REVIEW OF RELIGIOUS
EDUCATION AND THEOLOGY

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Investigating the Spiritual and Religious Dimension of Life
With Young People in Catholic Second-Level Schools in Ireland

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Introduction

Marisa Crawford and Graham Rossiter's book, *Missionaries to a Teenage Culture: Religious Education in a Time of Rapid Change* (1989), remains one of those books with a truly international reach. It captured something essential at the time, defending energetically the role of religious education in Catholic schools. Its emphasis on religious education as education continues to resonate with many, and not just in Australia. In the Republic of Ireland, hereafter Ireland, this book became a key text for those reflecting on how religious education could impact for the good of young people, taking them and their questions seriously (Devitt, 2000). The rapid change referenced by Crawford and Rossiter came a little later to Ireland, but the seeds of change were already germinating in Irish schools. The reshaping of Irish society, socially, culturally, and religiously, has more recently become the focus of much commentary (Anderson, Byrne, & Cullen, 2016; Murray, 2017). The challenge associated with rapid change in schools is now all-consuming (Government of Ireland, 1998, 2018; National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA], 2015, 2019). The place of religious education in schools has become a hot topic (Byrne, 2018a, 2018b; Catholic Schools Partnership, 2015; Cullen, 2019; Joint Managerial Body / Association of Catholic Managers of Secondary Schools, 2019; Kieran, 2019).

Outreach to
a Teenage Culture

When I began teaching religious education at second level in Dublin in 1985, it was in a state-run Vocational Education Committee school that, by law and in agreement with the local bishop, was "designated" as having a fully committed Catholic ethos (Government of Ireland, 1930). By the mid-1980s, the percentage of the population in the Republic of Ireland registering themselves as Catholics had come down slightly from the 94.9% highpoint of 1961, with the 1971 census recording 93.9%, and that of 1981, 93.1% (Central Statistics

Office, 2017). In the 1970s and into the early 1980s attendance at Sunday Mass in Ireland was recorded regularly at between 88% and 95% of Catholics (Byrne, Francis, Sweetman, & McKenna, 2019). In the latter half of the 1980s, however, the number attending church weekly reduced to 80%—still very high when compared to other countries in Europe (Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, 2010).

The Religious Education Department in the school had six "religion teachers": two priests who taught religious education full-time and who were also chaplains to the school community, and two religious sisters and two laypeople, each of whom had a second subject along with religious education. We were a team and between us we brought a great variety of gifts and a lot of enthusiasm. Situated in one of the most disadvantaged areas of Dublin, it was clear to us that many more young people had disengaged from churchgoing in that locality at the time than was the case in most parts of Dublin and in Ireland more generally. Many families were struggling even to make ends meet. The Catholic Church in Dublin in those years, with the social teaching of the church in mind, deliberately put enormous resources into parishes and schools like this on the margins. There were, however, some teachers and students who professed no religion. Some also wanted to dispute with the religion teacher in class and create something of a debate. We considered this an important part of growing up, of young people testing their identity on a journey we hoped toward a more mature and intimate relationship with self, others, society, and with God (Erikson, 1968; Shelton, 1990).

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Outreach Within

a Plural Society

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Since then, changing times have come to Ireland, reflecting 'the flux that Irish society is in' (Irish Episcopal Conference, 2014, p. 9). The percentage of the population who identify as Catholic on the census has fallen in recent years from 84.2% in 2011 to 78.3% in 2016, with 9.8% now indicating that they have no religion (Central Statistics Office, 2017). The truth is, however, that participation and wholehearted belonging were already in serious decline by the late 1980s, certainly in some areas of Dublin as described above, long before globalisation and secularisation opened up a fuller questioning of the role of the church in society. The emergence in the mid-1990s of the scandal of clerical child sexual abuse in Ireland filled Catholics and others with disappointment and despair. The inability of church leadership to deal with the crisis brought the whole church enterprise and its institutions into further disrepute. Without doubt, many at that time turned away from the church as a source

of moral and religious authority (Cassidy, 2002; Lane, 2008). A reimagining of what church could be was required, but first it seems many people felt the need to unburden themselves of religion or certainly of religious practice (Byrne, Francis, McKenna, & Sweetman, 2019). The most up-to-date European Social Survey puts Mass attendance weekly or more often among the Catholic population generally in the Republic of Ireland at 35.8% (European Social Survey, 2016). Recently published research among three thousand 13- to 15-year-olds indicates 21% weekly attendance among those surveyed, with 22% of their mothers and 17% of their fathers reported as attending Mass weekly (Byrne, Francis, & McKenna, 2019).

The peace process in Northern Ireland in the 1990s and beyond, and the economic lift and spending power associated with the Celtic Tiger years (mid-1990s to the late 2000s), were other important contributors to the changing face of Ireland. This was a period of rapid economic growth fuelled by foreign investment. With the boom years, which also saw the development of digital and social media opportunities, people from Europe and beyond came to live and work in Ireland. These immigrants brought with them a rich tapestry of religious and cultural traditions from beyond Ireland's experience (Anderson et al., 2016).

Share the Good News

The new plural nature of the Irish context was acknowledged by the Irish Catholic Bishops in 2010. *Share the Good News: National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland* (Irish Episcopal Conference, 2010) recognises the changing realities in Ireland, North and South, and the variety of peoples now constituting Irish society (Irish Episcopal Conference, 2010, nn. 12–22). The bishops recognise that young people, young adults, and often whole families, had become absent and sometimes alienated from church:

> Young adults, in the urban centres particularly, where increasing numbers of Irish people live their lives, are becoming generally absent from Church life, living often with cultural influences that are at best indifferent to religion.
> (Irish Episcopal Conference, 2010, n. 8)

Since then, many would say, the situation described more recently by Rymarz and Belmonte in the Australian context concerning the disconnection between religion and the younger generations is already on the horizon in Ireland:

> the days when religion was seen as a much more decisive factor in shaping belief and patterns are now decades past. In many families this would be the worldview of grandparents and great-grandparents but parents and their children reflect the new dispensation. (Rymarz & Belmonte, 2019)

The church's life in Ireland is now lived within a plural society, where religion, or certainly engaged Catholicism, while still significant to some, and deeply rooted in the culture, can no longer be presumed. In response, *Share the Good News* is invitational, asking all those of good will to become involved in a conversation, seeking "in love and with respect, to open up a dialogue about all these things" (Irish Episcopal Conference, 2010, n. 8). The Irish bishops establish in their catechetical directory a new style that recognises dialogue as crucial (Byrne, 2013). In setting out its stall on evangelisation, catechesis, and religious education, the Catholic Church in Ireland accepts that dialogue with young people, and dialogue with all people, whatever their religion, denomination, or world view, is the appropriate stance, trusting that "the Christian message has something to say to everyone" (Irish Episcopal Conference, 2010, n. 6).

COVID-19

More recently the devastating experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the conviction that although we are diverse we are still interconnected as citizens of one world. We are dependent on each other and have become ever more so, not just for trade, for culture, for the development of our belief systems and values, but, now more clearly, for our health and the very safety within which we can live our lives. One result of COVID-19 seems to be that everyone, even those who have paid little attention to the big questions, are asking: What is important? What gives us meaning? What should we root our values in? Research in Ireland during this period has shown that many see themselves as having become more reflective, more prayerful, closer to God, and closer to church during the more severe period of lockdown, keeping distant but as having become more conscious of what belonging to the Christian community means for them (Byrne & Sweetman, 2020).

Outreach to Young People
in a Plural World

If Ireland is a more plural society than it was in the past, how then does this impact on the parameters within which religious education takes place in schools, and particularly, for the purpose of this argument, in Catholic schools? Sandra Cullen, reflecting on research published under the title, *Religion and Education: The Voices of Young People in Ireland* (Byrne & Francis, 2019), observes that the young people surveyed call attention to their own identity-making, and, it could be said, express their own spirituality, whether this is congruent with that of their family and their community, or less so:

Young people are learning to negotiate their many contexts and construct a meaningful identity for themselves. This identity does not necessarily draw on traditional constructs or expressions so is not given or fixed; instead identity can be both fluid and contextual . . . Religious identity is a choice rather than an inherited identity. (Cullen, 2019, pp. 276–277)

For some now in Ireland, there is no place for religion in society, or certainly no place for any overt demonstration or recognition of religion and no need for religious education in schools. Eschewing such a secularist philosophy, however, many see a pluralist approach as a more appropriate position for a state to adopt in today's world, positively acknowledging difference, taking people's religious or other world view seriously (Merrigan, 2013). The state that acknowledges plurality supports people in following their spiritual and religious inclinations, once they do no harm to others. On this understanding society promotes respect, justice for all, and dialogue between differing views and cultures. Such a community of communities does not choose one set of beliefs for everyone, but sustains its people in the world view and values they espouse. Society will, however, need to differentiate between beliefs that commend themselves by their support of the common good (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2005) and those that might threaten respect and dialogue. The Irish state in following such a philosophy takes a neutral stance without imposing neutrality on its citizens.

State-Certified
Religious Education

It is clear from "The Voices of Young People in Ireland" research that the state-certified subject, religious education, introduced at second-level in 2000 at junior cycle for 12- to 15-year-olds (Department of Education and Science, 2000) and in 2003 at senior cycle for 16- to 18-year-olds (Department of Education and Science, 2003) has played an increasingly significant role in presenting young people with the spiritual and religious questions they may not be addressing elsewhere. Eighty-five per cent of the 13- to 15-year-olds surveyed said that studying religion in school helped them understand people of other religions, 84% agreed that we must respect all religions, and 71% said that studying religion in school shaped their own views about religion (Byrne, Francis, & McKenna, 2019). Religious education at this level, as conceived of by the state in Ireland, provides young people with an opportunity to understand the beliefs of others and to test their own beliefs and values:

Studying religion at school has shaped young people's views about religion; other than the classroom, the opportunity for most of the young people to talk about religion or faith is limited. Religious education is generally regarded positively when it comes to understanding religious diversity. (Cullen, 2019, p. 280)

Junior Cycle Religious Education Specification **(2019)**

This appreciation of the usefulness of religious education as a state-supported, and state-examined, subject in second-level schools in the Republic of Ireland is important in understanding the introduction of the newly revised approach to religious education, presented as an option for schools in September 2019. The *Framework for Junior Cycle, 2015* (Department of Education and Skills, 2015), and the new *Junior Cycle Religious Education Specification* that sits alongside it (NCCA, 2019), are understood as responding to a plural world. They facilitate engagement with the changing landscape of spirituality and religion we see around us (Rossiter, 2010, 2018). Schools use the framework to plan a program for junior cycle that is "informed by the particular learning needs and interests of the students, and reflects the characteristic spirit of the school" (Department of Education and Skills, 2016, para. 2.1). The state in this religious education specification doesn't adopt a position towards any particular religions, spiritualities, or world views. Rather it nominates the five world religions that are either traditional in Ireland (Christianity and Judaism) or now have significant numbers in the Republic (Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism). A non-religious or other religious perspective can, also, be the student's starting point. The young people participating are encouraged to research and study from their own perspective, choosing one religion or belief system repeatedly (their own) in order to fulfil many of the thirty-one designated Learning Outcomes (LOs), such as, for example, LOs 1.3, 1.9, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, and 3.8. Sometimes to complete their work they are asked to investigate and reflect on two religions (LOs 1.2, 2.4, 2.8, 3.3, 3.7), or on religious and non-religious world views (LO 2.2, 3.4). Once they are asked to engage with the fundamental beliefs of all five religions (LOs 1.1), once to investigate how Christianity has contributed to Irish culture and heritage (LO 1.4), and once to discuss the significance of non-religious rituals/celebrations for people's lives (LO 1.7). Other learning outcomes allow the students to respond from their own experience and investigations without specifying any number of examples to be given (NCCA, 2019, pp. 16–21).

A great variety of approaches to religious education can now be observed worldwide, some faith-based, some providing only for a study of religions from the outside as it were. The new approach in Ireland for 12- to 15-year-olds encourages the young person to enquire, explore, reflect, and act within the context of their own belief system, while learning about the beliefs of others and growing in respect for all. The specification is structured in pluralist language to allow all to find their place, but supports the individual student in his/her fullest possible development and according to their own needs:

> Religious Education promotes the holistic development of the person. It facilitates the intellectual, social, emotional, spiritual and moral development of students. Religious Education provides a particular space for students to encounter and engage with the deepest and most fundamental questions relating to life, meaning and relationships. (NCCA, 2019, p. 6)

The three interconnected strands, "Expressing Beliefs", "Exploring Questions", "Living Our Values" (NCCA, 2019, pp. 16–21), within which the learning outcomes mentioned above are provided, are decisively underpinned by three cross-cutting elements, Enquiry, Exploration, and Reflection and Action. These ensure that the study the students participate in cannot stop at simply enquiring about and exploring a theme. They are asked to reflect "on what they have learnt and on their own experience of, and/or response to, the topic", and to actively "consider how the learning relates to their lives and/or to the lives of others" (NCCA, 2019, p. 12). The rationale for junior cycle religious education in Ireland, then, provides for something much more than the study of religion. It hopes to touch the heart and the spirit of the young person, opening them up to responsibility for their beliefs and values in life.

Religious Education in
the Catholic School

Within this frame, the Catholic school can support its Catholic students in the study of their religion by helping them to enquire, explore, and reflect and act in that context, while, also, opening them up to the beliefs and values of others. The Catholic school can, likewise, support its students who profess other religions, who have no religion, or who are questioning. They can be encouraged to enquire, explore, and reflect and act according to their own needs and interests. Everyone can contribute to a conversation that is worthy and respectful of the emerging beliefs and values of all concerned. The Catholic school offers it young people a community that is Catholic and therefore by definition should be reflective,

critically disposed, service-of-other-orientated, and happy to support its students in ecumenical, interreligious, and intercultural dialogue. Everyone is asked to bring their beliefs and values, their very selves, into the religious education classroom and to open their mind and heart to the deepest meaning of life:

> A good religious education needs to inform and promote such a "spirited debate" about what people think "life to the full" really means and about what matters most in their lives. If Catholic school religious education does not include a strong component in the critical study of contemporary life, then it will appear to most young people as having nothing worthwhile to say. (Rossiter, 2018, p. 134)

The Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference document, *Religious Education and the Framework for Junior Cycle* (2017), reminds those engaged in Catholic schools that religious education is understood as one expression among many of the school's ethos and faith life, one whose contribution should be given high priority at a whole series of levels:

> Reimagining the role and contribution of RE depends . . . on a realistic understanding of the needs of contemporary young people, on an appreciation of the opportunities and challenges they face in the secular world that dominates their lives and the continuing willingness of the Catholic faith community to put its best resources at the disposal of the young. (Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, 2017, p. 5)

Outreach Promoting
the Spiritual in Life

The emergence of a pandemic has, it seems, provided the spiritual dimension of life with an opportunity to re-emerge and to draw the attention to itself it deserves. The new approach to religious education in second-level schools in Ireland is important, because it opens up possibilities and makes demands on young people of all backgrounds and religious and philosophical perspectives to discover and unveil the spiritual in their lives, and to dig deeply into its meaning for them, whatever their belief system. This new approach to religious education is important for Catholic schools, too, because it treats every young person in the Catholic school authentically and with respect. All can participate. Young Catholics, too, are challenged to open up to the spiritual. They are encouraged to learn about and honour the religious tradition of their family and their parish community, and at the same time they are provided with the opportunity to delve into mystery on their own two feet, as it were. They are urged to engage for themselves, while coming to the realisation that they and

their classmates of different religions and world views are participating in the same human search for meaning.

The Irish Catholic bishops' Council for Catechetics notes, in its response to the new religious education specification, *Junior Cycle Religious Education in the Catholic School*, that the "experience of RE in a Catholic school always has theological, spiritual and pastoral depth" (Council for Catechetics of the Irish Episcopal Conference, 2019, p. 12). This document indicates explicit ways in which the Catholic school can investigate Catholic material and themes with Catholic students and with others. This is not to suggest a catechetical approach, which presumes engagement from a faith perspective, but a religious education approach that may in its own way contribute to the catechesis of young Catholics (Irish Episcopal Conference, 2010, nn. 39, 107–111). Examples given include: salvation history as presented in both the Old and New Testaments; the gospel values and message of Jesus; the trinitarian understanding of God; the mission of the church; the church's sacramental life; putting the Christian way of life into action; prayer; the saints; and the liturgical year. All of this can all be studied within the specification, responding to specific learning outcomes, once good decisions are made by teachers, and teenagers are helped to engage with the material in a way that is appropriate for them (Council for Catechetics of the Irish Episcopal Conference, 2019, pp. 12–14).

Missionary Disciples
of Jesus Christ

The church, for Pope Francis, is "a community of missionary disciples" of Jesus Christ. He envisages this to mean that members of the Catholic community go out into the world with the joy of the Gospel in their hearts, working tirelessly for justice and peace for the world and all its peoples (Francis, 2013, n. 24). Francis is at home with the term *spirituality* and the many versions of Christian spirituality that can express and explain the one Christian life lived fully in a variety of ways and according to a variety of charisms (Byrne, 2004). In fact, he has named a number of particular types of spirituality that he sees as essential to the lived expression of Christianity today:

> We often speak of the spirituality of the catechist, the spirituality of diocesan priesthood, the spirituality of work. For the same reason in *Evangelii Gaudium* I concluded by speaking of a spirituality of mission, in *Laudato Si'* of ecological spirituality, and in *Amoris Laetitia* of a spirituality of family life.
> (Francis, 2018, n. 28)

These three striking examples from Pope Francis speak to the impact of being spiritually aware and engaged around significant questions on life's journey: Of whom (or what) are we disciples in the way we live life? How do we envisage the obligations we have toward planet earth? In what ways can we best love, care for, and support each other in our family units? On topics such as these, young people can be bearers of light, even to their parents and grandparents, acknowledging their own responsibility, and growing into it:

> Young people call us to renewed and expansive hope, for they represent new directions for humanity and open us up to the future, lest we cling to nostalgia for structures and customs which are no longer life-giving in today's world.
> (Francis, 2013, n. 108)

Pope Francis continues to carve out his response to life, daily (Dorr, 2018). He is a model to all, asking everyone to do the same, in their space, in their way. His spirituality clearly emerges from his close relationship with Jesus Christ, whom he carries with him as his source and strength. He stands with Jesus, whom he knows stands with him. He understands Jesus as the expression of God's loving mercy: "Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy" (Francis, 2015b, n. 1). The spirituality of Francis is rooted in scripture, in the healing touch of the historical Jesus and the powerful transformation promised in the risen Christ (Francis, 2013). The Pope's spirituality is recognised for its ecological courage and commitment (Francis, 2015a). Within this perspective he asks the world, with Jesus, to care for all people, particularly the poor and those most in need, not just with words but by our actions (Francis, 2013, 2015a). His is a spirituality that appreciates family love (Francis, 2016) and embraces young people as agents of their own development, seeking to support them on life's journey (Francis, 2019). In summary, the spirituality that Francis lives is reflective, contemplative, prophetic, dialogical, collegial, and open to all.

The Christian way of life described by Pope Francis values the individual, whom the church understands "exists 'with' and 'for' others" (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2005, n. 164). He is convinced that young people can thrive in freedom but that they need support: "Young people need to have their freedom respected, yet they also need to be accompanied" (Francis, 2019, n. 242). He suggests the faith community to which they can belong as a source of that accompaniment (Francis, 2018). The community of faith offers its life for its young people. The success of the community, too, will depend on its ability to draw out the most creative, energetic, and future-driven response from its young people, for their own good and by extension for the good of the community and of society:

This calls for a deeper kind of listening, one that is able to discern the direction in which the person truly wants to move. Apart from what they are feeling or thinking right now, and whatever has happened up to this point in their lives, the real issue is what they would like to be . . . This kind of listening seeks to discern their ultimate intention, the intention that definitively decides the meaning of their life. Jesus knows and appreciates this ultimate intention of the heart. He is always there, ready to help each of us to recognise it. (Francis, 2019, n. 294).

The Catholic school as a school community has much to celebrate today in its Catholic ethos as it accompanies all its young people in investigating what it means to be human, what it means to be spiritual, what it means to be religious, and what it means to be truly Christian. It does so not just through the teaching and learning that goes on in the religious education classroom but throughout the whole life of the school, by the witness of the community it creates, the strength of its service of those in need, and by the liveliness of its prayerful reflection and liturgical celebrations with and around Christ (Irish Episcopal Conference, 2010, n. 36): "Catholic schools are a *community of faith* that have at their foundation an educational initiative characterised by evangelical values" (Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, 2020, n. 310, italics in the original). They have a great deal to offer their students and the world from the heart of their being, joining Pope Francis on his quest to speak to the deepest things in human nature.

Facing Up to the Spiritual and Religious With Young People Today

Some key characteristics of the spirituality that Catholic parents, teachers, and parish leaders might aspire to engage in with young people have emerged in this discussion. They can provide a stimulus for further reflection in a variety of ways in the Catholic school—a spirituality:

- open to the plural reality of the world, but standing with Jesus Christ
- that respects and celebrates the unique identity of every person
- that honours young people as agents of their own development
- of communion, with God and with each other, family, neighbours, friends, and new connections
- focused on the dialogue between faith and reason, asking and reflecting on the big questions

- guided by the Holy Spirit, at work in the church and in the world from generation to generation

- that rejoices in all of creation, sustains it, and defends it

- that builds justice and peace, inspiring care for and service of others

- that encourages reflection, prayer, and sacramental celebration

- that is happy to accompany young people in discerning their future

- that begins and ends in God, celebrates all of life, looks forward to completion, and tends toward things eternal.

All in all, what has been described here is the openness to develop processes that can engage young people in the search that defines them. It is work to be embraced at home, in schools, in parishes, and by the wider community, giving time and space for young people to grow:

> We need to encourage and accompany processes, without imposing our own roadmaps. For these processes have to do with persons who remain always unique and free. (Francis, 2019, n. 297)

Religious educators in Catholic schools work to strengthen young people by developing in them skills that will help them at every stage of life as they encounter new questions and deeper challenges. It may be hoped that, through engagement in religious education, an essential aspect of life, the spiritual and religious dimension, will have been discovered or rediscovered, fortified, and celebrated imaginatively, and been made available to them, then, for the rest of young people's lives.

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Towards a Curriculum for
Life in Christian Formation

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Introduction

Let me begin with two assertions, neither of which I have space to defend adequately here, but both of which influence my motivation in writing this article. First, the very close association between what is learned in church and what is learned outside of church—and throughout life—has been lost. Yet the Gospel is inscribed in—and conveyed by—lives, lives in which the dividing line between the explicitly religious and the ordinarily secular is porous, if not absent. To reduce this gap between faith-learning and the other kinds of learning that take place in life, we need to practise telling our faith story, set in the midst of everyday life; and we need to hear the stories of others in their faith journeys. We need to reverse the tendency to separate out church life from everyday life. Such a tendency diminishes our appreciation of God's presence, gives a false and unduly precious and pious understanding of the spiritual, and downgrades the value of our quotidian experiences.

Second, the church's massive contribution to educational provision over the centuries and in so many countries has a significant shadow side: the neglect of ongoing, lifelong faith formation. To use a cliché, but a true one, too many eggs have been put in the basket of schools (and to a lesser extent, in universities) and too few resources allocated to adult faith formation. In order to encourage and equip people to respond to the Gospel with their whole self, to embrace their vocation, whatever this may be, and to use their different gifts in ministry or service, there need to be ongoing programs of adult faith formation on the meaning and implications of our baptism and vocation, closely related to the different stages of our life journeys. While the current situation prevails, where, relative to the provision for clergy education, adult Christians receive few opportunities sponsored by the church to grow and deepen in their faith, the kinds of curriculum offered in formal education will often seem out of touch with what students see are the real-life concerns and experiences of adults.

Thus, my concern is that there is a parallel between the gap many students experience, both in school and at university, a gap between the questions emerging from their lives and

the questions being focused on in their classrooms—and a similar gap many members of a congregation experience between the official teaching of the church on the one hand, and the questions and concerns of their everyday lives, on the other. I suspect that many pastors, at least those who are close to their parishioners, also worry about this gap, even as they seek to bridge it in how they apply the rules and teaching of the church with flexibility and sensitivity. Finding ways that are both faithful and creative to establish bridges between the world of church and the everyday lives of students has been a constant feature of the work of the religious educator, Graham Rossiter (e.g., see Crawford & Rossiter, 1988, 2006; Rossiter, 2017, 2018). Although his work has been mainly concerned about devising a viable approach to the task of religious education in schools, and developing appropriate resources for this task, there are clearly wider implications for how the church engages her people in lifelong learning about the faith. In the spirit of Rossiter's pervasive concern to render religious education vibrant and resonant for contemporary culture, in this article I address the gap identified above and propose some possible principles and starting points for building bridges between church teaching and the daily lives of congregations.

The danger facing teachers and pastors in their attempts to adapt what they are charged with conveying to their students or parishioners is that they find themselves accused of (or feel unsure as to whether they are guilty of) opening the door to inconsistency, idiosyncrasy, a selective approach to church teaching, and failing to do justice to the tradition they are supposed to be representing. Too much regimentation, too much stress on orthodoxy in teaching and correctness in applying church rules, can come across as alienating, lacking humanity, demanding too much of people, and as disconnected from real-life concerns. However, too individualistic an approach by teachers and pastors and a failure to introduce people with sufficient care to the tradition can run the risk of downplaying, or giving a false impression of, its integrity, richness, challenge, and power to transform lives.

There are three parts to the article. First, I comment on central features of education and the process of Christian formation, before proposing two central purposes for such formation. Second, I explore the notion of a "curriculum for life" that would equip people to live as Christians in the secular world. How can we bring significant life-experiences and concerns into constructive engagement with the life and teaching of the church? Third, I identify potential resources for developing a "curriculum for life" in Christian formation and raise questions for church communities that resolve to be both more deliberate and more effective in promoting faith formation and Christian learning.

<h1 align="center">(1) Christian Education
and Formation</h1>

Education is about the capacities of human nature—*energy, emotions, intelligence, memory, will, conscience,* and *wonder*—and it concerns itself with how these capacities are developed, oriented, ordered, and integrated. The way education is carried out is influenced by one's views of oneself, the world or reality, threats, society; the nature, needs, and modes of learning of those to be taught or formed (whether children, young people, or those of a more mature age); the knowledge worth passing on, and the needs of one's particular time and place. I believe that education should equip young people with a confident sense of their own identity and perspective, together with a generous receptivity and responsiveness to others. We might say that an education or formation program offers a deliberately structured journey whose goal is to assist learners to grow into their humanity (and thus into their divinity). But journeys are vulnerable to the unexpected. If life is a journey, one in which the unexpected can happen, where the way ahead is not always clear, and along which decisions are constantly called for as to which direction to take, then each of us needs reference points to clarify our location and to orient us for the next step. Religious traditions provide such reference points and a compass to assist in steering a way through life. However, the outcome of formation and education programs is necessarily unpredictable and precarious. Ultimately, what students take into themselves from the learning process, as soul food, for use in the future, is something that cannot be controlled; this is always a free act on their part.

Over generations, people have been instructed in their Christian faith in a wide range of ways: from their mothers by the hearth at home, from sermons in and outside of church, from the liturgy, from hymns, from the work and worship of confraternities and guilds, from stained glass windows, paintings, tapestries, religious plays on festive occasions, through hearing stories from the Bible and the lives of the saints, through pilgrimages, processions, and devotions at sacred shrines, and from their experience of pastoral care. At its best, Christian formation displays an interrelation of the moral, physical, mental, and spiritual, a combination of the inner and outer. The linguistic, affective, cognitive, and embodied dimensions of learning are all linked. A comprehensive account of approaches to faith formation—which is beyond the scope of this article—would need to take into consideration structures, practices, and ethos, each of these being influenced and filtered by the changing contexts and diverse purposes of those involved.

What purposes should guide and govern Christian formation today? Here I focus on just two possible aims, though others could be envisaged. The first is to acquire the mind of

Christ; the second is to become a prototype or living embodiment of the Gospel. St Paul clearly states: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). We acquire this mind of Christ in the context of the church community and its associated practices. What does "having the mind of Christ" mean? What does it mean to think Christianly? It does not mean simply thinking about the Bible, prayer, the church, the sacraments, the saints—necessary although all this might be. For this might be to leave the rest of our thinking—about work, the world of production, politics, taxes, holidays, food, family, sex and relationships, investments, travel—untouched and unconverted. We have to bring into dialogue two kinds of truth: sacred, salvific truth—truth for the sake of our salvation—and all the other kinds of truth that are part of our life. This means that we must bring together and harmonise faith and reason—harmonise them, not compartmentalise them. When electricity was installed into our houses, all rooms were illuminated, not some. In the house of our lives, all our rooms must be illuminated and all dimensions of our being should be seen differently in the light of faith: intellectual, physical, social, moral, economic, political, artistic, as well as spiritual. Having the mind of Christ must engage not only the intellect but also heart, imagination, will, memory, and character.

What about becoming a prototype of the Gospel as an educational aim for Christian formation? We are called not only to believe in but also to become the Gospel; not just to hear about and approve of it but personally and actively to participate in the life and work of God in our world. Not only to be familiar with what God was doing in Jesus Christ but to live our lives, in all their aspects and dimensions (not only the explicitly religious side), in such a way that they are shaped by and permeated with the Gospel. What Christ is for us, we have to be for the world, at least for that part of it in which we find ourselves placed. Thus, we are not only to benefit from what God offers to us but also to bear witness to this by faithfully embodying the good news in our words and actions. As individuals and as church communities we should be like a microcosm of the Kingdom, a mini-version, a prototype, a rehearsal; our churches should not be escapes from or hiding places from the world but a sign of what we are all called to become, if we accept God's grace.

We are called to be more than merely beneficiaries of the salvation God has brought about in Christ, though we are that, but also to bear witness to it and to embody it in all we do. Our church communities are meant to be walking explanations of the Gospel, like a living commentary on it. Not all are called to be public preachers or travelling missionaries, but all Christians should become the reflectors of as well as recipients of the Gospel. Being, doing, and telling—or presence, practice, and proclamation through example: these are the three

dimensions of our Christian mission and the ways people come to learn the Gospel. And the more we *become* the Gospel, the more opportunities will open up to *speak* the Gospel.

For all of us, our task is to learn how to love. This is the way to enter into our humanity and to share God's life. The task of Christian formation is to help us to develop a Christian imagination and sensibility, the capacity to read and respond to the world in the light of the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ—reading and responding to ourselves, our neighbours, and to our culture and creation—as we learn *about* Christ, *from* Christ, learn to live *in* Christ together, *with* Christ*, as* Christ in ourselves, and *for* Christ in others.

Christian formation is less about content and concepts and more about verbs and joint activity. It is about worshipping together, encountering the Bible, sharing experiences, welcoming, celebrating, questioning, listening, healing, forgiving, reconciling, remembering, serving others, loving, praying, and, some of the time, learning and teaching more deliberately and explicitly, instead of doing so implicitly, alongside and as part of all the other activities. Such learning helps us to see with the eyes of faith, interpret in the light of truth, and respond with a heart of love.

We would do well today to recapture the notion of the total environment of the Christian community as the principal site for formation. The quality of the community life of a congregation speaks more powerfully than the explicit teaching that occurs within (though of course that has a necessary place). This community life constitutes its implicit curriculum, which is always more powerful in its influence than any explicit curriculum. David Heywood refers to the operation of this implicit curriculum:

> The welcome offered to strangers and occasional worshippers; the demeanour of the worship leader; the content of the liturgy; the scope of the prayers; the relationships in evidence between the worshippers; even the state of the building—all these convey, often in a far more effective way than any sermon or deliberate teaching event, what the members of a particular local church really believe and value.
> (Heywood, 2004, p. 85)

Christian formation needs to display the three features of being lifelong, communitarian, and intergenerational. First, we need to beware of restricting formation to the young when it is needed for every age of life. There is no point at which any of us can claim that we are fully formed or fully converted. Second, we should ensure that Christian formation is not merely an induction for individuals, but seek to make much of it a communal process. Third, we need to find creative ways to bring together different generations so that

these can enrich and stimulate each other with their various experiences of and perspectives on life.

(2) Lifelong Learning and
a Curriculum for Life

Any proposal to analyse the needs of the present, with a view to developing a "curriculum for life" runs (at least) two types of risks. First, the nature of one's sociocultural location, upbringing, and education, one's minor choices and major decisions, one's gender, race, personality: all these, although they will cumulatively grant one a certain vantage point that enables perception, are also bound to limit what one is able to see, or even to imagine, as important elements in a life worth living. Second, so rapid is the pace of technological and social change that any attempt to prescribe a curriculum that prepares for and addresses the needs of the present is almost inevitably going to seem, to some degree at least, out of date by the time it has been received.

Learning, ever more deeply, about sacred scripture, or the teachings, history, and tradition of the church will always be essential resources for growth in Christian faith and for daily life as disciples. However, what is also needed, if faith is to be incarnated in all dimensions of life, is guidance as to how these traditional resources assist us in being Christians in the world outside the confines, the protection, and community atmosphere of the church. How do we express and live out our faith in such diverse settings as the home, the office, or the factory, the gymnasium or the pub: in all the places of work and leisure? How does faith influence our willingness to volunteer to alleviate some social or pastoral need, for example, to help people experiencing problems with housing, poverty, hunger, debt, drugs and alcohol, loneliness and isolation, mobility, dementia, rehabilitation after prison, or settling into a new country as a refugee? While individual Christians can contribute time, energy, and resources in such cases, collective action is often required and this may entail political engagement. How well equipped are Christians for exercising social responsibilities and upholding the common good?

Unfortunately, little help is given to Christians to support their making connections between in-church learning and their daily life-situations. Heywood points out that "Lay engagement and influence in the workplace, community and society is vast", but there is "very little curiosity, affirmation, prayer, theological or practical resourcing for these roles at local church level" (Heywood, 2017, p. xi, quoting a Church of England report). Referring to the Church of England, Heywood questions whether lay development and discipleship are

considered seriously as priorities in most dioceses. He attributes this to the clericalised culture, where ministry is treated as the domain of the clergy, rather than as a natural expression of the vocation of all the baptised. His point applies equally strongly to the Catholic Church. Too often, only lip service is paid to adult faith formation that takes account of all the seasons of our life journey and the diverse contexts in which we are called upon to put our beliefs into practice in service of others.

We might ask of Christian formation: How does this fit in with our life story? What light does it cast on our life story? How does it support or challenge our life story? What matters to us at different stages of our lives—what we notice, care about, fear, desire, value, or prioritise—changes in response to the experiences we undergo. As Christian teachers seek to invite others into the faith tradition, the response given to their educational and formational efforts—whether this response be acceptance or rejection, understanding or confusion, distortion or creative modification as it is adopted and expressed—will inevitably be influenced by people's circumstances, contexts, and life-experiences.

Can we connect Christian literacy—with its biblical, spiritual, theological, and historical dimensions—more closely and more comprehensively with a literacy for life in a way that embraces our bodily, emotional, linguistic, scientific, aesthetic, creative, moral, social, economic, cultural, political, environmental concerns? The contexts, currents, courses, and choices of our lives and the corporeal, contextual, and communal aspects of our humanity need to be brought into dialogue with what is touched upon in Christian formation. Thus, coping with vulnerability, death, limitation, suffering, loss, disappointment, guilt, and setbacks all play a part in our journey towards salvation. Similarly, joy, excitement, a sense of achievement that we make a difference, a positive contribution, finding meaning and purpose: all these are directly relevant to appreciating and responding to our vocation. Christian formation needs to engage the desire for belonging, for identity, for feeling part of something bigger and worthwhile, as well as the inner desire to encounter truth, to see the bigger picture in which we are situated. Within people there is a yearning for love, friendship, warm, healthy and life-giving relationships, and a capacity to receive and share intimacy.

Education is integral to the church's life and pivotal to promoting mature Christian discipleship. If Christian faith is to lead to an ongoing transformation of lives so that these have a recognisable Christlike character and display a reading and response to reality as God-given, then education in the church must provide a multifaceted experience of learning that engages with, listens to, illuminates, and integrates the totality of each person's experience.

I now draw upon two recent books that offer helpful prompts as to how Christian educators and those involved in faith formation might establish links between our life stories and our faith tradition. The first of these books does not explicitly articulate a Christian vision, although it seems thoroughly infused with a Christian spirit. The Hungarian philosopher and polymath, Gabor Csepregi, published in 2019 a phenomenology of life-defining moments; the book was called *In Vivo*. I will pick out three themes highlighted in this book that seem to me to be fertile starting points for building bridges between the Christian story of salvation and a curriculum for life. These are, respectively, key experiences, decisions, and models.

The first theme from Csepregi is a focus on key experiences or moments in life. Among these, the author mentions, "The birth of a child, a marriage, the commencement of a career, severe illness, retirement, or the death of a loved one" (p. 4). At such times we often modify how we relate to our past, present, and future. Of course, in addition to the key moments in an individual's life, communities also undergo landmark events or experiences in their history that change in significant ways how they see themselves and their world. The author singles out six vital experiences that many individuals undergo: "moments of deciding, of breaking away from actual circumstances, of encountering a model, of immersing in a foreign culture, of listening to a beautiful piece of music, and of experiencing an ethical action" (p. 5). Other experiences he mentions include those of failure, of forgiveness, and of reconciliation, of achievement, or of a "breakthrough" moment when an obstacle no longer seems an impossible stumbling block or when an insight surfaces without our conscious effort. One can envisage fruitful reflections on such moments, with people of all ages, as offering opportunities to connect life stories with Christian learning and formation.

A second theme on which Csepregi focuses is the role of decisions in life. He notes that "Decisions are serious affairs: the 'either-or' of a decision constitutes a fork in the highway of our lives" (p. 19). He distinguishes such decisions from choices, which are much less significant for us, because they do not fundamentally change the nature or direction of life. "We can undo what we have chosen, but we have to live with our decision" (p. 19). Often decisions are made when we face a turning point or crisis (a word that also means an opportunity). For Csepregi, "it is only by courageously making decisions—with the associated risks, uncertainties, responsibilities, and feeling of solitude—that we are able to create a strong and mature personality" (p. 31). Christian formation should include a supporting environment for reflection on, and opportunities to practice, decision-making.

Without a robust capacity and willingness to take decisions, we remain vulnerable to the pressures and temptations of prevailing social and cultural norms. This applies to individuals, but also to communities. I have seen, in my own archdiocese, as we prepare for our forthcoming Synod 2020, how difficult Christian communities can find the process of reaching collective decisions about equipping ourselves to be the kind of church that God is calling us to be. Accepting responsibility for the health of the church and becoming positively involved, exercising properly one's baptismal calling, seems to require a revolution in habits of thinking and acting. And if Christian communities find it hard to engage in decision-making within the household of the faith, they will not be optimally equipped to do so as Christians in the world of daily life. Christian formation has a part to play in fostering mature engagement in decision-making.

The third theme to be drawn from Csepregi is the educational role of models. Csepregi defines a model as a person who:

> due to his or her perceived qualities, values, and achievements, exerts a profound and transformative influence on another person. . . . Models make manifest a discernible value or a selective set of values; they are the incarnation of values in a specific historical epoch and a particular social environment. (pp. 67–68)

Such models might radiate vitality, depth, conviction, integrity, and authenticity; or generosity, modesty, or equanimity. They can give us inspiration, confidence, and insight into what we can be if we replicate their qualities. They show us what is possible; by attracting our admiration they motivate us to adopt their way of being, at least, in some aspects of their lifestyle. Although the models we admire and approve of change as we get older, no age is entirely immune from being influenced by the example of those around us (and by those further afield); nor is the process of imitation restricted merely to children and young people. Thus, consideration of the models to which we give attention can provide a salutary bridge between church and world in Christian formation.

The second source, more briefly to be drawn upon here, is by an American Episcopal priest and Professor of Historical Theology, Ephraim Radner. In his book *A Time to Keep*, sub-titled *Theology, Mortality and the Shape of a Human Life*, Radner brings out the implications of the temporal nature of our lives. If, as Radner points out, our "life span is the very means by which human beings relate to God" (p. 11), then "we cannot pry apart the concrete realities of our life spans from the redemptive claims made about our beings in the gospel" (p. 15). "God's time includes the times that mark our coming to be our survival, and our passing away: times of birth, growth, eating, learning, sexual engagement, relating, work,

birthing, forming, weakening, and dying" (p. 8). Traditionally, Christians have read the scriptures as though they were speaking about our own times, not a period locked away in the past. They assumed that God was as active in their own time as in the times of their ancestors and that he speaks to us, here and now, through these scriptures. We need to recapture that sense of the immediate presence of God throughout our lives; otherwise our tradition runs the risk of being seen merely as a museum, that is, as offering items for inspection, perhaps interesting, but no longer vitally necessary for life. Being inducted into our Christian tradition should be experienced as a process of being brought into a living presence who speaks directly to the core of our human condition, someone who addresses us personally and who embraces our hopes and fears, our needs and desires at all the stages and seasons of life.

(3) Resources for
Lifelong Christian Formation

To assist us in assembling resources that could support a curriculum for life in lifelong Christian formation, we might take careful note of three writers whose work, at first sight, seems removed from the faith perspective from which we would be operating. The first, by Iain McGilchrist, is a vast and somewhat intimidating, but immensely rich book, based on a rare combination of expertise in both English literature and neuroscience, *The Master and His Emissary* (2009). It seems to me that, although never explicit, underlying McGilchrist's argument there is a deeply Christian sensibility. At the heart of the book is a thorough analysis of the two hemispheres of the brain, the differences between them, and how they operate together. One quotation will have to suffice to illustrate this work:

> The world of the left hemisphere, dependent on denotative language and abstraction, yields clarity and power to manipulate things that are known, fixed, static, isolated, decontextualised, explicit, disembodied, general in nature, but ultimately lifeless. The right hemisphere, by contrast, yields a world of individual, changing, evolving, interconnected, implicit, incarnate, living beings within the context of the lived world, but in the nature of things never fully graspable, always imperfectly known—and to this world it exists in a relationship of care. (p. 174)

The first half of this book focuses on the workings of these two hemispheres, while the second part re-reads the entire history of Western culture in the light of the scientific points made earlier. A curriculum for life should take into account McGilchrist's insights into how the brain functions, even though at no stage does he refer to the implications for

education of his analysis. If grace builds on nature, it is incumbent on Christian educators to understand and appreciate what nature gives to us.

Second, careful consideration of a book by the psychologist, Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (1994), provides pointers to areas that should be addressed in a curriculum for life. Kegan starts from a survey of the principal tasks carried out by adults throughout their life cycle and then he unpacks the range of qualities and skills required to carry out these tasks. These tasks include, among others, parenting, sustaining an intimate relationship over the long haul, engaging in work, participating as citizens in a society where differences have to be encountered and negotiated, managing one's own physical and mental health. "These activities present us with a vast variety of expectations, prescriptions, claims and demands" (p. 5). He points out that a literature has been developed about each of these different spheres of activity, but rarely do these literatures take account of each other, to such an extent that insufficient account is taken of the overall experience of learners (at any stage or season of life) and curriculum coherence is left too often to the student to work out for herself, usually unaided. Thus, "People who write, teach, and shape the discourse about management apparently do not read the literature about intimacy. The people who create the leadership literature do not read the parenting literature" (p. 6). Specialisation deepens our understanding of particular aspects of life while failing to attend to its wholeness, unity, and interconnectedness. Again, while faith is not the focus of this book, those engaged in faith formation intended to connect to the real-life concerns of people of all ages would benefit from Kegan's unfolding of the social, psychological, and cultural demands of the different spheres of life. It is striking how frequently Pope Francis emphasises that pastoral ministry and accompaniment begins with engaging with the reality of peoples' lives.

I find particularly helpful the distinction Kegan makes between "wondering at" and "wondering about". "'Wondering at' is watching and reverencing; 'wondering about' is asking and reckoning" (p. 8). The first is "receptive, contemplation as an end in itself"; it is aesthetic in nature, "the inspiration of the humanities". The second is acting upon, a means to an end; it is analytic, "the inspiration of the sciences" (p. 8). Christian formation should facilitate both types of wonder, facilitating the capacity to reverence as well as to analyse. The former helps us to see rightly; the second helps us to use rightly what we see.

If McGilchrist's and Kegan's works complement and reinforce each other, and jointly provide a sound foundation that underpins the notion of a "curriculum for life", a third writer has contributed valuable insights that offer further building blocks for such a curriculum.

Howard Gardner is a foremost exponent of the theory of multiple intelligences (see Gardner, 1993a; 1993b; 2000). These include linguistic, logical/mathematical, spatial, musical, kinaesthetic, self-understanding, and understanding other individuals. His theory challenges educators to realise that, not only do people learn at different speeds, they also learn in different ways. A truly inclusive approach to education and formation will attend to all the different types of intelligence and not restrict itself to the linguistic and logical. While Gardner's work might not be sufficient on its own as a foundation for Christian learning, it does offer salutary insights that should prompt Christian educators towards a more comprehensive approach to planning learning opportunities for those in their care and it challenges them to extend the repertoire of teaching methods they employ.

In order to harness the insights of each of these three writers into a much more explicitly Catholic vision for the project of developing a "curriculum for life", I would recommend drawing upon Thomas Groome's 1998 volume, *Educating For Life*. Here one will find an inspiring outline of a faithful approach to education that is truly holistic and multidimensional, that renders tradition as both vital in itself and as life-giving to others, that is inclusive and invitational, and one that combines deep spiritual roots with contemporary cultural relevance. Groome demonstrates how "for life, for all" can be conveyed in curriculum, pedagogy, community, and ethos. Key features of Catholicism receive in-depth treatment: "a sacramental consciousness, commitment to relationship and community, appreciation for tradition, cultivating reason for wisdom of life, fostering holistic spirituality, formation in social justice and inculcating a catholic worldview" (p. 427).

Building on these reflections, I propose five questions for church communities that wish to be intentionally formational. First, to what extent does the experience of congregational members *outside* of church colour, frame, reinforce, or inhibit their reception of what is offered *inside* church? Second, are the differences (in life-experience and perspective) among church members drawn upon as a potential source of learning? Third, to what extent are church members expected to be agents in their own faith-learning—rather than recipients of teaching? What scope is given for engagement, responsibility, and initiative in church life, work, and learning? Are church members consulted about decisions in the life of the church? Is their judgement and evaluation invited? Fourth, what kind of balance is there, within a congregation's experience of the church's curriculum, between (a) receiving instruction and teaching (in sermons and beyond) by clergy; (b) individual guidance and mentoring of parishioners by clergy; (c) peer ministry and teaching by parishioners; (d) opportunities for sharing experience and giving testimony; and (e) joint action on projects or

in serving others? Fifth, is there encouragement and facilitation of shared reflection on the story of the faith journeys and the struggles, challenges, questions, and insights of church members? I nurture the hope that, if these questions were taken seriously, and then acted upon, the gap between faith-learning and life in the world might be, at least partly, reduced.

Fortunately, God is more patient with us than we are with ourselves. To be too ambitious can be self-defeating. It is salutary to bear in mind Étienne Gilson's warning about school education:

> However heavily we load our programmes, and however widely we may diversify them in order to answer the future needs of all our pupils, many of them will feel later on that they have been taught many things they did not need to know, whereas what they did need to know has never been taught to them in school.
> (Gilson, 1957, pp. 308–309)

Those of us who are committed to Christian formation should remember that the primary agent in moving a person to accept the Gospel and all that this entails is not us, but the Holy Spirit, whose work is often invisible to us and who operates according to God's time, not ours. For that we should be grateful.

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Three Key Themes for Religious Education
in the Time of COVID-19

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Introduction

The present article is an attempt to raise up three major themes in the corpus of the work of Graham Rossiter throughout his illustrious career. The article is structured around the three themes and will provide an entry point to engage them with fresh eyes. I call these themes: language, spirituality, and tradition. Within each of these areas I would like to call attention to key issues that are central to each—and that are at the forefront of Rossiter's work. In terms of language, I will attend to the intramural linguistic turn in contemporary religious education. In the area of spirituality, I address its shifting meanings in terms of its plurality and ambiguity. Finally, within the theme of tradition, I illustrate the choice between engaging tradition as static or subversive. My interest in the three themes of language, spirituality, and tradition is to throw light on religious education, especially in its schooling form of teaching religion in Roman Catholic schools. Specifically, the themes open up for exploration a set of questions: What do we mean (*identity*) when we say religions education? How do we do (*process*) religious education? What is the *content* of religious education? The first theme is the most critical. The second and third themes are often in acute tension. It is vital that the first be explored in a way that the tension be maintained and be made creative.

Language

Religious education has a language problem. In an earlier article, I described it as "Linguistic Clutter: Multiple Games—No Common Rules" (Scott, 2015). In a recent article, Rossiter refers to it as "ecclesiastical drift" (Rossiter, 2020). In it, Rossiter comprehensively documents an intramural linguistic shift in Catholic religious education at every level of the church's life. Since the 1980s, but especially within the last decade, he notes, its linguistic discourse has come to be dominated by ecclesiastical constructs. He writes, "Ecclesiastical drift has occurred in religious education where the discourse about its purpose and practice has gradually come to be dominated almost exclusively by constructs like faith development,

faith formation, Catholic identity, new evangelisation and Catholic mission. Excessive use of this language, at the expense of the word education, turns the focus 'inward' toward Catholicism—at the very time when more of the 'outward' focus on the shaping influence of culture is needed" (2020, p. 4). Rossiter's thesis and critique is: When religious education is framed and perceived to be an exclusively ecclesiastical activity and not an educational one, its fundamental educational purposes are eclipsed. In fact, it creates ambiguity about the fundamental meaning of religious education and its very purposes, processes, and practices.

Words are wells of meaning. We understand in and through language. Our languages are social and historical carriers of memories, images, and insights. We live and move and have our being within linguistic systems. Our thinking (and practice) is curtailed within the perimeters of our language. The limits of our world are linguistic limits. The current linguistic discourse we engage in religious education profoundly shapes and limits all who participate in it—teachers, students, parents. The place of religion in the school curriculum is undervalued and the teaching of it misunderstood. In an earlier work, Rossiter (with Marisa Crawford) addressed the implications. "Inevitably", he wrote, "the language of religious education structures the discussion of the subject. In effect, it determines many of the possibilities that will emerge; it has a formative influence on teachers' expectations and what and how they teach; it influences presumptions about the type of responses they will seek from students; it provides criteria for judging what has been achieved; it influences teachers' perception and interpretation of problems in religious education; it even influences the way teachers feel about their work" (Crawford & Rossiter, 1986, p. 33). Currently, Rossiter asserts, an imbalance exists between ecclesiastical and educational concerns in religious education. A type of "geological fault line" has developed "between the normative discourse of Catholic religious education and the real situation in the classroom" (2020, p. 13). This fault line is going to further widen if the prevailing and persistent discourse remains ecclesially centred, hermetically sealed and walled off from the contemporary cultural and existential experience of young people beyond the *ecclesia*. A "course correction" is needed to redirect the drift and restore a balance. He advocates, "the discourse needs to shift away from the current dominant 'inward looking', ecclesiastical metaphors toward 'outward looking' concern about how to educate young people spiritually, morally and religiously" (2020, p. 13). In a word, Rossiter advocates a more open, expansive, meaningful, and effective education in religion for our youth. For this, an alternative, but complementary, language form is needed. Walter Brueggemann offers insight into the tension between these two language forms.

Brueggemann illustrates the struggle around the two languages in a passage in the Hebrew Bible: 2 Kings 18:17-27 (Brueggemann, 1989, pp. 3–34). It is a dramatic encounter in 701 BCE between the Assyrians and Judah. The Assyrian army is at the gate of Jerusalem. The city is under siege. It is a complete mismatch between Assyria and Judah. The Assyrian negotiator stands at the city wall and shouts terms of surrender. He taunts the soldiers of Judah, arguing that they have no real alternative to surrender. The leaders of Judah respond to the Assyrians: "Speak to us in Aramaic. Do not speak to us in Hebrew within the hearing of the people". (Aramaic was the language of international diplomacy—a sophisticated public language that the common folk did not understand.) The leaders of Judah are afraid that their soldiers, if they understood, would be intimidated. The Assyrian negotiator, for the same reason, continues to speak in Hebrew. King Hezekiah, for Judah, consults the prophet Isaiah about what to do. The prophet warns that military options are not the road to success. The faith of the people and communal prayer, recited in Hebrew, eventually lead to deliverance from the Assyrians.

Brueggemann contrasts these two language practices and their use in their particular contexts. He names them the "conversation behind the wall" and the "conversation at the wall". The former, spoken in Hebrew, concerns the ordinary life of the sect, including the most intimate and sacred dealings in the community. Whereas, the latter, spoken in a public form, concerns the public life and lifeworld beyond the sectarian wall. It is important, Brueggemann advocates, that these two conversations go on at the same time. He urges that church education must be bilingual. We must have a public language for negotiation at the wall. And we need an inner, communal language of faith for processing behind the gate, where a different set of assumptions, perceptions of the world, and a different epistemology is at work. However, he warns, "the language behind the wall is dysfunctional on the wall. Those who speak the language behind the wall when on the wall are likely to be irrelevant" (p. 7).

The field of religious education as a whole, and, in particular, the teacher of religion, has much to learn from Brueggemann's insightful illustration. Gabriel Moran, in this spirit, suggests an integrative frame. He proposes that there are two languages of religious education: ecclesiastical and educational (Moran, 1977, pp. 7–15). The ecclesiastical language of religious education is the communal language of faith. It is an intimate, nurturing, formative, caressing language. It is very particular and concrete, with its own imaginative symbolic system. It is the language of devotion, prayer, liturgy, and catechesis. Today it is set within the context of the new evangelisation. Rossiter's main point, as noted

above, is that the contemporary discourse in religious education has drifted almost exclusively into this ecclesiastical frame and its linguistic construct. Both Moran and Rossiter oppose this reduction of religious education to the language of the church. As Moran notes, it is not "educationally adequate today to use the particular language of a church without relating it to a broader context" (p. 8). We can be loyal, he notes, to our choices and commitments without being parochial in our vision or appreciation. To undertake this critical task, a second language of religious education is required, namely, an educational language.

Education is a public venture. It is the great civilising work of our public world. It is the systematic planning of human experience for growth in human understanding. It is a social form of life in which we learn most by interplay with others. Education is the name we give to that constant reshaping or transforming of our life forms in which embodied meaning emerges or is uncovered. In a word, it is the human attempt to improve the world by passing on what is most valuable from one generation to the next. And a vital aspect of this passing on concerns the criticism of what is being transmitted. In contrast to inner communal ecclesial language of sectarian discourse, educational language is intercommunal public discourse. The language, at its best, is grounded in experiences broad enough to offer a bridge between communities "behind the wall" and communities "at the wall". It is speech that can be translated and transferred. It is a modern form of secular discourse that gives positive meaning to objectivity, tolerance, civility, and critique. Ironically, these values have their roots in religious history. What is severely lacking in religious education today is a tolerant and mediating language to link our indigenous religious concerns to public life, in the public forum, on the vital public issues of our time. "Without public speech", Thomas Green writes, "there is no public, only a babble of lamentations and complaints, pleadings, pronouncements, claims and counter-claims. Without public speech, the public dies, politics turn to polemics, becomes partisan in the worse sense, even venomous, and we are left with nothing we can reasonably speak of as public education, public service, or public life" (Green, 1994, p. 369). Dwayne Huebner asserts: We must be able to de-centre from our own language uses, to get away from our taken-for-granted ways of speaking and thinking and consider the possibility of speaking about phenomena as others do. For this, he writes, "We need a public language, as we need public buildings, public gardens, public transportation, public ceremonies. These public spaces, public means, public occasions provide grounds upon which we meet. They are the grounds for community. They give direction as we do things together. They often give shape and meaning to our personal experiences" (Huebner, 1979, p. 90).

In terms of the two languages of religious education, the ecclesiastical and the educational, we do not necessarily see them as competitors. We cannot abandon traditional religious language. It is indispensable to the life a religious body. However, equally important, the teaching of religion cannot be a setting for one's religious dialect without asking how it interacts publicly with the modern world. The two languages need to be kept in a rhythm of creative tension. Currently, they are out of balance. Rossiter's assertion is: Only a public educational approach to religion will restore the balance and address the world of COVID-19.

Spirituality

Language is dynamic. People do not so much have (possess) a language as participate in a language as in a game, a back-and-forth flow of interaction between participants (Wittgenstein, 1953). We can understand the meaning of a word only when we understand its use in a particular context or game. Meanings are fluid and change and emerge in a plurality of forms. If you want to know the meaning of a word, observe how it functions in practice. This plurality and ambiguity of meaning(s) is nowhere more manifest than in the term *spirituality* and in how the meaning(s) of the word is found in its contemporary religious and secular use.

Spirituality is central to the recent writings of Rossiter. He uses it as an interpretative key to seek a new agenda for religious education. There has been a dramatic shift, he notes, in the landscape of contemporary spirituality: It is a construct that is used in both the religious and the secular spheres. It is no longer a synonym for religiosity. It is used to identify the way people who are not necessarily religious relate to spiritual and moral dimensions of life. The spiritual and religious are closely related. However, in Rossiter's designated meaning, "Spirituality is defined as the natural genetic capacity of human beings to acknowledge either consciously or by implication in their word and actions, a spiritual and moral dimension of human life and culture" (2018, p. 16). He sees it as a basic human spirituality that is implied in the values people show in their actions, words, and thinking. Today, the large majority of students in Catholic schools, Rossiter asserts, have such a functioning spirituality. It is evident in the values they adopt, their commitments, lifestyle, and motivations. It is an implied spirituality and it may draw little from their religious tradition. The principal shaping influence on their lifestyle and spirituality in our secularised Western societies are the powerful media-driven forces of consumerism and capitalism.

In contrast to traditional (medieval) Christian forms of spirituality, Rossiter writes, "A common form of contemporary spirituality is individualistic (rather than communal), eclectic in the way it pieces together various elements from different sources (often little may be drawn from the religious traditions), subjective in that it is private and personal without much communal identification, and secular in that it has little or no overlay of religious cultural meanings" (2018, p. 33). The term *secular spirituality* has been used to describe this phenomenon. This is the sea of secular popular culture that young people swim in. Rossiter's central thesis is: This ought to be the starting point for religious education, namely, critically engaging (through teacher–student dialogue) the reality of students' lives in today's secularised society. This can and should be followed, as an end point, by engagement with significant themes from our religious heritage. Spirituality can then take a strategic location between both. It can act as a central bridge construct between religious and secular thinking about educational development. In sum, Rossiter writes, "One of the advantages of the word spirituality in educational discourse is that it can be used to cover both religious and secular purposes in a complementary fashion." "Despite ambiguities in definitions of spirituality," he notes, "it can function like a mediating central construct in interpreting the spiritual/moral dimensions of religious life (in various religions), as well as in interpreting lives that do not engage with religion. Spirituality is like a 'meeting place' for those interested in the spiritual dimension of the religious sphere, and for those concerned with the spiritual dimension to the secular sphere—hopefully to promote mutual interest in both spheres" (2018, p. 18). So it has utility for education in general, and for religious education in particular, in terms of its purpose and content.

However, there is no such thing as spirituality in general. Its ambiguity allows the emergence of particular meanings and a particular pluralistic set of practices. A set of questions can be asked: Do these pluralities of forms of spirituality operate on parallel tracks that never meet or mix? Are they compatible or/and conflictual? What is their relationship to religion and education? What is their engagement or lack of it with the world of COVID-19? To address those questions, we need to turn to the sudden burst of interest in spirituality, particularly in the past thirty years.

Spirituality is undergoing a widespread renaissance. The interest touches multiple levels of church and society. On the academic level, there has been a resurgence of programmatic study and interest in historical figures, Christian mystics, such as Julian of Norwich, Catherine of Siena, Hildegard of Bingen, and Ignatius of Loyola. On the pastoral level, we see the re-emergence of centring prayer, retreats, and devotional exercises. Among

popular audiences, books on spirituality regularly hit the bestseller list and have their own section in every large bookstore. TV audiences can tune in daily to Oprah, Suzie Orman, Gwyneth Paltrow, or Deepak Chopra for discussions on how to integrate the spiritual with love, sex, wellness, monetary success, and world peace. A growing number of persons are engaging in mind-body practices such as yoga, meditation, Kabbala, Tai Chi, and Zen mindfulness exercises. Does this interest in the spiritual offer people rich resources for navigating life's challenges in the contemporary world or is it illusionary? Or is it a mix of both? And where did this eruption of the spiritual come from?

My interest here is the linkage between spirituality, the practice of religion, and religious education. However, before we can move in this direction, some historical perspective is needed and some current misconceived spiritualities need unmasking. The new spirituality addresses the novel situation of the present. There is a hunger, a quest in people's lives for meaning and purpose—beyond the material. In this sense, the quest for a spiritual life can be seen as a genuine prophetic protest against a dehumanising culture and some meaningless forms of religion. More and more people are going about this task without the benefit of membership in traditional religious institutions. It is not a credible option for them. This sends them outside institutionalised religion to have their spiritual thirst quenched. And the new spirituality attempts to respond to their deep yearnings. It is a sign of frustration as well as a gauntlet thrown down in front of the church, and at the feet of religious educators. It is a sign of distress and a cry of distress. There are lessons to be taught here by spiritual seekers, and lessons to be learned by religious (church, synagogue, mosque) institutions.

Spirituality today, in its multiple forms, is seen as the great unifier. It is based on the notion of holism. Its all-inclusive meaning is seen as an advantage. There is a deeply felt need for something that would overcome the fragmentary character of contemporary life. Dualism abounds: body–soul, secular–religious, science–religion, human–nature. The "new spirituality" holds the promise of healing the world's splits. However, caution is needed here. A language that seeks to be all-encompassing risks being vacuous. A premature jump into unity may be illusionary. Glittering generalities may be deceptive. The vague all-inclusive meaning of spirituality can float into abstractions in spite of some of the creative and well-meaning practices that function under its canopy today.

With its current amorphous meaning, spirituality can mean just about anything—except, of course, religion ("I'm spiritual, not religious"). There is a fuzziness, a Disneyland, cafeteria-style choosing, an eclecticism, a "religious mixing" to some of its forms and expressions. "I'm spiritual" has come to connote a journey of self-discovery and self-

creation. It is a search for a coherent inner "self", by attending to one's inner growth, on one's own flexible terms, and of one's own choosing. The goal is to arrive at a sense of one's own uniqueness, authenticity, and truth. In this form, it can simply become another consumer item for self-fulfilment. Luke Timothy Johnson notes, "a great deal of what calls itself spirituality these days is more psychic self-grooming than engagement with the Holy Spirit of God" (Johnson, 2006, p. 30). The search for meaning and purpose is reduced to another mode of self-help therapy. Gregory Jones offers a similar critique. "I am convinced", Jones writes, "that much of contemporary spirituality is shaped by consumer impulses and captive to a therapeutic culture . . . [it] separates spirituality both from theological convictions and practices on the one hand, and social and political realities and commitments on the other" (Jones, 1997, p. 4). Too often, Jones observes, popular spirituality is prone to tailor the spiritual journey to the individual's privatised needs and desires. The focus is almost exclusively on the self-sufficiency of one's interior life. It becomes a new commodity to consume. Social, economic, and political realities and commitments are not addressed. And it has severed itself from centuries of Christian practice (pp. 3–28). This can lead to forms of escapism and spirituality devoid of firm roots. This is the result of the uncoupling of spirituality from religion—and why it is in critical need of religion and its set of practices.

Religion, with all its flaws, acts as a wise restraint on our spiritual drive, and, at the same time, nourishes it with centuries of (external) religious practices. There is a living Christian tradition of the contemplative life, spiritual classics, and spiritual guides to direct people on the way. The Christian religion, at its best, offers an embodied spirituality rooted in the concrete, and imbedded in the particularities of human experience. It is radically incarnational and profoundly historical as it directs people in justice to repair the world. If the contemporary meanings and forms of spirituality are to be both sustaining in the long run and transformative of the broad society, they need a larger context of religious traditions and the institutions that house them. In other words, our internal spiritual quest (for a coherent self) has to be linked to a historical tradition, to its original meaning, to a disciplined community life, and to a just and peaceful concern for all creatures, both human and non-human. What is critically needed, in our time, then, is a reconciliation of the spiritual and the religious. They ought to be natural allies, not divisive competitors. The spiritual is the lifeblood of religion, and religion gives form, direction, nurturing, and boundaries to enrich the spiritual life. They can coexist in healthy tension with each other. When they are reframed in this manner, they can become genuine partners in our work of religious education. When recoupled, they can

be a treasure of wise resources, and forms of spiritual and religious resistance to commodified culture for young people in a time of COVID-19.

Tradition

Rossiter's operating assumption throughout the body of his life's work has been that studying the Catholic tradition (and other religions) is essential. Its importance and relevance is presumed and not in question (2018, p. x). Even though little explicit attention is given to it in his most recent writings, it is lurking in the background and is never a neglected commitment. The focus of my attention under this third theme is to explore what the Catholic tradition is and how it is made accessible to students in the classroom of the school. In particular, I wish to explore whether the (Catholic) tradition is handed over in the form of stasis or in a subversive manner.

Huebner seeks to correct what he perceives as a curricular imbalance. He writes, "I do not wish to displace the individual from a position of primacy in our thinking. I do wish to claim an equal place for the past and for the community. In thinking about education, we cannot effectively start our thinking with the individual and then make the past and community secondary. Rather our thinking must start with all three: the individual, the past, and the community. Then we can ask how all three are interrelated" (Huebner, 1999, p. 188). Huebner points to three forms of content in need of attention in the educational setting of the classroom: the past (tradition), the community (social and political/institutional structures), and the individual (students). The task of the teacher is to highlight the distinctiveness of each; have each stand out and bring them into creative tension with each other in a "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer, 1982, p. 350). The teacher directs the drama. He or she orchestrates the interplay between the three components. The content of tradition, in particular the Catholic tradition, is what we seek to hold up and have stand out here. But what is the nature of tradition?

Tradition is not a very popular term in liberal educational circles. The loss of a sense of tradition goes back to the eighteenth century. Modernity was a revolt against tradition. Today we need to offer a counterargument. Etymologically, the term means to hand over, to pass on. It is about the transmission of what is most valuable from one generation to the next. G. K. Chesterton wrote that tradition is "an extension of the franchise by giving value to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors" (1959, p. 48). It is a democracy of the dead, as well as of the living. Jaroslav Pelikan offers an insightful distinction between seeing tradition as a token, as an idol, and as a true image or icon (1984, pp. 55–57). When tradition becomes

an idol, he instructs, it makes the preservation of the past an end in itself. It requires idolatrous submission to the authority of (past) tradition and its absolute truths. Tradition, as a token, does point beyond itself, but it does not embody what it represents. Universal truths are sought but are severed from the particularity of tradition. However, tradition as an icon is what it represents. It invites us to look at it, through it, and beyond it. It does not present itself as coextensive with the truth but invites us to a way toward universal truth. Authentic tradition, for Pelikan, is iconic. It is the living faith of the dead rather than the dead faith of the living (p. 65). To be alive it has to be in constant change. It provides the larger context for what is passed on. In doing so, it is a fundamental resistance to stasis. It is subversive of tradition as a fixed and permanent idol. It is constantly becoming other than it is. It is a never-ending subversive process.

Terrence Tilley transfers this meaning of tradition to the Catholic tradition. He writes, "The Catholic tradition, then, can be seen as a set of practices that, when engaged in properly, shape people into a communion of saints" (2000, p. 58). The process (*traditio*) of handing on the set of practices is the tradition. What (*tradita*) is handed on, its beliefs, doctrines, visions, etc., follows from the process. Religious traditions are not fixed but fluid. They may change radically. In fact, when contexts change, Tilley asserts, we must constantly invent the tradition (p. 121). Failure to do so can cause the tradition to wither away. The Catholic tradition is invented and reinvented in response to internal and external changes. Tilley concludes, "to be a faithful member of a [Catholic] religious tradition is to engage in traditio faithfully . . . We cannot merely repeat the past or even its formulations or rubrics. Rote repetition may even be counterproductive to fidelity, a counterfeit of faithful remembering . . . fidelity may require even abandoning traditional formulations" (p. 185). The Catholic tradition, then, must be constantly and critically reappropriated if it is to be a *traditio* (i.e., the living reality of the past in the present) and not merely a series of disparate *tradita* (i.e., the handed-down conclusions of a once living tradition). The choice before us, Pelikan notes, is whether to be conscious participants in the tradition or to be unconscious victims of it (p. 53).

Religious education is an educational approach to religion and religious tradition. Education is a traditioning process, the process of handing on the wisdom of the past from one generation to the next. There is an aspect of education that concerns the criticism of tradition, the asking of critical questioning of it. The assumption is: The tradition can only be kept healthy by asking tough questions of it. The challenge and question facing teachers of religion in Catholic (and state-sponsored) schools is: Can this tradition (of profound wisdom)

be made intelligible and relevant to today's problems and possibilities for our students? In the end, Richard Gaillardetz writes, it depends on how they envision their work: Are they to be museum curators proudly displaying some precious treasure from antiquity? Are they to be master debaters cleverly overcoming the arguments of their opponents? Or are they to be humble pilgrims eager for some company on the long journey ahead? (Gaillardetz, 2004, p. 33). If it is to be the last-mentioned, Gaillardetz advocates, then Catholic school teaching and its teachings must be culturally engaged. It must resonate with the daily lives of students and be attuned to their ordinary (secular) human experience (see Rossiter above). It must illuminate and draw from the riches of the heritage in order to name what they, in some hidden and confused way, have already experienced.

The teacher of religion is the conserver and trustee of the tradition (Huebner, 1987, p. 20). If the tradition is to retain its liberating and life-giving quality, a never-ending hermeneutic is required. Teaching is this critical, inquiring, dialogical process (Rossiter, 2018, p. 95). It is showing students how to live by the best lights of the tradition. In terms of the three curricular contents (noted above), the student's past and present experience is a distinctive content in and of itself. A healthy critical and creative tension ought to ensue between the content of the (Catholic) tradition and the content of the student's life. Good teaching directs this conversation to the mutual benefit of each. On the other hand, a vibrant and living Catholic tradition can offer students profound meaning and purpose in life. The tradition, in turn, can be renewed by the novelty and challenge of the young. Each has its own emerging story. Good teaching is the rhythmically meshing of each. Both can participate in the shaping and reformation of the other's story. The student's life can be renewed through the truthfulness of the tradition, and the emerging truthfulness in the student's life story can reshape the tradition.

The third content in the educational environment of the classroom is the communal, political, and institutional structure and setting of the Catholic school. Whose interests do the governing structures serve? What political influences does the school have over the selection of curriculum materials? over the philosophy of teaching religion—its goals and purposes? Nicholas Lash, in reference to the Roman Catholic Church, notes, "I have long maintained that the heart of the crisis of contemporary Catholicism lies in . . . subordination of education to governance, the effect of which has too often been to substitute for teaching proclamation construed as command . . . What we call 'official teaching' in the church is, for the most part, not teaching but governance" (2010, pp. 17–18). Failure to attend to the influence of this pattern of power in the classroom can silence and marginalise the student's life experience.

The current normative language in Catholic religious education, as illustrated above by Rossiter, of faith formation, faith development, and the new evangelisation, domesticates the widest and deepest meaning of education. On the other hand, the key to liberative and transforming teaching of the Catholic tradition is to hold the three curricular sources of content in interplay with each other. The tension between them should never be hidden or suppressed. In fact, to maintain and skillfully hold them in creative tension offers the educational possibility of making the Catholic tradition accessible to our students as "ever ancient . . . ever new" (Augustine) in the time of COVID-19.

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Where the Teachers Know My Name:
Old and New Challenges for Catholic Schools

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Introduction

Graham Rossiter stands as a seminal figure in the history and practice of religious education (RE) in Catholic education. His contribution, over many decades, has provided guidance and inspiration for generations of students, teachers, and administrators. One of his seminal contributions has been to propose an educational approach to RE in faith-based schools not at the expense of more affective, catechetical approaches but as an approach of perduring creative tension. Writing in 1982 in what was one of his most significant articles Rossiter noted:

> Perhaps Catholic school-based religious education should be reconceptualized more along educational than catechetical lines. Perhaps the title of the popular paperback, "Creative Divorce", might be appropriate. A clearer differentiation between religious education and catechesis, as far as a school is concerned, could foster more authentic and creative development of both aspects. However, the "divorce" analogy is not perfectly appropriate, because a revision of the foundations for religious education in Catholic schools would not want to exclude catechesis but would critically determine the possibilities and limitations for "faith-sharing" within the matrix of a more general educational role for religion in the school. Still, there is a need for sufficient space for critically reviewing and renegotiating the relationship between catechesis and religious education, with more independence and freedom for each of the partners. (Rossiter, 1982, pp. 5–6)

In this article I will comment on a topic that has always been a factor in Rossiter's work but in recent times has become more prominent. This is the cultural context in which schools operate and, following on from this, the manner in which RE is both understood and operates. I would like to focus on two questions. First, the "then and now". In the last fifty years or so, what have been some of the key changes in the cultural context in which Catholic

schools operate? We can trace Rossiter's published work in the field back to the 1970s; this marks the outer limit of this period. So, in the fifty or so years since Rossiter's initial contributions, what have been some key societal markers that have shaped the way RE in Catholic schools has been conducted? Secondly, and following on from the first point, how do Catholic schools address the challenges inherent in presenting themselves to the wider culture in a fashion that respects the heritage of schools but also the new cultural realties in which they operate? To advance this second argument a micronarrative will be given as a way of illustrating and amplifying the creative tension under which Catholic schools operate. The thesis of this article is that the challenges that prompted Rossiter's emphasis on education in RE approaches today are even more evident; and the need for an educational emphasis is ever present.

Any discussion of the cultural changes within which the Catholic school operates must take into account a much wider social analysis than is possible from an approach that examines strictly educational sources. In this article a comprehensive social overview is not possible, but a number of conceptual markers will be identified utilising four key thinkers. These markers point to critical cultural shifts that highlight loss of individual autonomy and the rise of a collectivist mentality at the expense of a more distinct and personal voice. Guardini (1950/1998), writing just after the Second World War, summarised the coming age as the end of the modern world. This new era, marked by mass communication and enhanced means of production, promised a material flourishing but at the same time it would give rise to a loss of individual autonomy where personal and intimate relationships are replaced by more anonymous ones. This is a remarkably prescient observation, because Guardini was writing well before the advent of social media in any form. A similar argument can be found in the work of Zygmunt Bauman in his analysis of culture (Bauman, 2004). He commented that in "liquid modernity" the individual as stranger had become a dominant metaphor, describing the loss of the interpersonal, in relationships and in ongoing support, as a marker of culture (Bauman, 2000). The communal niches in which individuals were previously able to develop personal autonomy and identity have increasingly been under threat, and have been replaced by a powerful but loose sense of association—a wider social pattern of belief, behaviour, and socialisation. People have still "belonged" to a range of groups but the nature of these associations has become more nebulous and, often, transitory. This more tenuous connection between individual and groups or institutions can be clearly seen in affiliation patterns in religious groups. Berger and Luckmann (1967) noted that the place of religion in contemporary culture was one of diminished significance, but it had not disappeared entirely.

Rather the field in which religion survived was in the personal and private sphere. This was opposed to the public domain and in the conduct and purpose of religiously aligned social institutions. Seeing religion as a personal construct is in keeping with the wider cultural trend of disengagement from partisan communal association.

Now and Then

By the 1970s there were clearly evident cultural trends that placed the individual in an increasingly uneasy relationship with what had previously been strong social institutions (Lambert, 2005). These institutions gave the individual a place and an identity that could be consolidated through social reinforcing. This has been evident in Catholic institutional life. The much vaunted "triad" of school, parish, and family that, when in unison, provided a strong sense of communal identity in the face of wider social pressure was, by the 1970s, severely under pressure. Smith, Longest, Hill, and Christofferson (2014, p. 26) note the precipitous collapse of this triad and the various consequences of this:

> The old system of Catholic faith transmission—which relied on concentrated Catholic residential neighborhoods, ethnic solidarity, strong Catholic schools, religious education classes designed to reinforce family and parish life and "thickly" Catholic cultures, practices and rituals—had drastically eroded by the time this generation of parents came of age. Yet no alternative approach to effective intergenerational Catholic faith transmission had been devised and instituted to replace the old system—and indeed it is not clear that any such effective system has been put in place even today.

To reiterate the point that is being made here: this collapse and its implications have been evident for decades and they were certainly key elements of the cultural milieu in which Catholic schools operated in the 1970s (Flynn et al., 1993).

A feature of the 1970s for many of those involved in Catholic school communities was a transition from an older socialised religious identity to a new form that was far more aligned to general cultural norms (Campion, 1982). The chains of memory that tied people to a religious tradition were still tangible in this period (Hervieu-Leger, 2002). These connections, though, were becoming more fragile and over time would become very loose indeed. In general, in the 1970s and the immediately following period, it was possible for many Catholics to articulate a religious identity that was largely defined in cultural terms (Turner, 1992). It involved marking key life events through church ceremonies, occasionally taking part in religious rituals, in social networks where many shared the same historical

connection with the religious community (Turner, 1993). Involvement in Catholic education, despite other receding associations, was an ongoing and dominant feature of many individuals' sense of being a Catholic (Dixon, Dantis, & Reid, 2015).

If we now redirect the focus to the current day, we can ask: What has changed? Or, to be more specific: What are some key features of the cultural context in which Catholic schools operate that have emerged in recent decades? I would argue that these features can clearly be traced to earlier patterns and that what is seen today should be seen in continuity with earlier decades—certainly with the 1970s. I would nominate three features that are critical in understanding the current cultural context in which schools operate and, following on from this, what needs to be taken into account when considering RE in Catholic schools.

First, the trend to greater individualisation or even atomisation in culture has proceeded. The sense of the communal and the collective that is gained by being part of a range of different groups, as defined by beliefs, behaviour, and social networks, is increasingly diminished. This is in accord with the propositions offered by Guardini. The stranger, lurking on the margins of communities, in Bauman's conception has never been more evident. For Catholics the sense of belonging to a church, in keeping with Berger and Luckmann's view, is now far looser, though not always obliterated. The connections with the church have greatly weakened, as evidenced by a steady, almost relentless decline in participation in parish involvement, in church rituals, in familial connections, and in reinforcing social networks (Dixon, Reid, & Chee, 2013; Dillon, 2018; Bullivant, 2019). To take just one of these as an example, the social networks that many Catholics are part of are now reflective of social indicators other than religious affiliation (Smith et al., 2014). The exception to this is involvement in Catholic education a point that I will return to at the conclusion of this article.

The second feature that is critical to understanding the current cultural context is, in more general terms, the weakening of bonds between individuals and social groups, as evidenced in terms of religious affiliation: there is a rapidly increasing number of people who express no religious affiliation (Singleton, 2014). This has been a marked phenomenon in very recent times and has seen the number of religiously unaffiliated rise to where they have become the largest single group, in terms of expressed religious affiliation (Bouma & Halafoff, 2017). However, those who nominate as having no religion do not fit into a single category (Bibby, Thiessen, & Bailey, 2019). Some could be described as spiritual, as described in the following section of this article; others are better understood as being secular (Zuckerman, Galen, & Pasquale, 2016).

The third new feature of the cultural landscape is the emergence of spirituality as a self-contained category, and the increasing prevalence of it as a descriptor of individual worldview (Tacey, 2004; Holmes, 2007). This is a large and growing area of scholarly interest, but in this article the focus will be on the relationship between spirituality and religion. Mason and his colleagues describe spirituality as a master idea that has long pervaded Western culture (Mason, Singleton, & Webber, 2007). What has emerged in recent times is a strong cultural current that disassociates spirituality from formal religion (Ammerman, 2013). Formal religion can be described as traditional groups with established doctrine, norms of behaviour, and agreed rituals. The longstanding sense of spirituality as a manifestation of religious association has been replaced by spirituality as a category that is not directly tied to any formal religious tradition (O'Sullivan, 2012). This, once again, accords with a key societal realignment that privileges the individual over the community. Spirituality understood within a Catholic context, however, does offer a variety of expressions. But all of these are intimately tied to Christian doctrine, and a particular strand of spirituality is often associated with a particular figure. The disassociation between religion and spiritualty has progressed to a point where spiritualty can be seen as distinct and even inimical to religion (Heelas & Woodhead, 2005). Spirituality can be seen as representing a more benign and enlightened option, opposed to the confining rigour of a religious tradition (Bouma, 2007).

The three factors described here have led to both a diversification of the human community that make up Catholic schools but also to a certain homogenisation. More Catholics have become distanced from a formal and formative association with the church. Large numbers of people now have no religious affiliation, and the rise of a disassociation between spirituality and religion has led to a range of eclectic worldviews. All of these factors point to a diversification of those who are connected with Catholic schools, families, and students. At the same time, beneath this diversification, there is also a certain commonality. The changes that have marked the culture in recent decades have led to a collapse of traditional categories as many of these have little predictive value. To give one important example: if we follow the discussion in this article, the distinction between Catholic and non-Catholic has become increasingly blurred. As religious affiliation becomes weaker, as marked by distancing from or the renouncing of formal affiliation, or by adapting a generic spiritual outlook, families in Catholic schools, be they Catholic or non-Catholic, often have far more in common with each other than different from each other when it comes to beliefs, behaviour, and social networks. The national figure for non-Catholic enrolment in

Catholic schools currently stands at around thirty per cent (National Catholic Education Commission, Australia, 2017). The contention here is that there is often not a strong distinction between Catholic and non-Catholic enrolments as both groups are heavily impacted by the factors discussed in this article; in particular, the three new factors.

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Challenges for
Catholic Schools Today

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Catholics school communities, for some time, have been part of a culture where religion does not play a prominent part either institutionally or in a personal sense. The most prominent religious association that many people have is participation in a Catholic school. This applies not just to students and families but also to teachers and others employed in the school. The paradox is that while formal religious affiliation weakens, Catholic schools remain, in an institutional sense, quite strong despite their not disavowing their religious foundation and identity. In fact, Catholic schools are part of the mission of the church and see their religious identity as central to their rationale and function. Pope Francis (2014), for example, puts the purpose of Catholic educational institutions in these terms:

> Catholic educational institutions offer everyone an education aimed at the integral development of the person that responds to [the] right of all people to have access to knowledge and understanding. But they are equally called to offer to all the Christian message—respecting fully the freedom of all and the proper methods of each specific scholastic environment—namely that Jesus Christ is the meaning of life, of the cosmos and of history.

This strong ecclesial character has been an unchanging feature of Catholic education. The Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization's *Directory of Catechesis* (2020) further illustrates this point:

> The Catholic school is an *ecclesial subject* that makes the Church's mission visible above all in the fields of education and culture. It has as its point of reference the particular Church, with respect to which it is not a foreign body. One must not, therefore, exclude or marginalise its Catholic identity or its role in evangelisation. "It is from its Catholic identity that the school derives its original characteristics and its 'structure' as a genuine instrument of the Church, a place of real and specific pastoral ministry. The Catholic school participates in the evangelising mission of the Church and is the privileged environment in which Christian education is carried out."
> (n. 311; italics in the original)

A range of studies, beginning with the seminal work of Marcellin Flynn, has pointed out the various factors that impact on a family's decision to send their children to a Catholic school (McCarthy, 2016; Angus, 2015; Campbell, Proctor, & Sherrington, 2009). In this mixture there are religious factors, but these tend to be rated as less important than more strictly academic or social reasons. Flynn points out that, as far back as the 1970s, religious reasons, such as strengthening the faith of students, or learning more about Catholicism, have not been highly regarded by parents but rated below factors such as strong academic performance. It is also an elaboration on the argument of this article that, as religion as a cultural factor, generally understood, weakens, then religious reasons contributing to school choice are unlikely to increase in importance. We now arrive at a major challenge for Catholic schools currently and well into the future. This centres on how to best align the religious foundation and understanding of the school with a community that is increasingly marked by weakening affiliation amongst Catholics, the increase in no religious affiliation in general, and the separation of spirituality from formal religion. The need for this alignment was evident in the 1970s but it is now a much more pressing concern.

To encapsulate these tensions, now even more evident, consideration will be given to how Catholic schools describe and promote themselves. The illustration provided is not a strong empirical argument but rather one that provides some insight into the challenges facing Catholics and prompts further investigation and discussion. In this sense it is a micronarrative that seeks to capture a large amount of information by using an indicative analogy (Higgins, 2007). A term that is useful here in expanding how Catholic schools can respond authentically to cultural changes is *polyhedron*. In the *Directory of Catechesis*, the term *polyhedral* is used to describe the way in which the church can understand its missiological dimension. This image captures the dynamism inherent in seeing institutional structures as capable of reflecting different aspects of their mission and purpose, taking into account complex cultural realities. Catholic schools also can offer a diversity of goals and aspirations yet remain faithful to their mission.

Many Catholic schools have a motto that is displayed boldly on school crests and in prominent parts of the school. These mottos, often in Latin, are a way of distilling, in a pithy phrase, a founding principle of the school. These founding principles are reflective of an era when religion was a far greater influence on individuals, social institutions, and public discourse. This era predates the scope of this article, that is, looking from the 1970s to the current day. These mottos can be seen as an insight into the foundational aspirations of the school. In many parts of Australia one of the ways Catholic schools market themselves is in

the production of published catalogues that list the names, features, and services of schools in a particular area. In one of these publications produced for schools in a large Australian archdiocese, the *Catholic School Guide* (2020), as well as more comprehensive information, each school provides a brief, one- or two-sentence statement that is intended to encapsulate what the school offers. In this way it can be seen as some type of contemporary approximation of the traditional motto of the school. If we compare the two descriptors, we can see evident the tensions between the foundational principle of the school and its contemporary point of reference.

This is borne out if we look at just three comparisons of classical and contemporary mottos. The first juxtaposes *Speculum sine Macula* with "The city school for girls". The Latin motto refers to the Blessed Virgin Mary as the spotless mirror born without sin or mark. This is a strong statement of dogmatic theology. The contemporary motto encapsulates well a feature of the school that may well appeal to parents who are shaped by the factors discussed in this article. A second example offers a similar juxtaposition: "In the way of Mary" with "A complete education". The final example captures the title of this article and contrasts the crest motto of "Unity in Christ" with the contemporary motto of "Where the teachers know my name".

We see in these contrasting mottos some of the dynamism that is at the heart of Catholic education today. On the one hand they are reflective of a strong and ongoing institutional religious expression. On the other hand, they are trying to respond to new cultural realties, where religion, as discussed in this article, is not a strong feature in the lives of many of those associated with Catholic schools. The argument is that this tension between religious foundation and contemporary expression would be reflected not just in slogans or mottos but throughout the school. And this would certainly apply to the RE education curriculum.

Conclusion

I began this article noting the seminal contribution of Rossiter to religious education. Let me conclude with another explicit reference to his work. I have argued here that the challenges that face Catholic schools today are in continuity with those facing schools in the 1970s. In terms of RE in Catholic schools, the best response to the cultural challenges facing the schools is a strong educational focus. This was, and remains, the best approach to cater for the needs of the range of students in Catholic schools. As Rossiter (2017, p. 4) has

observed, "[what] is needed above all [is] to promote the relevance of RE as an academic subject for students but also to promote research, creativity, and innovation in RE".

Consider the three changes that have been highlighted above. These all build on the rising individualism noted by Guardini (1950/1998), Bauman (2000, 2004), and Berger and Luckmann (1967). Catholics are now even more distant than they were in the 1970s from being active members of faith communities. Large numbers of people no longer have any religious affiliation whatsoever, and many see spiritualty as being separate and distinct from religious belief and behaviour. All of these factors point to a need to try to engage people with religious narratives and, given the lack of religious socialisation, the best option for Catholic schools is to continue to emphasise an educational approach to RE. This is an approach that stresses the need for growth in knowledge, but is not averse to other more affective goals. The classic analogy that has long been drawn to describe the goals of RE in Catholic schools still applies today (Engebretson, Fleming, & Rymarz, 2003). In the 1970s and later, it was argued that students received RE in different ways. Some students did see this in catechetical terms; that is, it helps build up and reinforce their faith. Others encountered the content of RE in a fashion akin to evangelisation; that is, they encountered the message of the gospel in a fresh and new way. Still for others RE was of value as it added to their understanding of the world. This threefold analogy still applies today.

Since the 1970s, the number of students disengaged from religious traditions has grown, so an educational emphasis that seeks to engage students but to also present the Christian world view is more urgent. The emphasis on making this engagement as fruitful as possible brings the discussion back to how educational approaches can deal with the changing cohorts in Catholic schools in a fashion that takes into account the need for innovation and creativity, as noted by Rossiter. Two features remain salient. First, the importance of teachers: The educational approach to RE has always placed significant demands on teachers. These have only been magnified in recent times. Teachers in Catholic schools are not immune to the wider cultural forces that have been touched on in this article, so how they respond to the tensions inherent in Catholic education today is a critical consideration. Rymarz and Franchi (2019) point out the two narratives that often are displayed in educational approaches to RE; these have relevance for the discussion on the role and formation of RE teachers. These narratives distinguish between, first, existing approaches to RE that retain the high, conventional demands on teachers. These demands include strong content knowledge, expert pedagogy, and the capacity to be authentic witnesses. The second narrative presents a change of focus on how RE is offered in schools.

In either case the discussion on how to proceed is premised on a clear vision of how RE teachers will be formed and supported in Catholic schools.

The second salient feature of new, creative, and innovative educational approaches is the perennial issue of the content of RE. In Catholic schools the content has always reflected a strong emphasis on presenting the fullness of the Christian message as a basis for encounter and discourse. As the chain of memory become more fragile this emphasis remains an urgent concern. There are difficulties inherent in presenting the complex content that comprise a characteristic feature of RE curriculums. The disassociation of many students from an active participation in the faith community has been exacerbated in recent times, but it has been a factor in Catholic schools for decades. As has been argued, this has been recognised as an important driver of the educational approach to RE. The need for creative and innovative ways to present this content is ever present. To move the foundation of RE away from the founding tradition in faith-based schools may seem an appropriate response to cultural changes, but it brings with it a whole new range of difficulties, not least of which is the assumption that such an approach would be more engaging for students. This assumption deserves further investigation.

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A Strategy for Putting Religious Education
Back on the "Australian Catholic Schools Map"

Professor Graham Rossiter

Introduction

The Australian bishops' National Catholic Education Commission identified the distinctive place of religious education (RE) in the Catholic school as follows:

- [RE] . . . the classroom learning and teaching of religion . . . which is responsive to changing social, ecclesial and educational contexts . . . [is] the learning area at the heart of the Catholic school (NCEC, 2018, p. 5).
- [RE is] a scholastic discipline with the same systematic demands and the same rigour as other disciplines (p. 6, quoting the Roman *General Directory of Catechesis*, 1997, n. 73).
- [RE] expands students' spiritual awareness and religious identity, fostering their capacities and skills of discerning, interpreting, thinking critically, seeking truth and making meaning (p. 7).

However, there is some concern among Catholic educators that all is not well with this core subject in the Catholic school curriculum. There appears to be some discernible loss of focus for RE, especially in the language used for articulating its purposes. Perhaps an unintended consequence of the special attention given to Catholic identity, faith formation, new evangelisation, and the church's mission has been some growing ambiguity about the *nature* and *role* of RE in the Catholic school. In a sense, RE seems to be slipping off the Catholic school map; and this can affect the morale of religion teachers as well as cloud their perspective on the educational task at hand.

This article briefly identifies the potential problem, and speculates about how to address it in a way that will prompt more reflection and debate among those variously engaged in the enterprise of Catholic schooling. The article is not about the religious "life" of the school, which has always been fundamentally important; but it has never been a substitute for religious "education": the two are complementary. What follows will suggest the need for restating Catholic RE in a way that is meaningful and realistic; this is essential for securing the professional support of all teachers in the schools, and crucial for making it a valuable part of young people's education. It tries to respond to the call in the NCEC (2018) *Framing Paper: Religious Education in Australian Catholic schools* to rearticulate RE to address more effectively the contemporary socioreligious situation of the young people in Catholic schools.

How Catholic schools talk about RE (the discourse of RE) is an important starting point for informing classroom practice. And in times of unprecedented social change and uncertainty, amplified by the current pandemic, it is more important than ever to show how RE can make a valuable contribution to young people's education and their personal/spiritual/religious development. This may help diminish the noticeable and growing divide between the discourse of Catholic RE and the realities of the classroom and young people's spirituality.

Emergence of the Problem of "Ecclesiastical Drift" in the Discourse of Australian Catholic School Religious Education

In 1970, in the article "Catechetics R.I.P.", US scholar Gabriel Moran was one of the first to comment on an emerging problem within the language of Catholic RE. Where idiosyncratic, ecclesiastical terms were used exclusively, the discourse became "in-house" and relatively closed to outside ideas and debate. Since 1981, publications by Rossiter (1981) and Crawford and Rossiter collectively (1985, 1988, 2006, 2018) drew attention to various aspects of this problem, including the multiplicity of ecclesiastical terms as well as the way that devotional and emotional titles, and presumptive language had negative effects on religion curricula and teaching.

More recently, Rossiter (2020) explained the problem he labelled as "ecclesiastical drift". It is said to occur where the discourse about the purposes and practices of RE has gradually and incrementally come to be dominated almost exclusively by constructs like faith development, faith formation, Catholic identity, new evangelisation, and Catholic mission. There is evidence (in diocesan and school documents/websites and in the renaming of former diocesan RE departments, as well as in the rise of new religious leadership roles in Catholic schools) that these ecclesiastical terms have been replacing the term "religious education". For example: in one instance, the rebadged, advertised role description of the former diocesan RE director did not include any direct mention of RE. Also noted in this study, has been a deleterious effect on RE as an academic discipline at Catholic tertiary institutions.

Only some conclusions from the study will be summarised here, where the focus will turn towards what might be done to address this ongoing problem:

- Excessive use of ecclesiastical language, at the expense of the word "education", turns the focus *inwards* towards Catholicism—at the very time when more of an *outwards* focus on the shaping influence of culture is needed.
- Ecclesiastical language dominance eclipses the educational dimension to RE and what suffers is thinking about what it means to *educate* today's young people spiritually and religiously.
- If students, teachers, and parents are inclined to see RE as an *ecclesiastical* rather than as an *educational* activity, then increasingly they are less likely to see it as a meaningful part of school education.
- Special attention given to Catholic identity gives the impression of exclusiveness that can make the thirty per cent of students who are not Catholic, as well as the non-religious Catholic students, and non-Catholic and non-religious teachers feel uncomfortable and perhaps marginalised.

As noted later in the article, an empirical study has been initiated to investigate the views that teachers and senior students have on these questions.

A Proposed Strategy for Addressing
the Problem of Ecclesiastical Drift

The remainder of the article will summarise principles/issues as parts of an overall strategy that might help bring more balance to the discourse of Catholic school RE by emphasising its educational value and processes. Hopefully, this can assist in reconfiguring the creative tension that needs to exist between legitimate ecclesiastical and educational perspectives.

What follows is in one sense not anything new. It is proposed simply as putting a spotlight on current best thinking and practice. This could be affirming for religion teachers as well as more inviting to teachers who are considering involvement. Detailed academic references for the items have been omitted. This does not mean that they lack academic roots and credibility. The list of principles/issues may well be "old hat" for many religion teachers; if this is the case, and if a high proportion are "on the same page", then I would see this as "good news". Inevitably there are different and conflicting estimates of the nature and purposes of school RE, and individuals will disagree with, and diverge from, the value positions stated here. But as well as proposing emphases that will address ecclesiastical drift, this material will help readers pinpoint more readily which are the issues that they consider still remain controversial and open to debate.

In brief, this is about building a narrative for RE that can give a *meaningful account of the educational value of this core spiritual/moral subject* in the curriculum that can *resource*

the spirituality of young people for life in the twenty-first century, whether or not they are formally religious or Catholic. Hopefully, this narrative can enhance both the perceptions of RE as well as its classroom practice. In turn, this might help "put religious education back on the Catholic schools map".

First, there are three main functions for RE:

- giving young people substantial access to their Catholic religious heritage with knowledge (and experience where relevant) of theology, scripture, liturgy, prayer, morality, church history etc.;
- growth in knowledge of other religious traditions that are present in Australia and of their complex interactions with society;
- development of skills in the critical evaluation of the shaping influence of culture on beliefs, values, and lifestyle, together with study of contemporary spiritual/moral issues. This aspect needs to have more prominence in the senior classes.

Elements in the Strategy

(1) Avoid Ecclesiastical Drift Language and Restore Balance by Giving More Attention to Educational and Psychological Accounts of Religious Education

Because ecclesiastical terms are so deeply embedded in the current discourse of RE, it has become difficult for educators to articulate its purposes without recourse to them (Rossiter, 2018, p. 132). But it is educationally rewarding to try to do so—reformulating one's understanding of RE in terms that are meaningful and relevant for students and teachers. In 1985, Crawford and Rossiter argued why this task is so important—and this is even more critical for Catholic RE now than it was then:

> The language of religious education structures the discussion of the subject. In effect, it determines many of the possibilities that will emerge; it has a formative influence on teachers' expectations and on what and how they teach; it influences presumptions about the types of responses they will seek from students; it provides criteria for judging what has been achieved; it influences teachers' perception and interpretation of problems in religious education; it even influences the way teachers feel about their work—"Am I a success or a failure?" This language can be oppressive if it restricts religion teachers to limited or unrealistic ways of thinking and talking about their work. (Crawford & Rossiter, 1985, p. 33)

(2) Enhancing Students' Perceptions of the Educational and Potential Personal Value of the Subject, Religious Education

The narrative for RE needs to give more attention to explaining for both students and

teachers its educational values. It is the only core subject that is directly concerned with the spiritual/moral dimension to life. It can cover this content to help *resource the personal spirituality* of young people no matter what their religious disposition. Children have a *right* to an informative education in their own cultural religious tradition; at their own personal level they will respond differently and not all will become active members of the church. But all need to become properly *educated* citizens, and this includes systematic knowledge and understanding of religion.

In addition to the above educational values of RE, attention can be given at different places in the religion curriculum to highlighting the following:

- While RE is about *educating* young people spiritually, morally and religiously, the process hopefully will enhance their capacity to find meaning and value in life, and in decision-making while trying to navigate a happy life in a challenging culture, in difficult times. The current pandemic has amplified the uncertainty and fears that many young people were already experiencing; previously secure and stable presumptions about lifestyle, freedom, career, travel, media, communications, peak experiences etc. now seem more contingent and fragile, making it more pressing to give attention to clarifying personal values and goals in life. Education cannot make young people wise—but it can *resource their wisdom*. Hopefully, the knowledge and skills gained from RE can help them become more capable of learning from their life experience.

- Students' awareness of contemporary spiritual/moral issues and the value of analytical and interpretative skills for their evaluation; growth in confidence that they can research important questions and make better informed decisions.

- Research indicates that young people with reasonable theological backgrounds are less likely to be "conned" into joining religious cults.

- As noted in the United Kingdom in the 1970s, being educated in religions has been a valuable background for people engaged in various roles of public service (e.g., doctors, nurses, paramedics, other healthcare workers, teachers, police, lawyers, etc.).

(3) The Importance of a Core Spiritual/Moral Subject in the School Curriculum

This is a long-held key element in Catholic educational philosophy and arguably the most distinctively Catholic religious aspect of Catholic schools. Catholic educational philosophy has always abided by the principle that *any school curriculum (even in state schools) that does not have a learning area that attends specifically to the spiritual/moral dimension would be judged as deficient*. This is the rationale for having RE as a core element in the curriculum of Catholic schools since their origins in Australia in the early 1800s. Arguably, *religious education is the most distinctive Catholic religious feature of Australian Catholic schooling*.

This argument suggests that RE should be regarded as philosophically the most important subject in the curriculum. The fact that it has low status and how this fuels students' dislike of RE will be considered later (see item 5, below).

(4) Religious Education as a Challenging Academic Subject Across the School Curriculum

RE should be an academic subject that in no way suffers by comparison with the academic demands made by other regular subjects. For this principle to work, it has to apply from the earliest primary school years. What is considered to be "academic" will naturally be different depending on the age and level of maturity of the students. For example, in the early years a literal "hands on" approach is a part of being "academic".

This principle means that RE should abide by all the standard protocols for student study, assignments, and examinations and assessment procedures. Where a challenging academic study is not experienced by students, they are more likely to consider RE as of little consequence in their schooling.

What happens in religion classes should be comparable with what happens in other standard academic subjects in the school curriculum. Hence, there should be a transfer of good teaching methods and skills into religion lessons.

(5) Acknowledging and Addressing the Problem of Negative Student Perceptions of Religion and Religious Education

Because of the relatively low regard for religion among many people in secularised Western countries, it is inevitable that this will flow over into poor perceptions of RE by Catholic school students and their parents. While RE is philosophically the most important life-related subject in the curriculum, its perceived life-relevance is "subverted" by a number of sociocultural and educational factors. This is explained in detail in Crawford and Rossiter (2006, chap. 14, esp. pp. 307–309).

There is no formula that will completely solve this problem. Even where students have said they "like RE" and acknowledge that they can learn something valuable about life from it, they will still feel that it is of little importance by comparison with the subjects that "count" like English, Maths etc. Acknowledging the problem as a sort of "natural" one these days is important for RE teachers—and for their mental health. Anything that can be done to enhance students' experience and perceptions of the subject, including the proposals here, will be helpful.

(6) The Potential Place for the Teacher's Own Beliefs and Commitments in Classroom Interactions: The Ethics of Teaching

This and the following four sections as a block, deal with topics that have significant ethical implications for teachers as well as students. They are concerned with the interactions and learning transactions that occur in the classroom. They have a considerable bearing on both content and pedagogy, and on expectations of what should be achieved in RE. For many years I have been puzzled why diocesan RE documents do not address these questions in any depth. While I believe that most religion teachers follow their own healthy professional instincts on these questions, there remains some ambiguity and uncertainty that, in my view, have been created and sustained by the ongoing problem of ecclesiastical drift, which affects teachers' understanding of the nature and purposes of RE.

This topic is an issue at the heart of the educator's ethics of teaching. One of the very best and most useful accounts of the question has been in the writings of Australian philosopher of education and Christian education scholar, Brian Hill. A detailed presentation of his views is provided on the Agora for Spiritual, Moral and Religious Education (ASMRE) (2020) website. The code of ethics for teaching referred to here is derived from Hill (1981).

The teacher's personal and professional commitments should not be confused. The teacher is to help students engage with the content. Teachers may refer to their own personal

views only if, and when, they judge that this makes a valid educational contribution to the classroom transactions; and the same applies to the students. Their personal views are content along with the other provided content and should be subject to the same sort of academic class evaluation. The teacher should not "privilege" their own personal views. Neither should they compromise church teachings and other content by substituting their own idiosyncratic interpretation.

Pope John Paul II made a strong statement about this potential problem in *Catechesi tradendae* in 1979:

> [The religion teacher/catechist] will not seek to keep directed towards himself and his personal opinions and attitudes the attention and the consent of the mind and heart of the person he is catechising. Above all, he will not try to inculcate his personal opinions and options as if they expressed [adequately] Christ's teaching and the lessons of his life. (n. 6)

No one (teacher or student) should ever be made to feel any psychological pressure to reveal their own personal views. Anyone can "pass" if they do not want to talk about them. If any personal sharing occurs naturally in class, that is fine and it should be valued and acknowledged. But personal testimony is not the purpose of classroom RE (while it is often more natural and prominent in voluntary religious commitment groups). Content needs to be presented impartially. The teacher should be able to model responsible, respectful, critical evaluation.

Evidence suggests that such an ethical regime in the classroom not only protects students and teachers' privacy and personal views, it makes it more likely that personal statements may be made comfortably, precisely because of the ethically respectful class environment (cf. item 7, below).

May there be Christian witnessing in the classroom? It is pertinent here to note the problem sometimes caused by misunderstanding the implications of the teacher being a Christian witness. Christian witnessing is about how Christlike individuals are in the way they relate to other people and the environment etc. This is about how the core values in a person are manifested. Witnessing goes on all the time both inside and outside the classroom. But witnessing is not a classroom pedagogy. And it is not an un-ethical licence to purvey one's own views in the classroom. See also item 8 below.

(7) Personalism: What Does Making RE Personal Mean? What Is Healthy, Authentic Personal Sharing in the Classroom? What Is Faith Sharing? How Does Personal Sharing Foster Personal and Spiritual Development? What Ethical Caution Is Needed to Prevent Manipulation?

The stance that teachers take on the issues signposted here strongly influences what they will try to achieve in their classroom interactions with students and in interactions between students. A more detailed discussion of "The Quest for Personalism and Relevance in Religious Education" is given in Crawford and Rossiter (2006, chap. 17, pp. 391–408).

Since the 1960s, one of the principal driving motifs in Catholic RE was the intention to make it more *personal* and *life relevant* for young people (Buchanan, 2005; Rossiter, 1999; Ryan, 2013). Not all the efforts in this direction were successful. In particular, where so named "personal sharing" discussions came to dominate RE, they were perceived by students as contrived rather than authentically personal; they felt uncomfortable with any perceived psychological pressure to reveal the inner self. This same problem exists to some extent in contemporary RE when too much attention is given to "sharing your personal story" or "witnessing your faith journey" (cf. 8 below)—an approach that is more relevant in retreats than in the classroom; but even in retreats it causes problems.

The desirability of healthy personalism and relevance in RE has never been in question. Perhaps now they are more pertinent and important than at any previous time. The critical questions are about how much and what sort of personalism and relevance are desired, and how teachers and the RE curriculum are to promote this in healthy and ethical ways.

Crawford (1982) in a seminal article showed that it was really *informed debate* rather than *personal sharing* that was "at home" in RE; and that a challenging academic study with the right sort of content provided the best natural context not only for such debate but also for personal insights from students when they felt comfortable enough to contribute freely to the learning process in this way. Her study also showed how wrong it was to claim that RE could not be *personal* if it was *academic*; the two are in no way incompatible. See also items 9 and 10 below, especially the need for personal/life-related content.

There is an interesting parallel evident in the discussion approach to British state school religious education in the mid-1960s. It was influenced by the writings of Loukes

(1961, 1965, 1973). But what proved problematic in both in the United Kingdom and in Catholic school discussion-oriented RE was the pedagogy. Uninformed discussion could amount to little more than sharing ignorant opinions. And the intention of having "deep" personal discussion was usually counterproductive. It could not sustain student interest for long. Also, this approach was perceived by students as a low-grade pedagogy in a subject that had little academic status; the crucial missing ingredient was a high-grade pedagogy: a serious study of the issues, in the light of up-to-date expert information. Here dialogue or discussion was one useful part of the whole study exercise—like an informed debate—and not like a time-filling, non-directed, relatively purposeless activity.

(8) The Relevance of "Sharing Your Personal Story" and "Witnessing Your Faith Journey"

The religion program *Sharing Our Story* originated in the Parramatta diocese (Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Parramatta, 1999) and was adopted or adapted in some other dioceses. It was based on Groome's (1980) Shared Christian Praxis approach. There were also references in diocesan and other literature stating or implying that "personal faith sharing" was a fundamentally important process in RE. It was regarded as the transaction in RE in which personal faith "developed".

The interest in personal sharing spread widely in RE in the 1970s following the impact of Carl Rogers' (1961, 1969) relationship-centred, humanistic psychology, where the idea of intimate personal sharing in encounter groups became popular with the religious personnel who accounted for most of the Catholic school religion teachers at the time. It influenced their thinking about, and practice of, personalism in the RE classroom. And in the next decade, this morphed into the idea of personal, *religious* faith sharing in the wake of the great popularity of Fowler's (1981) *psychological* faith development theory. The term *faith development* still remains prominent in the contemporary Catholic RE discourse.

From fifteen years of conducting adult retreats, I have regularly experienced and valued the sharing of personal insights in groups. No doubt it was important for the participants and they would see it as helpful for their own lives. Whether it was the participants' fundamental faith/fidelity relationship with God that was being shared or a "lesser" personal matter, I was never interested in wanting to know. I could comfortably leave all the details of personal faith in the hands of God and the believer. I also have firsthand experience of young people sharing personal insights in voluntary commitment groups and camps, and to a lesser extent in school retreats. In these settings, especially where

participation was voluntary, there seemed to be an unspoken acceptance that sharing of personal insights was natural and healthy. But it could not be authentic if there was any psychological pressure to contribute at this level.

The religion classroom in Catholic schools is a type of public educational forum. It is not like the voluntary retreat. Hence, I take the position that "sharing of personal/faith insights" is not a principal, or even a desirable, activity to try to make happen in this setting. The ethical principles noted in item 6 above should apply to both students and teachers in the classroom—in RE and all other subjects. It is not that personal sharing is wrong. It is not banned. It is good and healthy when free, authentic, and not contrived. And as noted in item 7, it often occurs naturally within a sound academic study; but this is a valuable, somewhat serendipitous event. It is an unintended healthy by-product of academic study and a respectful, accepting class climate, and not a programmed or expected outcome that is essential for RE. In most cases, how young people integrate learning in RE within their own beliefs, values, and lifestyle will happen privately and slowly over many years.

Problems with misunderstanding of witnessing were noted in item 6. In a study of retreats in Catholic secondary schools, Rossiter cautioned about the strategy of teachers (and others) telling their "personal faith journey" as a stimulus to get students to do the same. While students naturally are interested in any personal details volunteered by their teachers, the faith journey approach can be counterproductive, particularly if it appears contrived and rehearsed, and if there is unwelcome psychological pressure on young people to make revelations about their personal thinking and values. I expect that adolescents are uncomfortable if they feel the teacher is manoeuvring them towards talking about their "faith journey". I heard a report from some students who have labelled teachers who tried this as "over-exposures" or "over-sharers". There are related difficulties where a student personal RE journal or diary is required and even more so where this is to be inspected by teachers.

(9) Relevance in Pedagogy: The Need for Critical, Evaluative, Research-Oriented Pedagogy, Especially in the Senior Classes

Brian Hill described the mission of education as "resourcing the choosing self", while RE could make a special contribution through helping students "to *interrogate their own cultural conditioning* and reach a position of being able to develop an adequate personal framework of meaning and value" (Hill, 2006, p. 55, italics in the original; see also Hill, 2004).

Hill took for granted that the sense of freedom and individuality permeating Westernised cultures would ensure that young people will eventually construct their own meaning, values, and beliefs—even if for some (or perhaps many?) this will not be a conscious, reflective process but more a popular, cultural socialisation. Nothing could stop the "choosing"; but their choosing could be better *educated*. Hence, knowledge of contemporary issues and critical thinking would be important for informing life decisions, as well as knowledge of what one's own and other religious traditions were saying about meaning in life. The religion classroom should be the very place where one might expect that students could learn how to appraise the shaping influence of culture.

A critical pedagogy and issue-related content can be a part of religious education across the whole curriculum. How it is employed will depend upon the age and academic maturity of the students. The same style of pedagogy can and should be applied when teaching formally religious topics.

A good student-centred religious education always includes the following pedagogical elements in an age-appropriate fashion: information-rich study; knowledge of traditions; critical interpretation; informed debate; the experiential dimension; student research.

Much more detail on an inquiring, evaluative pedagogy is provided in Rossiter (2018). Examples of presentations from students, as well as from postgraduate RE teachers that illustrate mini-research projects on contemporary spiritual/moral issues are posted on the ASMRE (2020) website.

(10) Relevance in Content: Including Something on World Religions and on the Contemporary Search for Meaning, Including Contemporary Spiritual/Moral Issues

It is difficult to sell the idea of a religion curriculum that is relevant to students' lives if all the content is exclusively Catholic. While in Catholic schools it is to be expected that Catholicism would be the principal content of RE, it is recognised that most of the students are not very religious and for them a broader content would be beneficial. But even for the religious, regular churchgoing students, just studying Catholicism would be an inadequate religious education. They need the second and third elements mentioned earlier just as much as the non-religious students.

Attention to world religions has long been a part of Catholic RE, even if most diocesan syllabuses make little mention of it. In German state schools, where denominational RE is taught by regular, trained departmental teachers, study of world religions has been for many years a mandated part of the Catholic religion curriculum.

But just including some world religions content is not enough. There is a need for more issue-oriented content that is pertinent to contemporary life, including spiritual and moral issues and study of the search for meaning in a secularised, consumer society. This is important if young people are to see RE as making a valuable contribution to their education and personal development (cf. item 2). Note, for example, an elective unit in the new Brisbane Catholic Education (2019) syllabus for the course *Religion, Meaning and Life* is titled "Identity and Meaning: How People Construct Personal Identity and Community in a Consumerist Culture".

Because Catholic school Y11–12 students can already study state ATAR courses like *Studies of Religion* and *Religion and Society*, and non-ATAR *Religion and Ethics*, it has been acceptable to have "other-than-Catholic" content in RE programs at this level. So the principle of allowing for the study of spiritual/moral questions that at first sight are not formally religious can be claimed as already established in Catholic RE. At this point it is noted that in my professional opinion, the state-accredited courses can be judged not to have enough life-relevant content because they have for too long stayed with the descriptive world religions approach that dominated UK school courses in the early 1970s (Crawford and Rossiter, 2006).

(11) Participation in Research Concerned With the Discourse of Catholic Religious Education

Currently, trial data collection has commenced in a survey that investigates the extent to which teachers think that there is a problem with excessive use of ecclesiastical terms in RE (ASMRE, 2020). This is an opportunity for those engaged in RE to have their say.

Ecclesiastical terms have become so embedded in the fabric of Catholic RE that any questioning of their relevance and utility tends to be resisted, because it feels somewhat uncomfortable—as you would feel if you were questioning key words in the country's founding constitution. These terms have acquired a resilience in the discourse of RE and they are likely to remain prominent for a considerable time to come. It seemed unlikely then that, initially, the survey would show a high proportion of teachers who readily identified the problems in ecclesiastical drift. Hence the principal purpose of the questionnaire was to serve as an initial stimulus for religion teachers to think about the issues and potential problems. I called it the "stop and think!" or "reflective" questionnaire. It may perhaps incline religion teachers towards a more discerning and frugal use of ecclesiastical constructs.

The first part of the questionnaire asks for a simple valuation of various ecclesiastical and educational words for explaining the purposes of RE. This is followed by some brief narratives or scenarios for RE where an exclusively ecclesiastical narrative can be compared with others that have an educational focus.

Then questions are raised about potential problems with excessive use of ecclesiastical terms where they have displaced the term "religious education" from the RE narrative. Attention is then given to particular constructs: faith formation and Catholic identity. In addition to investigating ecclesiastical drift, the survey has items looking at the possibility of giving more curriculum space and time to critical evaluation of culture and study of the contemporary search for meaning and values in a relatively secularised society.

The questionnaire takes about fifteen minutes to complete. However, some trial participants noted that it takes longer because it prompted them to pause and think about the issues, resulting in some clarification of their views. The proportion of participants who choose the "not sure" option for questionnaire items could end up being significant as an indicator of a "stop and think" approach to the survey.

In the trial, some found it more difficult answering the initial questions evaluating the various terms; they said it was easier to answer questions than to identify potential problems related to the excessive use of ecclesiastical language. While the initial trial data has not yet been analysed and while no Catholic school systems have yet participated systematically, I anticipate that the same pattern in the results of an earlier small-scale study of the views of teachers and parents by Finn (2011) would show up again. He found that teachers (more so than parents) were respectful of ecclesiastical terms. But both groups found "the language was generally confusing and not helpful for understanding religious education" (Finn, 2011, p. 84; cf. pp. 89, 111).

Hopefully, it will be possible to get Catholic diocesan school systems interested in participating in the survey.

(12) Taking Into Account the Relative Secular Spirituality of Most Students in Catholic Schools

An important "need to know and understand" for religion teachers is the extensive secularisation of culture in Australia and elsewhere that has an inevitable bearing on how one approaches RE. Most of the pupils in Catholic schools are, or will be, non-churchgoing. Nevertheless, no matter what their religious affiliation and level of religious practice, RE can make a valuable contribution to their education and personal development resources (Rossiter, 2018).

Conclusion

This article has attempted to raise awareness about what is considered to be a significant problem for Australian Catholic school religious education going forward. And hopefully it may catalyse further research and debate on the questions considered.

To address the problem of ecclesiastical drift, it has compiled a set of principles/issues considered to be in line with best practice; it is not proposing any new approach. It recommends that efforts to revitalise the narrative of RE as a particularly valuable learning area in the Catholic school curriculum should give more attention to these aspects. And to stimulate and resource a contemporary reconfiguring of the narrative of RE, it has proffered ideas and unambiguous language that may help get RE better appreciated by teachers and students for its great potential in resourcing young people's spirituality and enhancing their capacity to construct a meaningful personal narrative for their own lives.

Also this discussion, by giving attention to the educational dynamics of RE, may help affirm what religion teachers do best: *educate*. It can help both current and prospective RE teachers by projecting more realistic *expectations* about the knowledge/skills student outcomes of RE, together with *hopes* about how it might enhance their personal spirituality. And this lessens the problem of evaluating RE in terms of changing the young people's level of religious practice. This may help give RE a more realistic, but also more prominent and important, place in the larger discourse of Australian Catholic education. In brief, these efforts may help "put religious education back on the Australian Catholic schools' map"— front and centre.

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Author Note

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Agnosticism as a Breakout Room: Theologising With Young People in Their Search for Meaning, Identity, and Spirituality

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Introduction

In this article the focus is on the concept of "theologising with youth" (*Jugendtheologie*), which has been developed for religious education classes in secondary schools in the German-speaking world. It differs from the concept of "youth spirituality" as in the work of Graham Rossiter and others in the Anglo-Saxon world, the latter having a more pre-reflective and secular connotation. However, "theologising with youth" as a creative pedagogical act, in which the possibility of religious transcendence is presented, discussed, reflected on, and evaluated can be educationally meaningful in its encounter with the so-called "secular spirituality of youth". In this article the concept of youth theology in German religious pedagogy is presented systematically, followed by a reflection on the place and role of agnosticism as a "breakout room" in theologising with youth. Agnosticism is considered to be a typical feature of the spiritual and religious development of the adolescent. We examine how the basic attitude of questioning can be interpreted in youth theology in an anthropologically critical and theologically relevant way and how it can be articulated in an educational process. In the third part of the paper the implications of this approach are briefly discussed with respect to the credibility of faith communities in their work with young people, such as in Catholic schools.

Systematic Reconstruction of the Concept of Youth Theology

It is important to determine an appropriate level and extent of critical topics that could be a valuable part of the Catholic school religion curriculum. A systematic and critical study of theology is an adult task. Catholic schools are not seminaries or theological colleges; their role is to introduce young people to theology and not to train them as theologians. Hence, the extent of controversial theological topics needs to be limited,

but a healthy, inquiring, critical approach can still be used appropriately throughout the religion curriculum. (Rossiter, 2011, p. 66)

Although Graham Rossiter writes this statement in an article on rethinking the religion curriculum in Catholic schools to address the needs of contemporary youth spirituality (an article in which he criticises the idea of a static, traditional church-related theology as the only source for religious education classes), the quote is an excellent starting point to clarify the German youth theology concept. As opposed to Rossiter's (static) view on theology, I believe that a (dynamic) theology is not a privilege for adults, or for specific adults such as bishops, ministers, theologians, or religious education teachers, but a right for every learner, for every child and adolescent, for every adult and senior. Theology "lies in the hands of every person who seriously tries to understand his/her attachment to 'ultimate concerns'" (Roebben, 2016, p. 90). There are of course differences between young people as "lay theologians" (Schlag & Schweitzer, 2011) or "ordinary theologians" (Astley, 2002) and professional academic theologians, but "young people [also] can be independent actors of religious reflection. If there are enough educational impulses and situations of challenge, young people can 'do theology' in a broad sense and develop their own theological voice . . . The basic assumption here is that there is no substantial, but only a gradual difference between children, young people and adults with regard to dealing with theologically relevant questions" (Roebben & Schlag, 2019, 446).[1]

The second basic assumption of youth theology is that there are always two different experiential modes in the lives of young people, which "are not strictly separated from each other, but are to be understood in direct relation to each other—and this through the mutual process of interpretation between teachers and students in the sense of the experience of common reflection and experimentation and . . . of a common meaningful level of relationship . . . One mode is individual (*primary*) religious communication, specifically what is classically called the level of religious feeling, religious experience and religious self-positioning: i.e. perception and experience, but also soliloquy and the search for meaning, in short, individual religiosity, which can take on and cultivate various forms of impression and expression. The other mode of (*secondary*) religious communication refers to the specifically scientific interpretation perspective on this complexity of religious experience and

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[1].   My translations from Dutch and German research literature into the English text of this paper are considered to be a major contribution to the "international knowledge transfer" that is urgently needed in the discourse on the future of religious education (Schweitzer & Schreiner, 2019).

expression: here it is a matter of the interpretive vitalization of biblical and dogmatic contents and traditions and thus of a theological act of interpretation" (Roebben & Schlag, 2019, p. 448).

The scope of this article is precisely to connect perceptions of young people's spirituality (Rossiter) or religiosity (Roebben & Schlag)—as *primary* communication; and to see how their perceptions can be educationally deepened and reflected within a theological framework—as *secondary* communication—in youth theology. The ongoing academic conversation on "being spiritual but not religious" (e.g., Ammermann, 2013) in the sociology of religion and the definition of theology in the context of children's and youth theology in Germany can however not be discussed in the limited space of this article.

The concept of youth theology or, better, of "theologising with youth" in its active-pedagogical form has its origin in the divergence from the concept of children's theology. This very successful new religious educational approach in German primary schools was established with the publication of the first yearbook of children's theology (*Jahrbuch für Kindertheologie*) in 2002 and consolidated first in a German and later in an international network of children's theology. People from other interest groups and academic guilds such as the *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* and the Child Theology Movement, among others, joined the discourse, which became more and more internationally received (e.g., Büttner, 2007; Zimmermann, 2015). The German network of youth theology was founded in the religious educational institute of Loccum (September 4–6, 2011) and published its first yearbook in 2013. International scholars were invited to the German network sessions to discuss topics such as youth theology and church (in Zürich 2014) and youth theology and interreligious encounter (in Dortmund 2015). The habitat of children's theology and in its wake of youth theology was mainly to be found in the field of religious pedagogy for schools, located in German teacher education departments at universities and higher institutions of education (Schweitzer, 2014).

What then are the gradual differences between children's theology and youth theology that contribute to the fact that the perception of (in *primary* communication) and the learning of (in *secondary* communication) substantial elements of faith in youth-theological learning processes are different from those in child-theological learning processes? Five aspects should be considered.

First, adolescence is often characterised by a critical approach to one's own childlike faith. "A revision . . . of religious-cognitive childhood patterns" (Riegel & Faix, 2015, p. 15) and a new construction of the world view are necessary in this phase, "even if this is . . . not

an overall system and total work of art, but rather remains patchwork" (Heinz Streib and Carsten Gennerich, quoted in Dieterich, 2012, p. 16). One should not close one's eyes to the fact that many young people also simply say goodbye to the faith as a whole.

In connection with this, adolescence often reveals an elementary experience of doubt. Young people fight the faith in which they were socialised at critical points, but without the guarantee that there are new certainties. The "dam bursts of faith" (*Einbruchstellen des Glaubens*)—according to Karl Ernst Nipkow (1987), these are theodicy, explanation of the world, existence of God, mediation of faith—are more likely to be experienced as dam bursts in everyday life, flooding the self-evidence of (childlike) faith. This doubt cannot only unsettle the seeking adolescent (up to the radical rejection of a position of faith), but can also positively challenge him/her to deal with faith again—without security but not without interest. This basic attitude of agnosticism is positively described in (religious) identity formation research as "a willing suspension of disbelief" (see below).

Thirdly, in this context, the didactic dynamics of youth theology must also be thought about and implemented differently from within children's theology. The spontaneous, often over-romanticised childlike amazement that is perceived and didactically absorbed as raw material for children's theology is no longer present in adolescence. Children usually say what they think and often surprise with creative ideas and vivid images. Young people think more abstractly, are more cautious, are more critical of the world and are more easily irritated by empty words that do not touch the core of their question. New, especially biographical and triggering learning formats are needed in youth theology, so that young people can "overcome old conventionalities and build post-conventionality" (Roebben & Schlag, 2019, p. 453).

Fourth, the developmental tasks in adolescence are complex and multifaceted. "The common denominator of these developments is the development of individual autonomy, which . . . must be lived in the tension between socio-cultural independence and relatively strong economic dependence" (Riegel & Faix, 2015, p. 15). Authenticity and the responsiveness of the adult are of crucial importance in this complexity. Open and honest opportunities for interaction between young people and adults are part of the basic vocabulary of youth theology.

And finally, critical resistance during adolescence should be perceived and taken seriously as "prophetic power" in society and church. Dorothee Sölle argued in 1983 as follows: "Young people have a strong interest in living credibly and a right to demand more than the realization of what is 'feasible'. With their criticism and their desire to think

differently, they stand in the best Jewish and Christian tradition. For this tradition has always talked about change and conversion. The question of this tradition was not: 'What is feasible?', but 'What is just? What is the will of God in a particular situation?' This tradition admonishes us to know exactly what justice is . . . If we let go of this question, we have betrayed the biblical tradition" (Sölle, 1983, pp. 55–56). Young people provoke society and the church to strive not for what is feasible but for what is just. The climate protest movement of young people in Europe (#fridaysforfuture) is a current example of this. The rationale speaks for itself: "The true growth we need is the growth of love, of doing things together, of commitment and especially of imagination, hope, passion for life, respect for nature and the growth of consciousness. And above all: the growth of courage. Does it sound naive?" (De Wever & Gantois, 2019, pp. 66–67). It speaks for itself that a youth-theological appropriation of this dynamic of hope is completely counterproductive if it is instrumentalised for the sake of the future of the church and if the prophetic sting that constitutes its vitality is removed (Roebben, 2012, pp. 193–195).

Youth Theology and
the Challenge of Agnosticism

In the 1980s, Nipkow could still speak of the "dam bursts of Christian faith" that were critically questioned by young people. In our time this is no longer the case. They do not deal with the possibility of faith anymore because it is simply no longer given. They do not care whether God exists or not and whether he influences their daily life. They do not connect their life and suffering experiences with God "spontaneously", because he simply does not appear "spontaneously" in their life world. Their existential experiences are purely worldly and are shared with "worldly" companions. "In dealing with the problem of theodicy… young people are attentive to the world and the human being on the one hand, but on the other hand they are relaxed, unagitated and not very traditionally oriented in dealing with the vocabulary of God" (Stögbauer, 2015, pp. 187–188). There are more urgent issues than religion, church, and God, such as climate change, social injustice, and racism. What keeps them going is, as always for everyone in puberty, "negotiating the perils of adolescence" (Crawford & Rossiter, 2016, pp. 202–227), their "search for meaning" (pp. 80–88), and their "finding a way through the cultural maze" (pp. 129–170). But they do this with lots of passion and engagement: young people still want to save the world. From my own experience (that of myself and my own children) I know—as no doubt many readers of this article do— that the time between childhood and (young) adulthood is very confusing and complicated.

With a narrative interlude I hope to highlight some lines of puberty as a highly complex and at the same time productive time of human life. I will then re-read this narrative from an anthropological and theological perspective with regard to its youth-theological meaning and from an educational perspective with regard to learning processes in school.

A Small Cartography of Puberty

The story of Holden Caulfield in Jerome D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* (1951/2010) is known to many as a typical example of an outsider novel. Because of his headstrong character, the 16-year-old main character is angry with everyone, leaves school and goes out into the wide world. There he meets old friends, better-knowing teachers, adult strangers who confront him with, on the one hand, the harshness of the world out there, and on the other hand, his burgeoning emotional and sexual identity in here. He becomes desperate: he loses his money, his temperament, and his trust in people. He can no longer return to the past of his childhood, but the way into the future is also uncertain. He has learned one thing: "Trust no one (especially not 'traditional adults'), trust only yourself (as a 'new' adult). Your path in life can only be followed through you". At the end of the novel, the sexually tinted title of the book takes on an existential meaning: Holden experiences himself as the person who wants to protect young friends from the damage of traditional adulthood. He wants to hold them in the rye field and protect them for the leap into the abyss of traditional adulthood.

> Anyway, I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids, and nobody's around—nobody big, I mean—except me. And I'm standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff—I mean if they're running and they don't look where they're going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That's all I'd do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all. I know it's crazy, but that's the only thing I'd really like to be. I know it's crazy.
> (Salinger, 2010, p. 186)

The metaphor is convincing. A young man reaches the limits of pubertal behaviour, is confronted with the question of the meaning of life, but does not want to dare to make the leap to an unsatisfactory maturity. He also wants to save others from this leap. In his story, four central elements of a youthful growth process emerge, which form the small cartography of puberty: (1) getting lost in a disorienting time out; (2) setting out on the path and trying out

alternatives; (3) dealing with opacity and loneliness; and (4) beginning to explore one's own reality of life with a view to finding new ways out.

A second example confirms this cartography. It is about Bob Dylan's early years in the late 1950s—roughly the same time frame as the main character in Salinger's novel—in a disoriented and at the same time euphoric post–World War II America. Dylan retrospectively condenses his own experiences as a not-yet-adult in his autobiography. Here, too, there are the four steps: (1) a time out "to change inner thought patterns" (Dylan, 2004, p. 71) and to leave the traditional road; (2) daring to get outside, where the world is dangerous and uncertain, "like the unbroken sea of frost that lay outside the window and you had to have awkward footgear to walk on it" (p. 35); (3) dealing with an environment that is in itself uncertain as well, with "no idea which one of these stages America was in. There was nobody to check with. A certain rude rhythm was making it all sway, though. It was pointless to think about it. Whatever you were thinking could be dead wrong" (p. 35); and (4) "to learn how to telescope things, ideas. Things were too big to see all at once, like all the books in the library—everything laying around on all tables" (p. 61). The protest singer Dylan appropriated a way of life in his music in order to come to terms with the insecurity in himself and in his environment. In the two examples it becomes clear how puberty as a "moratorium" (Erik Erikson) cannot only unsettle young people but also encourage them to take new and original paths.

Anthropological and Theological Re-reading

At the end of Salinger's novel, one thing becomes clear to Holden: "The mark of the immature man is that he wants to die nobly for a cause, while the mark of the mature man is that he wants to live humbly for one" (Salinger, 2010, p. 203). Giving your life: dying nobly for something or living consistently for something? The challenge of puberty is to examine whether the first naivety of radical childlike devotion must definitely be discarded in view of growing up or whether it can be rediscovered and meaningfully and critically experienced in a second naivety (Paul Ricœur) as a young adult.

Graham Rossiter elaborates together with Marisa Crawford on this paradox in their groundbreaking book on the spirituality of young people:

> Growth towards maturity in meaning involves replacing *false certainties* with *true uncertainties*. It means learning how to cope with a natural level of complexity and live with the valuable partial meanings that individuals can construct in connection with community life; and it includes valuing traditional meanings even if they are

reinterpreted anew from generation to generation. . . . . it can be more suited to some personalities than others; some find it difficult to live with too many "loose ends", especially as regards their ultimate meanings. Inevitably, some will reject this view as relativism of a sort because it admits to a level of uncertainty in personal knowledge that they are not prepared to accept. (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, p. 85)

This task of life never ends: again and again, the human being must reassure him- or herself about the existential question of how he/she can understand and realise his/her youthful passion and longing in new phases of life, in the field of tension between "idem" and "ipse" (Paul Ricœur), between who one is and who one can become, without losing oneself. The four moments (losing, setting out, experiencing loneliness, and discovering new horizons) are generically part of this process of (young) adult self-discovery.

Also theologically this journey is relevant and interesting: the young person has a right to a time out, to say goodbye to the childlike faith, a time in which everything can be rediscovered, in which the loneliness of one's own imperfect decision hurts and in which new horizons of trust are revealed. It is a theological probationary period, away from traditional and self-evident faith and at the same time open to the conscious suspension of non-belief. In line with Donald Schön the practical theologian Heather Walton defines this "willing suspension of disbelief" as a process of "risk taking, adventure and artistry. We fashion knowledge creatively when faced by the challenge of the unknown . . . The 'willing suspension of disbelief' is a necessary part of the process of opening ourselves up to new possibilities and ways of thinking/acting" (Schön, quoted in Walton, 2014, p. xix). To be able to float freely between what was and what is to come, between childlike security and adult insecurity, between past knowledge and not-yet-knowledge, between "false certainties and true uncertainties" (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, p. 85) is a right of every adolescent. I consider it here as a right to theological agnosticism. Finding new confidence, dedicating oneself again to a life project (no longer as a child, but in a second revised naivety), passing self-criticism, and rediscovering and living the mystery of one's own life in a new critical way are essential developmental tasks of the adolescent.

Dealing With Agnosticism as an Educational "Breakout Room" in Youth Theology

The ideal way for religious education to deal with youthful agnosticism is to take this development from the first to the second naivety seriously and to support it sensitively— without appropriation on the one hand and disqualification on the other. It is important to create a "breakout room" for agnosticism: a time out and a safe space for experimentation

and alternatives. In the framework of theologising with youth one can determine generative agnostic themes together with young people, listen to their passions and longings and their need for spiritual clarity, create with them space for criticism of one's own childlike faith, and develop with them a variety of new ways of theologising. One could argue with the German religious educationalist Heinz Streib: "The more radical the forgetting of tradition, the more necessary is theological reflection. But of special importance for this process of reflection is the communication of inter-individual differences in the present world, in our case: the theological dialogue between the young people themselves" (Streib, 2015, p. 163).

Religious education in schools can offer a safe space to deal with the possibility of an agnostic position. In the interaction with other young people, the adoption of the childlike faith, the confrontation with dam bursts of faith, and the prophetic power of faith (what is "just" rather than what is "feasible", according to Sölle; see above) can be tried out and activated by means of "hermeneutically irritating" didactical impulses (Roebben, 2019, p. 58) for action and thought and in conversation with authentic adults. The challenge remains to engage explicitly with young people performatively and narratively in the possibility of agnosticism, which is a "practice in a non-traditional approach to tradition", according to the German religious educationalist Rudolf Englert (quoted in Büttner, 2012, p. 153). "The question is not: Do I orientate myself by a given tradition or do I decide for myself? The question is: In which story do I get entangled? In light of which meaningful tradition do I 'read' my life? Reflection on this is an educational task of the first order" (Englert, in Büttner, 2012, p. 153).

Agnosticism, Youth Theology,
and the Catholic school

So, the next question needs to be raised: What about schools in the Catholic tradition? Are they prepared to open up their "comfort zone" of Christian faith for their students, in order to offer them "breakout rooms" for searching, doubting, experimenting, and performing in their faith development—in short, for agnosticism? Are these spaces *safe* enough? And are schools *brave* enough to deal with them? Can "Catholic education authorities . . . [be persuaded] to accept, rather than condemn or ignore, the significant change in contemporary spirituality" (Rossiter, 2010, p. 129)? Are they ready to admit that "ecclesiastical drift" is changing the ideology of the Catholic school thoroughly (Rossiter, 2020), but that this drift can also be a blessing in the long run: young people repositioning themselves critically and autonomously in the life of faith?

Do schools leave them alone in this quest for meaning, identity, and spirituality? Or do they show the courage of their convictions? Do they offer them educational support? Catholic schools are not only— in the same way as the official church—*ecclesia docens* but also *ecclesia discens*, a learning community in which all can and should learn from and with each other. The four elements of the agnostic position, discussed in the second part of this article, can help in outlining new curricula in religious education and in understanding the mission of the Catholic school. It is my contention that young people have the right to a religious education that does give them a back-up when they are (1) getting lost in disorienting time out; (2) setting out on the path and trying out alternatives; (3) dealing with opacity and loneliness; and (4) beginning to explore their own reality of life with a view to finding new ways out. And it should go without saying that this approach contributes to internal plurality in the classroom. The German religious educationalist Katharina Kammeyer argues that this can be a real blessing for the school: "Methods that respond to individual learning paths promote an understanding of theology that lives from the plurality of possible interpretations. To discuss this plurality with one another . . . is a central element of theological conversations. When the conversation itself deals with diversity, a new level, the meta-level, is reached" (Kammeyer, 2012, p. 199).

Conclusion

On the first row of this unique learning experience stands the religious education teacher. Anyone who, as a teacher, sets the fire to young people and irritates them hermeneutically with good learning materials and with "reasons for living" (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006) that are not self-evident and who provides them with a theological "language game" to do so, is engaging in creating fireworks. Anyone who empowers young people with regard to the walk of life gets the wind from the front. Is the Catholic school administration ready to join their teachers in this process, to support them, and to learn from them? Ultimately, this is all about the street credibility of the church in youth culture. The theology *of* young people should be perceived, interpreted, and developed on an equal footing *with* young people as a new theology *for* young people—including its pious, enthusiastic, critical, creative, agnostic, and abstinent dimensions. So there is still much work to be done to understand the ever new and creative impact of the Holy Spirit in the lives of young people, in their theologies, and from there on in their religious education.

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Witnesses to Faith: Building Upon the Religious Spirituality
of Early Childhood Teachers in Catholic Schools

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Introduction

Teachers in Catholic schools are called to be witnesses of the faith; to be living examples of what it means to be part of the church community. They are entrusted to convey the Catholic faith tradition to the children in their class; in particular, through the teaching of religious education (RE). Given that many teachers in religious schools have a fragmentary and fluid understanding of faith (Casson, 2019, p. 520), it is crucial that teachers themselves have opportunities to develop their own faith—to experience opportunities for faith formation that engage them as individuals and as members of the Catholic community. Existing literature advocates for spirituality as the starting point to religious development (Grajczonek, 2010) and suggests opportunities for teachers that allow for both personal and professional faith formation experiences for the teachers themselves (Scharf, Hackett, & Lavery, 2020). By drawing on the work of Rossiter (2012, 2018) and the existing research, this article presents findings from an investigation that explored Catholic early childhood teachers' understandings and experiences of a spiritual and faith formation-based program: the T.I.T.U.S. Project.

Religious Education in Catholic Schools
in Western Australia

The purpose of teaching classroom RE in Catholic schools is to assist children to grow in their knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith tradition and of how followers of this tradition integrate this wisdom into their lives and the culture of their time (Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE], 1988, n. 69). This key learning area complements children's spiritual and religious formation as part of their general human capabilities in their development of a disposition as a confident, creative, and civic person

and as a missionary disciple (Council of Australian Governments Education Council [CAGEC], 2019; McGunnigle & Hackett, 2015; National Catholic Education Commission [NCEC], 2018, p. 5). Rossiter (2018) proposes that such an integrated disposition is called "religious spirituality" or "religiosity". He defines religiosity as:

> a religious spirituality with engagement in religious activities and thinking; personal and communal prayer and participation in religious rituals in a community of faith are prominent. Religiosity is a spirituality that is clearly referenced to religion.
>
> A religious spirituality is where a basic human spirituality is informed and motivated by religious beliefs and commitments. The purpose of religion could be interpreted as trying to enhance people's basic human spirituality. (p. 16)

This definition implies that religious spirituality builds upon a basic or innate human spirituality. A child's human spirituality is formed as a school assists him or her to become a confident, creative, and civic person. In a Catholic school, such a formation is deepened through a focus on evangelisation activities in the curriculum and life of the school, including through the teaching of RE (CCE, 1977, nn. 19, 30; McGunnigle & Hackett, 2015; Robinson & Hackett, 2019a). This formation contributes to the religious spirituality of children; in other words, the development of an integrated Christian person (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997, n. 75). Children can learn about and perhaps even become part of the "community of missionary disciples" (Francis, 2013, nn. 24, 120) as they experience the three key languages of the Catholic school curriculum (Francis, 2015); namely, through deeper learning (head), deeper discerning (heart) and deeper missioning (hands) (Robinson & Hackett, 2019a, p. 285). Pope Francis reminds educators that "the three languages [must be] in harmony: that the child think about what he feels and does, feels what he thinks and does, and does that which he thinks and feels" (Zenit Staff, 2015). These languages are experienced by the child to move him or her away from an inordinate focus on oneself toward a disposition of "love of God and love of neighbour" (Mark 12:30-31). The formation galvanises a Catholic school curriculum to provide a sense of meaning and purpose for a child (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2012, p. 40) and to ground him or her with a sense of wellbeing, and allows him or her to consider vocational choices (Robinson & Hackett, 2019a).

Teachers as
Witnesses to Faith

Crucial to children's integral formation of their human and religious spirituality within a Catholic school setting is the classroom teacher (CCE, 1982, nn. 15, 28). The teacher

is considered to be an "educator"; that is, one who "is not simply a professional person who systematically transmits a body of knowledge [but] understood as 'educator'—one who helps to form human persons" (CCE, 1982, n. 16). The role of the classroom teacher in a Catholic school is twofold: first, to assist in the formation of children's civic growth to complement their human spirituality (CAGEC, 2019; CCE, 1988, n. 67) in line with "the principles of the Gospel" (CCE, 1982, n. 19); secondly, to assist in the formation of children's awareness of the Transcendent to complement their religious spirituality (CCE, 1982, n. 17). Indeed, this latter obligation is incumbent on the classroom RE teacher (CCE, 1988, n. 96).

Not only must these teachers have a thorough content knowledge and teaching prowess to teach children how to be human and Christ-like (Hackett, 2007), they also need to show authentic qualities of what this means (CCE, 1988, n. 96). As Pope Paul VI (1975) emphasised to lay people, "Modern man [*sic*] listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (n. 41). Such an example by the teacher presents a lived synthesis of faith, culture, and life (CCE, 1982, n. 29) that allows for genuine and open dialogue between the teacher and the child (CCE, 1982, n. 21; 1988, n. 96). The classroom teacher becomes an "educator" of human and religious spirituality because he or she can communicate and model a genuine professional faith persona confidently (Hackett, 2010) to the children in his or her care; that is, he or she can be a "witness, specialist and moderator at the same time" (Pollefeyt, 2020, p. 9).

This synthesis of a confident professional faith persona in a teacher occurs if he or she has the personal and professional faith formation experiences themselves. Hackett (2010) refers to this as "experiential content knowledge". The classroom RE teacher has the confidence to relate to and lead the children in understanding and empathising with the spiritual and the religious. The teacher displays a self-efficacy or "groundedness" that imparts a confidence or trust in the children. In turn, "it offers a great opportunity for the teachers to provide the students with a living example of what it means to be a member of that great community which is the Church" (CCE, 1982, n. 220).

Robinson and Hackett (2019b) have proposed that growth in religious spirituality in a school setting may occur with a focus on enhancing the spiritual and religious capabilities of children. However, if the self-efficacy of the teacher is not well grounded, he or she will struggle or be unable to teach effectively (NCEC, 2017, p. 3); then there is the danger that harm may be done to the religious spirituality of the children (CCE, 1988, n. 97). Scharf, Hackett, and Lavery (2020) have found that educators require a spiritual and faith formation program that provides rigorous knowledge (head), experiential and reflective activities

(heart), as well opportunities for focused actions and mentoring (hands) that encourage and deepen their experiential content knowledge. The educators learn to empathise with how others such as children can connect with a growing transcendence towards God (Dowling et al., 2004, pp. 428–431).

Early Childhood Teachers' Understandings
of Religious Spirituality

Prior to undertaking this investigation into teachers' understandings of religious spirituality, and as explicated in this article, existing discourse identified a need for teachers of RE to possess this experiential content knowledge (Scharf, Hackett, & Lavery, 2020). In addition, the researchers (that is, the authors) were informed, anecdotally, of a desire for more opportunities for Catholic primary school staff to engage in spiritual and faith formation-based professional development. From these initial discussions, the T.I.T.U.S. Project was borne. T.I.T.U.S. (Testament in Teachers Using Scripture) was developed to meet the needs of Catholic primary school teachers by providing a series of sessions, rather than a one-off experience, that would assist them both personally and professionally. The formation-based sessions were developed and delivered by a facilitator with expertise in the area of spiritual and religious formation and with a focus on the Catholic primary school setting. A researcher was engaged to sit alongside the facilitator and engage the participants in the research elements of the project, as outlined in the Research Design. Twelve early childhood teachers from one Catholic primary school formed the participant sample. The principal of this primary school requested the professional development for the school's early childhood staff, that is, for teachers of children from pre-kindergarten (three-year-olds) through to year three. As such, participation in the professional development was mandatory. However, as the research was independent of the formation sessions, participation in the research was by invitation and informed consent was gained from each participant.

The T.I.T.U.S. Project

The aim of the project was to engage the twelve early childhood educators in a series of formation sessions using scripture as an avenue to develop their personal spiritual and faith formation. Consideration of current research was taken into account to determine how best to structure each session. The document *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education* (NCEC, 2017) suggests that "formation builds on the experience of the participants through processes of input, reflection, sharing and application. The facilitator

does not know everything but instead lets the process, participants and Holy Spirit do the work" (p. 18). Taking this into account, a shared human experience was the starting point for each session and this was related to a spiritual concept. Following this, the spiritual concept was connected to a religious concept. This connection was achieved by drawing on the New Testament. For example, in Session 3, participants were read a picture book by the facilitator, titled *Let's Eat*, by Ana Zamorano, which explored the themes of community and table fellowship. The teachers were initially asked to reflect on their own experiences of the rituals and traditions they had experienced when preparing or taking part in a meal. This concept was connected to the notion of community to engage the teachers' spirituality. The participants were then provided with the contextual background of the Preparation for the Passover and the Institution of the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:7-20). Both scripture passages connected community and table fellowship as a human and spiritual concept to a religious one. Following this, the teachers were invited to experience the scripture story through a play-based storytelling method. The facilitator encouraged the teachers to reflect on the relationship between the scripture story and their own lives by journalling their responses to various questions; and these opportunities were presented at various points within the sessions. Questions included: "What communities do you belong to and why?" and "What connections can you see between the scripture story of the Last Supper and your own life in regards to the theme of community?" The participants were encouraged to respond to the questions in a form that most suited them, such as by writing words, referring to symbols, or drawing images. Other themes explored in the sessions included belonging, empathy, compassion, gratitude, and happiness.

A similarity between each of the sessions was the way in which each scripture story was shared. Each play-based storytelling method focused on the use of telling story orally. Existing literature discusses the powerful role that storytelling can play, specifically in relation to the telling of religious stories in the oral tradition. Rossiter (2012) draws on the work of Power (2010). He states that "stories are always intended to be entertaining and engaging; but the hallmark of religious stories is their embedded meanings about the values, purpose and direction to life—they are never just about entertainment" (Rossiter, 2012, p. 16).

Research Design

To best gather the teachers' understandings and perspectives of religious spirituality and to ascertain their experiences of the T.I.T.U.S. Project, a qualitative approach to research

was selected. Within a qualitative approach, an interpretivist theoretical perspective was chosen as most appropriate. Researching within a qualitative framework facilitated the collection of multiple sources of narrative data, and in this project three methods were utilised: surveys, interviews, and journalling.

Surveys. An online survey was employed as the first method of data collection. Survey is widely used in qualitative research as it provides an effective means of gathering participant responses (Babbie, 2016). The online survey was developed through SurveyMonkey and distributed via email to the teachers. The survey was completed prior to the commencement of the formation sessions as a way to determine the variety of previous experiences the teachers had had with spirituality and faith formation and with their teaching experiences.

Journalling. At the first of the four sessions the teachers were provided with a journal. The journal formed the second method of data collection. Journalling is a qualitative tool that can provide insight into participants' personal experiences and feelings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), thus making it a suitable method for uncovering the teachers' formational experiences. Time was made available within each of the sessions for the teachers to journal. On some occasions the facilitator provided themes and questions for the teachers to focus their journalling on, and on other occasions participants were invited to journal freely. Participants were asked to bring their journal with them to the final interview, which formed the third method of data collection.

Interviews. At the conclusion of the four sessions, participants were interviewed individually. A semi-structured form of interview was used, and the interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed. The teachers were asked to bring with them their journal as well as one creative item made within the sessions; these items assisted the researcher in asking probing questions. Questions asked in the interview focused on the teachers' experiences of spirituality, faith, personal formation, scripture confidence and knowledge, and their teaching of RE.

The Process of Analysis

Thematic coding was adopted to analyse each data set independently. Specifically, open coding was used through a process of reading and re-reading each set of data to identify patterns, resulting in codes. These codes were then grouped into the emergent themes (Babbie, 2016). Survey data were printed and coded initially, followed by the interview

transcripts and lastly the journals. Findings pertaining specifically to religious spirituality are presented in this article.

Results

Religious spirituality—What did the early childhood teachers have to say? Findings from the T.I.T.U.S. Project appropriate within the scope of this article are presented in this section for discussion. The teachers who participated in the research demonstrated that they had an understanding of spirituality constructed from their own personal experiences. However, findings suggested that whilst they held a personal understanding of spirituality, they themselves acknowledged a lack of focus on spirituality in their RE lessons. Furthermore, the teachers identified that they could further enhance the translation of their understanding of a religious spirituality to their pedagogy. Survey and interview data are drawn upon as evidence of the thematic findings. Pseudonyms are used to refer to data from specific teachers. Data gathered from the journals are referred to only through questioning in the interviews and is otherwise beyond the scope of this paper.

Spirituality: A basic human capability. The survey data that were employed to ascertain the early childhood teachers' perspectives and experiences prior to participating in the T.I.T.U.S. Project indicated that nine of the twelve teachers had not undertaken professional learning or experiences in the area of spirituality. In addition, all twelve teachers responded that they had been provided with many opportunities for religious learning and experience, although they expressed that little connection to spirituality had been made during these opportunities. Findings from the survey clearly revealed that the knowledge and understandings of spirituality that the teachers possessed were gathered through personal experience. It was not surprising, therefore, to find that for most teachers spirituality was viewed through a religious lens. The interview data illustrated teachers' desire to connect to spirituality, which they explained was a natural part of being human. Opportunities provided during the T.I.T.U.S. sessions to connect to their spiritual capacity were well received by the teachers:

> I found the journalling really gave me time to connect with my self . . . you know, to think. (Jane)
>
> > I mean everyone is spiritual, but I hadn't really given it much thought . . .
> I really liked how we had time just to stop and reflect. (Bree)

> The journalling was really a spiritual time, like a time of personal growth for me . . . to think about myself and my family and me as a teacher. (Tania)

The teachers' description of spirituality as an innate capability resonates with existing literature that explains the spiritual as an essential capability that resides alongside the cognitive, emotional, and physical capabilities of being human (Casson, 2019; De Souza, 2016; Kim & Esquivel, 2011). The responses provided by the teachers support Hay's (2006) claim that people have a natural openness to the spiritual dimension of life. The spiritual capability requires activation and nourishment through opportunities for experience and expression (King, 2013). The teachers involved in this research articulated their own sense of openness to the spiritual when participating in the formation sessions, and, in particular, they commented on the use of the journal as an opportunity for them to engage with their spirituality.

To return to the work of Rossiter (2018, p. 16), the teachers in this investigation supported his suggestion of a basic human spirituality. Rossiter described all people as possessing a genetic capacity for spirituality. He suggested that people enter into this basic spiritual capability through their virtues, their thinking, and their behaviours, even if they do not articulate spirituality in this particular way.

Where is the spirituality in religious education? Within the T.I.T.U.S. formation sessions, the early childhood teachers were encouraged to reflect not only on their own personal spirituality and faith but also on that of the children in their class. In particular, the teachers were facilitated to make connections between their own formation and that of their students within the learning area of RE. In Western Australian Catholic schools, RE is an activity described as both formative and educative (Cullen, 2019). As a mandated learning area (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009), the focus of RE is the development of knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith (CCE, 1988, n. 69). However, within the wider context of the Catholic school, conversion to the faith is also a hope. Within the formation sessions, teachers were facilitated by the structure of the sessions to engage in a human experience offering a spiritual opportunity that then connected to a religious theme. Interview findings suggested that teachers found this structure to be personally beneficial and allowed them to reflect on their own teaching of RE. In doing so, the teachers responded that they were unintentionally omitting spirituality from their lessons and that, by including the spiritual, they may better engage the students in their class.

I liked how the sessions started with the spiritual because it made me actually think about it, in my own life and in how I do it in class and then, I guess, I liked how [to use] the scripture by starting with the spiritual theme. (Tania)

Whereas before these sessions I would read a scripture story but not really relate it to my life or translate it to my teaching . . . these sessions reminded me that we've got to sort of start off with just wondering and about a human experience and then engage the children through that into something religious. (Janet)

The sessions have made me think I need to make more time, like time for reflecting and thinking for my kids . . . the whole idea of starting with something spiritual and I saw the benefits of this for me. (Mia)

The journalling I really enjoyed. It was so good to be made to stop, to have some down time and reflect. Made me think my students would probably enjoy that time too! (Bec)

The notion that spirituality is the starting point to more formal RE is documented in the work of Grajczonek (2010). In that work, Grajczonek suggested that spirituality, as an innate capability, must be engaged before more religious learning and experience can be explored with children. Early childhood educators have a key role in embedding spiritual development when planning the curriculum and must ensure that they are attending to the spiritual domains of the child, alongside the cognitive and affective domains (Grajczonek, 2012; Robinson 2017). To explicitly address children's spirituality requires that educators plan for this capability alongside others within a holistic approach to children's learning and development (Robinson, 2017). Findings from the T.I.T.U.S. Project clearly suggest a realisation from teachers that spirituality must form more of a focus as a starting point within their own teaching of RE.

Translating Religious Spirituality
From an Understanding Into Practice

The classroom teacher is described as critical to children's religious spirituality (CCE, 1982, nn. 15, 28) and therefore, as evidenced through the T.I.T.U.S. Project, it is necessary that teachers be provided with opportunities for their own spiritual and faith formation. The teachers involved in this investigation articulated that in experiencing their own formation, they reflected on their teaching of RE and the ways in which they offer spiritual and faith formational experiences for their students. Rossiter (2018) described religious spirituality or "religiosity" as an engagement in religious activities and thinking, and personal and

communal prayer, and participation in religious rituals in a community of faith (p. 18). He described spirituality in this way to be motivated by religious beliefs and commitments. In the Catholic school context, teachers have a unique opportunity to teach the learning area of RE through the engagement of children's spirituality and, in doing so, to enhance children's religiosity. A challenge articulated by the teachers in the present investigation was the translation from understanding this process to enacting it within their early childhood classrooms:

> The sessions made me realise how much I enjoyed starting with something spiritual, like I really connected with the belonging theme, and how I should do this with my students but often I get straight into the religion, so yeah I really see a connection here for my teaching. The structure was so good starting with the spiritual into faith. (Thea)

> I found the activities we did, making the story boxes and responding to scripture through drawing and that really like, um, formational 'cos like everyone's sitting around making stuff and kind of in the mode talking about the story . . . yeah . . . I need to do more of this 'cos I could see how my kids would love to do that too. (Lee)

> The sessions really helped me to understand the scripture stories better so I guess I need to somehow fit more of this into my lesson so I know what I'm talking about now when I teach it in class. (Bec)

Implementing spiritual and religious capabilities, as proposed in the work of McGunnigle and Hackett (2015), is one way that teachers may be assisted to ensure opportunities for both spirituality and religiosity within the Catholic school context. Spiritual and religious capabilities offer a framework to intentionally plan for the promotion of children's spiritual and religious development in the hope that they develop Christian dispositions (Robinson & Hackett, 2019b). Robinson and Hackett (2019a) suggest that by embedding spiritual and religious capabilities, teachers may be able to enact the word of Pope Francis through deeper learning, deeper discerning, and deeper missioning in the Catholic school context.

Conclusion

The findings presented in this article provide the foundations for further research and discourse on teachers' own spiritual and faith formation and, in particular, how these formational experiences influence their teaching of RE. By drawing on the work of Rossiter

(2018), the T.I.T.U.S. Project was developed to meet the needs of early childhood teachers by providing a series of formation-based sessions that utilised scripture as a means for engaging teachers in spiritual and faith opportunities. The teachers in this investigation highlighted the ongoing requirement for professional development that goes beyond pedagogical practice to engage their inner self: their own personal spirituality and faith. If opportunities such as the T.I.T.U.S. Project continue to be offered, teachers of RE in Catholic schools have a real possibility of developing a "grounded-ness" and of becoming a living example of what it means to be part of a Catholic community and this, in turn, could impart a confidence or trust in the children they teach (CCE, 1982, n. 220).

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Celebrating Christmas in the Polish Family

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Introduction

Nowadays in Poland (like in most Central and Eastern European countries) important changes are occurring in the structure and functions of society. Political, economic and cultural transformation from a socialist type of society to a liberal, capitalist one has seemed to be self-evident, but now, approximately thirty years after the collapse of communism in Poland, the process of transition is perceived as highly problematic (Osewska, 2011, pp. 71–88). The existential, psychological and sociological transition is experienced as a far more complex process than expected and it is taking a very long time to achieve its goals; yet at the same time (especially since Poland joined the European Union in 2004), a new, surprising phenomenon has appeared. Poles are now living in a time of transition, where, in one sense, the old system is present, but the new one is becoming more and more effective in daily praxis. Both systems seem to coexist, although, in many ways, they are contradictory. People feel uncertain as the balance of the previous situation is disturbed (Lombaerts, 2002, pp. 47–64; Osewska & Stala, 1999, pp. 241–246). They are also concerned about rituals and rites connected with celebrating holidays and Christian festivities, because the move into a new model of society is accompanied by a decrease in shared time among family members in the home setting: a theme taken up by Graham Rossiter in several works (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, pp. 51–57; Rossiter, 2013, pp. 173–176). Nevertheless, the family is still perceived as the crucial environment for introduction into society and culture. How true is it to say that the Polish family is the central arena for religious and cultural education? Having in mind the present changes of rituals in the family setting, the authors of this article intend to present the celebration of Christmas in the Polish family that is still kept in the villages and small towns, but that is slowly vanishing from the cities.

This article focuses on the values of the Polish family as the setting for a caring culture, and on Christianity as the support for the revival of present-day Europe. The right

understanding of family in the process of transmitting Christian and national traditions, rites, and customs is extremely important because only strong and happy families can become the basis for a strong society and Christian culture. In postmodern Europe, where emphasis is put on the individual and individual freedom, a community/family dimension is becoming even more demanding. Despite the strong process of dechristianisation in Europe, it is still possible to find some signs that clearly show Christianity is believed, proclaimed, and celebrated in everyday life and on festive days. There are many examples of authentic Catholic families in Poland who try to keep and renew religious activities in their daily lives and especially during festive days, which this article will try to present as a sign of hope; it will concentrate on Christmas.

The Family, Culture,
and the Nation

The importance of national culture being present in the life of Poles was often underlined by Pope John Paul II, for whom his homeland was always much more than a geographical, social, or political construct, but rather a cultural and spiritual reality deeply rooted in Christianity. In a speech he gave to UNESCO, he highlighted: "I am the son of a Nation which has lived the greatest experience of history, which its neighbours have condemned to death several times, but which has survived and remained itself. It has kept its identity, and it has kept, in spite of partitions and foreign occupations, its national sovereignty, not by relying on the resources of physical power, but solely *by relying on its culture.* This culture turned out in the circumstances to be more powerful than all other forces" (John Paul II, 1980, italics in the original). So, according to the pope from Wadowice, the culture of Poland deserves to be adequately appraised in the light of its contribution to the growth of the nation and of humanity.

National identity in Poland was created on the basis of shared culture, language, religion, memories of past victories, literature, art and music, mostly by people who considered themselves creators of the national culture and the spiritual community. Looking from an historical perspective Roman Catholicism played a very significant part in the shared national culture. The Roman Catholic Church and strong faith were linked with the national identity, especially in Poland, where most of the enemies were of a different religion or confession. Polish nationalism developed against a state rather than within the state, and opposition to the oppressive state became part of nationalism, an important element of national identity and culture. The constructed image of the Polish nation and culture naturally include Christianity

and became an essential component of the protection of Polish identity in the time of struggles with foreign powers: the neighbouring countries of Germany and Russia (Mach, 2007, pp. 117–133).

> The culture of the nation is directly conditioned by the culture of the family:
> In the first place there is the almost organic link existing between *the family and the nation*. Naturally we cannot speak in all cases about a nation in the proper sense. Ethnic groups still exist which, without being able to be considered true nations, do fulfil to some extent the function of a "greater" society. In both cases, the link of the family with the ethnic group or the nation is founded above all on *a participation in its culture*. In one sense, parents also give birth to children for the nation, so that they can be members of it and can share in its historic and cultural heritage. From the very outset the identity of the family is to some extent shaped by the identity of the nation to which it belongs.
>
> By sharing in the nation's cultural heritage, the family contributes to that *specific sovereignty*, which has its origin in a distinct culture and language.
> (John Paul II, 1994, n. 17, italics in the original)

The family is the basic nucleus of society and the Church, and is more powerful than any other institution in the process of human growth. Therefore, a strong, happy, and healthy family is the prerequisite and the basis for any true cultural progress of society or nation. According to *Gratissimam sane* the family is strongly linked with society and the nation by participating in the culture, transmitting and supporting it. Families with a strong Christian culture raise human beings into culture who later become agents and bearers of Christian culture. But presently, as the family is often presented by the media in a negative light, it needs to get support from the Church and educational institutions.

The Distinctive Nature of Christmas
Celebrated in a Polish Family

Polish family life is organically linked to Christian culture that is expressed in everyday life, but especially during the time of Christian festivities like Christmas, Epiphany, Holy Week and Easter, Pentecost, Corpus Christi, All Saints' Day, and Mary's holidays, especially the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (which is also Polish Armed Forces Day, celebrating the battle of Warsaw in 1920, also known as the Miracle of the Vistula—a series of battles that resulted in a decisive Polish victory in 1920 during the Polish–Soviet War that stopped the Red Army in its move towards Western Europe).

The contemporary Polish family, in the time of so many challenges, is searching for times of love, joy, and unity, when all family members can offer a "sincere gift" of unconditional love and acceptance. During public holidays, families achieve the good of "being together" and every family member (including the older children) has a chance to add something to family celebrations. This is the good par excellence of the family community: that every person as a subject can add originality to family communal celebrations.

Even though for a long time (1945–1989) communism stressed a radical departure from religious tradition in Poland, the family has kept local, regional, and national traditions mostly connected to Christianity. Moreover, during the socialist period, the Catholic Church underlined the necessity of the continuation of the Catholic identity of the nation. Ideological tools and oppression used by the Soviet regime created in believers' consciousness even stronger opposition to the political regime. Many times the government under Soviet pressure tried to stop religious rituals or at least restrict them, but that resulted mainly in creating a stronger dividing line between Catholic and communist. Due to this strong, historical connection Christmas time in Poland is not about consumerism or rest time only, but is much more based on the joyful meeting of all family members, sometimes coming from all over Poland and abroad to the house of grandparents (Stala, 2014, pp. 431–449).

In Poland Advent is still treated as time for peaceful preparation for Christmas, so many Poles try to give up their favourite foods, drinks, or attendance at discos and parties. Some families also go to church more frequently, especially for the *roraty*, special Masses held at dawn dedicated to Mary. There is a tradition to go for roraty with a special candle lantern giving light on the way to the church when it is still so dark in the morning. The Christmas period in Poland begins on Christmas Eve and lasts till January 6 (feast of the Epiphany)—known in Poland as the feast of the Three Kings. As in Western Europe, the Christmas tree is the focus of the festivities, especially for children. What is special in Poland is that the Christmas tree (often called God's tree) is kept till February 2 (feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple) and carol singing also is continued till that day. Today the Christmas tree is probably less often trimmed with paper chains and other paper ornaments, toys, apples, nuts and sweets wrapped in gold and silver foil, multicoloured ribbons, and beads, but more often with ready-made decorations bought in shops. Yet in the villages there is still cultivated the tradition of preparing handmade decorations for the tree. A few weeks before Christmas, mothers with children prepare gingerbread cookies that will be hung on the tree. Other traditional decorations are paper cut-outs that are used as friezes on walls or as borders on table cloths. Chandelier-like ornaments are fashionable in the north-

eastern part of the country (Kurpie region). These colourful paper and straw *pająki* (spiders) hang from the ceiling. Other materials may be introduced, such as wire or string, to spread the "spider web"; and sometimes feathers or beads are used to make them more impressive. The "spider" may be just a star—small and round or a complex structure expressing family originality and inventiveness (Ogrodowska, 2004, pp. 10–39).

To make elaborate cut-outs—typical of Polish farmers' homes—paper is first folded and cut for the basic pattern. Then other colours are pasted on with egg white, or flour, and water glue. Repeated pasting, folding and cutting produces works of amazing variety. Each region in Poland has its own style, but within each style individual persons exercise their own talents. Sometimes unbelievably complicated lacy patterns are produced with sheep shears and wood. Geometrical designs include circles, ovals, and long rectangles, the composition of which can be reduced to a few variants. There are also plant designs based on symmetrical arrangements of rings, and rooster or peacock motifs worked out around a common axis. Stylised human figures and depictions of weddings and fieldwork also appear. Before sunset on Christmas Eve, parents and grandparents put out gifts for all family members, but especially for children in such a way that children are not able to see them, because, according to tradition, these gifts are brought by angels or St. Nicholas (*święty Mikołaj*). In many Polish families children believe that during Christmas Eve they are carefully observed by angels or St. Nicholas, who decide whether they deserve some gifts or not. Children who have behaved badly may expect to get a twig. Sometimes one of the family members dresses up as a bishop and pretends to be St. Nicholas. Traditional Poles avoid using the name of Santa Claus, as in the Soviet time they rejected the name Father Frost (*Dziadek Mróz*), who came for New Year's Eve (Osewska, 2015, pp. 186–190).

The most important meal of Christmas in the Polish family is *wigilia*, Christmas Eve supper. Traditionally, Advent was a period of fasting, and meat was not eaten during the six weeks before Christmas. So also the wigilia is meatless, but nonetheless it is lavish. Tradition prescribes the number of dishes that should be included in the meal. Sometimes it is nine and sometimes twelve, according to the number of apostles or months in the year. The requirement common to all localities is that all the dishes served should represent the produce of the farmers' land. Some vegetarian dishes are served only on that day of the year. Most often they include mushrooms, representing the woods; wheat or millet, the fields; dried fruit, the orchards; peas and cabbage, the gardens and, where fish is eaten, herring and carp represent the waters. The various foods are combined in many different dishes throughout the country but some of them are found all over Poland. Among them are beetroot soup with

mushroom-stuffed *pierogi* (a kind of ravioli), or dried mushroom soup, sauerkraut with mushrooms. Other common dishes are prune pierogi, cabbage with peas or mushrooms, marinated herring, fried carp (sometimes with raisins), groats with honey. The most popular dessert is a poppy seed cake. The dough is usually cake mixture made with yeast, sugar, eggs, and butter. The filling is made of ground poppy seeds and raisins, eggs and honey, with a dash of cinnamon and rum. The dough is flattened out very thin, covered with the filling, rolled, glazed with egg white, and baked. This cake is made in large quantities so that it might last throughout the holiday. The common "sweet" at the end of Christmas Eve supper is a compote made from stewed fruits (Pruszak, 2011, pp. 70–151; Hryń-Kuśmierek & Śliwa, 2007, pp. 29–31). Though many other traditions are dying out, except in remote rural communities, these dishes are still included in Christmas Eve supper all over Poland; and the meal is still meatless even in cases where fasting is not otherwise observed.

As Christmas Eve approaches, the house must be spotless. The interior is thoroughly cleaned out and the decorations are hung on the walls and ceiling and the Christmas tree is brought in and placed where the tradition of the family dictates. The table is laid in a special way. To commemorate Jesus Christ's birth in a manger, hay is spread over the table to lie under the cloth. The best linen must be used and the table must be laid for all family members and guests plus one more seat for someone unexpected who may come. In some Polish families this special place is reserved for family members who are not able to come or those who have died. An *opłatek (Christmas wafer) must be put on the table, along with a Bible and a candle symbolising the presence of Jesus Christ (*Osewska, 2015, pp. 187–190*).*

With the table laid and the food ready, the children watch at the windows or out of doors, waiting for the first star to appear. Many Poles wait until the first star appears in the sky before sitting down to eat on December 24. This tradition commemorates the Star of Bethlehem, which according to the New Testament guided the Wise Men to the birthplace of Jesus Christ. Nowadays, with so many satellites circling around the Earth and reflecting light, it is sometimes very difficult to adhere to this tradition, but many families do their best. The star is so important in Polish tradition that it has given its name to the occasion. The formal name of the holiday is *Boże Narodzenie*, the Nativity, but the popular everyday term used particularly by children is *Gwiazdka* (Little Star). As soon as the star appears, all start reading the passage about the Nativity from the Bible, pray, exchange greetings, and break opłatek; only then may the family sit down to supper (Osewska & Stala, 2003, pp. 235–238).

Typical for Poland is the tradition of breaking opłatek together with expressing best wishes for the coming liturgical year. If a member of a family is not present during Christmas

Eve, a small opłatek will be posted to him/her, so Poles even in the time of information and communication technology are sending letters to close ones, especially those living abroad, with opłatek and a Christmas card. Opłatek is an unleavened wafer made of flour and water embossed with an image of the Nativity or other religious representations. Every person attending the Christmas celebration in a Polish family gets one and then shares pieces of it with everyone else. This is accompanied by exchanges of good wishes and occurs before sitting down to eat. This tradition is linked to the breaking of bread at the Last Supper (Szymanderska, 1988, pp. 15–18). Everyone breaks off a piece of opłatek and eats it as a symbol of their unity with Jesus Christ. The tradition of breaking *opłatek together and of expressing best wishes is also celebrated in Polish institutions like schools, universities, offices, small companies, various societies, and organisations; so often the time just before Christmas is called in a joyful way as a season of opłatek.*

Traditional practices regarding leftovers from the Christmas feast have varied, but care has always been taken to treat them with respect and to make full use of their beneficent properties. In many places families have made a ceremonial visit to the farm animals after supper, taking for them the food remaining from the feast (Pruszak, 2011, p. 141). Animals were believed to speak human language on the Nativity night. In some regions of Poland the family proceeded to the orchard, where the straw from the table was wrapped round the trees to induce them to bear lavishly. This tradition shows the close connection in farmers' communities between festivals such as Christmas and ancient fertility rites.

In Poland Christmas Day itself is generally marked by less formal ceremony than Christmas Eve. Visits to relatives and friends are made and carol singing occurs everywhere. The exchange of gifts has not been important in the past, but now presents are placed under the Christmas tree and distributed either after the Christmas Eve supper or on Christmas Day. In some parts of Poland gifts are brought to children by St. Nicolas either at Christmas or on St. Nicolas' Day (December 6).

A great feature of the Christmas season is the *szopka* (meaning manger, crib, crèche, or nativity scene), usually made of cardboard and lavishly decorated. It often takes the form of a church and includes stages set with biblical scenes. Wood, cardboard, glass, steel, modelling clay, plastics, coloured metallic foil in bright shades are used—no material is off limits. The whole construction may also be equipped with electrically operated features that allow it to impress in dim light and come to life through moving pieces and figurines. If the szopka is very small, it is carried on a stick in procession from house to house. Larger ones are built on a platform and carried by several boys. On the miniature stages are wooden

puppets in characteristic costumes representing St. Joseph, St. Mary, and Jesus; often also important Polish heroes and figures in national costume are presented on the stage floor. The traditional figures represented vary according to locality. Nativity cribs are also presented in the churches, so families walk from church to church to see the various Bethlehem mangers. Often the Nativity scenes in the churches also have many patriotic elements like Polish flags, a white eagle. Children have Christmas pantomimes called *jasełka*, which are usually plays with traditional words depicting scenes from the Bible acted by children with the Holy Family, many angels, devils, and shepherds (Ogrodowska, 2004, pp. 43–53).

Despite numerous changes in Poland the tradition of singing carols is still present. Polish carols are so vital, because they are a kind of fusion of religious and secular content, national and local, and are full of emotion. Carol singing continues through to Epiphany, or the "Three Kings", everywhere in Poland. Carols fall into two groups, religious and secular, and carollers often gather together and rehearse well before Christmas. In places where this custom is still observed, it retains its ancient and solemn character. In some places the singers may be youths or married men, but the chief requirement is the ability to sing. Today the carol singers are often mere boys and girls, not young men. They carry with them from house to house the traditional paper star on a long stick, which is made of cardboard and constructed so that the star revolves like a pinwheel. Often one or two youngsters will be masked as a devil, an angel, a goat, a bear, or a pony to add to the entertainment (Hryń-Kuśmierek & Śliwa, 2007, pp. 32–33).

Christmas Eve ends with *Pasterka* (Shepherds' Mass), the midnight Mass celebrated at the local parish church. Lasting up to two hours or even more, and filled with beautiful Polish carols, Pasterka is one of the most joyous religious events for Poles. Usually plenty of people come for this Mass. Despite the night, families come with children; and even for less religious Poles, it might be one of only two yearly churchgoing occasions, the other being Easter or even the very popular blessing of the Easter basket. Many people come to the church one hour before the midnight Mass in order to reserve their seats (because the church will be packed and outside can be very cold), to sing carols together, and to share opłatek with colleagues and neighbours. For many children, walking on the snow in the frosty night to the church and being a part of community joy is a very pleasant event that stays for a long time in their memories (Osewska, 2015, pp. 190–193).

In old times there were a number of customs connected with St. Stephen's Day, December 26. Farmers would throw grain at one another to bring a good harvest in the coming year. Another very old custom, which is almost forgotten today, is that this was the

traditional day when all work agreements would be concluded and the farmhand would be hired for another year or left to seek another job (Ogrodowska, 2004, pp. 42–45). Before the Christmas season ends with the Feast of the Three Kings on January 6, the new year begins. Today, New Year's Day is a national holiday in Poland and New Year's Eve, called *Sylvester*, from the feast of St. Silvester, which falls on December 31, is celebrated much as in other countries. Epiphany is an important Christian feast that commemorates the three kings' visit to the infant Jesus in Bethlehem. Epiphany is a big celebration in many villages, towns and cities in Poland, featuring street parades, carolling, and enactments of the Nativity scene. The street parades usually involve a procession of the three kings with their teams dressed in colourful costumes signifying Asia, Africa, and Europe (the respective homelands of the kings). Epiphany was a holiday that was cancelled during the Socialist time in Poland, but it was restored as an public holiday in 2011. Today, Catholic families according to tradition use chalk to mark their doors with the letters K, M, and B and crosses after each letter and the year (K+M+B 2020). According to popular religiosity this symbolises the three kings, Kasper, Melchior, and Balthazar, who visited Jesus; but in reality it refers to the Latin blessing, *Christus Mansionem Benedicat* (May Christ bless this house). The experience of celebrating Christmas in a Polish family is on one hand a very joyful and positive one, full of Christian rites; on the other hand, it requires a very good preparation, both externally (cleaning and decorating the house) and internally (as spiritual preparation for meeting with the newborn baby Jesus, so many people try to go to confession). Probably Poland is one of the few countries in the world where people queue before the confession box.

Conclusion

The opening of the borders of Central and Eastern Europe to the West has brought, among other things, freedom of choice and the free market of ideas, where religious institutions have had to compete for influence and where there has been strong scepticism about any claim to truth. The free exchange of ideas has introduced to Poland many concepts, and ways for spending holidays, that were not previously known in Poland. Many campaigns by tourist agencies have been launched to promote Christmas as holiday time abroad in luxury hotels, mostly in Islamic countries. Older generations of Poles have found it difficult to live in the new sociocultural context, where an old tradition is opposed by a new view of the world, yet most Poles have decided to keep a Christian approach to Christmas. Without intending to deal with all the various aspects of the complex theme of the celebration of Christmas in the Polish family, it is important to underline that for many Poles Christmas is a special time dedicated

to spiritual and religious support of the family, a time full of acceptance, love, joy, peace, and unity. All religious aspects are strongly connected with emotional and educational concern for every family member, especially for the weak or sick one, who should be surrounded by close ones. Polish Christian values are changing but are still very prominent and they still create the basis for Polish national identity. "God, Honour, and Motherland" (*Bóg, Honor i Ojczyzna*) name the values that belong to the traditional Polish cultural ethos framing Polish national identity and that, in turn, embodies the essence of Polishness. Strong religious aspects, combined with patriotism, freedom, as well as love towards the motherland, and honour are still expressed in Christmas rituals.

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Children's Play, Spirituality, and Children's "Schoolwork": A Response to Rossiter's Position on the Place of Play in Primary School Religious Education—Eight Years On

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Introduction

This article reconsiders a response I made in relation to Rossiter's (2012) contribution to the journal *Religious Education Journal of Australia*, titled, "Children's Play and Spirituality: Some Issues for Church School Religious Education at Primary Level", in which he argued the need for a transition from children's play to children's schoolwork in religious education. In such a reconsideration, I integrate some additional valuable perspectives, namely a theology of play and the notion that children are well positioned to be a means of grace, as well as some recent research into young children and spirituality.

Eight years ago, I wrote an article in response to a submission by Graham Rossiter, appearing in *Religious Education Journal of Australia*, in which he argued the need for a transition from children's play to children's schoolwork in religious education. I have the greatest admiration for Rossiter and the immense contribution he has made to religious education in Australia. I consider him a mentor, an esteemed colleague, and dare I say, a friend. And so it was with the greatest of respect, and in the interest of continued debate and robust discussion, that I made my original response at that time to his article in *Religious Education Journal of Australia.* And it is in that same spirit of academic comradery and inquiry that I revisit my response and make this contribution to *Review of Religious Education and Theology*.

The original response that I wrote addressed a number of erroneous claims Rossiter (2012) had made in his submission. He argued that while a focus on the place of children's play in spirituality and religious education is valuable, making a transition from *children's play* to *children's academic work* in religious education is necessary and is, indeed, one of the basic goals of the primary school. On the face of it, this sounds reasonable, and Rossiter offered some timely and provisional cautions for religious educators with the aim of making more effective and relevant their classroom practice involving play and children's

spirituality. However, a close reading of Rossiter's article revealed three major erroneous conjectures. First, Rossiter equated play with entertainment; secondly, that some literature on children's spirituality, and in particular that of my own work, Hyde (2010), had unrealistically projected an adult spiritual/religious competence on to children; and thirdly, that there has been an overestimation of the significance of play in primary school religious education. At that time, I then set about attempting to respond systematically to each of these three erroneous conjectures, and to affirm the centrality of play in religious education not just for early years' classrooms but for all primary school year levels.

Eight years later, I now revisit my response to Rossiter's set of contentions (set out in Hyde, 2013). While I stand by what I had written at the time, two visits to the Centre for the Theology of Childhood in Denver, Colorado (generously funded by Australian Catholic University and BBI-The Australian Institute for Theological Education, respectively) and the completion of an initial research project exploring the notion of children as a means of grace (Hyde, 2020) have led me to consider some additional perspectives that are worthy of attention. These comprise the notion of a theology of play (and related to it, a theology of childhood) and the notion that children are well positioned to be a means of—and to communicate—grace (Berryman, 2009). This article integrates these perspectives within the original lines of argument presented in my original response to Rossiter's contribution, as well as some recent research into young children and spirituality.

Play as Opposed to Entertainment:
The Importance of a Theology of Play

Rossiter equates play with entertainment. Play constitutes one of the most enduring discourses in early childhood education. It is surprising, then, that Rossiter (2012) makes only scant reference to the vast body of literature that contributes to this field. Nonetheless, he is correct in maintaining that play *can* be entertaining. While there is no one agreed upon definition, the descriptions of play that are emphasised and affirmed in the literature maintain that play is pleasurable and played for itself. It is voluntary and spontaneous, and lacks compulsion (e.g., Garvey, 1977; Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2005; Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005; Brown, 2009). However, such elements provide only a partial insight into play. Others are needed to present a more robust description of this phenomenon. When such insights are considered, it becomes clear that while play can be entertaining, it does not equate with entertainment, nor does it always necessarily involve entertainment.

In *Homo Ludens,* which was concerned primarily with the aesthetic quality of play, Huizinga (1955) argued that even in its simplest form, play involves more than a physiological phenomenon or a psychological reflex. It has, he argued, a significant function in enabling all who engage in play to transcend the immediate needs of life and impart meaning to action. Therefore, all play "means something" (p. 1). Herein lies the first hint that play exceeds mere entertainment.

Because play always means something to those who engage in it (and Huizinga is referring to both children and adults here), there exists the possibility of a close relationship between play and sacred ritual as a means by which human beings create meaning in relation to the holy. For Huizinga, the concept of play merges quite naturally with the concept of holiness:

> In play as we conceive it the distinction between belief and make-belief breaks
> down . . . archaic ritual is thus sacred play, indispensable for the well-being of the
> community, fecund of cosmic insight and social development, but always in the sense
> Plato gave it—an action accomplishing itself outside and above the necessities and
> seriousness of everyday life. (pp. 25–26)

That all play means something to those who engage in it suggests at the very least that the act of play involves more than simply entertainment. Some have proposed a theology of play.

Ludic(rous) Thinking:
Toward a Theology of Play

Hugo Rahner was among the first to articulate an understanding of religion as *theologia ludens*, an interpretation of traditional religion as play. H. Rahner (1965) posits that religion as play recovers the forgotten virtue of *eutrapelia*, a Greek word that attempts to express a mean between "gravity and playfulness, crying and laughing" (p. 92) in religion. Put another way, it may also be translated as "play for the sake of seriousness" (p. 95).

David Miller's extensive work, *Gods and Games: Towards a Theology of Play*, reviews H. Rahner's contribution to play theory. Miller (1973) notes that *theologia ludens* views God as a player, human beings as players, the church as the community of play, and salvation as play. In other words, *theologia ludens* is "a theology *of* play, *by* play, and *for* play; it must wittingly incarnate its content" (p. 159, italics in the original).

Brian Edgar's (2018) more recent work, *The God Who Plays*, notes that the idea of a playful attitude, which ought to be central to people's relationship with God, stands in contrast with most common descriptions of the Christian way of life characterised by

obedience to God and service to others. While these are important and necessary elements of discipleship needed to bring about God's reign in the present, most portrayals of the future kingdom of God centre on joy, song, dance, laughter and play. The question for Edgar is, then, whether the people of God, who are called to live out the future kingdom in the present, ought to do more to demonstrate a life filled with joy, laughter and play, as well as obedience and service. Noting that play is often not considered a serious phenomenon for theological study, Edgar notes that cultural presuppositions about play are "ambivalent, to say the least, and the disconnect between play and the church . . . is comprehensive" (p. 2). The disconnect, he argues, needs to be addressed because play is the essential and ultimate form of relationship with God.

Jerome Berryman is one who has sought to address this disconnect. Drawing on the theological concept of the *imago Dei*, Berryman (1982) argues that "Play is at the heart of creativity, and creativity is at the heart of all creatures created in the image of the Creator" (p. 48). Since human beings are made in the image of the Creator, they are, therefore, creators as well, called to live as God lives: creatively, joyfully, freely *and playfully* (see Edgar, 2018, p. 62). When those made in God's image live this way "the raw grace of God's creation flows through the creative process [and] becomes available to humankind [enabling them] to help cooperate with God as co-creators" (Berryman, 2009, p. 236).

Thought of in this way, play clearly does not equate with entertainment, as Rossiter (2012) contends. Play is a much richer, robust and indeed more profound concept, and ought be considered a serious topic for theological reflection. Especially when envisaged within religious education, play involves "ludic(rous) thinking", and has a function to fulfill (Hyde, 2019).

Rossiter (2012) goes on to claim that when play ceases to be fun, it is no longer play, and that this will have implications for schooling where there is too much emphasis placed on entertainment as a condition for learning. However, this too is erroneous. One of the themes of play highlighted by Fein (1989, 1991) is that of emotive theory. In this type of play, children enact events that enable them to express and to work through particular emotions they may have experienced. While emotions such as joy and excitement may indeed be fun to work through, others such as fear, disappointment, and sadness do not necessarily result in fun. Children enact these events containing emotion because there is a strong affective power to them. Children are able to adjust the intensity of the emotion being explored by either playing out the event longer and in greater detail, or by ending the play. Yet, and as attested to in the literature, play provides a means through which children can address and work

through such emotions (see, e.g., Fein, 1989, 1991; Lillard, 1993; Sawyers & Carrick, 2008).
Play can be play without necessarily being fun because play means something to those who
engage in it (Huizinga, 1955).

Unrealistically Projecting an Adult Spiritual/Religious Competence
Onto Children Versus Children as a Means of Grace

In his original submission to *Religious Education Journal of Australia*, and as an
example of the types of issues identified in the literature related to the place of play in
children's religious education, Rossiter (2012) notes the unrealistic projection of an adult
spiritual/religious competence on to children. He cites my own work (Hyde, 2010) as a case
in point of being guilty of such a projection. The difficulty here was that Rossiter had taken
my work out of context.

In Hyde (2010), I presented a phenomenological reflection upon the life expression of
a young boy, Daniel, and his response during a "Godly Play" session, and how, through this
incident, four characteristics of his spirituality were brought to the fore. This work was
neither a simple nor an ad hoc set of observations and interpretation of an incident. Rather,
the reflection was guided by the philosophical principles of phenomenology as outlined in
particular by Gadamer (1989), as well as the life world existentials as detailed by van Manen
(1990), who sought to give practical expression and methodological application to the task of
phenomenology. The reflection that resulted from my work was therefore rigorous, and
grounded in the phenomenological literature (see Hyde, 2010, for a greater treatment of this
method).

In constructing his critique, Rossiter (2012) had merely quoted isolated excerpts from
the description of the incident outlined in Hyde (2010), rather than from the reflection on
Daniel's life expression, which followed in the article, and which was structured around the
life-world existential as outlined by van Manen (1990), which I used for the framework of
analysis. Therefore, Rossiter's treatment of my work was, at best, ill informed, and at worst,
potentially misrepresentative. I constructed a detailed table in which I responded to each of
Rossiter's interpretations of the select excerpts from my work, as set out in Table 1.

Table 1. Rossiter's Contrasting Interpretations of a Three-Year-Old Child's Participation in a Godly Play Session and Hyde's Response

Interpretation of a 3 year old child's behaviour during the Godly Play session, based on hermeneutic phenomenological reflection (Hyde, 2010, p. 509)	Rossiter's (2012) interpretation from the perspective of children's ordinary inquisitive, curious, play behaviour (p. 13)	Hyde's response to Rossiter's interpretation
Daniel using the Parable of the Good Shepherd Godly Play materials		
"With care, he unpacked the contents of the parable box. Slowly and deliberately, he manipulated the pieces of the presentation. In particular, he took great care in placing each of the sheep."	This is normal, ordinary behaviour by inquisitive, curious children. They would show the same sort of careful handling of most objects, e.g., TV remote control, their own toys, pets and even food items on a plate. It seems unrealistic and unnecessary to interpret such behaviour as spiritual.	Hyde (2010) does not necessarily interpret this behaviour as spiritual, but rather, in the context of the broader, robust hermeneutic phenomenological reflection, suggests how the incident described brought to the fore particular characteristics of Daniel's spirituality. That children might exhibit the same care in handling a TV remote, toys, or food on a plate is an unfounded claim on the part of Rossiter (2012).
"The care with which he displayed in moving the pieces suggests that, for him at that moment in time, nothing else existed outside of this activity."	Absorption in the immediate activity is common in any children's play (DEEWR, 2010).	Precisely! Absorption in the immediate activity is common, *and* the literature explicitly links this as a sensitising spiritual concept, e.g., Hyde (2008) terms this "integrating awareness", Hay with Nye (2006) term this "awareness sensing", Hart (2003) and Williams (2006) term this as "absorption", and psychologist Csikszentmihalyi (1990) terms this as "flow".
"He was in the process of making meaning from this parable . . . For Daniel it seemed that this particular presentation held particular significance. He was searching for that significance by revisiting the parable and manipulating the materials."	The child may have just been enjoying play with the toys used in the story; he was "replaying" the action repetitively as children do to "master" this new item in his repertoire. This contributes to the child's knowledge and experience of the world; but it may be beyond his mental capacity at this age to have ideas about the "life meaning" and "spiritual significance" of the story, apart from the simple	To begin, these are not "toys" but pedagogical materials, or "pieces" (Berryman, 2009) used to tell the parable. Secondly, these were not new items, as Hyde (2010) makes clear that Daniel had chosen this parable for his work on many previous occasions. Thirdly, simply because a child may not have the cognitive ability to speak about "spiritual significance" does not mean that the child is not

Interpretation of a 3 year old child's behaviour during the Godly Play session, based on hermeneutic phenomenological reflection (Hyde, 2010, p. 509)	Rossiter's (2012) interpretation from the perspective of children's ordinary inquisitive, curious, play behaviour (p. 13)	Hyde's response to Rossiter's interpretation
	idea of the shepherd caring for the sheep just as the child cares for his toys.	encountering the spiritual through engagement with these materials.
"Throughout his engagement in this activity, Daniel did not speak. He looked intently at the materials as he manoeuvred them, slowly and deliberately. He was engaged in seriously playful play, which carried with it a sense of sacredness, which he honoured through silence and reverence."	Silent, deliberate engagement in play with toys is natural and common in children at this age. It is unnecessary to invoke ideas of "sacredness" and spiritual "reverence" to explain the behaviour; to do so appears to be projecting an adult awareness onto the child that is beyond their spiritual competence at that age. The description "spiritually responsive" should not be used when behaviour is more likely to be a simple expression of children's natural curiosity and inquisitiveness.	True. Silent and deliberate engagement in activity is common in children. However, in this instance, Daniel was not playing with toys. He was playing with the pieces of the parable in an environment that had been specially prepared for this purpose. His play was not play in general. The hermeneutic phenomenological reflection on Daniel's life expression suggested that Daniel's behaviour was more than a simple expression of a child's natural curiosity and inquisitiveness.

Hyde (2013)

The completion of a more recent, initial research project exploring the notion of children as a means of grace (Hyde, 2020) adds further relevant perspectives here. Again, I used a phenomenological framework to design and analyse the findings of this recent study. Phenomenological analysis results in neither a simple nor an ad hoc set of observations and interpretations, and my own program of research over the years, modest as it may be, has resulted in the development of some expertise on my part in terms of the use of the phenomenological method in both design and analysis (see Hyde, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2018, 2020).

Far from unrealistically projecting an adult spiritual/religious competence on to children, the phenomenological method utilised was, again, rigorous, and grounded in the phenomenological literature. Participants in this project composed short anecdotes about a time during one of their Godly Play classes in which they believed a child acted as a means of grace. The phenomenological framework, drawing on the evocative method, was then used to analyse the written anecdotes.

In short, the findings of this recent study (Hyde, 2020)—the analysis of the anecdotes written by the participants—affirm that children can be a means of grace, communicating God's gift of life and love to others. For instance, the anecdote of one of the participants, Cathy, detailed one of the children reaching out to "hug" the Christ child during the presentation of the Holy Family story. Cathy recounts:

> As I moved the materials, I held the Christ child in the palm of my hand and said, "This is the Christ child reaching out to give you a hug" . . . But this one child reached out and picked up the piece from my hand. Part of me was saying, "No, you shouldn't do that!" But a part of me was also really curious. He took the Christ child and held it against his cheek, and then he very gently put it back in my hand. So, I kept going around the circle and each child did the same thing. They all received a hug from the Christ child. Oh, my goodness that brings tears to my eyes when I remember it! That is one my favourite moments of grace.

My phenomenological analysis noted that this anecdote revealed a "Kairos moment" (Hyde, 2020), a fleeting moment that demanded of Cathy the right response, or action, at the right time. For Cathy, the right action consisted of refraining herself from stopping that child from taking the carved figure of the Christ child from her hand, and allowing those children to place it, each in turn, against their own cheeks, receiving a hug from Christ: a touch from God in a very tangible way. Her decision to allow a change to the way in which Godly Play presentations generally operate (i.e., presenting the materials to the children and modelling how they are to be used by telling the story and wondering about it before allowing the children to use that material) in her own practice was the action that was demanded of her in this Kairos moment. As a result, Cathy was rewarded with new insights: she experienced those children receiving a tangible touch from the Divine, and she recognised this as a grace-filled moment, a moment in which a child reminded her of God's grace in her own life.

As the above analysis demonstrates, the phenomenological reflection was neither a simple nor an ad hoc set of observations and interpretations, as Rossiter might maintain. This particular analysis—as with the analysis of Daniel's play in Hyde (2010)—was the result of a rigorous application of the phenomenological method, and a considered reflection on the text (in this case, the anecdote of Cathy) being examined.

Young Children and Spirituality

Of particular concern in Rossiter's (2012) original article is the claim that young children have yet to develop their spirituality. He maintains that many of a child's

psychological capacities are better labelled as "pre-spiritual, pre-cursors to the spiritual, or proto-spiritual—reflecting the views that humans have a generic capacity for the spiritual" (p. 12). At the time, I argued that such a position seemed to ignore the vast body of scholarly literature that maintains that children are *already* spiritual beings (see, e.g., Coles, 1990; Erricker, Erricker, Sullivan, Ota, & Fletcher, 1997; Champagne, 2003; Hart, 2003; Hay, 2006; Adams, Hyde, & Woolley, 2008), and that children possess qualities and features to their spirituality that seem to be lost or suppressed as they grow older (Priestley, 2000; Eaude, 2005).

More recently, additional research has been undertaken affirming that children are indeed already spiritual beings. Bryant, Garbarino, Nart, and McDowell (2020) maintain that spirituality emerges in childhood. Adams, Bull, and Maynes (2016) concur, although they note that studies exploring the spirituality of very young children are scarce, rendering difficult to understand the distinctive features of their spirituality. Richardson's (2015) research found that children's play in the context of illness provided them with a means by which to uncover the spiritual in their everyday lives, while Mata-McMahon's (2017) research found that young children's participation in storytelling enables them to express aspects of their spirituality, noting that both joy and imagination "as expressions of spirituality and viewed as consequences of and ways in which children express themselves humorously, are tangible ways in which spirituality and humour are connected for children" (p. 177). Frady's (2019) research with two-year-old children found that, using a Godly Play methodology, children were able to express their spiritual and theological ideas. She terms this the emergence of the concept of "rendering theology" (p. 183) with two-year-old children.

From a theological perspective, the work of Karl Rahner is helpful here. In a chapter titled "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood" in *Theological Investigations, Volume 8*: *Further Theology of the Spiritual Life*, K. Rahner (1971) maintains that children are open to God in a way that does not assume childhood as a prelude to later stages of development. This is because at every stage of development it is possible to grasp one's self as a whole. People do not, then, move away from childhood towards eternity, but rather they move toward the eternity of childhood. Applying this notion to spirituality suggests that children's psychological capacities ought not be labelled as "pre-spiritual", "pre-cursors to the spiritual", or "proto-spiritual". Children are already open to the spirit—and are indeed already spiritual—in a way that does not assume childhood as a prelude to later stages of development. They do not "develop" spirituality as they "progress" through the various

stages of development, be they cognitive, human, physical or otherwise. They *are* spiritual beings.

So, in addition to K. Rahner's (1971) contribution, the now vast and yet growing body of scholarly literature, of which the studies referred to above are merely representative, affirms that children are already spiritual beings. It is a part of their ontology. It is a part of who they already are, as well as who they are becoming, rather than some type of proto-spiritual, or indeed pre-spiritual, phenomenon.

Conclusion

There are some other erroneous conjectures in Rossiter's (2012) article in relation to the supposed overestimation of the significance of play in primary school religious education and the need to advance from children's play towards what he terms as "schoolwork". However, I addressed these in some detail in my original response, and while more recent literature would further affirm my response, it would not necessarily change or enhance it.

To reiterate, I consider Graham Rossiter a mentor, an esteemed colleague, and indeed a friend. His contribution to religious education, especially in Australia, has been outstanding. Religious education practitioners and scholars are in debt to his astute insights and leadership in this field. It is with the greatest of respect, and in the interest of continued debate and robust discussion, that I revisited my response to his article, "Children's Play and Spirituality", and in this vein that I make this contribution to *Review of Religious Educationn and Theology*.

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Reshaping Religious Education

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Introduction

Graham Rossiter's scholarly output has made a significant impact on the field of Catholic education and, within that, on the specific domain of religious education in the Catholic school (Rossiter, 2017, passim). Rossiter's article, "The Need for a Creative Divorce Between Catechesis and Religious Education in Catholic Schools" (1982; henceforth "Creative Divorce"), is one of the seminal texts in contemporary thinking on Catholic education. In brief, Rossiter argued that the predominance of catechetical concepts and practices in school-based religious education was an error. The way ahead, he suggested, lay in separating catechesis and religious education in order to understand better their foundations and key concepts. This reshaping of both catechesis and religious education in the Catholic school was, he believed, essential for building a strong, confident Catholic educational culture in the school.

While Rossiter wrote many works on religious education and on related topics such as youth ministry and spirituality, the focus in the present article is on how the principal argument of "Creative Divorce" influenced, to a greater or lesser extent, the work of the Congregation of Catholic Education on the subject of religious education in schools. In Part 1, I argue that "Creative Divorce" is an important article on two counts: first, it is a major response to the call in Vatican II to develop the foundations of Christian education and, second, it has had a marked, if understated, influence on subsequent church teaching on religious education. In Part 2, I explore the changing nature of religious education as proposed in the work of the Congregation for Catholic Education. In Part 3, I explain how "Creative Divorce" influenced my own scholarly work in the field, with close reference to *Shared Mission: Religious Education in the Catholic Tradition* (Franchi, 2017).

(1) The Second Vatican Council and Catholic Education:
Responding to the Spirit of Reform

Catholics believe that the church is the Body of Christ and has, therefore, a divine mission (Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, 1964, n. 20). A corollary is the reality of the incarnation: Christians live and move in the world, and the church, through the life and action of all the baptised, must reckon with the vagaries of human decision-making and the many incomplete, and often fragile, strands that make up the web of human life. As the members of the church live and move in the world, it follows that the church cannot be isolated from wider social and cultural trends (O'Malley, 2015).

Throughout its history, a succession of ecumenical councils has allowed the church to reflect on and respond, as appropriate, to clusters of challenges to its inherited beliefs and practices. Such august gatherings as ecumenical councils are, by definition, significant landmarks in the life of the church, offering, as they do, welcome opportunities for both revision and revival of cherished beliefs. The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), called to complete the work of the aborted First Vatican Council (1869–1870) had a mission, as Pope St John XXIII noted in his opening address, to refresh the way doctrine is taught:

> The greatest concern of the Ecumenical Council is this: that the sacred deposit of
> Christian doctrine should be guarded and taught more efficaciously.
> (John XXIII, 1962)

For Pope John, education in the broadest sense, was at the heart of the council's mission. The challenge lay precisely in how to teach the much-valued "sacred deposit of Christian doctrine" in a pastorally appropriate and culturally sensitive way. The key question seemed to be: To what extent could the council (referring to the church) make "operative its deepest values"?

What, however, were the particular challenges that the Second Vatican Council wished to address? Pope St Pius X (1905), for example, drawing on the example of the Council of Trent (1545–1563), had highlighted the need for robust doctrinal formation for all the baptised. The Second Vatican Council had to contend with a growing realisation that its mission and message were increasingly marginalised and in need of reform. This is not a new occurrence. Such calls for urgent renewal of Christian life and teaching are a sort of leitmotif running through the history of the church.

The reasons for the council's concerns were many: clericalisation, poor catechesis, and perceptions that the church had not kept up to date with societal developments, to name a few. These issues had not just appeared *ex nihilo* in the 1960s, but were, it seems, neuralgic

hangovers from the industrialisation and urbanisation that had marked mid to late nineteenth-century Europe. The council, therefore, was charged with finding fresh ways to engage positively with the "world" (and people of all creeds) in order to show how the eternal, Christian message could bring solace and hope to new generations in both traditionally Christian countries and in the churches that had grown in the "new world". In adopting this way of working, the church was not adopting radically new insights as such but developing and refreshing its social doctrine, which Pope Leo XIII had mapped out in 1891 in the landmark encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, the "Magna Carta" of modern Catholic social doctrine. The attempt to merge Catholic social teaching with a renewal of catechesis, while not new (see the history of the teaching congregations below) was surely an effective reminder that we do not live by bread alone.

While *Rerum Novarum* has been lauded as the beginning of modern Catholic social teaching, it is worth remembering that Catholics do not need a papal starting gun in order to seek and facilitate societal change. In the field of education, there is abundant evidence from historians of all stripes of how Catholic teaching congregations, especially in the years following the Catholic Reform movements (the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), were at the forefront of initiatives to expand the capacity of schools to educate the children of the poor across Europe and beyond (cf. O'Donoghue, 2012; Rymarz & Franchi, 2019). This is a stark reminder, if we need reminding, of the church's seemingly inherent capacity to reform itself and its mission through the actions of heroic men and women, and not just as the legacy of particular institutional events, namely ecumenical councils and synods. This is not the place to offer encomia of particular individuals, but the educational legacy of St John Baptist de La Salle and St Julie Billiart, for example, should remind us that authentic reform (in education and in other fields) can begin with sincere efforts to enact and embody a grace-inspired vision.

If the wider church landscape is important, even more so is the immediate educational context. The Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965), saw itself as kick-starting a process of gradual and locally-driven educational reform, as noted in the declaration's Introduction:

> Hence this sacred synod declares certain fundamental principles of Christian education especially in schools. These principles will have to be developed at greater length by a special post-conciliar commission and applied by episcopal conferences to varying local situations.

Evaluating the work (and possible success) of such commissions, wherever established, is a project for another day. Such commissions were, it seems, based on a tightly regulated institutional view that sought to harness the developmental energy within particular structures. While this way of working could be interpreted as an expression of a desire to retain ecclesiastical control over possible new directions, it did not take into account the possibility that Catholic educators might forge new paths alongside— and perhaps at arms length from—any officially established local commission.

It is in this second, outward-looking strand that we can locate the work of the Catholic academic community despite the need for "Catholic academics" (an admittedly problematic term) to see themselves as *insiders* in the life of the church (Franchi, 2019). In particular, Rossiter (as an insider) was responding to the call in *Gravissimum Educationis* for ongoing development of Catholic thinking in education—and in this he was not alone. The apparent desire for change (with varying degrees of radicalism) could not be easily separated from the related desire to reform catechesis. The preponderance in schools of traditional methods of catechesis, with deep roots in the Tridentine reforms, was challenged by those who, in broad terms, recognised the limits of traditional catechetical language and "thought-forms" in the life of the school. This offered opportunities to shift the emphasis in religious education away from a focus on intentionally deductive methods towards more inductive (experiential) approaches to religious education (cf. Moran, n.d., 1974).

Such reform-mindedness (and we bear in mind that the church is *semper reformanda)* was rooted in the church's inclination to seek inspiration for reform from its fund of ancient sources (*ressourcement*). It was also driven by the rise of secularism and associated ways of thinking that were having varying levels of impact on religious practices. Deeper analysis of the extent to which Charles Taylor's diagnosis of the "buffered self" could be a factor in the manifest decline of religious practices in the years following the council is for another time, yet the move towards rationality and away from a seemingly enchanted world was one factor in the flattening of the Catholic religious landscape in the years following the council (cf. Taylor, 2007, passim; Bullivant, 2019).

The double-source of reform, from within and without official commissions, offered ample opportunities for new thinking in the field of religious education. Gerard Rummery's *Catechesis and Religious Education in a Pluralist Society* (1975) served as the advance guard of a raft of significant developments that would occur in the field of religious education. Rossiter, while clearly indebted to Rummery, offered in turn a clear and practice-focused agenda. Rossiter's position in "Creative Divorce" can be summarised as follows:

(1) Religious education is not catechesis.

(2) Catechesis can (and should) take place in the Catholic school.

(3) Religious education, along with chaplaincy work and retreats etc. can be suitable vehicles for catechesis in the Catholic school.

"Creative Divorce" sought to make both catechesis and religious education more robust and equally fit for purpose. The conflation of both concepts, Rossiter argued, had weakened them conceptually, especially religious education. Note 27 in the article offers a summary of the position adopted throughout the article. Two paradigms are briefly explained: *education in faith* and *education in religion*. Rossiter argues that the latter is a more appropriate landing space for good religious education, owing to its adoption of educational language. This, he argues, is the appropriate register for a school-based subject.

In the following section, I outline some ways in which Rossiter's work seems to have influenced the work of Catholic education and the life of the church.

(2) The Changing Nature of Religious Education in the Church's Magisterial Documents

Proving that a particular academic paper (in any domain) has influenced matters of public policy is never easy. Academics grapple constantly with the possible "impact" of their output beyond the academy.

In the world of Catholic education, the documents of the Congregation for Catholic Education in Rome serve as the international policy documents (for want of a better term) of Catholic education. Rossiter's article seems to have influenced (to a greater or lesser extent) some contemporary hot topics in Catholic religious education. Of course, there is no paper trail of which I am aware that would offer anything like "proof" of influence; nonetheless, lines of convergence between "Creative Divorce" and the subsequent work of the Congregation for Catholic Education can be identified.

An important shift in the congregation's thinking on religious education was evident in *The Religious Dimension of Education in the Catholic School* (1988). With the subtitle *Guidelines for Reflection and Renewal*, and intentionally placing itself as a response to the council's call for deeper thinking on education, this wideranging document offered inter alia some critical comments on the nature of the curriculum (nn. 58–65), thus aiming to show how the wider curriculum of the Catholic school offered ample possibilities for integrating a Catholic worldview into the life of the school. More specifically for purposes of the present article, the document dealt creatively with the relationship between religious education and

catechesis in paragraphs numbered 68 and 69. It is worth quoting in full the relevant sections, given their importance:

> There is a close connection, and at the same time a clear distinction, between religious instruction and catechesis, or the handing on of the Gospel message. The close connection makes it possible for a school to remain a school and still integrate culture with the message of Christianity. The distinction comes from the fact that, unlike religious instruction, catechesis presupposes that the hearer is receiving the Christian message as a salvific reality. Moreover, catechesis takes place within a community living out its faith at a level of space and time not available to a school: a whole lifetime.

> The aim of catechesis, or handing on the Gospel message, is maturity: spiritual, liturgical, sacramental and apostolic; this happens most especially in a local Church community. The aim of the school however, is knowledge. While it uses the same elements of the Gospel message, it tries to convey a sense of the nature of Christianity, and of how Christians are trying to live their lives. It is evident, of course, that religious instruction cannot help but strengthen the faith of a believing student, just as catechesis cannot help but increase one's knowledge of the Christian message.

> The distinction between religious instruction and catechesis does not change the fact that a school can and must play its specific role in the work of catechesis. Since its educational goals are rooted in Christian principles, the school as a whole is inserted into the evangelical function of the Church. It assists in and promotes faith education.

This extract is, essentially, a summary of the principal argument of "Creative Divorce". Subsequent documents from the congregation have continued to propose a fluid "separation" between catechesis and religious education (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2009, n. 17). This is not the place, however, to launch into a critical exploration of the genre and status of the Congregation for Catholic Education documents, far less their mixed reception in the local churches. It is fair to argue, as I would, that the distinction between catechesis and religious education, as outlined in various magisterial documents, is a necessary accompaniment to the important contemporary discussion, animated by Pope Francis, on the necessity of promoting a "culture of encounter" (Francis, 2018).

Rossiter's proposals for religious education offered some possible avenues for the subject to be of greater interest to a wider range of people and thus offer possibilities for the

"culture of encounter" to be realised in the life of the Catholic school. While religious education remains a principal energy-source of the Catholic school's mission, it also offers an opportunity for dialogue with those from other religious and philosophical traditions. Furthermore, if religious education were not primarily framed as a catechetical endeavour, it could facilitate and encourage exploration of how Catholic doctrine could be taught in a coherent way. A related issue, of course, was the relationship between religious education in Catholic school and the rise of more "liberal" frameworks of religious education. It would be easy initially to glimpse seeds of a non-denominational religious studies model of Catholic religious education in Rossiter's proposal, but such a view would, I suggest, fall short because Rossiter was opening a debate about how to improve the culture of the Catholic school, including its potential as an agent of catechesis. In his own words:

> It is ironic that a "creative divorce" might be the very thing needed to promote *more* catechesis, as well as more *authentic* catechesis, sponsored by the Catholic school, rather than an uncritical lumping of all activities under the cover-all, "catechetics", which may not always be authentic catechesis or good education.
> (Rossiter, 1982, p. 23).

A further criticism could be made that the "Creative Divorce" proposal is a "motherhood and apple pie" approach: better catechesis, better religious education, better school. To move the debate forward, and seeing religious education as an essential component of a "culture of encounter" enables us to reframe the religious education curriculum, as site of knowledge of the Catholic religious tradition, wherein a particular culture is lived and taught.

Alongside internal church debates over the nature of religious education, the "culture of encounter" also demands serious reflection on what makes the wider educational experience available in the Catholic school different in kind, and not just in degree, from that offered by other forms of schooling. A good case can be made that the whole curriculum of the Catholic school (not just religious education) should be grounded on traditional liberal education principles, eschewing narrower skills-based approaches (Davis & Franchi, 2013). Religious education, following the reforming principles sketched out by Rossiter, and articulated in some recent documents of the church's magisterium, offers an opportunity to reclaim some of the ground lost to secularism. While this is clearly a wider issue and lies beyond the immediate scope of the present essay, it remains pertinent to discussions on how the culture of the Catholic school can be a suitable host for an educationally coherent religious education curriculum.

In the following section, I outline how Rossiter's ideas informed my own thinking in religious education, as found in *Shared Mission: Religious Education in the Catholic Tradition* (Franchi, 2017).

<h2 style="text-align:center">(3) Shared Mission in Religious Education:
Developing Rossiter's Vision</h2>

Shared Mission in Religious Education (Franchi, 2017) is intended to be a meaningful contribution to higher studies on religious education and to school-based practitioners alike. It does not repeat Rossiter's arguments, but draws on his work to propose the theology of *communio* as a key integrating principle for a forward-thinking and robust understanding of religious education.

Before moving on, it is important to ask why the focus is on church as *communion* when other worthy ecclesiological models are widely available (*Lumen Gentium*, 1964, passim). Is *communio* not a rather abstract image that has little to say to pedagogical questions? I would suggest rather that it manages to bring together aspects of the life and history of the church in an attractive yet challenging model:

> In the years during and following the Second Vatican Council, ancient terms like People of God and *communio* were recovered from the worlds of Judaism and early Christianity and reconsidered in the broad context of the *tradition/progress* relationship. The theology of *communio* had much to offer Catholic thought at an important juncture in its history. It was the re-discovery of the value for the contemporary Church of an ancient Christian term (*koinonia*—fellowship) and hence reflected the twin themes of *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento.*
> (Franchi, 2017, p. 124).

Of course, theology that is overly abstract runs the risk of becoming a niche interest: the best theology is done on our knees, so some form of theological reflection is an essential conduit to good pedagogy. In broad terms, the Catholic Church, understood as a profound and multidimensional *communio*, is one way of underpinning the "culture of encounter" (see above). Within this model there is ample scope for faith and practice to inform each other and, critically, due weight is given as to how *unity-in-diversity* has the potential to enrich the life of the contemporary church. The focus on unity does not impede diversity; the focus on diversity enriches the unity of the church under the successor of Peter (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1992).

The theology of *communio* was without question a major contribution to the intellectual and pastoral life of the church in the twentieth century (Rowland, 2017). It served to widen the ecclesiological canvas beyond pre-existing models of church—with varying degrees of attachment to institutionalised ideas—towards one that sought to combine the church's sacramental and relational dimensions. *Communio* continues to challenge overly rigid interpretations of other ecclesiological positions in favour of a seemingly more harmonious and dialogic model. In this way, it mirrors the partnership with faith that enlarges reason beyond the confines of rationalism: this *unity-in-diversity* is a powerful intellectual force that the established Catholic intellectual tradition (Royal, 2015) can offer a world that too easily mistakes rigidity for rigour.

Considered application of this ecclesiological "model" to matters of education is, in its essence, a call to dialogue and theological nuance. As the title of the book proposes, it is a *shared mission* to unite faith and reason, past and present, the mind and the heart. In proposing religious education as a marriage between theology/catechesis and education, *Shared Mission* seeks to expand existing typologies of religious education and offers a fresh canvas on which local churches can design and shape their own religious education curricula.

The ecclesial "paradigm" of *communio* reminds the church that its many institutional features, some of which are more necessary than others, should serve no other purpose than to strengthen, in the words of Pope St John Paul II, the "spirituality of communion" (2001, nn. 4) as a guiding principle of educational and, indeed, wider church reform. A "spirituality of communion" indicates above all the heart's contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us. In education, awareness of the potential of "spirituality of communion" for invigorating the life of the church allows for, and perhaps demands, creative thinking to explore how the church's educational mission can be better expressed and practised.

Following this line of thinking, religious education consists of two vibrant "encounters". The first encounter is between religious and non-religious educational philosophies; the second is between multiple ways of articulating the Catholic educational tradition. It is the task of religious education to synthesise, as far as possible, both pathways and to break open fresh avenues for further study of how faith and reason interact in educational institutions.

For Pope Benedict XVI (2009), "to enlarge the area of our rationality" is to be open to influence from wider consideration of what is true and good, drawing, as appropriate, from fields such as philosophy, theology, and science. The idea of "expansion" is crucial to the

argument of *Shared Mission* and flows more or less naturally from Rossiter's original proposal. In the first place, Theology is *expanded* by the reasonable expectation to see theological education not just as study of that which is divine but as an important contribution to human flourishing; pedagogy, in turn, is *expanded* by a theologically-scented openness to the numinous, the divine, the eternal. Pope Benedict's words above, offered to teachers of religious education (in Italy), remind us of the central role played by the corps of teachers in the life of the Catholic school today. Religious education hence is much more than a catechetical phenomenon aimed at the baptised, but is an appropriately serious scholarly study of the relationship between aspects of religious and secular culture. It has a specific focus on "knowledge about Christianity's identity and Christian life", and what this means for the life of the Christian community in a secular environment (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2009, n. 17).

The question of truth, central to the religious search, has profound epistemological consequences. While the Christian has a firm belief in revealed truth, the ripples of this belief system shape associated educational endeavours. *Shared Mission*, in accepting the centrality of revealed truth to religious education, argues that there is more than one way for this truth to be communicated in educational settings. Hence the need to enlarge the conversation between catechesis (which is for the whole church) and religious education (which is a school-based phenomenon).

In practical terms, a Catholic school rooted in Truth must be open to people from all religious traditions and none. It is vital that the curriculum in such a school be a genuine conversation between and across the generations. In this model, religious education, at its best, integrates insights from the fields of theology and pedagogy: in other words, it is the marriage of "catechetical theology" (defined as the potential of theology to be part of catechetical/educational ventures) with insights from pedagogy. A religious education curriculum orientated towards teaching a body of knowledge and fostering an appropriate personal response to this cultural deposit is, epistemologically, open to the transcendent and welcomes the contribution to dialogue of those who come to the table from other perspectives. This is not to weaken its catholicity; rather it is a sign of vitality and confidence.

Conclusion

In this essay I have argued that "Creative Divorce" by Rossiter (1982) offered potentially new directions for the development of the subject of religious education. *The*

Religious Dimension of Education in the Catholic School (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988) served as an official forum for Rossiter's ideas and proposed religious education as a school phenomenon that differed from wider catechesis. In *Shared Mission*, I proposed the theology of *communio* as a model that allowed both catechesis and religious education to speak fluently to each other. "Creative Divorce" offers a template for the future direction of religious education and can support the "culture of encounter" proposed by Pope Francis.

Rossiter's position, unsurprisingly, is not without its challengers. Some brief recognition of the "other side of the coin" is appropriate at this juncture.

A strong line of criticism came from the pen of Thomas Groome. In "Religious Education and Catechesis: No Divorce, for the Children's Sake" (2002), Groome argued that religious education *can* be studied academically *and* be formative if done with the right pedagogy. He claims that there should be no opposition between the two. As evidence he quotes the First Vatican Council, which declared reason and faith as "mutually advantageous". They are partners in faith, as religious education and catechesis should be. There is, of course, scope for further critical study of Groome's observations on "Creative Divorce", and on how Groome's famed proposal of "shared praxis" can articulate a sound vision of school-based Catholic religious education for the present age.

Another issue worthy of study is the extent to which the model proposed by Rossiter and advocated in turn by the Congregation for Catholic Education, found support and practical application in the Catholic educational community. This requires a sustained scholarly study with an intentional international focus. This will help uncover issues relating to, for example, consistent and precise use of language across cultures in which there is no shared agreement about the nature of "religious education" (Franchi, 2018).

In summary, an authentically rich understanding of religious education has the potential to shape the wider curriculum of the Catholic school as follows:

(1) A Catholic school (by definition) should be open to all; it follows that the curriculum for religious education should reflect a theoretical and pedagogical openness to other ways of thinking. This is a *sine qua non* of Catholic thought on education.

(2) The religious education curriculum in a Catholic school has a particular theological orientation—it is rooted in the Truth— that invites students to engage with the Catholic theological tradition but does not assume a prior faith commitment.

Good religious education in the Catholic school hence should be academic, rigorous, and informed by a Catholic worldview. In this way, while remaining distinct from explicit catechesis, religious education could and should contribute effectively to the life and culture

of the school, including its catechetical ambitions. To develop this way of thinking in theoretical and practical terms remains an important task for contemporary educators.

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