

**TOWARD AN APPROPRIATE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FOR FUTURE
TEACHERS OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION:
PRINCIPLES FOR A THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION APPROACH**

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the award of PhD

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DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of PhD, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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DEDICATION

To the memory of Rev. Andrew McNally (1960-2012)

Religious Educator, Priest, Beloved Friend

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ABSTRACT

This study considers what constitutes an appropriate religious education for student teachers of religious education in the second-level sector in the Republic of Ireland. The research adopts an interpretive approach to relevant documentary sources and traces the evolution of how the State and the Catholic Church, given its prominent role in that society, understand the term religious education. This analysis suggests that how the nature and purpose of religious education is understood is a significant context in developing an appropriate religious education for teachers of religious education. It is argued that religious education is best conceived of as a conversational activity that is hermeneutical in nature. How the religious educator is prepared to lead such a conversation is crucial. This concept of religious education is developed by drawing on Thomas Groome's theological vision of appropriation and Robert Jackson's educational concept of edification. The argument considers how the study of theology, an essential requirement in the initial teacher education of teachers of religious education according to the Teaching Council of Ireland, can contribute to the religious education of these students. The tradition of theological education, with its focus on how theology is taught, emerges as a significant foundation for a religious education that is appropriate for the students in question. Six principles for such a theological education arise from this research indicating essential elements for an appropriate religious education for future teachers of religious education in the Republic of Ireland and beyond.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCE: Congregation for Catholic Education

CT: Catechesi tradendae

DES: Department of Education and Skills, from 1997-2010 DES refers to the
Department of Education and Science

DV: Dei verbum

DRE: Denominational Religious Education

EN: Evangelii nuntiandi

ERB: Education about Religions and Beliefs

GCD: General Catechetical Directory

GDC: General Directory for Catechesis

GE: Gravissimus educationis

GS: Gaudium et spes

ICRE: Irish Centre for Religious Education

IHRC: Irish Human Rights Commission

INTO: Irish National Teachers Organisation

ITE: Initial Teacher Education

JCRE: Junior Certificate Religious Education

JCRES: Junior Certificate Religious Education Syllabus

LCA: Leaving Certificate Applied

LCRE: Leaving Certificate Religious Education

LCRES: Leaving Certificate Religious Education Syllabus

LG: Lumen gentium

MDI: Mater Dei Institute of Education

NCCA: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

NFQ: National Framework for Qualifications

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PDE: Professional Diploma in Education

RDECS: Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School

REDCo: Religion in Education. A Contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict in Transforming Societies of European Countries

SGN: Share the Good News

TMG: Toward Mutual Ground

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to consider the religious education of student teachers of religious education in the second-level sector in the Republic of Ireland, and to address the question of what constitutes an appropriate religious education for these students.¹

1.2 The Research Question

Research questions are formulated in situ and in response to the complexity of the situations observed.² The research question that this study is concerned with was formulated in response to the researcher's continuing critical reflection on her professional context as a Lecturer in Religious Education in a College of Education that provides a concurrent model of initial teacher education (ITE). Emerging from this reflection is a concern that the student teachers of religious education are not offered the opportunity to engage in a religious education for themselves. A desk survey of the documentation of the Colleges and Institutes that provide concurrent programmes of ITE for teachers of religious education reveals that, when the term religious education appears, it is only with reference to the study of the history, content, context, and method of religious education.³ The programmes at Mater Dei Institute and St. Angela's College, Sligo, have Religious Education in their titles, whereas the programme in St. Patrick's College, Thurles, has Religious Studies in its title. The Professional Diploma in Education (PDE) provided through the universities as consecutive programmes of ITE, refer to religious education in terms of methodology, pedagogy, and the resourcing of second-level curricula.⁴ None of

¹ Unless otherwise stated, the terms Irish and Ireland will refer to the Republic of Ireland.

² *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods*, ed. by Robert Bogdan and Sari Knopp Biklen, 2nd edn (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1992), p. 2.

³ Concurrent ITE Programmes for second-level Religious Education are available at Mater Dei Institute of Education, <http://courses.materdei.ie/index.cfm/page/undergraduate> ; St. Angela's College, Sligo, http://www.stangelas.nuigalway.ie/departments/course_details.php?id=AS002&ver=en; St. Patrick's College, Thurles, http://www.stpats.ie/courses/edu_bus_rel_studies [accessed 10 May 2013].

⁴ Religious education as a curriculum subject in a PDE programme may be studied at DCU, UCD, UCC, NUIG, NUIM, and Trinity College.

the documentation surveyed refers to the religious education of the student teacher as a component of the ITE of the future teacher of religious education. Investigations of Irish journals such as *Oideas*, *Irish Educational Studies*, *The Furrow*, *Doctrine & Life*, *Irish Theological Quarterly*, and *Studies*, as well as a survey of research available through such portals as the Educational Studies Association of Ireland Register of Theses, EThOS, DORAS, and Theses.com, reveal that the question of the religious education of student teachers of religious education has not been researched heretofore in the Republic of Ireland.⁵

1.3 Rationale for the Study

Within the tradition of religious education in Ireland there is an explicit link between the educational mission of the churches and the place of religion in education.⁶ This link finds expression in the traditional acceptance by the State of the role and responsibility of the churches for the provision of curricula, syllabi, and on-going professional development of teachers in this area. Arguably, the introduction of the Department of Education and Science (DES) syllabi for Junior Certificate Religious Education (JCRE) in 2000 marks a defining moment in the debate about the nature, purpose, and scope of religious education in schools. This debate has become sharply focussed in the recent past, with significant publications that both reflect and shape the discourse. *Share the Good News: National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland* (2010), the report of the Irish Human Rights Commission *Religion & Education: A Human Rights Perspective* (2011), *The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector: Report of the Forum's Advisory Group* (2012), as well as the publication of *Toward Mutual Ground: Pluralism, Religious Education and Diversity in Irish Schools* (2013), give voice to a variety of perspectives that all point to the changing nature of religious education, the public questioning of the role of religion in schools, the challenge for religious education to be congruent with human rights law, and the call for a new articulation of the nature, scope, specificity, and value of religious education.

Against this backdrop it is evident that religious education is now seen as part of both the public sphere as well as the religious sphere and therefore accountable to

⁵ <http://www.esai.ie/resources/annualregistersoftheses#2000>; <<http://ethos.bl.uk/>>; <doras.dcu.ie>; <<http://www.theses.com>> [accessed 10 May 2013].

⁶ This theme will be explored in Chapters Two and Three of this research.

both. Religious education finds its place in the Academy by virtue of its position within ITE programmes. As all ITE comes under the aegis of the Universities, it is also accountable to the academic norms and standards that characterise university education. Borrowing the language of David Tracy, it can be suggested therefore that religious education is accountable to the three publics of the State, the Church and the Academy.⁷ Though this research adopts Tracy's term Church to describe one of the publics, this research broadens the term to include all faith communities and religious worldviews. What is notable about the literature that has been written in Ireland since 2000 is the gradual shift from a concern for the place of religious education in the Church to a more engaged discussion between the Church, Society, and the Academy.

An important aspect of the religious education discussion that has been neglected to date is the question of who teaches religious education and how they are to engage with the changing landscape of religious education.⁸ This question provides the impetus for some initial probing: To which public is religious education accountable? How is the teacher of religious education to respond to the demands of each public? Does current practice in ITE prepare religion teachers to engage with the varying expectations of each public? How is the teacher of religious education to be accountable to the demands of a State syllabus as well as faithful to the tasks of religious education as understood by the religious patron of the school in which they teach? These concerns lead to the issue of the preparation of people to be teachers of religious education. Who makes the best teacher of religious education? How does a person prepare for this? Should those preparing to be teachers of religious education receive a religious education? A concern emerging from these questions is for the person who will teach. All education is concerned with the development of the person; ITE is no different. Arguably then the education of the person is a 'public' to which religious education has to be accountable. This study proposes that the Person is a fourth public that may be added to Tracy's list. Religious education has also to

⁷ David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981), p. 5.

⁸ This issue was raised by Eleanor Gormally who called for the introduction of catechesis as an academic subject within the Colleges of Education which would focus on adult faith formation and be distinct from theology and religious education. The purpose of this catechesis for student teachers would be so that they could then contribute to the catechetical process for young children. 'Catechesis within Catholic Colleges of Education', *Doctrine & Life*, 54/2 (2004), pp. 20-27.

be accountable to the person who teaches religious education. If religious education is to be accountable to each of the publics - Church, State, Academy and the Person - then it must be appropriate to each public. The key word in the research question that this research is concerned with is *appropriate*. What type of religious education is appropriate for student teachers who will have to engage with the four publics?

1.4 The Scope of the Research

Each of the issues raised thus far is a subject for research in its own right. Initial investigations into these issues suggested three possible approaches to the research question. The first approach would argue that the current situation of religious education in Ireland has been the result of various sociological, cultural, historical, educational, ecclesiological, and theological shifts since the 1960s. A multi-disciplinary perspective based on the work of Eoin Cassidy, Louise Fuller, Kevin Williams, Tom Inglis, Dermot Lane, and Micheál MacGréil, would assist in tracing and understanding the shifts that have occurred in Ireland.⁹ The commentary provided by these authors demonstrates many challenges. Among such challenges are: a secular challenge, a theological challenge, an educational challenge, and a liberal challenge to the task of religious education. However, in terms of their impact on the discourse about religious education, these analyses tend to be partial, as they come from historical, theological, and sociological perspectives rather than from the perspective of the educational sciences.

A second approach could consider a profile of the students presenting for ITE in religious education.¹⁰ Insights may be extrapolated from Einike Pilli, Graham

⁹ *Measuring Ireland: Discerning Beliefs and Values*, ed. by Eoin Cassidy (Dublin: Veritas, 2002); Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism Since 1950: The Undoing of a Culture* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2004); Kevin Williams, *Faith and the Nation: Religion, Culture and Schooling in Ireland* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 2005); Tom Inglis, 'Catholic Identity in Contemporary Ireland: Belief and Belonging to Tradition', *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 22/2 (2007), pp. 205-220; Dermot A. Lane, *Challenges Facing Religious Education in Contemporary Ireland* (Dublin: Veritas, 2008); Micheál MacGréil, *Pluralism and Diversity in Ireland: Prejudice and Related Issues in Early 21st Century Ireland* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2011).

¹⁰ Einike Pilli, 'Challenges of Postmodernity to Religious Education', *Panorama: International Journal of Comparative Religious Education and Values* 16/1 (2004), pp. 22-32; Graham Rossiter and Marisa Crawford, *Reasons for Living: Education and Young Peoples Search for Meaning, Identity and Spirituality* (Victoria: ACER Press, 2006); *Encountering Religious Pluralism in School and Society: A Qualitative Study of Teenage Perspectives in Europe*, ed. by Thorsten Knauth, Dan-Paul Jozsa, Gerdien Bertram-Troost, Julia Iprgrave (Münster: Waxmann, 2008); *Teenagers' Perspectives on the Role of Religion in their Lives, Schools and Societies: A European Quantitative Study*, ed. by Pille Valk, Gerdien Bertram-Troost, Markus Friederici, Céline Béraud (Münster: Waxmann, 2009).

Rossiter and Marisa Crawford, and the REDCo project, about youth culture and faith in a post-modern age and the implications of this for religious education. What this second approach implies is that any attempt to address the religious education of this particular cohort of students must take into account the breakdown of the meta-narrative, the individualised search for meaning and identity, the distancing from ecclesia, an apparent religious illiteracy, and an emphasis on the central place of the person as subject in the learning process. These features could then be put into dialogue with research by David Tuohy, Oliver Brennan, Andrew Greeley and Conor Ward, and Desmond O'Donnell, to get a sense of concerns specific to Ireland.¹¹

Beginning the research with these two approaches in mind revealed that, in Ireland, there is as yet no indigenous theoretical framework for religious education. For the most part, reflection on religious education has been at the level of resourcing, commentary, or justification, rather than on the sustained construction of a theoretical approach to religious education that is responsive to the Irish context. A second and arguably more significant finding for this research was that there is no shared understanding of the term religious education and what constitutes its nature, task, and scope. This fact determined that the key issue for this researcher was to consider how religious education has been understood in Ireland and argue that this understanding, informed as it is by each of the four publics, provides the particular context to which the religious education of student teachers must be appropriate.

1.5 The Context within which this Research takes Place

According to Lev Vygotsky human learning and development occurs in socially and culturally shaped contexts; he is critical of research that considers individuals in isolation from this.¹² By extension then any research question must attend to the multi-faceted nature of all contexts. Context may be defined as the interrelated conditions within which something exists. For the purpose of this research, context refers to the understanding of religious education in Ireland. This is reflected

¹¹ David Tuohy, *Youth 2K: Threat or Promise to a Religious Culture?* (Dublin: Marino Institute of Education, 2000); Oliver Brennan, *Cultures Apart? The Catholic Church and Contemporary Irish Youth* (Dublin: Veritas, 2001); Andrew M. Greeley and Conor Ward, 'How Secularized Is the Ireland We Live In?' *Doctrine & Life* 50/10 (2000) pp. 581-603; Desmond O'Donnell, 'Young Educated Adults: A Survey', *Doctrine & Life* 52/1 (2002), pp. 3-79; The results of Leslie Francis' and Andrew McGrady's research of the religious attitudes of adolescents will be available in late 2013.

¹² Lev S. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 79-91.

primarily in the use of language. Language both reflects and shapes context; therefore attention to linguistic nuances offers a lens through which to view context. Gabriel Moran draws attention to the fact that the meaning of a word lies in its use.¹³

Religious education is a contested term and an agreed on definition of its nature, scope and purpose is not easily arrived at. The variety of nomenclature used when speaking about the teaching of religion, religious doctrine, catechetics, religious instruction, religious knowledge, Christian doctrine, Christian nurture or religious education, underscores the notion that there has never been one agreed term to describe what it means to teach religion. Religious education is a bruised term, and now carries so many meanings that it has become laden with overtones that tarnish the initial energy of the term. Such linguistic confusion, or 'babel' as Finola Cunnane describes it, has not been helpful in the attempt to both describe and delimit the task of teaching religion.¹⁴ Irish religious educators Cunnane, Patrick Devitt, Patricia Kieran, Anne Hession, and Andrew McGrady have each made useful contributions to the explication of the terms relating to the teaching of religion.¹⁵ However, to date such explication has not been done with specific reference to the Irish context. This task will be undertaken in Chapters Two and Three of this research.

A second context within which this research takes place is the changing pattern of ITE for teachers of religious education. This is not the focus of the study itself, but forms the backdrop within which the research belongs. An appropriate religious education for students in ITE cannot be considered without reference to the broader discussion about the principles and practices of how all teacher education is considered in Ireland.

¹³ Gabriel Moran, *Religious Education as a Second Language* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1989), p. 11.

¹⁴ Finola Cunnane, *New Directions in Religious Education* (Dublin: Veritas, 2004), pp. 17-35.

¹⁵ Patrick M. Devitt, *Willingly To School: Religious Education as an Examination Subject* (Dublin: Veritas, 2000); *Children, Catholicism & Religious Education*, ed. by Patricia Kieran and Anne Hession (Dublin: Veritas, 2005); Andrew G. McGrady, 'Teaching Religion: Challenges and Opportunities for Educational Practice in a Pluralist Context', in *Toward Mutual Ground: Pluralism, Religious Education and Diversity in Irish Schools*, ed. by Gareth Byrne and Patricia Kieran (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2013), pp. 79-91.

1.6 The ITE of Teachers of Religious Education: A Historical Perspective

The constitutional prohibition on the public endowment of religion meant that ITE for teachers of religious education generally occurred in specialist colleges that had evolved as subsets of larger theological faculties connected to seminaries. J. D. King's survey of the history of religious education in Ireland from 1922 to 1970 includes an overview of the curriculum provided by the institutes where the training of teachers of religion at second-level took place.¹⁶ King pays particular attention to the Mater Dei Institute of Religious Education, arguing that it represented the most progressive understanding of religious education in Ireland in the late 1960s. The curriculum emphasised the principles and methods of catechetics supported by doctrine, Scripture, liturgy, and philosophy. The aim of the programme in Mater Dei was 'to introduce the students into the Mystery of Christ as the foundation of all spiritual and apostolic formation'.¹⁷ The purpose of such spiritual and apostolic formation was to prepare the teacher to fulfil the purpose of catechetics which was to communicate the message of Christ to the adolescent. This formation was sustained by a sense of the specific vocation of the catechist, as well as by the communal and liturgical life of the institution in which ITE occurred. It is arguable that, in a catechetical environment which depended largely on a theological curriculum, the question of the explicit religious education of lay students did not arise. The role of theology in the education of teachers of religious education will be the focus of Chapter Five.

Traditionally, students who wished to train to be teachers of religion had to fulfil the general entry requirements for teaching as well as undergo an interview to assess their suitability for the profession. A significant shift occurred in the 1990s, when entry onto all ITE programmes came under the rubric of the Central Admissions Office and the policy of interviewing candidates was discontinued. The personal commitment and religious affiliation of the student was no longer part of the admissions process. Studies by Marie Clarke and Manuela Heinz show that many who enter second-level teacher education in Ireland do so with high expectations of what they can achieve in their teaching career, and high levels of confidence, commitment, and altruism, which are balanced by a number of realistic concerns and

¹⁶ J.D. King, *Religious Education in Ireland* (Dublin: Fallons, 1970).

¹⁷ King, p. 268.

critical perspectives on Irish second-level education.¹⁸ There is no such data available that would allow for a profile of the student who presents for ITE for religious education; neither has any research been undertaken into students' experience of their ITE in religious education. It is difficult therefore to ascertain what the needs of these students are and what form of religious education is appropriate for them.

1.7 The ITE of Teachers of Religious Education: A Contemporary Perspective

John Coolahan's assessment of the 'chequered history' of teacher education in Ireland suggests that it has traditionally suffered from a lack of coherence in terms of both policy and practice.¹⁹ He notes how the issue of teacher education came under the spotlight during the 2000s with the publication of a number of significant reports that have had a positive impact on the way that all teacher education is now considered as a continuum. Taking the 2005 *Report of the Advisory Group on Post-Primary Teacher Education* as the starting point for the current discussion about teacher education,²⁰ Coolahan observes its concern for reform in a variety of aspects of teacher education programmes, necessitated by the social context in which current and future teachers would be operating.²¹ This concern for reform on the basis of social change resonates with the concerns of the 2005 OECD Report *Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers*.²² The same concern is evident in the Council of Europe and the European Parliament:

Changes in education and in society place new demands on the teaching profession. For example, as well as imparting basic knowledge, teachers are also increasingly called upon to help young people become fully autonomous learners by acquiring key skills, rather than memorising information; they are asked to develop more collaborative and

¹⁸ Marie Clarke, Anne Lodge, and Michael Shevlin, 'Evaluating Initial Teacher Education Programmes: Perspectives from the Republic of Ireland', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 28/2 (2012), pp. 141-153. Manuela Heinz, 'The Composition of Applicants and Entrants to Teacher Education Programmes in Ireland: Trends and Patterns', *Irish Educational Studies* 27 (2008), pp. 223-240; Manuela Heinz, 'Why Choose Teaching in The Republic of Ireland?: Student Teachers' Motivations and Perceptions of Teaching as a Career and their Evaluations of Irish Second-Level Education', *European Journal of Educational Studies* 5/1 (2013), pp. 1-16.

¹⁹ John Coolahan, 'A Review Paper on Thinking and Policies Relating to Teacher Education in Ireland' (2007), <http://www.teachingcouncil.ie/_fileupload/Teacher%20Education/Continuum_ppr_PositionPaperJohnCoolahan_18feb2009_ck_61560932.pdf> [accessed 12 May 2013].

²⁰ Kieran Byrne, *Report of the Advisory Group on Post-Primary Teacher Education* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 2005).

²¹ Coolahan, 'A Review Paper', p. 19.

²² OECD, *Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers* (Paris: OECD, 2003). John Coolahan, *Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers: Country Background Report for Ireland* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 2003).

constructive approaches to learning and expected to be facilitators and classroom managers rather than *ex cathedra* trainers [...] Furthermore, classrooms now contain a more heterogeneous mix of young people from different backgrounds and with different levels of ability and disability [...] Systems of education and training for teachers need to provide the necessary opportunities for this.²³

What is evident in these documents is a concern for the reform of the professional development of teachers in the context of a changing society. The primary focus is on identifying the skills that teachers are required to have, and how these skills are to be developed, so that teachers can respond to the needs of students.

Padraig Ó Conchubhair argues that ‘a crucial task confronting us today is to educate and support teachers to become agents rather than recipients of change.’²⁴ How to educate teachers to become agents rather than recipients of change became the focus of the work of the Teaching Council. Informing the Teaching Council’s policy on the continuum of teacher education was the 2009 Report, *Learning to Teach*, which arguably broadened the vision of teacher education from the acquisition of skills for the professional context to a consideration of the identity of the teacher and a focus on the teacher as learner.²⁵ This broadening of the discussion is particularly apposite to the research question of this study. In its consideration of the dimensions of the continuum of teacher education, the authors of the *Learning to Teach* report identify four features of the multi-dimensional and complex nature of the teacher’s role. The teacher is described as ‘instructional manager’, ‘caring and moral person’, ‘generous expert learner’, and ‘cultural and civic being’.²⁶ The authors argue that, when taken together, these dimensions ‘provide insight into the multi-faceted and complex nature of teaching and by implication, of learning to teach, and the demands of designing quality teacher education’. Other features identified by the authors include the acknowledgement that ‘context is highly influential in shaping teacher development’, and that ‘the move toward a more social view of learning has implications for how teachers teach and how they learn to teach’. The contingent and contextual nature of learning also applies to teacher

²³ Communication from The Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, ‘Improving the Quality of Teacher Education’ (2007), pp. 4-5.

²⁴ Pádraig Ó Conchubhair, ‘Teacher Education in Ireland: Facing Challenge and Recognising Opportunity’, *Oideas*, 54 (2009), pp. 7-9 (p. 7).

²⁵ Paul Conway, Rosaleen Murphy, Anne Rath, and Kathy Hall, *Learning to Teach and its Implications for the Continuum of Teacher Education: A Nine-Country Cross National Study*, <http://www.teachingcouncil.ie/_fileupload/Publications/LearningToTeach-ConwayMurphyRathHall-2009_10344263.pdf> [accessed 28 May 2013].

²⁶ *Learning to Teach*, p. 10-11.

education; therefore the Report recommends that the development of an inquiry stance in the form of reflective practice be promoted across the teaching continuum.²⁷

This general background about teacher education provides the context for the discussion about the nature of ITE.²⁸ ITE occurs within the general framework for the continuum of teacher education which is overseen by the Teaching Council of Ireland and articulated in the Teaching Council's *Policy Paper on the Continuum of Teacher Education* (2011), *Initial Teacher Education: Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers* (2011), as well as the *General and Special Requirements for Teachers of Recognised Subjects in Mainstream Post-Primary Education* (2011).²⁹ The aim of the Teaching Council is to ensure that 'tomorrow's teachers are competent to meet the challenges that they face and are life-long learners, continually adapting over the course of their careers to enable them to support their students' learning'.³⁰ This focus on the development of the professional skills and competences of the teacher is paralleled by a concern for the student teacher as learner. According to the Teaching Council, ITE programmes should 'focus on the personal development of the student teacher together with preparation for life in the classroom and for active engagement in teaching within a professional learning community'. Of particular relevance to the research question of this study is the recommendation by the Teaching Council that 'subject discipline components' be 'integrated into the programme in a way that is meaningful for student teachers'.³¹ As ITE programmes are accredited by the Universities as Level 8 or Level 9 awards, then they must also comply with Programme Learning Outcomes that are mapped onto the National Framework for Qualifications (NFQ). In its 'Grid of Level Indicators', the NFQ describes education in terms of the attainment of knowledge, know-how and skill, and competence in four key areas. These areas are defined as

²⁷ *Learning to Teach*, p. 192, p. 203.

²⁸ A useful bibliography of research on the continuum of teacher education in Ireland is provided in *Learning to Teach*, pp. 244-268.

²⁹ The Teaching Council, *Policy Paper on the Continuum of Teacher Education* (Maynooth: The Teaching Council, 2011); *Initial Teacher Education: Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers* (Maynooth: The Teaching Council, 2011); *General and Special Requirements for Teachers of Recognised Subjects in Mainstream Post-Primary Education* (Maynooth: The Teaching Council, 2013).

³⁰ *Policy Paper on the Continuum of Teacher Education*, p. 7.

³¹ *Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers*, p. 12.

learning how to act within specific contexts, how to assume roles, the capacity to learn how to learn, and the ability to express insight.³²

1.8 The Research Paradigm

This research is in the field of religious education and so is necessarily interdisciplinary. It is therefore influenced by research traditions in education, the social sciences, philosophy, theology, and religious education. These research traditions emerge from differing ontological and epistemological assumptions as well as from varying expectations about the nature of research findings. Such underlying assumptions and expectations are expressed in what have come to be known as research paradigms. According to Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln:

A paradigm may be viewed as a set of basic beliefs (or metaphysics) that deals with ultimates or first principles. It represents a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the 'world', the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts, as for example, cosmologies and theologies do.³³

Paradigms are ways of explicating what the researcher brings, either explicitly or implicitly, to the research question. At their most abstract level, research paradigms are philosophical positions that emerge from particular ontological and epistemological assumptions. Joseph Maxwell argues that the focus of these more abstract paradigms becomes specific when applied to a research question.³⁴ At this more specific level it is possible to begin to speak of a theoretical framework within which the research is undertaken. This framework becomes the overarching structure of the subsequent research project and the lens through which data is collected, interpreted, and evaluated. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln describe the research paradigm as 'the net that contains the researcher's epistemological, ontological and methodological premises'.³⁵ Identifying one's research paradigm then allows the researcher to determine the most appropriate research method for

³² National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, 'National Framework of Qualifications, Grid of Level Indicators' (2003), <<http://www.nfq.ie/nfq/en/documents/NFQLevelindicators.pdf>> [accessed 10 June 2013].

³³ Egon E. Guba and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 'Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research', in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 1st edn (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 1994), pp. 105-117 (p. 107).

³⁴ Joseph A. Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach* (Thousand Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), pp. 33-43.

³⁵ Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 4th edn. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2011), p. 13.

considering the research question. The research method must always be congruent with one's paradigmatic stance.

1.8.1 Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions

Ontology deals with the questions of being and existence. It asks about the nature of reality and experience and what can be known about these. A realist response contends that the world is 'out there', and that it is one single reality that can be described objectively, as there is a direct correspondence between it and the person's perception of it. A realist is not primarily concerned with how people create meaning from what is observed or explained. A realist approach to research in the social sciences has been challenged by a nominalist response to the question of being which understands human experience as more subjective and relativistic than realism allows for. A nominalist response holds that there are no universals and no abstract objects; nothing exists outside the activity of the knower. Nominalism informs the perspective of the constructivist, who argues that the person's view of the world is always interpretive. Norman Blaikie describes constructivism as the 'meaning giving activity of the individual', whereas social constructionism refers to inter-subjectively shared knowledge, meaning-giving that is social rather than individual'.³⁶ However, these two concepts are not easily distinguishable, as individual meaning making occurs within social contexts and social contexts are comprised of individual meaning makers. Constructivism assumes that there are cognitive processes and conceptual frameworks which enable an individual to construct reality. A constructivist response to the ontological question considers that the human person is internally and continually constructed when new information comes into contact with existing knowledge that has emerged from experience and from the meaning assigned to experience. This meaning is only accessible through the symbols and language people and groups use to describe, explain, and interpret their inner lives.

Kate Burningham and Geoff Cooper distinguish between contextual and strict constructivism. Strict constructivism maintains the belief that there are multiple realities and that all are equally meaningful. Such a belief is open to charges of relativism and a denial of any objective reality. It therefore makes no ontological

³⁶ Norman Blaikie, *Approaches to Social Enquiry: Advancing Knowledge*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p. 22.

claims. There is no reality other than what is socially constructed. The preferred mode of qualitative inquiry for strict constructivists is social constructionism.³⁷ In contrast to this mode, contextual constructivism recognises objective reality and its influence. It lives within the tension between nominalism and realism and is comfortable with the possibility of objective truth. However, for the contextual constructivist the knowledge of this truth is only accessible through the construction of human experience, thought, and language. Contextual constructivism best describes the ontological assumption that informs this research in terms of its design, its decision making, its interpretive framework, and ultimately its conclusions. This ontology attributes a creative role to individuals and acknowledges the free and active participation of the individual in her or his own human becoming. The ontological assumption of this research is influenced by Martin Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*, which may be thought of as the way that the being of the person exists in an agential relationship with historical reality. Heidegger placed an emphasis on language as the vehicle through which the question of being can be unfolded. *Dasein*, that being which we ourselves are, is distinguished from all other beings by the fact that it makes issue of its own being. *Dasein* always finds itself already in a certain spiritually, materially, and historically conditioned environment in which the space of possibilities is always somehow limited.³⁸ The person is in the experience and knows in the experience. Inquiry therefore is always contextual, always interpretive, and always personal.

Epistemological assumptions about the nature of human knowing emerge from one's ontological assumptions. A positivist epistemology emerges from a realist ontology that there is an objective reality that can be known through observation and once knowledge is acquired it can be described in absolutist terms. To know something involves 'standing behind a one way mirror, viewing natural phenomena as they happen and recording them objectively'.³⁹ A properly scientific method of observation, deduction, and analysis is the best approach to uncovering the processes by which both physical and human events occur. The aim of a positivist approach is to observe and explain. The role of the researcher is to be neutral. This approach was

³⁷ Kate Burningham and Geoff Cooper, 'Being Constructive: Social Constructionism and the Environment', *Sociology* 33/2 (1999), pp. 297-316.

³⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1962), pp. 21-35.

³⁹ Guba and Lincoln, p. 107.

challenged by the emergence of a constructivist paradigm that undermined the positivist assertion that observation comes before theory; constructivism presumes that theory, however inarticulate, precedes observation. Observation therefore is not a neutral activity, as decisions will have already been made before one begins the research. Constructivism holds that the only reality that can be known is that which is represented by human thought. In Michael Crotty's words, 'reality is independent of human thought, but meaning or knowledge is always a human construction'.⁴⁰ What appeals to this researcher is that constructivism does not go so far as to suggest that there is nothing to be known; rather it asserts that, what there is to know can only be known through the active construction of the knower. Another dimension of this researcher's epistemological assumptions is a preference for the verb knowing rather than the noun knowledge. Knowing is dynamic, evolving, and open-ended, whereas knowledge assumes a level of given-ness, finiteness and completion.

These assumptions about being and knowing give rise to this researcher's view of educational research as essentially an act of interpreting a situated reality. It is impossible to understand any social construct without attention to context. Constructivism recognises that individuals develop subjective meanings of their contextualised experience. These meanings are multiple and varied, which John Cresswell argues leads the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrow the meaning into a few categories or ideas.⁴¹ The task of the researcher is to try to understand the many and various ways that meaning and knowledge are constructed and communicated in particular contexts. As this research is concerned with understanding the nature of religious education within a specific context, it most properly belongs within a contextual constructivist paradigm.

1.8.2 Educational Assumptions

The Latin root of the English word education is *ducere*, meaning to lead, which, with its prefix *e*, meaning out, implies that education is concerned with leading out what is already inherent in the person. The image of leading suggests that someone must lead and someone is to be led. The implication here is that *educere* is not a task that

⁴⁰ Michael Crotty, *The Foundations of Social Science Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process* (London: Sage Publications, 1998).

⁴¹ John W. Cresswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 2nd edn (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), p. 20.

an individual can undertake by themselves. Education, though translated as a noun, is in its original form, a verb. To educate is an action that one undertakes with and for someone else. It is necessarily an interpersonal or communal task that implies a relationship between learner, educator, and what is to be learned. Education, then, is an intentional activity that has a clear purpose. It is a craft that has its own skills and its own rationale. It is about creating space in an atmosphere of trust and discovery so that learning may begin. It is about giving access or keys so that students can unlock their own doors into meaning. This view of education is rooted in an understanding that learning occurs when the learner makes sense of something for themselves.

Education is not an objective or neutral imparting of information. It is not the transmission of information as if the learner were an empty vessel. A person does not receive an education but claims an education. Adrienne Rich draws attention to the fact that the verb 'to claim' means to 'take as the rightful owner; to assert in the face of possible contradiction'. Rich argues that 'to receive' means to come into possession of, or to act as a receptacle or container for something. To claim, rather than to receive, is 'the difference between being acted-upon and acting'.⁴² Education invites the learner to claim their own learning. This does not mean that the learner does this by themselves, but they must do it for themselves. Education is an ontological task that is concerned with the flourishing of the being and agency of the person. This ontology attributes a creative role to individuals and acknowledges the free and active participation of the individual in their own human becoming. From a contextual constructivist approach, it is possible to say that education invites people into an engagement with a tradition, or what society has learned about itself and about the world. Maria Harris describes tradition as 'the process by which humans communicate ways of knowing, ways of being, and ways of doing from one generation to the next, it is the handing on of life and of living'.⁴³ The task is not to naively hand on a tradition, but to engage in a serious critique of the values and assumptions that determine what and how a way of knowing is communicated. The purpose of engaging with tradition is to draw on it as a source of wisdom for how to live now and in the future. At the same time, education must provide and develop the

⁴² Adrienne Rich, 'Claiming an Education', in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1979), p. 231.

⁴³ Maria Harris, *Dance of the Spirit* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989), p. 147.

vision and skills to enable people to move beyond themselves toward active participation in creating a future. Donal Murray expresses this vision of education in the following way:

The purpose of education, and even more fundamentally of religious education, is not to prepare unquestioning and compliant cogs for the smooth running of society as it is. It is to prepare people to be constructively critical, to take responsibility, to recognise the need for change. It is to give people a vision of human dignity and human purpose against which the shortcomings of any society can be judged and in the light of which something more human can be pursued.⁴⁴

In summary then, education is for human flourishing, personally and communally. It draws on the wisdom of the past, in conversation with the context of the present, but is always future oriented.

1.8.3 Theological Assumptions

The traditional purpose of theology is to understand the human response to what can be known and understood about God. Theology undertakes this interpretation from within the context of religious faith. The task of theology is interpretation. How one goes about this task will be shaped by one's ontological and epistemological assumptions. A positivist view is reflected in the basic premise of propositional theology that God can be known through a kind of verbal communication that has taken place between God and the world. God speaks to the individual and the community through Scripture which contains the literal word of God, and tradition which reflects on this communication. Propositionalism places a strong emphasis on logical constructs of propositional knowledge. It is critiqued on the grounds that it does not necessarily include other forms of knowledge and may give insufficient attention to human experience. Lane critiques a propositional approach to theology on the grounds that the understanding of God could be 'reduced to a series of propositions to which the individual must give assent'.⁴⁵

The theological assumptions of this research are predicated on a constructivist approach to the nature of reality so is always informed by the dynamic and open-ended inquiry of the experience of faith. The purpose of theology therefore is to 'critically unpack the revelation of God that takes place in human experience.'⁴⁶ The

⁴⁴ Donal Murray, 'The Language of Catechesis', in *Religious Education and the Future*, ed. by Dermot A. Lane (Dublin: The Columba Press, 1986), pp. 118-134 (p. 133).

⁴⁵ Dermot Lane, *The Experience of God: An Invitation to do Theology* (Dublin: Veritas, 2003), p. 49.

⁴⁶ Lane, p. 15.

turn to experience is arguably the most significant shift in theology in the twentieth century. As explicated by Lane, human experience has three basic elements.⁴⁷ Firstly, experience involves a human subject capable of seeing, thinking, feeling and discerning. This gives rise to the notion of a conscious encounter between the subject and the external world of matter and spirit. In encountering the external world, the individual receives whatever is there but is not responsible for producing what is received. This encounter with whatever is there leads to a process of interaction between the subject and reality. It is in this process of response, refraction, and critical reflection that the person moves beyond a surface engagement to an interpretive mode. The person then interprets the encounter within the overall horizon of understanding that is available to them through their cultural, historical, and religious contexts. For Lane then, experience is the living relationship between the subject and reality that shapes both the capacity of the subject to become a constituted self, as well as the identity of the constituted self. Lane's view is consistent with a contextual constructivist approach.

The activity of interpretation is central to this turn to experience. For Tracy, interpretation is unavoidable, because to experience anything in other than a purely passive sense is to interpret.⁴⁸ Tracy calls such interpretation a critical-correlation theology, as it reflects on the relationship between the two poles of human experience and the Christian tradition. The correlation of these two poles occurs through a critical conversation between the questions and answers of human experience and the theological event or text.⁴⁹ This theological approach emphasises a hermeneutics of conversation and recognises the possibility of truth in each text, person, event, discourse, and symbol system that is encountered and understood. A hermeneutics of conversation will be dependent on the understanding of language. A correlational approach sees a dialectical relationship between experience and language. Language clarifies experience and the original experience clarifies language. Theology is attentive to how experience is named and how that naming affects the interpretation of experience. Theology is also concerned with how experience should be evaluated. A correlational approach is concerned with the

⁴⁷ Lane, pp. 16-25.

⁴⁸ David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), p. 9.

⁴⁹ David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p. 46.

religious dimension of human experience. It takes as its foundational principle that God is co-known and co-experienced in human experience and therefore an appropriate theology is one that reflects on human experience as the mediating locus of God's presence. Tracy argues that a religious interpretation of experience must be consistent with a secular understanding of life. They are not separate spheres. Tracy outlines three criteria of adequacy for evaluating the meanings of human experience and Christian texts.⁵⁰ The first criterion suggests that the religious interpretation of existence must be rooted in shared human experience if it is to be meaningful. The second criterion concerns the coherence of the conceptual claims of the religious interpretation. These should not contradict, though they may challenge, the claims of the secular and scientific community. The third of Tracy's criteria is the issue of truth. He asks if the religious understanding of experience adds anything to what is already known about human existence. It is in the area of correlational theology that a contemporary religious education can find a home.

1.8.4 The Understanding of Religious Education in this Research

This research concurs with Moran's view, that, despite the limitations of the term religious education, it provides the best way to describe 'all the possible relations between religion and education'.⁵¹ Moran suggests that religious education may be understood in two senses. The first, applicable to all religious communities, is to teach or show people how to be religious in a particular way. The second sense is to teach people to understand religion in as great a depth as possible.⁵² Though cognisant that these two senses are not always easily distinguishable from each other, it is the second sense, teaching people to understand religion, with which this research is primarily concerned. Religious education implies a relationship between the experience and insight of education, and the experience and insight of religion. Religious education is therefore an educational activity and a religious activity that is informed by both education and religion. Hession describes religious education as the 'educational process by which people are invited to explore the human religious traditions that protect and illuminate the transcendent dimension of their lives'.⁵³

⁵⁰ Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order*, pp. 64-90.

⁵¹ Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran, *Reshaping Religious Education: Conversations on Contemporary Practice* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1998), p. 7.

⁵² Harris and Moran, pp. 35-41.

⁵³ Kieran and Hession, *Children, Catholicism & Religious Education*, p. 32.

When religious education is understood purely in its second sense, then it is possible to describe it as the critical encounter between religion and education. The juxtaposition of education and religion suggests that these two concepts inform each other, act as a corrective to each other, and ultimately benefit each other. The use of the word critical indicates that this encounter is intentional, and draws on both religious and educational principles to create the possibility of a critically reflective engagement between the person and religion for the purpose of understanding both the content of religious faith, as well as people's commitments to religious faith.

Religious education is an activity of faith communities, but is also a necessary activity of any education that claims to be holistic, as religion and the religious apprehension of reality are features of human culture. There are a number of worthwhile approaches to religious education that contribute to the understanding of religion as well as the relationship between religion and education. However, this research comes from the perspective that to understand religion requires the opportunity to acquire some kind of experience of the religion from the inside. Therefore the approach to religious education in this research draws primarily on the Christian theological tradition as its main source.

Religious education begins with the learner's experience of religion and his or her search for meaning in whatever form that is expressed. Coming from a constructivist perspective, this cannot mean a transmissive approach. What religious education aims for is a respectful and generous engagement with the religious response to life. Part of such a religious education will require that faith traditions are made available to the learner. These traditions may be appropriated into the life of the student or the student may be edified by these. These themes will be developed in Chapter Four of this research.

In this study, religious education is rooted in the tradition of practical theology as it emerges from, (i) a critical engagement with the socio-cultural realities of an increasingly multi-cultural and multi-faith Ireland with rapidly changing patterns of religious identity and expression, and (ii) with the educational discourse and justification of the place of religious education within schools. Religious education is always a hermeneutical and communicative interpretation of religious traditions and people's engagement with these. The purpose is not to give the impression that

religion is something out there that other people do and which can be known about; rather its purpose is to help people to understand the religious impulse and the nature of religion, so as to be able to draw on that as a source of wisdom for their own lives and the lives of others.

1.9 Methodological Assumptions

Methodology addresses the issue of how to go about finding out whatever it is that is believed to be known or can come to be known. Having identified the research question, decisions had to be made as to which research design is best for addressing the question. Religious education can be thought of as a hermeneutical and communicative interpretation of people's understanding of God as expressed in religious traditions and their engagement with these. In that sense then, it can be argued that research in religious education can be thought of in terms of a form of social inquiry. Thomas Schwandt defines social inquiry as:

a distinctive praxis, a kind of activity (like teaching) that in the doing transforms the very theory that aims and guides it. In other words, as one engages in the "practical" activities of generating and interpreting data to answer questions about what others are doing and saying and then transforming that understanding into public knowledge, one inevitably takes up "theoretical" concerns about what constitutes knowledge and how it is to be justified, about the nature and aim of social theorising, and so forth. In sum, acting and thinking, practice and theory, are linked in a continuous process of critical reflection and transformation.⁵⁴

This research adopts the premise of social inquiry that theory and practice are linked. The gathering and interpreting of existing data in the light of the research question is for the purpose of understanding the social context in which religious education exists. Social inquiry allows for attention to be kept on the difference the question makes to the education of student teachers. Interpretation leading to understanding is always for the purpose of improved practice. As social inquiry is concerned with interpretation, it adopts a qualitative inquiry approach to the research. This research design is consistent with the constructivist paradigm underpinning the research.

⁵⁴ Thomas A. Schwandt, 'Three Epistemological Stances for Qualitative Inquiry: Interpretivism, Hermeneutics and Social Constructionism', in *The Landscape of Qualitative Research: Theories and Issues*, ed. by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), pp. 292-331 (p. 190).

1.9.1 Undertaking a Qualitative Inquiry

Schwandt identifies three epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry.⁵⁵ These are interpretivism, hermeneutics, and social constructionism. Each of these stances is based on the premise that human action is meaningful, but each of them assumes a different perspective on the aim and practice of understanding human action. Though this research emerges from a constructivist paradigm, it does not go as far as the premise of social constructionism that locates all meaning in the constructs of the social world. A contextual constructivism assumes that the task of research is to interpret a context so as to understand it and maybe learn from it, change it or confirm it. Interpretivism and hermeneutics are appropriate epistemological stances for a constructivist approach. Within the interpretivist tradition, the constitutive elements of understanding are empathic identification, phenomenological sociology, and language games. Empathic identification refers to the attempt of the researcher to get an *insider* understanding of the situation or phenomenon being investigated. It assumes that the interpreter or researcher can break out of their own historical circumstances in order to reproduce the meaning or intention of the actor. The work of phenomenological sociology is concerned with understanding how the everyday, intersubjective world is constituted. The aim is to 'grasp how we come to interpret our own and others' action as meaningful'.⁵⁶ The conceptual tools of this approach are indexicality, which signifies that the meaning of a word is dependent on the context in which it is used, and reflexivity which indicates that what is said is not just about something but is also doing something. The words that are used do not just reflect reality but also shape it. Schwandt defines the third element of interpretive understanding as a language game that has its own rules or criteria for making the game meaningful to participants. So 'human action is meaningful by virtue of the system of meanings to which it belongs'.⁵⁷

Apprehending these systems of meanings is the goal of understanding. Schwandt says that these three ways of thinking about interpretivism have three features in common. In the first place they view human action as meaningful, secondly they are ethical in their respect for people's lived reality, and thirdly they emphasise the contribution of human subjectivity without sacrificing the objectivity

⁵⁵ Schwandt, pp. 189-213.

⁵⁶ Schwandt, p. 192.

⁵⁷ Schwandt, p. 193.

of knowledge. For an interpretivist, it is possible to understand the self-understandings of people engaged in particular activities or contexts and present these in an objective manner. At the heart of interpretivist thinking is an emphasis on *Verstehen*, that is, the empathic understanding of human behaviour in its own context.⁵⁸ In that sense then this type of qualitative inquiry is hermeneutical, that is, it draws on the hermeneutic circle as a method. This research draws on Clifford Geertz's description of the hermeneutic circle as:

a continuous dialectical tacking between the most local of local detail and the most global of global structure in such a way as to bring them into simultaneous view [...] Hopping back and forth between the whole conceived through the parts that actualize it and the parts conceived through the whole which motivates them, we seek to turn them, by a sort of intellectual perpetual motion, into explications of one another.⁵⁹

In situating the research question within a local context, which is the understanding of religious education, the research draws on the more global structures of theology, philosophy, education, and religious education to explicate the local and allow the research question to elucidate the larger question of religious education. This allows for qualitative research that does not necessarily have individual people at the heart of the research, but is concerned with how concepts within the social world have evolved.

Schwandt argues that a fourth way of interpretive understanding is found in the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Charles Taylor, which have been inspired by Heidegger.⁶⁰ Though not fully adopted in this research, this fourth way offers some perspectives that have shaped the direction of the research. The first perspective is the challenge to the notion that the interpreter is in some way a detached or objective observer. The researcher does not have to get rid of bias, but must acknowledge that one's own bias is part of all understanding; the researcher is shaped by a tradition and cannot step outside of it. This is a significant insight given the professional role of this researcher. Though this research is written in the passive voice and attempts some objective distance, there is also a critical awareness that decisions about the selection of data, the influence of selected authors, and the questions asked of the data all reflect the researcher's bias. A second perspective

⁵⁸ Schwandt, p. 192.

⁵⁹ Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*, 3rd edn (New York: Basic Books, 2000), p. 69.

⁶⁰ Schwandt, pp. 194-197.

that has shaped this research is the emphasis on the sense that understanding does not just follow from research or engagement, but is the very condition of being human. Understanding is itself a kind of practical experience; it is lived now rather than applied later. Within this framework, understanding is participative, conversational, and dialogic. Meaning is produced in the dialogue rather than reproduced by the researcher. This insight forms the basis of the construction of Chapters Four and Five of this research and has been a significant element in the ongoing learning of this researcher. A third insight that is of value is the realisation that it is only in the dialogical encounter with what is alien to us, or what makes a claim on us, that we can open ourselves to understanding.⁶¹

Any interpretive project is concerned with dialogue, conversation, and what Schwandt calls 'education understood as an interpretational interchange that is self-transformative'.⁶² Joe Kincheloe and Peter McLaren observe that the act of interpretation involves making sense of what has been observed in a way that communicates understanding. They suggest that an interpretive approach gives rise to a methodology that produces 'profound insights that lead to transformative action'.⁶³ Such an approach is consistent with the aim of this research which does not perceive understanding as an end in itself, but in the act of understanding to be transformative of structures and people. The results of the interpretive nature of this research are seen in Chapter Six. An interpretive approach is also consistent with the premise of this research that religious education is always a hermeneutical and communicative interpretation of religious traditions and people's engagement with these.

An interpretive mode of inquiry lends itself to adopting a qualitative methodological approach to the research. A qualitative approach was judged to be appropriate as the research set out to investigate a context that was not easy to quantify or measure accurately and as its concern was with language, concepts, definitions, and meanings. Qualitative research generally refers to the attempt to uncover and understand meaning from the analysis of collected data so as to capture

⁶¹ Schwandt, p. 195.

⁶² Schwandt, p. 202-203.

⁶³ Joe L. Kincheloe and Peter McLaren, 'Rethinking Critical Theory and Qualitative Research', in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 3rd edn (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), pp. 303-343 (p. 311).

the best representation of social reality. Qualitative research methods accept that there are multiple realities and multiple interpretations rather than just one conception of reality or one interpretation, and so is congruent with a constructivist paradigm. According to Sharan Merriam, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. The researcher will primarily employ an inductive research strategy focussing on process, meaning, and understanding, resulting in a richly descriptive product.⁶⁴ An inductive approach expects that knowledge will emerge from the study and perhaps lead to the development of a theory rather than confirming a theory. This is relevant to this research as, to date, there is no theory of religious education for student teachers of religious education in the Irish context. An appropriate starting point for qualitative analysis is descriptive research. David Krathwohl notes that 'descriptive research involves collecting data in order to answer questions [...] about the current status of the situation under study'.⁶⁵ The intention of descriptive research is to develop a purposeful, systematic, intelligent, and accurate description of some particular situation. An advantage of qualitative research is that it allows the researcher to describe and examine the breadth and depth of existing phenomena, concepts, and current situations, so as to yield results that further knowledge. The disadvantage of qualitative research is that it can be difficult to make generalisations with confidence.

1.9.2 The Role of the Researcher

The purpose of the qualitative inquiry undertaken in this study is to acquire an understanding of the issues pertaining to the research question. The explicit incorporation of the experience of the researcher within a qualitative inquiry has gained support.⁶⁶ The researcher is not a neutral observer. Though a passive voice is adopted for the writing up of this research, the researcher is inevitably present in every decision and argument, both explicitly as well as in the lacunae. Peter Reason uses the term 'critical subjectivity' to allow for the involvement of the researcher's assumptions in the shaping of the research project. Critical subjectivity is 'a quality

⁶⁴ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), p. 14.

⁶⁵ David R. Krathwohl, *Social and Behavioral Science Research: A New Framework for Conceptualizing, Implementing, and Evaluating Research Studies* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1985), p. 178.

⁶⁶ Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna, S. Lincoln, 'Introduction: Disciplining the Practice of Qualitative Research', in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. by Denzin and Lincoln, 4th edn, pp. 1-19 (p. 12).

of awareness in which we do not suppress our primary experience; nor do we allow ourselves to be swept away and overwhelmed by it; rather we raise it to consciousness and use it as part of the inquiry process'.⁶⁷ Louis Cohen introduces the word 'reflexivity' to refer to the researcher's involvement with a particular study.⁶⁸ The first form of reflexivity is personal reflexivity which involves reflecting upon the way that the researcher's identity and experiences have shaped the research. A second form of reflexivity concerns epistemological reflexivity, which requires an engagement with assumptions about the world. This second form also requires the acquisition of the type of reflective knowledge that helps us to think about the implications of such assumptions. While aware of the first form, it is this second form of reflexivity that is central to how this research proceeds.

1.9.3 Using Documents as the Source of Data

The early part of this research relies on documents as its source of data. According to John Scott, a document is a written text 'produced by individuals and groups in the course of their everyday practices and [...] geared exclusively for their own immediate practical needs'.⁶⁹ Documents are not deliberately produced for the benefit of the researcher. Geoff Payne and Judy Payne describe documents as having a semi-permanent existence which tell us indirectly about the social world, and the epistemological and ontological assumptions of the people who created the documents.⁷⁰ The documents in question provide what Scott characterises as 'mediate access' as opposed to 'proximate access' to the context. Though in the case of this research the researcher is in some way proximate or 'contemporaneous' to the context, the documents offer a mediated access to data that can therefore fulfil the requirements of authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning. According to Scott, the researcher must ensure that the evidence is genuine and from impeccable sources, that it is typical of its kind, free from error or distortion, and representative of the totality of the relevant documents. The ultimate purpose of examining any document is 'to arrive at an understanding of the meaning and

⁶⁷ Peter Reason, 'Three Approaches to Participative Inquiry', in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. by Denzin and Lincoln, 1st edn, pp. 324-339 (p. 327).

⁶⁸ Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion and Keith Morrison, *Research Methods in Education*, 5th edn (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2000), pp. 140-141.

⁶⁹ John Scott, *A Matter of Record: Documentary Sources in Social Research* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p. 5.

⁷⁰ Geoff Payne and Judy Payne, *Key Concepts in Social Research* (London: Sage Publications, 2004), p. 61.

significance of what the document contains'.⁷¹ This research has attended to Scott's criteria in its selection of material for review. Documents do not exist as neutral records; they offer only partial and partisan views of the topic under discussion. As such, each individual document offers a limited perspective. However, insights can emerge from considering how a range of documents from a variety of sources interact with each other. From a constructivist perspective this is essential, as there is no single uncontested history of anything.

Contrary to some forms of research where the review of literature is preparatory to the study, the literature review in this study provides the actual data for research. In this study, the literature review presented in Chapter Two and Chapter Three occurs within larger historical, cultural, political, religious, and socio-economic contexts that colour and shape the interpretation of the selected documents. The material for review was selected on the basis of its pertinence to the research question and evaluated on the basis of the source of the document, its generalisability, reliability, and validity. Care was taken that the review of the data was evaluative and not merely descriptive. The literature was then organised on the basis of its source. Chapter Two charts the literature emanating from the State while Chapter Three presents the material from the perspective of the Church. For the most part, this material is presented chronologically so as to get a sense of emerging trends, concerns, issues, and developments.

1.9.4 Content Analysis

Content Analysis is an unobtrusive research method that is concerned with the study of content in terms of inferring its meanings, contexts, and intentions.⁷² It is an empirical method used to determine the presence of certain words or concepts within texts or sets of texts. Researchers quantify and analyse the presence, meanings, and relationships of such words and concepts, then make inferences about the messages within the texts, the writer(s), the audience, and even the culture and time of which these are a part. Content analysis begins with a specific statement of the research question. The researcher asks the question, 'what do I want to find out from this communication content?' The researcher must therefore identify existing data

⁷¹ Scott, p. 28.

⁷² Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to its Methodology* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000).

relevant to the research question and ask questions that can be solved by content analysis. In other words, what is it that we would hope to be able to say about something by analysing the communication content or a body of text? Content analysis is considered to be an unobtrusive or non-reactive method of research. However, analysing the content in terms of a research question is consistent with the principles of the interpretivist tradition, as it allows for the development of understanding on the part of the researcher.

This research has used content analysis at its simplest level, counting the occurrence of key words and concepts within a specific set of data judged to be pertinent to the research question. A manual approach to the identification and synthesis of the data into meaningful patterns and themes was undertaken with the assistance of Microsoft Word and *Wordle*. The assumption is that words and phrases mentioned most often are those reflecting important concerns. This helped to elucidate the content of the document, as well as to throw additional light on the source of the communication, its author, and its intended recipients. Content analysis provides a rich source of data about the context within which this research occurs; however, it is limited for theorising the concepts that emerge from the analysis. For that reason, the latter part of the research focussed on generating a conceptual framework within which a response to the research question could be framed.

1.9.5 Generating a Conceptual Framework

Yosef Jabareen defines a conceptual framework as a network of interlinked concepts that together provide a comprehensive understanding of the question under consideration.⁷³ A conceptual framework is not just a collection of concepts, but a construct in which each concept plays a role. This is particularly significant for an interdisciplinary project such as this, as it allows for concepts from differing frameworks to dialogue with each other. A conceptual framework offers an interpretive approach to understanding reality, and so is congruent with the research paradigm adopted here. A conceptual framework does not predict outcomes, but through a process of qualitative analysis it can offer preliminary responses to questions that may be refined and redefined as insights emerge. Jabareen holds that

⁷³ Yosef Jabareen, 'Building a Conceptual Framework: Philosophy, Definitions and Procedure', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 8/4 (2009), pp. 49-63.

building a conceptual framework emerges from a grounded theory technique that aims to generate, identify, and trace a phenomenon's major concepts, each of which has its own attributes, characteristics, assumptions, limitations, and distinct perspectives. These major concepts, as they are reflected in key texts, provide the data for a conceptual framework analysis. The methodology for such an analysis is composed of eight main phases. The first four phases of the methodology, (i) map the selected data sources, (ii) engage in extensive reading and categorising of the selected data, (iii) identify and name the key concepts and (iv) deconstruct and categorise the concepts, are undertaken in Chapters Two and Three of this research. The next two phases which (v) integrate concepts, and (vi) synthesise and resynthesize concepts to help make sense of what is emerging, determine the shape of Chapters Four, Five and Six of this research.⁷⁴

The final stages of Jabareen's framework do not form part of the final written presentation of this research as they occur 'off-stage'. The aim of phase (vii) is to validate the conceptual framework, through the presentation of the research to others in the form of conference presentations, seminars or other academic fora. A paper entitled '*Two Roads Diverged: The Changed Landscape of Second Level Religious Education in Ireland*', which emanated from this research project, was presented at an Inter-University Colloquium, St. Deiniol's Library, Wales in 2010, and at the Religious Education Association Annual Meeting, Dallas, Texas in November 2010. '*Recovering theologia: Edward Farley's Contribution to Theological Education*', was presented to an Inter-University Colloquium hosted by Mater Dei Institute of Education in May 2011. '*Towards an Appropriate Religious Education for Student Teachers of Religious Education*' will be presented at the RE21 Conference, UCC, August 2013. The on-going rethinking of the conceptual framework forms what Jabareen sees as phase (viii) of a conceptual framework analysis. Phase (viii) finds expression in the recommendations for future research that will be identified in Chapter Seven. The dynamic revision of the conceptual framework continues to be on-going aspect of the professional practice of this researcher.

⁷⁴ Jabareen, p. 54.

1.10 The Structure of the Study

The study is organised as follows:

Chapter One introduced the study, identified the research question and its scope, and described the context within which the research has been conducted. This chapter then outlined the ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions that underpin the research paradigm. The educational and theological assumptions, as well as the understanding of religious education guiding the research were also considered. The chapter then described the research methods utilised in the study.

Chapter Two analyses the development of the term religious education in the context of the Irish State. Chapter Three examines the Catholic Church's approach to religious education making particular reference to how this has been interpreted in the Catholic Church in the Republic of Ireland. Both of these chapters are documentary in nature. These two chapters form part of the same analysis of the context of how religious education has come to be understood in Ireland.

The findings outlined in Chapters Two and Three are drawn together in Chapter Four, which proposes a conversational approach to religious education based on Gadamer's understanding of conversation as an analogy for understanding. The chapter then considers Thomas Groome's concept of appropriation and Robert Jackson's concept of reflexivity as approaches that can contribute to a conversational approach to religious education. Chapter Four raises the question of how the teacher of religious education is prepared to lead such a conversation.

Chapter Five considers the place of theology in response to the themes raised in the first three chapters. The term theological education is then introduced and considered. The history of the field of theological education since the 1980s is presented through the lens of the research question. This chapter attends in a particular way to Farley's concept of *theologia*.

Chapter Six provides a synthesis of the study in the form of six principles for a theological education approach. These principles have emerged from the research. This chapter acts as a response to the research question.

Chapter Seven concludes the study by making recommendations for practice as well as highlighting areas for future research. It also identifies the significance of the study and its unique contribution to knowledge.

Chapter Two

CONSIDERING CONTEXT: THE STATE'S UNDERSTANDING OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

2.1 Introduction

In the Acts of the Apostles, Paul is invited to the Areopagus to justify his preaching of a foreign deity, an activity that was illegal in Athens. The Areopagus referred both to a physical place where the Athenian supreme council held its sessions, as well as to the governing body that acted as a legislative and educational body. One of its educational functions was to deliberate on new ideas being promoted. Acts 17:19-34 presents an example of Paul's preaching in which he draws on the philosophical and intellectual reasoning that underscored secular discourse in order to preach his message in terms that his audience would understand. What Paul's address illustrates is that, when speaking in the civic space, one's language may have to be adjusted, but this must be done without denying the specific contribution one has to make to civic discourse. In a situation redolent of Paul's address to the Areopagus, contemporary religious education has to find a way to speak appropriately in the public square. This requires an awareness that the meaning of the terms as used by the participants in public discourse may differ greatly. Participants in the discourse may use the same words, but these may not have the same reference points or contexts thus leading to the situation where participants speak across each other rather than to each other. The challenge is to understand how words are used and to what they refer in particular contexts.

In the Republic of Ireland, religious education generally refers to the activity of teaching religion within the schooling context.¹ It is therefore situated at the intersection between religion and education. Religious education can be understood both as an activity of a faith community and an activity that is accountable to the aims of education as articulated by the State. One can take a variety of hermeneutical approaches to considering this activity. The research undertaken in this chapter is documentary in nature. It provides an interpretive background from which it is

¹ For a brief overview of the place of religious education in the schooling context in Ireland see, Kevin Williams, 'Republic of Ireland: Kevin Williams', in *Debates in Religious Education*, ed. by L. Philip Barnes (Oxon: Routledge, 2012), pp. 45-51.

possible to ascertain the perception of religious education that informs the State's evolving understanding of religious education.

Chapter Two therefore sets out to provide a review of key documentary evidence that charts the semantic evolution of the State's understanding of religious instruction and religious education. The approach is chronological in nature, as this helps to demonstrate how the use of language both reflects and responds to lived situations. This review is undertaken in three parts. The first part reports on the State's understanding of teaching religion prior to the *Education Act* of 1998, the second part considers the State's understanding of religious instruction. The third part of the review focuses on the emergence of the term religious education in the documents of the State and its eventual acceptance into educational discourse through the inclusion of religious education as a State-certified examination subject within the second-level curriculum. The purpose of this review is to ascertain how a general understanding of religious education impacts on the particular context of second-level religious education.

In allowing for State certification of religious education, the *Education Act* of 1998 emerges as a watershed moment in the development of religious education in Ireland. Its significance is that for the first time the State was involving itself in the religious education of its citizens. Particular attention is given to the various syllabi and frameworks for religious education at second-level level, as it is within these documents that the clearest articulation of the State's understanding of religious education is to be found. The documents analysed are chosen because they are considered to be normative in the way that they have shaped the actual practice of religious education in a way that some more theoretical documents may not. The chapter concludes with a consideration of recent developments in the public space that impact on how the State understands religious education. These are the Irish Human Rights Commission Report (IHRC), *Religion and Education: A Human Rights Perspective* and the publication of *The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector: Report of the Advisory Group*.

2.2 The State's Understanding of Teaching Religion Prior to the *Education Act*

Prior to the *Education Act* of 1998, the status of religious education was determined by the declaration of the *Intermediate Education (Ireland) Act*, 1878, that 'no examination shall be held in any subject of religious instruction, nor any payment made in respect thereof'.² This was interpreted to mean that the State could not directly endow the teaching of religion and therefore could have no direct involvement in the teaching of religion.³ The State's position was that it could provide for religious instruction through its inclusion in the State's educational policy, its payment of teachers, and the inclusion of religious instruction in curriculum frameworks. However, the State could not directly provide the curriculum, resources, and examination of religious instruction such that it could be construed as promoting any particular religious viewpoint. Consequently, the provision of religious education was accepted as the sole responsibility of the churches and faith communities whose concern was with the faith formation of its members. With about 92% of all schools under the patronage of the Catholic Church, in practice this meant that nearly all religion teaching reflected the theological and educational vision of the Church's educational mission.⁴

The dominant model for the teaching of religion within this system was transmissive, in the sense that there was a very deliberate attempt to teach a Catholic worldview, its culture, beliefs and values, and a particular view of the identity of the Irish State and its citizens. The purpose of teaching religion was transmissive so that pupils could, in John Hull's definition of the term, 'learn religion':

'Learning religion' describes the situation where a single religious tradition is taught as the religious education curriculum and is taught from the inside, so to speak. The teachers are expected to be believers in the religion themselves and the object of the

² *Intermediate Education (Ireland) Act*, 1878, Section 5, subsection 4.

³ According to Justice Barrington the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution in 1972 left a Constitution under which the State is obliged to respect and honour religion but is prohibited from endowing any religion or from discriminating on religious grounds. He noted that, in his judgment on the challenge to the constitutionality of the *Employment Equality Bill*, the Chief Justice had found that State aid to denominational schools does not involve the endowment of any religion. The Keane Judgement in the *Campaign to Separate Church and State Ltd v Minister for Education* [1998] is that Article 44.2.4° makes it 'clear beyond argument, not merely that the State is entitled to provide aid to schools under the management of different religious denominations, but that such schools may also include religious instruction as a subject in their curricula. It is subject to two qualifications; firstly, the legislation must not discriminate between schools under the management of different religious denominations and, secondly, it must respect the right of a child not to attend religious instruction in a school in receipt of public funds.' *Irish Law Review Monthly*, 2 (1998), p. 81-101 (p.84).

⁴ <<http://www.cso.ie/px/des/database/des/des.asp>> [accessed 2 June 2013].

instruction is to enable pupils to come to believe in the religion or to strengthen their commitment to it.⁵

The teaching of religion had a significant place on all school timetables, with 120-150 minutes per week allocated to it. In both primary and second-level schools, the teaching of religion was resourced by the churches in terms of syllabi and textbooks, as well as by the provision of both pre-service and in-service training of teachers. An anomaly existed, however, in that teachers of religion in second level schools, were paid directly by the State provided that they held formally recognised teaching qualifications, but were not accountable to the State for the material they taught. The subject did not fall under the remit of the State inspectorate and was not supported by the State in terms of textbooks, resources or in-career development. The fact that the teaching of religion was not provided as such by the State, meant that within the educational sector, the teaching of religion remained somewhat anomalous, with no provision for in-career development, and no resourcing of the subject other than in a voluntary capacity by the churches and religious communities. The effect of this status meant that the discourse about the subject remained somewhat internal to the churches and followed international ecclesial trends rather than national educational trends.

2.3 The State's Understanding of Religious Instruction

In the Republic of Ireland, religious instruction is the constitutional and legal term to describe 'the provision which is made for education and practice in particular faiths',⁶ or 'teaching of a catechetical nature'.⁷ Religious instruction is therefore necessarily denominational. According to McGrady's reading of the Irish Constitution of 1937, Article 44.2.4 implies that 'religious instruction' is denominational in character and linked to what is referred to today as the ethos of the school. This was perhaps inevitable in twentieth century Ireland, where an emerging

⁵ John M. Hull, 'The Contribution of Religious Education to Religious Freedom: A Global Perspective', in *Committed to Europe's Future: Contributions From Education and Religious Education: A Reader*, ed. by Peter Schreiner, Hans Spinder, Jeremy Taylor, and Wim Westerman (Münster: Comenius Institute, 2002), p. 107-110.

⁶ Irish National Teachers' Organisation, *The Place of Religious Education in the National School System* (Dublin: Irish National Teachers' Organisation, 1991), p. 2.

⁷ Williams, *Faith and the Nation*, p. 12. McGrady, 'Teaching Religion', p. 81 For further discussion of the constitutional understanding of religious instruction see Gerry Whyte, 'Education and the Constitution', in *Religion, Education & The Constitution*, ed. by Dermot Lane (Dublin: The Columba Press, 1992), pp. 84-118; Rory O'Connell, 'Theories of Religious Education in Ireland', *American Journal of Law and Religion*, 14/2 (1999-2000), pp. 433-523.

national identity was strongly tied to a particular confession.⁸ Such a close identification between the State's aims and the aims of a dominant church had notable effects on the way formal school education was designed. As the State became increasingly identified with Catholicism it may be argued that the educational aims of the State became aligned with the aims of the Catholic Church.⁹ This is particularly evident in the understanding of the purpose of continuation education (what has come to be known as vocational education) which, according to the DES's *Memorandum V. 40* (1942) is:

To develop, with the assistance of God's grace, the whole man with all his faculties, natural and supernatural, so that he may realise his duties and responsibilities as a member of society, that he may contribute effectively to the welfare of this fellow man, and by doing so attain the end designed for him by his Creator.¹⁰

The Memorandum further states that, to achieve such a purpose, pupils 'should receive instruction in the fundamental truths of the Christian faith'.¹¹ This instruction would be the responsibility of the local ecclesiastical authority in collaboration with the provider of continuation education. *Memorandum V. 40* goes on to specify that religious instruction should not just be confined to a particular time period, but should be integrated into the whole organisation of the school. As articulated by the DES on behalf of the State, religious instruction, inherently rooted in a particular religious vision, was to underpin all the activities of the school.

This understanding of the purpose and ethos of education informs the 1954 *Report from the Council of Education* which notes that, 'primary schools today are essentially religious and denominational in character [...] their purpose is religious'.¹² In its description of the first duty of the primary school as training

⁸ Fuller, *Irish Catholicism Since 1950*, pp. 149-177.

⁹ This issue is discussed by Williams in *Faith and the Nation*, p.49, in which he argues that because the 'right formation of citizens' was 'closely associated' with religion that civic education or the education of a people derives from religious principles. Jean-Paul Willaime makes this general observation in his study of the possibility of convergence in the way that European States are addressing the question of religion in education. 'Different Models for Religion and Education in Europe', in *Religion and Education in Europe: Developments, Contexts and Debates*, ed. by Robert Jackson, Siebren Miedema, Wolfram Weisse, and Jean-Paul Willaime (Münster: Waxmann, 2003), pp. 57-66.

¹⁰ Department of Education, *Memorandum V. 40*; 'Organisation of Whole-time Continuation Courses in Borough, Urban and County Areas, 1942' (Dublin: Department of Education, 1942), p. 230.

¹¹ *Memorandum V. 40*, p. 231.

¹² 'Report of the Council of Education on (1) The Function of the Primary School (2) The Curriculum to be Pursued in the Primary School' (Dublin, 1954), para. 194-195 in *Irish Education Documents Vol. II*, ed. by Áine Hyland and Kenneth Milne (Dublin: C.I.C.E., 1992), pp.119-125.

children in 'the fear and love of God',¹³ the Report emphasises the importance that the State attaches to religious values. The aim of the primary school is that the child should 'leave the primary school well versed in the knowledge and practice of his faith' and 'have a clear conception of his dignity as a creature of God and the duties that he owes to his Creator', and to 'his fellow man'.¹⁴ This link between the teaching of religion and the concept of nurture in a faith tradition finds its clearest expression in Rule 68 of the 1965 *Rules for National Schools*:

Of all parts of a school curriculum Religious Instruction is by far the most important, as its subject matter, God's honour and service, includes the proper use of all man's faculties, and affords the most powerful inducements to their proper use. Religious Instruction is, therefore, a fundamental part of the school course, and a religious spirit should inform and vivify the whole work of the school.¹⁵

The Council further elaborates on this link in its reflection on secondary education when, based on its assumption that everybody shares the same value system, it states that:

The essential quality, the animating principle of any school, is determined by the ultimate values recognised by the agencies which found and direct it. In Ireland, fortunately, there is no need to dwell at length on the importance of such values. Our schools are the heirs of a great tradition and it is universally recognised that their purpose is, in short, to prepare their pupils to be God-fearing and responsible citizens. The school itself is seen as a social institution, of its very nature subsidiary and complementary to the family and the Church [...] The purpose of school education, then is the organised development and equipment of all the powers of the individual person — religious, moral, intellectual, physical — so that, by making the fullest use of his talents, he may responsibly discharge his duties to God and to his fellow-men in society.¹⁶

The constitutional provision for the right of parents to withdraw their child from religious instruction further underscores the assumption of the formative nature of religious instruction.¹⁷

Despite the overt connection between the State's vision and the vision of the denominations, the programme of religious instruction to be followed was designed, implemented and inspected by the denominations. Due to the legal interpretation of

¹³ 'Report of the Council of Education', para. 129.

¹⁴ 'Report of the Council of Education', para. 130.

¹⁵ Department of Education, *Rules for National Schools under the Department of Education* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1965), p. 38.

¹⁶ 'Report of the Council of Education on the Curriculum of the Secondary School' (Dublin, 1962), in Hyland and Milne, pp. 199-200, para. 164.

¹⁷ See Williams, *Faith and the Nation*, pp. 34-51. The right of a child not to receive religious instruction has only been considered once by the Courts in the Campaign to Separate Church and State Ltd v Minister for Education [1998]. Justice Keane concluded that Article 44.2.4 makes it clear that schools in receipt of public funds 'must respect the right of a child not to attend religious instruction in a school in receipt of public funds.' *Irish Law Review Monthly*, 2 (1998), p. 84.

the prohibition on the endowment of religion, the State had no role in the direct provision of religious instruction, but could provide for religious instruction by allowing for the inclusion of religious instruction on school timetables and allowing teachers paid by the State to teach religious instruction. Changes in the understanding of what constitutes the teaching of religion therefore owe more to the educational philosophies of the denominations and faith communities than to the State. One obvious example of this is the gradual disappearance of the term religious instruction from the discourse of the Catholic Church about the teaching of religion, which is due to the on-going reflection of the faith communities on their educative role.¹⁸

In 1991, the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) made a very clear and particular distinction between religious instruction and religious education:

Religious instruction (the term used in the Rules for National Schools and the Irish Constitution) refers [...] to the current provision which is made for education and practice in particular faiths, in the great majority of National Schools which are denominational in character.

Religious Education denotes an approach which is not denominational in focus, which provides for teaching about both majority and other important faiths which are held in a society, and which seeks to promote understanding and awareness of, and sensitivity towards the faiths of others, for the common good.¹⁹

Though emerging from reflection on the primary sector, this distinction between religious education and religious instruction on the basis of breadth of scope reflected the discussion occurring within the second-level system at that time. The INTO report continues:

It [religious education] is concerned with social, civic and moral education and is not confined to particular denominational Religious Instruction. It recognises the plurality of Christian religious faiths, but also encompasses other faiths and belief systems of a non-theistic kind. Religious Education implies, in effect, education about religion as distinct from nurture in a religion. Religious Education does not conflict with denominational Religious Instruction, but complements and enhances moral and religious development.²⁰

The challenge inherent in this vision of religious education is not underestimated by the authors:

¹⁸ Developments in the Catholic Church's understanding of religious instruction will be traced in Chapter Three of this research.

¹⁹ INTO, *The Place of Religious Education*, p. 2.

²⁰ INTO, p. 35.

The inclusion of Religious Education as distinct from Religious Instruction in the national school curriculum would inevitably involve the State adopting a direct and more active role in seeking to fulfil its constitutional obligations in the areas of moral development and religious education, the responsibility for which it has traditionally ceded to denominational religious authorities.²¹

The distinction between this understanding of religious education as a broad education about religion provided by the State for all pupils, regardless of denominational affiliation or secular conviction, and a denominational religious education, provided by local faith communities, also emerged in the policy document of the Dalkey School Project which, in 1977, distinguished between religious education as 'a core curriculum subject which would be provided for all pupils within the school day', and 'Religious (Denominational) Instruction, which would be facilitated by the Board of Management if requested by groups of parents to do so'. The Dalkey School Project's understanding of religious education is that it 'would not assume or preclude adherence to any religion or faith'.²²

The issue of religious instruction emerged again in the 1998 legal challenge taken by the Campaign to Separate Church and State against the Minister for Education in opposition to the funding of school chaplains.²³ In his judgement, Justice Barrington distinguished between religious education and religious instruction, describing religious education as a 'wider' concept than religious instruction. His view was that though Article 44.2.4 of the Constitution guaranteed the right of a child not to have to attend religious instruction at a publicly funded school, it did not protect the child from being influenced by the religious ethos or curriculum of the school, 'provided this does not constitute religious instruction as such'.²⁴ The implication is that explicit religious instruction may be avoided but that a broader implicit ethos may not be preventable. Gerry Whyte interprets Barrington to mean that 'parents had the right to have religious education provided in the schools which their children attend and were not obliged to settle merely for

²¹ INTO, p. 6.

²² Áine Hyland, 'Submission to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector', (6 June 2011), available at <<http://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Conferences/Patronage-and-Pluralism-in-the-Primary-Sector/Patronage-Forum-Submissions/Hyland-%C3%81ine.pdf>> [accessed 2 July 2012].

²³ 'Campaign to Separate Church and State Ltd v Minister for Education [1998]' *Irish Law Review Monthly*, 2 (1998), pp.81-101 (p.81).

²⁴ The legal and human rights issues surrounding the right to withdraw from religious instruction in Ireland are discussed in Alison Mawhinney, *Freedom of Religion and Schools: The Case of Ireland* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag, 2009).

religious 'instruction'.²⁵ Whyte's use of the word 'merely' in this instance draws attention to the distinction between the specifically doctrinal aspect of denominational religious instruction and the Constitutional provision for the broader religious and moral formation of children that may be considered to be better named as religious education.

By the time of the publication of the 1999 *Revised Curriculum for Primary Schools*, the term religious instruction had been replaced by religious education, but the document continued to refer to an education which 'enables the child to develop spiritual and moral values and to come to a knowledge of God'.²⁶ Building on the aims expressed in the Government's White Paper, *Charting Our Education Future*,²⁷ *The Revised Primary Curriculum* situates religious education within the State's responsibility to educate the whole child:

The importance that the curriculum attributes to the child's spiritual development is expressed through the breadth of learning experiences the curriculum offers, through the inclusion of religious education as one of the areas of the curriculum, and through the child's engagement with the aesthetic and affective domains of learning.²⁸

Despite the passing into law of the *Education Act* in 1998, it is only in 2013, with the National Council of Curriculum and Assessment's (NCCA) appointment of an education officer to assist in the development of curriculum and guidelines for Education in Religion and Beliefs and in Ethics for primary schools, that the State has begun to adopt a direct and active role in the provision of religious education at primary level.²⁹ Though religious education is included as one of the seven areas of the curriculum, the State has taken a 'hands-off' approach in terms of the provision of religious education, by insisting that the 'development and implementation of the curriculum in religious education in primary schools remains the responsibility of the relevant patron bodies'.³⁰ In an information booklet provided by the NCCA, there is no mention of religious education, other than the statement that, '[t]he curriculum for

²⁵ Gerry Whyte, 'Religion and Education: A Human Rights Perspective', p. 9, <<http://www.ihrc.ie/publications/list/professor-gerry-whyte-paper-on-religion-and-educat/>> [accessed 12 May 2012].

²⁶ Department of Education and Science, *Primary School Curriculum* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1999), p. 58.

²⁷ Government of Ireland, *Charting Our Education Future* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1995), pp. 12-13.

²⁸ *Primary School Curriculum*, p. 27.

²⁹ NCCA, 'Open Competition for the Appointment of Education Officer: Information Booklet', 2013. <<http://ncca.ie/en/file/ncca/InformationSheet.pdf>> [accessed 1 June 2013].

³⁰ *Primary School Curriculum*, p. vi.

Religious Education is the responsibility of the different Church authorities'.³¹ Such an omission from a public information document suggests that religious education is understood as being an ecclesial task rather than a task for which that the State takes responsibility. The absence of information about religious education in the brochures for parents means that it is not considered mainstream or understood to be educational in the same way as other curriculum areas.

In its 2003 publication, *Teaching Religion in the Primary School: Issues and Challenges*, the INTO maintains that the teaching of religion is the responsibility of all schools. In its presentation of teachers' stated reasons for the teaching of religion, (i) to support the ethos of the school (ii) to pass on the faith (iii) to pass on values and (iv) to prepare children for the sacraments in a supportive rather than a leading role, it is evident that, for many teachers, the teaching of religion is closely aligned with faith formation in a specific tradition. Though the faith development perspective is the dominant perspective amongst the teachers surveyed, two other perspectives emerge as significant. These are the role of religion class in the development of moral values (with or without reference to a specific religion) and information about the facts of religion.³² The INTO argues that providing an education in religion is the responsibility of all schools and 'should aim at helping pupils to understand what religion is and what it means to take religion seriously'. On this basis, the INTO then argues that it would be timely 'to consider the introduction of a religious education programme in all schools which would help children to achieve a knowledge and understanding of religious insights, beliefs and practices'.³³ In this document, religious education has come to mean education in religion that has knowledge and understanding as its aim. This is distinct from religious instruction, which is taken to mean nurture in a specific religion. The INTO's distinction between the broad term religious education and the more specific term religious instruction is not so clearly made in the 2007 edition of *Board of Management Handbook*, published by the Catholic Primary School Management Association (CPSMA). This handbook initially refers to religious education, which it describes as including 'instruction in the teaching of the Catholic Church', and which is 'wider than mere knowledge,

³¹ NCCA, *The What, Why and How of Children's Learning in Primary School: Information for Parents* (Dublin: NCCA, 2006), p. 2.

³² INTO, *Teaching Religion in the Primary School: Issues and Challenges* (Dublin: Irish National Teachers' Organisation, 2003), p. 136.

³³ INTO, *Teaching Religion*, p. 138.

including as it does religious formation as well as information'. Such a religious instruction 'should be part of the fullness of the education given in schools to children who belong to that Church.'³⁴

It is important at this juncture to highlight the difference between the State's understanding of religious instruction and how that term is used by the Catholic Church. In its understanding of the task of religious instruction as facilitating nurture in a particular religion, the State equates religious instruction with a catechetical or faith formation approach. This in fact differs from the usage of the term in the Catholic tradition, where religious instruction has much in common with a religious studies approach and is situated alongside a faith formation or catechetical approach. *The General Directory for Catechesis (GDC)* describes the relationship between religious instruction in schools and catechesis as being one of 'distinction and complementarity', but reiterates the call of John Paul II that 'there is an absolute necessity to distinguish clearly between religious instruction and catechesis.'³⁵ The *GDC* continues, 'religious instruction in schools should appear as a scholastic discipline with the same rigour as other disciplines', the aim of which is, according to Hession, 'the learning of forms of religious knowing and the acquisition of knowledge of religious beliefs and practices, neither of which require a faith commitment in principle'.³⁶ A Catholic understanding of religious instruction refers to the academic and inter-disciplinary study of Christian religion in schools in a way that can contribute to catechetical or faith formation and development. Religious instruction refers to a more specific educational activity than that understood by its use in the documents of the State. The study now considers the emergence of the term religious education within Irish discourse.

2.4 The Emergence of the Use of the Term Religious Education

Arguably the term religious education is more familiar within the second level sector than in the primary sector. Its emergence has a different starting point and trajectory to the discussion at primary level. In a letter dated 16 February 1976, the Episcopal Conference of the Catholic Church in Ireland requested that the DES would

³⁴ Catholic Primary School Management Association, *Board of Management Handbook* (Dublin: CPMSA, 2007), p. 8.

³⁵ Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* (Dublin: Veritas, 1997), para. 73.

³⁶ Kieran and Hession, *Children, Catholicism & Religious Education*, p. 41.

introduce Religious Studies as an examination subject. The request from the Episcopal Conference reflected an understanding of Religious Studies in which the in-depth presentation and study of the faith of a believing community, which is in keeping with a Catholic understanding of religious instruction, would become part of the State Examinations system. The concern underlying the request of the Episcopal Commission was the perception that little was being done in schools in terms of the academic study of religion, with the result that religion was both losing academic credibility within schools and not providing an education in faith. The intention was that, by providing a more rigorous academic programme, some of the difficulties being encountered by teachers of religion would be alleviated. This concern emerges within the context of the employment of appropriately qualified teachers of religion who were bringing to the table changing understandings of the distinctions between religious instruction and religious education and arguing for a shift from an ecclesial understanding of the study of religion in school to an educational understanding. Parallel to this was an emerging post-Vatican II vision of catechesis that resonated with the child-centred curriculum of post 1960s educational policy. In 1977, subsequent to the refusal of their request to the DES, the Episcopal Conference set up a Working Party to draw up a draft syllabus for *Religious Studies for Leaving Certificate*, an amended version of which was submitted to the DES in 1982. However, due to the prohibition on the State examination of religion neither proposal was accepted by the DES.

The prohibition on the examination of religious instruction came under scrutiny in 1986 when questions about the submission from the Episcopal Conference about the possibility of the introduction of religious studies as a Leaving Certificate examination subject were raised in the Dáil. The Dáil Proceedings show that the response of Minister for Education, Gemma Hussey, drawing on advice from the Chief State Solicitor, was that an amendment to the *Intermediate Education Act, 1878* would be necessary in order to introduce religious studies as a subject in the Leaving Certificate programme, and that the issue was being considered by the DES.³⁷ In 1989, Minister for Education, Mary O'Rourke signalled that she was 'considering the introduction of an examination in religious studies'. She continued,

³⁷ Minister for Education, 'Written Answers - Religious Studies', 13 February 1986, *Dáil Eireann Debate*, 363/12 <<http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1986/02/13/00072.asp>> [accessed 24 August 2012].

'[in] this connection the question of amending the *Intermediate Education (Ireland) Act, 1878*, is being considered at present in consultation with the Government's legal advisers.'³⁸ It should be noted that the term religious studies was taken in the Episcopal submission, and it appears by the DES, to mean the academic study of Catholic faith and doctrine, rather than what may now be perceived as a more phenomenological or sociological discipline.

2.5 *Whither Religious Education?* The Weafer and Hanley Report

Whither Religious Education?, John Weafer and Ann Hanley's 1989 Report was a significant marker in the use of the term religious education to describe the teaching of religion at second level in Ireland. The aim of this national survey of teachers of religion was to 'better understand the work of religious education in the post-primary schools'.³⁹ Based on a survey of 665 teachers of religious education in a variety of contexts, the research size and wide sampling elicited a comprehensive overview of how those teaching religion understood their task. The context within which the collated data was interpreted is evident in Murray's comment that the results of the survey would 'enable the community of the church to understand better the work of teachers of religion in the most important apostolate of catechesis'.⁴⁰ From this we can see that religious education was understood to be synonymous with the apostolate of catechesis or the teaching of religion in such a way as to enable faith to mature. By the time of the publication of *Whither Religious Education?*, the term religious education was being used increasingly to describe a model of educating in faith that was moving away from a transmissive model to a model engaging with contemporary educational practice, but still firmly rooted in the apostolate of catechesis. What is of note in the survey is that it assumes that all of the respondents were unanimous in their understanding of a religious education that is catechetical in nature, scope, and intent. This is in keeping with what the State understood as religious instruction, though it is clear again from the respondents that there was little inclination for using this particular term.

³⁸ Minister for Education, 'Written Answers – Examination in Religious Studies', 26 October 1989, *Dáil Éireann Debate* 392/3, <<http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1989/10/26/00081.asp>> [accessed 24 August 2012].

³⁹ *Whither Religious Education? A Survey of Post-Primary Teachers in Ireland*, ed. by John A. Weafer and Ann Hanley (Dublin: Columba Press, 1991).

⁴⁰ Donal Murray, 'Foreword', in Weafer and Hanley, p. 11.

It is clear from the published responses that the majority of teachers understood that the primary aim of their task was to foster a personal Christian faith (41%) or to assist pupils' spiritual development (44%). Responses to the question on the 'desired impact of religious education on pupil's lives' stressed the personal and spiritual dimension of the lives of the pupils, with most emphasis placed on encouraging 'responsibility and personal development' (47%).⁴¹ The view that religious education is primarily, if not exclusively about faith development is also evident in the response to the question of the role of teachers' faith in the classroom. 74% of respondents strongly agreed that a teacher's faith is a vital component in fostering faith in the classroom, with 57% saying that one 'cannot teach religion without faith'.⁴² This theme is reflected in Seán Cahill's use of the term 'vocation' to describe the teaching of religion and in Lane's description of the teaching of religion as 'a form of lay ministry'. It is sharply focussed in Anne Looney's comment that the 'religious educator is a minister of the church and agent of the educational institution'.⁴³ Like Looney, the rest of the commentaries on the survey share an unquestioned assumption that religious education in the second-level school is understood as being an ecclesial ministry. The question of whether religious education should be taught, or what form it should most properly take in the classroom, did not emerge in the research. The issue that engages the commentators is the gap between school and a community of faith or parish, with the expressed concern that the school is increasingly seen as being the only locus for faith development.

Weafer and Hanley raised the question of the examination status of religious education and analysed it in terms of the role of religious education in the future. The survey found that those who had a formal qualification in religious education were more likely to be in favour of religious education being a Leaving Certificate subject (51%). When the question of certification and assessment at junior cycle was raised, only 34% were in favour of examinations, with 38% opposed and 28% who ticked the 'don't know' box. Of the responses opposing the introduction of examinations in religious education, the most common reason given was the fear that the introduction

⁴¹ Weafer and Hanley, p. 87.

⁴² Weafer and Hanley, p. 89.

⁴³ Weafer and Hanley, p. 126, p. 129, p. 149.

of an examination would 'destroy the faith dimension of religious education'.⁴⁴ With the exception of Brian Mooney's contribution, the commentaries on the survey pay no attention to the question of examinations in religious education.⁴⁵ Mooney raises the issue of the identity of religious education within the school environment and contends that the status of religious education is 'handicapped by uncertainty' as to the goals to be achieved. According to Mooney, the goal of the religious education classroom is the acquisition of religious knowledge. This is related to but separate from the goal of faith development, which is a shared responsibility of the wider faith community. This reflects the religious instruction model as understood in the catechetical documents of the Catholic Church.

The significance of the survey was that the voices of those teaching religion in a variety of second level school contexts were being heard in a public way, though the discourse remained quite internal to the discipline. Murray sees this report as a challenge to the church community. There is little sense that it was a challenge to the wider educational community.⁴⁶ The more significant impact of the survey was, in this researcher's view, that the term religious education, however that is understood, had become the widely accepted term for the teaching of religion at second level.

2.6 Renewing the Call for Examinations in Religion

Despite the legal prohibition on the examination of religious instruction, the debate about assessment continued into the 1990s. Devitt and Caroline Renehan presented the case for religious education as a Leaving Certificate subject on the basis of a number of assumptions about the nature and function of assessment as an integral function of teaching.⁴⁷ For them, the purpose of a terminal examination is to assess pupils' 'religiacy', that is their ability to understand religion and to empathise in a knowledgeable manner with the encounter with the religions and with people of

⁴⁴ Weafer and Hanley, p. 87.

⁴⁵ Brian Mooney, 'The Views of a Teacher', in Weafer and Hanley, pp. 142-144.

⁴⁶ Other than a review by Renehan in *Oideas* little public attention was paid to the results of the survey. Caroline Renehan, 'First Professional Survey of Teachers in School: An Appetite to be More Included!' Review of John A. Weafer and Ann Hanley, *Whither Religious Education?* in *Oideas*, 38 (1992), pp. 151-154.

⁴⁷ Patrick Devitt, Caroline Renehan, Anne Looney, and Robert Dunne, 'Religious Education as a Leaving Certificate Subject: The Pros and Cons', *Catechetical Association of Ireland*, 5/3 (1992), pp. 4-5.

religious commitment.⁴⁸ Religiacy is promoted by an academic study of religion that may be critically assimilated into the faith development of a person. Devitt and Renehan's other concern is that, in the absence of a serious academic approach demanding an imaginative engagement with religion, it would be difficult in the future to convince schools that religion had a place in an academic curriculum, with the result that time for the teaching of religion would be eroded.

In their argument against the introduction of an examination for religious education at Leaving Certificate, Looney and Robert Dunne maintain that the problematic issues surrounding the teaching of religious education will not be solved through the introduction of a terminal examination. Their contention is that, ideally, an academic programme of religious studies would be separate from a faith formation programme, which they refer to as religious education, although the reality is that the classroom must provide for both. They then ask if it is possible or even justifiable to assess a subject that has a faith dimension at its core. Looney and Dunne's argument bears out the NCCA's speculation that, 'the impact of the catechetical movement had created an atmosphere in schools largely unsympathetic to formal assessment and certification'.⁴⁹

Writing a few years later, Williams supports the call for religious education as an examination subject.⁵⁰ By separating what he terms the 'practical dimension of religion' or the lived richness of a religious tradition from the 'theoretical dimension of religion', Williams is able to argue that it is possible to distinguish between a conceptual apprehension of the theory of religion and the lived experience of religious belief. Building on Williams' premise, it is possible to argue for the external assessment of conceptual understanding while at the same time facilitating the internal reflective practice that lies at the heart of a maturing religious faith. Situating this argument in the context of a school, Williams is alert to the fact that the formal curriculum is not the only instrument of religious education. A

⁴⁸ This theme is developed in greater depth by Patrick Devitt in 'Religious Education as an Examination Subject: Identifying Some Emerging Questions', in *REA: A Journal of Religion, Education and the Arts*, 1 (2000), pp. 9-24.

⁴⁹ Anne Looney, 'Religious Education in the Public Space: Challenges and Contestations', in *International Handbook of the Religious, Moral and Spiritual Dimensions in Education*, Part Two, ed. by Marian de Souza, Kathleen Engebretson, Gloria Durka, Robert Jackson, and Andrew McGrady (The Netherlands: Springer, 2006), pp. 949-966 (p. 956).

⁵⁰ Kevin Williams, 'Public Examinations and Religious Education', *The Furrow*, 46/7-8 (1995), pp. 437-441.

conceptually rich religious education can enhance a rich lived experience of religion, which in turn can inform the depth of conceptual apprehension. The two dimensions are not mutually exclusive, but neither are they identical. Conceptual understanding does not necessarily equate with lived experience nor vice versa. This theme is further explicated by Devitt's distinction between taking a faith stance in life and the ability to stand back from that faith to reflect on it and on religious belief generally.⁵¹ The religious person can 'bracket their commitment' in order to investigate its sources, meanings and challenges. They can also engage with other religions and worldviews and critique the negative elements of some religious expressions. For Devitt the aim of the religion class, in line with the aims of all second-level education, is knowledge, understanding, and the skill of critical and independent thinking. The main aim of religious instruction is so that members may be able to live more religiously the faith to which they belong. Devitt suggests that religious education could provide a parallel to religious instruction in so far as the main aim of religious education is the development of the person's capacity to be *religiante*.⁵² The ability to think creatively in the field of religion, which is a matter of knowledge, attitude, understanding, and the skills associated with religious thinking, is clearly assessable in a way that the religious life of people is not.

The call for a State-certified examination of religious education was about more than assessment; it paved the way for a more public discussion about the nature and scope of religious education as both a societal task and a more formal educational task for which the State has some responsibility. Religious education is not just the task of the churches.

2.7 General Developments in Education that Impact on Religious Education

Second level religious education occurs in the context of developments within the Irish educational sector and must respond to these.⁵³ Extrapolating from these developments, it may be suggested that, in the Irish State, education has the capacity

⁵¹ Devitt, *Willingly to School*, pp. 48-59.

⁵² Patrick M. Devitt, *Immortal Diamond: Facts of Mature Faith* (Dublin: Veritas, 1997), p. 30.

⁵³ Recent documents guiding national education policy are: *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020* (2011); *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (2011); *Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education* (2011); *The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector: Report of the Advisory Group* (2012); *A Framework for Junior Cycle* (2012).

to empower individuals to participate fully and creatively in their communities. These communities are increasingly understood to exist within a pan-European and global context. This context requires education to be primarily about the development of skill sets for a global knowledge economy. The 1996 International Commission on Education for the 21st Century report to UNESCO entitled: *Learning: The Treasure Within*, argued that education throughout life is based on four pillars: Learning to know (acquiring the instruments of understanding), Learning to Do (to be able to act creatively on one's environment), Learning to Live Together (so as to participate and co-operate with other people in all human activities) and Learning to Be (the aim of development being the complete fulfilment of man in all the richness of his personality).⁵⁴ These aims are summarised in the statements that:

Education should contribute to every person's complete development – mind and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic appreciation and spirituality.

The aim of this development is the complete fulfilment of the human person, in all the richness of his or her personality, the complexity of his or her forms of expression and his or her various commitments – as individual, member of a family and of a community, citizen and a producer, inventor of techniques and creative dreamer.⁵⁵

Such a holistic vision of education integrates body, mind, and spirit and puts the person of the learner at the heart of the education process.

The influence of the UNESCO Report is evident in the concern of the 1995 White Paper, *Charting our Education Future*, for a more comprehensive philosophy of education that prepares people to be engaged in lifelong education that is both student centred and globally focussed in terms of emphases.⁵⁶ Such a philosophy may be discerned in the way that education in its broadest terms is described by the DES:

The general aim of education is to contribute towards the development of all aspects of the individual, including aesthetic, creative, critical, cultural, emotional, intellectual, moral, physical, political, social and spiritual development, for personal and family life, for working life, for living in community and for leisure.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Jacques Delors and others, *Learning: The Treasure Within: Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century* (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1996).

⁵⁵ Delors, p. 8.

⁵⁶ Government of Ireland, *Charting our Education Future: White Paper on Education* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1992), pp. 12-13.

⁵⁷ Department of Education and Science: 'The Aims of the Junior Certificate', <http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Post-Primary_Education/Junior_Cycle/_Aims_of_junior_cycle/_Aims_of_junior_cycle.html> [accessed 16 July 2012].

The sense behind these aims is that all education is inherently formative and that the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students is undertaken in consultation with parents, having due regard for the characteristic spirit of the particular school. This language gets further explicated in the *Education Act* (1998) which states in section 9 that one of the functions of a school is, 'to promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and provide health education for them, in consultation with their parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school'.⁵⁸ Section 15 (b) of the Act determines that the function of the Board of Management of a school is to 'uphold the characteristic spirit of the school as determined by the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school'.⁵⁹ While not all school subjects contribute in the same way to each dimension of the development of the student, all subjects must be taught in such a way as not to undermine any of the dimensions. It is this inclusive approach to the education of the person that allows ideologically for the adoption of religious education as a legitimate activity of the State. The State assumes that religious education has something to contribute to the development of the learner; however what that 'something' is, or its source, has not been defined. Spirituality and morality are both seen to be part of the full human development of the child, but these are not necessarily assumed to emerge from the religious domain.

Both Gareth Byrne and Williams draw attention to the fact that the Government's White Paper on Education states that 'all students, in accordance with their abilities' should have 'formative experiences in moral, religious and spiritual education', with Williams suggesting that by definition this then also includes senior cycle.⁶⁰ Williams' reading of the White Paper highlights the fact that as is the case with every other specific subject on the curriculum, religious education is not explored. He concludes that, in the progression of subjects from junior to senior cycle, there is an implied recognition of the place of religious education in both cycles. By not singling out religious education in the White Paper, the DES has not

⁵⁸ Government of Ireland, *Education Act*, 1998 (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1998), Section 9 (d), p. 13.

⁵⁹ *Education Act*, Section 15 (b), p. 19.

⁶⁰ Williams, *Faith and the Nation*, pp. 60-63. Gareth Byrne, *Religious Education Renewed: An Overview of Developments in Post-Primary Religious Education* (Dublin: Veritas, 2005), p. 2.

given it a special status. This arguably gives religious education an educational place within the school; however, it does not address the question of religious instruction within the school. Williams points out that there is a shift from the Green Paper's emphasis on the fostering of understanding and critical appreciation, to the White Paper's emphasis on the formative aspects of religious education.⁶¹ The trajectory of the shift as outlined by Williams draws attention to the tentative nature of the search for a language with which to speak of religious education and its place in a modern education system. In highlighting the developments in the primary sector, Williams' study underscores the lack of public debate and discourse at second level. This may have to do with the understanding of the specifically formative dimension of religious education in the primary curriculum with its aim of fostering faith through an integrated curriculum; this is not pursued rigorously in the day to day life of the second-level school.

2.8 The State's Understanding of Religious Education at Second Level

It is fair to say that the State's understanding of religious education has emerged historically rather than as the result of any conceptual framework, and is to be found in curriculum, syllabi, and in the resourcing of religious education, rather than in any specific documentation. The trajectory toward State provision of religious education re-emerged in the 1995 submission from the NCCA to the DES, in which four reasons were advanced for advocating State provision of religious education on the grounds of public interest and as no longer solely an ecclesial project.⁶² The reasons given were, (i) the increasing professionalisation of teachers of religious education, (ii) the growing range of institutions offering specialist degrees in theology and religious studies, (iii) the changing patterns of religious affiliation and practice, and (iv) the political imperative to build relationships between the major religious traditions in Ireland. The submission also proposed an educational rationale for the inclusion of religious education in the curriculum:

Religious education, in offering opportunities to develop an informed and critical understanding of the Christian tradition in its historical origins and cultural and social

⁶¹ Government of Ireland, *Education for a Changing World: Green Paper on Education* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1992).

⁶² The background to this submission is outlined by Anne Looney, 'Religious Education in the Public Space', pp. 949-966, and by Martin Convey, 'Public Examinations and Religious Education', *The Furrow*, 46/11 (1995), pp. 634-639.

expressions, should be part of a curriculum which seeks to promote the critical and cultural development of the individual in his or her social and personal contexts.⁶³

The submission from the NCCA must be understood in the context of *Charting our Education Future* which claimed that, 'education should value and promote all dimensions of human development and seek to prepare people for full participation in cultural, social and economic life'.⁶⁴ The explicit acknowledgement of the spiritual as an aspect of the individual paved the way for the introduction of a State curriculum for religious education on educational grounds. Drawing on the premise of the White Paper that educating every aspect of the individual was the business of the State, religious education could be situated within the context of lifelong learning and education for active, participatory citizenship, in which the student assumes the roles of critical questioner and reflective searcher.

The NCCA's submission also reflects the preparatory work being undertaken on the 1998 *Education Act*, the purpose of which was to 'make provision in the interests of the common good for the education of every person in the State'.⁶⁵ To achieve this aim, Section 35 of the *Education Act* of Ireland 1998 amended Section 5 of the *Intermediate Education (Ireland) Act, 1878*, by the deletion of 'provided that no examination shall be held in any subject of religious instruction, nor any payment made in respect thereof'. As a consequence of the *Education Act*'s deletion of the prohibition on funding for the examination of religious instruction, the Council of the NCCA approved the Junior Certificate Syllabus at its meeting on 26 May 1998. In December 1998, the Minister for Education and Science approved the syllabus and, in June 1999, *Circular M 19/99* was issued to all second-level schools inviting them to participate in the phased introduction of Junior Certificate Religious Education (JCRE). Arguably, this amendment marks the beginning of the shift from understanding the learning and teaching of religion as a solely ecclesial task (religious instruction) to appreciating it as a legitimate activity within the public domain (religious education), the implications of which have yet to be fully realised both by the faith communities and by the public. In response to the *Education Act* of

⁶³NCCA, 'Submission to the Department of Education and Science from the Course Committee for Religious Education' (Dublin: NCCA, 1995), p. 5. This submission was later included in the rationale for Religious Education for Junior Certificate, however, the final word 'contexts' was amended to read 'life'. Department of Education and Science, *Junior Certificate: Religious Education Syllabus* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 2000), p. 4.

⁶⁴*Charting our Education Future*, p. 8.

⁶⁵*Education Act*, Preamble, p. 5.

1998 the State began to take a more engaged approach in the question of religious education as something that is the concern not just of the religions, but also of the State.

2.8.1 A Syllabus for Junior Certificate Religious Education

In 2000 the DES introduced a syllabus for Junior Certificate Religious Education (*JCRES*), the aims of which are:

- To foster an awareness that the human search for meaning is common to all peoples, of all ages and at all times
- To explore how this search for meaning has found, and continues to find, expression in religion
- To identify how understandings of God, religious traditions, and in particular the Christian tradition, have contributed to the culture in which we live, and continue to have an impact on personal life-style, inter-personal relationships and relationships between individuals and their communities and contexts
- To appreciate the richness of religious traditions and to acknowledge the non-religious interpretation of life
- To contribute to the spiritual and moral development of the student.⁶⁶

The spiritual rather than the religious aspect of a person is identified in the general aim of education adopted by the DES. However, religious and moral education, rather than spiritual education, was designated as one of the eight areas forming the 1989 framework for the Junior Certificate curriculum. This decision suggests that, for the designers of the curriculum, spirituality and morality were to be understood in terms of their religious expression. Despite the reference to the ‘non-religious interpretation of life’, there appears to be an assumption that religion contributes to the spiritual and moral development of all students.⁶⁷ Religious education is therefore understood as being integral to the education of all students. The *JCRES* is therefore, in Williams’ view, ‘inclusive and consistent with liberal democratic principles’.⁶⁸

The *JCRES* presents a vision of religious education as a subject that engages learners in the process of constructing meaning from the knowledge they acquire. It places interpretation at the heart of learning. It is evident that the *JCRES* is envisaged as providing an opportunity for students to learn not just *about* but *from* religion. As

⁶⁶ *JCRES*, p. 5.

⁶⁷ *JCRES*, p.4.

⁶⁸ Williams, *Faith and the Nation*, p. 77.

used by Hull, 'learning *from* religion' refers to 'the kind of religious education which has as its principal objective the humanisation of the pupil, that is, making a contribution to the moral and spiritual development of the pupil'.⁶⁹ However, this sense that religious education contributes to the holistic education of the learner is not borne out in the information leaflet provided to students and their parents, which states that:

In Religious Education (RE) you will learn about what people believe, why they believe and how these beliefs influence their own lives, the lives of others and the world around us. You will explore how many religions, particularly Christian religions, have shaped the Ireland you live in today.⁷⁰

According to this summary, the study of religion appears to be purely descriptive and a factual approach is promoted. This factsheet, either as a result of an oversight or for some other reason, limits the study of religious education to a sociological or phenomenological approach. In this instance, the NCCA's approach is not entirely in line with the values espoused by the syllabus. It is suggested here that religious education is solely a phenomenological study of religion that does not necessarily invite the learner to experience 'religion from the inside'.⁷¹ The complexity the NCCA conjured with in defining religious education in the *JCRES* has, in this instance, been ignored or forgotten.

2.8.2 A Syllabus for Leaving Certificate Religious Education

The Leaving Certificate programme is situated within the context of preparing students for 'their role as participative, enterprising citizens' by promoting 'a spirit of inquiry, critical thinking, problem solving, self-reliance, initiative and enterprise'.⁷² All subjects contribute to the programme but are independent of each other. Religious education is situated within the social groups of subjects which explore issues common to all people living in society. The intention of this set of subjects is to 'develop the skills and knowledge used to manage personal resources and guide human behaviour'. The DES acknowledges that religious education has a

⁶⁹ Hull, 'The Contribution of Religious Education to Religious Freedom', p. 109. The theme of 'learning *from* religion', is explored with reference to the Irish second-level classroom by Suzanne Dillon, 'Religious Education at Second Level in Ireland', in Byrne and Kieran, pp. 71-77.

⁷⁰ National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 'Junior Certificate Religious Education: Factsheet', available at <http://www.ncca.ie/uploadedfiles/Factsheets/RE_factsheet.pdf> [accessed 22 July 2012].

⁷¹ Williams, *Faith and the Nation*, p. 79.

⁷² Department of Education and Science, *Leaving Certificate Religious Education Syllabus* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 2003), Preamble.

particular contribution to make to a Leaving Certificate programme by facilitating a student's 'reflective engagement with the particular knowledge, understanding, skills, and attitudes which form the foundation of the religious education syllabus'. The Department stresses that the emphasis in the syllabus is 'on the value of religious belief'.⁷³ This value is assessed in terms of the contribution that religious belief can make to citizenship rather than in terms of what religion itself contributes. This suggests a phenomenological approach to the syllabus which, in keeping with the liberal democratic principles of tolerance, diversity, and plurality, requires an understanding of a variety of religious and secular worldviews, but does not concern itself with any of the truth claims of any of the religions. LCRE is therefore a response to negotiating the cultural fact of religion. A popular website for Leaving Certificate students describes religious education in the following way:

Religious education in the Leaving Certificate programme calls for the exploration of issues such as meaning and value, the nature of morality, the development of diversity and belief, the principles of a just society, and the implications of scientific progress. It has a particular role to play in the curriculum in the promotion of tolerance and mutual understanding. It seeks to develop in students the skills needed to engage in meaningful dialogue with those of other or of no religious traditions.⁷⁴

Another website describes religious education as 'a personally enriching subject which helps the learner to function effectively in a complex, pluralist culture.'⁷⁵

In 2003, the DES published a syllabus for LCRE that had the same aims as the Junior Certificate Syllabus. However, the two syllabi describe the general aim of education in slightly different terms. In contrast to the *JCRES* statement about the aim of education, the *LCRES* defines the aim of education in the following way:

The general aim of education is to contribute towards the development of all aspects of the individual, including aesthetic, creative, critical, cultural, emotional, expressive, intellectual, for personal and home life, for working life, for living in the community and for leisure.⁷⁶

The marked difference between the two statements is the inclusion of the 'expressive' aspect of the individual in the Leaving Certificate statement, but the exclusion of the 'moral, physical, political, social and spiritual' aspects of the person. It is not clear what philosophical outlook held sway in arriving at this change.

⁷³ *LCRES*, p.4.

⁷⁴ <<http://www.careersportal.ie>> [accessed 16 July, 2012].

⁷⁵ <<http://www.schooethos.ie/>> [accessed 16 July 2012].

⁷⁶ *LCRES*, Preamble.

Religious education fits less comfortably within the general aim of education as articulated here. From this it seems that, for some, it is perhaps easier to argue for the inclusion of religious education at junior level than at senior level.

2.8.3 Leaving Certificate Applied: Draft Syllabus for Religious Education

The Leaving Certificate Applied Programme (LCA) is a two year Leaving Certificate Programme available to students who wish to follow a practical course of studies with a strong vocational emphasis. LCA is situated within the general framework for Senior Cycle education and shares the same general aim of contributing to the development of all aspects of the individual, but with a particular focus on preparation of the students for their role as ‘participative, enterprising citizens’.⁷⁷ The LCA is a person-centred programme that is cross-curricular in design. Within this programme religious education contributes to the moral and spiritual development of the student. The purpose of religious education is:

to support the holistic aims of education by promoting personal growth and facilitating spiritual development. It engages the students in the human search for meaning and offers them an opportunity to reflect, understand and interpret that experience in the light of our changing world. It invites students to examine religious stories, and where appropriate, their own religious story, and to value their place within it now and in the future. It exposes them to a broad range of religious traditions and encourages the promotion of mutual understanding and tolerance. It facilitates moral development through the application of a process of moral decision-making.⁷⁸

This rationale describes the purpose of religious education in terms of ‘learning *from* religion’, and addresses Hull’s question, ‘what is the educational advantage to be gained by the study of religion?’⁷⁹ What is it that people learn that is valuable for their lives? Consistent with the general aims of education adopted by the Irish State, religious education is justified, in so far as it contributes to the personal growth of a student in the context of ‘the promotion of mutual understanding and tolerance’. Religion is for the person, not the person for the religion. In contrast to the citizenship education approach that is evident in the LCRE syllabus, the approach to

⁷⁷ Department of Education and Science, *LCA: Programme Statement and Outline of Student Tasks* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 2001), Preamble.

⁷⁸ Department of Education and Science, *Leaving Certificate Applied: Draft Syllabus for Religious Education* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 2000). Despite being published in 2000, this syllabus remains in draft form; there is very little support for the provision of resources for Religious Education in the LCA programme.

⁷⁹ John Hull, ‘Religion and Education in a Pluralist Society’, in Lane, *Religion, Education & The Constitution*, pp. 15-33 (p. 16).

LCA religious education owes more to a personal development approach than a phenomenological one.

2.8.4 A Curriculum Framework for Senior Cycle Religious Education

Popularly known as the non-examination framework for religious education, the *Curriculum Framework for Senior Cycle* outlines its rationale for religious education in the following terms:

In exposing students to a broad range of religious issues, religious traditions and ways of understanding the human search for meaning, the framework can help contribute to the spiritual and moral development of students from all faiths and none. It can also help develop a healthy respect for the beliefs of others and an openness to dialogue in search of mutual understanding.⁸⁰

The focus of this framework is on the personal, spiritual, and moral development of the student. This framework merges the approaches of both the JCRE and LCRE. Though students will study a range of issues and traditions, the overarching purpose is to contribute to their own spiritual and moral development in a manner that is respectful of the beliefs of others. This is in line with the Junior Certificate approach, but somewhat at odds with the approach of LCRE which has a greater focus on the development of critical questioning with the aim of engaged citizenship. The inconsistency is that those students following the LCRE syllabus will have a different experience of the aims of religious education than their peers who are following the Curriculum Framework.

2.8.5 A Framework for Junior Cycle

In 2010 the NCCA published *Innovation and Identity: Ideas for a New Junior Cycle* in which a framework for a revised Junior Cycle curriculum was proposed.⁸¹ The proposed framework was adopted by the DES in its document, *A Framework for Junior Cycle*, published in 2012.⁸² The focus of this revision is on the student as a learner engaged in learning for life. The justification for the inclusion of any subject in the revised framework will be its potential to contribute to at least some of the twenty-four statements of learning identified as core aims of the syllabus. The

⁸⁰ Department of Education and Science, 'A Curriculum Framework for Senior Cycle Religious Education', in *Religious Education: Leaving Certificate Guidelines for Teachers* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 2005), p. 152.

⁸¹ NCCA, *Innovation and Identity: Ideas for a New Junior Cycle* (Dublin: NCCA, 2010).

⁸² Department of Education and Skills, *A Framework for Junior Cycle* (Dublin, Department of Education and Skills, 2012).

statements of learning to which religious education, as it is understood within the present Junior Cycle, could contribute, include the following:

The student [...] appreciates and respects how diverse values, beliefs and traditions have contributed to the communities and culture in which they live; [...] develops moral, ethical and responsible decision making and a sense of personal values; [...] values what it means to be an active citizen, with rights and responsibilities in local and wider contexts; [...] values local and national heritage and recognises the relevance of the past to current national and international issues and events; [...] uses ICT effectively and ethically in learning and in life; [...] takes action to safeguard and promote their wellbeing and that of others.⁸³

By not being identified as a distinct subject designed and resourced by faith communities, it can be argued that religious education, as understood in terms of existing DES syllabi has become mainstream. Religious education is no longer a special case but has taken its place as an integral part of general developments in education. Such mainstreaming is also evident in *Towards Learning: An Overview of Senior Cycle Education*, where there is mention of understanding and appreciating the moral and spiritual values that 'have been distinctive in shaping Irish society'.⁸⁴ No mention is made of the way in which these values are expressed in religion. Other evidence for such mainstreaming is the fact that the suggestion in the 2005 document, *Proposals for the Future Development of Senior Cycle Education in Ireland*, that religious education could be a short course designed by the school but not assessed by the State, has not made its way into the later *Towards Learning* document.⁸⁵

2.9 Evaluation of the DES Syllabi

At one level, the evaluation of the State syllabi for Religious Education takes the form of reviewing student learning through the State examination system. The publicly available *Chief Examiner's Report* of 2008 gives a thorough understanding of the results up to that point.⁸⁶ The first State examinations in JCRE were held in 2003 and for LCRE in 2005. In 2012, 28,608 (49.1%) of students sat the JCRE

⁸³ *A Framework for Junior Cycle*, p. 6.

⁸⁴ NCCA, *Towards Learning: An Overview of Senior Cycle Education* (Dublin: NCCA, 2009), p.14.

⁸⁵ NCCA, *Proposals for the Future Development of Senior Cycle Education in Ireland* (Dublin: NCCA, 2005) p. 19.

⁸⁶ The *Chief Examiner's Report* for both JCRE and LCRE was published in 2008, <http://www.examinations.ie/archive/examiners_reports/cer_2008/JC_Religion_2008.pdf> [accessed 20 July 2012]. <http://www.examinations.ie/archive/examiners_reports/cer_2008/LC_Religion_2008.pdf> [accessed 20 July 2012].

examination, and 1186 students (2.3% of all Leaving Certificate students) sat the Leaving Certificate Examination.⁸⁷ Schools are required to provide religious education; however they are free to opt in or out of taking the examination route, leading to the unfortunate designation within schools of 'exam RE' and 'non-exam RE'. The optional nature of introducing the State curriculum for religious education has led to the situation in which schools that adopt the State curriculum, with its understanding of religious education, are resourced in this area by the DES, whereas schools that continue with a religious instruction or a catechetical model do not receive such on-going professional development or resources from the State.

A second mode of evaluation of the State syllabi to consider is the reflection of the students themselves on their experience of religious education. One source for this information is from an informal survey published in 2008 by Lorraine Gillespie of the Religious Education Support Service. Students' reflections on JCRE demonstrate a consistency in terms of an understanding that what they have studied has helped them to develop knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes linked to what we could suggest are the cultural and social purposes of religious education. None of the respondents in this survey referred to their own spiritual, moral, or religious development. Typical responses include:

'It [RE] promotes, questions, broadens the mind and creates awareness of different religions and cultures.'

'By learning the history, concepts and rituals of the world's major religions, one can dispel common prejudices and stereotypes as a person who wants to gain a cultured mind and view.'

'I gained an awareness and respect for varying religions and I feel that this is important. Students need to learn acceptance of differing people and differing faiths and the R.E. course allows them to do so.'

'For me the most important aspect of the Junior Cert. R.E. course was the chance to learn about other cultures and faiths, because only through knowledge can we establish respect and understanding.'⁸⁸

Gillespie's survey of students undertaking LCRE was more focussed in terms of the information she attempted to elicit. In line with the JCRE respondents, the overwhelming response to LCRE can be summarised in the words of one respondent: 'The course really helped me to understand others. We looked at issues

⁸⁷ State Examinations Commission, <<http://www.examinations.ie/index.php?l=en&mc=st&sc=r12>> [accessed 24 April 2013].

⁸⁸ Lorraine Gillespie, 'Student Opinions on Junior Certificate Religious Education', in *Teaching Religious Education*, 2/5 (2008), pp. 30-32.

and faiths that I would never have understood or learnt about otherwise and I think this has strengthened my understanding of others'. The final question to which student were invited to respond was: 'Please comment on how your beliefs/faith, spiritual or moral development have been affected by studying this course, if at all'. The question elicited the following responses:

'I have never been particularly religious (Catholic) but I have acquired a new interest in the beliefs of religions, communities and individuals.'

'Before, I didn't believe in God/s but now I do.'

'For me, my beliefs were questioned as was my faith. I enjoyed hearing so many theories and beliefs. My own beliefs became stronger as a result.'

'It has made me more spiritual I suppose and I have started to attend Mass more, maybe because I saw from my course that Muslims devoted some time to their religion and so should I.'

'Helped me to ask more questions and think more about my religion but also to appreciate it.'

'I have always been an atheist in my teenage years. This course has certainly strengthened my belief, but has also given me a more spiritual aspect to my life with respect to people, nature and within myself. It has also changed my perspective on organised religions.'

'I have huge respect for devout followers as 'belief without an if' is simply something I cannot have.'

'This course made me ask myself a lot of hard questions about my faith and developing ideas which made me an atheist.'

'My belief or faith has not been affected.'

'I'm a non-believer and while the LCRE course hasn't changed this it has given me the scope to accept more ideas and also to engage with who I am and what my own life is about. It taught me to value and to cherish things.'⁸⁹

If the responses of students are indicative of what the perception of religious education is, then we can infer that, while there has been a positive attitude towards religious education and an arguably successful implementation of the aims of the LCRE, there has been a dramatic shift away from the sense of religious education as inherently education in faith within a particular religious tradition. In practice for many, religious education may have become 'divorced' from education in faith, yet the expectation of faith communities is that both are possible. Unfortunately, Gillespie's survey did not allow for a qualitative interpretation of this data. It is to be hoped that such data will be available to researchers in the future.

⁸⁹ Lorraine Gillespie, 'Students' Reflections on Leaving Certificate R.E.', in *Teaching Religious Education*, 4/9 (2009), pp. 50-54.

A third mode of evaluation emerges from reflection on the impact of the introduction of the State's syllabi for Religious Education. Ankica Marinovic of the Bobina Institute for Social Research in Zagreb identifies that the approach to the phenomenon of religion, as presented in the Irish religious education syllabus, is primarily cultural, and less doctrinally normative than some of its European counterparts. It thus comes close to a non-confessional religious education that has as its aim, 'to transfer information about religion/religions, for the purpose of developing social tolerance and enabling students to obtain a view of different religions and worldviews to be able to eventually make a conscious choice and to be able to live in a pluralist society'. Her conclusion is that, 'according to the analysed curriculum, the elements of religious instruction have almost completely disappeared. Catechetical efforts are not present as one of the objectives, nor is pastoral activity, or the immanent endeavour of the catechism to testify to faith'. In effect, Ireland promotes a 'cultural religious education'.⁹⁰ This stark assessment gives pause for thought, as none of the other commentators, who for the most part come from the Irish context, interpret the syllabus and its aims in this way.

If one's experience of the syllabus is restricted to only reading it, one could concur with Marinovic's assessment of the syllabus as a cultural religious education. Such a minimal approach, however, is at odds with the maximal approach suggested by the active and participative methodologies proposed in the *Guidelines for Teachers of LCRE*.⁹¹ The inclusion of methodologies such as a Shared Praxis approach, teaching controversial issues, critical questioning, and teaching for diversity, demonstrates a commitment to support an active pedagogical approach that belies any type of reductionism to learning about religion.

To inform in a way that is formative becomes a question of pedagogy, or in the words of the Irish Bishops in the 1982 *Syllabus*, 'what is taught is not more important than, or independent of, how it is taught'.⁹² The inclusion of Groome's essay, 'Shared Praxis: A Way Towards Educating For Spiritual Wisdom' in the

⁹⁰ Ankica Marinović Bobinac, 'Comparative analysis of curricula for religious education: examples of four catholic countries', *Metodika* 15 (2007), pp. 425-443 (p.3).

⁹¹ NCCA, *Leaving Certificate Religious Education: Guidelines for Teachers* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 2005).

⁹² Irish Episcopal Commission for Catechetics, *A Syllabus for the Religious Education of Catholic Pupils in Post-Primary Schools* (Dublin, Veritas Publications, 1982), p.4.

*LCRE: Guidelines for Teachers*⁹³ may suggest an attempt to achieve what Vince Murray terms, ‘an integrating synthesis rather than a divorce between informative and formative approaches’.⁹⁴ Situating religious education within the interplay between religion and education, Groome suggests that it is possible to teach a religious tradition in ways that honour it as a source of great spiritual wisdom, enabling people not simply to learn about it but to learn from it. Groome eschews an understanding of catechesis as socialisation without education as being insufficient to promote the kind of lived commitments required by Christian faith, and holds the aims of catechesis and religious education together through a pedagogical approach that both forms and informs. This pedagogical approach is consistent with the aims of the White Paper.

Murray betrays his unease with the possibility of such an ‘integrating synthesis’ in his observation that he had yet to meet a teacher of religious education who claims that it is possible to prepare students to achieve high grades in religious education at a state examination and simultaneously nurture their faith in a meaningful manner. Murray acknowledges that this is at odds with the aims of education as outlined in the White paper. Murray’s disquiet is confirmed in Gillespie’s survey of students’ attitudes to JCRE, where traditional expressions of a faith language are absent, and enthusiasm about religious education does not seem to reflect any ecclesial or even explicitly religious aim. In their evaluation of the introduction of religious education, James Norman and Paul King suggest that ‘the convergent view is that the academic, critical approach to religious education as underpinned in the syllabus and the catechetical dimension as expressed in the formative intention to educate young people in the way of being spiritual are not diametrically opposed’. Byrne concurs with such a view, arguing that, from the perspective of a faith community ‘there is no need for too strict a dichotomy between religious education and faith formation’.⁹⁵ This view is not necessarily universally shared, as evidenced by the funding of faith development offices by a number of

⁹³ ‘Shared Praxis: A Way Towards Educating for Spiritual Wisdom’, in *LCRE: Guidelines for Teachers*, pp. 110-112.

⁹⁴ Vince Murray, ‘The Junior Certificate Syllabi: Background, Issues and Challenges’, in *Exploring Religious Education* ed. by Patricia Kieran and Anne Hession (Dublin: Veritas, 2008) pp. 97-106 (p.103).

⁹⁵ Byrne, *Religious Education Renewed*, p. 20.

Catholic School Trusts to resource their schools. It is not yet clear if this is to support religious education or to make up for what may be perceived to be wanting in it.

The educational justification for the inclusion of religious education within the examination system is that the syllabus can be taught or studied both by people of faith or people of other worldviews. One way of interpreting the supposedly neutral approach of the syllabus has been to take a catechetical or faith development approach to the new syllabus, thus allowing for congruence between the aims expressed in Department policy and the characteristics of Catholic education expressed in Church documents. Such a positive approach was expressed in John Coolahan's assertion that, 'religious education can be taught in such a way as to fulfil its catechetical objectives and at the same time achieve the educational objectives as determined by the NCCA, a catechetical religious education which itself has critically reflective effects or products'.⁹⁶ This same optimism is repeated in McGrady's observation that the State syllabi are not secular or detached and do not 'espouse' a religious studies approach,⁹⁷ but sharply critiqued by Thomas Deenihan's conclusion that the distinctive aims of religious education and catechesis demand that they cannot be taught together.⁹⁸ The question arises: does the use of religious education for catechetical purposes undermine the nature, scope and task of both religious education and catechesis?

What is evident from this survey of developments in second-level religious education is that there is no consistent theory underpinning the State's approach to religious education. The State does not have a clear vision of religious education or its purpose, scope or rationale for all citizens, as it sees religious education purely as a task for the formal school sector. As already noted, the dominant model at primary level is a denominational approach to teaching religion that prioritises faith formation, with no direct State involvement in relation to content or method. This is in contrast to the initiative taken by the State in the area of religious education at second level, in which it is claimed that religious education may be studied by

⁹⁶ John Coolahan, cited in Frank Hurl, 'Religious Education: Catechetics or Academics?' *The Furrow*, 51/5 (2000), pp. 279-286 (p. 286).

⁹⁷ Andrew McGrady, 'The Role of Religion in the Curriculum in the Catholic School' in *Exploring Religious Education*, ed. by Kieran and Hession, pp. 269-279 (p. 274).

⁹⁸ Thomas Deenihan, 'Catholic Schools and Schooling in the Republic of Ireland: Reviewing Policy and Strategy', *Presentation Studies*, 18/6 (2008), pp. 15-41.

students of all faiths or none, and which operates primarily out of what may best be described as a contextual approach. Contextual religious education is a term that has emerged in Western Europe to describe a shift that is taking place in religious education. It takes as a basic premise that cultural postmodernity is sceptical about any absolute truth and about the value of meta-narratives like religion or ideology. It assumes that religious education can only be based in the local context of individuals whose own personal narratives are constructed in the light of the meanings that are available to them. The aim of religious education, then, is to facilitate the students to develop their own personal identity and narrative; a faith tradition is but one aspect of a range of cultural resources to which they may have access. The major contribution of contextual religious education emphasises the central place of the person as subject in the learning process. This approach to religious education may be summarised in terms of responding to Hull's question 'in what way can the study of religion illuminate the problems of human living?',⁹⁹

2.10 Recent Developments in the Public Space that Impact on the State's Understanding of Religious Education

Two recent developments in the public space that both reflect on and influence the public perception of religious education in Ireland are the publication in May 2011 of the Irish Human Rights Commission Report, *Religion and Education: A Human Rights Perspective*, and the publication in 2012 of the *Report of the Advisory Group to The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector*.¹⁰⁰

2.10.1 The Irish Human Rights Commission

The IHRC has recently drawn attention to the human rights issues involved in the lack of provision of State education free 'from' religious influence. In its 2010 Discussion Paper, the IHRC attempted to distinguish between the terms *religious education* and *religious instruction*. Paragraph 12 states:

In the context of religious education it is noted that in the preface to the Rules the relevant provisions of the Constitution in relation to education are set out, and there is

⁹⁹ Hull, 'Religion and Education in a Pluralist Society', p. 16.

¹⁰⁰ IHRC, *Religion & Education: A Human Rights Perspective* (Dublin: Irish Human Rights Commission, 2011); *The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector*, ed. by John Coolahan, Caroline Hussey, and Fionnuala Kilfeather, eds, (Dublin: Department of Education and Skills, 2012).

acknowledgment of the Constitutional right of parents to withdraw their children from religious instruction in a particular school.¹⁰¹

As used in this sense, instruction refers to ‘formal classes in any subject including religion’, whereas religious education is a ‘very broad all-encompassing term’ that includes moral formation.¹⁰² The logic of both Rule 68 of the *Rules for National Schools*, with its ‘exhortation for religion to vivify the whole work of the school’, and the integrated curriculum implemented by the 1999 Primary School Curriculum suggests that religious and moral formation may be allowed to permeate the school day beyond mere formal religious instruction. The concern raised by the IHRC is that the role of religious nurture implied in this raises legitimate questions in ‘relation to the system of religious education/instruction in Ireland and its adherence to relevant human rights standards’.¹⁰³

A number of issues emerge in the submissions to the IHRC in response to this discussion paper. Mater Dei Institute of Education (MDI) is concerned that ‘the interpretation of the language of religious instruction used in the Constitution has not kept pace with developments in the field of religious education’.¹⁰⁴ This concern is also highlighted by Kieran and Daniel O’Connell, who draw attention to the fact that ‘there appears to be little understanding of the actual dynamics of religious education’ in the discussion paper.¹⁰⁵ In its submission to the IHRC, MDI makes the point that in its provision for religious education at second level through the State Examinations Commission, the State already makes provision for religious education which:

supports a variety of beliefs and commitments and which seeks to enhance social cohesion by promoting a depth knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the religious and human heritage of humankind and the impact of this upon local, national and global cultures and societies.¹⁰⁶

Such a view of religious education is consistent with the contribution of the Religion Teachers’ Association of Ireland, whose understanding is that:

¹⁰¹ IHRC, ‘Religion and Education’, para. 12. <<http://www.ihrc.ie/download/pdf/religionandeducationpdf.pdf>> [accessed 19 July 2012].

¹⁰² IHRC, para. 34.

¹⁰³ IHRC, p. 18.

¹⁰⁴ MDI, ‘Submission to IHRC’ (January 2011), <<http://www.ihrc.ie/download/pdf/reledsub45.pdf>> [accessed 20 July 2012].

¹⁰⁵ Patricia Kieran and Daniel O’Connell, ‘Submission to IHRC’ (January 2011), <<http://www.ihrc.ie/download/pdf/reledsub42.pdf>> [accessed 20 July 2012].

¹⁰⁶ MDI, ‘Submission to IHRC’, p. 7.

An approach to religious education that helps pupils develop critical reflection, acknowledging the pluralist context of Ireland today and encouraging respect for the plurality of positions people adopt in society is appropriate. Religious education will of necessity be in dialogue with the religious education interests of religious communities within a particular society, respecting their beliefs, rituals, moral life and understanding of faith formation. It will also be in dialogue with and respect the beliefs and rights of those with a non-religious perspective.¹⁰⁷

What is of note is that, of the sixty submissions received by the IHRC there are very few references to religious instruction. Religious instruction is used only by those calling for the removal of the teaching of religion from school. When the term is used, it tends to be used pejoratively, as in Brian Bocking's submission, which describes religious instruction as a 'myopic view of religious education'. He argues that as religious instruction promotes a single form of religion then all other religious traditions are 'othered' and thereby marginalised.¹⁰⁸ Bocking implies that, in contrast to religious education which is objective and critical, religious instruction is not 'wholly educational'. He cautions against the practice of replacing the term *religious instruction* with *religious education* while a mode of delivery or pervasive religious ethos exists. Such a view is not shared by McGrady, who argues that no form of education, if it is to be genuinely called educational, can be objective or neutral. The challenge to all educators is to provide the environment that is hospitable to the learner's own critical engagement with a tradition of knowledge.¹⁰⁹

The term religious instruction is not used by those who argue for the retention of the teaching of religion in school, who prefer the term religious education; it is clear, however, that the term is not used univocally. What is apparent from the submissions to the IHRC is that religious instruction is no longer the preferred term for the teaching of religion in Ireland.

2.10.2 The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism

June 2012 saw the publication of *The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector: Report of the Forum's Advisory Group*.¹¹⁰ The public consultation

¹⁰⁷ Religion Teachers' Association of Ireland, 'Submission to IHRC' (January 2011), pp. 2-3, <<http://www.ihrc.ie/download/pdf/reledsub34.pdf>> [accessed 20 July 2012].

¹⁰⁸ Brian Bocking, 'Submission to IHRC' (January 2011), available at <<http://www.ihrc.ie/download/pdf/reledsub11.pdf>> [accessed 20 July 2012].

¹⁰⁹ Andrew McGrady, 'Submission to IHRC' (January 2011), <<http://www.ihrc.ie/download/pdf/reledsub44.pdf>> [accessed 20 July 2012].

¹¹⁰ Details of the submissions, consultation, and the Final Report are available on <<http://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Conferences/Patronage-and-Pluralism-in-the-Primary-Sector/Forum-on-Patronage-and-Pluralism-in-the-Primary-Sector.html>> [accessed 21 July 2012].

and ensuing debate on this issue, as well as the Minister for Education's speech to the Seanad and his Dáil contributions, have highlighted the role of religion in education as an issue in the public domain.¹¹¹ Though referring in the main to provision for a diversity of patronage models at primary level, there is a significant statement about the teaching of religion that has implications for second-level religious education. The Report recognises that a 'great deal of innovative thinking has been taking place on the nature and content of religious education'; however, such innovative thinking has not been adequately reflected in the final report.¹¹²

In its introduction of the term *Denominational Religious Education* (DRE), the Report marks the disappearance of the term religious instruction from the discourse about teaching religion. The only time the term religious instruction appears is with reference to its historical usage. The Report then proceeds to distinguish between two particular approaches to religious education: DRE, which focuses on faith formation and Education about Religion and Beliefs (ERB) which promotes learning about religions.¹¹³ DRE is described as:

[...] 'formation' in a belief system. It involves learning how to live a life according to religious guidelines and learning modes of thinking, values formation and moral action in the light of religious beliefs. It incorporates the constitutional and legal term "religious instruction" whose connotation is now regarded as pedagogically limiting, but whose usage was widespread in the past. Religious education also incorporates a dimension of critical thinking and is opposed to the indoctrination of pupils.¹¹⁴

DRE is in effect 'learning religion'; its purpose is faith formation. It reflects on religion as a way of living in the world in response to ultimate truth that makes demands on the person. As presented in the Report, it does not appear to have anything to contribute to the public space nor to the overall personal development of pupil; neither does it fit comfortably with the holistic aims of education espoused by the State. The suggestion in Recommendation 7.2 that religious education be separated from the rest of the curriculum as a discrete subject places it in an invidious position, where it is not seen to be part of the integrated curriculum, but

¹¹¹ The Forum received 246 submissions. The Report was discussed in the Seanad on <<http://debates.oireachtas.ie/seanad/2012/05/01/00006.asp>> [accessed 21 July 2012]. Ruairí Quinn, 'Response to Report of the Advisory Group on the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector', 20 June 2012, <<http://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Speeches/2012-Speeches/20-June-2012-Speech-by-Minister-Ruair%C3%AD-Quinn-TD-Response-to-Report-of-the-Advisory-Group-on-the-Forum-on-Patronage-and-Pluralism-in-the-Primary-Sector.html>> [Accessed 21 July 2012].

¹¹² The Forum Report, p. v.

¹¹³ The Forum Report, p. 88.

¹¹⁴ The Forum Report, p. v.

remains the responsibility of the denominations. The State will not have any role to play in what it has come to call religious education, a subject that remains in fact, religious instruction. As seen in the second level sector, this has the effect of isolating religious education from the general discourse about education policy and pedagogy, as it is difficult to argue for such an understanding of religious education within contemporary educational discourse in Ireland.

DRE is distinguished in the Report from ERB, which is described as:

[...] a programme which helps pupils to know about and to understand the rich cultural heritage of forms of religion and beliefs which have been embraced by humankind. It is not focussed on nurturing a belief or practice system of any religion, but to have an informed awareness of the main theist and non-theist beliefs and of key aspects of their cultural manifestations. It also aims to foster a respect for adherents of such religions and beliefs. A current synonym for this programme is ERB, education about religion and beliefs.¹¹⁵

ERB invites pupils into a way of learning about religion and beliefs that is characterised by an understanding of cultural heritage, so as to have respect for adherents of religious belief. While there is a sense in this statement of learning about religion so as to learn from religion, such learning is limited to respect for others. There is no sense in the current articulation of ERB that it has anything to contribute to the development of the student in line with the aims of education for both primary and second-level students. No other subject at either primary or post-primary level limits itself to 'learning about', as this would be contrary to the holistic aims of education adopted by the State. By distinguishing ERB in this way, is it possible that it could be viewed as something of an intrusion into the rest of an integrated curriculum?

Emerging as it does from a context that problematizes the nature of the teaching of religion in the primary sector, it is clear that the Report has adopted a dualistic approach to the teaching of religion. On the one hand, the Forum is concerned that all students would at least get the opportunity for education about religion and ethical education. This phrasing suggests that education about religion is the right of the student. The sources for such an education are not explicated by the Forum. When referring to the teaching of religion, the Forum uses the term *learning about religion*, however when referring to the teaching of ethics the term used is

¹¹⁵ The Forum Report, p. v.

ethical education. This dramatically changes how the teaching of ethics is to be understood. An ethical education assumes both learning ethics and learning from ethics. Not identifying a philosophical or educational rationale for such an ethical education suggests that ERB is a neutral construct. On the other hand, the Forum appears unable to conceive of a vision of religious education that does not have denominational religious formation as its aim. The result of this is a vision of both religious education and ERB that is somewhat reductive in nature, and the teaching of religion is unhelpfully separated into separate spheres with a limited understanding of a possible relationship between the two.

In the complex debate about the relationship between religion and a publicly funded education system, religious education itself can lose its identity and end up being overwhelmed by issues that are outside of its domain. One of the issues clouding the discussion of the relationship between DRE and ERB is an assumption that religious education and Catholic education are synonymous. For those who understand the purpose of religious education as ‘the transmission of faith’, ERB will cause difficulties. Eamonn Conway sees the two approaches as incompatible with, and a potential threat to, Catholic education. He is concerned that an ERB approach, which he describes as a form of ‘secularist social engineering’, undermines the mission to educate pupils from and in the Catholic faith.¹¹⁶ This view is shared by Rik Van Nieuwenhove who argues that the implementation of the proposals of the Forum would destroy the Catholic ethos in schools and be a ‘recipe for the utter secularisation of Ireland’.¹¹⁷ Van Nieuwenhove’s call for schools in which a ‘genuine Catholic identity’ can be maintained is indicative of the suspicion of some commentators towards the introduction of an ERB approach.

The Forum’s distinction between DRE and ERB is an attempt to respond to Recommendation 1720 (6) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Recommendation 1720 calls on Governments to, ‘do more to guarantee freedom of conscience and religious expression, to encourage religious instruction, to promote dialogue with and between religions, and to further the cultural and social expression of religions’. Section 8 of the same Recommendation then states that ‘even the

¹¹⁶ Eamonn Conway, ‘The Future of Catholic Schools – The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism: a cultural marker and wake-up call’, *The Furrow*, 63/6 (2012), pp. 269-277.

¹¹⁷ Rik Van Nieuwenhove, ‘The End of Catholic Education in Ireland: Further Reflections on the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism’, *The Furrow*, 63/6 (2012), pp. 278-285.

countries in which one confession largely predominates must teach the origins of all religions rather than privilege or promote proselytising'.¹¹⁸ Unfortunately in its lack of explication of the theoretical rationale underpinning both ERB and DRE, and its apparent lack of engagement with what the denominations themselves understand by the term religious education, the Forum has created a polarising approach to the very question it sought to address. Despite some apparent overlap between the distinctions made by the Forum and Recommendation 1720, the relegation of DRE to the private sphere of the denominations is juxtaposed with the perceived public role of ERB, the syllabus of which would be drawn up by the NCCA. This is not congruent with the general thrust of the direction of the European discussion as exemplified in the work of REDCo, and the European Wergeland Centre.¹¹⁹

One possible convergence between the two spheres that could be considered is to adopt the State's understanding of religious education as explicated at second-level. However the nature of this was poorly interpreted by the Forum, which concluded that the NCCA's Religious Education programmes have an ERB character.¹²⁰ This is in contrast to the understanding of religious education articulated by the Irish Centre for Religious Education (ICRE). The ICRE argues that the *JCRES* and the *LCRES* allow for religious education to teach from 'the pupil's experience of religion and/or their continuing search for meaning'. This approach to teaching which moves beyond an ERB approach, enriches a pupil's understanding of their own religious faith or conviction as well as their ability to respect the beliefs and commitments of others. The ICRE maintains that for 'those with religious faith, such faith needs to be educated and integrated with their general knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes, and facilitated in a manner that helps them as citizens to embrace the common good'.¹²¹ In the documentation from the Forum the dichotomy between DRE and ERB is unable to sustain an approach to the teaching of religion that is about the critical encounter between religion and education. The

¹¹⁸ Parliamentary Assembly Council of Europe. Recommendation 1720, Education and Religion (2005), <<http://assembly.coe.int/main.asp?Link=/documents/adoptedtext/ta05/erec1720.htm>> [accessed 24 July 2012].

¹¹⁹ <<http://www.redco.uni-hamburg.de/web/3480/3481/index.html>>, <<http://theewc.org>> [accessed 2 June 2013].

¹²⁰ The Forum Report, p. 91.

¹²¹ ICRE, 'Submission to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector' (June 2011), p. 10. <<http://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Conferences/Patronage-and-Pluralism-in-the-Primary-Sector/Patronage-Forum-Submissions-June-2011/Organisations-June-2011/Irish-Centre-for-Religious-Education-Mater-Dei.pdf>> [accessed 27 July 2012].

notion of encounter expressed in the ICRE submission describes the engagement between learner and religion in such a way as to facilitate students' negotiation of the complex world of religion, their own religious identity, and the personal demands of religious belief. It provides them with a compass to find their way in it. Like all education, religious education makes a claim on the learner.

The aims of the *JCRES* and *LCRES*, as well as the ICRE statement, are consistent with the work of McGrady, who situates an argument for educational religious education within the context of both Hull's framework of teaching for, about, and from religion, and the *Toledo Guidelines for Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools*.¹²² In McGrady's view, this form of religious education does not have to be mutually exclusive of a denominational religious education, provided that a denominational approach is undertaken in a way that dialogues with 'the learner's life experience and invite(s) personal appropriation', and is respectful of the free assent of the learner to participate. McGrady's reading of the ten principles of the *Toledo Guidelines* suggests that each principle must remain in constant dialogue with the other principles if the teaching of religion is to be genuinely respectful of human rights and diversity. An example of this is McGrady's reading of Principle 1, which states:

Teaching about religions and beliefs must be provided in ways that are fair, accurate and based on sound scholarship. Students should learn about religions and beliefs in an environment respectful of human rights, fundamental freedoms and civic values.¹²³

The foundational principle of respect explicated in Principle 1 is then related to Principle 3:

Teaching about religions and beliefs is a major responsibility of schools, but the manner in which this teaching takes place should not undermine or ignore the role of families and religious or belief organizations in transmitting values to successive generations.¹²⁴

Thus, concludes McGrady, 'teaching about religions and beliefs in the context of religious freedom should not be regarded as identical to 'religious education' but as a necessary aspect of it'.¹²⁵ He then proceeds to argue that, on this basis, in contrast to

¹²² ODIHR Advisory Council of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Beliefs, *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools* (Poland: OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2007).

¹²³ *Toledo Guiding Principles*, p. 16.

¹²⁴ *Toledo Guiding Principles*, p. 16.

¹²⁵ McGrady, 'Teaching Religion', pp. 87-88.

the conclusion of the Forum, there does not need to be 'a separate curriculum subject dedicated to teaching about religions and beliefs'. McGrady's reconciling approach allows for the teaching of religion in school that can be respectful of both the rights of those of secular conviction as well as those of religious faith. The teaching of religion is an activity in the public space, so is therefore a legitimate activity of the State, both in the form of ERB and in its denominational form. The two approaches can act as dialogue partners in the evolution of an approach to teaching religion grounded in best educational theory and practice.

2.11 Conclusion

A number of conclusions have emerged from this review of developments in the State's understanding of religious education. The first is that there is no continuity between the State's understanding of religious education at primary level and second level. This lack of a consistent and coherent rationale for religious education suggests that the State is not confident about proposing a religious education that is justifiable on the grounds of the common good. This chapter demonstrates that the State is reactive rather than proactive in response to issues pertaining to the intersection of religion and education. In such a context, it is not possible to evaluate what the State's understanding of the purposes of religious education is. Is religious education accountable to the State or only to the denominations? Who is the final arbiter as to the success or failure of religious education? Where the State has articulated a vision of religious education for second-level schools, the lack of consistency both between syllabi as well as within syllabi underscores the sense of disunity of purpose in the State's approach.

A second conclusion of this review is that the State's use of the term religious instruction has not kept pace with national and international developments in the broad area of religious education and so has become somewhat arcane and pejorative in its usage. This has led to the situation where the public space is unable to translate the language of religious education. The Areopagus therefore becomes a symbol of dissonance and discord rather than a place of dialogue and mutuality. It is within this context that what the State has come to call DRE must find a voice. That voice may be increasingly distinct from, but cannot remove itself from, public discourse about education. To justify its place within a State funded education system, religious

education must be credible in what it offers to the public space. That will only become possible when the public space is able to engage with the particular contribution that religious education can make both to the personal lives of citizens and to the vitality of the public space.

What this chapter has shown is that in the current educational landscape there is increasing tension between confessional or transmissive forms of religious education and phenomenological approaches to religious education. So long as there is a lack of consistency and coherence in the way terms are understood and used religious education will be unable to make any worthwhile contribution to civic discourse. The recent identification of the term religious education as a denominational activity, separate from education about religion, demonstrates the emergence of a potentially divisive understanding of the relationship between religion and education. If this separation between learning religion and learning about religions and beliefs is maintained then teachers of religion will have to be able to negotiate both spheres of discourse. This comes with the caveat that a facile synthesis between what are increasingly seen as separate spheres could lead to a syncretistic approach to religious education that offers little to faith communities or to the public space.

A third conclusion of this review is that a new articulation that takes account of developments in inter-religious education and public religious education would benefit both the religious and educational ends of religious education. This survey of the evolution of the State's understanding of religious education reveals the emergence of an educational understanding of religious education at second-level that has the potential to act as a model for a more coherent vision of religious education in Ireland.

With this context as a backdrop the next chapter will proceed to investigate the understanding of religious education as it is linguistically mediated in primary source documents that are normative for how one denomination, the Catholic Church in Ireland, has interpreted the broad task of religious education. This understanding does not run along parallel lines to that of the State, but is intimately intertwined with every development that has occurred in the evolution of religious education in Ireland. Chapters Two and Three therefore are considered to be two aspects of the

same analysis. Chapter Two has examined the sphere of the State's understanding of religious education, while Chapter Three will examine the sphere of the Catholic Church's understanding of religious education. Though at times these spheres are distinct, the Irish experience shows that they are not mutually exclusive.

Chapter Three

CONSIDERING CONTEXT: A CATHOLIC UNDERSTANDING OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

3.1 Introduction

Once you got words you thought the world was everything that could be described, but it was also what couldn't be described. In a way things were more perfect when you couldn't describe anything. [...] Once you locked into language, all you could do was shuffle the greasy pack of a few thousand words that millions of people had used before. There might be little moments of freshness, not because the life of the world has been successfully translated but because a new life has been made out of this stuff.¹

The survey undertaken in Chapter Two demonstrated some of the problems with trying to pin down how words are used and the difficulties presented by being, what Edward St. Aubyn calls, 'locked into language'. Chapter Two has examined the State's understanding of religious education. Chapter Three now proceeds to investigate the understanding of religious education as it is linguistically mediated in primary source documents that are normative for how one denomination, the Catholic Church in Ireland, has interpreted the broad task of religious education. As this chapter is also concerned with the use of language it will concern itself in the first instance with how the terms religious education, religious instruction, and catechesis² are used in a number of normative documents from Vatican II, Paul VI, John Paul II, the Congregation for the Clergy and the Congregation for Catholic Education. In order to understand the significance of any particular document, care must be taken to identify the type of document it is, as well as its authority, purpose, and context. To that end, the documents selected for this study will be grouped according to the source of the document and reviewed in terms of the contribution it makes to the evolving understanding of religious education. The study then turns to the Irish context and considers a number of documents from the Irish Episcopal Conference and the National Catechetical Office, as well as some contributions that arguably have made a significant contribution to how the term religious education is understood by the Church in Ireland. The Irish documents will be presented in

¹ Edward St. Aubyn, *Mother's Milk* (London: Picador, 2006), p. 24.

² Catechesis refers to the process of sharing or passing on of a faith tradition and has a long history within a Catholic self-understanding of its educational task. It assumes a formational dimension that is educational in intent but with its origins in the Greek *katechein*, it assumes both a sharing of faith and an echoing of a coherent message, that has at its centre the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

chronological order so as to allow for developments in the use of language to emerge. Though at times the spheres of Church and State are distinct, the Irish experience is that they are not mutually exclusive, as evidenced in the later sections of this chapter. Chapters Two and Three are therefore considered to be two aspects of the same analysis.

3.2 Documents from Vatican II, Paul VI and John Paul II

A contemporary Roman Catholic understanding of religious education has its roots in the theological, ecclesiological and pastoral impetus of Vatican II.³ The Council did not deal explicitly with the theme of religious education but, in its decrees and documents, articulated the theological principles from which religious education draws its rationale. One of the most significant theological principles underpinning religious education is the changing understanding of revelation articulated in *Dei verbum (DV)*, which underlined the purpose of revelation as not just the communication of a body of truth about God, but the personal self-communication of God to people through Jesus. The response to revelation is not just assent to a set of propositions but a living out of the implications of the response to what God has revealed. The response to the revelatory message is comprised of a dialectic between deeds and words which have 'an inner unity'.⁴ The changing emphasis in the understanding of revelation from knowing about God to being in relationship with God, allows Catholicism to describe itself as being in dialogue with the world and open to 'reading the signs of the times' as revelatory.⁵ The Medellin International Study Week of 1968 concluded that:

This more adequate theology of Revelation [...] recognises in historical situations and in authentic human aspirations the first sign to which we must be attentive in order to discover the plan of God for men and women today. Such situations are an indispensable part of the content of catechesis.⁶

The historical and socio-cultural sensitivity necessary for reading the 'signs of the times,' has proven a key factor in the shaping of Catholic sensibility and was

³ All quotations from the Documents of the Second Vatican Council are taken from *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, ed. by Austin Flannery (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1996).

⁴ *DV*, para. 2. For an overview of the understanding of Revelation proposed at Vatican II see Lane, *The Experience of God*, pp. 66-71.

⁵ *Gaudium et spes*, para. 4.

⁶ *The Medellin Papers: A Selection from the Proceedings of the Sixth International Study Week on Catechetics held at Medellin*, ed. by Johannes Hofinger and Terence J. Sheridan (Manila: East Asian Pastoral Institute, 1969), pp. 213-219, pp. 215.

particularly significant for the direction that religious education took in the post Vatican II period.

The turn to experience evident in *DV* is spelt out more explicitly in *Gaudium et spes* (*GS*) and *Lumen gentium* (*LG*). These documents locate the revealing activity of God within the scope of the knowledge available to the person through reason. Reason here refers to the reflective capacity of the person to understand, interpret, and analyse the human condition. Reason allows the person to posit new theories about the nature of reality, as well as to consider practical solutions to the contingencies of life. The hermeneutical shift evident in *DV* leads to a consideration that *knowing God* is a verb; it is a knowing that is active and progressive rather than static and defined as in the noun, *knowledge of*. However, to suggest that knowing is active and progressive is not to suggest that it is arbitrary and partial in nature. *DV* insists that human knowing is always in relation to the God who reveals Godself through the economy of salvation. Human knowing has a definite end, a definite object that is knowledge of God. Human being has a definite end, which is communion with God. Though the understanding of knowing as dynamic and relational has come to the fore in Catholic thinking, the fact that there is a specific object or end point in view keeps the task of education within a particular framework. The shift from a propositional to an experiential and relational approach to the nature of knowing had profound implications for how the educative task of the Church was to be reimagined. Education has an end point, which is relationship with God. This is the impetus for the educational mission of the Church.

The theme of the dialectic between word and deed emphasised in *DV* is also evident in the call to the return to origins or *aggiornamento*. Returning to origins allowed educators to consider the ways that the early Christian community educated by both word and deed. The activities of *kerygma* (the message), *didache* (the teaching), *koinonia* (community), *diakonia* (service), *leiturgia* (liturgy), and even *marturia* (witness unto death), were all educational in nature even if that was not the primary intent.⁷ Such scope is reflected in *DV*'s assertion that, 'the Church, in her

⁷ Maria Harris, *Fashion Me A People* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989). Thomas Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998). Both of these authors draw extensively on these activities as the basis for a pastoral religious education that has its roots in the evolving approach of the early Christian communities to the education of new members.

teaching, life, and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes'.⁸

3.2.1 *Gravissimum educationis*

The 1965 Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum educationis (GE)*, situates education within the overall mission of the Church. The concern of the declaration is to promote a vision of education that is for the formation of the human person. This anthropological approach stems from the conviction that every person has an inalienable right to an education. The document states that this education, 'aims at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end and of the good of the societies of which, as man, he is a member, and in whose obligations, as an adult, he will share.'⁹ Arguably the most significant influence of *GE* is the emphasis on the end of education as communion with God. Such an end implies more than knowing about God, or communion with the Church. Instead, it promotes an invitational understanding of education as leading a person into relationship with God. Such relationality is necessarily dynamic, responsive, and deeply personal, even as it is lived out in a historical community that is shaped by context. Having a vision of the end to which the human person is destined necessitates a shared understanding of how that end is to be pursued. For *GE*, that end is pursued within a Christian community. As an act within community, education necessarily takes the form of socialisation. The passing on of a religious vision is the passing on of the life-force of the community.

GE does not deal explicitly with catechesis, evangelisation, religious instruction, or religious education, but sets out a vision of education that has implications for how these terms have evolved. The term religious education is only used once in the document, when it refers to the claim that the Church has a responsibility for the moral and religious education of its members.¹⁰ The term religious instruction is used only once to distinguish the teaching of religion from other types of education.¹¹ The term catechetical instruction is used more often and refers to that 'which enlightens and strengthens the faith, nourishes life according to

⁸ *DV*, para. 8

⁹ *GE*, para. 1.

¹⁰ *GE*, para. 8.

¹¹ *GE*, para. 9.

the spirit of Christ, leads to intelligent and active participation in the liturgical mystery and gives motivation for apostolic activity'.¹² Catechetical instruction is understood to be an aid to the more general task of Christian education that the Church has a duty to provide. Catechetical instruction therefore is a subset of a full Christian education rather than the totality of a Christian education.¹³

GE also offers a vision of the teacher as messenger, one in whom there is no distinction between what is proclaimed and what is lived. Using the term witness to describe the teacher implies a catechetical dimension to all teaching, as the document does not distinguish between the religion teacher and other teachers.¹⁴ Though the document offers a vision of education that goes on to inform religious education, its imprecise use of the terms religious education, religious instruction, and catechetical instruction, does not provide clarity about the distinctive nature of each of these tasks and begs the question if, in fact, these tasks were understood by the Council to be distinct.¹⁵ What is clear from *GE* is that all education is fundamentally understood to be for the formation of the human person within the context of a community that understands itself as having a socialising function that has a specific end or purpose, that is, communion of the person with God. Catechetical instruction is part of a socialising function.

3.2.2 *Evangelii nuntiandi*

Paul VI's 1975 Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii nuntiandi* (*EN*) reframes the traditional understanding of evangelisation.¹⁶ Traditionally, evangelisation had come to describe the work of the missionary bringing the word of God to foreign lands. *EN* reclaimed the concept and used the term to refer to all the activities of a person's or community's life that witness to the living reality of the Gospel message of salvation. Evangelisation is described as the deepest identity of the Church, in so far as the proclaiming of the good news of the kingdom of God is its proper vocation. According to *EN*, one of the primary functions of evangelisation is to 'form patterns

¹² *GE*, para. 16.

¹³ *GE*, para. 4.

¹⁴ *GE*, para. 2, 7, 8 and 10. Such an understanding is articulated more fully in The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (London, Catholic Truth Society, 1982).

¹⁵ Distinguishing between the distinctive nature of each of these tasks emerges later in the post-Vatican II tradition. It is most clearly explicated in *SGN*, pp. 46-64.

¹⁶ Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1976).

of Christian living and not to remain only notional'.¹⁷ It is this function that allows for the connection between evangelisation, catechesis, and religious education. The term catechesis appears seven times in the exhortation, though it is not explicitly defined. It is, however, described as an element or aspect of evangelisation understood, along with kerygma and preaching, as proclamation. *EN* also begins to articulate a sense of a distinction between stages of evangelisation, first proclamation, then catechesis, and then a further deepening of faith. Paragraphs 54 and 63 call attention to the language of catechesis that, while suited to people and circumstances, must be 'full of Gospel vitality'. It is in this negotiation between appropriate proclamation and the readiness of the audience that we see the most obvious impact of the theology of Vatican II on the articulation of the concept of evangelisation.

Paragraph 44 deals with the concept of catechetical instruction at some length. As it is used here, the term is synonymous with religious instruction and refers particularly to children and young people. It would appear that Paul VI is making a distinction between a more general catechesis and a 'systematic religious instruction'. This religious instruction addresses the intellectual requirements to learn the fundamental teachings of the faith in a way that moves a person from the notional to forming patterns of Christian living. Religious instruction, 'or training of children', operates out of a transmissive understanding of education 'in the faith'. Such transmission is for the purpose of inviting young people into a person-to-person relationship, in which the triadic structure of memory, intelligence, and heart is equally significant. The instruction envisaged by *EN* encompasses information and formation. The young person is instructed in the truth of the Gospel so as to live in the truth of a relationship with Christ. It is this aim that allows religious or catechetical instruction to be identified as a means of catechesis which in its turn is an aspect of evangelisation. The task of religious or catechetical instruction is profoundly ecclesial and is therefore a task of the whole Church and not just the school or classroom. In its acknowledgment of *EN*'s privileging of evangelisation as 'an indispensable point of reference for catechesis', the *GDC* reiterates the principle

¹⁷ *EN*, para. 44.

that catechesis and evangelisation are both needed to carry out the mission of the Church.¹⁸

3.2.3 *Catechesi tradendae*

Catechesi tradendae (CT), John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation of 1979, must be read in the context of *EN*, as it follows the same trajectory in establishing the nature of the evangelising mission of the whole Church as a constitutive element of its identity. The exhortation must also be read in light of the 1971 *General Catechetical Directory* (GCD), which John Paul II stated was to remain the norm for catechesis, as he called upon specialists to define the various meanings and branches of catechesis.¹⁹ Jean Frisk makes the point that CT distinguishes between evangelisation as 'the beginning stage, the first encounter and decision to embrace the faith', and catechesis, which is 'the deepening, the instruction in the doctrine once the faith-decision has been made.'²⁰ Despite this distinction, John Paul II reiterates that there is 'no separation or opposition between catechesis and evangelization. Nor can the two be simply identified with each other. Instead, they have close links whereby they integrate and complement each other'.²¹ This emphasis on complementarity reflects what Jim Gallagher describes as 'a background of still unresolved tensions' among opposing views on the relationship between the Church and the world.²² These tensions emerged as differing theological and hermeneutical principles crystallised in the issue of how to most appropriately approach the relationship between content and process, message and method, kerygma and experience. The language of CT responded to some of the issues that had been raised. There was a strong emphasis on the need for a systematic approach to catechesis as distinct from simply responding to the needs and interests of the students. John Paul II's critique of what he perceived to be an overemphasis on the students' life experience, the neglect of content, and the sense of responsibility for the handing on of tradition, emerged from what he considered was an incorrect application of the 'life-experience' approach, resulting in a dichotomy between

¹⁸ GCD, para. 35.

¹⁹ John Paul II, *Catechesi tradendae* (London: Catholic Truth Society), para. 18.

²⁰ Jean Frisk, 'Catechesi Tradendae: Brief History', <http://www.campus.udayton.edu/mary/religious_education/sources/documents/CT.html> [accessed 25 August 2012].

²¹ CT, para. 22.

²² Jim Gallagher, *Soil for the Seed: Historical, Pastoral and Theological Reflections on Educating to and in the Faith* (Great Wakering: McCrimmons, 2001), p. 134.

experience and content.²³ This dialectic between experience and tradition, faith and life, praxis and doctrine, was to become a recurring theme in the discourse of religious education throughout the 1980s and 1990s in Ireland, and is a theme to which this research will return.

CT reiterates the theme of the end of education that emerged in *GE*, that is, the initiation of 'hearers into the fullness of Christian life'.²⁴ The knowledge promoted in all education is a knowledge that promotes faith; the knowledge promoted in catechesis consists in 'surrendering to the word of God' and endeavouring to 'know better the profound meaning of this word'.²⁵ This understanding is further developed in paragraph 20, which offers some specificity about what constitutes the activity named as catechesis:

The specific aim of catechesis is to develop, with God's help, an as yet initial faith, and to advance in fullness and to nourish day by day the Christian life of the faithful, young and old. It is in fact a matter of giving growth, at the level of knowledge and in life, to the seed of faith sown by the Holy Spirit with the initial proclamation and effectively transmitted by Baptism [...] Catechesis aims therefore at developing understanding of the mystery of Christ in the light of God's word, so that the whole of a person's humanity is impregnated by that word.

Arguably the most significant contribution of *CT* is its contribution, albeit somewhat lacking in clarity, to an evolving understanding of moments or phases in education in faith and the maintenance of the necessary distinctions between these. Evangelisation and catechesis are distinct activities that 'complement each other'.²⁶ This distinction, while somewhat helpful for religious education, nevertheless highlights the limitation of *CT* for religious education, in that it focuses almost exclusively on a very general pastoral sense of catechesis that does not necessarily translate to the task of the classroom. In *CT*, the term religious education is used on four occasions to refer to a general education in and about religion,²⁷ whereas religious instruction refers to a more specific Church activity and is used three times in the document.²⁸ Both of these terms are understood to belong within the larger construct of a catechesis that refers to the total educational mission of the Church.

²³ *CT*, para. 22.

²⁴ *CT*, para. 18.

²⁵ *CT*, para. 20 22.

²⁶ *CT*, para. 18.

²⁷ *CT*, para. 19, 66, 69.

²⁸ *CT*, para. 62, 69.

Of its seventy three paragraphs *CT*, devotes only one paragraph to catechesis in schools.²⁹ This lack of emphasis on school as a natural location for catechesis suggests that, while schools can provide opportunities for catechesis, they are more properly to be considered as providing support for catechesis rather than substituting for catechesis. The document does not use the term catechesis to describe faith education in schools. Rather, paragraph 69 emphasises a religious instruction that is integrated into the education of each student and offers the possibility for a student ‘to deepen their faith and religious experience’. This distinction between catechesis and religious instruction is not very clearly stated and has led to the adoption of terms being used out of their proper contexts. This has resulted in an inappropriate understanding of the nature and purpose of religious education in school.

3.3 Documents from the Congregation for the Clergy

As part of its remit, the Catechetical Office of the Congregation for the Clergy:

[...] provides for the religious formation of the faithful of all ages and states of life; it issues appropriate norms so that catechetical teaching is imparted in a suitable fashion; it ensures that catechetical formation is properly executed.³⁰

Two significant Directories for Catechesis have been published by the Congregation following the prescription of Vatican II that a ‘Directory for the Catechetical Instruction of the Christian People’ be drawn up.³¹ The *GCD* was published in 1971 and revised in 1997 and is now referred to as the *GDC*.³² Both Directories were addressed to the Bishops, as the chief catechist of the diocese, as well as to those with responsibilities for catechesis.

3.3.1 General Catechetical Directory

Published in 1971 the stated purpose of the *GCD* was ‘to provide the basic principles of pastoral theology [...] by which pastoral action in the ministry of the word can be more fittingly directed and governed’.³³ The theology of Vatican II informs the language of the *GCD* with its emphasis on the role of experience and the centrality

²⁹ *CT*, para. 69.

³⁰ Congregation for the Clergy, <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc_con_cclergy_pro_31051999_en.html> [accessed 15 June 2013].

³¹ Second Vatican Council, *Christus dominus* (1965), para. 44.

³² Congregation for the Clergy, *General Catechetical Directory* (London, Catholic Truth Society, 1971).

³³ *GCD*, ‘Foreword’, p. 2.

of the person in the on-going dynamic of revelation. Though rooted in a theological framework, the *GCD* is a pedagogical document that focuses on the 'how' of religious education. The term religious education appears three times in the *GCD*, as a very general term but does not refer to specific educational forms or practices. Religious instruction appears once and is used to refer to a form of catechesis.³⁴ The inference in the use of terminology is that the overarching ecclesial task is catechesis, a form of pastoral theology that is 'intended to make [...] faith become living, conscious, and active, through the light of instruction'.³⁵ It could be argued that the lack of specificity about distinct terms does not help towards the evolution of a consistent theory of religious education for the second level classroom. That said, in its attempt to put educational principles into dialogue with the theological principles of Vatican II, the tone of the *GCD* demonstrates in practice the shift in emphasis from doctrine to relationship, from *knowing about* to active *knowing*. Its most significant contribution to the broad field of religious education was to articulate the concept of education, in the form of catechesis, as leading the person towards a mature faith.³⁶ For the *GCD*, the task of the teaching Church is catechesis. This is set out in very specific language that is ecclesial in tone and articulated in terms of a pastoral theology. The focus of the *GCD* is broadly pastoral with little attention paid to schooling. Despite its theoretical framework being catechetical rather than educational, the document was adopted as providing the de facto principles underpinning all aspects of education in faith.

3.3.2 General Directory for Catechesis

Written in the context of *Catechism of the Catholic Church* of 1994, and *EN*'s contextualisation of catechesis within evangelisation, the stated purpose of the 1997 *GDC* is to describe the nature and purpose of catechesis as part of the function of informing and forming Christian identity. According to Marilyn Kravatz's reading of the *GDC*, evangelisation provides a comprehensive conceptual framework within which catechesis finds its meaning.³⁷ Evangelisation is the organising principle. Positioning catechesis within evangelisation has implications when catechesis and

³⁴ *GCD*, para. 19.

³⁵ *GCD*, para. 14.

³⁶ *GCD*, para, 6, 7, 21-29, 38, 49, 76, 104.

³⁷ Marilyn Kravatz, *Partners in Wisdom and Grace: Catechesis and Religious Education in Dialogue* (Maryland: University Press of America, 2010), pp. 48-55.

religious education are used synonymously, as it assumes that religious education by definition has an evangelising function. The *GDC* makes clear that religious instruction is a scholastic discipline and should be approached with academic rigour.³⁸ However, the *GDC* is limited in what it says about the place of religious education in schools despite the significance of this setting in Ireland, and in many other countries, for most peoples' encounter with religion. From his research into the attitudes of teachers, children, and priests to the primary school religion programme in Ireland, Martin Kennedy concluded that, 'while the classroom emerges as a space of positive religious engagement for the children, the parish appears to be a space of diminishing religious engagement and the home a space of little or no religious engagement'.³⁹ The implication of Kennedy's conclusion is that while the classroom may provide a positive encounter with religion it cannot be a significant locus for catechesis, in so far as it is disconnected from home and parish.

Paragraph 69 of the *GDC* stresses that distinguishing 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'. However, it appears that it is the school rather than the classroom that 'assists in and promotes faith education'.⁴⁰ This leads to the situation in which the task of the school is considered to be catechetical and evangelising, but the task of the classroom is the academic study of religion. In not attending to the distinctive educational nature of the religion classroom does the document itself allow for a dichotomous approach to religious education? It is such a dichotomy that leads to calls for what Catherine Dooley describes as 'an evangelising catechesis',⁴¹ or what Groome describes as 'a total catechetical education'.⁴² Dooley sees the attempt to articulate the complementary relationship between religious instruction and catechesis as an innovation of the 1997 *GDC*, with its understanding of both modes as forms of the ministry of the word. Gallagher, drawing on the English and Welsh experience, outlines the distinctions between

³⁸ *GDC*, para. 73.

³⁹ Martin Kennedy, 'Islands Apart: The Religious Experience of Children', *The Furrow*, 50/10 (1999), pp. 527-533 (p. 527).

⁴⁰ *GDC*, para. 69.

⁴¹ Catherine Dooley, 'Catechesis and Religious Instruction in Catholic Schools, Perspectives of the General Directory for Catechesis', in *Religious Education as Practical Theology*, ed. by Bert Roebben and Michael Warren (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), pp. 175-190.

⁴² Thomas Groome, 'Total Catechesis/Religious Education: A Vision for Now and Always', in *Horizons & Hopes: The Future of Religious Education*, ed. by Thomas Groome and Harold Daly Horell (Mahwah, N.J: Paulist Press, 2003), pp. 1-29.

catechesis as an activity proper to the Church community, and religious education as a professional task of the teacher in the classroom whose task is to enable pupils to appreciate religion as a feature of human life and culture. *SGN* nuances this further in its insistence that religious education is not a form of catechesis, but a distinctive moment within the overarching structure of faith development.⁴³

3.4 The Congregation for Catholic Education

To understand the developments in religious education it is not sufficient to focus only on what we may call the catechetical documents which consider the nature of catechesis as an educational activity of the whole Church. It is also necessary to consider the significant insights emerging from the work of the Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE) on the nature of the Catholic school and the role of teachers in the Catholic school. Such documents reveal how the understanding of catechesis was in fact translating into practical concerns. The 1977 document, *The Catholic School*, outlined the apostolate of the Catholic school as the place that unites teaching and religious education to a well-defined professional activity, where religious instruction is considered to be part of a wider religious education.⁴⁴ It stressed, as had the earlier documents, the need to link teaching with the religious educational needs of the group concerned, and stated that prepared material must try to speak a language comprehensible to the generation in question. The document locates religious education within the broader remit of the catechetical mission of the Church. Though it makes some distinction between catechesis and religious education, which it uses synonymously with religious instruction, its insights are limited by the fact that it was written before *CT*. It therefore fails to distinguish between the task of the school, which it understands as a community of faith, and the remit of the classroom as a particular learning site.

An important statement about the distinctive nature of religious instruction comes from the 1982 document *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* which states that:

Religious instruction is appropriate in every school, for the purpose of the school is human formation in all of its fundamental dimensions, and the religious dimension is an

⁴³ *SGN*, para. 31.

⁴⁴ Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1977), para. 71.

integral part of this formation. Religious education is actually a right - with the corresponding duties - of the student and of the parents. It is also, at least in the case of the Catholic religion, an extremely important instrument for attaining the adequate synthesis of faith and culture that has been insisted on so often.

Therefore, the teaching of the Catholic religion, distinct from and at the same time complementary to catechesis properly so called, ought to form a part of the curriculum of every school.⁴⁵

Religious education, understood as religious instruction, is not seen within the context of catechesis, but as part of an education that has as its purpose, the 'integral formation of the human person'.⁴⁶ Such a religious education is also distinct from the development of 'all the human faculties of the students', 'preparation for professional life', 'formation of ethical and social awareness', and 'becoming aware of the transcendental'. This list of the human faculties of the students implies that religious education cannot be reduced to any of these dimensions. Nor is it necessarily expected to achieve all of these purposes. Instead it exists alongside these as an educative activity that is worthwhile in its own right. As Chapter Two of this study indicates, this differs significantly from how the term religious instruction is understood by the Irish State. Such a religious education is only possible when the religion teacher is theologically informed, faithful to genuine sources and to the light of the Magisterium, and rooted in life witness and an intensely lived spirituality.⁴⁷ For the CCE, the teaching of religion is an act of faith undertaken by witnesses who understand their role as participating in the mission of the Church.

3.4.1 The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School

Published in 1988 by the CCE, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School (RDECS)* provided a significant development in the understanding of religious education. *RDECS* draws extensively on *CT* but moves beyond a catechetical framework for religious education as it attempts to identify the nature of religious instruction in a school context. Its major contribution is the acknowledgement of the tension between the school as a civic institution with responsibilities to civic society and the school as a Christian community that has religious formation as a primary aim.⁴⁸ *RDECS* proposes that attention to the

⁴⁵ *Lay Catholics*, para. 56.

⁴⁶ *Lay Catholics*, para. 17.

⁴⁷ *Lay Catholics*, para. 59.

⁴⁸ The Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (Dublin: Veritas, 1988), para. 67.

distinction between these aims may help to overcome inevitable tensions. This distinction is made between the distinctive nature of religious instruction that has knowledge as its primary aim and a catechesis that aims at maturity of faith.⁴⁹ Religious instruction and catechesis are distinct but complementary activities, both having the students' integral formation as their aim.

Citing the address of John Paul II to the priests of the diocese of Rome, *RDECS* reiterates:

The basic principle which must guide us in our commitment to this sensitive area of pastoral activity is that religious instruction and catechesis are at the same time distinct and complementary. A school has as its purpose the students' integral formation. Religious instruction, therefore, should be integrated into the objectives and criteria which characterize a modern school.⁵⁰

Such an understanding of religious instruction assumes that the school in some way models a Christian community and that the teacher is a personal witness to faith. This emphasis on the personal role of the teacher highlights the religious dimension of religious instruction and is a theme that will be returned to in Chapter Five of this research. Though the document attends in some measure to the issue of methodology it does so only in terms of attention to the necessity of being aware of the experience of pupils' lives, and offers the caveat that it is, 'not easy to develop a course syllabus for religious instruction classes which will present the Christian faith systematically and in a way suited to the young people of today'.⁵¹ However such a course syllabus is to be devised, it must be 'complete in content, faithful to the Gospel message, organic in form, and [...] developed according to a methodology based on the words and deeds of the Lord'.⁵² The CCE attempts to provide an educational perspective on religious instruction and makes a clear statement that education in religion rather than catechesis is the primary purpose of the school. In its use of educational language such as aims, objectives, pupil experience, context, curriculum, and syllabus, the document begins to situate religious instruction within the sphere of education rather than in the sphere of pastoral theology favoured by the Papal Office and the Congregation for the Clergy. It is this shift that will begin to provide greater clarity and distinctiveness for the emerging field of religious education.

⁴⁹ *RDECS*, para. 68-69.

⁵⁰ 'Address of John Paul II to the Priests of the Diocese of Rome', 5 March 1981, *Insegnamenti*, IV/1, pp. 629.

⁵¹ *RDECS*, para. 73.

⁵² *RDECS*, para. 73.

According to G. P. Fleming's analysis of *RDECS*, this is the most sustained attempt by the Congregation for the Clergy to provide an educational perspective on religious education in its departure from the catechetical focus of earlier documents.⁵³ The term catechesis is only mentioned ten times and then only to distinguish it from religious instruction, which is mentioned twenty-one times. Mentioned twice, religious education is the term used, with less clarity, to describe the very general field of education in faith. Religious instruction, rather than catechesis, occurs in classrooms and draws on the insights of philosophy, psychology, and pedagogy, whereas catechesis occurs in voluntary associations like family, parish, and ecclesial organisations. *RDECS* asserts that religious instruction in the classroom allows for the possibility of catechesis but does not have catechesis as its primary goal. *RDECS* attempts to chart different territory from the catechetical documents though the difficulty remains that no clear distinction is made between religious instruction and religious education.⁵⁴

3.4.2 Circular Letter to the Presidents of Bishops' Conferences on Religious Education in Schools

The most recent document from the CCE pertinent to the teaching of religion in school is the *Circular Letter to the Presidents of Bishops Conferences on Religious Education in Schools*, 2009.⁵⁵ The significance of this contribution is its use of the term religious education to replace religious instruction. However, the CCE merely replaces the earlier term without distinguishing between education and instruction. This shifting of terminology had begun in the 2002 document from the same Congregation, *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools: Reflections and Guidelines*, in which the term religious education replaces religious instruction as the preferred way to name the activity of the teaching of religion in schools.⁵⁶ In the *Circular Letter* the term religious education is used twenty-seven times. Religious instruction is used four times, three times when quoting from other sources and once

⁵³ G.P. Fleming, 'Catholic Church Documents on Religious Education', in *International Handbook*, Part One, ed. by De Souza, Engbretson, Durka, Jackson, and McGrady, pp. 607-620.

⁵⁴ For a reflection on the implications of the *RDECS* for the introduction of the *JCRES* and *LCRES* see Devitt, *Willingly to School*, pp. 151-161.

⁵⁵ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Circular Letter to the Presidents of Bishops' Conferences on Religious Education in Schools* (2009), <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20090505_circ-insegn-relig_en.html> [accessed 29 August 2012].

⁵⁶ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Consecrated Persons and Their Mission in Schools* (Great Britain: Catholic Truth Society, 2003).

in a way that distinguishes, without comment, between the two terms 'catholic religious instruction and education'.⁵⁷ The term catechesis appears five times in the document.

The 2009 *Circular Letter* reiterates the theme of the *RDECS* that:

Religious education is different from, and complementary to, catechesis, as it is school education that does not require the assent of faith, but conveys knowledge on the identity of Christianity and Christian life. Moreover, it enriches the Church and humanity with areas for growth, of both culture and humanity.⁵⁸

This distinction between two key modes of education in faith is evident in what Kieran argues are two overarching approaches to religious education in Ireland.⁵⁹ On the one hand, there are 'catechetical or faith formational approaches that are transmissive in intent and nature and explicitly nurture faith in children'. On the other hand, there is an emerging understanding, reflected in the writings of the CCE, that religious education is broader than faith formation. This broader based religious education includes, but is not limited to, information about religion and belief. For Kieran, such a religious education prepares children to engage with a world where religion is a 'significant cultural, social although not necessarily important personal factor for the child'.⁶⁰ A limitation of the *Circular Letter* is that the relationship between these two modes of education in faith is not articulated. Despite the language of complementarity, there appears to be an artificial division between the two that is not easily negotiated. The lack of nuance evident in the CCE's use of the term religious education is not always easy to reconcile with the language of the CCE, leading to a conceptual confusion that does not help the discourse for Catholic religious education. The distinction between catechesis and religious instruction is easily made, however the difficulty arises when the term religious education is too easily interchanged with religious instruction.

While the *RDECS* made a very clear distinction between catechesis and religious instruction, this distinction is not so evident in the *GDC*, which was published nine years later. What is evident is that the documents emanating from the

⁵⁷ *Circular Letter*, para. 19.

⁵⁸ *Circular Letter*, para. 18.

⁵⁹ Patricia Kieran, 'Children Negotiating Their Own Beliefs: The Religious Education of Young Children in Families in the Republic of Ireland', *Journal of Religious Education*, 59/3 (2011), pp. 50-60.

⁶⁰ Kieran, 'Children Negotiating Their Own Beliefs', p. 53.

CCE are more responsive to both the civic and the pedagogical realities of schools, whereas those coming from the Congregation for the Clergy or from the Papal Office are more theologically nuanced, and situate religious education within the home of pastoral theology. This may go some way to explaining the inherent tensions faced by teachers of religious education working in the essentially public space that characterises most schools.

3.5 A Review of Significant Contributions to the Debate in the Irish Context

This study now turns its attention to the Irish context and reviews documents from the Irish Episcopal Conference and the National Catechetical Office, as well as some contributions that have arguably made a significant contribution to how the term religious education is understood by the Church in Ireland. These will be reviewed in chronological order. The first contribution selected for particular review is the 1982 publication, *A Syllabus for the Religious Education of Catholic Pupils in Post-Primary Schools*, arguably where post-Vatican II ecclesial perspectives on religious education find expression in the Irish context. The focal point of the chapter will be the consideration of some of the responses to the introduction of the syllabi for JCRE and LCRE, with the intention of extracting the meanings behind the language being used. Continuing to trace the ecclesial language, attention will be given to *Share the Good News: National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland (SGN)*, a key influence on how religious education is understood within contemporary ecclesial discourse.

3.5.1 A Syllabus for the Religious Education of Post-Primary Pupils

By 1982, it was clear that distinctions were emerging between evangelisation and catechesis, and religious instruction and religious education, even though religious instruction and religious education were generally being used synonymously. Despite the attempt to distinguish between different categories of religious education what had emerged was what Avery Dulles later described as a three-fold understanding of the broad task of religious education:

One task of religious education is to present the Christian religion as worthy of belief [...]
the second task of religious education is that of communicating the contents of

Christian faith [...] the third and last function of religious education is the socialisation into the community of faith.⁶¹

Each of the categories has a theological underpinning and given the nature of the Church's understanding of the end of education there is an emphasis on formation and community. It is with this understanding in mind that this study now turns to an analysis of the Irish Episcopal Commission for Catechetics 1982 publication, *A Syllabus for the Religious Education of Post-Primary Pupils*.⁶² The question under consideration is how the Church's developing understanding of religious education impacted on the construction of the syllabus. This was the first major document on religious education in second-level schools published in Ireland after Vatican II and became the foundational document for the publication of textbooks and resources, as well as providing a language for the way that religious educators were beginning to describe their task in terms of leading people to maturity of faith. Though ostensibly a pedagogical document, it is essentially catechetical and theological in intent. For that reason it is necessary to read the syllabus in light of the post-Vatican II catechetical documents on which it draws so extensively.

Though it built on the 1977 draft syllabus for *Religious Studies for Leaving Certificate*, the 1982 *Syllabus* has a different focus. The language of religious studies is absent from the document. Instead, the 1982 *Syllabus* attempts to respond to the challenge of evangelising a new generation by means of 'catechesis or religious education'. This document has a different status to those studied heretofore, as it is written for the local circumstances of both the Irish Church and the Irish education system. It is written with the practical application of pedagogical principles in mind, so may not necessarily be expected to offer a fully realised rationale for religious education. Though called *A Syllabus for Religious Education* the document presumes that religious education in Ireland is catechetical. It is therefore written in catechetical rather than pedagogical language and uses the term religious education when it is more accurately referring to catechesis. Six insights from the 1982 *Syllabus* emerge as significant for understanding the evolution of the term religious education at that point in time.

⁶¹ Avery Dulles, *The Communication of Faith and Its Content* (Washington: National Catholic Association Department of Religious Education, 1985), pp. 11-14.

⁶² Irish Episcopal Commission for Catechetics, *A Syllabus for the Religious Education of Post-Primary Pupils* (Dublin: Veritas, 1982).

- (i) Religious education is used as the official term to describe the task of teaching religion in second level schools. In line with *GCD*, *EN* and *CT*, the syllabus refers to catechesis or religious education as ‘one of the main means of evangelisation’. We do not find a distinction between religious education and catechesis; neither though do we find any mention of the term religious instruction, which seems to have quietly disappeared from Irish ecclesial discourse at this point.
- (ii) The syllabus provides a very clear statement that the aim of religious education is ‘to awaken people to faith and then to help them throughout their lives to deepen and strengthen that faith’.⁶³ It takes up the language of the *GCD* and *CT* in the phrase, ‘religious education is concerned with leading people to a mature faith’. The syllabus takes a deductive approach to the task of leading young people towards mature faith by helping them to acquire ‘knowledge, understanding, attitudes and values’. Though the phrase ‘helping them to acquire’ acknowledges the personal agency of the learner, there is an inherent assumption that the learner desires to grow towards a mature faith, and that this desire will manifest itself in a readiness to inform faith. The qualities of that mature faith are explicated in the ten aims identified in the syllabus. Consistent with the conviction that ‘religious education is an integral and indispensable aspect of the total education of children and young people’, these aims are personal and formative, social and political, intellectual and spiritual, and are expressed in an ecclesial language that is explicitly catechetical.
- (iii) The description of Christianity as a way of life involving attitudes ‘caught’ from others testifies to the understanding of religious education as socialisation into a living faith community in which the teacher is ‘committed to the faith’ and ‘competent and willing to teach it’. The emphasis on ‘the faith’, underlines an understanding that religious education for Catholic pupils is intentionally about teaching people to be religious in a particular way.
- (iv) Though the term religious education is used throughout the syllabus the introduction to the syllabus calls it a ‘catechetical syllabus’. In its detailing of

⁶³ 1982 *Syllabus*, p. 4.

content, the programme reflects a theological approach to the teaching of religion that, while rooted in the content-experience dialectic, follows quite strictly the traditional theological categories of systematic theology, moral theology, scripture, liturgy, prayer and sacramental theology.

- (v) A significant contribution of this document is to the understanding of the role of process in the teaching of religion. In its aphorism that, 'what is taught is not more important than, or independent of, how it is taught',⁶⁴ the document draws attention to the necessity of maintaining a content-process dialectic if the formative dimensions of religious education are to be achieved.
- (vi) The brevity of the document allows for clarity about the ecclesial understanding of religious education as a form of evangelisation. However, its conflation of the terms religious education and catechesis, while with hindsight appearing to lack conceptual clarity, is consistent with the general Church documents at that particular point in time. The chronological approach of this study suggests that what we are seeing is not a lack of clarity but an organic evolution in the understanding of what is specific about religious education in the second level classroom. Such an understanding is rooted in the theology of Vatican II in dialogue with emerging philosophical insights that impact on the very nature of education itself, as well as with the rapidly changing socio-political understanding of the purposes of schooling.

The most obvious critique of the document emerges from the consideration that religious education takes place in schools which have, as their, *raison d'être*, the understanding that education is a public activity the aims of which should be pursued in accordance with educational principles. These principles are not spelled out, but one would question whether the general educational principles of critical reasoning and intellectual curiosity are appropriately supported. These elements are present in the stated aims of the syllabus, but with the definite end of maturity of faith in view, it may be questioned if it is too transmissive in intent and if such transmission is justifiable within the public space of a classroom. That said, the public space within which religious education occurred was what could be called a faith-recognising

⁶⁴ 1982 *Syllabus*, p. 7.

public space, in which transmission was seen to be an acceptable educational activity.

Geraldine Bourke's critique of the syllabus draws on the educational philosophy of R.S. Peters and Paul Hirst to assess the document.⁶⁵ Though such a philosophy is useful, as a critique it is limited, as it neglects the theological vision informing a pedagogical document and leads Bourke to the assumption that intellectual development and catechetical goals are somewhat antithetical. Bourke argues that the intellectual development of pupils in the area of religion is being neglected in the pursuit of catechetical goals, and makes the case for a separation between the two. The fact that she neglects the ecclesial language and intent of the Episcopal Conference to critique the document means that Bourke's analysis falls into the very confusion she critiques. She is correct in her assessment that the authors do not appear to see any logical difference between the concepts of religious education and catechesis. On these grounds she then makes a case for a distinction between educational goals and catechetical goals. The difficulty is that, in 1982, these goals were not as easily distinguishable because, for the most part, the concept that religious education had a contribution to make outside of the ecclesial space was not part of the public discourse. What a reading of Bourke's assessment does is to highlight that, in fact, the use of the term religious education in the 1982 document is what is causing the difficulty. The more appropriate term, given the stated aims and description of content in the syllabus, would be religious instruction which is continuous with catechesis, in that it can hold both the intellectual and faith formation elements in a more harmonious relationship.

3.5.2 Responses to the Introduction of the DES Syllabus for Religious Education

In 2000, the DES introduced the *JCRES*, followed in 2003 with the introduction of the *LCRES*. The background to the implementation of these initiatives was presented in Chapter Two of this study. As this chapter is concerned with the question of language, it will limit itself to considering how the term religious education began to be used in divergent ways to describe an emerging context. To this end, this chapter examines some of the responses that demonstrate the use of language and the

⁶⁵ Geraldine Bourke, 'The Teaching of Senior-Cycle Religion: An Irish Perspective', *Irish Educational Studies*, 10/1 (1991), pp. 151- 162.

conflict that emerged between different understandings of similar terms. What is to be noted initially is the internal nature of the debate that makes little reference to the educational context within which religious education exists. The debate draws extensively on a deeply theological understanding of religious education and, for the most part, neglects the civic educational discourse that was occurring in tandem. The emphasis in the debate is on a religious rather than on a philosophical understanding of the educational. The interdisciplinary nature of religious education, that is the interplay between the broad field of education and the broad understanding of religion, does not feature adequately in the contributions, with the result that the concerns raised by the contributors did not adequately become part of any wider discourse about the nature and scope of religious education within the broader public project of education.

Frank Hurl's contribution 'Religious Education: Catechetics or Academics?' captures the polarisation that marked the reception of the DES syllabus.⁶⁶ Hurl's title immediately polarises catechetics (a term no longer seen in the literature) and the academic study of religion, highlighting a view that somehow, information and formation were inherently opposed. In acknowledging the educational justification for the new syllabus, Hurl points out that core questions, central to an ecclesial understanding of religious education, have not been addressed. He asks if the NCCA, in proposing a programme that he deems to be 'rightly a-denominational', is producing a programme in which religious education must be taught from a non-denominational perspective?⁶⁷ Does the introduction of the new syllabus imply that a catechetical model of religious education is no longer sound? Under the new system, does religious education demand neutrality about truth claims? How does the critical education approach adopted by the syllabus fit with the responsibility of religious education that understands itself within an ecclesial context as being catechetical? Though polarised in the debate and in Hurl's attention to the possible conflict between formation and information, these tasks as understood by the *GDC* are not mutually exclusive. Drawing on the work of Moran, Hurl argues for an education that is both formative and critical, that teaches people to be religious as well as teaching people to understand religion.

⁶⁶ Frank Hurl, 'Religious Education: Catechetics or Academics?' *The Furrow*, 51/5 (2000), pp. 279-286.

⁶⁷ Hurl, p. 283.

For Hurl, the issue becomes more problematic when the question of truth claims is considered. Careful to avoid any charge of indoctrination, Hurl argues that the new syllabus will demand that doctrinal content or truth claims will be open to rational assessment. The essential element in the future teaching of religion will be the logical presentation of the rationality of the belief system. For Hurl, this has the potential to become reductionist in approach. Could knowledge be reduced to an empirical mode with little account being taken of religious ways of knowing? Could an over-emphasis on religious knowledge reduce the experience of religious knowing that is at the heart of a Catholic understanding of revelation? Another dimension to this shifting emphasis is the possibility that an ecumenical or inter-religious approach runs the risk of becoming syncretistic unless it has the capacity to critically engage with the truth claims of competing religious and secular viewpoints. Hurl argues that 'the healthy tension between being formed in a tradition and rebelling against that tradition through critical reflection is the best type of education'.⁶⁸ Such an education is part of the preparation for life and concurs with the general aims of education as articulated by the State. In this manner, Hurl argues persuasively for the inclusion of doctrine in any rational inquiry into religion which would provide a platform from which, or a context within which, a critical study can be undertaken, and calls for a 'religious education which is catechetical and also academically sound in its critical reflection'.⁶⁹ Drawing on both Paulo Freire and Groome, Hurl argues against any attempt at a so-called neutral education, but instead calls for a critical education with formation at its heart. Hurl's conclusion is that the new syllabus can allow for a religious education that is formative and doctrinal, as well as critical and academic in ways that are synergistic. Though Hurl calls this approach religious education it is more properly identified as religious instruction in the tradition of the *GDC*. In his assumption that that the DES syllabus and an academic approach is somehow neutral, Hurl does not take sufficient account of the philosophy underpinning the DES religious education syllabus and so reduces it to the academic study of religion, which must somehow be complemented by a more formative approach to the teaching of religion.

⁶⁸ Hurl, p. 283.

⁶⁹ Hurl, p. 284.

Hurl's conviction is that the aims and approaches of catechesis and religious education can be reconciled, but that ultimately the aims of religious education are catechetical. Such a view finds expression also in Anne Holton's contribution to the debate. For Holton, the aim of religious education is to guide 'the student to recognise the revelation of God in their lives and fully respond to it and so develop a relationship with God'.⁷⁰ Holton uses the language of religious education synonymously with the language of faith formation and foreshadows in effect what has happened in many schools, that is, a perceived split between religious education and faith formation, where faith development teams and chaplains take on roles that may have little if anything to do with the religious education classroom. In a later article, Holton clarifies some of the issues she raised in 2000.⁷¹ Her later thesis is that faith formation is an integral part of religious education and so argues for the adoption of catechetical education (a phrase used deliberately to echo Groome's 'total catechetical education'), which would allow for a less sharp distinction between religious education and catechesis. Though the core of Holton's thesis is creative and imaginative in its attempt to move the argument beyond educational outcomes as always assessable and predictable, a weakness in her argument is that she does not articulate the educational dimension of religious education and the dynamics and scope of the classroom as a particular site of learning with its own specificities and limitations. This neglect of the specifically educational remit of religious education and the blurring of the lines of demarcation between catechesis and religious education appears to suggest that no academic/intellectual inquiry is necessary.

The emerging polarity between catechesis and religious education finds its most dramatic expression in Looney's contribution, 'Testing Times' in which she plays with the word 'test' and proposes that the introduction of the syllabus provides three tests for the partners.⁷² The first test is a test of purpose. In providing a curriculum for religious education, the State must ensure that religious education is justifiable both on educational grounds and on the grounds of public interest,

⁷⁰ Anne Holton, 'Religious Education: an Examination Subject', *The Furrow*, 51/5 (2000), pp. 287-295.

⁷¹ Anne Holton, 'Teaching Religion in the Examination System', *The Furrow*, 53/9 (2002), pp. 469-478.

⁷² Anne Looney, 'Testing Times? A New Challenge for Religious Education', *Doctrine & Life*, 50/9 (2000), pp. 386-392.

religious education must have something to offer to the civic space, and not just to the religious space. Emerging from that is the second test, which is a test of role. Is religious education essentially educational or ministerial? Can religious education be faithful to the demands of both? Should religious education be faithful to the demands of both? This is the dilemma being dealt with by both Hurl and Holton, who arguably, due to a lack of attention to the underlying premise of the DES syllabus, seem to assume that religious education has to choose between the educational and the ministerial. The third test is a test of priorities, how do churches and denominational schools resource both visions of religious education? Will one vision be supported to the detriment of the other? Can a denominational school hold both visions in creative tension? In this article, Looney calls, in a somewhat disingenuous echoing of Rossiter's phrase, for a creative divorce between catechesis and religious education, where religious education is understood to be the fundamental remit of a formal educational space.⁷³ Looney's attempt to make a claim for the distinctive nature of religious education highlights the ideological difficulty that has given rise to religious education increasingly being separated into 'exam RE' and 'non-exam RE'. The notion of separate spheres for the two activities, albeit with the same name, begins to gain some ground.

'Catholicism is in danger say teachers', was the dramatic headline that appeared in *The Sunday Times* of 17 February 2002, and brought the debate about the nature of religious education into the public arena. The article was based on the contribution of Deenihan who, basing his thesis on the legal basis for religious instruction in second level schools called for a separation between religious instruction and religious education. Contrary to the other contributors, Deenihan argues that religious education as an 'examinable, non-denominational religious education' cannot be expected to either 'nourish' or 'sustain' a living faith.⁷⁴ Deenihan's conclusion is that, as catechesis and religious instruction are concerned with faith formation and development, they need to be separated from religious education. This separation suggests that for Deenihan religious education is more akin to a religious studies approach. This contention is disagreed with by Micheál

⁷³ Graham Rossiter, 'Stifling Union or Creative Divorce? The Future Relationship between Catechesis and Religious Education in Catholic Schools', *Word in Life*, 29/4 (1981), pp.162-173.

⁷⁴ Thomas Deenihan, 'Religious Education and Religious Instruction: An Alternative Viewpoint.' *The Furrow*, 53/2 (2002), pp.75-83.

deBarra, who in claiming what he identifies as the middle ground, along the lines of Groome and Holton, argues that religious education and religious instruction are not mutually exclusive and that to suggest so is to set up a false dichotomy and overstate the case.⁷⁵ In the classroom the aim and approach of the teacher is to foster thought about religion. In a later clarification in response to deBarra, Deenihan asks if religious instruction has been facilitated or hindered by the syllabus.⁷⁶ For Deenihan, the central issue is that if one is to be true to the aims of both 'exam religious education' and religious instruction, then these cannot combine or co-exist in the one classroom.⁷⁷

In his contribution, 'No Divorce for the Sake of the Children', Groome quickly repudiates Looney's separation of catechesis and religious education, arguing that catechesis and religious education must be considered to be a both/and relationship instead of an either/or one.⁷⁸ Approving of both Hurl's and Holton's view, Groome's contention is that to allow for a separation between catechesis and religious education acquiesces to the debilitating dichotomy left by the Enlightenment era between critical reasoning and faith formation and proposes that the informative can be done in such a way as to be deeply formative.⁷⁹ However, what emerges is a variety of understandings as to what people are formed for and in. Groome argues that 'formation and critical education do not stand in opposition to each other but are interdependent and maybe even inherently so'.⁸⁰ He goes on then to suggest a new partnership rather than a divorce because it is, in his view, possible to teach any great religious tradition with academic rigour and critical reflection, without indoctrination or confessional bias, and yet in ways that people learn from it for their lives rather than merely about it for their heads. This pedagogical approach is consistent with the aims of the DES, however there is no easily agreed on understanding of what is meant by formation. This approach is profoundly educational but is it catechetical?

⁷⁵ Micheál DeBarra, 'Religious Education and Catechesis: The View from the Middle Ground', *The Furrow*, 53/5 (2002), pp. 292-298.

⁷⁶ Thomas Deenihan, 'Religious Education and Catechesis', *The Furrow*, 53/5 (2002), pp. 298-301 (p.292).

⁷⁷ Thomas Deenihan, 'Catholic Schools and Schooling in the Republic of Ireland: Reviewing Policy and Strategy', *Presentation Studies*, 18/6 (2008), pp. 15-41.

⁷⁸ Thomas Groome, 'Religious Education and Catechesis: No Divorce for the Sake of the Children', *The Furrow*, 53/11 (2002), pp. 587-596.

⁷⁹ Groome develops this theme in a later reflection: 'Both Religious Knowledge and Spiritual Wisdom: The Challenge for Religious Education as an "Exam Subject" in Irish Secondary Schools: A Thing of the Past or Coming to Birth?' *Teaching Religious Education*, 5/10 (2010) pp. 5-10.

⁸⁰ Groome, 'Religious Education and Catechesis', p. 594.

Is the formation offered purely personal or does it have social and ecclesial consequences? Deenihan's contribution to the debate is a reminder that such an understanding may better be described as religious instruction, and that to ascribe the term religious education to this endeavour only serves to both underscore the linguistic confusion and frustrate both endeavours.

In the contributions just analysed, which all come from the Roman Catholic tradition, religious education remains aligned to a particular faith tradition and at the service of a particular faith tradition. Much of the debate centred on the faith formation aspect of religious education and whether this is appropriately and satisfactorily served under the State certified syllabi. The general conclusion of the reviewed authors' readings of the DES syllabus is that a catechetical approach can be taken to the new syllabus, and religious education taught in such a way as to fulfil its catechetical objectives while at the same time achieving the educational objectives as determined by the DES. This suggests the possibility of a catechetical religious education which has critically reflective effects.

3.5.3 Guidelines for the Faith Formation of Catholic Students

In the *Guidelines for the Faith Formation and Development of Catholic Students: Junior Certificate Religious Education Syllabus*, 1999, and the 2006 *Guidelines for the Faith Formation of Catholic Students: Leaving Certificate Religious Education Syllabus*, the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference welcomes the DES Religious Education syllabi as a 'valuable contribution to the religious education of young people in Ireland'.⁸¹ It is clear that the Irish Bishops do not see that the syllabi can provide a complete religious education for Catholic students. However, the DES does not make such a claim. In its provision of syllabi for Religious Education, the DES attends to its remit of providing for religious education. The DES syllabi for Religious Education are optional, and according to Looney, CEO of the NCCA, were 'not supposed to replace traditional religion classes. Students were welcome to bring their own personal religious experience to bear in the exam, and during the

⁸¹ Irish Catholic Bishops Conference, *Guidelines for the Faith Formation and Development of Catholic Students: Junior Certificate Religious Education Syllabus* (Dublin: Veritas, 1999), p.7. Irish Catholic Bishops Conference, *Guidelines for the Faith Formation and Development of Catholic Students: Leaving Certificate Religious Education Syllabus* (Dublin: Veritas, 2006), p. 7.

syllabus'.⁸² The DES does not use the language of faith in its description of aims or learning outcomes whereas, for the Bishops the general aim of religious education is to 'awaken people to faith'.⁸³ In the Bishops' guidelines, faith formation is seen as an integral task of religious education, therefore the purpose of the guidelines is to supplement the academic aspects of the study of religion with considerations of faith formation, with a view to guiding students to maturity of faith according to Catholic teaching.⁸⁴ The academic study of religion is then essentially a subset of faith formation and catechesis, which in turn is a subset of evangelisation. This is evident in the guidelines for *JCRES* in which the six core elements of faith formation - knowledge, liturgical education, moral formation, prayer, community life and missionary initiation⁸⁵ - are reflected in the structure of the sections of the *JCRES*: Communities of Faith, World Religions, Christianity, Worship, The Moral Challenge, and The Question of Faith.⁸⁶

The language of the Bishops' guidelines is catechetical in nature and leads to a sense of disjuncture between the aims of the DES syllabus and the task of religious education from a Catholic perspective. This disjuncture can be noted in everyday parlance in schools where teachers, pupils, parents and school management speak of 'exam RE' and 'non-exam RE' and ascribe different valuing of the subject through this language. According to the guidelines the appropriate method for religious education is a catechetical method that is faithful to the Word of God, to the teaching of the Church, and to the person being taught. When these three criteria meet then genuine catechesis may be said to occur. In contrast to the 1982 *Syllabus* which calls for attention to the 'how' of teaching, the Bishops' guidelines emphasise what is to be taught with little attention given to the question of pedagogy. The theological approach underlying the guidelines is propositional, and in their presentation of the content to be taught, there is a lack of attention to the purpose or process of what is to be taught. With the exception of some suggestions for methodology in the section dealing with the Framework for Senior Cycle Religious Education, and the recommendation that the journal work and course work element, required for examination purposes, could be used as ways of promoting personal faith formation,

⁸² Anne Looney, cited in 'Catholicism in Danger', *The Sunday Times*, 17 February 2002.

⁸³ 1982 *Syllabus*, p. 4.

⁸⁴ 1999 *Guidelines*, p. 20.

⁸⁵ *GDC*, para 85-86.

⁸⁶ *JCRES*, p. 2.

the primary emphasis of the guidelines is theological rather than pedagogical. In essence then, the guidelines offer an outline of what a Catholic student should know, but provides little insight into how a student can be led to such knowing.

The theological emphasis of the guidelines is further emphasised in the description of the criteria of assessment for selecting suitably qualified teachers of religious education. The suggested requirement is a qualification, to at least degree level, in theology, divinity or religious education. The nature of such a degree should be theologically suitable. Following this basic requirement, teaching skills and qualifications should be educationally comparable to other subjects. Religion classes should be entrusted to those who are committed to the faith, professionally qualified to teach religion, and willing to do so.

What may also be noticed in the Bishops' guidelines is that the language of religious instruction has completely disappeared from the discourse. It has been replaced by the language of religious education, even though what is being described is fully consistent with religious instruction as described in the *GDC* and other Church documents though, not with how religious instruction had come to be understood by the State. The difference in the guidelines is that religious education is not assumed to be about faith education, and therefore must be supplemented by a new term, faith formation. Instead of religious education being used to also assume faith education, the guidelines do not allow for such a possibility, and so create a linguistic distinction between religious education and faith formation which, though helpful at one level, highlights a perception that religious education may not necessarily be considered to be formative. The Irish Bishops try to reconcile such a separation in their statement in *Vision 08*:

Religious education, designed to confirm and deepen an understanding of the faith, forms an essential part of the curriculum in Catholic schools and functions at its core. This means, for example, that Catholic schools commit resources and time to religious education as a matter of priority.⁸⁷

For the Bishops, religious education is an activity that promotes and supports faith. This view becomes more nuanced in the next document to be reviewed.

⁸⁷ Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, *Vision 08: A Vision for Catholic Education in Ireland* (Maynooth: Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, 2008), p. 4.

3.5.4 *Share the Good News: National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland*

Religious education is a process that contributes to the faith development of children, adolescents and adults. Religious education helps people to develop religious ways of thinking, feeling and doing, which give expression to the spiritual, moral and transcendent dimensions of life and can lead to personal and social transformation. Religious education can also teach people to think profoundly, allowing them to make free and consistent choices in the way they live their religious, and other, commitments. Religious education can take place within a Church context or outside that context, it is important therefore to understand what form of religious education is being spoken of in a particular context'.⁸⁸

Late 2010 saw the publication by the Irish Bishops' Conference of *Share the Good News, the National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland*. The acknowledgement of a variety of forms of religious education both inside and outside of particular Church or faith contexts is a welcome direction. Within the Catholic context, religious education takes place as a moment within the overarching construct of faith development. Such a construct situates a Catholic understanding of religious education within a faith context, with the assumptions attendant on theological underpinnings as outlined in Church documents already reviewed in this chapter. *SGN* states that religious education should support faith life; it is not purely phenomenological.⁸⁹ Lived religious faith is the context for religious education. Therefore, it always has a formational aspect and should contribute to both the faith life as well as the whole life of the person because, within Catholic theology, there is no distinction between the two. As with all recent Church documents, the term religious instruction does not appear in *SGN*, despite its being the legal term for the teaching of religion in Ireland.

SGN situates religious education within the overarching framework of faith development which is used as an 'all inclusive term' that allows for the consideration of all the 'nuanced meanings' of on-going faith education. Religious education, while related to evangelisation and catechesis has its own distinctive identity. As expressed in *SGN*, a Catholic understanding of religious education has a formational aspect that is rooted in the lived faith of pupils. To that end, it can contribute to faith development though faith development is not the primary aim of religious education. It is this distinction that allows for religious education as an educational activity to have its own characteristic identity apart from faith development. *SGN* also

⁸⁸ *SGN*, p. 57.

⁸⁹ *SGN*, p. 57.

recognises and welcomes the variety of students in the religious education classroom and their varied faith commitments and traditions. Religious education can stand alongside faith education and work in partnership with it, but there is no expectation that religious education has to adopt the aims of faith education, evangelisation, or catechesis.⁹⁰

Though *SGN* makes very explicit the moments of faith development, and distinguishes carefully between catechesis and religious education, such clarity is not provided in the 2011 document from the Irish Bishops Conference, a *Policy for the Religious Education of Catholic Children not Attending Catholic Schools*, which states:

Religious Education is one form of the Church's mission of evangelisation. It invites the believer to live a conscious and active faith. This mission is carried out by various people on different levels. The responsibility of each person will vary, but all are important to the fulfilment of the Church's mission to proclaim the Good News.⁹¹

Though there is some obvious consistency between this statement and the description of religious education found in *SGN*, the care that is evident in *SGN* about the specific nature of religious education as distinct from, though complementary to, catechesis, is absent from this policy document. While the term religious education appears in the title of the document, the rest of the document refers only to catechesis, and infers that the aims of catechesis and the aims of religious education are one and the same. The repeated emphasis on catechesis, as well as the call for the training and employment of catechists to teach religious education, leads to the situation where the distinction between catechesis and religious education is elided.

3.6 Conclusion

This survey of the evolution of the term religious education in Ireland demonstrates that the context for religious education in Ireland has been predominantly shaped by an ecclesial discourse rooted in an understanding of religious education as a form of practical theology. What the survey also demonstrates is that, even within an ecclesial discourse, religious education is a contested term that needs to claim what is distinctive about it so that it is not too easily subsumed into a catechetical or faith

⁹⁰ *SGN*, p. 58.

⁹¹ Irish Bishops' Conference, *Policy for the Religious Education of Catholic Children Not Attending Catholic Schools* (Maynooth: Irish Bishops' Conference, 2011), p. 6.

development model. This chapter has outlined the catechetical tradition particular to Ireland that can act as a resource for religious education, but may not be the most appropriate activity for the second level classroom. What is emerging is a clearer sense of the relationship between catechesis, faith development, and religious education, and an awareness of the need to distinguish more carefully between them. *SGN* is clear that religious education is an educational classroom activity separate from catechesis. However, an explicit educational theory of the relationship between religious education as a faith activity and a religious education that is adequate or appropriate for the classroom on educational grounds, or on the grounds of public interest, has not yet evolved.

What emerges from this study of the developments in the Church's understanding of religious education is that there is a lack of consistency in the way that terms are used. The Church documents on religious education offer a framework for understanding religious education, but do not always provide a coherent theory of religious education in the Irish context. However, instead of bemoaning this lack of a cohesive development or systematic theory this study welcomes what may be called the textured understanding of religious education that seeks to move beyond the ecclesial discourse to an engagement with other hermeneutical viewpoints. St. Aubyn's suggestion that there 'might be little moments of freshness, not because the life of the world has been successfully translated but because a new life has been made out of this stuff', is apposite to the survey undertaken in this Chapter.

What this study has done is to focus the question of language as used within the Irish context. The documents under review share certain assumptions. In the first instance, religious education is understood as an activity of faith rooted in a theological vision of the human person as well as in a dynamic understanding of revelation. Secondly, the documents assume that religious education has a socialising function, and that the school as a community of faith has a role to play in such socialisation. However, these assumptions, combined with an inappropriate conflation of terminology, lead to the term religious education being understood narrowly and defined in what can be thought of as *insider language*. Such *insider language*, or what Walter Brueggemann describes as 'language behind the wall', though a rich, useful, and affirming language, is not easily comprehensible outside

the family or outside the wall and is therefore limited in what it can offer to public or societal discourse.⁹² For Moran, religious education as the critical engagement between religion and education is necessarily an outsider or public language, a language that transcends the particularities of faith communities and theological commitments. The evolving ecclesial discourse about religious education outlined in this chapter remains an internal discourse, as it is shaped more by its religious understanding than by its pedagogical understanding:

A religious education cannot abandon traditional religious language on the basis that it conflicts with what the modern world says is true. But equally important, religious education cannot be a settling for one's religious dialect without asking how it interacts with the modern world.⁹³

Moran's work on religious education as a second language offers a way of facilitating discourse 'at the wall' so as to interact with the modern world. Moran considers that faith language, the lived language of faith in a religious community, be that family, school, or parish, is the primary language that people speak because it is part of their deepest identity. On the other hand, people have the capacity to learn a second language that is public in nature and allows people to become bilingual. This public language is the language of religious education. Such a language cannot be private, as it attempts to bring many languages into conversation. It can bridge the sacred and the secular, the public and the private, the outside and the inside. Scott describes such a public language as a 'border crossing model', which 'transcends the local ecclesial community without negating it.'⁹⁴ Chapter Four will examine how discourse 'at the wall' may be facilitated in a way that draws on the textured understandings of religious education that have emerged from the study undertaken in Chapters Two and Three.

⁹² Marilyn Kravatz, *Partners in Wisdom and Grace*, p. 120. Walter Brueggemann, 'The Legitimacy of a Secular Hermeneutic: 2 Kings 18-19', in Mary C. Boys, *Education for Citizenship and Discipleship* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1989), pp. 1-34.

⁹³ Moran, *Religious Education as a Second Language*, p. 12.

⁹⁴ Kieran Scott, 'Three Traditions of Religious Education', *Religious Education* 79/2 (1984), pp. 323-339 (p. 333).

Chapter Four

TOWARD A CONVERSATIONAL APPROACH TO RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

4.1 Introduction

The study undertaken in Chapters Two and Three allows for four conclusions to be drawn about the context within which the ITE of teachers of religious education occurs:

- (i) The traditional ownership of religious education by faith communities is being challenged by a liberal or secular form of religious education that is concerned with the provision of religious education separate from faith communities.
- (ii) As yet there is no consistent theoretical rationale for a secular or liberal form of religious education in Ireland.
- (iii) Two increasingly separate discourses have emerged about religious education that do not necessarily share the same assumptions, worldviews, epistemologies or reference points, with the result that they often speak across each other rather than to each other.
- (iv) There is a lack of a shared understanding and a common discourse about the aims of religious education, both within faith communities and in public discourse.

Chapter Three concluded with the image of religious education as a discourse that occurs both within the walls of religious traditions as well as within the public space outside the walls of religious traditions. The discourse of the insider refers to those who speak about religious education from the perspective of religious faith, and the discourse of the outsider refers to those who speak about religious education from the perspective of an acceptance of religion as a cultural fact and therefore of value as an object of study. It can be argued that this identification of insider and outsider as inhabiting separate spheres could lead to the assumption that these must be addressed independently of each other. The use of the image of the Areopagus, a place of discourse, draws attention to the necessity of the insider language being able to speak the language of the public space so as to be understood by the public space.

This ability to discourse within and between multiple contexts or spheres calls for the ability to dialogue or converse in a manner that is responsive to, and appropriate for, particular contexts. The purpose of all such dialogue is understanding. Though the image of boundary walls appears as a background theme in this chapter, it is not always entirely helpful, as it separates the spheres too rigidly. This thesis proposes that the metaphor of the semi-permeable membrane, which allows for the transfer of properties between cells in a differential manner, while still retaining their distinctive shape, is a richer symbol of the porous nature of the discourse necessary between a number of interrelated, though not always coherent, spheres.

This chapter proposes a conversational approach to religious education that is responsive to the context of how religious education is understood in the interrelated spheres within which it occurs in Ireland. The argument will be based on Hans-Georg Gadamer's understanding of conversation as an analogy for understanding. What Gadamer means by conversation is not just a voicing of opinion or an exchange of views, but an exchange that helps both partners come to a respectful and mutual understanding of the view of each other's perspective. There may be a tendency to think that, if the language sounds the same, or that there is common ground, then understanding is automatic. Gadamer's insight impels us to move from common ground to mutual ground, which means immersing oneself in the language of another and, in so doing, coming to a new understanding of one's own language. This chapter then considers Thomas Groome's concept of appropriation, as well as Robert Jackson's concept of reflexivity, as theoretical approaches to ways of conducting a conversation between the spheres outlined in Chapters Two and Three. Groome's theological vision of appropriation and Jackson's concept of edification, though markedly different in character, offer a *via media* between the spheres.

4.2 The Ideology of Separate Spheres

Chapters Two and Three suggested that the nature, task and scope of religious education are understood differently by the private space of the religions and the more public spaces of education and politics. These contexts are increasingly being thought of as inhabiting separate spheres, as seen in the separation between DRE and

ERB proposed by the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism.¹ The phrase separate spheres is borrowed from the set of ideas known as the ideology of separate spheres that emerged in the early nineteenth century in the context of the separation of the private sphere of women's lives and the public sphere of men's lives.² The difficulty arises when one sphere, the public, is deemed to be of more consequence than the other, with the result that the private sphere is domesticated and even denigrated. The ideology of separate spheres may be transplanted from the issue of gender politics to the politics of religion. If religion is situated only within the private sphere, a space understood to be of lesser significance than the public sphere, it runs the risk of becoming domesticated and neutralised. In their reflections on what is happening in Irish society, both Lane and Conway suggest that there is an emerging consensus that religion belongs primarily to the private sphere and may provide a moral foundation for individual lives but does not have a direct influence or bearing on public discourse.³

When the image is applied to religious education, then it is possible to argue that a denominational religious education cannot have the same public consequence as a more liberal approach to religious education. This argument depends on a strict separation between the spheres, and is consistent with the image of the wall. The consideration thus becomes a matter of finding the correct language with which to speak within each sphere and how to speak between spheres. The most common critique of the ideology of separate spheres is that the public and private spaces are not strictly separated spheres but are necessarily interrelated, as in reality, people negotiate both spheres. As currently practised in Ireland, religious education negotiates both spheres; it is in many cases a denominational activity that occurs in the public space.⁴

¹ The Forum Report, p. v.

² Linda K. Kerber, 'Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History', *The Journal of American History*, 75/1 (1988), pp. 9-39.

³ Lane, *Challenges Facing Religious Education*, pp. 11-22. Eamonn Conway, 'The Commodification of Religion and the Challenges for Theology: Reflections from the Irish Experience', *ET Studies: Journal of the European Society for Catholic Theology*, 17/1 (2006), pp. 142-163.

⁴ One example of this is the public funding of denominational religious education via the payment of teachers' salaries.

4.3 Communicating Between Spheres

This chapter has thus far argued that, from a religious perspective, religious education takes place as a discourse both within a religious community and from the religious community to the public space. However, religious education is also an activity of the public space, where it does not have religious aims. As seen in the analysis presented in Chapters Two and Three, religious education is a dialogical activity that occurs within the religious sphere and within the public sphere, as well as between the religious sphere and the public sphere.

According to Moran, religious education has two distinct and equally important aims.⁵ The first aim relates exclusively to the religious context as it is concerned primarily with the task of teaching people to practise a religious way of life which may well exclude other ways of acting. The second aim, to teach people to understand religion, has a plural object, as it begins from the understanding of one's own religion but also involves comparisons with other religions. Emphasising the distinction between the two aims could suggest a contradiction, but Moran claims that it is in the tension between the two that the logic of religion and religious understanding emerges. Moran acknowledges that there is a need to retain the first aim, but maintains that this must be situated within a worldwide conversation about religious education that is plural in its aim.

For the public context, the purpose of religious education can only relate to Moran's second aim, which is to teach people to understand religion. However, unlike Moran's differentiation, religious education in the public space does not necessarily begin from understanding one's own religion. Understanding religion within the context of the public sphere is based on the premise that religion is a cultural fact that may be observed in terms of artefacts, texts, rituals, institutions, structures, and other observable phenomena. There is also a sense that the public sphere instrumentalises the study of religion. The Council of Europe situates religious education within the framework of learning to live together.⁶ In 2003, the 21st session of the Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education adopted a declaration on 'intercultural education in the new European context' in response to the 2002 decision of the Secretary General 'to make intercultural and interfaith

⁵ Harris and Moran, p. 30.

⁶ Delors, p. 20.

dialogue one of the major axes of the Council of Europe's development'.⁷ Situating religious education within this context implies that it must be concerned primarily with 'teaching for tolerance, respect and recognition in relation with religion or belief'.⁸ The religious dimension of intercultural education has its roots in the premise that the more people know about each other the better they will get along with each other.⁹

However, this is not sufficient for understanding the compelling nature of the religious impulse. Religions deal with more than observable phenomena, so it is necessary also to take seriously what religions take seriously, what the religions believe about themselves, the claims they make about truth, and the relationship they have with truth claims. Religious education exists because faith, the response to the religious impulse, exists. From this perspective, religion can only be properly understood by developing a deeper appreciation of particular ways of being religious. A key task for religious education then is how best to negotiate between these spheres with their varying aims and concerns. What is being proposed here is that religious education may be described as an activity within the semi-permeable membrane that allows for exchanges between spheres. Its role in this space is to facilitate understanding.

4.4 Gadamer's Concept of Conversation as an Analogy for Understanding

It is the view of this research that understanding is a hermeneutical act, as it is always an interpretive activity. This does not suggest that understanding is an individualised act that is highly subjective, reductionist, or relativistic in nature. Rather, following Gadamer, understanding is the insight that follows from an engagement with human existence that is defined by a questioning concern for its

⁷ <http://www.coe.int/T/E/Com/Files/Events/2002-10-Intercultural-Dialogue/> [accessed 15 January 2013].

⁸ Title of the Oslo Global Meeting of Experts Hosted by the Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief in cooperation with UNESCO within the framework of the UNESCO Inter-cultural and Inter-Religious Dialogue Programme and the Norwegian National Commission for UNESCO, 2004, <<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001423/142342eo.pdf>> [accessed 15 January 2013].

⁹ There is a growing bibliography on this theme. Some examples include Schreiner, *Committed to Europe's Future*; John Keast, *Religious Diversity and Intercultural Education: A Reference Book for Schools* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2007). Robert Jackson, *International Perspectives on Citizenship, Education and Religious Diversity* (London: RoutledgeFarmer, 2007). Robert Jackson, 'European Institutions and the Contribution of Studies of Religious Diversity to Education for Democratic Citizenship: The International Context', in Jackson, *Religion and Education in Europe*, pp. 27-55.

own being and the being of the world. Gadamer relies on Heidegger's concept of the radical historicity of the human situation, and therefore of all human understanding, to argue that people are embedded in the particular history and culture that shaped them.¹⁰ People cannot step outside the horizon of their experience, because experience is our only access to the world.¹¹ Present experience is always filtered through and interpreted through the lens of past experience, though care must be taken that interpretation is not conditioned by or limited by past experience. Gadamer recognises the inescapably interpretive nature of even the most objective knowledge, but argues that knowledge is inconceivable apart from adopting some perspective, horizon of understanding, or interpretive standpoint.¹² To understand the knowledge presented in a text or a tradition therefore involves a fusion of horizons, where a question that the person raises, or a concern that engages them, finds a correspondence in the questions or concerns of the tradition.¹³ In his reading of Gadamer, Ingram describes it thus:

The world reveals a sense to us only in response to our questions so that our knowledge of it consists of specific answers to specific questions we have tacitly or expressly posed in our encounters with it.¹⁴

For Gadamer, even the most objective knowledge does not allow for the person to stand at a distance from it or make assertions about it, but demands an engagement in conversation with it.¹⁵ Any attempt to achieve truth by ignoring or side-stepping the knower's interpretive framework is counterproductive and impossible. The acknowledgement of bias is a prerequisite for understanding. However, at the same time, one has to bracket one's familiar understanding so as to correctly identify with the understanding of the other. This bracketing out of distortions does not mean the adoption of a neutral attitude or the assumption that all knowledge is objective. It is an attempt to clear the conversation of distortions so as

¹⁰ *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, ed. by Robert Dostal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 3.

¹¹ David Ingram, 'Jürgen Habermas and Hans-Georg Gadamer', in Robert C. Solomon and David Sherman, *The Blackwell Guide to Continental Philosophy* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), pp. 219-242 (p.226).

¹² Ingram, p. 219.

¹³ This theme finds a theological parallel in the work of theologians such as Paul Tillich, Edward Schillebeeckx, and David Tracy and those whose work is described as correlational. As described in Chapter One, correlational theology describes a movement in theology that engages in a mutually critical dialogue between theological thinking and other forms of critical thinking.

¹⁴ Ingram, p. 220.

¹⁵ Joel C. Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 199-212.

to arrive at truth. Dogmatic statements do not belong in conversation; on the other hand, neither is conversation so hesitant as to render it irrelevant. Gadamer locates truth in the authority of tradition; however this cannot be adopted uncritically. He maintains a necessary connection between truth and interpretation. It is this connection that reveals meaning. The revelation of meaning is the encounter with truth. It is when, for Gadamer, we have entered into 'the fusion of horizons'.¹⁶ Such fusion occurs when the learner's horizon, the limit of their vision and understanding, fuses with the horizon of the tradition. Gadamer describes truth as an event in which we find ourselves engaged and changed rather than what can be affirmed relative to a set of criteria. This is not to suggest that truth, understood as both correctness and insightfulness, is limited to human experience, but it acknowledges that human knowing is finite. This idea is reminiscent of the Pauline phrase, 'For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known' (1 Cor. 13:12).

Gadamer's thesis is that understanding is basically dialogical in character. It involves coming to an agreement on a subject matter rather than just being an exchange of views. There is a willingness to accept that another way of considering the subject may be valid for us. This dialogue offers the possibility for a deeper solidarity in the pursuit of understanding. Such understanding is not purely at a cognitive level, as for Gadamer, understanding involves an intellectual grasp, as well as practical know-how, agreement, application, and translation.¹⁷ Understanding is not just what occurs after the conversation, but is what is happening in the conversation between the partners and the subject matter. Understanding involves being able to integrate one's own understanding into a larger frame of reference. This frame of reference may be thought of in terms of text or tradition as well as in terms of the interpretive frameworks of other viewpoints.

Gadamer uses the term conversation as an analogy for understanding; without conversation there is no manifestation of truth. Conversation implies the spoken word, so therefore relies on language as the medium in which substantive

¹⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. by Joel C. Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Sheed & Ward, 1989), pp. 304-307.

¹⁷ Jean Grondin, 'Gadamer's Basic Understanding of Understanding', in Grondin, *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, pp. 36-51.

understanding and agreement take place between two people.¹⁸ However, words are not univocal static signifiers, but are responsive to the dynamic momentum and energy of thinking about particular subjects. In a sense then, words are not in themselves revelatory; rather they are tools that assist in the task of understanding. As observed in Chapters Two and Three of this study, words and language do not exist apart from their use in particular contexts. As Lash notes, 'in the world as it is and as it has ever been, there is no such thing as "universal" memory or "universal" language. There are only particular memories and particular languages'.¹⁹ The language of the present, as it is used in conversation, is the only language available for understanding. Gadamer argues that no text or book speaks, as it does not speak the language that reaches the other. In and of itself, a text cannot reveal understanding; all it can do is act as a dialogue partner.²⁰

Language, as it is used in conversation, is not exact or precise but, in its attempt to say something, establishes common ground. As understanding develops, this common ground becomes mutual ground from which both participants benefit. However, in order for conversation to occur, the conversation partners must be willing to speak a common language. Gadamer argues that it is 'only by first participating in language as a trusting member of a speech community composed of equals that we acquire a true understanding of that language and community'.²¹ This is not a limitation on the freedom of knowledge; rather it is in attending to the particularities and nuances of one's own tradition that one can be free to open up to conversation outside the tradition. Gadamer argues that being 'situated within a tradition does not limit the freedom of knowledge but makes it possible'.²² Knowing in this sense is an inductive process; the person learns from the particular and extrapolates from that for the general. To understand one tradition in as great a depth as possible allows one to begin to understand how and why people engage with the depths of another tradition. To participate in a speech community requires that we have acquired the first language of habit and imitation. To participate in another speech community demands acquiring a second language which is a more deliberative process that allows the language of a faith community to be critiqued

¹⁸ Gadamer, p. 384.

¹⁹ Nicholas Lash, *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1986), p. 25.

²⁰ Gadamer, pp. 367-379.

²¹ Ingram, p. 238.

²² Gadamer, p. 361.

and held up to self-evaluation, so that it can engage in discourse of the public sphere. Conversation therefore does not demand that one step fully outside of the tradition, but it does mean that one must step at least partially outside the tradition in terms of openness to other ways of being religious or of not having a religious worldview. Conversation is an activity that occurs within the semi-permeable membrane.

For Gadamer, conversation entails commitment to the two principles of reciprocity and charity. Reciprocity begins with treating people with respect, an existential openness to the other rather than a dogged insistence on one's own perspective. The second principle is charity, which assumes that both dialogue partners are reasonable in their communication of claims and therefore merit a presumption of coherence and truth.²³ The act of conversation, the search for words to articulate what one understands is the act of understanding itself. Conversation is something we fall into rather than conduct. Neither partner knows or directs the outcome. We do not lead a conversation but are a conversation; an authentic conversation is not one that we conduct but one that we are.²⁴ As a hermeneutical activity without a predetermined endpoint, conversation has a spirit of its own. Gadamer does not expect conversation partners to transpose themselves into another person's world and relive their experiences; instead the partners attempt to understand each other so as to come to an understanding about the subject matter.

An issue that is of concern in the attempt to communicate between spheres is that, as noted in Chapters Two and Three, many different languages are being spoken. Gadamer argues that conversation between two different languages can be made possible through translation. The translator must translate the meaning to be understood into the context in which the other speaker lives. Gadamer cautions that the translator is not free to falsify the meaning of what is said. The meaning must be preserved, but since it must be understood in a new language world, it must establish its validity within it in a new way, 'thus every translation is at the same time an interpretation'.²⁵ Gadamer develops this further when he says that all translation is the culmination of the interpretation that the translator has made of the worlds given to them. The implication of this for the translator is that the translator is always alert

²³ Ingram, p. 221.

²⁴ Gadamer, pp. 383-389.

²⁵ Gadamer, p. 384.

to their own biases and attentive to their role in the interpretive process. Translation is not a neutral activity, so the power of the translator must be considered as a significant element in the conversational process. If, as has been argued, religious education is an activity of the semi-permeable membrane, then it can be proposed that religious education fulfils a translator's role. To that end, religious education must take on board the caveat of being attentive to its own biases and alert to the risks of misinterpretation based on poor translation.

Brian Friel's play, *Translations*, explores the theme of the importance of language as a cultural signifier, and examines the social interaction necessary for the building of culture and the maintenance of culture that is carried on through language. What Friel draws attention to, in common with Gadamer, is that to translate is not merely to rename, but is also an act of reinterpretation. The intention is that something of the essence of the original language will be maintained and not lost in translation; however this cannot be guaranteed. The limits of translation without interpretation are highlighted in the words of Hugh, the master of the hedge school, to Yolland, the British lieutenant charged with the responsibility of translating place-names: 'I will provide you with the available words and the available grammar. But will that help you to interpret between privacies?'²⁶ Translation, no matter how accurate, does not necessarily yield understanding. Later in the play, Yolland accepts that learning the language of the insider does not mean that one knows the language:

'Even if I did speak Irish, I'd always be considered an outsider here, wouldn't I? I may learn the password but the language of the tribe will always elude me, won't it? The private core will always be ...hermetic, won't it?'²⁷

To learn a language is not sufficient to facilitate understanding. It is only when one is open to interpreting 'between privacies' that understanding emerges. Interpreting between privacies involves conversation as the attempt to 'hear each other to speech'.²⁸ It is the attempt to share or to converse with the other that leads to understanding, rather than just the ability to speak the language. According to Ingram, Gadamer teaches us that all must exercise their right to speak and be heard

²⁶ Brian Friel, *Translations* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), p. 446.

²⁷ Friel, p. 416.

²⁸ Nelle Morton, *The Journey is Home* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), p. 128.

because all participate in a 'cooperative venture of meaning making leading to solidarity'.²⁹ Conversation is above all a participative activity.

4.5 'Interpreting between privacies': The Role of Conversation

The question for this research is how, in the words of Hugh, religious education can facilitate 'interpreting between privacies'? The word 'dialogue' has generally come to mean an exchange of ideas or opinions between equals. It may be characterised by a willingness to learn about something or someone new. A mutual listening and questioning, it assumes reciprocity, understanding, honesty, trust, openness, intellectual and affective engagement, self-knowledge, commitment, and respect for the other as a person; in short, it assumes that there is a pre-existing openness to entering into relationship with another.³⁰ It is generally taken as a given that dialogue is a value worth pursuing, though it can be contended that there are two arguments as to why this is so. The first and perhaps most common assumption is the recognition of the necessity for dialogue, or what may be called the argument from expedience. The argument is often made, that because religion plays a role in hostilities between peoples, then religious education should be able to go some way towards solving some of these conflicts. The same may be said of cultural differences. The assumption is that, the more we know about another, then the less of a stranger they will be. It makes sense for the world to be at peace, for people to strive for some sort of harmony. It is expedient for people to get along.

Monika Hellwig outlines the three goals of such dialogue, (i) friendly understanding, (ii) to enrich one's own faith and (iii) to establish a more solid foundation for community life and action.³¹ Perhaps we should understand Hellwig's goals as a minimum; otherwise there is the danger that we never really enter into the mind-set of another so as to truly understand them, with the result that meaningful encounter is denied to us. A danger inherent in the argument from expedience is that all difference is minimised and becomes a benign neutrality, where sameness is

²⁹ Ingram, p. 240.

³⁰ A version of this section has previously been published. Sandra Cullen, 'The Role of the School in Promoting Inter-religious and Inter-Cultural Dialogue', in *International Handbook*, Part Two, ed. by De Souza, Engbretson, Durka, Jackson, and McGrady, pp. 993-1000.

³¹ Monika Hellwig, 'The Thrust and Tenor of our Conversations', in *Death or Dialogue? From the Age of Monologue to the Age of Dialogue*, ed. by Leonard Swidler, John B. Cobb, Paul Knitter, and Monika Hellwig (London: SCM Press, 1990), pp. 45-56 (p. 51).

celebrated in a homogeneity of accents, dress, cultural references, and values - a 'one culture fits all' mentality. If the goal of dialogue remains at this level, then there is the risk of superficial engagement in a pseudo-dialogue for fear of upsetting others.

Whilst the argument from expedience provides a laudable reason for dialogue, the justification for dialogue must come from another source if it is to be truly humanising for all engaged in it. We dialogue because we are people. We dialogue because of our shared humanity. We dialogue, to use the words of Tracy in his reflection on pluralism:

as a responsible and fruitful option because it allows (indeed demands) that we develop better ways as selves, as communities of inquirers, as societies, as cultures, as an inchoately global culture to allow for more possibilities to enrich our personal and communal lives.³²

Catholic reflection on education emphasises the relational nature of the person. The existence of a person is 'a call to the duty to exist for one another' and to participate in the humanity of the other.³³ The person engages in dialogue with another because of an innate respect for the life of the other. The dignity of every person with their views, opinions, beliefs, values, cultural assumptions, faith stories, religious practices, and life experience is honoured. Respect for the life of the other leads to a delight in the richness of cultural and religious differences. From this perspective, dialogue is a profoundly humanising activity.

Using the argument from shared humanity allows us to begin this conversation not from the sharing of ideas but in the encounter with people. People are innately curious about other people, young people even more so; it is natural to want to find out about others. In the everydayness of our lives we do this through conversation, the flow of the chat that happens between people. Conversation breaks down barriers as it is about swapping the small details and sharing the small intimacies of everyday living, allowing glimpses into the life of another person. Using the language of liberation theology, it is possible to suggest that dialogue is a second step activity; it is what happens when the sun goes down on a conversation that has been allowed to flourish. Conversation is built on what Nicholas Burbules calls 'the communicative virtues' of perseverance, patience, receptivity to criticism, ability to be critical of

³² David Tracy, 'Christianity in the Wider Context: Demands and Transformations', *Religion and Intellectual Life*, 4 (1987), pp. 7-20 (p. 15).

³³ CCE, *Consecrated Persons*, para. 35-36.

another, self-control and the willingness to be a good listener.³⁴ Establishing such virtues or skills prepares the ground for the type of dialogue outlined in Leonard Swidler's 'Decalogue for Dialogue'.³⁵ In this Decalogue, Swidler states that the primary purpose of dialogue is to change and grow in the perception and understanding of reality and then to act accordingly. In his terms, this dialogue must be a two-sided project within each religious community and between religious communities. From the perspective of this study, it is necessary to broaden Swidler's notion of the dialogue partners to include the dialogue between religious communities and other world views. Each participant must come to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity and assume a similar complete honesty and sincerity in the other partners. Each participant must define what it means to be a member of his or her own tradition; conversely, the one defined must be able to recognize himself or herself in the interpretation. Each participant must come to the dialogue with no hard-and-fast assumptions as to where the points of disagreement are. Dialogue can take place only between equals on the basis of mutual trust, and participants must be at least minimally self-critical of both themselves and their own religious traditions. Finally, Swidler states that each participant must eventually attempt to experience the partner's religion from within. Placing Swidler's tenth commandment in the context of an emphasis on conversation suggests that the establishing of relationships of trust and friendship is the beginning of the possibility of experiencing another's religion or culture from within.

One way of beginning such a conversation is to engage with the argument from shared humanity and adopt what literary critic Patricia Spacks calls a 'gossip strategy'.³⁶ Gossip, as understood by Spacks, is about swapping stories so as to build the foundations of friendship. Much of the conversation we have with those we associate with consists of 'small shared truths' that are concerned with the particular and the personal, sometimes even the petty. This does not mean that such activity is trivial; on the contrary, it has the possibility of getting to the heart of things. Gossip,

³⁴ Nicholas Burbules, *Dialogue in Teaching: Theory and Practice* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993), p.42.

³⁵ *Triologue: Jews, Christians and Muslims in Dialogue*, ed. by Leonard Swidler, Reuven Firestone and Khalid Duran (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2007), pp. 27-32.

³⁶ *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*, ed. by Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, Jill Mattuck Tarule (New York: Basic Books, 1986), p. 116.

as the sharing of small intimacies, is grounded in the argument from shared humanity. Gossip, evidenced in those long late-night conversations, is built on trust and builds trust. It follows its own rhythms and has no discernible end point or purpose. The conversation that emerges from such intimacies is a recognition that it is possible to engage meaningfully in the life of another person. Such conversation is dependent on language, and the willingness to understand what the other is saying.

The next phase of this chapter examines two examples of what may be thought of as conversational approaches to religious education. Groome's Shared Christian Praxis Approach envisages a conversation within a religious community; Jackson's Interpretive Approach begins the conversation outside of any particular faith community. Following an overview of both approaches, particular attention will be given to the theme of appropriation in Groome's work and the concept of edification in Jackson's approach. The purpose of this is to consider how these themes may contribute to a theoretical grounding for religious education as a conversational activity as well as how these approaches may play a role in the religious education of student teachers of religious education.

4.6 The Shared Christian Praxis Approach

Groome's Shared Christian Praxis approach to religious education is one instance of a contemporary practice of religious education and catechesis, which it can be argued has made a significant contribution to the understanding of religious education in Ireland.³⁷ Groome speaks from within the Catholic tradition, and brings to the discussion and practice of religious education a consistent attempt to reflect on the relationship between faith and life in terms of how this is to be communicated educationally while remaining grounded theologically. For Groome, religious education is essentially about teaching people to be religious in a particular way. It may therefore be considered to be an insider activity; it takes place within the walls.

³⁷ This is evident in his contribution to Irish discourse through numerous articles as well as through conference presentations. A survey of ITE courses on religious education reveals the inclusion of Groome's work in module descriptors and reading requirements. Recent conference presentations in Ireland include: 'Will There Be Faith? So Much Depends on What, How and Why We Share It', National Religious Education Congress, Tralee, 7–9 October 2011. 'Challenges for the Church in Communicating the Transforming Presence of Christ in the World', All Hallows College, Dublin, 16 October 2010. 'Forging in the Smithy of the Teacher's Soul: The Best Hope for Irish Education', 'Reimagining the Catholic School' Conference, Citywest, Dublin, March 2002. His influence may also be seen in the decision to include his essay, 'Shared Praxis: A Way Towards Educating for Spiritual Wisdom', in the DES, *Religious Education: Leaving Certificate Guidelines for Teachers*.

Faith colours all of one's orientation towards life, it is an inherent element of being human, so de facto, includes faith education. Both Moran and Michael Warren distinguish between a religious education that teaches people to be religious in a particular way and religious education that is concerned with understanding religion.³⁸ Groome holds the two aims in tension. His concern is to retain the complex relationship between catechesis as teaching people to be religious and education as the moment of critical reflection and engagement.³⁹ He argues that religious education is always a dialectical activity, and suggests a both/and approach rather than a strict separation between purposes. In attempting to retain this dual purpose of religious education, Groome does not always distinguish sufficiently clearly between terms with the result that these elide somewhat unhelpfully at times. A particular example of this is his use of the term total catechetical education to refer to all education in faith.⁴⁰ This is an unhelpful phrase as, in qualifying education in such a way, there is an assumption that all religious education is essentially catechetical in so far as it contributes to the formation of a Christian identity and to the development of a specific ability to live out the call of Christian faith.⁴¹ That said, it would be a caricature of Groome's work to conclude that his work is totally concerned with catechesis. He offers a carefully nuanced overview of the relationship between religious education and catechesis, holding the two in a both/and dialectic. It is this dialectic that has something to offer to the development of a religious education that is responsive to the demands of the semi-permeable membrane within which religious education is developing in Ireland.

Kieran Scott identifies Groome's approach as belonging within the revisionist tradition.⁴² The conceptual framework of this tradition assumes that there is an inevitable intersection between religious traditions and human experience, and that this intersection is the locus for a critical hermeneutic, though the form that this hermeneutic takes is a critical correlation method. Religious education attempts to negotiate a *via media* between tradition and contemporary experience. This *via*

³⁸ Michael Warren, 'Catechesis and (or) Religious Education: Another Look', in Roebben and Warren, pp. 125-144.

³⁹ Groome, 'No Divorce for the Sake of the Children', pp. 587-596.

⁴⁰ Groome, 'Total Catechesis/Religious Education', pp. 1-30.

⁴¹ *SGN* argues that religious education can support such a task but is not necessarily to be identified with it.

⁴² Scott, 'Three Traditions of Religious Education', pp. 323-339.

media is undertaken through a dialectical method that aims to engage the learner in intelligent participation in the Christian community. It is a form of religious education that teaches people to understand their own religious tradition so as to be able to live by the rich wisdom of that tradition. What distinguishes this approach from catechesis is the emphasis on critical engagement. Learners are invited to stand back from the tradition, critically engage with it, and freely incorporate its insights into one's own life. It is this distancing that changes the model from being a transmissive one to being an educational model that places the critical facility of the learner at its centre.

4.6.1 Groome's Concept of Appropriation

Rather than investigating the details of Groome's Shared Christian Praxis approach, the purpose of this element of the research is to consider Groome's conceptualisation of the theme of appropriation and to assess its usefulness for the construction of a conversational religious education. The term appropriation is not used by Groome in his initial presentation of the fourth movement of Shared Christian Praxis in *Christian Religious Education*.⁴³ However, in his more detailed presentation of the fourth movement in *Sharing Faith*, he introduces the term appropriation as a way of explaining the effect of a dialectical hermeneutic between the Christian story and the participants' stories.⁴⁴ This research argues that the concept of appropriation underpins Groome's entire approach to religious education. For Groome, appropriation means that:

Participants integrate Christian story and vision by a personal agency into their own identity and understanding, [...] they make their own, judge, and come to see for themselves how their lives are to be shaped by it and how they are to be reshapers of its historical realisation in place and time'.⁴⁵

The intent of appropriation is to 'deepen the Christian identity or agency of participants by enabling them to make the tradition their own in ways that promote commitment and wisdom in Christian faith'.⁴⁶ He argues that appropriation must be thought of as a dialectic if it is to avoid both subjectivism and objectivism. This is necessary especially for religious education, due to an insistence on objective truth in some traditional approaches and on subjectivism in more liberal ones. The core

⁴³ Thomas Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision*, 2nd edn (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), pp. 217-221.

⁴⁴ Groome, *Sharing Faith*, pp. 249-265.

⁴⁵ *Sharing Faith*, p. 250.

⁴⁶ *Sharing Faith*, p. 253.

element of appropriation is the participant's judgement of the adequacy of the present version of the Christian story to their own praxis. Using the language of Gadamer, Groome concludes that appropriation occurs when the fusion of the horizon of the text of the Christian story, with the horizon of the participants' understanding, expands both horizons.⁴⁷ The participants recognise their own horizons as reflected in and expanded by the symbols of their faith tradition. This leads in turn to practical wisdom, in the Aristotelian sense of *phronesis*, as the fusion of horizons prompts decision-making that engages the union of desire and intellect towards choice and action. This practical wisdom is rooted in the participants' sense of correlation, no matter how tenuous, between their own praxis and the vision presented to them. This correlation is not a matter of assimilating the Christian story without critique, but an assessment of what is true and life-giving in the tradition. It is only when such an assessment occurs that the person's appropriation of the Christian story becomes the basis for future commitment. Such appropriation is not a once only conversion experience, but the continual process of dialogue between the person as evolving subject and the unfolding understanding of the Christian story. At no point does Groome assess the adequacy or veracity of the Christian story itself, but only the presentation of the story within a particular version or context.

For Groome, appropriation is the task of a religious education that deliberately attends to the transcendent dimension of life by which a conscious relationship to an ultimate ground of being is promoted and enabled to come to expression.⁴⁸ This general definition is built on a number of epistemological, ontological, educational, and theological assumptions and convictions that underpin Groome's understanding of faith, and hence his approach to religious education. The usefulness of Groome's concept of appropriation for a religious education that is responsive to the particular historical and cultural situation that is the focus of this research will be considered under three headings, (i) Religious education is a faith activity, (ii) Religious education is an educational activity, (iii) Religious education is a wisdom activity.

⁴⁷ *Sharing Faith*, pp. 224-225.

⁴⁸ *Christian Religious Education*, p. 22.

4.6.1.1 Religious Education is a Faith Activity

Though Groome's work is in the area of religious education, the term religion rarely appears in his writings. He follows Richard McBrien's view that there is no such thing as religion as such, but only specific religions which participate in the general definition of religion.⁴⁹ Using the Latin *religare*, which he translates as 'to tie fast' or 'to moor', Groome suggests that religion may be imagined as the way in which people try to anchor their lives in relation to their apprehension of a transcendent being.⁵⁰ Religions do not exist merely as objective phenomena, but primarily in terms of how people live religions as traditions of spiritual wisdom for life.⁵¹ This view finds echoes in Moran's description of religion as 'that one level abstraction from the actual ways that religious people live'.⁵² One can only investigate the ways that people have responded to an apprehension of the transcendent and codified and celebrated this through specific religions and faith communities. It follows, therefore, that if there is no such thing as religion per se, then one cannot teach about religion apart from considering those who are religious. To some extent, Groome draws on Husserl's insights into the 'agential consciousness' of knowing as the basis for his own treatment of a praxis way of knowing. For Groome, praxis is a way of knowing that is continually informed by a critical consciousness of one's own agency. However, Groome distances himself from a purely phenomenological approach to religious education on the basis of his disagreement with Husserl's assumption that people can ever have a 'pristine and presuppositionless view of reality'.⁵³ For Husserl, to know something means that the person must leave aside one's presuppositions so as to encounter phenomena afresh. One suspends judgement through *epoché*, or holding back. One then perceives, feels, and notes attitudes to the particular or intuits more abstractly. It is what is intuited abstractly that Husserl terms *eideia*, or essences. For Groome, the learner cannot bracket out or suspend what they already apprehend about reality. Groome also rejects Husserl's thesis that the source and measure of essential truth is an individualistic and internal

⁴⁹ *Christian Religious Education*, p. 23. Richard McBrien, 'Towards an American Catechesis', *The Living Light*, 13/2 (1976), pp.167-181 (p. 171).

⁵⁰ Thomas Groome, *Will There Be Faith? A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), p. 98-99.

⁵¹ The theme of spiritual wisdom is further explicated by Groome in *Educating for Life: A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent* (New York: Crossroads, 2000).

⁵² Moran, *Religious Education as a Second Language*, p. 83.

⁵³ *Sharing Faith*, p. 75.

analysis of consciousness. Though Groome places individual consciousness at the centre of the activity of knowing, essential truth is only attained in dialogue with a community and a tradition. Groome's rejection of such a form of learning has implications for how the educator goes about their work, and will be considered later in this chapter.

In *Christian Religious Education* Groome defines religion as 'the human quest for the transcendent in which one's relationship with an ultimate ground of being is brought to consciousness and somehow given expression'.⁵⁴ In more recent work, Groome expresses this in more traditionally religious terms as 'a lived response to God's loving outreach into people's lives'.⁵⁵ When this understanding is put into relationship with the process of education, then the noun 'religion' takes on an adjectival quality and so becomes 'religious'. By insisting that the noun is *education* and the qualifier is *religious*, Groome draws attention to his conviction that religious education is an activity that deliberately attends to the transcendent dimension of life in order that a 'conscious relationship with an ultimate ground of being is promoted and enabled to come to expression'.⁵⁶ This insistence on a personal relationship with an ultimate ground of being underscores Groome's conviction that education is never confined to learning about, but is essentially a living or dynamic encounter with what he, following Tillich, calls the ultimate ground of being. The way one lives this relationship is faith. For Groome, '[Religion] expresses, informs and perhaps increases faith. But faith is broader than any organised expression of it'.⁵⁷ It is possible at this point to discern Groome's dependence on Karl Rahner's concept of the *a priori* dimension of faith as the apprehension of the transcendent that is then illumined by the *a posteriori* proposition of verbal revelation.⁵⁸ The *a priori* language about faith as a human universal evident in the early chapters of *Christian Religious Education* is quickly focussed by Groome into an immediately recognisable *a posteriori* language that, in his later work, is refined in a particularly Christian Catholic sense. This should not be seen as a limitation of Groome's work, but rather as the type of grounding in the particular that creates openness to the universal. Groome's premise is that any possibility of the universal must always be

⁵⁴ *Christian Religious Education*, p. 22.

⁵⁵ *Will There Be Faith?* p. 99.

⁵⁶ *Christian Religious Education*, p. 22.

⁵⁷ *Christian Religious Education*, p. 69.

⁵⁸ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978), p. 150.

grounded in the particular, as without the specificity of the particular, one cannot begin to apprehend the general.⁵⁹ This concept will be explored later as a basic premise of a conversational religious education. A criticism of Groome's work is that he never demonstrates how one leaves the particularity of one's own tradition. His insistence on the symbol of the Reign of God as the overarching horizon of education in faith cannot be transferred to other contexts.

Groome's starting point is educating for faith. In *Sharing Faith*, he asserts that 'the more immediate existential purpose of Christian religious education is to promote lived Christian faith in the lives of the participants'.⁶⁰ Religion can help faith come to expression. Building on the work of Wilfred Cantwell Smith, and James Fowler, Groome presents a vision of faith as being an activity of the mind, heart, and hands. If Christian faith is ultimately an act of knowing a relational God, then the ways that the person knows also apply to faith. The person knows cognitively, affectively, and actively. The whole being is engaged in any act of knowing; so too the whole being is engaged in any act of faith. In the words of Tillich, 'Faith as ultimate concern is an act of the total personality. It is the most centred act of the human mind [...] it participates in the dynamics of personal life'.⁶¹

In *Sharing Faith*, Groome draws on Michael Grimmitt's categories of learning about religion and learning from religion, but frames these in terms of understanding the Christian tradition, learning from it, and being shaped by it in one's 'religious identity and historical agency'.⁶² In identifying religious education so clearly with the language of Christian faith, Groome's posits that religious education is about teaching people to be religious in a particular way, not purely in terms of a human universal but within the specificity of a communal tradition. The person learns for Christian faith but also from Christian faith. Christian faith is not something that a person has but is what a person does. Christian faith is a verb rather than a noun. To educate a person in this way implies that religious education is a faith activity that encourages people to integrate their faith into their daily lives, and to critically appropriate their tradition as their own. In his most recent articulation of a Shared

⁵⁹ *Christian Religious Education*, p. xvi.

⁶⁰ *Sharing Faith*, p. 18.

⁶¹ Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), p. 5.

⁶² *Sharing Faith*, p. 3.

Praxis approach, Groome describes religious education as the intentional activity that allows people to attempt to bring life to faith and faith to life.⁶³ This integration or correlation, consistent with the *GDC*, is the key task of an education in faith which ‘bridges the gap between belief and life, between the Christian message and the cultural context’.⁶⁴ The *GDC* highlights the place of experience as the locus for revelation, and so the illumination and interpretation of experience in light of what it calls the ‘data of faith’ is an essential task of all education in faith.⁶⁵ This dialogical relationship between life and faith does not remain at a cognitive level, but impacts all living. Christian faith begins with living faith and returns to living faith. The *GDC* summarises this in the following way, ‘one must start with praxis to be able to arrive at praxis’.⁶⁶ Christian faith, though essentially personal, is only Christian faith in so far as it facilitates the inbreaking of the Reign of God, expressed in human freedom, justice, and wisdom. Faith is not an end in itself and its end purpose is not the development of individual identity, but participation in Christian living as an ever expanding horizon of possibility. For Groome then, religious faith assumes the appropriation of a tradition in a meaningful way into the life of the person. This is consistent with his reading of the *GDC*. In his essay, ‘Hope for Dirty Hands’, Groome argues that it is the existential dimension of faith that necessitates the cultivation of personal appropriation in the learner. Religious education is essentially a crafting of a praxis that engages students in ways that are relevant to their lives but points to a reality beyond their lives.⁶⁷

4.6.1.2 Religious Education is an Educational Activity

Religious education is an educational task first. Any approach to religious education must be aware of its underlying pedagogy, its understanding of teaching and learning, its aims, methodologies and contents. Groome’s understanding of education as an activity of *educare*, or ‘leading out’, is rooted in his reading of Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Comenius, but more particularly in his interpretation of the

⁶³ Groome describes the origins of the term ‘life to faith to life’ in *Will There Be Faith?* pp. 261-262. In this latest iteration Groome favours the term ‘life to faith to life’ over Shared Christian Praxis which he only refers to on one occasion in the book, p. 261.

⁶⁴ *GDC*, para. 205.

⁶⁵ *GDC*, para. 152, 153.

⁶⁶ *GDC*, para. 245.

⁶⁷ Groome, ‘Hope for Dirty Hands: A New General Directory for Catechesis’, *The Furrow*, 49/4 (1998), pp. 220-227.

learner-centred educational philosophies of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Dewey, Maria Montessori and Freire.⁶⁸ He is particularly influenced by Dewey's concept that education is the ordering and reordering of present experiential activity. Dewey describes education as 'that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent events'.⁶⁹ Such reorganisation of experience is done within the dialectic of an 'acquaintance with a changing world', and an awareness of the accumulated wisdom of a culture, or what Dewey terms the 'funded capital of civilisation'.⁷⁰ What can be noted both in the sources for Groome's philosophy of education, and in his insistence that education is an activity, is an attempt to eschew a transmissive approach to education.⁷¹

Borrowing Lawrence Cremin's terms, Groome describes education as an intentional activity that is 'the deliberate, systematic and sustained effort to transmit, evoke or acquire knowledge, attitudes, values and skills or sensibilities as well as any outcomes of that effort'.⁷² Groome praises Cremin's language for directing educational activity toward the whole person and insisting that good education is cognitive, affective, and behavioural. Contrary to Groome's positive reading of Cremin's definition, Moran takes issue with what he perceives to be a narrowing of educational activity to short-term outcomes predetermined by the educator or by outside agencies. Moran critiques Cremin's definition on the basis that the repetition of the word 'effort' emphasises an outcome-driven approach to education that is ultimately limiting.⁷³ Moran's development of the concept of education as being 'with end' and 'without end' may also be seen to be an implicit critique of any narrowing of education to observable short-term outcomes.⁷⁴ If Moran's critique is valid, then Cremin's potentially behaviourist articulation seems to be at odds with the philosophical sources on which Groome draws. Though Groome does not offer any explicit critique of Cremin's statement, it can be suggested that, when taken as a

⁶⁸ *Christian Religious Education*, pp. 135-183, *Sharing Faith*, pp. 36-84.

⁶⁹ *Sharing Faith*, p. 10.

⁷⁰ *Sharing Faith*, p. 11. Groome uses the word *Story* to convey what Dewey means by this phrase.

⁷¹ *Sharing Faith*, p. 7 acknowledges that the task of education is to promote knowledge but not in a transmissive way.

⁷² *Christian Religious Education*, p. 20.

⁷³ Gabriel Moran, *Interplay: A Theory of Religion and Education* (Minnesota: Saint Mary's Press, 1981), p. 41.

⁷⁴ Harris and Moran, p. 18.

whole, Groome's approach offers an implicit critique of any narrowing of the purpose of educational activity. What seems to be the case is that Groome wants to insist on educational activity as 'a deliberate and structured intervention in people's lives'.⁷⁵ What is not so clear in Groome's early work, however, is who has to make the 'effort' and whose intentionality drives the process.

Groome's vision of education is rooted in a teleological view of the human person. Education is about the humanisation of the person in the context of an ultimate ground of being and so will always be about more than responding to immediate needs. This vision is situated within the context of a Catholic vision of education that in the words of Cardinal Basil Hume, has 'a coherent philosophy and a vision of education that we believe to be of universal significance [...] God is at the heart of religious education and the purpose of all education.'⁷⁶ In Hume's view, this does not limit an understanding of education but enriches all understandings. It is a profound awareness of creation as a single and continuing expression of God's overwhelming goodness and love that affects all knowledge and all values. From this perspective, then, religious education is ultimately responsive to the person's apprehension of God. Such an apprehension, grounded in experience that is shaped and re-shaped in dialogue with a faith tradition and in community with other believers, assists in the humanisation of the person whose end is communion with God.

4.6.1.3 Religious Education is a Wisdom Activity

Groome uses the term epistemic ontology to convey his foundational premise that knowing is an inherent dimension of being human. The person is a being who knows. Following Aristotle, Groome gives equal attention to the cognitive, the practical, and the affective dimensions of knowing. No dimension has more significance than another, but all exist in a dialogical relationship, and all ways of knowing must be attended to in any educational activity.⁷⁷ To know, therefore, is an

⁷⁵ *Christian Religious Education*, p. 15.

⁷⁶ 'What do our Schools offer Catholics?' *The Catholic Herald*, 4 November 1988. <<http://archive.catholicherald.co.uk/article/4th-november-1988/9/what-do-our-schools-offer-catholics>> [accessed, 10 November 2012].

⁷⁷ For a further study of Groome's hermeneutic see Neville Clement, 'Thomas Groome and the Intersection of Narrative and Action: Praxis, Dialectic and Hermeneutics', *Australian eJournal of Theology* 10 (2007), <http://aejt.com.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/378106/AEJT_10.6_Clement_Thomas_Groome.pdf> [accessed 14 February 2013].

act of conation. Conation, as 'the conscious drive to perform volitional acts', includes but moves beyond cognition.⁷⁸ Groome then reclaims the term by drawing primarily on the Platonic concept that conation is not one activity of the psyche, but the holistic capacity of the individual to self-realisation. Spinoza's starting point is that *conatus* is the active disposition of all beings toward self-preservation. Self-preservation is the preservation of being, and so *conatus* is the active agency of the self and is for Spinoza the central trait of being human. It may be argued that this equation of knowing with being has been somewhat neglected in a post-Enlightenment epistemology. Building on its historical roots, Groome presents an understanding of conation that recognises that human beings have an inherent desire that moves them to realise their own being in relationship with others and the world.⁷⁹ When applied to the purpose of Christian faith, conation refers to being and becoming Christian in terms of cognition, affection, and volition. One is Christian in head, heart, and hands. After setting out this understanding of conation, Groome then explores the concept of wisdom which he says is a synonym for conation but which has the advantage of being rooted in the Biblical tradition. He proposes, therefore, that the learning outcome of Christian religious education is 'wisdom in Christian faith'.⁸⁰ Such wisdom embraces knowing characterised by reflectiveness and informed judgement. It is a practical wisdom for one's life.

In *Will There Be Faith?*, Groome replaces the term conation with the term spiritual wisdom.⁸¹ Spiritual wisdom is rooted in the biblical image of wisdom as the craftsman who is with God at creation. Groome uses the image to denote the learning from faith to which Christians are invited. Spiritual wisdom reaches behind knowledge, but does not leave it behind. Instead, it uses knowledge in a holistic way as a resource for living. Groome argues that, 'when we push beyond knowledge toward wisdom, our faith becomes a spirituality for life'.⁸² Groome does not refer so explicitly to spirituality in his early work; this more inclusive term may offer a language for teachers of religious education to move more easily between faith approaches and more liberal approaches to religious education. In his essay, 'Shared Praxis: A Way Towards Educating for Spiritual Wisdom', Groome argues for

⁷⁸ *Sharing Faith*, p. 27.

⁷⁹ *Sharing Faith*, p. 29.

⁸⁰ *Sharing Faith*, p. 32.

⁸¹ *Will There Be Faith?* pp. 117-120.

⁸² *Will There Be Faith?* p. 118.

religious education as lending access to spiritual wisdom, so people can learn from it for their own lives.⁸³ The great world religions are sources of wisdom for people to learn from in ways that can enhance their own spiritual journey as well as promote the common good. Christian faith is understood then as a resource for wise living rather than as an end in itself. If religious education is to be humanising, then it has to allow people learn for their lives more than learn for their heads. Knowledge only becomes personal knowing when it is appropriated into the life of the learner. All teachers teach so that students at least learn about something. Groome argues that 'religion teachers teach not simply so that students learn about religion and religions but that they learn something from them for their lives'.⁸⁴ However, in Groome's view, such an approach is deficient. What teachers must teach are the skills for students to learn spiritual wisdom that gives access to life-giving resources for their life journey. The cognitive dynamic demanded in such teaching reaches beyond knowledge and understanding towards personal judgement, decision, and action. This is a teaching dynamic that critically correlates life and a faith tradition in a way that enables students to bring their lives to their study of the tradition. The insistence that such correlation is undertaken in a critical way is essential for a personal appropriation that avoids the charge of indoctrination. This dialectical appropriation is a permanent *habitus* of a life of faith.⁸⁵

4.6.2 The Contribution of Groome's Concept of Appropriation

The application of Grimmitt's typology of learning religion, learning *about* religion and learning *from* religion to Groome's work suggests that Groome's approach does not sit easily within its categories.⁸⁶ Groome could never be content with learning about religion as if either learning or religion involves some type of detached objectivity or neutrality. For Groome, education assumes that there is an objective content with which people are invited to engage. Within Groome's context, this objective content is the Christian story and vision. The person does not respond objectively to this knowledge. Groome rejects what he perceives as the position of

⁸³ 'Shared Praxis', p. 110-112.

⁸⁴ 'Shared Praxis' p. 110. Both the *JCRES* and the *LCRES* encourage students to engage with questions from within the context of their own lived religious faith.

⁸⁵ *Sharing Faith*, p. 255.

⁸⁶ Michael Grimmitt, *Religious Education and Human Development* (Great Wakering, Essex: McCrimmon Publishing, 1987), pp. 224-226. This theme will be considered in greater detail later in this chapter.

Jürgen Habermas in accepting the Enlightenment's rejection of tradition and holding reason to be the sole source of authority, and disputes Habermas' position that the consequence and interest of all hermeneutics is practical control. Groome favours Gadamer's position that hermeneutical activity can be emancipatory in breaking the bondage of practical control when it 'is dialectical and poses an open horizon for tradition'.⁸⁷

The concept of learning religion, though arguably Groome would prefer to speak of learning faith, is obvious in Groome's work, but his later writings make more explicit the theme of learning from religion. Groome goes beyond learning from religion that would see religion defined by its relevance to human development in a personal capacity and its potential to contribute to social cohesion. Though he does not cite Charles Taylor, except briefly in *Will There Be Faith?*, it is clear that Groome concurs with Taylor's view that the role of religion is about more than solving the need for meaning. According to Gallagher's reading of *A Secular Age*, Taylor is unwilling to let a functional view of religion monopolise all discussion about religion. Taylor insists on religion as a source of graced transformation that takes the person beyond what is generally termed human flourishing.⁸⁸ Groome would concur with Taylor, as his insistence on the image of the Reign of God at the core of all human religious activity suggests. Given Groome's understanding of the holistic nature of educating for faith, it could be argued that learning in religion is a category that would best describe Groome's contribution to religious education. This category of learning in religion is consistent with a Catholic approach to the overarching task of faith development where religious education is understood to be one moment in the life-faith task of the person.⁸⁹

4.6.3 Limitations of Groome's Concept of Appropriation

Groome's articulation of the concept of appropriation as a dialectical activity between faith, as articulated in the Christian tradition, and faith as an activity inherent to being, offers an approach to the development of a conversational approach to religious education. Groome speaks to the concerns of those engaged in

⁸⁷ *Christian Religious Education*, p 174, p. 204.

⁸⁸ Michael Paul Gallagher, 'Translating Taylor: Pastoral and Theological Horizons' in *The Taylor Effect: Responding to a Secular Age*, ed by Ian Leask with Eoin Cassidy, Alan Kearns, Fainche Ryan, and Mary Shanahan (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010) pp. 113-121.

⁸⁹ *SGN*, p. 52.

faith development. In his view, the task of religious education is to bring the learner to the tradition so that they can appropriate this for their own lives. Groome's concept of appropriation offers a way to consider the forms that religious education takes when it is closely aligned with faith education. Groome's approach offers a way of understanding the dialectical interaction between self and the Christian tradition that allows for the appropriation of the tradition into the living faith of the person. The measure of appropriation is the person who adopts a *habitus*, a way of being in the world, a way of apprehending the world, and a way of acting in the world that is consistent with the Christian story and vision. For Groome, religious education emerges from pastoral theology; at heart it is a ministry of the word and an activity rooted in the ecclesial mission of the Church.

Groome's approach offers valuable insights for religious education within faith communities, but is arguably limited in its application to the semi-permeable membrane. This research concurs with William Kay's assessment that in drawing the parameters of a shared praxis approach within a particular religious tradition, Groome makes it difficult, if not impossible, to apply a shared praxis approach outside that tradition. For Kay, this is because without reference to the Reign of God there is no common basis for discussion between students and between students and the teacher.⁹⁰ A shared praxis approach assumes that there is an underlying vision that students and teachers can share. Groome's approach is also limited by his lack of attention to contemporary culture. Despite his insistence that it is both the dialectical interaction between self and the socio-cultural context as well as the dialectical interaction between self and the faith tradition that shapes self-identity, Groome takes insufficient account of the socio-cultural context.⁹¹ Groome offers no reflection on the world of learners who live in a context marked by the breakdown of meta-narratives, a distrust in institutions, and the search for holism within the acceptance of multiplicity.⁹² He also neglects the role of scepticism in modern life and the necessity of attending to this in all educational discourse.

⁹⁰ William K. Kay, 'Philosophical Approaches to the Teaching of Religion in Schools', in *International Handbook*, Part One, ed. by de Souza, Engebretson, Durka, Jackson, and McGrady, pp. 559-576.

⁹¹ *Christian Religious Education*, pp. 113-114, pp. 121-126. *Sharing Faith*, pp. 100-104.

⁹² Pilli, pp. 22-32.

4.6.4 Appropriation and the Role of the Teacher of Religious Education

Groome's primary concern is with those who educate others to be religious in a Christian way and for whom religious commitment is a hoped for outcome.⁹³ Though Groome highlights the role of the individual learner as the protagonist of their own learning, it is the teacher who is the key organiser of the learning environment. Groome claims that 'the heart of religious education is the heart of the religious educator'.⁹⁴ His view is that every teacher has a vocation to be a 'humanizing educator, to teach with a spiritual vision'.⁹⁵ Groome believes that a humanising education is only possible if teachers believe in the worth of their vocation and in the potential of their students. He also suggests that teachers who have a religiously held conviction are able to appropriate that into their own lives and draw on that as a source for their commitment in their teaching. Groome's conviction is that it is possible to educate out of one's own particularity in a way that offers a vision of education that is humanising for all. To do so demands that one attends to the depth structures of one's own tradition whilst simultaneously attending to the needs of people. We teach people, not a tradition. Groome claims that teacher training programmes need to be concerned with a theological formation that presents the best current understandings, informed by reliable scholarship, that Christians have of their tradition.⁹⁶ This theological formation is always undertaken in mutual collaboration with the educational and professional development of the student teacher. Such collaboration can be described as religious education. In moving the focus to the teacher, Groome claims that religious education has to be concerned, not just with the student, but with the religious education of the teacher. Unfortunately, for the purposes of this research, little reflection has been done on what such a religious education might consist of. Instead, commentators on Groome's work have tended to adopt the term spirituality or spiritual education when referring to the education of the religion teacher.⁹⁷

⁹³ *Sharing Faith*, p. 3.

⁹⁴ Thomas Groome, 'The Spirituality of the Religious Educator', *Religious Education*, 83/1(1988), pp. 9-20.

⁹⁵ *Educating for Life*, p. 37.

⁹⁶ *Shared Christian Praxis*, pp. 227-230.

⁹⁷ Meg Orr, 'The Role of the Teacher in the Theological Education of the Laity', in *Learning in the Way* ed. by Jeff Astley (Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2000), pp. 72-89. Patricia Helene Earl, 'Spiritual Formation for Catholic Educators: Understanding the Need', *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 8/4 (2005), pp. 513-530. Amalee Meehan, *Joining the Dots: A Programme of Spiritual Reflection and Renewal for Educators* (Dublin: Veritas, 2012).

4.7 An Introduction to Liberal Religious Education

The case for religious education as a kind of inquiry that is situated within the educational sphere as opposed to or distinct from the religious space is a consistent feature of the discourse of religious education. Any approach to religious education is based on certain premises and assumptions about the relationship between religion and education. When the context for this relationship is a secular education system, then the possibility for any shared understandings about the purposes of religious education becomes increasingly challenging. The clearest example of this approach to religious education may arguably be found in what is generally termed secular or liberal religious education as it has developed within the British education system. These terms have not yet gained currency within the Irish context.⁹⁸ In describing a liberal religious education, Hull describes a form of religious education where religious education does not assume faith commitment or a theological engagement with religion, but does assume intellectual inquiry and religious literacy. Such a religious education generally draws on a range of disciplines, other than theology, as the basis for an educational approach. The aim of a liberal education within a secular context is not to lead people to adopting religious beliefs, but to understand religion and beliefs as part of the cultural heritage of a society.⁹⁹

Examples of liberal religious education include Hull's liberal religious education approach, Grimmitt's human development model, Jackson's interpretive approach, Julia Igrave's dialogical approach, and Clive Erriker's conceptual enquiry approach.¹⁰⁰ None of these theorists sees religious education as necessarily leading to commitment to a particular faith stance. Despite differing emphases, what unites these approaches is their underlying assumption that a genuine religious education engages the person of the student, and therefore each of them sees religious education taking the form of learning from religion. Each of these theorists is influenced to a greater or lesser extent by Grimmitt's human development

⁹⁸ This issue is only beginning to be addressed in Ireland, see Fiachra Long, 'Religious Education in a Secular Society', *The Furrow*, 63/12 (2012), pp. 603-609.

⁹⁹ Hull, 'Religion and Education in a Pluralist Society', pp. 15-33.

¹⁰⁰ A useful overview and analysis of these approaches as well as the theological approaches of Copley and Wright is offered by Clive Erriker, *Religious Education: A Conceptual and Interdisciplinary Approach for Secondary Level* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 43-68. John M. Hull, 'The Nature of Religious Education', in *Distinctive Aspects of Baha'i Education: Proceedings of the Third Symposium on Baha'i Education*, ed. by Hooshang Nikjoo and Stephen Vickers (India: The Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1993), pp. 13-19.

approach to religious education, which focuses on human experience first and accommodates religious experience within it. Grimmitt's argument is that religious education can only be justified in terms of its adherence to the educational values of the development of cognitive perspective or rationality, the promotion of understanding the structure and procedures of the particular discipline, and the recognition of the integrity, autonomy, and voluntariness of the pupil. Religious education is always in the first instance a secular education, in so far as its prime commitment is to the achievement of these educational goals.¹⁰¹

Central to the contribution of each of the named theorists is an understanding of the concepts learning *about* religion and learning *from* religion, which were first introduced by Grimmitt and Garth Read in 1975.¹⁰² The definitive statement is to be found in Grimmitt's 1987 work, though this is not necessarily how the terms are always interpreted.¹⁰³ Learning *about* religion refers to what people learn about the beliefs, teachings, and practices of the great religious traditions of the world. To learn *about* religion includes learning about 'the nature and demands of ultimate questions, about the nature of a 'faith' response to ultimate questions, about the normative views of the human condition and what it means to be human'.¹⁰⁴ This type of learning invites the learner to engage in an impersonal mode of understanding, the task of which is to critically evaluate the truth claims, beliefs and practices of a religion. It is clear that educational criteria demand this type of impersonal evaluative understanding.

However, in Grimmitt's view, distinguishing between impersonal and personal categories does not have to mean that these are completely separate from each other. A more personal mode of understanding is described as learning *from* religion, and refers to what pupils learn from their study of religion about themselves, about discerning ultimate questions and signals of transcendence in their own experience, and considering how they might respond to them. This personal mode of understanding is directly concerned with promoting self-knowledge. Evaluating

¹⁰¹ Grimmitt, *Religious Education and Human Development*, p. 258.

¹⁰² Michael Grimmitt and Garth Read, *Teaching Christianity in RE* (Great Wakering, Essex: Mayhew, 1975). A useful review of this is to be found in Geoff Teece, 'Is it Learning About and From Religions, Religion or Religious Education? And Is It Any Wonder Some Teachers Don't Get It?' *British Journal of Religious Education*, 32/2 (2010), pp. 93–103.

¹⁰³ Grimmitt, pp. 224–226.

¹⁰⁴ Grimmitt, p. 225.

religious belief becomes, therefore, a process of self-evaluation, a process that permits religious education to be a formative influence in promoting self-knowledge. In other words, religious education in so far as it is a humanising activity, is a justifiable educational activity. Grimmitt recognises the role that evaluating religious beliefs and values plays in the process of encouraging pupils to use religious insights in the interpretation of their own experience. Geoff Teece highlights how Grimmitt's work has been transplanted from its original context.¹⁰⁵ He cites an example from an OFSTED Report of 2005 which identified a concern that learning *about* lacks depth and learning *from* is too narrowly conceived if its only concern is to help pupils to identify and reflect on aspects of their lives, with lessons used narrowly as a springboard for this reflection. As Teece points out, there is nothing in Grimmitt's original conception of learning *from* religion that should inhibit students from examining the truth claims of religious traditions.

In his articulation of the distinctions between learning, learning *about* and learning *from*, Hull argues that in learning *about* religion one learns religion for its own sake as an object worthy of critical study. Hull's view is that in learning *from* religion, the distance between the pupils and the religious content, which is typical of learning *about* religion, is strictly maintained, and yet at the same time the life-world of the pupil, rather than the internal structure of the religion, tends to inform the curriculum.¹⁰⁶ Hull argues that, in the move to learning *from* religion, the central focus switches from an emphasis on the religion to an emphasis on the person as learner. In other words, the emphasis shifts from a concern for the religion to seeing religion as part of the humanisation process. For this reason, Hull concludes that this kind of religious education may be described as educational religious education and therefore a discipline within educational studies.

4.8 The Origins of the Interpretive Approach

The work of Robert Jackson emerges from a liberal or secular approach to religious education. His interpretive approach to religious education was developed at the University of Warwick in England in conjunction with Eleanor Nesbitt and initially presented by Jackson in 1997, in his work *Religious Education: An Interpretive*

¹⁰⁵ Teece, 'Is it Learning About and From Religion?' pp. 93-103.

¹⁰⁶ Hull, 'The Contribution of Religious Education to Religious Freedom', pp. 107-110.

*Approach.*¹⁰⁷ This approach has been used and developed in practice both in the UK and in Europe, and is emerging as a significant contributor to the shaping of the discourse about religious education in Europe.¹⁰⁸ The interpretive approach is primarily addressed to children in religious education classrooms in secular schools in the UK, and is rooted in Jackson's understanding of religious education as a hermeneutical and dialogical activity, the purpose of which is to develop a critical and reflective understanding of religions. The aim of the interpretive approach is to provide a framework for increasing knowledge and developing understanding of different religious traditions, so as to provide a means to personal engagement with a religious ways of life. It has its roots in the experience of religiously diverse classrooms, and responds to that diversity from an educational rather than a theological or ecclesial rationale. In this approach, religious education is not understood to have a transmissive function, though it aims to help children and young people to find their own positions within the key debates about religious plurality.¹⁰⁹ Following Moran's distinction, it is an approach that teaches people to understand religion rather than teach them to be religious. Religious education is only one influence on the formation of a young person's views. It co-exists with the nurture or socialisation of the home, the influence of other groups that a person may belong to, as well as the impact of culture. It is not considered to be more important than the influence of home or culture, but can be significant among the influences on the development of a person's point of view. It aims neither to promote nor undermine religious belief.

The key difference between this approach and a confessional approach is that, in the interpretive approach, people bring their religious tradition with them to religious education whereas, in a more transmissive approach, even one such as Groome's that is deliberately dialogical, religious education brings people to a

¹⁰⁷ Robert Jackson, *Religious Education: An Interpretive Approach* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1997). For a useful summary of the approach see Robert Jackson, 'Understanding Religious Diversity in a Plural World: The Interpretive Approach', in *International Handbook*, Part One, ed. by de Souza, Engebretson, Durka, Jackson, and McGrady, pp. 399-414.

¹⁰⁸ Robert Jackson, 'Learning about Religions and Beliefs: Developments in European Policy and Practice' (2013), <<http://www.theewc.org/library/category/view/learning.about.religions.and.beliefs.developments.in.european.policy.and.practice./>> [accessed 11 June 2013]. Other developments undertaken by the RedCo project are outlined at <<http://www.redco.uni-hamburg.de/web/3480/3497/3501/index.html>> [accessed 17 June 2013].

¹⁰⁹ Robert Jackson, *Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality: Issues in Diversity and Pedagogy* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 87.

religious tradition. Jackson is influenced by Grimmitt's description of an existential approach to religious education which understands the role of religious education as the opportunity for reflection on the interaction of religion and culture in a way that allows for a maximal interpretation of both of these contested concepts. Jackson asserts that the interpretive approach is neither a replacement nor a substitute for other approaches to religious education, but a complementary contribution to the theoretical, methodological and pedagogical debates surrounding religious education.¹¹⁰ It is a model that may be applied to a variety of contexts and adapted according to the requirements of these contexts.¹¹¹

4.8.1 Methodology

The methodology of the interpretive approach emerges from the insights gleaned from the experience of field studies of children and young people from different religious backgrounds in Britain, and draws mainly on the methods of ethnography and social anthropology. Though the approach emerges from the social sciences, it does not reduce religious education to the social sciences. For Jackson, a social studies approach on its own only offers a descriptive overview of religion and religions that does not allow for an understanding of how and why religions function in the lives of people. It was the findings from field studies that revealed both the diversity within religions as well as between religions, and 'the inner diversity, fuzzy-edgedness and contested nature of religious traditions as well as the complexity of cultural expression and change from social and individual perspectives.'¹¹² Such findings need to be interpreted within frameworks that move beyond the sociological or phenomenological, and so Jackson draws on the work of anthropologist Clifford Geertz and the hermeneutical approaches of Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur to ground his approach to religious education.

Jackson situates the rationale for the interpretive approach in a critique of the theoretical position of the phenomenology of religion. This critique is based on the experience of fieldwork which highlighted the limitations of a phenomenological approach to the study of religion. Using Grimmitt's categories, Jackson argues that,

¹¹⁰ *Religious Education*, p. 6.

¹¹¹ For examples of practice see *Religious Education Research through a Community of Practice: Action Research and the Interpretive Approach* ed. by Julia Ipgrave, Robert Jackson, and Kevin O'Grady (Münster: Waxmann, 2009).

¹¹² *Rethinking Religious Education*, p. 87.

too often, some versions of the phenomenological approach can reduce religious education to learning about religion in such a way as to deny the role of the person within the learning process. He critiques any suggestion that students should be expected to set aside or bracket out their own presuppositions when approaching learning; instead Jackson argues that learners bring their own experience into the learning process. Learning is not a neutral activity. Jackson's contention is that knowledge about something does not necessarily lead to understanding; learning is not an exercise in detachment. Jackson has repeatedly refuted this suggestion of detachment.¹¹³ Learning about cannot be separate to learning from. Learning only occurs when the learner learns from what is being studied. This integrated learning process combines understanding and knowledge with reflection and constructive criticism. The key difference between Groome's and Jackson's approaches is that, for Groome, all interpretation must necessarily lead to praxis, a way of reflectively acting in the world, rooted in conation (wisdom and understanding). For Jackson, the purpose of the interpretive approach is *phronesis* (understanding).

The interpretive approach uses three 'levels' to represent religions. The broadest level is the tradition, a term preferred to religion that includes the various denominational and cultural expressions of the tradition. Insiders and outsiders will have differing views about the tradition and differing relationships with it. All can learn from a study of any tradition. The next level is the group, which is the way that a particular student encounters the tradition at a more local level. The third level is that of the individual, which is how the person lives their tradition. Jackson argues that it is only at this level that the human face of religion can be appreciated. It is only personal stories that can break stereotypes. These three levels must then be brought into a dialogical relationship with each other so as to begin to reflect on how they influence and challenge each other. The exchanges between the levels are therefore exercises in which the differences between a religion as a schematic belief system and that religion as experienced by one individual can be examined. According to Jackson, the interpretive model encourages a view of religions which acknowledges both their complexity and their internal diversity, as well as emphasising 'the personal element in religions'.¹¹⁴ The intention is to arrive at an

¹¹³ *Rethinking Religious Education*, pp. 85-108.

¹¹⁴ *Rethinking Religious Education*, p. 133.

understanding of the 'grammar' of a specific individual, in order to authentically understand that person's real and lived experience within the context of his or her religion. The interpretive approach is constructed around the three key concepts of representation, interpretation, and reflexivity, which will now be considered in turn.

4.8.2 Representation

Representation refers to the way that religious traditions should be presented. The approach critiques what Jackson terms a post-Enlightenment tendency to represent religious traditions as 'schematic and homogenous belief systems'.¹¹⁵ Jackson adopts Geertz's notion of culture as being internally contested and fuzzy-edged, and applies this to how we might consider religion. In Geertz's view culture is both process and possession; Jackson concludes that religion is also process and possession. Just as the person shapes and is shaped by culture, so too the person shapes and is shaped by religion. A basic premise of the interpretive approach is that religions should not be presented as homogeneous, bounded systems, nor presented in a way that would essentialise or stereotype them. This premise is based on Jackson's critique of the nineteenth century reification and generalisation of the term as a generic category.¹¹⁶ Under the influence of Schleiermacher, Hegel and Feuerbach there had emerged the idea that religion has an essence. This view led inevitably to the rise of a phenomenological approach to the study of religion and the consequent perception of religious education as learning about the phenomenon of religion. Like Groome, Jackson draws on Cantwell Smith to argue that, in a sense, there is no such concept as religion per se, and therefore, there is no such thing as an essence that can be studied. Rather, what we have come to call religion is the link between faith and tradition that is the 'living person'.¹¹⁷ Jackson then develops a model for representing material in a way that encourages an exploration of the 'relationship between individuals in the context of their religious and cultural groups and to the wider religious tradition'.¹¹⁸ This takes account of Jackson's contention that individuals have varying understandings and apprehensions of the religious traditions to which they belong. In a similar way to Groome, Jackson sees religions

¹¹⁵ 'Understanding Religious Diversity in a Plural World', p. 395.

¹¹⁶ *Religious Education*, p. 52.

¹¹⁷ *Religious Education*, p. 61.

¹¹⁸ 'The Interpretive Approach to Religious Education and the Development of a Community of Practice', p. 24.

as dynamic interactions between personal faith and religious traditions and groups as they exist in particular historical and social contexts. A significant distinction between the approaches of Groome and Jackson is their understanding of faith. While Groome draws, in part, on Cantwell Smith's understanding of faith both as a human universal and a personal meaning making activity, Jackson critiques this personalised notion of faith.¹¹⁹ In his critique of Cantwell Smith as a representative of a liberal Christian theology of faith, Jackson argues for individual faith rather than personal faith. What Jackson attempts to do is to broaden Cantwell Smith's categories to include the variety of expressions, obligations and rituals that constitute a person's religious experience. What faith means in one religious tradition, for example as response to revelation in the Christian tradition, cannot be easily equated with the understanding of faith as obedience to the will of Allah in the Islamic tradition.

Jackson's primary assumption is that religions are inherently diverse systems and impossible to consider in terms of essence. Such an assumption leads to the charge of relativism. If there is no essence to a religion, then can there be truth in the religion? Is truth inherent, or is it socially constructed and therefore relative to each constructed way of life? Jackson's view is that aspects of knowledge are socially constructed, but he eschews any notion that all knowledge is socially constructed.¹²⁰ However, he insists that, because the interpretive approach is an educational approach, then the issue of truth claims do not properly come within its remit. He denies that this approach is relativistic, arguing instead for a procedural epistemological openness that acknowledges varying and often competing truth claims. This is the major issue for Wright's critique of the interpretive approach.¹²¹ Jackson's reply is that the interpretive approach acknowledges the notion that ultimate truth has meaning. It attempts to engage in an epistemologically open way with the question of the meaning of ultimate truth, and proceeds to find a pragmatic way of dealing with epistemological difference and how people respond to the question of the meaning of ultimate truth. The approach invites participants to express their beliefs in their own terms, and is particularly sensitive to the ways that

¹¹⁹ *Rethinking Religious Education*, p. 62.

¹²⁰ *Religious Education*, pp. 122-126.

¹²¹ Andrew Wright, 'Contextual Religious Education and the Actuality of Religions', *British Journal of Religious Education*, 30/1 (2008), pp. 3-12.

religious groups make truth claims. Jackson's view is that 'young people should have the right to study and reflect on *different* views of truth represented within and across religious traditions as well as considering the functions of religious activity in people's lives.'¹²²

The question of representation and its inherent link with knowledge is important. As understood by the Council of Europe, the provision of religious education is a response to the right that citizens have to learn about what others believe and why.¹²³ How are adherents of particular religions to be represented, but perhaps more significantly, how are they to represent themselves? Though not addressed by Jackson, this also raises the issue of what is explicit, implicit and null in the way that religions are represented.¹²⁴ Who speaks for the Christians or the Muslims? Whose voice dominates classroom discourse? What voices are excluded from the discourse? On what grounds, race, gender, poverty, disability, are voices excluded by religious insiders? Are non-believers included in the discourse? Representation allows for the fact that even insiders may have differing understandings of the whole tradition and how that is to be lived out. Religion is presented as part of lived experience that is necessarily diverse and open to reflection. The student's personal encounter with religion, rather than a consideration of the student's personal faith, is at the centre of this approach. This acceptance of diverse viewpoints allows for students to compare their own viewpoint with that of others. In other words, the students' own perspectives are an essential part of the learning process. Students are asked to be constructively critical of what they study and to maintain an awareness of the perspectives they bring to the material and the methods they are using. In this way students are invited to become reflective on their own learning. The centrality of the students' own perspectives negates any charge that the interpretive approach is objectively neutral, however, it does raise the question of reductionism. Against what measure do students evaluate their own learning?

¹²² Robert Jackson, 'Contextual Religious Education and the Interpretive Approach', *British Journal of Religious Education*, 30/1 (2008), pp. 13-24.

¹²³ Janne Haaland Matlary, 'Education for Tolerance: Religion and Conflict in Europe', in *The Religious Dimension of Intercultural Education* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2004), pp. 29-36 (p. 35).

¹²⁴ This phrase is borrowed from Elliot Eisner, *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs*, 3rd edn (Columbus, Ohio: Merrill, Prentice, Hall, 1985), pp. 87-107.

4.8.3 Interpretation

Jackson's vision of religious education is that it is a hermeneutical subject that has understanding as its aim. It is hermeneutical in that it engages students with the process of constructing meaning from the knowledge that they acquire. This view is influenced by Jackson's dependence on the interpretive anthropology of Geertz, as well as the hermeneutical approaches of Gadamer and Ricoeur, that emphasise both the personalist as well as the constructivist nature of all knowing. This is also borne out in research findings that 'children are active agents in their own religious formation'.¹²⁵ Developing the skill of interpretation is a core task of the interpretive approach. Within this approach, interpretation refers to the skill of being able to move between the three levels of tradition, group, and the individual. Rather than concentrating on the key concepts of the religion being studied, students are invited to consider how individuals engage in their religious membership groups with reference to the wider religious tradition. Students are encouraged to see themselves within wider frameworks than their own immediate environment. The second concern involves comparing and contrasting the language and experience of insiders (those who identify with a particular religion) and outsiders (those who do not identify with the religion under discussion or those who identify with no religion). The aim of the interpretive method is to find areas of overlap that in turn provide the basis for a discussion about similarity and difference. Jackson draws on Geertz's distinction between 'experience-near' and 'experience-distant' concepts that relies on a 'form of provisional interpretation' rather than literal translation.¹²⁶ In his comment on Jackson's use of the term translation, Erriker draws attention to the necessity of avoiding the tendency to translate another's 'grammar' into the conceptual confines of one's own language.¹²⁷

Interpretation assumes a basic religious literacy, but also a willingness to move from being merely literate in terms of being able to *read about* a tradition to being able to *read* a tradition in terms of understanding its nuances, assumptions, and particularities. This skill demands a sensitivity that can lead to empathy when the

¹²⁵ Anna Halsall and Bert Roebben, *Religious Education in A Multicultural Society, Literature Review: International and Comparative Perspectives* (p. 56), <http://www.esri.ie/research/research_areas/education/Remc/final_report_publicable/REMC_Final_Report_Publishable_Summary.pdf> [accessed 14 October 2012].

¹²⁶ *Religious Education*, pp. 32-38.

¹²⁷ Erriker, *Religious Education*, pp. 46-51.

'terms and symbols of the other's discourse have been grasped'.¹²⁸ Empathy demands that one is willing to enter into the experience of the other. This does not mean suspending or denying one's own presuppositions, beliefs, or convictions. Rather, it demands a willingness to compare and contrast unfamiliar terms and practices with one's own familiar concepts and experiences in a spirit of open dialogue. Meijer draws attention to Gadamer's assertion that the study of something radically different helps learners to identify their own preconceptions or prejudices. Students should not be expected to set aside their own pre-suppositions when they encounter difference, but should compare their own concepts with those of others.¹²⁹ For Gadamer, preconceptions cannot be known directly, but can be recovered through the experience of negativity evoked when one is alert to and concentrating on the strange and unfamiliar. These preconceptions are in our eyes, not in front of our eyes.¹³⁰ Meijer points out that an important element of interpretation is attentiveness to one's preconceptions when faced with difference and reflection upon one's own response to it. This process is close to what Jackson means by edification, a theme that will be considered later in this chapter. Jackson insists that the student brings their presuppositions with them rather than bracketing them out of the learning process. Interpretation requires a 'comparison and contrast between the learner's concepts and those of the 'insider'.¹³¹ Such contrast and comparison requires sensitivity as a necessary condition for empathy. For Jackson, empathy with the insider view is a goal of the interpretive approach.

4.8.4 Reflexivity

The third element of the interpretive approach is reflexivity. This term is used to describe the dialogical relationship between the experience of students and the experience of those whose ways of life they are attempting to interpret. Jackson identifies three aspects of reflexivity, (i) learners are encouraged to review their understanding of their own way of life (edification), (ii) they are helped to make a constructive critique of the material studied at a distance, and (iii) they are involved

¹²⁸ 'Understanding Religious Diversity in a Plural World', p.402.

¹²⁹ Wilma Meijer, 'Plural Selves and Living Traditions: A Hermeneutical View on Identity and Diversity, Tradition And Historicity', in *International Handbook*, Part One, ed. by de Souza, Engebretson, Durka, Jackson, and McGrady, pp. 321-332.

¹³⁰ *Rethinking Religious Education*, p. 93.

¹³¹ Robert Jackson, 'The Interpretive Approach', *Religious Diversity and Intercultural Education: A Reference Book for Schools* ed. by John Keast (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2007), pp. 79-90 (p. 81).

in reviewing their methods of study. As a hermeneutic, the interpretive approach does not aim to simply increase knowledge, but to use new knowledge to increase understanding by inviting students to reflect on the impact of their new learning on their previous understanding. Jackson describes the content of the lesson as ‘an interactive relationship between material provided by the teacher and the knowledge and experience of the participants’.¹³² The dialogical process undertaken in a constructive, rational, sensitive, and informed way draws on the skills of reflection and constructive criticism and is similar to what Groome understands as the dialectical hermeneutic between the Christian story and the participants’ stories. However, Jackson’s approach allows for more subjectivity in terms of content than Groome’s presentation of the Christian Story and Vision. Central to the process is the voice of each student, whose views are open to examination in so far as the class is invited to examine different ideas of truth held within it. This is perhaps the most challenging dimension of the approach, as it can leave participants vulnerable to being misunderstood and even victimised.

Jackson’s understanding of reflexivity is rooted in his understanding of Geertz’s interpretive anthropology. Geertz’s concern is with meaning and context and how these are intrinsically related to each other and not easily separated in practice.¹³³ To understand meaning, one must attend to context. This context will be interpreted through one’s own lens, so the observer must be attentive, not just to what they are observing but also to their own presuppositions, prior knowledge, and experience. The reflexive process demands an ability to engage critically with the content presented in class, as well as with other students’ responses to this. How this is done is a crucial pedagogical issue for both teachers and students. One way of addressing this is to involve students in the design of the presentation of materials, the critique bias present in content and methods, and the evaluation of lessons and programmes. Jackson summarises this element of reflexivity as:

giving pupils opportunities to make a constructive critique of the material studied at a distance, to re-assess their understanding of their own way of life in the light of their studies and to help to design and to review their own methods of learning.¹³⁴

¹³² ‘Understanding Religious Diversity’, p. 403.

¹³³ Clifford Geertz, ‘Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture’, in, Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 3-30.

¹³⁴ Robert Jackson, ‘Intercultural Education and Religious Diversity: Interpretive and Dialogical Approaches from England’, in *The Religious Dimension of Intercultural Education*, 39-50 (p. 44).

Such a view is consistent with Grimmitt's observation that 'the evaluative process of learning from religion(s) should be fully integrated into how, within a secular educational context, pupils are learning about religions in the first place'.¹³⁵ Such an approach would attempt to take students into the heart of interpretation; however such generic skills ultimately fall short of what Geertz and Jackson mean by reflexivity.

Given the risk that interpretation could remain at a cognitive level, reflexivity allows for a movement beyond interpretation to edification. For Jackson, edification refers to the experience of learning something for one's own self. The way that this becomes possible is through what Geertz, borrowing from Gilbert Ryle, calls 'thick description'. Thick description, the inclusion of every level of people's experience of religion, without comment or censorship, brings the complexity of religion into the frame. Thick description allows for what Sullivan describes as the duty of religious education 'to bring out for pupils key features of the demands that a religion makes on its adherents and the way it poses probing questions about individual and communal life'.¹³⁶ Geertz does not see interpretation or even empathy as the primary purpose of his observation or study. Instead, these are the preconditions for the primary purpose of discovery, which is to be able to live with people and to allow insiders and outsiders to live together:

To discover who people think they are, what they think they are doing, and to what end they think they are doing it, it is necessary to gain a working familiarity with the frames of meaning within which they enact their lives. This does not involve feeling anyone else's feelings, or thinking anyone else's thoughts, simple impossibilities. Nor does it involve going native, an impractical idea, inevitably bogus. It involves learning how, as a being from elsewhere with a world of one's own, to live with them.¹³⁷

The interpretive approach recognises that learning in religious education is an unbroken hermeneutic circle that can begin at different points on its circumference.¹³⁸ Learning can occur at any point in the circle and from any of the elements: representation, interpretation or reflexivity. These elements are not sequential, but all elements should be present. It is the element of reflexivity that

¹³⁵ Michael Grimmitt, *Pedagogies of Religious Education: Case Studies in the Research and Development of Good Pedagogic Practice in RE* (Great Wakering, Essex: McCrimmons, 2000), p.15.

¹³⁶ John Sullivan, 'Dismembering and Remembering Religious Education', in *Inspiring Faith in Schools: Studies in Religious Education*, ed. by Marius Felderhof, David Torevell, and Penny Thompson (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), pp. 127-137 (p. 127).

¹³⁷ Clifford Geertz, *Available Light* (Princeton: Princeton Press, 2000), p. 16.

¹³⁸ *Rethinking Religious Education*, pp. 105-108.

allows for representation and interpretation to move beyond learning about religion to learning from religion. Jackson uses the term edification to describe the moment when one learns from religion for his or her own life. This is a step that may be missed in applications of the interpretive approach, which in the name of pluralism, and in an attempt not to offend, foreclose on the contested nature of religious practices. Reflexivity, in so far as it leads to edification, allows for a vision of religious education that goes beyond the study of religion. Such a view is now finding expression in the Council of Europe's approach to religious education. In her opening address to a conference on 'The religious dimension of intercultural education', Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni, Director General of Education, Culture and Heritage stated that:

Because the matter of religion - whatever orientation we each adopt - goes to the heart of our emotions and identities, it does unfortunately have a particular potential to transform ordinary conflicts into great clashes of principle, which later generations may have trouble in understanding. But by the same token, religion and the study of it creates the greatest opportunities for learning from each other. We all face the challenge of being truly human. Religions offer different answers but the question is more or less the same. In the great words of Rabbi Hillel: 'If I am not for myself, who is for me? If I am only for myself, what am I?'¹³⁹

4.8.5 Edification

The term edification is used by Jackson to describe the form of learning that may occur when the learner reassesses their understanding of their own way of life in light of another's way of life. Learners re-assess their understanding of their own way of life through their study of other ways of life. It is in studying other 'ways of life' that the peculiarities of one's own 'way of life' first come to stand out. The movement is from learning about other people's ways to learning from these for one's own way of life. Jackson notes that there is a difference between Grimmitt's understanding of learning *from* religion which Jackson argues can be measured in some way, and the less structured spontaneous response that edification connotes.¹⁴⁰ Within the interpretive approach the three-fold process of representation, interpretation, and reflexivity do not necessarily follow sequentially from each other, but exist in a dialogical relationship with each other. Each element is integral to the learning process and must be present before edification is possible. Edification is the

¹³⁹ Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni, Speech given at Council of Europe Conference, in *The Religious Dimension of Intercultural Education*, pp. 17-20 (p. 20).

¹⁴⁰ *Religious Education*, p. 132.

part of the learning process where students learn for themselves and are transformed by their learning. However, edification is not a foregone conclusion of the interpretive approach.

Jackson borrows the term edification from Richard Rorty who uses it to describe the transformation that occurs when one is open to the encounter with the other. For Jackson, to be edified, 'is to be taken out of one's own self. Through the challenge of 'unpacking' another worldview one can, in a sense, become a new person'.¹⁴¹ To be edified, therefore, is to be transformed. It is a personal activity that cannot be guaranteed by any particular approach, but all approaches should provide opportunities for this type of reflection. In common with O'Grady and Groome, Jackson draws attention to the fact that 'a religious education disconnected from pupils' own questions and concerns is very likely to fail to engage and to motivate them'.¹⁴² Reflection on the connection, but perhaps more accurately the disconnection, between different religious ways of life and one's own can promote the reflective capacity that leads to edification. However, Jackson offers an important caveat: 'Being edified by studying religious material does not imply adopting the beliefs of followers of that religion'.¹⁴³

4.8.6 Some Limitations of the Interpretive Approach

The primary concern of the interpretive approach is with understanding as a unique mode of thought and awareness. However, its limited philosophical rationale leads to Wright's and Copley's critique that a liberal approach to religious education denies students the opportunity to think theologically and philosophically.¹⁴⁴ What is also absent from the approach is any theological or philosophical reflection on the validity or otherwise of the truth claims of the religions. Wright claims that liberal frameworks for religious education have tended to domesticate religions and have foreclosed on questions of religious truth.¹⁴⁵ If religious education is pupil-centred, then what happens to the concept of religion as a discipline worthy of study for its own sake? Is religion only to be interpreted in relation to human experience? Wright

¹⁴¹ *Religious Education*, pp. 130-131.

¹⁴² *Religious Education Research*, p. 26.

¹⁴³ *Religious Education*, p. 26.

¹⁴⁴ See Erriker, *Religious Education*, pp. 54-63, for an overview of Wright's and Copley's critique of liberal approaches to religious education.

¹⁴⁵ This theme is taken up by Geoff Teece, 'What is RE for? A Question of the Subject's Identity', <http://www.shapworkingparty.org.uk/journals/articles_0506/Teece.rtf> [accessed 15 October 2012].

argues for religion to be understood religiously, i.e. in terms of its transcendent transformative powers.¹⁴⁶ Watson and Thompson call for a religious education that is God-focussed, that accepts that belief in God or the Transcendent is at the heart of religion. If religious education is focussed around belief in God as the core fundamental concept around which the rest of religion revolves, then religious education, for them, can be properly coherent and inclusive.¹⁴⁷ Terence Copley calls for a re-turning towards religious material on its own grounds. Religious education should be about searching for the real meanings of the religion and the 'given' meanings found in the Bible, rather than always emphasising their effect on the reader. His call for the return of God to religious education is powerfully captured in the following image, 'Education is visibly preserving the discourse of religion, but sometimes rather like a fish that has been filleted, God, the backbone of religion, has too often been neatly excised from the presentation'.¹⁴⁸

4.8.7 The Interpretive Approach and the Teacher of Religious Education

For Jackson, a key role of the religious educator is to develop partnerships between religious education professionals and religious insiders. In this distinction, Jackson upholds the concept of separate spheres when describing the religions and their relationship to the public space of education. However, in calling for a partnership between the spaces, it may be argued that Jackson's interpretive approach is essentially an activity that occurs in the semi-permeable membrane. A question that must be engaged with is the issue of who directs the conversation and if this conversation really is a partnership. Jackson insists that 'religious educators regardless of their own religious or non-religious backgrounds, and with their professional commitment to achieving the aims of RE to the fore, need to work co-operatively with insiders'.¹⁴⁹ The involvement of insiders is essential to the process; however the religious educator does not have to be an insider. The professional must have the final editorial role, but make the involvement of insiders clear. This is clarified when we realise that the essence of the interpretive approach is the

¹⁴⁶ Andrew Wright, *Religion, Education and Post-Modernity* (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004), p 208-231.

¹⁴⁷ Brenda Watson and Penny Thompson, *The Effective Teaching of Religious Education*, 2nd edn (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2007), p. 67.

¹⁴⁸ Terence Copley, *Indoctrination, Education and God: The Struggle for the Mind* (London: SPCK, 2005), p.148.

¹⁴⁹ *Religious Education*, p. 135.

understanding of the ways of life of others.¹⁵⁰ Though a strength of Jackson's approach is the insistence that no single viewpoint, regardless of how official, fully represents a whole religious tradition, the question remains, at what point does the religious tradition get to represent itself? However, the fundamental question that emerges, and that Jackson does not adequately address, is how far should insiders have control over the ways in which religions are represented? The converse of this question is how far should outsiders have control over the ways in which religions are represented?

Jackson does not assume that religious commitment is a prerequisite for the teacher of religious education, as the teacher does not represent the tradition. He argues that what is required is commitment to a conversational religious education, which is marked by open dialogue. The religious educator must also be capable of teaching with impartiality which is not the same as neutrality. Impartial teachers are those who can 'countenance rival conclusions as well as those to which they are personally attached and know how and when to contain their commitments and how to present material from a religious tradition from the point of view of an adherent'.¹⁵¹ Jackson does not propose bracketing out the beliefs or views of the teacher. Teachers can draw on their own commitments, religious or secular, as resources for the classroom, but these can only be offered as resources not conclusions.

The influence of Jackson's view may be seen in the statement from the Toledo Guidelines:

While recognizing that the expression of the personal beliefs of the teacher can promote understanding and encourage reflection, teacher education should include strategies to ensure that educators' personal, religious or non-religious commitments do not create bias in their teaching about different religions and philosophies.¹⁵²

Though the *Toledo Guidelines* deal with teaching about religions and beliefs, there are implications for the education of teachers. The key implication is that those who teach religion in the public space, from whatever perspective, must do so with a commitment to 'human rights in general and freedom of religion or belief in

¹⁵⁰ *Rethinking Religious Education*, p. 87.

¹⁵¹ *Religious Education*, p. 136

¹⁵² The ODIHR Advisory Council Of Experts On Freedom Of Religion Or Belief, *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools* (Poland: ODIHR, 2007), p. 57.

particular, rather than religious affiliation or conviction'. The *Toledo Guidelines* then call for an 'understanding of empathetic education principles' which would 'make teachers more effective when teaching about various religions and belief systems, since empathetic education attempts to arrive at a deeper understanding of others' experiences and beliefs'.¹⁵³ Such understanding is situated within a critical thinking framework.

The religion teacher who adopts the interpretive approach is therefore one who acts as a conduit between two spheres, the sphere of faith and the sphere of the public space. The task is one of negotiating the space between spheres with empathy and attention to critical thinking and human rights. However, is it the task of the teacher to decide what is appropriate or acceptable in the classroom? Is it the individual teacher who acts as the filter between spheres? How is the teacher to evaluate the religions and on what grounds? Can a teacher coming from one perspective critically engage with numerous other perspectives? Though Jackson offers a useful approach for a conversational religious education in the semi-permeable membrane, there is scope for further investigation into how the teacher learns to use the interpretive approach. What type of education does the teacher of religion need in order to develop the skills of reflexivity that lead to edification? The basic aims of the interpretive approach are to develop an understanding of the religious worldviews, language, and symbols of others, and to help pupils to reflect on what they are learning so as to develop their own self-understanding.¹⁵⁴ If the teacher is to facilitate this, then the teacher too must be able to develop their own self-understanding through engaging in the reflexivity that leads to edification. This study of Jackson's work has highlighted the concept of edification as a key concept within the interpretive approach, but is left with the lacuna of how the teacher is to be edified. With the exception of Joyce Miller's study of the transferability of the interpretive approach to teachers' continuing professional development, and Judith Everington's action research with student teachers of religious education, the implications of the interpretive approach for teacher education is under-researched.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ *Toledo Guiding Principles*, p. 59.

¹⁵⁴ *Religious Education*, p. 112.

¹⁵⁵ Joyce Miller, 'An Evaluation of the Transferability of The Interpretive Approach to Teachers' Continuing Professional Development' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 2009)

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter presented the image of the semi-permeable membrane as a metaphor for considering the place at which conversation can happen between the spheres of religious education as a religious discourse and religious education as a public discourse. This metaphor emerged from a concern that religious education cannot helpfully be thought of as belonging to separate spheres, rather it is an activity that both occurs between spheres and mediates between spheres. The challenge now is to develop a language that can speak respectfully between these spheres. This chapter then proposed a conversational approach to religious education that is responsive to the context of separate spheres. This approach is, in the first instance, based on Gadamer's understanding of conversation as an analogy for understanding. This chapter then considered the theoretical approaches of Groome and Jackson in terms of their potential to contribute to an understanding of conversation as a foundational principle of a conversational religious education. For Jackson, the emphasis is on understanding the religion of the other. For Groome, it is about coming to a deeper understanding of one's own faith tradition. Emerging from this study is the question of how one develops the skills and attitudes to lead or conduct a conversation that is responsive to a particular context. The study of the theoretical perspectives of Groome and Jackson reveals an emphasis on reflexivity. For Groome, this will lead to appropriation. For Jackson, reflexivity will lead to edification. In Groome's view, appropriation becomes evident in the person who adopts a *habitus* that is consistent with the Christian story and vision. For Jackson, the concept of edification becomes clear when a person learns for themselves and is transformed by their learning. At this point the person moves beyond acquiring skills and attitudes and develops the qualities of appropriation and edification. Thus we could argue that appropriation and edification take on the character of being qualities of the person.

The implication we have now arrived at is that it must be possible for a teacher of religious education to develop the skills necessary to lead a conversation. The only way that will happen is if the student teacher claims a religious education for themselves. The conversation envisaged in religious education will lead some people to appropriate the insights of a religious tradition into their own lives and draw on

<<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/3172/>> [accessed 20 October 2012]. Judith Everington, 'The Interpretive Approach and Bridging the "Theory-Practice Gap": Action Research with Student Teachers of Religious Education in England', *Religion & Education* 40/1 (2013), pp. 90-106.

this a resource for their own spiritual wisdom. For others the conversation will lead to being edified by the insights of a religious tradition without necessarily claiming that tradition as one's own. For the teacher of religious education, this conversation has to be able to engage the religious sphere as well as the public sphere. To engage within the religious sphere requires an acknowledgement that the central focus of religious education is God. Therefore, religious education must be able to access the deepest possible understanding of the religion's convictions and engage with the religion on its own terms. For both Groome and Jackson, religious education must attempt to understand and engage with the inner world of the religion which cannot be adequately observed from the outside. Such engagement demands theological knowledge and sensitivity. For Jackson, a teacher who has knowledge and sensitivity will be sufficient; for Groome, however, more is expected of the teacher. Without this engagement, religious education runs the risk of repeating Yolland's concern: 'I may learn the password but the language of the tribe will always elude me, won't it? The private core will always be... hermetic, won't it?'¹⁵⁶

This research has suggested that religious education moves people beyond learning about religion to learning from religion. To learn from religion will necessitate a movement from learning 'the password' to engaging with the 'language of the tribe'. Within the Christian tradition, theology opens up the language of the tribe. Chapter Five will propose that to learn the language of the tribe one will have to engage with its theology or what the community knows about itself. For the Christian community, theology consists of more than learning about theology, the Christian community learns from its theology. Chapter Five will therefore introduce the term theological education to describe a study of theology that moves from learning about theology to learning from theology. Theological education is concerned with teaching theology in such a way that the person can appropriate its insights into their own life or be edified by it. If the study of theology is thought of in this way then it has the potential to be considered an appropriate religious education for student teachers. For this reason, Chapter Five considers the type of theological education necessary for the ITE of teachers of religious education.

¹⁵⁶ Brian Friel, *Translations*, p. 416.

Chapter Five

TOWARD A THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION APPROACH

5.1 Introduction

Chapter Four proposed a conversational approach to religious education that would allow for a religious education that is appropriate for the semi-permeable membrane. The type of conversation envisaged in such an approach facilitates and promotes understanding. Those who engage in conversation do not just speak about a language; the participants in conversation have to be able to speak a language. For meaningful conversation to occur, the participants must speak each other's languages, with all their nuances and particularities. To speak the language of a religion necessitates learning the language as spoken by the religion. Theology opens up the language of the religion, so acts as a valuable source of insight into the self-understanding of the religion in question. Chapter Four concluded that the study of theology in the ITE of teachers of religious education contributes to the development of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for facilitating a conversation that leads to understanding. Chapter Five introduces the term theological education to describe a study of theology that moves from learning about theology to learning from theology. Theological education is concerned with teaching theology in such a way that the person can learn about and from a religion for their own lives, so is consistent with the understanding of religious education presented in this study. Chapter Five reflects on the tradition of theological education, which, in its consideration of why and how theology is taught, offers a useful lens through which to view the contribution of theology to an appropriate religious education for future teachers of religious education.

5.2 The Relationship between Religious Education and Theology

Historically, religious education has always been aligned with theology and in many cases seen as the pastoral application of theology.¹ In the context of the understandings of religious education in Ireland, it can be observed that the

¹ Michel Dujarier, *A History of the Catechumenate: The First Six Centuries* (New York: Sadlier, 1979); *Source Book for Modern Catechetics*, ed. by Michael Warren, 2 vols (Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 1983); *A Faithful Church: Issues in the History of Catechesis*, ed. by John H. Westerhoff and Carl, O. Edwards (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow, 1981).

relationship between theology and religious education has yet to be reconceptualised. Chapter Three of this research highlighted some instances of this tendency within the Irish context. There still remains an assumption that theology provides the impetus for religious education. A danger in such a view is that theology can be instrumentalised by religious education, or religious education can be seen somehow as the ‘messenger boy’ of theology.² An example of how the relationship between theology and religious education is understood in Ireland is to be found in the Teaching Council’s subject criteria requirements for teachers of religious education which states that:

Applicants must provide officially certified evidence of satisfactory achievement in primary degree studies (or equivalent) as outlined hereunder:

- The study of Religious Education (or Religious Studies or Theology) as a major subject in the degree extending over at least three years and of the order of 35% at a minimum of that period
- Details of the degree course content to show that the knowledge and understanding required to teach Religious Education to the highest level in post-primary education has been acquired
- The study of the following elements as an integral part of the degree course: Moral Theology, Scripture or Biblical Studies, Systematic Theology and Christology/Origins of Christianity with either Philosophy of Religion or World Religions
- The methodology and practice of the teaching of Religious Education in post-primary education must be studied as an essential part of the training-in-teaching course
- Explicit details of standards achieved in degree studies in Religious Education with at least an overall Pass result in the examinations.³

The assumption in the Teaching Council’s requirements is that theology plays a central role in the education of teachers of religious education. The conflation of the disciplines of religious education, theology, and religious studies, as if they were interchangeable, reveals unexamined assumptions about the nature of religious education. There is little sense in these requirements of the distinctive nature of what each discipline would bring to an articulation of the role and identity of religious education in the public space. There is little sense either of the relationship between the study of particular elements of theology and the methodology and practice of the teaching of religious education. This chapter proposes that the field of theological education provides a unifying space between theology and religious education in these circumstances. Through the Teaching Council, the State makes it explicit that

² James Michael Lee, *The Shape of Religious Instruction* (Dayton, OH: Pflaum, 1971), pp. 246-247.

³ *General and Special Requirements for Teachers of Recognised Subjects*, p. 27.

theological knowledge is a necessary requirement for the teaching of religious education. The study of theology here is not an end in itself, but serves as a foundational discipline of religious education, the aim of which is the development of knowledge, understanding, skills, and attitudes in the area of religion and religious understanding. The maintenance of theology as a foundational discipline of religious education cannot be justified on the grounds of theological claims but rather on a conviction that theology offers an indispensable way of understanding religion.

A separation between theology and religious education only emerged with the study of religious education as an academic discipline and an understanding that religious education is a discipline which draws on theology but is not determined by it. Moran is very clear that theology has ‘nothing to offer concerning the method, structure, and institutional form of religious education’, and may in fact prove to be an obstacle to religious education.⁴ While such a view is welcome in terms of broadening the space for religious education, there is now some agreement between religious educators that religious education is a branch of practical theology, with religious educators like Herman Lombaerts and Mary Boys arguing that, though related, the two disciplines are distinct. Boys contends that theology is significant for religious education because, (i) it offers a means of constructing analytical categories for investigating the concerns of religious education, (ii) it suggests some useful methodologies for ‘constructing one’s own worldview’, and (iii) it provides significant knowledge that is unavailable from other sources.⁵ However, Boys also advises that theology does not suffice for religious education, since theology is only one way to understand religion.

Lombaerts situates religious education within the context of practical theology. His understanding is that practical theology is both an empirical and hermeneutical reflection on how the ‘religion-related dimensions of human existence are mapped and interpreted against the background of social and cultural shifts’.⁶ Its aim is to clarify and justify the broader search for meaning, religion and faith that increasingly

⁴ Gabriel Moran, ‘From Obstacle to Modest Contributor: Theology in Religious Education’, in *Religious Education and Theology*, ed. by Norma Thompson (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1982), p. 42.

⁵ Mary C. Boys, *Educating in Faith: Maps and Visions* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), pp. 200-201.

⁶ Roebben and Warren, p. x.

takes place outside institutional faith communities. The link between religious education and practical theology is premised on two fundamental convictions, (i) people are the organisers of their own religious learning, and (ii) religious education is a work of interpretation of religion. This concurs with the insights gleaned in Chapter Four from the work of both Groome and Jackson. These convictions, which result in a focus on praxis, appropriation, reflexivity, and edification allow for a way of considering the role of theology in the religious education of future teachers of religious education.

5.3 Theological Education: Introducing the Term

This section of the research introduces the term *theological education* and interrogates how useful this term is in coming to some clarity about the relationship between theology and religious education. An exploration of the term *theological education* will reveal that, for the most part, it refers to seminary education. However, in recent discourse, it is generally used to describe the situation of teaching theology, outside the seminary framework, to a largely lay and female audience who do not have a specifically ecclesial ministry as their end goal. This chapter traces how the term has been used, the key directions the literature has taken, and the possibilities for arguing that *theological education* and *religious education* are intrinsically related. The chapter then proposes that a particular way of understanding *theological education* offers a useful way of conceiving of a *religious education* that is appropriate for student teachers of *religious education*.

Though a review of the literature pertaining to theology in Ireland reveals some useful reflections on the current state of theology in the country, the dominant concern is with the perceived crisis in theology and its relegation to the margins of public discourse rather than with the issue of how theology is to be taught in a changing landscape.⁷ Research into the history of the teaching of theology, or

⁷ David McLoughlin and Gemma Simmonds, 'Pastoral and Practical Theology in Britain and Ireland: A Catholic Perspective', in *Keeping Faith in Practice: Aspects of Catholic Pastoral Theology*, ed. by James Sweeney, Gemma Simmonds, and David Lonsdale (London: SCM Press, 2010), pp. 26-42. Eamonn Conway, 'The Future of Catholic Higher Education in Ireland', *International Studies in Catholic Education*, 3/2 (2005), pp. 158-169. *Theology in the University: The Irish Context*, ed. by Fiachra Long and Pádraig Corkery (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1997). Michael Drumm, 'The Place of Theology and Religion in Higher Education', in *The Future of Religion in Irish Education*, ed. by Pádraig Hogan and Kevin Williams (Dublin: Veritas, 1997), pp. 32-47.

reflection on how theology is taught is a relatively neglected field.⁸ This issue was raised by Archbishop Diarmuid Martin who called for an ‘examination of the way theology is being taught in order to guarantee that in the future we can have a small yet adequate number of teaching centres, each with an appropriately broad faculty, capable of the highest quality of theological teaching and research’.⁹ However, Martin’s call has as yet gone unheeded. Most teaching of theology now takes place outside the seminary and is not necessarily related to a specific ecclesial ministry. The student profile has also changed, with large numbers of lay men and women, a wider age profile, and increasing pluralism, the norm in any theology programme. Not all of these students would see a connection between church and theology, or between faith and theology. The traditional teaching of theology has usually been considered in terms of its relationship to the issue of the spiritual formation of priests. This relationship no longer holds true for all contexts where theology is taught in Ireland.

The term theological education emerges from the Protestant traditions so, for historical reasons, is seldom used in contemporary Irish discourse. When theological education is used in Catholic contexts, it more often refers to all teaching of theology. Part of the issue for Catholic theology is that the official texts of the Catholic Church pertaining to the study of theology take for granted that the study of theology is directly related to the training of priests. In his overview of the rationale for the study of Catholic theology, Norbert Mette argues that the fact that the training of priests is the ‘binding criterion for shaping theological study’ has consequences for how the teaching of theology is to be conceptualised in other contexts.¹⁰ A second issue identified by Mette is that teaching methods and pedagogy are not as a rule regarded as constituent elements of theology, but an appendix for which religious education and catechetics have responsibility.¹¹ Mette argues that ‘theology cannot be understood as an objective entity the content of which can be noted and appropriated as knowledge. Rather, knowing, learning, reflecting, and understanding

⁸ The only reflection on this theme is, Thomas Corbett, ‘Teaching Dogmatic Theology: Reflecting on the Discipline’, *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 61/1 (1995), pp. 44-56.

⁹ Homily at the Graduation Ceremony at Mater Dei Institute of Education, 17 November 2006, <<http://www.dublindiocese.ie/content/171106-mater-dei-conferring-mass-homily>> [accessed 13 January 2013].

¹⁰ Norbert Mette, ‘Theological Learning and the Study of Theology from a Teacher’s Perspective’, *Concilium* 1994/6, pp. 112-123 (p. 115).

¹¹ Mette, p. 118.

in 'matters' of faith are already genuinely theological processes'.¹² Recognising that pedagogy facilitates theological education will require a paradigm shift, so that theology is increasingly thought of as doing theology in a way that connects what someone learns (content) with how they learn (process).

Within the Irish context, theological education is not generally used to refer to the relationship between theology and education, or in reference to the relationship between theology and the learner. In wishing to adopt the term for the purposes of this research it is necessary therefore to turn to another context with the intention of extrapolating from it insights that may assist in the construction of an approach to religious education appropriate for those in ITE programmes. The context that appears to yield the most fruitful insight is the conversation about theological education that emerged from the Protestant theological schools of North America in the 1980s.

5.4 A North American Perspective on Theological Education

The term theological education is generally used to refer to the education of Protestant clergy for ministry as this has developed in North American Protestant Institutions for the education of clergy, though it can be argued that it also pertains to European theological schools and to Roman Catholic schools and has implications for the study of theology for other contexts than simply clergy education. Catholic theologian William Cahoy offers the caveat that what is striking about the literature on theological education is not its focus on mainline Protestantism, but the ease and extent to which the story of mainline Protestant theological education is identified with the story of theological education per se.¹³ Catholic theological education has its own particularity and should not be too easily elided into the Protestant discussion. This caveat will be kept in mind but, as this research is concerned with the question of how theological education can offer a perspective on religious education, then the value of the Protestant literature is precisely because of the attempt to engage with the question of formation in the preparation for professional

¹² Mette, p. 119.

¹³ William Cahoy, 'Why Theology? A Catholic Reflection on Twenty Years of Literature on Theological Education', <<http://www.resourcingchristianity.org/Essay.aspx?ID=118>> [accessed 24 January 2013], p. 20.

ministry outside the seminary context. The fundamental question centres on the measure to which spiritual formation occurs in the lives of students of theology.

Catholic theological education is arguably more explicit about the centrality of formation in the seminary. Such formation centres on the development of a relationship and communion with God and concentrates on human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation.¹⁴ The Catholic understanding of formation is predicated on preparation for ecclesial ministry. As a preparation for ministry, theological education has a particular teleology that informs its praxis. Within the seminary tradition it is this teleology that gives theological education its formative character. Shawn Copeland highlights that the shift or migration of theology from the seminary to the modern university, from the clergy to the laity, and from men to women, presents fresh imperatives to both theology itself and to the way of doing theology.¹⁵ The changing demographics of where theology is taught, who studies theology, and the separation between theology and ministry, raises questions about what the terms theological education or formation mean when cut loose from their original contexts. When theology moves outside of the seminary and away from ecclesial ministry, what gives it its formative character? What does it mean to do theology from within a shifting context where vocational education sits uneasily alongside university education? Does theology have a formative character in its own right? The core question is what is theological about theological education? The question of this research parallels this question. It asks, what is educational about theological education and in what sense can theological education be religious education? Neither is propaedeutic to the other. This research contends that it is the inherently formative dimension of a theological education that contributes to a religious education that is appropriate for students in ITE.

The development of the conversation about theological education that emerged within the context of the Protestant North American theological schools may be thought of in terms of three phases. The first of these phases emerged in the 1980s and early 1990s from the reflections of a largely homogenous group of white, male, Protestant, North American scholars from the mainline Protestant theological

¹⁴ John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1992).

¹⁵ M. Shawn Copeland, 'Theological Education of African American Catholics', in *Theological Education in the Catholic Tradition: Contemporary Challenges* ed. by Patrick Carey and Earl Muller (New York: A Crossroad Herder Book, 1997), pp. 318-339.

schools, and finds its clearest and most influential expression in the writings of Edward Farley, Charles Wood, Joseph Hough and John Cobb, and David Kelsey.¹⁶ Running concurrent to this first phase is the work of feminist scholars engaging with similar issues but coming from a wider variety of perspectives. The perspective of this second phase is seen most vibrantly in the work of The Mud Flower Collective, a multi-ethnic group of feminist theologians committed to the call to social justice.¹⁷ Another significant contributor to this second phase is Rebecca Chopp.¹⁸ What becomes most apparent in this second phase is a clear separation between theology and ministry, as well as between theology and the acceptance of doctrine. In this phase, the study of theology does not necessarily assume faith or ecclesial commitment on the part of the student.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, a third phase has begun to emerge that sees theological education as a practical theology that is characterised by a concern for theological literacy and interreligious learning.¹⁹ This concern emerges from the challenges to traditional understandings of theological education that come from the diverse voices of women, people of colour, men and women from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, adult learners, those not in ordained ministry, concerns with world religions, global ethics, and the need for the religions to offer a coherent and compelling rationale in the face of the challenges from scientism, secularism, humanism, and atheism. In this century, theological education is not a homogenous activity. However, despite the changing demographics of where theology is taught and for what purpose, there has been surprisingly little reflection on how theology is taught and what the term theological education implies when it is cut loose from its original contexts.

¹⁶ Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1994). The original work was published in 1983. Charles Wood, *Vision and Discernment: An Orientation in Theological Study* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985); Joseph Hough and John Cobb, *Christian Identity and Theological Education* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985); Edward Farley, *The Fragility of Knowledge: Theological Education in the Church and the University* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988); David Kelsey, *To Understand God Truly: What's Theological about a Theological School?* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992); David Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993).

¹⁷ The Mud Flower Collective, *God's Fierce Whimsy: Christian Feminism and Theological Education* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1985).

¹⁸ Rebecca Chopp, *Saving Work: Feminist Practices of Theological Education* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995).

¹⁹ *Theological Literacy for the Twenty-First Century* ed. by Rodney Petersen with Nancy Rourke (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002).

5.4.1 The Theological Education Conversation: The First Phase

As already noted, the term theological education has historically referred to the theological learning and practical training required for ministry within the Protestant churches. This narrow focus has broadened and there is some level of agreement that theological education should now be conceived of as all education, whatever the institutional locus, which has a theological character. However, the emphasis in much of the discussion still pertains to the relationship between theology and some form of preparation for ministry.²⁰ Earlier reflections on theological education tended towards the pastoral issues of what the minister needed to know so that they could function effectively. Theological education was at heart a skills based programme oriented towards ordained ministry.

Arguably, the impetus for the contemporary discussion about theological education was a concern about the functionalism inherent in theological education. Such functionalism was challenged by the reflections of Richard Niebuhr, David Williams, and James Gustafson who, on the basis of their 1957 research of seminary education in North America, asserted that:

The greatest defect in theological education today is that it is too much an affair of piecemeal transmission of knowledge and skills, and that, in consequence, it offers too little challenge to the student to develop his own resources and to become an independent, lifelong inquirer, growing constantly while he is engaged in the work of ministry.²¹

In other words, theological education had become a matter of acquiring the skills necessary for ministry, but had lost focus on the formative dimension of an education for independent, lifelong inquiry. The prescience in Niebuhr's words strike a chord in the discussion of twenty-first century religious education. How can religious education contribute to a person's willingness to take on the challenge to become an independent, lifelong inquirer? The fledgling conversation of the 1950s lost some focus in the 1960s and 1970s due to the political issue of the place of theological education in colleges and faculties, and the concern for the professionalisation of theological education. The conversation re-emerged forcefully within the North American Protestant tradition in 1983, arguably finding its clearest explication in the work of Farley and later commentators who use Farley's work as a touchstone. With

²⁰ This shift becomes clear in a survey of the contributions to *Journal of Adult Theological Education*, previously called the *British Journal of Theological Education*.

²¹ Richard Niebuhr, Daniel Williams, and James Gustafson, *The Advancement of Theological Education* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957) p. 209.

the 1983 publication of Farley's *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* and the literature that followed this seminal work, a scholarly perspective was brought to bear on the concerns of theological education. The most influential voices in the conversation of the 1980s and 1990s attempted to articulate the aim of theological education, believing that the 'how' would proceed from a clearly stated response to the 'what' and 'why' of theological education. Characterising the contributions of the most significant contributors, Jack Fitzmier asks the following questions: 'Has *theologia* been misplaced?' (Farley), 'Does Christian identity need to be reimagined?' (Hough and Cobb), 'Must a new sense of vision and discernment be developed to test the validity of Christian witness?' (Wood), 'Have theological schools forgotten what makes them theological?' (Kelsey), 'Does theological education suffer from a kind of chauvinism?' (The Mud Flower Collective).²² To Fitzmier's list we can also add 'Who is the subject of theological education?' (Chopp). With the exception of the Mud Flower Collective, these contributions are typically a product of North American theological schools and find echoes in the concerns of those engaged in practical theology. Engaging with these central questions gave rise to a series of sustained reflections on the nature, scope and aim of theological education, the conclusions of which cohere around a number of key themes: the fragmented nature of academic theology, the polarisation of approaches to the theological task, the problems that arise from the theory to practice model that attends much of what is involved in the teaching of theology, the separation of theology from vibrant faith or ecclesial contexts, and the privatisation and commodification of theological study.

Such conclusions are not exclusive to the Protestant experience and find echoes in Rahner's concern that:

the concrete theological disciplines as they are offered today [...] are too much scholarship for its own sake, they are too splintered and fragmented to be really able to respond in an adequate way to the personal situation of theology students today [...] Theology has in fact become fragmented into an immense number of individual disciplines, with each individual discipline offering an enormous amount of material, employing its own very differentiated and difficult methodology, and having very little contact with other related or neighbouring disciplines.²³

²² Jack Fitzmier, 'The Aims and Purposes Literature: Notes From the Field', <<http://www.resourcingchristianity.org/research-article/the-aims-purposes-of-literature-notes-from-the-field>> [accessed 6 November 2011].

²³ Rahner, p. 6-7.

Both Niehbuhr and Rahner reflect the concern of theology about its own internal coherence. While theologians such as Rahner, Tracy, Dulles and Bernard Lonergan, attempt to articulate the unity and coherence that they believe to be at the heart of theology, few theologians attempt a sustained dialogue between the tasks of theology and the tasks of education; arguably this has been the remit of the religious educator.

Acknowledging that much of the debate was largely polemical, Barbara Wheeler argues that the distinctive feature of the writing of the 1980s and 1990s is the focus on the theological underpinnings of what is termed theological education, rather than an exclusive focus on practical application and technique. This focus emerges from the consideration of two key assumptions that characterised traditional theological education. The first assumption to be challenged is that theological education is best conceived of as the preparation of clergy for their tasks. The contributors to this phase of the conversation argue that theological education will not serve adequately as preparation for ministry until it ceases to be oriented to ministerial functions and regains a theological focus that it has lost. In diverse ways, these writers draw attention to the idea that theological understanding is the primary goal of theological education. The second challenge is to the acceptance of the application of a theory to practice model of theological education. Criticisms of this model cohere around two dominant concerns. In the first place, in its 'learn now, apply later' curriculum, it reduces all theological studies to the status of theology for clerical practice. Secondly, it does not provide an adequate description of the complex ways that thinking and action are related to each other. Wheeler's assessment of the literature is that the perspective of academic faculty in theological schools rather than that of those concerned with pastoral issues allowed the question to evolve into 'what is theological about theological education?' In response to this question, the discussion has, in Wheeler's view, 'treated theological education as a form of Christian practice and thus the question of what should be its nature and purposes as a theological question rather than as a procedural question'.²⁴ She suggests that the result of this has been a 'nascent practical theology of theological education', as the literature has shifted from narrowly technical questions to

²⁴ *Shifting Boundaries: Contextual Approaches to the Structure of Theological Education*, ed. by Barbara Wheeler and Edward Farley (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), p. 9.

theological questions about what goals should orient the practice of theological education and what shape the practice itself should take. Theological education itself has to address what Wheeler describes as the 'critical step' of deciding what the purpose of a theological education should be and then to put in place a principle of coherence that accords with its purpose and helps to determine the elements and order of the educational process.

Between Athens and Berlin, David Kelsey's 1993 analysis of the literature on theological education, reveals first, that there are 'deep incoherences in the way theological education is, in actual practice, theologically conceived and, second, that the literature sharply focuses much of what is at stake in different understandings of the nature of theology'.²⁵ In his attempt to chart a way through the literature he creates a typology to organise the various contributions to the debate of the 1980s and 1990s. Playing on Tertullian's question, 'What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?', Kelsey argues that, in its current form, these axes may be called Athens and Berlin, which he suggests represent two normative types of theological education. These labels become shorthand for two 'contrasting and finally irreconcilable types or models of what education at its best ought to be'.²⁶ The Berlin model has its roots in the early nineteenth century with the rise of the modern university that saw the shift of theology from its traditional anchor in the Church to the Academy. This shift led to an increasing specialisation within theology and the separation of theology from its home within the churches. No longer was theology necessarily conceived of solely in terms of its role in the preparation for ecclesial ministry, but became a subject that could be studied in the same way as any other academic discipline. The driving ideology of the university was *Wissenschaft*, an ordered, disciplined enquiry which integrated science, learning, knowledge, and scholarship and emphasised the unity of teaching and the individual research of the student.²⁷ Kelsey maintains that there is nothing theological about the Berlin axis on the grounds that neither an intuitive experience of God nor capacities for such experience are cultivated, not even indirectly, by engaging in *Wissenschaft*. Such experience can only be cultivated in religious communities. However, *Wissenschaft* is necessary in the preparation of leaders who have the capacity to help communities

²⁵ Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin*, p. 2.

²⁶ Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin*, p. 3.

²⁷ Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin*, p. 8.

nurture consciousness of God. By implication then, *Wissenschaft* is also necessary to help communities understand this consciousness of God and their own response to this consciousness.

Athens, the second axis, represents an approach where *paideia*, or culturing the soul, is at the heart of education. This approach had emerged in Christian education by the end of the first century. Tertullian's question, as translated by Yves Congar, reads:

What is there in common between Athens and Jerusalem, between the Academy and the Church? Too bad for those who have embraced a Stoic, a Platonic, or a dialectical Christianity. As for us, we have no need for curiosity after Jesus Christ or for research after the Gospels'.²⁸

According to Congar, 'As Christ was everything, all that was good, true and beautiful could be found in him. Christianity itself became a *paideia*, Christ is the goal, the end. As Christ is sufficient so too are the Scriptures'.²⁹ Within this understanding of a Christian *paideia*, knowing Christ is the goal, but the goal can only be reached by knowing Christ. It is the endpoint but also the process itself. Werner Jaeger traces this model of education back from the Enlightenment to the Christian humanism of the Fathers of the fourth century CE arguing that it is rooted in the Christian adaptation to first century CE Greek culture which was in a broad sense *paideia*.³⁰ So Christianity, argues Jaeger, became an alternative *paideia* superseding the classical Greek *paideia*. Kelsey concludes that, 'if Christianity is seen as a *paideia* as it has been in its most ancient tradition then it is simply a theological education whose goal is knowledge of God and correlatively forming persons' souls to be holy'.³¹ According to the Athens model, theological education is a 'movement from source to personal appropriation of the source, and from revealed wisdom to the appropriation of revealed wisdom, in a way that is both identity forming and personally transforming'.³² It is understood that appropriation does not come about through direct instruction. Rather, it comes about indirectly by inquiry into other matters whose study is believed to capacitate people to appropriate this wisdom for themselves.

²⁸ Yves Congar, *A History of Theology* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), p. 37.

²⁹ Congar, p. 37.

³⁰ Werner Jaeger, *Early Christianity & Greek Paideia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

³¹ Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin*, p. 5.

³² Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin*, p. 11.

Kelsey argues that both forms of theological education have their inherent value and no attempt should be made to synthesise them. The value of an Athens model lies in its goal of cultivating a faith identity, whereas the Berlin model aims for the cultivation of capacities for *Wissenschaft*. He maintains then that both forms are intrinsically valuable and both forms are necessary, but trying to synthesise them will result in two competing goals for theological education that would be inherently incoherent. Theological education must therefore acknowledge the axis it is coming from, then draw on the insights of the other pole. When Kelsey's typology is applied to religious education, similar issues emerge. A catechetical approach to religious education will have resonances with the Athens/Jerusalem axis, whereas a liberal approach to religious education will recognise its roots in the Berlin axis. To maintain coherence, religious education will have to acknowledge which axis it emerges from.

5.4.2 The Contribution of Other Voices: The Second Phase

Significant challenges to traditional understandings of theological education come from the diverse voices of women, people of colour, men and women from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, adult learners, those in non-ordained ministries, the encounter with world religions, global ethics, and a growing awareness that theological education cannot be homogenous. Chopp suggests that the feminist agenda has resulted in a second generation of literature on theological education that, because of its attention to context, needs to remake the formal method of the first generation of writers into practical methods that investigate contemporary reality.³³ These methods must then anticipate possibilities for transformation. Despite Farley's suggestion that feminism is a way to proceed in the consideration of theological education, as well as the increasing numbers of women engaged in theological education, scant attention has been paid to how feminism provides resources for the restructuring of theological education or as a resource for the critique and transformation of theological education.³⁴ What feminism contributes to theological education is the uncovering of new voices and faces in theology, the defining of new areas of research which provides new resources and

³³ Chopp, *Saving Work*, p. 11.

³⁴ *Theologia*, p. 181.

new models for understanding and speaking of God and humanity.³⁵ Feminism's insistence on inclusive language and inclusive practice unearths prejudices and opens up new ways of relating, as well as showing something about the very structures of theological education as patriarchal that, in turn, might lead to a greater understanding of the need for transformation in theological education.

Chopp asserts that Farley's notion of *theologia* and Kelsey's call for a new relationship between *habitus* and *Wissenschaft* has some sympathy with a feminist agenda, and provides the kind of vision of what is lacking and to which theology aspires. Though acknowledging Farley's recognition of practical concerns, Chopp warns that, for both these authors, the constructive positions are formal, mediated neither through symbolic construction of faith nor through the particular subjects of theological education. The strategies of most of the work on theological education thus far are ideational, formulating an abstract ideal to offer some vantage point of unity amid the fragmentation and pluralism.³⁶ Critiquing this approach, Chopp then develops a contextual critical method by foregrounding three factors, (i) the subjects of theological education, (ii) the larger situation of cultural movements and changes, and (iii) the symbolic patterns invoked in Christian practice. In *Saving Work*, Chopp attends primarily to the issue of the subjects of theological education, echoing Groome's concern that the subject of education is the person and not a body of content.³⁷ She defends a feminist approach to theological education that takes the student as subject seriously on the grounds that 'education is not simply about correct ideas or handing down tradition of training in technical expertise; it is also about human change, transformation, growth'.³⁸

Chopp argues that a thorough critique of theological education must address the structure of theological education and its fundamental assumptions about what education is. The vision and practices of theological education can only be properly imagined in the concrete realities of the lives of real people. She describes the contemporary structure of education as dependent upon a practice of education 'in which the objective knowledge of specialised fields is handed on by expert

³⁵ Rebecca Chopp, 'Situating the Structure: Prophetic Feminism and Theological Education', in *Shifting Boundaries* ed. by Wheeler and Farley, pp. 67-89 (p. 68).

³⁶ Chopp, *Saving Work*, p. 11.

³⁷ *Sharing Faith*, p. 11.

³⁸ Chopp, *Saving Work*, p. 13.

professionals to students understood to be empty receptacles'.³⁹ Chopp's conclusion is that theological education is a process in which students participate. This process is both theological and educational. It is about the explicit curriculum, the style of teaching and the relationships formed. In Chopp's words:

The *how* of learning is directly related, in this notion of theological education as a process, to the *what* of learning. Indeed, the task for the subjects of theological education may be as much the doing of new forms of relationships to God, self, others, traditions, and society as it is the articulation of right ideas.⁴⁰

It would seem that the issues arising from how the shift in ways of 'apprehending theology' affect the ways in which the 'nature and purpose of theological education' is grasped, have been debated for the most part by mainline Protestant theologians.⁴¹ Arguably these have suggested a more explicit direction for theological education than has been seen within the Catholic tradition. However, this second phase of the development of contemporary theological education sees a more public contribution of Roman Catholic voices to the general conversation.⁴² From a Catholic perspective, a criticism of this second generation literature is that the concentration on the specificity of particular contexts has meant that there still does not seem to be sufficient attention paid to articulating a theory that honours both context and tradition.

5.4.3 Theological Education as Practical Theology: The Third Phase

As this question of theological education has evolved, it has come to be aligned with a particular field of theology known as Practical or Pastoral Theology, which traditionally referred to the practical consequences of theology such as catechesis, liturgy, pastoral ministry, and counselling. The idea that these ministries were consequent to theology emerges from a theory to practice model. In the light of the educational philosophies of Freire, Montessori, and Dewey, such dichotomies between theory and practice have been brought into question. Their insights demonstrate that people learn as they do; people learn when they are actively engaged in interpreting the world. What emerges in this third phase is a reclaiming of

³⁹ Chopp, 'Situating the Structure', p. 84.

⁴⁰ Chopp, *Saving Work*, p. 111.

⁴¹ Copeland, p. 320.

⁴² The most significant contribution to the debate from a North American Catholic perspective is the collection of selected papers from the 1995 symposium 'Theological Education in the Catholic Tradition' held at Marquette University in 1995, and published in Carey and Muller, *Theological Education in the Catholic Tradition*.

the terms practical and pastoral theology as a way of emphasising that theology is the knowledge of God that arises from reflection on praxis.⁴³ For Tracy, practical theology is 'the mutually critical correlation of the interpreted theory and praxis of the Christian fact and the interpreted theory and praxis of the contemporary situation'.⁴⁴ It is this insistence on the primacy of praxis that allows contemporary theology to engage with the concerns of religious education as it has offered insight into the educational nature of theology when it is not aligned to ministerial formation.

The shift from the theory to practice model of theological education to a praxis-based approach to theology brings the question of education into the theological realm, rather than seeing education as the application of theology. It is pertinent to ask which of the words theology or education is the qualifier? Is theological education an education that is theological in nature, or is the theology educational? Arguably, it has been in the area of religious education that these two fields are brought into dialogue, but religious education has often suffered by being seen as the poor relation of theology, the add on, what happens when theology has to be taught. The praxis-based approach reinforces the understanding of *theologia* as a *habitus* that 'involves a profound, life-orienting, identity-shaping participation in the constitutive practices of Christian life. If this is the case, then people learn theology by participating in these practices'.⁴⁵ Craig Dykstra proposes that such participation must be learned from the inside, from a vibrant engagement with the 'constitutive practices of Christian life'. He also proposes that people best learn such practices when they are active in them jointly with others who are, or are becoming, significant to them. The practices must become 'wide-ranging in their context and impact leading to a competence to connect articulations of the significance and meaning of these practices and the ways the various practices are connected and related to one another', as well as with one's own reasons for engaging in them. Finally one learns

⁴³ For a discussion of the history of praxis see Dermot Lane, *Foundations for a Social Theology: Praxis, Process, and Salvation* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1984). Terry Veling, 'Catholic Practical Theology: Reflections on an Emerging Field', *Compass Theology Review*, 45/2 (Winter 2011), pp. 35-39.

⁴⁴ David Tracy, 'The Foundations of Practical Theology', in Don, S. Browning, ed., *Practical Theology: The Emerging Field in Theology, Church, and World* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), pp. 62-82 (p. 62).

⁴⁵ Craig Dykstra, 'Reconceiving Practice', in Wheeler and Farley, *Shifting Boundaries*, pp. 35-66 (p. 50).

by taking 'personal responsibility for initiating, pursuing, and sustaining these practices, and for including and guiding others in them'.⁴⁶

The same theme is taken up by Groome, who argues for a revisionist pedagogy that would heal the gap between academia and the ecclesia.⁴⁷ For Groome, this is not just a task for religious education but also a task for theology. Groome claims that what is needed is a shift away from a theory to method approach to both religious education and theological education that assumes that the pedagogical difficulties encountered in both disciplines can be addressed if one just finds the right techniques for teaching. By putting the question of the *who*, *where*, and *why* of theology at the heart of the questions about pedagogy then, Groome suggests, the correct method will emerge. Such a move constitutes, in Groome's view, a paradigmatic shift toward a dialectical unity between praxis and theory in doing theology and religious education.

Dykstra's notions of competence and personal responsibility find expression in the concern for theological literacy, which is arguably the key theme of this third phase. While Farley argues for theological education to be concerned with wisdom, contemporary discourse argues for theological education to be concerned with literacy and fluency. Petersen describes literacy as, 'knowing how to navigate the conventions of identity, cultural meaning, perspectives on the nature of truth, and rhetoric important to the complexities of contemporary life'.⁴⁸ He then traces the development of the concept of theological literacy from the third generation of Christians who developed catechetical schools at Alexandria and Antioch for the training of church leadership. His argument is that, within the early Christian tradition theology aimed at literacy for communication and leadership. As understood in these early catechetical/theological centres, to be literate meant knowing and 'being shaped by the canon appropriate to the new dispensation' of being Christian.⁴⁹ From his brief overview of the development of theological literacy, Petersen argues that being literate means that one has absorbed the huge

⁴⁶ Dykstra, 'Reconceiving Practice', pp. 50-51.

⁴⁷ Thomas Groome, 'Theology on our Feet: A Revisionist Pedagogy for Healing the Gap between Academia and Ecclesia', in *Formation and Reflection: The Promise of Practical Theology*, ed. by Lewis S. Mudge and James N. Poling (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), pp. 55-78.

⁴⁸ Petersen, p. 6.

⁴⁹ Petersen, p. xvi.

array of knowledge and understanding found in the theological canon. Petersen's conclusion is that 'something basic and intuitive can be lost under the weight of human learning'.⁵⁰ Could the weight of human learning that constitutes the study of theology detract from the theological literacy that can flourish from a sense of 'faith seeking understanding'? Could the study of theology diminish theological literacy? Perhaps literacy could more properly be thought of as, not just the accumulation of content, but the ability to engage with the questions raised by the relationships between content and contexts and between content and learner. This gives rise to the concept of fluency which is the ability to communicate meaning in language appropriate to context. Such fluency is what was highlighted in Chapter Four of this research. Brian McDermott argues that theological literacy is more properly understood as an emancipatory process in and through which a person becomes more literate about their own faith tradition. This process necessitates 'learning new ways to learn', developing more complex forms of consciousness and 'taking responsibility for, and trusting what one has come to know'.⁵¹

Why and how one learns 'new ways to learn' is a significant theme in Tracy's reflection on theological education. Tracy identifies that the most appropriate forms of theological education invite people into a community of inquiry characterised by conversation. In Tracy's view, all education is conversation.⁵² Tracy then raises the question of whether a community of inquiry and a community of commitment and faith can be united. Though he does not use Kelsey's terms, he is asking if Berlin and Athens can be united. Tracy acknowledges the difficulty in achieving such unity or coherence due to the result of what he identifies as three fatal separations of modern Western culture. These fatal separations are the separation of feeling and thought, the separation of theory and practice, and the separation of form and content. Contrary to Kelsey's conclusion that such unity is not possible, Tracy argues that theological education can be a unifying force in so far as it explicitly and systematically brings together action and thought, academy and church, faith and reason, and the community of faith and the community of inquiry.⁵³ We can also add that theological education can bring the personal life of the student and the wisdom

⁵⁰ Petersen, p. xvii.

⁵¹ Brian McDermott, 'Theological Literacy: Some Catholic Reflections', in Petersen, pp. 325-334 (p. 326).

⁵² David Tracy, 'On Theological Education: A Reflection', in Petersen, pp. 13-22.

⁵³ Tracy, 'On Theological Education', p. 15.

of the conversation together. Unfortunately, Tracy falls short of offering solutions for the healing of these separations. Farley is acknowledged as a significant contributor to the theological education discussion who, in negotiating the space between Athens and Berlin, offers solutions for the healing of these separations. The next section of this chapter considers his contribution to the theological education conversation.

5.5 Farley's Contribution to the Theological Education Conversation

Farley's monographs, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* and *The Fragility of Knowledge: Theological Education in the Church and the University*, are widely acknowledged for their significant contribution to the discussion about theological education. In his reflections on theological education, Farley primarily addresses North American Protestant Institutions for the education of clergy. Though coloured by time, place, and denomination, Farley's analysis of theological education offers a lens through which we can view the theological education of those preparing to be teachers of religious education.

At the outset, it is important to establish what Farley means by theology. Farley maintains that theology may be understood in two senses.⁵⁴ The primary sense, which he calls *theologia*, concerns the reflective wisdom of the believer. Such reflective wisdom is a personal hermeneutical orientation to 'whatever presents itself for response and understanding'.⁵⁵ In its secondary and derived sense, theology refers to a scholarly discipline that usually occurs in a pedagogical setting. This more disciplined activity is understood to arise from and serve the first. Cahoy observes that it is not always clear how Farley sees the relation between these two genres.⁵⁶ In Farley's analysis, the two senses are distinct but not separated; together they constitute a kind of wisdom. Farley's basic thesis is that *theologia*, a sapiential and personal knowledge of God and things related to God that leads to a Christian way of life, has been displaced by a disconnected, fragmented understanding of theological knowledge.⁵⁷ This displacement has resulted in a loss of a unifying purpose for theology. Instead, what theology consists of is a collection of specialisms, related to

⁵⁴ *Theologia*, p. 31.

⁵⁵ *The Fragility of Knowledge*, p. ix.

⁵⁶ Cahoy, p. 6.

⁵⁷ *Theologia*, p. xi.

theories of knowledge about God and loosely gathered towards a new end, preparation for ministry.

Farley concurs with Anselm's description of theology as 'faith seeking understanding'. *Theologia* can only be understood in relation to faith. It 'is rooted in and rises out of faith's situation and must be understood in terms of its relation to faith'.⁵⁸ This definition presupposes three principles at the heart of Farley's understanding, (i) the historically incarnated or determinate character of religious faith, (ii) theology is primarily an understanding and only secondarily a science or discipline, (iii) theology occurs in a reflective mode, it is not simply the spontaneous insightfulness that may be generated by participation in or encounter with a specific faith. It occurs to some degree as self-conscious understanding and hence has a deliberative, purposive character. Theology is the reflectively procured insight and understanding which the encounter with a specific religious faith evokes.⁵⁹

Farley makes a crucial distinction between faith's prereflective insightfulness, which he calls belief-ful knowing, and *theologia* or theological understanding. Belief-ful knowing is not empty of content nor is it a blind hypothesis. Rather it is a prereflective 'opening into the world'. Faith then 'describes the way in which the human being lives in and toward God and the world under the impact of redemption'.⁶⁰ Faith is inherently driven to subject itself to 'deliberate processes of reflection and inquiry' through which its pre-reflective insightfulness becomes reflective and self-conscious insightfulness. This belief-ful knowing can and should obtain a self-conscious level of understanding. In its original and most authentic sense, theology is a life of faith best described as a *habitus*. It is 'a cognitively, insightfully disposed posture which leads to a knowledge of the self-disclosing God who wills salvation'.⁶¹ As such it is a practical knowing that informs one's response to the world and to God. It is such a *habitus* of understanding that emerges from the dialectical activity between the grounds of a 'determinate religious faith' and one's personal apprehension that properly describes *theologia*.⁶² The reflective wisdom at

⁵⁸ *Theologia*, p. 156. This theme is further explicated in *The Fragility of Knowledge*, pp. 137-138.

⁵⁹ *The Fragility of Knowledge*, p. ix

⁶⁰ *Theologia*, p. 156.

⁶¹ Edward Farley, 'Theology and Practice Outside the Clerical Paradigm', in Browning, *Practical Theology*, pp. 21-41 (p. 27).

⁶² *Theologia*, p. 197.

which faith arrives is *theologia*, a personal wisdom, or a way of being human.⁶³ *Theologia*, then is ‘a self-conscious level of understanding which the pre-reflective insightfulness of faith can and should obtain’.⁶⁴

Following from this description of faith, Farley contends that *theologia* can be considered as the believer’s *habitus* or settled disposition to do certain things or to act in specific ways. It is also the insight that emerges from the dialectical activity in which the believer engages. *Theologia* is both process and product. This concurs with Roger Haight’s understanding that, ‘[t]heology is the attempt to construe the whole of reality, the world, human existence, its history, and God, in the light of the symbols of the Christian tradition.’⁶⁵ Such a view is also consistent with the correlational theology underpinning this research. Simply put, theology is the attempt to respond to Rahner’s question: ‘What is a Christian and why can one live this Christian existence today with intellectual honesty?’⁶⁶ Farley’s general assumption is that all Christians are inevitably engaged every day in existential responses to the world, and that, ultimately, theology concerns the wisdom by which one brings the resources of a religious tradition to bear on experience. Consequently, theological education ought to be aimed at developing people with special capacities for theological wisdom. Theology should be about educating people whose take on the world is shaped by an understanding of God.⁶⁷ This take on the world is what he terms *theologia* or *habitus*. Such *habitus* is a ‘cognitive disposition and orientation of the soul, a knowledge of God and what God reveals’.⁶⁸ Theology is therefore not merely the accumulation of information about Christian beliefs and practices but is more like a kind of wisdom about God, the ways of God, and how this relates to the human condition.⁶⁹ Farley traces the historical development of theology through three major periods to identify how different understandings of theology have influenced theological education.⁷⁰

⁶³ *Theologia*, p. 157.

⁶⁴ *Theologia*, p. 159.

⁶⁵ Roger Haight, ‘The Church as Locus of Theology’, *Concilium*, 6 (1994), pp. 13-22 (p. 13).

⁶⁶ Rahner, p. 2.

⁶⁷ Farley articulated this vision in a 1998 interview with *The Christian Century* <www.christiancentury.org> [accessed 13 November 2011].

⁶⁸ *Theologia*, p.35.

⁶⁹ Cahoy, p. 27.

⁷⁰ It is instructive to read this alongside Richard McBrien’s history of Catholic theology, *Catholicism* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1980).

5.5.1 The Early Christian Centuries

Farley's study of the use of the term theology in the early Christian centuries is limited. He argues that it may be misleading to even speak of theology in this period, as the term itself rarely occurs. He does, however, acknowledge that 'a salvifically oriented knowledge of divine being was part of the Christian community long before it was named theology'.⁷¹ Whilst Farley acknowledges that theology (*theologia*), is a pre-Christian term he does not develop this adequately. The term theology occurs in both Plato and Aristotle to refer to discussions of divine matters or discourse about the gods. The term was co-opted by the Christian community to refer to the knowledge or understanding of God and the things of God. Such knowing or understanding demands a personal, cognitive disposition toward divine things, and is for Farley the primary sense of theology in the early Christian centuries. Alister McGrath notes that the word was used occasionally in the early Patristic period to refer to some aspects of Christian beliefs. For example, in the late second century, Clement of Alexandria used theology when speaking of Christian truth claims about God. Eusebius used the word to refer to the Christian understanding of God. It seems, according to McGrath, that theology was the term used to refer to aspects of the Christian life that related directly to God and the person's apprehension of God, and did not have the all-embracing connotation it subsequently developed.⁷²

The second sense of theology as a cognitive enterprise or discipline developed alongside the primary sense of theology as knowledge. Theology as the interpretation of what one knows to be true through faith was supplemented by the understanding that results from the intellectual inquiry that may be named a scientific discipline. Farley argues that, though such a discipline existed prior to the Middle Ages it was not called theology. Such a reading of this early period is not shared by many scholars and is perhaps a limitation in Farley's work. Congar notes that, within early Christianity, a science, in the sense of an understanding expressed systematically in a speculative manner, did proceed from faith leading quickly to a systematic conception of God and the world, giving rise to schools of theology by the second century C.E.⁷³ Angelo Di Berardino and Basil Studer draw attention to

⁷¹ *Theologia*, p.33.

⁷² Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 5th edn (Oxford:Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 101-103.

⁷³ Congar, p. 39.

the fact that the idea of scientific reflection on the faith is to be found as early as the pre-Nicene period and gives rise to 'the most perfect expression of the intellectual endeavour now known as theology'.⁷⁴ They argue that, after 450 C.E., the Byzantine and Scholastic periods preserved the patristic heritage and understanding of theology. However, with the rise of the universities the term began to take on connotations of a discipline, i.e. knowledge that has a self-conscious basis in demonstration.

5.5.2 From the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment

With the rise of the monastic schools and other centres of learning in the period from the twelfth century to the Enlightenment, we see the emergence of *theologia* as *scientia* (discipline) in the distinctive scholastic sense of a method of demonstrating conclusions. This does not, however, displace a sense of theology as: 'a state and disposition of the soul which has the character of knowledge'.⁷⁵ Despite varying emphases and interpretations among the various theological schools and denominations as to the kind of knowledge theology was, the underlying assumption was that theology is 'a practical, not theoretical, habit having the primary character of wisdom'.⁷⁶ The notion of theology as habit, or more accurately *habitus*, is translated from the Greek *hexis*, and means possessing an assimilated, enduring disposition in particular situations. Theology is a concrete knowledge of God that leads to salvation. Farley never makes it quite clear just what he means by 'concrete'. From his writings, it is possible to assume that he means a knowledge that is rooted in experience. What can also be seen in this period is that the distinction between theology as knowledge and theology as discipline becomes sharpened, though not completely separated. Farley uses Aquinas as an example of a theologian who thought of *theologia* as a discipline, a theoretical science, but did not 'abandon the notion that it was also a cognitive state', that had something to do with faith.⁷⁷ With the emergence of the universities, theology in the second sense as a discipline becomes more formalised. To justify its place in the university, theology needed a *ratio studiorum*, a rationale for studies which are theological, as well as a

⁷⁴ Angelo Di Berardino and Basil Studer, *History of Theology: The Patristic Period*, 2 vols (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1996), p. 1.

⁷⁵ *Theologia*, p. 3.

⁷⁶ *Theologia*, p. 35.

⁷⁷ *Theologia*, p. 35

method of rational enquiry based on founding principles that could yield conclusions. Such rational enquiry became known as scholasticism and marked an attempt to synthesise Christian ideas in a way that was capable of undergirding every aspect of life.⁷⁸ Scholasticism, though not actually mentioned by Farley, emphasised the rational justification of religious belief and the systematic presentation of this. Rational enquiry did not, in Farley's view, displace the sense of theology as *habitus*, but existed side by side with practical *habitus*.

5.5.3 From the Enlightenment to the Present

The third period identified by Farley is from the seventeenth century to the present, and it is to this period that he pays most attention. During this period, the influence of the Enlightenment introduced autonomous modes of scholarship into theology, with the effect that theology itself could be the object of a discipline as well as the discipline itself. Parallel to this development was the growth in continental Pietism which attempted to correct a scholastic-scientific approach to the study of theology, in which rational demonstrations were more central than faith and personal formation. Emphasising the faith and formation of the minister led to the realisation of a second purpose for the study of theology, which is the training of people for ministerial activities. This, according to Farley, set the stage for the conceiving of theology as a plurality of studies in preparation for ministry. Theology becomes, then, one subject among many in a minister's education.

The founding of the modern research university at The University of Berlin in 1810 represents the recognition of the method of coming to knowledge, understanding, and interpretation through critical, disciplined research into new material. Farley pays a lot of attention to Schleiermacher's rationale for the place of theology in the university, which is based on the argument that the scientific study of the Christian religion is a legitimate discipline, and like the medical and legal sciences, is ordered towards a goal. Such *Wissenschaft*, the knowledge required for a task, becomes the explicit guiding principle of theology in the university. The attempt, in the second half of the nineteenth century, to organise theology as a distinct field of knowledge, comprising of particular sciences or disciplines which were typically organised into a fourfold structure of Scripture, Church History,

⁷⁸ McGrath, p. 28.

Dogmatics, and Practical Theology became known as the theological encyclopaedia movement. Farley maintains that this was ‘the most important event and the most radical departure from tradition in the history of the education of clergy’, and marks the final shift from ‘theology viewed as a *habitus*, an act of practical knowledge having the primary character of wisdom, to theology used as a generic term for a cluster of disciplines’.⁷⁹ Cahoy notes that such displacement has occurred in Catholic theology though it does not follow the same timeline as Farley presents. Catholicism maintained a unity based on Scholasticism, the understanding of authority, and the centrality of formation within the seminary system. Cahoy also observes that, since Vatican II, Farley’s analysis is also pertinent to Catholic theological education.⁸⁰

Farley asserts that the effect of such displacement was that theology as a disposition of the soul towards God simply drops out of the study of theology.⁸¹ If the soul is turned towards God, this is the result of the activity of the individual rather than the purpose of theology itself. Acknowledging the widespread concern about such a development, Farley identifies three major expressions of this concern in more recent theological education, (a) the attempt to make each of the theological sciences in some way personally relevant, (b) the attempt to ensure that formation becomes part of the educational experience, (c) the most pervasive expression is present in the unifying model of most theological schools where the tasks of ministry are the *ratio studiorum*, within which there is a place for theology as a personal cognitive disposition. Farley seems to doubt the worthwhileness of such a model. This view also finds expression in Catholic contexts. Vincent Twomey criticises a literal interpretation of *Pastores dabo vobis*, which conceives of lecturers primarily as part of the formation team, and so subordinated to some vague process called formation, rather than seeing the disciplined study of theology as itself the primary source of formation.⁸² Farley argues that, when ministerial professionalism sets the agenda for theology the personal knowledge required for ministry seems to have a technical character rather than being in any sense a *habitus*. Theology is the strategic know-how required for ministerial tasks. In other words, the unity of theology is no longer found in the internal goods of theology, a knowledge of divine things that

⁷⁹ *Theologia*, p. 81.

⁸⁰ Cahoy, pp. 18-23.

⁸¹ *Theologia*, p. 43.

⁸² Vincent Twomey, *The End of Irish Catholicism* (Dublin: Veritas, 2002), p.160.

leads to wisdom and *habitus*, but in the external goods of preparing for the tasks of professional ministry. When *Wissenschaft* takes primacy, then the study of theology becomes commodified and begs such questions as, 'why do I need to know this?' 'What practical use is this for my professional life?' Farley's concern is that the sense of theology as wisdom and theology as discipline have disappeared from the teaching of theology and no longer provide the overall unity and rationale of theological study. *Theologia* has been displaced as the heart of and goal of theological education by a professional preparation for ministry. He implies that, while there may be imaginative and worthwhile programmes for ministerial preparation going on, it is not so clear that there is any meaningful theological education underpinning it. Without a self-evident unifying force, the danger facing theology is that 'the centre cannot hold'.⁸³

Farley's focus is the story of theology in the modern era and how the two genres separated and were transformed. He argues that theology as a technical discipline has supplanted theology as *habitus*. This, in Cahoy's assessment, has the dual effect of leaving theology as *habitus* being understood as non-cognitive, and theology as a technical discipline cut off from its source of life and its purpose.⁸⁴ One of the effects of this can be seen in much of the contemporary talk about the place of spirituality in theology, but as somehow separate from theology.⁸⁵ A second effect is that theology can be studied as if it can be extracted from the lived experience of faith.

5.6 Recovering *Theologia*

Having traced the demise of *theologia*, Farley then proceeds to argue for its return as the unifying goal and criteria of theological education. This implies looking to *Athens*, and taking seriously that character formation (*arête*), or a way of seeing the world with a *habitus*, is a legitimate form of knowing. At no point does Farley suggest that *Wissenschaft* should be discarded, but he does reject its domination of theological education. Admitting that his original assumption was that what was needed was a new theological encyclopaedia, or a way of structuring the major areas of study other than the traditional four-fold pattern, Farley soon concludes that there

⁸³ William Butler Yeats, 'The Second Coming'.

⁸⁴ Cahoy, p. 8.

⁸⁵ Cahoy, p. 8. The implication of Farley's work is that *theologia* itself is spirituality.

is a complex of problems which underlie the fragmentation of theology.⁸⁶ These problems include:

- (i) The question of the very possibility and viability of Christian faith.
- (ii) The lack of an ecclesial character in the study of theology evident in an assumption that faith is not the binding reality or the primary agenda-setting power at work in contemporary theological schools.
- (iii) The institutional and pedagogical issues which result from the reality that we cannot assume anything about a student's background or motivation.
- (iv) The development of a curriculum that is an aggregate of more or less independent disciplines.
- (v) Behind the loss of *theologia* in theological education is the demise of the classical Christian way of authority (Farley uses this as a code word for certain features of classical Catholic or Protestant ways of grounding claims in some specific entity - Scripture, Text, Church Father, Tradition, Magisterium).⁸⁷

Having identified these issues as problematic, Farley then proceeds to suggest how *theologia* may be recovered and thus restore unity to theological education. Two critical principles must guide the task of recovery. Firstly, theology's place in the 'map of faith' must be understood. Faith, describing the way in which the human being lives in and toward God and the world, is characterised by a certain insightfulness or pre-reflective cognitivity, which Farley calls belief-ful knowing.⁸⁸ At its heart, *theologia* is an appraising, assessing activity that has much in common with how both Jackson and Groome understand the reflexivity necessary in all educating activities. Farley's description of belief-ful knowing gives a flavour of what Farley proposes in his call for the recovery of *theologia*:

The life of *theologia* is a dialectic of interpretation impelled by faith and its mythos occurring in and toward life's setting. It is faith's way of self-consciously and critically existing in the world. It has, accordingly, the general character of *appraisal*. In faith's rise to self-conscious understanding, the human being exists in the world in the mode of appraisal. This appraisal is neither a detached curiosity nor even the kind of truth orientation which would dominate scholarly mode. [...] the very nature of faith prompts a resistance to uncritical, passive, merely gullible postures toward its own traditions and toward situations. Faith's emotional qualities (passion, praise, awe, wonder, emphatic suffering, indignant anger, peacefulness) do not exclude but require appraisal. All

⁸⁶ *Theologia*, p. 12.

⁸⁷ *Theologia*, pp. 12-16.

⁸⁸ *Theologia*, p. 156.

theological education is centrally an education in *theologia* as an appraising, assessing activity.⁸⁹

The second principle for the recovery of *theologia* is the recognition that theological understanding is not a timeless instant or structure, but a dialectical activity or life process which has the character of perpetual self-correction. Theological understanding is 'an already disposed biographical, social and historical situation'.⁹⁰ Farley describes theological understanding as being born of faith and serving the agenda of faith, 'which is living in the world attuned in the same way to the disclosure and presence of the sacred [...] *theologia* is a perennial possibility for faith as it occurs in its various social contexts.'⁹¹

Farley argues that faith is inherently driven to subject itself to deliberate processes of reflection and inquiry through which its pre-reflective insightfulness becomes reflective and self-conscious insightfulness. The reflective wisdom reached at the end of the process is *theologia*; it is a personal wisdom, a way of being human not information about being human. Farley describes three matrices of such *theologia*: the social situation of a believer, the faith community, and the school or academy.⁹² The first is the personal matrix of the believer, which though varied, will have some 'perennial elements' such as the in-built disposition to know and understand the world and human experience. The second matrix is the 'situation of leadership in the church' which again, though varied, has in common the attempt to take responsibility for gathering the community of faith. It is a leadership mode of theological understanding. The third matrix described by Farley is inquiry and scholarship which is, though not exclusively, the task of the academy or school. Within this matrix, *theologia* occurs in 'the form of self-conscious inquiry under scholarly or scientific requirements'. But such theological knowledge without reference to the other matrices does not constitute *theologia*. In each of these matrices, *theologia* is wisdom and understanding. It is only in the school, with its task of the uncovering of truth in orderly disciplined and systematic ways, that *theologia* exists as theological knowledge. The uncovering of truth brings Farley to the question of interpretation, which he sees as the heart of the structure of

⁸⁹ *Theologia*, p. 185.

⁹⁰ *Theologia*, p. 164.

⁹¹ *Theologia*, p. 162.

⁹² *Theologia*, pp. 158-159.

theological education. The basic modes of interpretation already present in *theologia*, or faith's dialectical activity, are the interpretation of tradition, the interpretation of the gospel, and the interpretation of praxis.⁹³ These three modes of interpretation are interrelated aspects of the believer's interpretive responses, but they can be examined and subjected to intellectual reflection, drawing on the wisdom of an academic community. Attention to these modes of interpretation forms the basis of a theological education that has *theologia* as both its process and its goal.

Farley outlines four pedagogical steps that he considers to be necessary for forming *habitus*.⁹⁴ The first step is to attend to the concrete historical situation of the person, or what Farley calls 'the primacy of the situation', as 'there is simply no way of conducting theology above the grid of life itself'.⁹⁵ The second step is when the faith tradition offers a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' to the situation. This hermeneutic repudiates the situation's claim to absoluteness and opens up the situation to theological critique. In the next step, Farley argues that a similar hermeneutic of suspicion must be brought to bear on the tradition, so that tradition and the situation are held in a dialectical tension and act as a corrective to each other. The final step allows for the discernment of 'the persisting imagery, symbols and doctrines of that mythos [tradition] which expresses enduring truth'.⁹⁶ The discernment promoted in the final step is guided by 'an assessed, de-absolutized tradition which has a disclosive character'.⁹⁷ This final step allows the person to return to the situation with a more theological interpretation of their situation. Farley's outline of these four pedagogical steps has many resonances with Groome's Shared Christian Praxis approach to religious education, not least in their attention to people's lived situation, the centrality of the dialectic between tradition and the situation, and the hoped for outcome of the apprehension of the situation through a theological lens. Though Farley does not use the term reflexivity in his description of the four pedagogical steps, engagement in these steps depends on the ability to be both reflective and reflexive. This emphasis on reflexivity resonates with Jackson's concerns in the interpretive approach, even though Jackson and Farley have different aims in mind. The shared emphasis on the lived situation, reflexivity, and appropriation, that is

⁹³ *The Fragility of Knowledge*, p. 138.

⁹⁴ *Theologia*, pp. 162-171.

⁹⁵ *Theologia*, p. 165.

⁹⁶ *Theologia*, p. 168.

⁹⁷ *Theologia*, p. 169.

found in the dialectical approaches of Farley, Groome and Jackson offers some insight into how a theological education approach may be considered an appropriate religious education.

5.7 Limitations of Farley's Work

Though welcoming of Farley's call for the recovery of *theologia*, Hough and Cobb find his treatment of the concept 'maddeningly elusive' as well as 'too abstract and formal' to give guidance for theological education. Their rewording of what Farley means by *theologia* is useful:

Theologia is reflective understanding, shared by members of a Christian community regarding who they are and what they are to do, given their concrete world-historical situation.⁹⁸

Though she agrees with Farley's explication of the concept *habitus*, and acknowledges that Farley comes close to many feminist concerns, Chopp critiques his conclusions as being limited in scope to cognition.⁹⁹ In Chopp's analysis, knowing has to also be understood in terms of physical presence and relationships between people, as well as connections between feelings and ideas. Her conclusion is that theological education is a process that must take into account the relationships formed, the style of teaching and the extracurricular activities, the implicit values of the institution, as well as the explicit curriculum that is designed.¹⁰⁰ The Mud Flower Collective argues that the issue of fragmentation may be considered from another perspective.¹⁰¹ What is perceived as fragmentation may actually be the result of the inclusion of more diverse voices and experiences in the theological enterprise. Fragmentation may actually be a strength and not a weakness.

A necessary critique of Farley's work is that at no point does Farley critique *theologia* itself; he takes it as given that this is the correct way to understand theology and that the recovery of this is the only way to overcome what he sees as the fragmentation that exists in theological education. This is perhaps the least satisfying aspect of his work, as there is little attention paid to the issue of whether *habitus* is an outcome of theological education or a necessary pre-condition for it. So while there is no doubt as to the centrality of *theologia* in Farley's understanding of

⁹⁸ Hough and Cobb, pp. 1-5.

⁹⁹ Chopp, *Saving Work*, p. 103.

¹⁰⁰ Chopp, *Saving Work*, p. 111.

¹⁰¹ The Mud Flower Collective, p. 203.

theological education, his analysis of the contemporary situation lacks a focussed theological-cultural-anthropological critique and so remains somewhat vague about how he would recover *theologia*. A second unresolved issue is if, in fact, the recovery of *theologia* is a return to a past sensibility that may no longer be possible in a post-modern environment. Is it just about returning to Athens? Despite such reservations, Farley's call for the recovery of *theologia* has found general acceptance as an imaginative way into the discourse of theological education.

5.8 Imagining *Theologia*

I feel that I have been given lots of pieces of a jigsaw but as there are no edges or an overall design to follow I'm not sure how to fit them all together or even if they are supposed to fit together.¹⁰²

Farley's observations about the fragmentary nature of theological studies that prepare people for a profession as well as Tracy's listing of the three fatal separations characterise the challenge expressed by this undergraduate student. What form would a return to *theologia* take in the education of teachers of religious education? In this context, what difference does the study of theology make to a person's way of engaging with the world? How would a shift to the concept of theological education help to explicate what constitutes an appropriate religious education for these teachers? Farley's plea for the recovery of *theologia* has an urgent quality about it. The recovery of *theologia* allows for the study of faith, as expressed in theology, seriously. Students can approach a determinate religious faith in a way that confronts them with the critical appraisals which attend theology. To teach theology is not simply to communicate information about theology, but to evoke participation in its claims, to invite students to engage in a way of seeing the world, eschewing the popular notion that one can engage neutrally in theology. This reflects the concern of religious education with learning from that is at the heart of this research's attention to the themes of conversation, appropriation and edification. *Theologia* can never occur if the study of theology remains at the level of looking at or learning about. Farley's vision of *theologia* is captured in C.S. Lewis' distinction

¹⁰² Undergraduate Student, MDI, 2010.

between looking at and looking along.¹⁰³ For Farley, *theologia* both makes possible the act of looking along as well as being the act of looking along:

I was standing today in the dark toolshed. The sun was shining outside and through the crack at the top of the door there came a sunbeam. From where I stood that beam of light, with the specks of dust floating in it, was the most striking thing in the place. Everything else was almost pitch-black. I was seeing the beam, not seeing things by it. Then I moved, so that the beam fell on my eyes. Instantly the whole previous picture vanished. I saw no toolshed, and (above all) no beam. Instead I saw, framed in the irregular cranny at the top of the door, green leaves moving on the branches of a tree outside and beyond that, 90 odd million miles away, the sun. Looking along the beam, and looking at the beam are very different experiences. But this is only a very simple example of the difference between looking at and looking along.¹⁰⁴

Farley challenges those responsible for theological education to help students develop *theologia*. The task of theological education is to facilitate students' cultivation of a *habitus* that sees the world with theological eyes.

5.9 Conclusion

Through the Teaching Council, the State makes it explicit that theological knowledge is a necessary requirement for the teaching of religious education. The study of theology is seen as a foundational discipline of religious education, the aim of which is the development of knowledge, understanding, skills, and attitudes in the area of religion. The study of theology in preparation for teaching religious education is to provide the skills necessary for facilitating the type of conversation that leads to understanding. This chapter has not been as concerned with the content of such an education in theology as with the process of how theology is taught and what its purpose is in teacher education.

Chapter Five proposed that the tradition of theological education, with its focus on how and why theology is taught, provides a possible space for an appropriate conversation between theology and religious education. This chapter then reviewed recent developments in the tradition of theological education in the North American theological schools. The insights emerging from this review, that are pertinent to the particular context of ITE in Ireland, may be summarised in the following concepts that were discussed in the chapter: religious and theological literacy, the cultivation of *habitus* and belief-ful knowing, attention to context, and the development of

¹⁰³ This analogy was suggested by William Cahoy in his essay, 'Learning to See', an addendum to footnote 61, 'Why Theology?' pp. 41-46.

¹⁰⁴ C.S. Lewis, *The Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 17 July 1945, p. 4. Reprinted in *God in the Dock*, ed. by Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970) pp. 212-212.

theologia. What these concepts have in common is the central role that conversation plays in the development of each of them. As seen in the three phases of the development of the theological education conversation, such conversation is becoming increasingly interreligious and increasingly respectful of diverse worldviews. The chapter concluded that Farley's concept of *theologia* provides a theoretical framework for a theological education approach that can be considered as an appropriate religious education for student teachers.

The question at the heart of the enterprise called theological education is 'what are we educating for?' The *why*, *what for*, and *for whom*, must precede the *how*. But, the *how*, must not be neglected in the consideration of the *why*, the *what for*, and the *for whom*. It is in its consideration of these questions that theological education may be judged to be an appropriate religious education for future teachers of religious education. The consideration of theological education presented in Chapter Five has elicited key themes that have the potential to contribute to how an appropriate religious education for student teachers may be conceptualised. Chapter Six will proceed to propose principles for a theological education approach that is based on the concepts presented in Chapters Four and Five, but responsive to the issues of context highlighted in Chapters One, Two, and Three.

Chapter Six

PRINCIPLES FOR A THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION APPROACH

6.1 Introduction

This research has arrived at an understanding that the religious education of future teachers of religious education is an issue that needs to be addressed. The explicit religious education of this cohort of students has not been considered heretofore. Religious education has emerged in this research as a hermeneutical and communicative interpretation of religion, religious traditions, and people's engagement with these. The person who has claimed a religious education can then be described as someone who can understand religion, religious traditions, and people's engagement with these, and can communicate this understanding. To teach religious education therefore requires that the teacher is able to both understand and communicate. For Groome, the religiously educated person has spiritual wisdom. For Jackson, the religiously educated person is edified. For Hession, the religiously educated person has developed 'religious ways of thinking, feeling and doing, which give expression to the spiritual, moral, and transcendent dimensions of life and can lead to personal and social transformation'.¹ For Lieven Boeve, the religiously educated person can 'deal creatively, critically and reflectively with plurality, identity and fundamental life options'.² Chapter Five demonstrated how a theological education as proposed by Farley can contribute to the religiously educated person.

The purpose of an explicit religious education for student teachers is two-fold. In the first instance, an explicit religious education prepares student teachers for their professional task of understanding religion and communicating this. In the second instance, an explicit religious education helps the student teacher to develop a way of seeing, interpreting, and appropriating concepts and images in ways that shape who they are in the world, what they think, what they feel, and how they are to participate in the world.

¹ Kieran and Hession, *Children, Catholicism & Religious Education*, p. 32.

² Lieven Boeve, 'Beyond Correlation Strategies: Teaching Religion in a Detraditionalised and Pluralised Context', in *Hermeneutics and Religious Education*, ed. by Herman Lombaerts and Didier Pollefeyt (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), pp. 233-254 (p. 253).

To arrive at a hermeneutical and communicative interpretation of religion it is necessary to draw on such disciplines as philosophy, sociology, psychology, religious studies, and literature, as well as on theology. Religious education is therefore necessarily interdisciplinary and does not privilege any one discipline above others. That said, for the purpose of this research within the context of the understanding of religious education in the Republic of Ireland, it has been necessary to focus specifically on the contribution theology makes to religious education. A theological approach to religious education recognises that theology offers a language that allows for coherence in the way that it reflects on God and the experience of faith. It has been argued that the theological education future teachers of religious education engage in is an appropriate form of religious education. As used in this research, the term theological education highlights the role of theology within the religious education of student teachers and is concerned with the development of *theologia*. This is not to suggest that the study of theology is instrumentalised by either religious education or theological education, but that the theological education of these students attends to certain principles. In its consideration of the relationship between professional preparation and the development of personal meaning-making skills, theological education has a contribution to make to religious education and is an appropriate form of religious education within the context of ITE. This research contends that it is the inherently formative dimension of a theological education that contributes to a religious education that is appropriate for students in ITE programmes. The religious education of these students is a special instance of theological education. Conversely, the theological education of these students is a special instance of religious education.

A number of themes surfaced in the course of this research that suggest possible ways of considering what constitutes an appropriate religious education for student teachers. This chapter then suggests six principles for such a theological education that have emerged from these themes. Each of these will be considered separately, however this is not to suggest that any of these exists independently of the other principles. Each of these principles informs the other.

6.2 A Theological Education Approach is Responsive to Context

Principle 1: *A theological education approach that is an appropriate religious education for future teachers of religious education is responsive to context.*

Context has been described in Chapter One as the interrelated conditions within which something exists. The particular context that this research has examined is how the use of the term religious education has evolved in the Republic of Ireland in both the ecclesial and public spaces. What can be concluded from the study undertaken in Chapters Two and Three concurs with Moran's view that 'any word that has a history cannot be defined', as no definition adequately covers the historical shifts in the meaning of a term. The result of such shifts is 'often sharply divergent meanings within a single term'.³ What the research also suggests is that it is more helpful to consider such divergence in meaning as positive rather than negative. An acceptance that religious education allows for a multi-textured understanding of all the possible relations between religion and education facilitates the development of an approach to understanding religious education that is concerned more with mutuality than with ownership.

This research is rooted in a correlative tradition so is concerned with the teaching strategies that theological education employs to help students correlate the texts of religious traditions with both the contexts they represent as well as with contemporary experience and expression. The implication of this is that all correlative teaching is contextual and is concerned with the dynamics of contextualisation. Correlative teaching develops students' learning skills to hear and describe the reality of present experience. It cultivates students' capacities to be attentive to their community's situation and environment and considers how these are interpreted in relation to sacred texts, tradition, religious practices, ethical decision-making, and meaning making. As explicated in the work of Groome, and to a certain extent by Jackson, correlative teaching is about inviting students into a community of conversation between the contemporary context and historical

³ Gabriel Moran, *Speaking of Teaching: Lessons from History* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008), p. 130.

contexts of religious expressions. A difficulty with a correlative approach is that, as student teachers no longer necessarily know the Christian tradition, they cannot correlate this with human experience. Boeve argues:

Religious education can indeed no longer (explicitly or implicitly) proceed from an existing overlap between Christian faith and present-day culture, a continuity between faith and culture (whether it be in principle or de facto) whereby Christian doctrines and attitudes can be linked directly to human experiences and/or problem areas.⁴

Boeve identifies three important interlinking features of sociocultural developments in Europe that have an impact on religion. The first feature is detraditionalisation, the second is the individualisation of identity formation, and the third element is the pluralisation of religion in Europe.⁵ For Boeve, detraditionalising refers to ‘the process by which traditions, religious as well as other traditions [...] no longer naturally transfer from one generation to another’.⁶ Religions can no longer assume that their tradition and traditions will be passed from one generation to the next, either through the workings of the State or even within their own churches. In Boeve’s view, ‘identity formation can no longer be perceived as quasi-automatically being educated into pre-given horizons, views, and practices that condition one’s perspectives on meaning and social existence’.⁷ This observation has implications for the Church’s vision of faith development, as well as for the State’s assumptions about the task of religious instruction or, to use the emerging term, DRE. If there is no shared understanding of the tradition, then can there be a shared understanding of how the individual is to be educated within the tradition? Conversely, if, as was outlined in Chapter Two, the State has no coherent understanding of religious education, then how is religious education to proceed?

Boeve argues that the flipside of such detraditionalisation is individualisation, which he defines as, ‘the structural given that identity is no longer assigned, but that it should be actively taken on in increasing measure (i.e. constructed)’.⁸ Individualisation, a necessary facet of identity construction, is distinct from individualism, which is absolute self-determination. Religious identity and tradition

⁴ Boeve, ‘Beyond Correlation Strategies’, p. 238.

⁵ Lieven Boeve, ‘Communicating Faith in Contemporary Europe: Dealing with Language Problems In and Outside the Church’, in *Communicating Faith*, ed. by John Sullivan (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), pp. 293-308.

⁶ Lieven Boeve, ‘Religious Education in a Post-Secular and Post-Christian Context’, *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, 33/2 (2012), pp. 143–156 (p. 145).

⁷ Boeve, ‘Communicating Faith’, p. 295.

⁸ Boeve, ‘Religious Education in a Post-Secular and Post-Christian Context’, p. 146.

are not given or fixed, but fluid and contextual. If there is no acceptance or trust in the validity of tradition, then every individual has to construct their own personal identity. Furthermore, religion may be a resource for such identity formation, but cannot be assumed to be the sole source of identity formation. Religious identity is therefore a choice rather than an inherited identity. The person chooses the religious option among the many available to them, and chooses to express their identity within a religious horizon.

The third element of the contemporary context is a pluralisation that acknowledges that 'each identity is structurally challenged to conceive of itself in relation to difference and otherness, especially to the effect of other truth claims to its own claim'.⁹ Boeve does not suggest that a correlational approach is unnecessary, but that it must also take account of the fact that experience and the Christian tradition cannot be easily mapped onto each other. Attempting to do so is facile and leads to a superficial engagement between experience and tradition which, it can be argued, becomes nothing more than window-dressing. Teachers of religious education may use the language of a particular tradition but this may not reflect a real engagement with that tradition.

As described in Chapter Two, contextual religious education refers to an emerging form of religious education that takes as a basic premise that cultural post modernity is sceptical about any absolute truth and about the value of meta-narratives like religion or ideology. It accepts the post-modern interpretation of reality with its questions about the validity and reliability of knowledge. It accepts detraditionalisation and pluralisation, and assumes therefore that religious education can only be based in the local contexts of individuals whose own personal narratives are constructed in the light of the meanings that are available to them. The aim of religious education is then to facilitate the students in developing their own personal identity and narrative; a faith tradition is but one aspect of a range of cultural resources to which they may have access. The analysis offered by the proponents of contextual religious education suggests that the attempt to address the religious education of this particular cohort of students must take into account at least some of the following characteristics: the breakdown of the meta-narrative, the individualised

⁹ Boeve, 'Religious Education in a Post-Secular and Post-Christian Context', p. 146.

search for meaning and identity, the distancing from ecclesia, and an apparent religious illiteracy. It is a mistake to think that all student teachers are a homogenous group. ITE occurs in detraditionalised and pluralised contexts. As Boeve's analysis suggests, even those of the same religion can live in very diverse ways. This is also a major theme of Jackson's work and offers a significant challenge to the providers of ITE in terms of how the diversity of student teachers' experience of religion is validated by and incorporated into their religious education.

The main contribution of a contextual approach to religious education lies in its emphasis on the central place of the person as subject in the learning process. The subject of the learning process is the person who is 'able to acquire a personal competence on matters such as religion and philosophies of life [...] and tests the plausibility of religious articulations on the basis of their own personal reality.'¹⁰ There is no evidence that this development has been integrated into the religious education of student teachers. In arguing for a theological education that is responsive to context, then a fundamental principle must be attention to the context of the semi-permeable membrane within which religious education takes place, but also attention to the context of the lives of the students. Within ITE, reflecting on context cannot just be some type of preparation for a future context, but must provide the opportunity for the student to learn how to engage with the context of their own learning environments. Roebben and Warren offer a pertinent insight:

Learning does not occur in the mediation of extrinsic contents, but in perceiving and reinterpreting the 'strong learning environment' in which one is involved with concrete others in everyday life and with the actual answers of religious traditions in breadth and depth. Learning implies a comprehensive and integrated conversation with fellow learners concerning their own religious experiences, religious questions, and with the possible insights found in traditions and cultures.¹¹

The creation and maintenance of a strong learning environment becomes the challenge for providers of ITE concerned with professional and personal development. Some obvious questions emerge: Are student teachers provided with strong learning environments? Are student teachers invited to engage in a learning process characterised by, what Roebben and Warren describe as, 'a comprehensive and integrated conversation with fellow learners concerning their own religious

¹⁰ Herman Lombaerts, 'A Hermeneutical-Communicative Concept of Teaching Religion', *Journal of Religious Education*, 48/ 4 (2000), pp. 2-7 (p. 2).

¹¹ Roebben and Warren *Religious Education as a Practical Theology*, p. x.

experiences’?¹² Or are providers of ITE nervous about inviting personal response for fear of being seen as intrusive? These are some of the challenges that a theological education approach has to address.

6.3 A Theological Education Approach Can Translate the Languages of the Semi-Permeable Membrane

Principle 2: *A theological education approach that is an appropriate religious education for future teachers of religious education can translate the languages of the semi-permeable membrane.*

In response to the consideration of context in Chapters Two and Three of this study, the image of the semi-permeable membrane was proposed as a metaphor for the ways that contexts inform each other and do not exist independently of each other. Chapter Four then argued that a key task for religious education is how best to negotiate the varying aims and concerns of public and religious understandings of religious education. As evidenced in the submissions and responses to both the ‘Forum on Patronage and Pluralism’ and the ‘Irish Human Rights Commission’, the space between spheres is contested. However, this research has argued that the image of the semi-permeable membrane may allow for an exchange between the concerns of each sphere, without a sense that the semi-permeable membrane has to be colonised by either. Instead of thinking of these as separate and at times competing spheres, this research proposed that the space between these spheres may be imagined as a semi-permeable membrane that allows for exchanges between spheres. Negotiating the semi-permeable membrane demands an ability to *speak* the languages of a number of interrelated spheres. This will mean that the religious educator can speak the relevant languages as well as translate between languages. Gadamer argues that all translation is the culmination of interpretation that the translator has made of the worlds given to them.¹³ The implication of this for the translator is that the translator is always alert to her or his own biases and attentive to his or her role in the interpretive process. Translation is not merely about matching like with like, but is about facilitating a correlation between experiences so that

¹² Roebben and Warren p. x.

¹³ Gadamer, p. 384.

understanding may emerge. A superficial learning of a language is not sufficient for facilitating understanding. As explored in Chapter Four, it is only when one is open to interpreting ‘between privacies’ that understanding emerges. Arguably, it is only in the semi-permeable membrane that ‘interpreting between privacies’ can occur.

The involvement of the religions in religious education has a long history whereas, as Chapter Two demonstrated, religious education is only beginning to emerge as a concern of the public sphere. The Recommendations of the Council of Europe (2008), the *Toledo Guiding Principles*, the REDCo project, as well as the forthcoming ‘Towards a Roadmap for Religions and Beliefs in European Intercultural Education’, attest to the fact that religious education is accepted as a legitimate activity of the public space.¹⁴ Nevertheless, in the spirit of Paul’s address at the Areopagus, religious education must continually justify its right to contribute to the public space. In its submission to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism, the ICRE argued that:

Religion then must play a role in education, and religious education is a valid and indeed necessary enterprise in the public space for the good of individuals and of society. Otherwise a whole reality, and way of dealing with that reality, is lost to the community, locally and nationally.¹⁵

Research and reflection on how religious education negotiates this space in the Irish context is only in its infancy.¹⁶

The 2013 publication *Toward Mutual Ground (TMG)* emerged from two conferences on the theme of pluralism, religious education, and diversity in Irish schools. The purpose of these conferences was to provide a space for discourse between participants from the ‘the diversity of educational and belief contexts’ in a way that acknowledged the distinct integrity of these diverse perspectives.¹⁷ What is notable about this publication is the attempt to move beyond the protection of vested interests to honest dialogue about what constitutes good religious education in a

¹⁴ Recommendation CM/Rec12 (2008) of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the Dimension of Religions and Non-Religious Convictions within Intercultural Education, <<https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1386911&Site=CM>> [accessed 12 June 2013]. For an overview of recent developments in Europe see, Robert Jackson, ‘Why Education about Religions and Beliefs? European Policy Recommendations and Research’, in Byrne and Kieran, pp. 43- 56.

¹⁵ ICRE, *Submission to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector* (2011) <<http://materdei.ie/icre>> [accessed 6 March 2013].

¹⁶ Patricia Kieran, ‘Taking Diversity of Belief Seriously in Contemporary Ireland: The Challenge for Religious Education in Irish Schools’, in Byrne and Kieran, pp. 23-39.

¹⁷ Kieran, p. 25-26.

pluralist context. The use of the word 'mutual' in the title recognises that mutual ground does not minimise difference, but is not threatened by it. Mutuality implies hospitality and generosity. For Kieran, dialogue is premised on mutuality which 'necessitates a joint process involving one's encounter, acknowledgement, dialogue and collaboration with the other'.¹⁸ From the perspective of a Catholic approach to religious education, this relationship between dialogue and mutuality is the core principle of the Church's engagement with the world. In the words of Lane, 'the Church at Vatican II formally seeks to move from being a Church that simply teaches to being a Church that both teaches and learns at the same time'.¹⁹ In his address at the launch of *TMG*, Coolahan suggested that in this time of major transition regarding thinking about the place of religion in a modern education system, it is only in mutuality and dialogue that the 'rights of all citizens in pluralistic democratic societies can be realised or promoted'.²⁰

For religious education to make a positive contribution to democracy Kieran argues that 'people must move beyond a society where citizens are hermetically sealed into their own belief system for fear of being contaminated by other beliefs, either religious or secular.'²¹ Kieran envisages mutuality as moving beyond knowing about the variety of religious and secular world views to encounter and collaboration with these. This is in contrast to the view held by Michael Nugent and Jane Donnelly of Atheist Ireland who maintain that only information about religions and beliefs should be discussed in schools supported by the State. This view is challenged by Byrne, who suggests that denying a young person of secular conviction the opportunity for a 'meaningful engagement concerning people's own experience of religion and belief', might actually 'undermine freedom and mitigate against the search for tolerance, respect and mutual care'.²² Byrne's and Kieran's view is reinforced by Richardson and Gallagher who in their review of the *Education for Diversity and Mutual Understanding* programmes in Northern Ireland state that:

¹⁸ Kieran, p. 27.

¹⁹ Dermot Lane, 'Foreword', Byrne and Kieran, pp. 17-22 (p. 19).

²⁰ John Coolahan, Address at Launch of *Toward Mutual Ground: Pluralism, Religious Education and Diversity in Irish Schools*, <<http://www.materdei.ie/contentfiles/ICRE/John%20Coolahan%20Launch%20of%20Toward%20Mutual%20Grounds'%20April%202013.pdf>> [accessed 10 June 2013], p. 8.

²¹ Kieran, p. 27.

²² Gareth Byrne, 'Encountering and Engaging with Religion and Belief', in Byrne and Kieran, pp. 207-224 (p. 210).

An educational approach which seeks to promote awareness of diversity, respect, human rights and mutual understanding must go beyond the accumulation of knowledge into processes of emotional development, personal growth and social challenge.²³

What is significant in *TMG* is the understanding of how the term religious education is continuing to evolve in the Irish context. Language cannot only be interpreted within and for one sphere. Acknowledging the validity of other interpretations of terms marks the beginning of a deeper understanding of what language means in the semi-permeable membrane. Student teachers need to be given the opportunity to learn the different languages of the public space and the religious space so that they can speak these fluently and convincingly. The student teacher must become familiar with the language of the public space and be able to make the case for religious education on grounds acceptable to that space. That is not to imply any form of reductionism of religious education to the demands of the public space, but if the language religious education speaks does not address the same issues, then it becomes irrelevant or at the very least a vaguely interesting but arcane feature of the education system. The student teacher also needs to be familiar with the languages of the religious space so as to take seriously what religions actually believe. To think of religion only in terms of its historical and cultural manifestations and its role as a meaning making activity denies students the opportunity to engage with religion in terms of its sense of transcendence, its claim on the imagination, and its sense of the depth dimensions of existence. It is arguably easier to examine the accidentals of religious faith than to engage with its essence. Unless people are introduced to this level of engagement, then they will not understand religion.

Staying with the metaphor of the semi-permeable membrane as the context for religious education allows for a consideration of the relationship between religion and education. Each of these has its own integrity, its own traditions, and its own purposes. While there are overlaps, they must each retain their distinctive properties if the charge of indoctrination is to be avoided. Religion and education cannot be subsumed into a discipline called religious education; it is not a melting pot. Religion and education exist in a correlational relationship within religious education. Student teachers are invited to enter into a study of education as a field of enquiry with its own integrity, their educational studies are not at the service of

²³ *Education for Diversity & Mutual Understanding: The Experience of Northern Ireland*, ed. by Norman Richardson and Tony Gallagher (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), p. 18.

religious education; neither is their study of theology at the service of religious education.

6.4 A Theological Education Approach Aims for Understanding Through Conversation

Principle 3: *A theological education approach that is an appropriate religious education for future teachers of religious education aims for understanding through conversation.*

As civilized human beings, we are the inheritors, neither of an inquiry about ourselves and the world, nor of an accumulating body of information, but of a conversation, begun in the primeval forests and extended and made more articulate in the course of centuries. It is a conversation which goes on both in public and within each of ourselves.²⁴

Chapter Four proposed that Gadamer's concept of conversation be considered as the model for understanding. Michael Oakeshott further nuances this theme from the perspective of educational philosophy. Oakeshott uses the term conversation as an image of human interaction in which the 'qualities, the diversities, and the proper relationships of human utterances' are recognised. The purpose of conversation, which Oakeshott defines as 'talk without conclusion', is not inquiry, debate or even the discovery of truth but an 'unrehearsed intellectual adventure'. Conversation is a defining feature of human being and human activity. Rather than being a skill that the human person strives to achieve, a conversation is something into which the person is born. For Oakeshott, the purpose of education is to initiate people into the 'skill and partnership of this conversation in which we learn to recognize the voices, to distinguish the proper occasions of utterance, and in which we acquire the intellectual and moral habits appropriate to conversation'.²⁵ For Oakeshott, such conversation is impossible without a diversity of voices. What is essential about conversation is that it is within the activity of conversing that 'different universes of discourse meet, acknowledge each other and enjoy an oblique relationship which neither requires nor forecasts their being assimilated to one another'.²⁶ Conversation does not have to lead to agreement with the viewpoint of the other. Conversation

²⁴ Michael Oakeshott, 'The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind', *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (London: Methuen, 1962), pp. 196-198 (p.198).

²⁵ Oakeshott, p. 198.

²⁶ Oakeshott, p. 196.

allows the participants to live with tentativeness. Education invites people into a conversation with differing viewpoints, differing truth claims and differing versions of what it means to be religious, to be educated and to be human. Putting Oakeshott's image of conversation into dialogue with Gadamer's thesis that conversation is an analogy for understanding suggests that every person is born into understanding. Like conversation, understanding only occurs within the context of differing voices. Just as people can be initiated into conversation, so too can they be initiated into understanding.

Oakeshott's theme of the necessarily diverse nature of the voices in conversation leads to a consideration of the necessity of engaging in the diversity of religious voices if one is to understand religion. It is arguable that the tradition of theological education has been concerned with intra-religious understanding. As identified in Chapter Four of this research, a contemporary conversation only makes sense if it is inter-religious and inter-cultural in the sense that it can engage in both with religious and secular conversations. Contemporary conversation occurs in the semi-permeable membrane because it has to. This theme of inter-religious understanding is a significant feature of contemporary religious education and, as outlined in Chapter Five, is becoming a significant feature of theological education.

One example of the significance of inter-religious understanding that has implications for theological education is the development of an inter-religious approach within the Catholic Church. Lane argues that the 'basic relationship between the Church and the world is one of conversation – the precise terms used in *Gaudium et spes* is 'colloquium' which is a two-way process'.²⁷ The notion of colloquium reiterates *Nostra Aetate's* recognition of the presence of the 'true and holy' in religions other than Christianity. To recognise that the world religions 'often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all', leads to an acknowledgement of the 'spiritual and moral truths' in the world religions.²⁸ To acknowledge the truth of the conversation partner then leads to a commitment to a new style of conversation. In Lane's words:

This new relationship between the Church and the world, between faith and culture, between Catholicism and other religions, influences the shape, colour and identity of

²⁷ Lane, *Challenges Facing Religious Education*, p. 24.

²⁸ *Nostra aetate*, para. 2.

Catholicism, now seen no longer in opposition to the world but in a new relationship with others.²⁹

This is consistent with both Gadamer's and Oakeshott's view of conversation as an open-ended relational activity. This new relationship is demanded by a deep respect for everything which is expressed in 'recognising the uniqueness of all religious traditions and respecting their religious integrity and irreducibility'.³⁰ Such respect is not 'marginal' to Christian faith but arises from the demands of faith.³¹ It is not an optional extra for a believer. Respect is based on the acknowledgment of difference rather than on any attempt to diminish or ignore difference. Judith Berling notes that a genuine encounter with another religion should cause some discomfort and some loss of 'inward ease'.³²

To move from engagement to understanding requires a willingness to enter into an open-ended conversation with the matters that the religion is serious about, or what Farley terms, 'the claims embodied in its tradition-formed experience'. But, warns Farley:

To study the religious faith seriously is to be pressed by the claim it sets. But anyone who wishes to grasp the religion at the level of its own claim and self-understanding, in other words, as a *faith*, must appreciate the structure of its reflective interpretations – of its theology. That is why the student must enter into the modes of interpretation that structure the religion's world of faith, and into the study of theology.³³

Lane proposes four guidelines for inter-religious education. These are, (i) acknowledging prejudice, (ii) respecting the irreducibility of the other and their distinctive religious convictions, (iii) being aware that every religious tradition has within itself a certain ambiguity and incompleteness, and (iv) acknowledging that all religions have inflicted pain and violence on each other.³⁴ In his more recent work, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, Lane addresses the limitations of these four principles by proposing a theology of dialogue as conversation.³⁵ Common between Oakeshott, Lane, Farley, and Jackson is the recognition and acceptance of difference

²⁹ Lane, *Challenges Facing Religious Education*, p. 25.

³⁰ Lane, p. 27.

³¹ Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, 'Letter to Presidents of Bishops' Conference on the Spirituality of Dialogue', 1999, <<http://www.chemichemi.org/attachments/article/19/letter-to-presidents-of-bishops.pdf>> [accessed 4 June 2013], p. 1.

³² Judith A. Berling, *Understanding Other Religious Worlds* (New York: Maryknoll, 2004), p. 62.

³³ *The Fragility of Knowledge*, p. 181.

³⁴ Lane, *Challenges Facing Religious Education*, pp.31-32.

³⁵ Dermot Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions: A Christian Theology of Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Dublin: Veritas, 2011), pp. 114-132.

as difference, and not difference as something that should be minimised, trivialised or ignored. An inter-religious education that is rooted in a theological approach offers the opportunity to engage with the depth structures of the religions.

Religions thrive in their concrete details, and we are at our best when we can speak vividly, concretely, with heartfelt and particular specificity and not in terms of an imagined least common denominator acceptable to everyone in the public and hence the interreligious environment in which we live [...] We can never know other religions in the way we know our own, but by way of analogy our understanding of the religions around us should likewise be concrete, integral, and subtle.³⁶

Francis Clooney indicates that attention to the specificity of a religion, undertaken with sensitivity to what is distinctive and different about it, allows for insight into the depth structures and consequent ethical demands of other religions. The positive acknowledgement of the distinctive voices of a pluralist religious world challenges theological education to be generous and hospitable. One way to approach such acknowledgement would be to work from Jackson's three levels of representation. Students would then get the opportunity to study theology from the perspectives of the tradition and the group, as well as to bring their own particular viewpoints to their study. Thus theology as 'faith seeking understanding' becomes a dynamic conversation between the person, the group, and the tradition, that points toward understanding.

6.5 A Theological Education Approach Promotes a Reflexive Praxis

Principle 4: *A theological education approach that is an appropriate religious education for future teachers of religious education promotes a reflexive praxis.*

Reflexivity is a constitutive feature of the work of both Groome and Jackson and emerges as a significant theme in Farley's consideration of theological education. For Groome and Farley, reflexivity emerges from and leads to praxis, whereas, for Jackson, reflexivity is a quality concerned with *phronesis* or understanding. Reflexivity differs from reflection in terms of its capacity to be bi-directional. It is a reflective capacity that is simultaneously directed back on itself as well as being future oriented. As understood by the social sciences, reflexivity refers to examining

³⁶ Francis X. Clooney, 'Reading the World Religiously', in Petersen, pp. 242-256 (p. 244).

social practices and modifying them in the light of the incoming information about them. In its application to theological education, reflexivity may be understood as reflection on the experience of faith and the encounter with religion that is focussed on both *phronesis* and praxis. The concern of this research is how this can be facilitated for and with student teachers.

Reflexivity is characterized by a spirit of enquiry that leads to the asking of good questions and a critique of easy or superficial answers. This research has adopted a contextual constructivist conception of learning that assumes that knowledge is both individually constructed and socially based on the interpretation of experience and how that experience is named within the tradition. Constructivism assumes that learners are not passive recipients of what Paulo Freire calls a 'banking model' of education.³⁷ Knowledge is not transmitted from teacher to learner, therefore education should consist of making available experiences and opportunities for the learner to construct knowing and knowledge. The learner is inextricably interconnected with what is learned. Through their reflexive approach the learner becomes an active meaning maker. This is consistent with the focus on reflective practice that Chapter One noted is a core concern of contemporary practice in ITE. The focus of a constructivist approach is on the agency of the learner. Bringing such an approach to bear on theological education allows for a consideration of what might be appropriate learning environments for theological education.

A contextual constructivist approach can draw on David Jonassen's proposal that learning environments should provide sites for active, intentional, complex, contextualized, reflective, conversational, collaborative, and constructive learning.³⁸ Marcy Driscoll proposes a number of constructivist principles for designing learning: learning must be embedded in complex, realistic, and relevant environments, social negotiation must be provided as an integral part of learning, multiple perspectives and the use of multiple modes of representation must be supported, ownership in learning is to be encouraged, and self-awareness of the

³⁷ Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2006), pp. 71-86.

³⁸ David Jonassen, 'Designing Constructivist Learning Environments', in *Instructional Design Theories and Models: A New Paradigm of Instructional Technology*, ed. by Charles M. Reigeluth, 2 vols (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1996), pp. 215-240.

knowledge construction process is to be nurtured.³⁹ Extrapolating from Jonassen's and Driscoll's proposals it can be proposed that a learning environment for a theological education approach should be characterised by the following features:

- (i) Learners must be given the opportunity to consider concrete, real-life situations through which they may begin to discern the questions, problems, contradictions, and patterns in these situations and begin to negotiate their own responses either in terms of appropriating the responses of a tradition for themselves or coming to their own reflectively procured insight. Jacqueline Brooks and Martin Brooks suggest that teachers should pose 'problems of emerging relevance to students'.⁴⁰ They use the phrase 'emerging relevance' because the teacher may need to facilitate the students' perception of relevance.
- (ii) Allowing the learner to discern the issues of concern means that the curriculum and learning outcomes are negotiated between learner and learner as well as between learner and teacher.
- (iii) Constructivist learning is individual, but it occurs within the context of a community of learners who are invited to engage in activity, discourse, inquiry, reflection, and open-ended investigation. This view is consistent with the recommendation in the 'Learning To Teach' Report to the Teaching Council that 'the promotion of inquiry be adopted as a core component within ITE programmes [...] both as an end in itself in ITE, but also as a basis for developing student teachers' initial capacity to use various reflective and inquiry tools'.⁴¹
- (iv) Learning within a community of dialogue stimulates further thinking as the learner is responsible for defending, justifying, and communicating their ideas to the class.
- (v) Diverse learning styles are acknowledged through the acceptance and valuing of multiple forms of representation and evaluation. Jonassen argues that, since constructivism is not concerned with the

³⁹ Marcy Perkins Driscoll, *Psychology of Learning for Instruction*, 3rd edn (Toronto: Pearson, 2005), pp. 384-407.

⁴⁰ Jacqueline Grennon Brooks and Martin Brooks, *In Search of Understanding: The Case for Constructivist Classrooms* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1999), pp. 35-45.

⁴¹ *Learning to Teach*, p. 203.

transmission of knowledge, then a 'criterion-referenced evaluation, which is based on predetermined objective standards, is not an appropriate evaluation tool' for a constructivist environment.⁴² Instead, the process of knowledge construction rather than the end product of learning is what is to be evaluated. The context of evaluation should be embedded in the authentic tasks and meaningful real-world context. The criteria of evaluation should represent the multiple perspectives in the learning environment.

- (vi) Respecting student autonomy encourages students to take on responsibility for their own learning in partnership with the teacher who becomes the facilitator of learning. Encouraging students to take on such responsibility may be the most significant challenge of a constructivist classroom. Everington's research into the use of the interpretive approach in the professional development of student teachers of religious education found that student teachers were initially reluctant to take responsibility for their own learning. However, their engagement in an interpretive approach to their own learning which required 'a reconsideration of fundamental assumptions about religion, education, and learning', provoked an academic and professional response, as well as affording the student teachers the opportunity to 'engage at a personal level, offering new ways of looking at the world and oneself and prompting new questions'.⁴³

⁴² David Jonassen, Kyle Peck, and Brent Wilson, *Learning with Technology: A Constructivist Perspective* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999).

⁴³ Everington, p. 103.

6.6 A Theological Education is God-Focussed

Principle 5: *A theological education approach that is an appropriate religious education for future teachers of religious education is God-focussed.*

At the heart of religion is belief in God or the Transcendent. By focussing RE on this as the core fundamental concept around which the rest of religion revolves we can give RE coherence and be properly inclusive.⁴⁴

In its legitimate concern for social cohesion, mutual understanding, and human flourishing, there is a danger that religious education may at times lose its central purpose which, for Watson and Thompson is the focus on belief in God. Such God-focussing emphasises that the concept of God, however that is articulated, is crucial for understanding religion and is what holds religions together despite disparate phenomena.⁴⁵ Religious education must be God-focussed both in its problematic form as well as in its life-giving form. Religion cannot be disconnected from its originating impulse. This moves religious education beyond the study of religion as a social phenomenon or cultural fact, into an engagement with people's response to their apprehension of God. In the words of Hull:

We can now conceive of religious education as performing tasks which go far beyond its role as comprising the study of religion. The task of religious education is to expose religion to itself, to reveal the ambiguity of religion in ways which liberate adults and children from oppressive aspects of religion, and at the same time to open up the treasures of religion, its liberating and life affirming aspects to human beings.⁴⁶

Similarly, John Sullivan argues that the duty of religious education is 'to bring out for pupils key features of the demands that a religion makes on its adherents and the way it poses probing questions about individual and communal life'.⁴⁷ Hull's and Sullivan's description of religious education is consistent with Anselm's definition of the task of theology as 'faith seeking understanding'. Anselm's phrase is in the active voice and implies engagement, reflective activity, and a movement towards understanding. As has been argued throughout this research, understanding occurs through conversation. Theology therefore takes on the character of a conversation in which a community attempts to articulate its best current understanding of itself and its convictions about God. Such conversation does not just aim for a cultural,

⁴⁴ Watson and Thompson, p. 67.

⁴⁵ Watson and Thompson, p. 68.

⁴⁶ John Hull, 'Religion and Education in a Pluralist Society', pp. 15-33 (p. 21).

⁴⁷ Sullivan, 'Dismembering and Remembering Religious Education', p. 127.

theoretical, or philosophical understanding, as we have seen in Chapter Four, but is an invitation into the realm of the transcendent. The fundamental question is whether religious education is about God. Watson and Thompson maintain that a God-focussed religious education also allows for the study of religion for its own sake so that ‘the sheer deep down-down loveliness’ of it all is not being missed.⁴⁸ In the words of Martin, ‘theology at its best will always invite students to enter into mystery rather than reduce religion and belief to a set of propositions to which we choose to give or not give intellectual assent.’⁴⁹ This invitation to enter into a God-focussed religious education brings students into a theological education. Astley’s experience with pupils reflecting on their own religious beliefs, as well as the beliefs of others, prompts him to ask, ‘what discipline is the pupil engaged in when reflecting on religious beliefs? Is it, perhaps, theology?’⁵⁰

Arguably, until 2000 the language of religious education in Ireland has been largely shaped by the language of theology. The relationship between theology and religious education was assumed. The Teaching Council’s requirements for teachers of Religious Education attest to the centrality of a particular approach to the study of theology, with an emphasis on Systematic Theology, Scripture, Liturgy, and Moral Theology. To some extent religious education is thought of as the practical application of these subjects in the school context. With the emergence of new ways of thinking about religious education, the relationship between religious education and theology needs to be reconceptualised.⁵¹ Groome notes that, in the early Christian tradition, the relationship between theology and religious education was based on a theory to practice epistemology. This is evidenced in a variety of catechetical discourses from such figures as John Chrysostom, Augustine, and Cyril of Jerusalem.⁵² This is consistent with a transmissive approach to education. A correlationist approach does not operate from the same assumption and so has a different view of the relationship between theology and religious education. Groome

⁴⁸ Watson and Thompson, p. 64.

⁴⁹ Diarmuid Martin, <<http://www.dublindiocese.ie/content/171106-mater-dei-conferring-mass-homily>> [accessed 10 May 2013].

⁵⁰ Jeff Astley and Leslie Francis, *Christian Theology & Religious Education: Connections and Contradictions* (London: SPCK, 1996), p. 61.

⁵¹ This theme is the subject of *Religious Education and Christian Theologies: Some European Perspectives*, ed. by Peter Schreiner, Gaynor Pollard and Surla Sagberg (Münster: Waxman, 2006).

⁵² These are considered in some detail by Patrick Devitt, *That You May Believe: A Brief History of Religious Education* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1992).

argues that religious education should be informed by the most scholarly understanding a faith community has of its tradition. He concludes, therefore, that a teacher education programme should be as concerned with theological formation as with educational development.⁵³ The dialogical relationship between theology and religious education is a key feature of Groome's work and is what underpins his concept of appropriation. The issue of correlation raised in Chapters One and Five also applies to how theological formulations correlate with the wider cultural insights of educational formulations; this tension is inherent to religious education. Religious education implies that the ideals and values of education would inform religious discourse and the ideals and values of religious worldviews would inform education.

Arguing that a theological education approach is an appropriate religious education for student teachers of religious education risks the charge that both theology and education are being instrumentalised by religious education. Each discipline has its own area of concern and brings its own insights to bear on religious education. Including theology as a key source for religious education raises the question of whether a theologically educated community of teachers of religious education is required. Farley asks if the purpose of theological education is to educate theologians or to educate people who can engage theologically. Arguably, within an ITE programme the concern is with people who can engage theologically. To that end then, it is possible to concur with Farley that 'theology is the reflectively procured insight and understanding which encounter with a specific religious faith evokes'.⁵⁴ Farley, as we have seen, links this with *habitus*, which he describes as a 'disposition of the mind that has the character of wisdom or understanding'.⁵⁵ Farley's definition is predicated on three principles that are consistent with a religious education that is God-focussed. The first is that religious faith is historically incarnated and has a determinate character. Secondly, understanding is the sort of thing theology itself is. A third principle is that theology 'occurs in a reflective mode'. This is not simply a 'spontaneous insightfulness' but a 'considered' self-consciousness and understanding with a deliberative and purposive character. Theological understanding occurs, therefore, in people who reflectively encounter a

⁵³ *Shared Christian Praxis*, p. 228.

⁵⁴ *The Fragility of Knowledge*, p. 64.

⁵⁵ *The Fragility of Knowledge*, p. 81, n. 15.

specific religious faith. It is this reflective mode that allows for theological education to be considered as an appropriate religious education for student teachers of religious education and is consistent with the other principles outlined here.

6.7 A Theological Education Approach Develops *Theologia*

Principle 6: *A theological education approach that is an appropriate religious education for future teachers of religious education develops theologia.*

Farley assumes that ‘theology concerns the wisdom by which one brings the resources of a religious tradition to bear on the world. This task calls for [...] wisdom, the ability to assess what is going on and to appraise new possibilities [which is] a creative act and an interpretive act, an act of theological understanding.’⁵⁶ Farley uses the image of *theologia* to illustrate such a theological understanding which may otherwise be described as seeing the world with theological eyes. A theological education concerned with *theologia* teaches people to learn how to see, how to look along and with the tradition, and how to learn to know and understand.⁵⁷ Such an education should be the result of a university education that has ‘experiential, pluralistic, hermeneutic, critical, rational, political, and aesthetic dimensions’.⁵⁸ Farley’s point is that education in its most genuine sense has to do with capacities of responding to and interpreting the complex dimensions of reality. The educated person is one who is shaped in a way that is ‘not simply the production of capacities of technical functioning but the evoking of ways of existing in and interpreting reality’.⁵⁹ Farley then outlines five characteristics of an educated person:

- i. an educated person is sufficiently exposed to a plurality of experiences and modes of interpretation to be self-conscious in his or her responses, decisions and policies
- ii. this self-consciousness has a critical dimension. It is a self-consciousness about evidence and what constitutes the establishment of a claim or the grounding of a tradition or policy
- iii. this critical attitude reflects the capacity to look behind things and beneath things, to respond not just to surfaces and face values.

⁵⁶ Edward Farley, ‘Toward Theological Understanding: An Interview with Edward Farley’, <<http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=366>> [accessed 14 November 2011].

⁵⁷ Cahoy, ‘Learning to See’, pp. 41-46.

⁵⁸ *The Fragility of Knowledge*, p. 60

⁵⁹ *The Fragility of Knowledge*, p. 60.

- iv. the educated person is self-conscious in his or her general existence in society, in the exercise of discerned obligation. In other words, the person knows enough about the workings of local and larger societies to interpret critically issues of social praxis
- v. the educated person is sufficiently introduced to the heritage of cultural accomplishments [...] to enjoy aesthetic dimensions of experience beyond those which are commercially and faddishly orchestrated.⁶⁰

When this vision of an educated person is considered in the light of theological education, it can be suggested that the theologically educated person must provide a plurality of experiences and modes of interpretation, so that the person become self-conscious and reflexive. This reflexivity has a critical dimension to it. It is not just the acceptance of the views of others, but a willingness to engage deeply with these views. The educated person is introduced to ‘the heritage of cultural accomplishments’. This characteristic is reminiscent of Tracy’s view that at the heart of the process of being educated is the ability to enter into the conversation with the classics of all cultures.⁶¹ This view is also consistent with a key educational assumption of this research articulated in Chapter One, that education makes the wisdom of a tradition available to future generations so that each generation may have a life.

In the language of the DES, the educated person is the one who has acquired knowledge, understanding, skills, and attitudes within a specific subject area. In the language of the NFQ’s ‘Grid of Level Indicators’, the person educated to Level 8 has a detailed knowledge and understanding of their field of study, some of which is at the current boundaries of the field. They can demonstrate mastery of complex and specialised areas as well as the use of advanced skills which they can transfer in a range of contexts. They exercise appropriate judgement and accountability and can act effectively under guidance as well as lead ‘multiple, complex and heterogeneous groups’. They learn to act in a variety of unfamiliar contexts and can manage learning tasks ‘independently, professionally and ethically’. Ultimately, the educated person gains insight which is expressed as a ‘comprehensive, internalised, personal world view, manifesting solidarity with others’.⁶² This could be summarised in Whitehead’s words that, ‘education is the guidance of the individual towards a comprehension of the art of life; and by the art of life I mean the most complete

⁶⁰ *The Fragility of Knowledge*, p. 60.

⁶¹ Tracy, ‘On Theological Education’, p. 13.

⁶² National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, ‘National Framework of Qualifications, Grid of Level Indicators’ (2003), <<http://www.nfq.ie/nfq/en/documents/NFQLevelindicators.pdf>> [accessed 18 June 2013].

achievement of varied activity expressing the potentialities of that living creature in the face of its actual environment'.⁶³ The NFQ's indicators imply that to say someone is educated, is to say something about the person. The indicators suggest that an educated person can know the world, understand the world, and ultimately change the world.

The teacher of religious education has a role to play in the education of the human person. Student teachers are therefore invited to consider how they see themselves in that role so that their religious education is always focussed, not just on their own religious education, but on how they will invite their students into this form of education. Roebben and Warren describe a teacher of religious education in the following way:

They experience the permanent challenge of inviting others to explore, to explain and to experience their daily life from another angle. This angle has a subversive character, one that transcends ordinary meaning and that engages the ones who are involved in new ways of knowing and loving [...] They invite others to participate in their struggle with a particular living tradition, with the 'fides et mores' of that tradition and, through this, with their own narrative identity. In this process they open up the hermeneutic space in which others can confront themselves with their meaning giving framework.⁶⁴

For Roebben and Warren, religious education occurs in a reflective mode, which aims for considered understanding which may not necessarily be the same as a belief-ful participation in a community of faith. Such a religious education may be facilitated by a theological education approach. Farley challenges those responsible for theological education to facilitate the development of *theologia* with and for their students. For Farley, *theologia* means that one sees the world with theological eyes. *Theologia* implies that educating people is not just about informing them about concepts, but is about forming people so that they can appropriate concepts in ways that shape who they are in the world, what they think, what they feel, and how they are to participate in the world in life-giving ways for all. Farley's image of *theologia*, Groome's concept of appropriation, and Jackson's concept of edification, are all ways that, in C.S. Lewis' image, teach people to look along the beam rather than look at the beam.

⁶³ Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays* (New York: The Free Press, 1929), p. 39.

⁶⁴ Roebben and Warren, *Religious Education as Practical Theology*, p. vii.

6.8 Conclusion

Chapter Six has outlined six principles for a theological education approach that is an appropriate religious education for future teachers of religious education. These principles have emerged from the findings of the study and provide a framework for a theological education approach. To be considered an appropriate form of religious education, a theological education approach must, (i) be responsive to context, (ii) be able to translate the languages of the semi-permeable membrane, (iii) aim for understanding through conversation, (iv) promote a reflexive praxis, (v) be God-focussed, and (vi) develop *theologia*.

Adopting these principles does not suggest that new programmes of explicit religious education are necessary or even desirable in ITE programmes. What is suggested is that every programme should attend to how it promotes a theological education approach as an appropriate religious education for student teachers. A theological education approach does not mandate what should be taught, but has something worthwhile to add to the discourse about why and how theology and religious education are taught in ITE programmes. Some recommendations for practice emerging from these six principles will be identified in the next chapter.

Chapter Seven

CONCLUSION: FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

7.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with a summary of the findings of the research. The conclusions of the study are outlined, followed by seven recommendations emerging from these conclusions for the practice of religious education in the ITE of teachers of religious education. This will be followed by proposals for future research that build on the foundations established in this study. Finally, the significance of this research is identified.

7.2 Findings of the Research

This research considered the question of what constitutes an appropriate religious education for student teachers of religious education in the second-level sector in the Republic of Ireland. Chapter One established the rationale for the study and contextualised the research question. The ontological, epistemological, theological, and educational assumptions underpinning the research were then outlined. A statement about the understanding of religious education guiding the research was formulated. Finally, the research methodology was described. Chapter One established that, (i) there is no explicit religious education within the ITE of teachers of religious education, and (ii) there has been no reflection on the place of religious education in the ITE of teachers of religious education. A key finding of Chapter One is that, in Ireland, there is a gradual and on-going shift from a Church provided model of ITE for teachers of religious education to the provision of ITE within a university context and therefore also accountable in the public space.

Chapters Two and Three investigated how the nature and purpose of religious education is understood in the Republic of Ireland. Chapter Two provided a review of key documentary evidence to chart the evolution of how religious education has come to be understood by the Irish State. The analysis of this review demonstrated that, (i) the State is reactive rather than proactive in response to issues pertaining to the intersection of religion and education, (ii) the State's use of the term religious

instruction has not kept pace with national and international developments in the broad area of religious education, (iii) there is a lack of consistency and coherence in the way terms are used, and (iv) there is an emerging understanding of religious education at second-level that has the potential to act as a model for a more coherent vision of religious education in Ireland.

Chapter Three proceeded then to investigate the understanding of religious education as it is mediated in primary source documents that are normative for how one denomination, the Catholic Church in Ireland, has interpreted the broad task of religious education. This survey of the evolution of the term religious education in Ireland demonstrates that the context for religious education in Ireland has been predominantly shaped by an ecclesial discourse rooted in an understanding of religious education as a form of practical theology. What the survey also demonstrates is that, even within an ecclesial discourse, religious education is a contested term.

Though at times the spheres of Church and State are distinct, the Irish experience is that they are not mutually exclusive and therefore the study undertaken in Chapters Two and Three is considered to be two aspects of the same analysis of context. This analysis allows for four conclusions to be drawn about the context within which ITE for teachers of religious education occurs:

1. The traditional ownership of religious education by faith communities is being challenged by a liberal or secular form of religious education that is concerned with the provision of religious education separate from faith communities.
2. As yet there is no consistent theoretical rationale for a secular or liberal form of religious education in Ireland.
3. Two increasingly separate discourses have emerged about religious education that do not necessarily share the same assumptions, worldviews, epistemologies or reference points, with the result that they often speak across each other rather than to each other.
4. There is a lack of a shared understanding and a common discourse about the aims of religious education, both within faith communities and in public discourse.

What this study has done is to focus the question of language as used within the Irish context. However, instead of bemoaning a lack of a cohesive development or systematic theory, this study argues for what may be called a textured understanding of religious education that seeks to move beyond the ecclesial discourse to an engagement with other hermeneutical viewpoints.

Chapter Four challenged the concept of the four publics being considered as separate spheres which may be addressed independently of each other. The chapter argued that the image of separate spheres is unhelpful as people move between spheres rather than being bounded by them. Religious education has to be able to respond to a number of interrelated, though not always coherent, spheres. Chapter Four therefore proposed the metaphor of the semi-permeable membrane which allows for the transfer of properties between cells in a differential manner while still retaining their distinctive shape. Building on this metaphor, Chapter Four then drew on Gadamer's concept of conversation to propose a conversational approach to religious education that is responsive to the context of how religious education is understood in the interrelated spheres within which it occurs in Ireland. Chapter Four considered Groome's concept of appropriation as well as Jackson's concept of reflexivity as activities of the semi-permeable membrane that have the potential to facilitate a movement between the spheres outlined in Chapters Two and Three. Chapter Four found that Groome's theological vision of religious education and Jackson's concept of edification, though markedly different in character, offer a *via media* between the spheres. The key conclusion of Chapter Four is that religious education is best conceived of as a conversational activity that is hermeneutical in nature. How the teacher of religious education is prepared to lead such a conversation is crucial.

Chapter Five argued that religious education must be able to access the deepest possible understanding of a religion's convictions and be able to engage with the religion on its own terms. It must attempt to understand and engage with the inner world of the religion which cannot be adequately observed from the outside but will demand theological knowledge and sensitivity. The study of theology allows for religious education to engage seriously with the truth claims of other world views and come to an appreciation of the depth structures of religion. The argument

considered how the study of theology, an essential requirement in the ITE of teachers of religious education according to the Teaching Council of Ireland, can contribute to the religious education of these students. The tradition of theological education, with its focus on how theology is taught, emerges as a significant foundation for a religious education that is appropriate for the students in question. The study of theology in preparation for teaching religious education is to provide the skills necessary for facilitating understanding. Chapter Five introduced the term theological education as a way of conceiving of a religious education that is appropriate for students engaged in higher education professional studies in which theology plays a significant role. The history of the field of theological education since the 1980s is presented through the lens of the research question. This chapter found that Farley's concept of *theologia* provides a theoretical framework for a theological education approach that can contribute to the religious education of student teachers.

A number of themes emerged in the research that in turn suggested six principles for a theological education approach which would be an appropriate religious education for students in ITE. These principles are:

1. A theological education approach that is an appropriate religious education for future teachers of religious education is responsive to context.
2. A theological education approach that is an appropriate religious education for future teachers of religious education can translate the languages of the semi-permeable membrane.
3. A theological education approach that is an appropriate religious education for future teachers of religious education aims for understanding through conversation.
4. A theological education approach that is an appropriate religious education for future teachers of religious education promotes a reflexive praxis.
5. A theological education approach that is an appropriate religious education for future teachers of religious education is God-focussed.
6. A theological education approach that is an appropriate religious education for future teachers of religious education develops *theologia*.

Chapter Six reflected on each of these six principles and extrapolated from them implications for the design of learning that would allow for a theological education approach to be considered as an appropriate religious education for student teachers. Chapter Six concluded that a theological education approach is an appropriate form of religious education for student teachers. Such an educational approach should be an explicit dimension of the ITE of every teacher of religious education.

7.3 Recommendations for Practice

The findings of the study suggest a number of recommendations for the practice of religious education in the ITE of future teachers of religious education:

1. Articulate the distinct responsibilities that religious education in Ireland has to Church, as well as to other religious communities and worldviews, Society, the Academy, and the Person
2. Develop a conversational approach to religious education that is responsive to the Irish context but can also contribute to the shaping of the Irish context
3. Formulate an explicit rationale for the religious education of future teachers of religious education
4. Design a theological education approach to ITE that is reflected in the design of learning environments, programme learning outcomes, module learning outcomes, and the design of the content and process of modules relevant to religious education
5. Promote reflective practice in all modules through inviting students into a conversational mode of teaching and learning that brings the voices of students into conversation with each other and with the depth structures of the religious traditions they encounter
6. Evaluate the religious education of teachers of religious education in terms of the six principles for a theological education approach to religious education
7. Propose that, as ITE cannot provide teachers with the knowledge, understanding, skills, and attitudes necessary for a life-time of teaching, there is potential to consider how a theological education approach may be imagined within the context of the structuring and resourcing of the continuing professional development of teachers of religious education.

7.4 Future Research

This research is the first in the area of the religious education of teachers of religious education. Its contribution to future research lies in its articulation of some underlying principles for what constitutes an appropriate religious education for future teachers of religious education. The Recommendations for Practice outlined in 7.3 suggest possible themes for future research. This study adopted a theological framework for its consideration of the research question. Considering the same question from a sociological, psychological, and educational perspective would yield insights that would both broaden and deepen the theoretical framework that emerged from this research. An action research project on the design, implementation, and evaluation of a theological education approach in ITE would offer reliable data for the on-going reconceptualising of the framework proposed in this study. Such an action research project could suggest methods for evaluating the effectiveness and appropriateness of the six principles proposed in Chapter Six. The six principles could also act as a basis for a collaborative research project between the ITE providers in Ireland into how the religious diversity of student teachers and their experience of religion is acknowledged and catered for in ITE. A qualitative survey into the attitudes of student teachers to how they experience their own religious education would yield useful data. This data would assist the development of an approach to religious education that is appropriate and accountable to the needs of this cohort of students, both in their personal lives, as well as in their preparation for their professional lives. What is imperative in any future research in religious education is the dissemination of its findings and conclusions. As noted at various points in this study, religious education discourse has tended to remain within the discipline itself. The types of research projects suggested here have the potential to make a contribution to the general discourse about teacher education.

7.5 The Significance of the Study

This research is unique in that it is the first study of its kind to be undertaken in Ireland. It is significant for the following reasons, (i) it charts the development of the use of the term religious education in Ireland, offering insight into the complexities of the Irish context and therefore acting as a knowledge base for future research, (ii) it introduces and sustains the metaphor of the semi-permeable membrane to describe the location where religious education in Ireland occurs. This metaphor allows for an

acceptance that religious education is a textured term that is not exclusive to any one sphere, (iii) it identifies a theological education approach as an appropriate religious education for future teachers of religious education, (iv) it has broadened the insight into what would constitute an appropriate form of religious education for student teachers of religious education. The originality of the study lies in its identification of six foundational principles for a theological education approach to religious education. These principles provide a distinctive contribution to be used in addressing the design of ITE programmes, as well as the design of programmes for the on-going education of teachers of religious education. These principles have the potential to be developed in other contexts, such as ITE programmes in other countries and in other religious traditions, and may have a contribution to make for the emerging discipline of ERB in Ireland.

7.6 Final Reflection

This study has been a source of learning and discovery of meaning for the researcher, resulting in a broadened and deepened insight into her own professional practice as a Lecturer in Religious Education. This insight contributes to the development of the researcher's own reflective practice, attentiveness to context and increasing sensitivity to the validity of the multi-textured understanding of religious education in Ireland. The use of the metaphor of the semi-permeable membrane to describe the context within which religious education occurs, and the emergence of principles for a theological education approach, have resulted in 'little moments of freshness' in response to what constitutes an appropriate religious education for future teachers of religious education.

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