounter are: ‘What do you think and sense?’ ‘What do others think and why do they think that?’ ‘What do the Catholic traditions think and teach?’ ‘How does this draw me closer to God/ to others?’ ‘What do I think now and why?’ These questions are multi-correlational ways of inquiring into a provocation or an issue that has spiritual significance for students. The transformative possibilities of such a dialogue are reliant on the conditions for learning created by the relationships in the learning environment, including trust in the other, courage to face uncertainty and preparedness to encounter difference. The theological dimension of dialogue emerge from the renewal of Christian spirituality proposed by Vatican II: an understanding of revelation as dynamic and dialogical and an understanding of the human person as open to God’s self-communication. This theology of a dialogical God elevates the importance of dialogical method in Catholic education and can appeal to school communities as they reflect on and develop their pedagogies.

The horizontal axis of the framework: Receptive – Responsive may illuminate two modes of being essential to dialogue. This possibility is further explored below in relation to teachers’ self-understanding and the development of pedagogy in religious education.

**The Receptive Mode in Dialogue**

Dialogue is inherently receptive in that the self engaged in dialogue is radically open to the other and the self-reflection such an encounter promotes. While the participants in this study did not reveal a deep understanding of the spiritual dimension of dialogue, they identified dialogue as a frequently used strategy for learning in religious education, referring to class discussions and creating a ‘safe space’ where students could feel respected and heard and so could enter a potentially transformative dialogue with confidence. Dialogue requires a space of trust and safety because there is risk involved in opening the self to the
degree of receptivity to the other that occurs. When the sense of self as spiritual is strong in at least a proportion of interlocutors and the environment is permeated with a sense of trust and respect, receptivity is high and meaning making in religious education is supported. It is essential for teachers involved in such a dialogue to be aware of their students’ spirituality in order to notice and name it, using language which is both faithful to the tradition and connected to the experiences of students. While teachers in the study were attuned to creating a learning environment that created a safe space for dialogue, teachers themselves must be given a safe space to risk the radical openness and receptivity needed for transformative dialogue which illuminates the spiritual dimension in order to plan for and understand the dynamic potential of dialogue in religious education. It also opens a space where the transformative power of the spirit works for good.

- It is recommended that teachers engage with the existential questions\(^2\) in each of the quadrants as part of professional learning processes to enhance their confidence to promote and partake in dialogue as a key strategy in religious education. It is recommended that a greater focus on open-ended questions promoting dialogue, such as those in the framework paradigms be used in curriculum design in religious education.

**The Responsive Mode in Dialogue**

Dialogue is also inherently responsive and creative inviting new thinking and language to emerge and contribute to future solutions, visions or theological approaches. The dialogue through which students grow into the intellectual and spiritual life of their community is itself a process that is heavily influenced, and may be constrained by, the quality and diversity of the community’s language, ideas and aspirations. Some participants demonstrated an implicit belief that it is possible to operate in a religiously neutral space, expressing a wish to allow students to make up their own mind about where they stand on

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\(^2\) The questions identified as part of this research form a unique contribution to the content strands in the Religious Education Curriculum Framework (2018) proposed for schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne by Catholic Education Melbourne, which the researcher was engaged in writing during this research. Teachers in the Archdiocese are currently exploring these questions in their religious education curriculum design as provocations for dialogue with students.
beliefs and faith, however, at the same time they acknowledge their influence on students and the witness they bear to their own spirituality. This tension undermines teachers’ confidence, making them reserved and even passive in their role as witness as well as undermining their role as educating students to be critical thinkers. Teachers should be assured that actively witnessing to a powerful and inspiring Christian vision as well as teaching students to think for themselves is possible at the same time and necessary for dialogue. A vision for the future communicated by the intellectual and faith community of the whole school can inform the personal identity of the student and the identity of the teacher if there is an emotional investment in the vision. This vision can be an important part of lesson planning and broad learning intentions for students in order to engage them emotionally and intellectually in dialogue. It is therefore important that the Christian foundations of the school and a vision for God’s reign are clearly visible and invitingly proposed in language that appeals to the community, stirs emotions and is brought in to the dialogue with teachers and with students.

The high frequency of lessons described as relating to the Commitment paradigm indicates spiritual development is seen as consistent with developing a strong connection to the Catholic tradition and in particular to full participation in the Catholic faith community. While this connection is not inconsistent with spiritual identity formation, it should not be the only correlation open to students in a dialogic approach. The extent to which diversity is acknowledged and invited is the extent to which a student will actively contribute in an open religious dialogue that is sensitive to different levels of spiritual awareness, a variety of personal spiritual and religious experiences including different religious traditions or no traditions, and a range of emotional intelligences. Remaining open and sensitive to these differences within the school community, while actively sharing a Christian faith perspective and vision is the highly complex task assigned to the religious educator and shared with students. The language which emerges in such a dialogue is not necessarily that of orthodox theology, however, it is not inconsistent with it. This language is an experiential theological language which responds to and resonates with students’ expressions, questions and experiences, informed by contemporary culture and the personal grappling with faith of the teacher and students; a language which brings forward the old and gives it a future orientation.
The Catholic intellectual community that nurtures educators and students must set a high value on critical thinking and ongoing professional learning in order to grapple with the demands of a dialogue model of religious education that engages the whole community. Reflecting on the horizontal axis in relation to dialogue may support teachers to balance the receptive and responsive modes essential for dialogue.

Balancing Receptive and Responsive Modes in Religious Education

No single narrative can hold meaning for all in the diverse societies of today; indeed each individual has plural narratives to hold together. In this context, Vatican II theology, with its existential flavour and focus on human experience and religious encounter is a spiritual text for a hermeneutical approach to religious education. Through a hermeneutic-communicative approach developmental learning in religious education can be broken open and understood. In order to create the confidence to adopt such a model, skilling teachers in the receptive and responsive movements of dialogue that engage students’ emotions, self-understanding and meaning making is of vital importance. The evidence in this study indicates teachers’ beliefs about student spirituality as both an inherent and ineffable quality and at the same time one open to teacher influence and development, impacts the quality of dialogue teachers invite students into.

Reflecting on the horizontal axis of the framework and its role in the four paradigms of spirituality may support teachers to clarify their understanding of spirituality as integral to a dialogical approach to religious education where progress and development is not only reflected in what students know, but in how they develop their sense of self, their emotions and their way of seeing the world.

Recommendations from the Four Paradigms

The analysis of the data through the lenses of the paradigms led to four recommendations for teachers to consider as they design learning for a relevant religious education as outlined in Chapter 5: clarity, proximity, complexity and diversity. To re-cap, the recommendations invited teachers to clarify intentions for students as spiritual, to encourage proximity of students to the emotional realities of experiences of otherness and face to face encounter, to embrace the complexity of the human person as the subject of religious education and the questions of ultimacy.
that arise, and finally to encourage diversity of voices, questions and experiences in the classroom.

These recommendations were discussed in detail in Chapter 5 and are areas of attention integral to every aspect of the discussion relating to dialogue and the hermeneutic-communicative pedagogical approach.

**Spirituality and Teacher Development Theory: Strategic Recommendations**

I have a role to fulfil but it has to come from a place within me otherwise that role is only just a role, isn’t it? So there has to be a personal connection with this. This quote from one of the participants frames the following discussion around spirituality and teacher development. It describes a teacher grappling with a sense of vocation and the deep commitment needed to be an effective and authentic religious educator. This quote resonates with many in the study revealing a sense of internal accountability integral to the spiritual identity of the teacher. In this light there is much reason to be optimistic in the evidence from this research that indicates religious education teachers highly value their own spirituality and express a great respect for the spirituality of their students. They also understand that spirituality plays an important role in education and link it to personal wellbeing and holistic development as well as connecting it to religious content. Especially heartening is the deep commitment expressed by participants to their role as religious educators in the Catholic school system and their acknowledgement that their spiritual witness has a powerful influence on their students. Teachers’ beliefs about spirituality and that of their students influence how they understand and enact their role as religious educators. The evidence in this research indicates that when teachers are not clear about their students’ spirituality, they draw on how they themselves understand spirituality to inform their pedagogical decision-making. While teachers are convinced of the importance of spirituality in education, few in this research are articulate about spirituality or are able to express explicitly their reasons for valuing it. It exposes an area of concern in a Catholic school system when teachers who are dedicated and feel called to teaching as a vocation are not supported to reflect on their role as spiritual leaders in their community or given the opportunity to weigh up their values, priorities and accountabilities.
Weighing Internal and External Accountabilities

Personal beliefs and social orientations are the internal accountabilities that make up identity and colour what teachers pay attention to in their students and in their practice. Internal accountabilities are the implicit beliefs that are the subject of this research: the beliefs about teaching and learning, about their role and their students that teachers carry within them. These are often tacitly held beliefs that go unexamined and are reflected in the assumptions and world views, whether religious or not, evidenced in teacher practice. It is important that these implicitly held beliefs are brought to light through professional learning in order that they can be explicitly noticed and affirmed, deepened or if needed, challenged. Teacher professional learning ideally conforms to the research literature that finds four voices contribute to quality teacher professional learning: teachers own beliefs, experience and identity; the theoretical knowledge of the subject matter; the voices of their students; and the narratives of their colleagues. These four components are best brought together in a professional dialogue in the local school setting where the internal accountabilities of teachers can be articulated and reflected on alongside the external accountabilities of the local school context. Beliefs about spirituality are evident in this study and it is clear they influence teachers’ approach to religious education. However, the evidence in this research indicates there are external accountabilities that impact how teachers understand their role and view their students. Some of these external accountabilities are accepted and internalised, forming part of the teachers’ identity, while others remain as external accountabilities. To the extent that they remain external, these accountabilities may be a source of internal dissonance or professional disharmony in the school culture. This dissonance according to teacher development theory may be an impetus to challenge and change either the external accountability or the teachers’ stance. In either case, it is important that external accountabilities are also noticed and named in professional learning conversations empowering teachers to make fully informed pedagogical choices.

The external accountabilities of teachers are many: to society’s need for active and responsible citizens as conveyed in the public domain, to State Government curriculum and achievement standards, to the schools’ visions for students and to the parents’ hopes for their children. In the case of religious education in the Melbourne Archdiocese there are as
well as these, extra accountabilities which shape the pedagogical choices teachers make: to the vision and mission of the Catholic Church under whose authority Catholic Education Melbourne supports schools through curriculum advice and resources; to the Bishop responsible for education in Melbourne who has mandated since 2005 the use of a series of religious education text books in all Catholic schools; and finally, but not least, to the local parish priest who in the Melbourne Archdiocese is the employer of the teacher. While this study did not specifically address external accountabilities, some interesting statements from participants reveal the impact of these accountabilities on how they understand their role, religion and their pedagogical choices in religious education. These statements are discussed below and inferences are made as to ways these external accountabilities may contribute to the teachers’ beliefs about their role and how they interact with students.

**Accountable to Parish**

With external accountabilities to State Government and Archdiocesan Catholic Church authorities as well as local Church authorities, each with at times conflicting understandings of what constitutes success for students and quality teaching, teachers of religious education must be able to discern what the most appropriate and best practice is for their students and their context, guided and supported by the local school community and the spiritual and religious leadership of that community. However, this study demonstrates that almost half the participants feel they alone carry responsibility for the religious and spiritual growth of students, with comments about whether they may perhaps be the only person with whom students have an opportunity to discuss God and religion. They feel they are often the only ones conducting such conversations in the absence of cultural and parental support. They hold that while their spiritual example is important for students they are ambivalent about the effectiveness of role of the family, school or parish community in developing a resilient and robust student spirituality, with three participants wondering whether students may only associate spirituality and religion with school and school based activities. The high frequency of lessons in the Commitment paradigm may be indirectly connected to a sometimes overt, sometimes subtle link made by a few parish priests

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3 This structure may change as a result of recommendations from the Royal Commission into institutional responses of child sexual abuse (2018) and at time of writing is being discussed.
between successful religious education and regular attendance and pious behaviour of students at mass. The parish priest as employer can communicate expectations to educators that are keenly felt, yet often serve to reinforce teachers’ feelings of sole responsibility for students’ religious education. A parish that is self-reflective and is actively involved in the identity formation of parishioners is open to discussion and exploration of diverse worldviews and welcoming of others. Such a parish presents the profile of an ‘engaged’ parish in terms of the Searching for Parish Engagement Scale (SPES). An ‘engaged’ parish may find a way to take seriously its ongoing role in the lives of the students and their parents and the teachers at the parish school, establishing a partnership that supports teachers in their role and actively shares responsibility for the spiritual education of students.

- It is recommended parishes undertake self-reflection and dialogue using a ‘SPES’ approach with a view to supporting their parish school community – students, parents and teachers, in ongoing engagement in spiritual development. The framework of spirituality can be a complementary dialogue and reflection tool to engage the community in a spiritual development program.

**Accountable to a Textbook**

Another incremental and subtle external accountability over the past fourteen years is the mandated use of a religious education text book which impacts how teachers understand religion itself and influences the pedagogical choices they make when designing learning for students. The text books were developed in 2005 at the request of Melbourne’s then Archbishop to provide information about the Catholic tradition directly to students; effectively reducing the particularity and complexity of the Christian tradition especially in the junior texts. It also had the effect of locating authority in a single source, by-passing the need for teachers to investigate a variety of sources to grapple with a deeper understanding

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of the tradition for themselves, their context and their students. A telling comment in this study that reveals a lack of confidence in and knowledge about the religious tradition bears repeating here: “But then I think some teachers hold themselves back from engaging in that conversation (about faith and life) because they’re worried that “I can’t impart the right information (laugh) I can’t tell you exactly what you need to hear.” This teacher is demonstrating a concern that has complex roots, but the implied authority of a textbook may have played a disempowering role over the years.

- The framework of spirituality in professional dialogue positions the teacher as learner but also as an inquirer with students into faith. It also engages teachers in developing their knowledge of the tradition through exploring existential questions in relation to the content of the Christian spiritual tradition. The framework does not prescribe specific teaching practices, rather gives an opportunity to examine teachers’ questions and thinking about religion and spirituality and why they are important for students. Using the framework as an audit tool, teachers can identify strengths and challenges, making changes to their practice in a self-regulated way that responds to and shapes internal accountabilities.

**Accountable to Outcomes**

Teachers feel they are positioned as action oriented, responding to the influence of both internal and external accountabilities: “That’s why even if you’re less inclined to be there, we’re driven from within and the nature of our jobs puts us in that (responsive) box a little more.” The nature of teaching and learning today focuses attention on learning outcomes that are concrete, explainable and applicable with activity based learning a recommended approach in most learning areas. Teachers internalize these understandings of teaching and learning and identify their role with an action oriented and outcomes driven approach. With outcomes around religious education and spirituality that are less readily identified and measurable, religious education and spirituality in particular may become reduced to those elements that are more concrete, as evidenced by the emphasis on the Kataphatic theological traditions in this study. The framework’s horizontal axis deals with the receptive and responsive modes of human being. These modes when brought to attention and examined in professional dialogue can be used to look for blind spots in curriculum planning
in relation to the variety of modes of learning offered to students. It may help challenge a learning culture that gives preference to the responsive mode which focuses on the concrete and immediate applicability of learning outcomes by requiring teachers to stay in a more receptive mode to consider longer term goals and higher order outcomes and slow down the learning of students to deepen insights and focus attention on spirituality. In line with teacher professional development theory, it is also important that teachers experience reflective learning in their professional development in religious education at the school level where connections to their context and students can be made in a communal approach.

- The framework dialogue tools provide a reflective model that engages teachers in theological discussion that highlights the importance of the receptive mode in the midst of the responsive world of schooling today.

**Accountable to Public Discourse**

While not an external accountability, an external cultural impact which must have bearing on any religious institution is the findings of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. One participant spoke of how difficult it is to identify as religious at this time, implying the sexual abuse scandal has undermined the Church’s ability to credibly contribute to public life and education. The criminality of the institutional responses to child sexual abuse has generated ‘collateral damage’ where association with the Church may tarnish one’s own integrity. With enrolments in Catholic schools falling for the first time in decades in Victoria, teachers must feel the impact of the findings of the royal commission on their role. The study shows teachers feel committed to and responsible for bringing the Catholic tradition into the future and it is incumbent on the Catholic learning community to unpack the tensions involved in being a religious educator in the current context.

- The Catholic education system might consider incorporating ongoing professional learning as a condition of teaching religious education. It might offer educators quality time to break open their role in sharing the Gospel in a way that remains open, recontextualising and seeking truth.
• The Church in its educative mission may consider ways to regularly listen and respond to the voices of the young people, teachers and students involved in Catholic education.

Accountable for the Full Flourishing of Students

The role of the religious educator can be described in ways that highlight teachers as accountable first and foremost to the flourishing of their students as part of God’s vision for creation and the ongoing creativity and flourishing of that vision in the future.

• Catholic education system leaders may re-consider the expectations placed on teachers ensuring external accountabilities are clear, transparent and realistically resourced and funded, ensuring funding priorities are aligned with the vision for students.

A Connected and Balanced Teacher Development Model

A focus of research in teacher professional learning theory over the last decade has seen a shift from what teachers need to know to how teachers learn. Just as the creation of conditions for learning are an important focus for student learning, so it is for teacher learning. Conditions for learning are not only about focussing on the transfer and retention of knowledge, but creating the connectedness that enhances self-understanding in community. The community of learners then extends beyond the classroom to include parents as well as students. At the school level, teachers and leaders work in harmony with parents and students, but are also connected to system and church leaders. These three levels must be receptive to each other and aware of how they interact to communicate a shared vision for learning and provide learning conditions in a school culture that reflects this vision.

While this study did not ask a specific question around the influence of a school’s prayer and learning culture on teachers, school-based teacher professional learning in religious education and school prayer were both noted as impacting teacher spirituality and teacher practice positively. Four participants mentioned prayer with comments such as: “prayer is like a meditation - even, you know, even new students, preppies – and, very quickly, that spirituality sort of just envelopes everyone. So it’s just a lovely place to work.” School based
professional learning was also appreciated by one participant: “I mean, at my previous school we worked with some great consultants and again at this school and I think that has really helped.” These two aspects of a Catholic culture indicate the importance of a learning environment created by and with teachers and students that provides religious experiences and intellectual support to bring to the dialogue.

The framework is designed using the Vatican II spiritual agenda of openness to the other and is an opportunity for teachers to become aware of their beliefs and consciously articulate their diverse faith positions and understandings in order that they better discern what’s at stake in the Catholic school community. A school culture that actively promotes the building of a community of learners and celebrates its religious foundations needs a core group, specifically system and Church leaders to be convinced of the importance of keeping spirituality on the leader, teacher and student learning agenda.

- Bringing to speech the internal aspects of identity formation – beliefs about what is important and worthwhile in human life and awareness of the emotional attachments impacting those beliefs; and external aspects – cultural and systemic expectations and the relationships and local connections that must be maintained, is an exercise that necessarily involves all three levels of learners: leaders, teachers and students. These levels should be receptive to each other united by a clear vision for the spiritual flourishing of students. Such a dialogue requires a commitment by system and local leadership to promote ongoing teacher learning in religious education and to support it financially and strategically.

**Leading for a Culture of Learning in Religious Education**

Teachers in the research are grappling with bringing their images of God and the human person into congruence with how they teach every day. In Chapter 5, the analysis of the data through the lenses of the four paradigms identified four pedagogical priorities for teachers in religious education: attention to clarity, diversity, complexity and proximity. Schools play an important role in supporting and challenging religious education teachers to come to clarity around their role and learning intentions for students, to be confident to address their context of difference and diversity, to embrace the complexity and uncertainty of seeking truth in mystery, and to invite encounter by risking proximity to the other. A
system wide approach to learning in religious education would ideally include a focus on these areas. Those teachers and leaders who are given time and space to grapple with faith, will be authentic leaders of faith and able to communicate and bring into dialogue faith positions that speak to the students and community, without dictating those positions as the only options. Grappling with faith is not a stage of faith development, but a spiritual way of being in which students, teachers and leaders engage in dialogue. Providing opportunities for grappling with faith creates a distinctive, visible and robust intellectual and religious culture into which all members: teachers, leaders, parents and students are invited. It is a system priority to build a culture where schools are seen as places of listening to parents and students to whom teachers and leaders are primarily responsible, and also places of listening to teachers and leaders by system and church leaders. Including Church leaders is an important link in the connected learning model since teacher professional dialogue is part of the ongoing dialogue between the orthodox theology of the Church and the practical theology of education. Church leaders should consider making opportunities to listen to and be part of this dialogue to promote a new theological approach for the future.

Research indicates that three strategies for professional learning are proven to be successful: the use of heuristics which cue prior knowledge and create dissonance; the creation of conditions for self-reflection and collegial dialogue; and offering extended opportunities for learning. These strategies are successful in surfacing tacit beliefs that may otherwise hinder change in practice. Teachers’ beliefs about spirituality can be brought into focus and expanded using the framework of spirituality as a heuristic to support an understanding of the Christian religious tradition as relevant to existential human experiences and questions.

- As a comprehensive and coherent survey of spirituality, the framework offers leaders and teachers the opportunity to audit their curriculum in relation to a balanced understanding of spirituality. Leadership that is committed to teacher learning as integral to a vision for a connected intellectual and spiritual learning community may consider prioritising reflective dialogical professional learning approaches that open spaces for encounter with God.

The recommendations above highlight the complexity of teaching and learning in religious education and the importance of spirituality as integral to religious education. The
recommendations also emphasise the role of leadership, both at the local and at the system levels in creating conditions for the full flourishing of all involved in learning communities, teachers, leaders and students alike. There are no easy solutions however; as the recommendations indicate, a focus on reflection and dialogue encapsulates a pedagogical and strategic approach that may become a strength of a Catholic education system.

**Further Areas of Investigation and Questions**

While this research has illuminated the research question: What are teachers’ expectations of and beliefs about their students as spiritual beings and how does this influence their pedagogy in religious education? It has also raised many more questions. This research has identified areas which call for further pedagogical and theological investigation and these are identified below.

Spiritual or religious awareness is seen as more sensory than cognitive by a minority of participants in the study, aligning with a non-developmental approach to religious education, where sensory awareness is enhanced through the use of ritual, symbol and meditation. These pedagogical design elements are not mentioned frequently in the study and it might be useful to investigate ways these elements may be used to build the emotional connection and sense of spiritual identity so important to making meaning in religious education. What pedagogical strategies can be used to build emotional and sensory awareness in religious education? And how might they lead to a sense of spiritual identity?

The role of the emotions in spirituality, identity and meaning making in religion is a complex one as hinted at in this research. What role do the emotions play in connection to learning, spirituality and wellbeing?

Some participants recommended the framework be used directly with students. This suggestion may appeal to those interested to explore and enhance the framework as a co-inquiry with students. How might the framework be used with students? What might student voice add to the framework?

Rebuilding relevance of the Catholic tradition through new communication patterns which uses the different voices of teachers, leaders, parents and students may bring new insights
to student self-understanding and a vision for the future. The language of the students and teachers in dialogical learning processes presents a practical theology which may inform and potentially reform theological approaches for the future church and should be celebrated and communicated widely. Investigating and creating new structures to ensure system and Church leaders can be more receptive to school communities and the theologies they are grappling with is an essential work that may inform future theological approaches. What are structures that might ensure system and Church leaders are receptive to the theologies of school communities?

This research highlighted questions around faith development and understanding faith responses in religious experiences as being interconnected with spirituality in religious education. What are the interconnections and how do the theological questions from faith to faith illuminate the complexity of the work of religious education in a diverse school population?

The framework focuses on Christian spirituality however; the framework might be extended as a tool for interfaith dialogue. A question for further investigation could be: How transferrable are the concepts in the framework for those in religious traditions outside of Christianity?

Each of the paradigms and its relationship to the axes has been developed in this research. However, exploring the interconnections and the depth of the paradigms is only here begun. There is more work to do in illuminating the theology of each of the paradigms. What further connections to Christian spirituality can be explored in the paradigms?

This research proposes a framework of spirituality which has had limited exposure to teachers to date and while the feedback on the framework is positive it is important that a longitudinal study is undertaken, working with teachers to use the framework in professional dialogue and reflection on practice over time in a theological action research cycle. This will allow documentation of changes in practice using student voice and greater feedback on and development of the framework itself. How might working with the framework impact practice in religious education over time?
Possibilities for a Framework of Spirituality

This research has developed a comprehensive, coherent and relatable theoretical framework of Christian spirituality for students and teacher in Catholic schools. The curriculum implications for each paradigm discussed in Chapter 3 touches only lightly on the range of religious and spiritual concepts that might be raised with students. In providing these specific examples in the discussion of the paradigms, the researcher does not intend to limit the range of human experiences or emotions that may arise in the learning, rather seeks to stimulate possibilities that may act as a springboard for further enrichment of curriculum and pedagogy. The framework highlights existential questions and paradigmatic human experience as liminal spaces where we become open to what these reveal. By reflecting on and illuminating these experiences in dialogue with Christian traditions, the framework offers a coherent approach to dialogue about spirituality, faith and revelation. Its focus on dialogue and a multi-correlational approach makes it a timely offering for using in conjunction with Catholic Education Melbourne’s Pedagogy of Encounter approach and a hermeneutic-communicative approach. The framework of spirituality may provide a lens for the future development of religious education curriculum content and professional learning processes for schools and Catholic Education systems in the following ways.

The framework responds to the Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project recommendations to make the particularity of the Catholic tradition visible and meaningful within schools. As a practical theological tool, the framework of spirituality describes Christian spirituality in elegant, comprehensive and practical terms that easily relate to teachers and the questions and experiences of students in religious education. It is clear from the participant feedback that it can be used as a curriculum audit and reflection tool for teachers as well as a stimulus for planning religious education and for teacher professional development using the dialogue tools. It has possibilities for becoming a widely recommended tool for those schools wishing to develop a recontextualising pedagogy using a hermeneutic-communicative approach to religious education.

Use of the framework may be extended to school leadership as an awareness raising tool for a balanced approach between responsiveness and receptiveness in decision-making and policy development, and for balancing the Apophatic and Kataphatic spiritualities in
communications and vision. Engaging leadership groups in the framework may highlight leadership styles that resonate with each of the paradigms and invite leaders to work to achieve a balance.

Use of the framework may be extended to tertiary education providers who prepare teachers for a career in Catholic schools, as religious educators. It may be developed as an online tool for teachers or developed as part of a course of studies around Christian spirituality and its theological insights for teaching religious education today.

Participants suggested the existential questions from each paradigm would make exciting provocations for learning in religious education, being broad enough to engage multiple perspectives and deep enough to engage with complex concepts. The researcher has devised these questions for the framework and has applied them to her work of writing Catholic Education Melbourne’s Religious Education Curriculum. The questions now feature as integral to the content areas of the curriculum and are currently being trialled by schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. Using the framework may provide teachers with further insights into how these questions can be used to design learning in religious education.

In the research participants were asked two questions about each of the four arms of the axes to which they responded on a Likert scale. They were then asked to connect the dots on the four axes, giving them a resulting area or ‘coverage’ within each quadrant. It was felt that this approach to using the framework did not promote full engagement with the paradigms; however the Likert scale results were a useful entree into discussion of the theological underpinnings of the two axes. Further development of the Likert Scale questions may provide quantitative data around the framework, but in a school climate where surveying already occurs to excess, this path is not recommended across all schools.

Changing teaching practice in ways that have real impact on students is not easy, as discussed in the literature. Schools are quick to adopt the latest trend in the educational headlines, hoping for a quick solution to problems and they are often a political football tossed around in public discourse at the whim of politicians on a ‘slow news day’. Such changeability does not allow the embedding of ideas into practice which is necessary to build teacher confidence and effectiveness. The framework’s power lies in the dialogical processes that anchor the theology of the tool, engaging teachers in theological discourse.
and grappling with faith and new ideas. To use the dialogue process developed for each paradigm as a practical theological tool and the framework as an audit and planning tool requires a school culture that values and allows regular opportunity for ongoing professional development in religious education. It is hoped that the dialogue processes around the four paradigms may become familiar and even be developed further to yield fresh insights each time.

The school/parish connection is a powerful one in primary schools. Insights from reflecting on the horizontal axis of the framework with parish and school leadership may lead to parishes and schools becoming more receptive to the language and experiences of the teachers, parents and students. Many in the school community are often situated at the edge of the parish worshipping community and can offer insights into being Church for the future if they are re-connected in ways that matter to them. Parish engagement in self-reflection and analysis around its purpose and engagement with its context such as using the Searching for a Parish Engagement Scale (SPES)\(^6\) may help identify ways that parishes can invite the school community to participate in ongoing, creative dialogue that enlivens the faith of both the parish and school community. The framework of spirituality may be further developed as an adjunct to this Scale or further operationalised in relation to parish community development.

**Final Word**

In Chapter 1, the context of Catholic schools in Melbourne was described as being influenced by the postmodern existential turn: a culture enchanted by the spiritual, the local, the individual and the personal. This focus resonates with the psychological and existential pursuits of today and culminates in a focus on the concept of spirituality as involved in identity formation and as an educative endeavour, for both teachers and students. It is seen as connecting with the emotions and wellbeing, and appeals to the sensibilities, existential problems and issues in the world of the student. It is also deeply connected to religion historically and conceptually and has been highlighted in the spiritual agenda of Vatican II, where the questions and concerns of human beings are deeply

\(^6\) Reed, *Engaging with the Hopes of Parishes.*
entwined with the questions and concerns of God. It is therefore an important concept to clarify and promote in the field of practical theology and religious education. Like the concept of spirituality itself, it has been difficult in this thesis to keep spirituality from being about everything; however in Chapter 2, the literature around spirituality was narrowed down in relation to the three areas that underpin the research question. These three areas were: Spirituality and its historical and conceptual connection to religion, Spirituality and its influence on education and religious education – in particular its role in a dialogue approach to religious education and thirdly the perspective and insight Spirituality offers to teacher professional development theory. In Chapter 6 the recommendations emerging from the data analysis were organised around the same three areas forming theological, pedagogical and strategic recommendations. These are summarised in Appendix 1 below.

Through systematic research a two dimensional framework of spirituality was developed and through the empirical data analysis in Chapter 5 was shown to be a successful analysis tool as well as a curriculum audit tool. The framework does not identify a normative position; rather it proposes a balanced approach between the two tensions on each axis and engagement with all four paradigms. It resonated with teachers in the study and was shown to offer possibilities for curriculum design and teacher professional dialogue. This thesis has identified that teachers value spirituality in themselves, their students and in education, but are generally less sure about what that means in terms of spiritual development for students. They are grappling with the complexity of the role of religion in spirituality and the spiritual impact of religion on student identity. It reveals teachers are challenged to understand religion in a way that embraces the spiritual impact of religion on each student’s identity. They face with sensitivity and heightened awareness the emotional as well as cognitive responses to the existential questions posed by life and faith with students. This research identifies a way forward that elevates spirituality as addressing a post-Christian and existential age and as a way of engaging students in religion for today. It makes real the possibility of grappling with existential spiritual questions in dialogue with Christian traditions. How teachers understand spirituality impacts religious education because at the heart of a Catholic education lies, not a simple cognitive task of explaining or handing on the Catholic tradition, but the task of teaching students how to interpret that tradition for their own lives and the future, connecting emotionally and intellectually with their self-
understanding as spiritual inviting them to understand and strengthen their connection with the sacred.

The four paradigms of spirituality offers teachers a way of exploring existential moments that open students to this connection: in times when they deal with uncertainty and unknowing, seeking truth (Vulnerability), in times when they feel called upon to respond to the other (Responsibility), in times when they discern ways to live out their story (Commitment) and in moments of reflection when they make sense of and appreciate their world (Fulfilment); each paradigmatic experience inviting deeper relationship with God. The definition of spirituality in this thesis grows out of and corresponds to the four paradigms. Spirituality is living between: between unknowing and knowing, between the call and the response, between belonging and distantiation, between ultimate concerns and the here and now. The framework offers imaginative possibilities for religion as to do with living and relationship, going to the heart of what it means to be human which is the core business of the study of religion in a Catholic school.

In the words of one of the participants: “I definitely think I have a role ... I definitely do something towards their spirituality that’s for sure ... given the fact that I’ll be the second most and in some cases the most influence in their lives at this point in time.” A systematic approach to teacher professional development that addresses spirituality in religious education can ensure that this influence is well considered and articulate. The framework of spirituality is a theory that may be developed as a learning instrument to support teacher understanding of religion and spirituality and strengthen pedagogical decision making in religious education in Catholic schools. As a comprehensive theory, attuned to the post-Christian and personally focused era of our day, it presents a way of engaging teachers and students in transformative dialogue and self-reflection around Christian spirituality.

Next year, a new group of five to six-year-old children will enter a Catholic primary school which their parents have elected to send them to for a variety of reasons and at some increased burden of cost to themselves. For many of these students their first contact with religion will occur in the school environment. Their teachers have chosen to teach in a Catholic school for a variety of reasons and bring to their teaching and learning a diverse range of understandings about and commitment to the Catholic faith. It falls to the Catholic school community to engage this group in a way that celebrates its diversity illuminated by
God’s vision for the full flourishing of the world and beyond. It is hoped this framework will provide a practical theological tool to assist teachers in noticing and naming spirituality, becoming comfortable with the tensions and joys of ‘living between’ as a vital contribution to their work of speaking about and embodying the Catholic story with students today.
Bibliography


Appendix 1

Summary of recommendations

Theological Recommendations

- Teachers must be supported to clarify the differences between the positive psychology of wellbeing programs concerned with facilitating a good life and enabling self-affirmation that are in essence formative; and the Catholic spiritual tradition which offers insights into truth and relational being that are potentially transformative. Without a critical lens on wellbeing agendas in Catholic primary schools, the trend towards a secularising pedagogy will continue and students will not be offered opportunities to see the world and themselves in a new light – the light of Christ.

- Teachers engaging students with the paradigms of Vulnerability and Responsibility will be able to a dialogue between a God of Intimacy (which is more commonly understood) and a God of Otherness (which is often neglected according to this study). This dialogue can bring into sharp focus the complexity of the Christian spiritual tradition as radically new for this generation and open to transformation of its narrative and the narrative of the self.

- It is recommended that teachers regularly reflect on the four paradigms in relation to the vertical axis of the framework to bring greater awareness of the complexity of the Christian theological traditions to their pedagogical choices in the classroom and to design learning in religious education that builds open-ended opportunities for freely sharing and exploring faith responses.

Pedagogical Recommendations

- The framework of spirituality as a professional learning tool can engage teachers in dialogue and reflection on the paradigmatic spiritual experiences that engage the emotions together with a Christian theological perspective that is explained in Chapter 3. The framework may assist in expanding teacher awareness of the variety
of spiritual experiences and the range of emotions that can be explored with students. It can support them to more confidently focus on the identity of the student as the subject of religious education and to look for ways to develop students’ sense of self and their emotional connectedness in order to develop their ability to make meaning and their ability to integrate their emotional, spiritual and cognitive responses.

- It is recommended that teachers engage with the existential questions in each of the quadrants as part of professional learning processes to enhance their confidence to promote and partake in dialogue as a key strategy in religious education. It is recommended that a greater focus on open-ended questions promoting dialogue, such as those in the framework paradigms be used in curriculum design in religious education.

- The Catholic intellectual community that nurtures educators and students must set a high value on critical thinking and ongoing professional learning in order to grapple with the demands of a dialogue model of religious education that engages the whole community. Reflecting on the horizontal axis in relation to dialogue may support teachers to balance the receptive and responsive modes essential for dialogue.

- Reflecting on the horizontal axis of the framework and its role in the four paradigms of spirituality may support teachers to clarify their understanding of spirituality as integral to a dialogical approach to religious education where progress and development is not only reflected in what students know, but in how they develop their sense of self, their emotions and their way of seeing the world.

- The analysis of the data through the lenses of the paradigms led to four recommendations for teachers to consider as they design learning for a relevant religious education: 1) to clarify intentions for students as spiritual, 2) to encourage proximity of students to the emotional realities of experiences of otherness and face to face encounter, 3) to embrace the complexity of the human person as the subject of religious education and the questions of ultimacy that arise, and finally 4) to encourage diversity of voices, questions and experiences in the classroom.
Strategic Recommendations

- It is recommended parishes undertake self-reflection and dialogue using a SPES approach with a view to supporting their parish school community – students, parents and teachers, in ongoing engagement in spiritual development. The framework of spirituality can be a complementary dialogue and reflection tool to engage the community in a spiritual development program.

- The framework of spirituality in professional dialogue positions the teacher as learner but also as an inquirer with students into faith. It also engages teachers in developing their knowledge of the tradition through exploring existential questions in relation to the content of the Christian spiritual tradition. The framework does not prescribe specific teaching practices, rather gives an opportunity to examine teachers’ questions and thinking about religion and spirituality and why they are important for students. Using the framework as an audit tool, teachers can identify strengths and challenges, making changes to their practice in a self-regulated way that responds to and shapes internal accountabilities.

- The framework dialogue tools provide a reflective model that engages teachers in theological discussion that highlights the importance of the receptive mode in the midst of the responsive world of schooling today.

- The Catholic education system might consider incorporating ongoing professional learning as a condition of teaching religious education. It might offer educators quality time to break open their role in sharing the Gospel in a way that remains open, recontextualising and seeking truth.

- The Church in its educative mission may consider ways to regularly listen and respond to the voices of the young people, teachers and students involved in Catholic education.

- Catholic education system leaders may re-consider the expectations placed on teachers ensuring external accountabilities are clear, transparent and realistically resourced and funded, ensuring funding priorities are aligned with the vision for students.

- Bringing to speech the internal aspects of identity formation – beliefs about what is important and worthwhile in human life and awareness of the emotional
attachments impacting those beliefs; and external aspects – cultural and systemic expectations and the relationships and local connections that must be maintained, is an exercise that necessarily involves all three levels of learners: leaders, teachers and students. These levels should be receptive to each other united by a clear vision for the spiritual flourishing of students. Such a dialogue requires a commitment by system and local leadership to promote ongoing teacher learning in religious education and to support it financially and strategically.

- As a comprehensive and coherent survey of spirituality, the framework offers leaders and teachers the opportunity to audit their curriculum in relation to a balanced understanding of spirituality. Leadership that is committed to teacher learning as integral to a vision for a connected intellectual and spiritual learning community may consider prioritising reflective dialogical professional learning approaches that open spaces for encounter with God.