“Why do you bother writing those books?”

Religious Book Publishing and its Possible Significance for Lifelong Religious Education:

An investigation into how authors of religious books in contemporary Ireland understand their role and whether they view their published work as contributing to lifelong religious education

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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 Doctor of Education, is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not, to the best of my knowledge, breach any law of copyright, 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

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, John and to our children, Ben and Ava, who together have been immensely patient and understanding throughout the time it took to bring this work to completion. You have shown understanding in knowing when to listen to me and when to give me the physical and psychic space to concentrate on work. It is very impressive the difference that supportive listening, empathy, hugs and home-baking can make to an academic project! Your loving presence has lightened the load and shortened the road.

You let me sing, you lifted me up, you gave my soul a beam to travel on.

Leonard Cohen, Book of Mercy (19)

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You folded your distance back into my heart. Leonard Cohen, Book of Mercy (19)

Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Abbreviations

AOC	Any Other Comments
CCE	Congregation for Catholic Education
CT	*Catechesi Tradendae*
CDF	Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DCU	Dublin City University
EC	European Commission
ECPA	Evangelical Christian Publishers Association
ICBC	Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference
IM	*Inter Mirifica*
GE	*Gravissimun Educationis*
GDC	General Directory for Catechesis
LRE	Lifelong Religious Education
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
SGN	Share the Good News: The National Directory for Catechesis
RE	Religious Education
REDCo	Religion in Education: A Contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict in Transforming Societies of European Countries
U.S.	United States
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organisation

Abstract

Donna Doherty

"Why do you bother writing those books?"
Religious book publishing and its possible significance for lifelong religious education:

An investigation into how authors of religious books in contemporary Ireland understand their role, and whether they view their published work as contributing to lifelong religious education.

Religious book publishing has a notable presence in Ireland and beyond. However, it is an area which suffers from a dearth of academic research with "a conspicuous absence in scholarship" in what is "an enormous and uncharted field" (Smith, 2015, p. 5). If we accept that books are crucial to the educational endeavour, it is noteworthy that little research has focused on non-fiction authors who write on religious themes or linked their role to religious education that is lifelong and life-wide (Moran, 1998, p.18). It is such a deficit which this study has sought to address through investigating how thirty-four Ireland-based authors of books on topics linked to religion understand their role and whether they view their work as contributing to lifelong religious education. Each participant in this study has published at least one non-fiction book associated with religion within the decade between 2005-2015. The timeframe is significant in that it denotes a period of ecclesial, educational and societal change in Ireland and represents a time of increasing global discussion surrounding the place of religion in the public sphere (Habermas, 2010, 2013). Situated within a descriptive interpretivist paradigm and underpinned by the theoretical framework of constructivism, this qualitative study employed a research instrument in the form of a cross-sectional survey design supplemented by a number of follow-up interviews. Data was analysed using content analysis which uncovered four main themes. Research findings suggest that religious book publishing in Ireland emanates predominantly from the Roman Catholic tradition and this cohort had only limited representation from other Christian denominations. Participants defined religious writing as implicitly or explicitly God-centred, and as encompassing religion, and its dimensions, including faith and belief, the spiritual nature of living, prayer, liturgy and scripture. They understood their author role variously as supporting religious, theological, biblical and liturgical education, encouraging critical thinking, offering pastoral support and providing theological reflection in the light of Vatican II. Their purpose was also to advocate for church renewal and reform, to promote right relationship (including social, gender and ecological justice), and to foster dialogue and common cause between those of religious and non-religious worldviews in the service of the Gospel. Over two-thirds of the cohort considered themselves to be religious authors but the remainder did not, and for some, the word "religious" is an encumbered one. The findings documented seven positives and six negatives associated with the publishing endeavour with chief among the former being receiving support from others and chief among the latter revealing writing as a most demanding task. The findings also showed that participants drew close parallels between the aforementioned features of their role, their understanding of education and their conceptualisation of religious education in a lifelong context. The latter they characterised as a continuing journey of movement and development in religious understanding; a maturing of faith and "the beginning of the wisdom"; as multi-facetted and not restricted to formal educational settings and as including a currently under-developed and under-resourced adult focus. In total, seventy-six and a half percent saw themselves as religious educators, seventy-three percent believed or hoped their books had made a contribution to lifelong religious education, and contributing to LRE was identified as a priority for sixty-four percent of the cohort.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Rationale

1.0 Introduction

"Why do you bother writing those books?" was the question posed by the mother of a participant when witnessing the time, energy and sacrifice that it takes to write for publication. This mother's curiosity is shared by the researcher. As well as contributing to the title of this research study, it encapsulates the first of its dual purposes. To begin with, the study explores the role understandings and experiences of a group of men and women in Ireland who write books related to religion. It seeks to hear first-hand testimony from these authors about who they are, why they pursue publication, what themes they write about, how they perceive what they do and what they hope to achieve. It is interested in the people behind the prose and asks them to tell their story of what it is like to be an author who writes for religious publishers in Ireland.

The second purpose is to explore religious education (RE) in a lifelong context. For many, whether consciously or unconsciously, RE can be viewed as taking place between childhood and young adulthood and mainly in the institutional setting of a primary, post-primary or third level environment. As we shall see, the work of Carr (2003) and McKenzie & Harton (2002) attests to the latter. Where adults are considered, the terminology used often relates to faith development or faith formation rather than to RE (Regan, 2002; Parent, 2009). This research seeks to probe such vocabulary and perception and to frame RE as a lifelong endeavour (Field, 2010) which can occur in all or any one of the three settings of formal, nonformal and informal education (Lane 2013a, Hull, 2001; Grimmit,1973).

Book authors who write on issues associated with religion are a significant group to research in this regard in that they have a platform, through publishing their work, to share their views and insights in the public arena, and in so doing to potentially influence the thinking, the knowledge, and perhaps, the religious education of their readers. But is RE their aim? It is this possibility that draws the two strands of this research together as it attempts to uncover whether those who write books related to religion understand their work as contributing to lifelong religious education (LRE).

This chapter will set out the rationale and scope of the study, explore the researcher's personal philosophy of education and her role in relation to the research. It will proceed to set the study in context and conclude by outlining the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Rationale and Scope of the Research

Religious publishing, with its varied strands and categories, has had a notable presence in Ireland for many decades. However, there is a dearth of empirical research into religious publishing and its associated authors (Elinsky, 2005), and into its possible links to RE in particular. A similar observation can be made about a lack of academic inquiry into LRE. The term itself is conspicuous by its absence in the literature which predominantly concentrates on RE concerning children and young people in school-based or tertiary settings (Byrne & Francis, 2019; Jackson 2014; Cullen 2013). On the limited occasions when the word "lifelong" is used in relation to RE, it is generally combined with "learning" rather than with education (Grothe, 1998; Reber & Roberts, 2010). Moreover, adult provision tends to be associated with faith development (Fowler, 1981; Harris 1989; Slee, 2004), theological formation (Johnson 1994, 2000, 2010, 2011), and spirituality (Fischer, 1993; Ó Murchú, 2005). It is these areas which have attracted most attention from the academy, both locally and globally. Though adult RE as a term is present in the literature, it is an area of inquiry that is largely associated with North American-based scholars and little has emanated from Ireland nor indeed from Europe in this regard with, as mentioned, LRE appearing to be largely unseen and unmissed. Identifying the foregoing gaps demonstrates that both religious book publishing and LRE are areas which are ripe for inquiry and it is this which provides the rationale for this study. It also signals the challenge involved in pinpointing key theorists and texts.

Given the predominance of research into RE in primary, post-primary and teacher education settings, this study is principally focused on the RE which takes place *outside* of these classroom settings and is particularly interested in the adult dimension of the lifelong spectrum. As a consequence, the publishing categories of primary and secondary RE and catechetical textbooks were excluded from the research, as were participant contributions to religious periodicals and academic journals. This decision was taken in order to avoid possible over-representation of formal RE and also to place a boundary around the research. Therefore, the study involves participants who have published at least one non-fiction book in one or more of the following areas of religious book publishing in Ireland during the period 2005-2015: religious education (principally aimed at tertiary or practitioner level), theology, ethics, scripture, prayer, spirituality, pastoral care/support, church and social

commentary and liturgical and parish resources. A final category of "other" caters for those books which do not easily fall into the aforementioned classifications.

1.2 Research Question

As indicated, this research explores religious book publishing and its possible significance for LRE. It seeks to do this by investigating how authors of religious books in contemporary Ireland understand their role and whether they view their published work as contributing to LRE.

In the first place, the study addresses itself to the gap in the literature by considering possible definitions of what might be intended when referring to a religious author (Gioia, 2013) or to a religious book (Smith, 2002). It tries to uncover and name what the role of the former implies and what the aims of the latter are envisaged to be. The study looks at these issues through the eyes of the research cohort and takes into account salient perspectives from the academy. This dialogue continues with the second aim of the research as it probes how the academy and participants understand education and RE in a lifelong context and across a range of educational settings (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974). In taking this journey, the research attempts to highlight the lacuna in the literature pertaining to LRE, and aims to take a small step towards addressing the existing void while answering the question of whether authors who write on issues related to religion believe what they do contributes to LRE.

As has been made clear, this researcher believes it is important to situate the study within LRE with a primary focus on the adult. Hence this study sought participants who write largely for the adult reader. The term *education* was chosen over *learning* in this context for reasons which are explicated in Chapter 2, (*2.4.3)*. However, the conscious adoption of this term presented the researcher with a number of challenges. Alongside the need to demonstrate the gap in research into religious book publishing and how it might pertain to RE was also the need to present some of the debates around education and learning at formal level (Carr, 2003; McKenzie & Harton, 2002), extra-formal level (Fairfield 2009; Matheson & Matheson, 1996; Lee, 1971), and in a lifelong learning versus lifelong education context (Field, 2010). It also required consideration of various understandings of RE across formal and extra-formal settings (Groome, 1991; Cullen, 2013; Durka & Smith, 1976; Moran, 1998). Added to this was the need to shine a light on adult educational theories (Knowles, 1980; Mezirow, 2009) and their influence on adult RE (Elias, 2012; McKenzie & Harton, 2002). In order to cover such a vast terrain it was necessary to be selective about the debates which she profiled. Therefore, while the researcher is aware of the significance of the broader

European discussion surrounding pluralism, diversity and the place of RE in schools (ODIHR/OSCE, 2007; Jackson, 2013, 2014), since such deliberation and academic inquiry focuses most prevalently on the formal classroom, she mentions these debates peripherally and for context-setting purposes only. Since she has laid out her primary, but not exclusive, interest in the adult extra-formal sphere, she has concentrated her attention on the most relevant literature from within and without the academy pertaining to this, and includes that which relates to the faith formation of adults as an aspect of RE. This literature principally emanates from North America (Vogel, 1991; Wickett, 1991; Regan, 2002; McKenzie & Harton, 2002; Parent, 2009; English, 2009; Elias 2012; Tauber, 2015), from the United Kingdom (Slee, 2004), or from within Ireland itself (Condren, 2005; Harrington, 2005, 2015; Doherty et al, 2005, 2016; O'Hanlon et al, 2017).

1.3 The Researcher's Role

From the outset, it is important to state that this researcher has worked professionally as a commissioning editor in the religious publications industry, as part of the production team in religious and social affairs documentary-making and in the post-primary educational context as a school chaplain. In each of these roles, she considers that she was contributing to LRE in a variety of ways and across the three educational settings of formal, nonformal and informal. She acknowledges that holding this belief informs her position in relation to the research and, without due diligence and transparency, could expose the research to bias. Therefore, in Chapter 3 she has described her chosen descriptive interpretive research paradigm and been explicit about her ontological and epistemological assumptions. She has also outlined her theoretical framework of constructivism and her sympathy for contextual constructivism. She has taken steps to hold her underlying assumptions to account and to protect the trustworthiness of the qualitative inquiry she has undertaken through a range of measures which she also details in Chapter 3 and which are recommended by the academy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Corbin Dwyer & Buckle 2009, p.59).

1.4 Personal Educational Philosophy of the Researcher

Irish legend has it that the warrior, Fionn MacCumhaill, and his followers were discussing what might be considered to be the most beautiful music. His companions listed various possibilities: the song of the lark, the laughter of a girl, a soft whisper, the call of the cuckoo. The chieftain replied that though all of these were fine examples, they were not the most beautiful. According to MacCumhaill, the most beautiful sound in the world is "the music of what happens". This insight offers a way into this researcher's understanding of education. For her, it involves all that happens in life so it is not confined to one setting but, as Moran

(1998) suggests, is experienced in many arenas: in the family, the local community, the classroom, the workplace, in wider society and individually. Although contending that education can happen in solitary occupations, such as in the reading or indeed, in the writing of a book, she believes it is an essentially relational, and participative endeavour (Cullen, 2013) because a dialogue is taking place, whether that is an internal or an external one between the author and the reader. If this is reflected upon and it resonates, it may occasion change if such is desired. In this sense, the researcher is persuaded by the views of Mezirow (2009), Freire (2000, 2004) and Durka & Smith (1976a) that education in a lifelong context involves critical thinking, continual exploring, searching and grappling with questions of ultimate meaning in the service of individual and societal transformation.

It is also life-wide because it attends to fundamental human themes and the deepest joys and struggles of the heart. These are the joys experienced in family, friendship and nature and the struggles that come with brokenness, fracture and loss. She associates it with music because like music, education has the capacity to elevate the mind and spirit and open the eye and heart to what is beautiful and lasting. Like Durka (2014) who emphasised its aesthetic nature, and Dostoevsky (2004) who wrote that "beauty will save the world", she sees education as fostering much more than utilitarian or career-related ends but also embracing "the appreciation of beauty, the commitment to truth and goodness, and the exercise of imagination, memory and empathy" (McCarthy in O'Hanlon et al, 2017, p.19).

In tandem with Dewey (1916) and Cullen, (2013) she sees education as a reciprocal process whereby the learner teaches and the teacher learns. It is therefore a combination of what Craft (cited in Bass & Good, 2004) describes as educare and educere, a mutual giving and receiving that facilitates a construction of knowledge which speaks to the contextual constructivist theoretical framework of this study. It could be asked how does this reciprocity happen between an author and a reader? In some cases, it can occur through reader review or direct correspondence and conversation. Though such mutuality is optimal, in its absence, the researcher suggests that reciprocity is nevertheless inherent in the act of publishing one's work. This is so because, to paraphrase Flannery O'Connor, authors do not write only because they do not know what they think until they read what they say (Fitzgerald, 1998), they write to respond to the needs of a readership about whom they already know something. Otherwise, how could they make a response through their writing? So, in this sense the "teacher" has already received from the "learner" even before further dialogue takes place. The publisher is also party to this dialogue and is more than a conduit

who facilitates the conversation (Clark & Philips, 2014). This is the case because the publisher must always engage in attentive listening:

> 1. they must listen to what is going on in churches, communities and society and become keenly informed and reflective about how they can respond;
>
> 2. they must hear what readers are telling them they need by being conscious of what the latter are buying or borrowing - and not buying or borrowing - and asking why either is so; and
>
> 3. they must engage with what authors tell them they wish to write about, assess if this is responding to the needs of the times and commission work that can do so.

In this sense, the publisher, if it is doing its job properly, is both a learner and a teacher. As we shall see later in this study, when it comes to religious book publishing which emanates from institutionally owned publishing houses, there is an inherent danger that the emphasis may be placed on the educare aspect of education which, in publishing, can create the risk of propagandising and the closing down of opposing or differing views. Therein lies a real tension that needs to be recognised and mitigated as much as possible. All who are party to the process - the author, the reader, the publisher and the institution - need to be aware of this tension, its implications, and of the consequences if it is not consciously acknowledged and addressed.

These understandings of education as lifelong, life-wide, holistic, dialogical, relational, exploratory, open to new understanding and transformation, also inform this researcher's view of RE. She sees it as in the service of bringing to light and bringing to life the deep connection between God, self, others and the planet. In this, she is influenced by the faith development work carried out by those such as Fowler (1981), Johnson (1994, 2000, 2010, 201) and Slee (2004), and the conscientisation work of Friere (2000, 2004), which go hand in hand. For as Jesus proclaimed (Luke 4:17-19), relationship with God is not a private affair but is intrinsically linked with social justice and how faith and belief animate action for the common good. As Hellwig suggests:

> poverty is not accidental, but is the outcome of the way the human community organises itself. That organisation, and all the human decisions which go to make it up, come under moral and spiritual scrutiny. They are not outside the responsibility we have to God our Creator and to Jesus our Saviour. They come within the scope of the redemption because, no matter how complex the structures of society, in

> the last analysis they are a matter of how we treat one another, whether we really love our neighbour as ourselves, and whether we are committed to the common good and realisation of God's reign among us. (Hellwig, 1992, pp.90-91)

The challenge of the latter, and the transforming instincts of others such as Groome (1991), align with the researcher's standpoint and she sees an elucidation of such transformation as exemplified in the missionary call of *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013) with its emphasis on "service to a world that is suffering" (O'Hanlon, 2017, p.111) as well as the urgent imperative to care for our common home that roars from the pages of *Laudato Si'(*2015).

With Hull (2001) and Lane (2013a), she sees RE as a lifelong, tri-fold process of learning about, from and within religion and is conscious that learning from within is open to the same educare-emphasising pitfalls that she has already spoken of with regard to religious publishing. If learning about and from religions and beliefs is not given appropriate weight and if the emphasis is on a narrow learning from within a faith tradition, the danger this time lies in failing to respect the teaching capacity of other worldviews and beliefs, something long since recognised in *Nostra Aetate* (1965). This is not to argue that all truth claims carry equal weight but it is to acknowledge the simple fact that truth cannot be contained or appropriated by any one worldview in splendid isolation.

While formal RE in Ireland and elsewhere is engaged in vigorous debate about how best to strike the balance (Coolahan, Hussey & Kilfeather, 2012; Jackson, 2013, 2014), this issue remains a challenge for adult RE which, to date, the Catholic tradition at least, tends to equate with faith development. While it is not the researcher's intention to in any way undervalue the crucial importance of the latter, for it underpins her understanding of the human person as essentially and spiritually oriented toward the Divine (Wallis, 2016), as one who was born and raised in Northern Ireland, she understands the importance of dialoguing with and respecting difference. She agrees with former SDLP leader John Hume who, in his Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech, made a point which is important now more than ever:

> All conflict is about difference, whether the difference is race, religion or nationality. The European visionaries decided that difference was not a threat, difference is natural. Difference is the essence of humanity. Difference is an accident of birth, and it should therefore never be the source of hatred or conflict. The answer to difference is to respect it. Therein lies a most fundamental principle of peace - respect for diversity." (Hume, 1998 cited in Fitzpatrick, 2017, Appendix, p.3)

In this researcher's view, it is also a fundamental principle of RE and this is underlined in the newly promulgated *General Directory for Catechesis* (GDN, 2020) when it denotes "ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue with Judaism and Islam" as special areas for catechesis (Vatican News, 2020). *Share the Good News: The National Directory for Catechesis* (2010, SGN, 24) coalesces in stating that "openness to dialogue with all, based on the ideals of human dignity, human good, human rights, justice and respect, is an important starting point for any discussion".

1.5 Setting the Research in Context

This research is framed by the decade between the years 2005-2015 in Ireland and is influenced by four related contexts including religious book publishing, education (specifically RE), church and society. These years saw significant economic, educational and ecclesial change in Ireland. They also represent a time of increasing global discussion surrounding the place of religion in the public sphere (Habermas, 2013; Lane, 2013a; O'Hanlon, 2010; O'Hanlon et al, 2017), a development which has had considerable strategic resonance in the academy and with practitioners.

1.5.1 Religious Book Publishing

This study will show that religious book publishing in Ireland is dominated by that which springs from the Roman Catholic tradition with three religious congregations including the Dominicans, the Jesuits and the Redemptorists all operating separate publishing houses. Veritas Publications is owned by the Irish Catholic Bishops Conference (ICBC) while the former Columba Press (now operating as Columba Books) is the only independently owned publisher which focuses primarily on the religious market.

These indigenous publishers cater mainly for the Christian reader and this reflects the demands of the religious book market in Ireland up until recent decades. However, as the CSO figures given below in ***1.5.2*** show, Irish demographics are changing noticeably and it remains to be seen what impact this will have on religious publishing. Nonetheless, given the ethos of the main religious publishers, given their traditionally Roman Catholic market-base, given that the vast majority of those who agreed to participate in the study come from the Roman Catholic tradition, it is the Catholic faith community which is reflected in much of the discussion regarding publishing and RE. This outcome was dictated by the foregoing realities and by the practicalities of placing a parameter around the research.

The researcher records that she endeavoured to include more representation from other Christian denominations but those invited had to graciously decline due to the pressure of

other commitments. She regrets that she was unable to include representation from other faiths and worldviews but reiterates that this was dictated by the aforementioned practicalities. This acknowledged, as she has already intimidated, she is persuaded by the views of Lane (2013b) when he advocates for inter-religious dialogue and by those of Kieran (Byrne & Kieran, 2013) and O'Hanlon et al (2017) when they argue for a need to also respect the belief stance of those of secular outlook. Therefore, in this study, she suggests that this is something that religious book publishing in Ireland might address itself to in more co-ordinated and collaborative ways into the future.

1.5.2 Education and Religious Education

This research will sketch the changes in educational policy which have impacted formal RE in Ireland during the timeframe. Such changes were influenced by a range of European initiatives set in train by the 2008 recommendation made by the Foreign Ministers of the forty-seven member states of the Council of Europe that all young Europeans should learn about religious diversity including non-religious perspectives (Jackson, 2014). They were also impacted by a changing and multi-cultural Ireland which was less wedded to a mono-faith or belief perspective than at any time in the past, a reality evidenced in figures from the last national census in 2016 which show that:

- in 2016 Roman Catholics accounted for 78.3 per cent of the de facto population compared with 84.2 per cent in 2011.

- persons indicating 'no religion' accounted for 9.8 per cent of the population up from 5.9 per in 2011. This was an increase of 198,610 persons over the five years, bringing the total to 468,421 and making 'no religion' the second largest group in 2016.

- the twenty-five years between 1991 and 2016 have seen significant increases in the non-Catholic population, driven by not only growing numbers with no religion but by increases also in other religions.

- the fastest growing religion in percentage terms has been Orthodox followed by Apostolic and Pentecostal……among larger religions in the State, only two have an annualised growth rate that is lower than the overall change in the population between 1991 and 2016, namely Roman Catholics and Methodists. (CSO, 2016)

As intimated, the study does not seek to assess European or local responses such as the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector (Coolahan, Hussey & Kilfeather, 2012) and its range of recommendations. However, they are mentioned here so as to set in

context the published work of some of the cohort during the period in question as well as to offer some understandings of how the concepts of learning about, from and into RE impact a lifelong perspective.

The research also acknowledges that adult education (Bailey, 2016) and lifelong learning (Coolahan, 1996) received much attention at policy level during the years in question. Adult RE in the Roman Catholic context however, despite attracting significant mention in SGN which set out a framework for national and local development in this and other regards, did not keep pace with its secular counterpart and had uneven reception and implementation across different dioceses. Further evidence that adult RE did not reach the top of the priority list is seen in the marked absence of local academic inquiry into the field or into understandings thereof. The closure of long-established third level colleges offering formal, examination-based courses, alongside those offering experiential and nonformal education in various disciplines associated with religion, also added to an uncertain future for adult provision.

1.5.3 Malaise in the Churches

> The Churches…are wounded, and in the eyes of many are discredited. Their exercise of institutional power has been as flawed and destructive as that of any political or civil institution. Behaviour that betrayed the central tenants of the Kingdom preached by Jesus arguably has represented a greater failure than any in the civil domain. (McCarthy in O'Hanlon et al, 2017, pp. 22-23)

So writes Dermot McCarthy as he reflects on the changing role of the Churches in Irish society. Scandals of clerical sexual abuse and institutional abuse by religious orders, alongside the ensuing cover-ups and monumental leadership failures, have beset the Catholic Church in particular in Ireland since the late 1980s and they continued into the period under discussion. The Ferns (2005), Ryan (2009), Murphy (2009), and Cloyne Reports (2011), as well as the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry Report (Hart, 2017) and the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes (established in 2015 and due to report in summer 2020), all either published damning reports or began to investigate during this period. The colossal damage to victims, their families, faith communities and wider society that was uncovered, as well as the self-inflicted body-blow to the moral authority of the Church itself, led the poet, Theo Dorgan, (2009) to predict that "something has changed forever in our Republic." His estimation was that "the skeletal presence of the Catholic

Church in our institutions and in our mores has begun to wither away, smoke in a gale, dust in the wind".

Alongside the litany of scandals, declining church attendance and falling vocations (O'Donovan, 2015, McGarry, 2014), there existed what many viewed as a centralised culture of suspicion and reprimand at Vatican level which saw clerics and religious both in Ireland and abroad investigated and summarily silenced by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) for expressing views which the latter viewed as contrary to official teaching. During the years in question, six respected and high-profile Catholic priests were censured by the CDF, moves which caused widespread condemnation and demands from the Association of Catholic Priests for "full and unrestricted ministry" to be returned to those who were silenced or reprimanded (McDonald, 2015).

Such division between those who hold so-called right-wing and those with more progressive attitudes to orthodoxy was not confined to the Catholic Church during the timeframe. Citing Archbishop Justin Welby, Gabriel Daly (2015, p.11) wrote of the latter's fear that "the Anglican Church might disintegrate as a result of differences between liberals and traditionalists". However, Daly went on to observe that "the Anglican Church has a long tradition of 'comprehensiveness' which is lacking in the Roman Catholic Church" and remarked that since both churches face similar problems, "perhaps both… could make a sterling contribution to church unity by seeking together an answer to a situation that threatens many Christian churches" (2015, p.11).

1.5.4 The Religious Voice in a Secular Society

Daly's appeal for dialogue and unity between the churches is shared by O'Hanlon when reflecting on the challenge to all the Christian churches in a post-Catholic, divided and secular society. He writes:

> The Christian teaching and practice concerning grace, forgiveness and reconciliation, salvation and sin have emancipatory potential as applied to the situation on our island, North and South. This contribution will be more effectively realised when the churches are more fully reconciled among themselves, when they find a common voice to speak to our society. A society which is increasingly secular will not be impressed by a divided Christian voice, whatever about a properly pluralist Christian voice. (O'Hanlon, 2017, p.117)

O'Hanlon advocates for the willingness "to explore and appreciate other people's religious and non-religious beliefs and practices, not in order to adopt them, but because they are

important to our fellow human beings" (2017, p.110). Such dialogue, he says, would not confine itself to the churches but would draw from

> secular sources and religious voices, from poor and rich people, from atheists and believers, from scientists and philosophers, from poets and theologians….in the service of a more participatory democracy, social and ecological justice, and human flourishing for all. (O'Hanlon, 2017, p.7)

This call for common purpose, partnership and preaching of the kerygma from a position of both confidence and humility (O'Hanlon, 2017, p.111) has echoes not only of Habermas (2013) and Lane (2013b), but also of Dorgan. The latter, even as he predicted a waning of institutional influence, recognised the costly consequence of the erosion of the religious voice in public life:

> there is a danger that with it will go the foundational ideals of justice, charity, compassion and mercy. We can already see the damage done in our country's short-lived flirtation with mammon. We have seen what happened when the post-Gorbachev USSR turned to gangster capitalism. We would do well to begin thinking clearly, and very soon, about what we will choose for the moral foundations of a post-Catholic Ireland. (Dorgan, 2009)

The four inter-connected contexts outlined here are important for this study because the dialogue between them sheds light on what RE across the life span is for. In the view of this researcher its purpose can be encapsulated in the words of Micah 6:8 which tell us that what is asked of us is to "act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with your God".

1.6 Conclusion and Structure of the Thesis

This chapter has introduced the study, outlined the rationale and scope of the research, considered the research question and the researcher's role and philosophical outlook. It has also illuminated the contexts which influence the research. It concludes by presenting an overview of the structure of the remaining chapters contained in the study.

Chapter 2 aims to establish the research gap into which this research study fits. It opens by assessing the available literature on religious book publishing and then on religious book authors. It continues by considering understandings of religion, informed by the work of McBrien (1981), Moran (no date) and Smart (1969,1989, 1998) and others. It proceeds by reviewing understandings of education as well as reflecting on the debates surrounding lifelong learning and lifelong education. It concludes by considering perceptions of RE and adult RE in a lifelong context.

Chapter 3 details the descriptive interpretive research paradigm which underpins the research (Rossman and Rallis, 2012). It considers its theoretical framework of contextual constructivism (Charmaz, 2006) and explicates the researcher's ontological and epistemological assumptions. It explores the qualitative research desgn, (Yilmaz, 2013), describes the conduct of the research including the recruitment of the research cohort and the instruments of data collection. It considers the analysis technique employed which was that of content analysis (Creswell, 2012) and ends by discussing the means of verification which were employed to safeguard the trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Chapter 4 gives a detailed description of the four themes, thirteen sub-themes and twenty-five findings which emanated from the study.

In Chapter 5, each of the results and findings which were elucidated in Chapter 4 are brought into dialogue with the literature identified in Chapter 2. This exchange led to twenty concluding discussion points which reflect on the role understandings and experience of a significant group of people who write books related to religion in Ireland. These discussion points also illuminate the cohort's understanding of education and RE in a lifelong context and address the latter's view of whether they have contributed to such through their published work.

Taken together, it is hoped that the material considered in the chapters of this thesis makes a small contribution to knowledge and specifically to that which addresses the research questions as identified. It is the researcher's aspiration that this will be of some service in highlighting and honouring the work of the participants as well as raising awareness of the important role that they play. The hope is also that these chapters will shine a light on an under-researched aspect of RE and go some way towards beginning to encourage parity of esteem for all, including the adult, in RE research and provision.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

2.0 Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to explore the basis for empirical research into the role of authors who write non-fiction books in an area related to religion. It is also to consider understandings of education from a religious and lifelong perspective in order to illuminate participants' perspective on whether they believe their written work can be considered as contributing to LRE. It will begin by establishing the existing research gap into which this research study fits by reviewing the available literature, first on religious book publishing, and then on the role of religious book authors. It will proceed by reviewing the pertinent definitional understandings of religion, informed by the work of McBrien (1981), Moran (no date), Smart (1969, 1989, 1998) and others. Taking account of a range of scholarly contributions from theorists and practitioners whose work is salient to the research question, it will then profile understandings of education as well as considering the debates on lifelong learning and lifelong education. The chapter will conclude by deliberating on perceptions of RE and adult RE in a lifelong context.

2.1 Surveying the Landscape of Inquiry into Non-Fiction Religious Book Publishing

As will become clear, religious book publishing has generated little academic inquiry either generally, or specifically, in terms of its possible link to RE. It is true that the contributions of many literary fiction authors, among them Graham Greene (Saroha and Vasishta, 2013), C.S. Lewis (King, 2015), J.R.R. Tolkien (Brown, 2012) and G.K. Chesterton (Knight, 2000), whose works explored religious themes have received the attention of the academy. This is also the case regarding the work of poets like Patrick Kavanagh (Agnew, 2019) and the literature of spiritual thinkers or activists such as Thomas Merton (Teahan, 1981) or Dorothy Day (Brady, 2010). However, consideration of the role of non-fiction religious book authors in Ireland, which is our concern here, is conspicuously absent from the literature and this researcher has found no research which explores the role of such authors or examines the significance of their work for RE.

2.1.1 The Media of Communication, Christian Education and The Holy See

It is perhaps self-evident to state that many forms of education are dependent on the availability of the written word. It was not until the advent of the printing press and the appearance of the Gutenberg Bible in 1455 when the potential for the mass production of

books unleashed the untapped potential for the education of whole populations in the West. This invention, in facilitating the spread of ideas across Europe, is considered to have significantly contributed to the Protestant Reformation and it was arguably the Religious Tract Societies of the Reformed Tradition in Britain and the US during the 1900s who, in their energetic publication and distribution of evangelical literature, were the precursors to what we now recognise as the religious publications industry and indeed the mass media (Nord, 2004, p. 3).

Recognising the power of the communications media, the Second Vatican Council, in its decree *Inter Mirifica,* stated that:

> all the children of the Church should join, without delay and with the greatest effort in a common work to make effective use of the media of social communication in various apostolic endeavours……with the clear purpose of forming, supporting and advancing public opinion in accord with natural law and Catholic teaching. (IM,1963, par. 13-14)

It is noteworthy that the Holy See has led by example in this regard in publishing L'Osservatore Romano, the daily newspaper of Vatican City, operating its own television and radio stations and, since 1926, running its own publishing house, Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Indeed, in his Apostolic Letter, *The Rapid Development* (2005, par. 3), Saint Pope John Paul II noted that the communications media have become "the principal means of guidance and inspiration for many people in their personal, familial, and social behaviour" and encouraged the Church to recognise the new and emerging communications technologies as "an integral part of its mission in the third millennium" (2005, par.2). This message was recently endorsed by Pope Francis when calling for internet technology to be used to build rather than to threaten community (World Communications Day, 2019).

In *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965) outlining various aids to Christian education, the Second Vatican Council identified catechetical instruction as the foremost of these aids and significantly, it also gave mention to the media of communication "as a valuable contribution to the development of character and to formation" (Flannery, 1975, par. 4, p.730), a point strongly reiterated in *Communio et Progressio* (1971, par. 1-2, 16,48, 184).

Giving an insight into seminal books which have influenced him, we have also seen Pope Francis co-operate with the Milan-based newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, in order to make available "The Library of Pope Francis" (2014), an 11-volume collection of books particularly favoured by the Pontiff and containing a mix of fiction and non-fiction books by

writers including St Ignatius of Loyola, Henri de Lubac, Gerard Manley Hopkins and Fyodor Dostoyevsky, among others. Indeed, on World Communications Day 2020, Francis chose storytelling as the theme for this year's message saying "human beings are storytellers…. we hunger for stories just as we hunger for food" (2020, par.1). Describing the Bible as "the story of stories" and "the great love story between God and humanity" (2020, par.3), he speaks of Jesus as the "quintessential storyteller - the Word - himself" (2020, par. 3) who becomes the story. Francis (2020, par. 5) talks of reading scripture, the lives of the saints and "those texts that have shed light on the human heart and its beauty" saying they revive "our memory of what we are in God's eyes".

2.1.2 Religious Book Publishing: The United States and Irish Contexts

In light of the recognition of the power of the written word, it is surprising that religious publishing has attracted relatively little academic study either globally or locally. In the United States (U.S.) religious publications research is still in its infancy and has attracted only limited academic focus. While a range of commentators have deliberated on religious publishing in trade magazines like Publisher's Weekly (Griffin, 1992), in evangelical magazines (Buss, 1987), or in denominational periodicals (Shattuck,1993), Erin A. Smith notes "a conspicuous absence in scholarship" in what is "an enormous and uncharted field" (2015, p. 5). Gutjahr concurs commenting that "neither the contemporary publishing industry itself nor scholars interested in that industry have paid much attention to religious publishing in modern America. As the religious historian Martin Marty has commented, American religious publishing is "largely an invisible phenomenon" (2015, in Nord, Rubin and Schudson, p. 376).

More recent years have seen something of an upsurge in interest from church and literary historians such as Gunther Brown (2004), Gutjahr (1999) and Nord (2004) whose work mainly focuses on the evangelical religious print culture. Scheiding and Bassimir (2017) too have edited a volume on religious periodical publishing in transnational contexts but this researcher has found only one published academic paper which focuses on religious book publishing in the context of collection development in Christian college libraries (Smith, 2002), and one other which specifically relates to Catholic religious books (Clancy, 2000). No studies into religious publishing and its possible link to LRE have been identified. It is acknowledged that 2018 saw the publication of Tony Farmar's book entitled *The History of Irish Book Publishing*. While his work gives interesting insights into the censorship years

between 1929 and 1959, it does not set out to concentrate specifically on religious book publishing but is rather an overview of the whole trade, principally from 1890 onwards.

Similarly, exploration of the role of the religious book author is noticeably absent in the literature. While journalist and academic Paul Elie (2004) has written on the life and work of Catholic authors such as Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy and others, and in tandem with Dana Gioia, (2013, 2019) has also contributed to debate on the place of the Catholic writer, these deliberations have concentrated primarily on the Catholic fiction writer and therefore are outside the remit of this thesis, the focus of which is on non-fiction works.

In Ireland, however, in the unpublished academic arena, one study has been conducted at MA level by Maura Hyland, a former director of Veritas Publications. This publishing house is owned by the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference and sees its primary function as serving "the needs of the Irish Church by assisting in the articulation of the Christian message in a manner appropriate to the experience of Irish people at a particular time in history " (Hyland, 2005, p. 9). It describes itself as "Ireland's leading religious publisher" (Veritas a, no date), a claim given some credence when in January 2016, based on Nielsen figures, the Irish Times listed Veritas among the top ten Irish book publishers (Doyle, 2016). As well as RE texts for primary and post-primary schools, it publishes "over 40 books each year in the areas of theology, scripture, prayer, spirituality, parenting, counselling, children's issues, social commentary and liturgical resource" (Veritas a, no date). Hyland's qualitative study, undertaken in 2005, involved interviews with five staff members and six authors and explored the author-publisher relationship in a non-profit publishing company "with a view to discerning potential points of tension, discovering why they occur and suggesting strategies for the future" (Hyland, 2005, p.7).

While the limited nature of relevant research is noted, there is nevertheless clear evidence that religious book publishing has a significant presence. The U.S., one of the world's largest markets for religious books, is host to an array of religious publishing houses (Jenkins, 2014) which Smith (2002 pp. 3-5) divides into five distinct categories including denominational presses, independent religious publishers, university presses, general trade publishers and subsidy or vanity publishers. Elinsky (2005, p.14) observes that of the six largest general or trade publishers in the U.S. many have at least one religious imprint or are "creating significantly more faith-based titles in a response effort to the demand". Kurian and Lamport (2016 p.504) agree identifying Howard Books (an imprint of Simon and Schuster), Faith Words (an imprint of Hachette Book Group), WaterBrook and Multnomah (imprints of

Penguin Random House), and HarperCollins Christian Publishing Group (HCCP), alongside HarperOne, as the main trade publishers who operate thriving religious books divisions.

In 2014 Amazon launched a new imprint called Waterfall Press aimed at a Christian readership while in the same year Nielsen BookScan (now NPD BookScan), reported a strong year for Christian books in the US with non-fiction Christian titles experiencing a growth of almost 11.3 percent (Nielsen, 2015).

Quoting the Christian Booksellers Association, Elinsky (2005, p.6) estimated that in 2002 the Christian publishing industry in the U.S. was worth $4.2 billion in annual sales. Though slowing significantly in intervening years with the global financial crash, the Nielsen Book Scan reported a strong year for Christian books in the U.S. in 2014:

> while all adult nonfiction religious titles experienced a combined average growth of almost 8.9% between 2009 and 2014, the nonfiction Christian subcategory saw growth of almost 11.3%. The Christian nonfiction subcategory has also significantly outpaced Christian fiction, which actually posted a double-digit decline between 2013 and 2014. (Nielsen, 2015)

More recently, using statistics attributed to NPD Book Scan, it has been reported that the Christian book market earned $44 million in 2018 and an increase of $5 million on 2017 and representing seven percent of the total book market (Mekouar, 2018).

The most current research into sales of Christian titles in the US was carried out in September/October 2019 by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association (ECPA). The research considered “the reading and buying preferences of book buyers who identify as Christians”. Identifying what it called “a broad sample of U.S. Christians who buy books”, it reports on “how they discover books, where they purchase them, why they purchase them, what they read, and more”. It also uncovers their specific “Christian book and Bible purchasing and reading habits and preferences” (ECPA, 2020). Though the results of the report are available to members and industry-insiders only, it is mentioned here in that it indicates pro-activity in the US religious book industry which may offer some guidance to the Irish equivalent.

Ireland itself has a rich religious publishing tradition with a number of Catholic religious orders such as the Jesuits, Redemptorists and Dominicans all contributing to the publishing corpus under the respective publishing enterprises of Messenger Publications, Redemptorist

Communications and Dominican Publications. St. Patrick's College, Maynooth has also published the monthly pastoral journal *The Furrow* for almost 70 years, as well as the *Irish Theological Quarterly*, a refereed journal of theology and sacred scripture.

While a number of general trade publishers also publish in the areas of religion and spirituality, including Gill Publishing, Hachette Ireland and Four Courts Press among others, in the decades following the Second Vatican Council and up until 2016, the two main religious book publishing houses in Ireland were Veritas Publications, founded in 1969 and Columba Press, established in 1984. The latter was an independent religious publishing house with titles "across a broad range of areas, including pastoral resources, spirituality, theology, the arts, and history" (Columba Press, no date). Columba Press ceased trading in 2016 but its imprint was bought by Grace Communications who publish using the name Columba Books and adopt a similar though not identical logo.

Alongside these Catholic religious book publishers also exists the publishing imprint Church of Ireland Publishing which was established in 2003 in order to facilitate the publication of internal, official church documents. While other Christian denominations in Ireland, including the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches also engage in magazine publishing and internal resource provision, they are not involved in book publishing at present. For this reason, while all participants in this research emanate from the Christian churches, the overwhelming majority come from a Catholic background so it is the Catholic perspective which will be prevalent in this study.

2.2 Considering the Terms of Engagement

We turn now to consider the words and concepts relevant to the research question and explore the salient literature in these areas in the hope of illuminating the key topics under inquiry. We begin by recognising that the notion of what makes a book, or indeed an author, "religious" is debatable, that the religious author and his or her role remain undefined in the literature, and that there is little mention of what might be meant by LRE. Moreover, it is also acknowledged that education and learning are contested concepts. Consequently, it is important to try to arrive at some definitional understandings for the purposes of this study.

2.2.1 What Constitutes a Book?

Defining what is meant by a book is a task that appears to be a remarkably simple one. Clark and Philips (2014, p.3) however, observe that the undertaking is not so clear-cut as it might first seem because "the so-called 'book publishing industry' encompasses significant non-

book publishing operations, such as the publication of scholarly journals and database reference works. Added to this, they recognise the significant changes brought about by the emergence of digital publishing which now mean that "content may be published as apps, enhanced e-books, or on websites" (Clark and Philips, 2014, p.3). These issues being acknowledged, both authors accept that "for the majority of book publishers the sale of printed books still constitutes by far their largest source of sales revenue" (Clark and Philips, 2014, p.3). Thus, for the purposes of this study, this researcher proposes to employ the following concise definition of a book as being "a non-periodical printed publication" of substantive length" (Feather, cited in Smith, 2002, p.1). She adds "Christian non-fiction" to this definition in order to limit the scope of her inquiry.

2.2.2 The Book Publishing Endeavour

What then can be understood as book publishing? Smith (2002, p.1) defines it as "the complex of processes involved in making a substantive, non-serial printed work available for public consumption". It involves an array of tasks which include commissioning works many months, or even years, ahead of publication, advising authors on the structure and content of a manuscript, then proofing, copy editing, typesetting and designing the finished work, and finally, financing and organising its printing, marketing, distribution and sales. As Clark and Philips point out:

> Publishers are not printers or mere 'middle men' interjecting themselves between authors and readers while creaming off the profits. They both add value to authors' works and protect the value of their copyrights. (Clark and Philips, 2014, p.1)

2.2.3 Religious Books and Their Authors

Having established a working definition of a book and what bringing it to publication entails we must now ask what makes a book "religious"? In pondering this, Elinski (2005 p.6) notes the definitional difficulties while Davis (in Goss and Aycock 1991, p.21) contends that there can be no such thing as exclusively "sacred" or "holy" language. Marty (cited in Smith, 2002, p.1), concurs stating that "you cannot sort religious books out from history, literature, philosophy in the humanities. Nor will they stand in lonely isolation from anthropological, sociological or psychological texts". Smith (2002, p.2) holds that "a work which assesses religious belief or practice from an external, nonreligious perspective is not truly a religious book, but a book about religion" and goes on to define religious book publishing as 'the process by which religious perspectives are offered to the public in the form of non-periodical printed works".

This researcher also refers the reader to the terminology of Oates (in Goss and Aycock, 1991, p.93) who denotes the religious author as one who explores "the presence of God through writing." This definition arguably goes a little further than Smith's and embraces those who write from religious conviction as well as those who may write as empathetic outsiders but who may not necessarily hold religious faith.

Gioia has elaborated on his understanding of what makes an author a Catholic writer, limiting his observations to writers of literature, poetry, drama and memoir and suggesting that Catholic writers share a general but distinctive worldview. Since the research cohort is composed predominantly of Catholic authors, and given the paucity of academic reflection on non-fiction religious authors of any denomination or faith tradition, his remarks are worth including at length:

> Catholic writers tend to see humanity struggling in a fallen world. They combine a longing for grace and redemption with a deep sense of human imperfection and sin. Evil exists, but the physical world is not evil. Nature is sacramental, shimmering with signs of sacred things. Indeed, all reality is mysteriously charged with the invisible presence of God. Catholics perceive suffering as redemptive, at least when borne in emulation of Christ's passion and death. Catholics also generally take the long view of things—looking back to the time of Christ and the Caesars while also gazing forward toward eternity……Catholicism is also intrinsically communal, a notion that goes far beyond sitting at Mass with the local congregation, extending to a mystical sense of continuity between the living and the dead. Finally, there is a habit of spiritual self-scrutiny and moral examination of conscience—one source of soi-disant Catholic guilt. (Gioia, 2013, p.2)

He coalesces with Davis and Marty in recognising that a work can be considered religious without it employing explicitly religious or pious language:

> The Catholic worldview does not require a sacred subject to express its sense of divine immanence. The greatest misunderstanding of Catholic literature is to classify it solely by its subject matter. Such literalism is not only reductive; it also ignores precisely those spiritual elements that give the best writing its special value. The religious insights usually emerge naturally out of depictions of worldly existence rather than appear to have been imposed intellectually upon the work. (Gioia, 2013, p.2)

In associating the foregoing attributes or characteristics particularly with Catholic writers, Gioia could be challenged for being unduly narrow or exclusive, especially when one considers the work of luminaries from other Christian denominations and world faiths such

as C.S. Lewis, Fyodor Dostoyevski, Hannah Arendt, Naomi Shihab Nye, to name only a few of an innumerable list. Nonetheless, his observations are useful for the current research in terms of placing boundaries around the broad characteristics of the religious author in a study where delimiting is necessary and unavoidable.

Further, and borrowing from a tri-fold understanding of RE, the religious author could be said to be one whose writing facilitates, in part or in full, the learning about, the learning from and the learning into religion and beliefs (Lane, 2013a, pp. 22-29). We will consider this terminology further later in this chapter, but for now, this researcher suggests that it is a useful way of conceptualising aspects of what a religious author might have in mind.

Crucial to the work of book publishers is the output of these authors whose books form part of "the oldest communication technology with central importance to the cultural, intellectual and educational life of a nation" (Altbach, no date). Not alone this, but it could be argued that what authors produce is the original form of distance learning which preceded, and indeed facilitated, the print-based correspondence course or what some scholars refer to as "first generation distance education" for adults (Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner, 2007, p.39; Frye, 2012, p.14). If we accept the argument, it is interesting that it seems that no specific research has specifically focused on their role nor linked it (whether they write on RE, theology, spirituality, scripture, liturgy or any other category of religious publishing) to LRE.

2.2.4 Defining Religion

While a concise definition of what makes a book or author religious may be opaque and somewhat challenging to isolate, defining religion itself has long been the subject of academic debate so taking cognisance of this may help to further illuminate our discussion of the "religious" book. Through the ages, the concept of religion has been explored by various branches of theology (Häring, 1963; Barth, 2019; Tillich, 1969; Rahner, 1982; Schüssler Fiorenza, 2012), sociology (Durkheim, 1912; Marx,1970; Bellah, 1969); cultural anthropology (Geertz, 1973), psychology (Erikson, 1958; Fromm, 1950; Otto, 1958) and many others. It is beyond the scope of this literature review to consider each specialism in any detail. However, this researcher concurs with McBrien that "no definition of religion can ignore any of these methods but must take each into account since religion 'denotes properly a relation to God'" (Summa Theologica II-II q.81, a.1 in McBrien, 1981, p. 250) and "has to do with the whole of human existence". Defining religion as "an individual, social, and institutional manifestation of some *explicit* faith in God", he states:

> God's presence touches the whole person in the totality of the person's relationships not only with God but with all other persons, and with the whole cosmic order as well. Religion is the whole complexus of attitudes, convictions, emotions, gestures, rituals, beliefs, and institutions by which we come to terms with and express our most fundamental relationship with *Reality* (God and the created order, perceived as coming forth from God's created hand). That relationship is disclosed by a process we have called revelation. Religion, therefore, is our (more or less) structured response to revelation….
>
> Religion presupposes and flows from faith. One is not religious who does not think there is more to reality than meets the eye. The religious person believes himself or herself to be in touch with another dimension, with "the beyond in the midst of life (Bonhoeffer). (McBrien, 1981, p.251)

2.2.5 God-talk and What God is Imagined to Be

The literature is replete with attempts to put words on this "beyond in the midst of life". In recent decades the efforts of a range of feminist thinkers and theologians to re-form language and symbol out of their own experience of God which balance images of God as "Ruler, King, Almighty Father" have become prominent (Thurston, 1995, p.80).

In surveying these efforts, it is important to note that no overarching schema which seeks to replace or neatly swop familiar forms of patriarchal language with an exclusively female lexicon is to be found and just as Thomas Aquinas argued for "the necessity of giving to God many names" (Pegis, 1955), theorists have uncovered "an embracing unity of multiplicity of many images" which show an "endless unfolding of God", ideas developed by Marcia Falk and Sallie McFague and Judith Plaskow (Grey, 2001, p. 38).

Aware of the limitations and non-literal nature of all God-language, many point to biblical images such as Light, Way, Bread, Word and Vine, Truth and Justice. A wealth of female images of God also emanate from within scripture: from the woman in labour (Is 42: 1- 4), to the woman will never abandon her children (Is. 42: 14), the woman pursuing her lover in Song of Songs (2:14), to Jesus' image of a hen brooding over her chicks and the tenacity of the woman searching for a lost coin (Lk 15: 8-10).

In her writing, Johnson acknowledges the core Christian heritage which speaks of God in Trinitarian language (2000, p.19) but also reminds us that tradition teaches us that no naming of God was meant to be taken as a literal formula and notes that scripture, early Christian writers and medieval mystics, as well as Jesus himself, all used female metaphor. A potent image favoured by her is that of Holy Wisdom or Sophia whom she describes as:

> the most developed personification of God's presence and activity in the Hebrew Scriptures …. The biblical depiction of Wisdom is consistently female, casting her as sister, mother, female beloved, chef and hostess, preacher, judge, liberator, establisher of justice, and a myriad of other female roles wherein she symbolizes the transcendent power ordering and delighting in the world. (Johnson, 1994 p. 87)

Elsewhere she speaks of God as "incomprehensible mystery" and "love beyond imagining" (2011) while for Condren, her God language finds expression in ethical questioning and praxis:

> For many, the words 'God' or 'Soul' function as nouns. For others, they are verbs. For me, the words 'God' and 'soul' are questions I give to my attempts to live with integrity. I suspect that any answers will be found, not in metaphysical speculation, but in ethics and praxis. Furthermore, an attempt to concretise, control or petrify divine imagery closes off the questions and consolidates relations of power. (Condren, 2005, p.44)

Womanist theology, which emerged as a critique of feminist theology (Grey, 2001, p.63), favours motherly, relational images of God and these too are taken up by Thurston using a womb metaphor in her own work (1995, p. 25). While the "rehem" or womb image is one on which Johnson also writes, other scholars see echoes of essentialism reflected in the imagery, a feature which goes too close to the stereotyping of roles for some feminists. (Grey 2001, pp 26-28). Nonetheless, the relationality and nurturing these images imply are also themes that Slee (2004, p.96) stresses. In her study involving thirty women belonging to, or on the edges of the Christian tradition, she identified a number of processes and patterns that were meaning-making in women's faith lives. She defined relationality as a "generative pattern" for women whose "identity, development and spirituality are embedded in a strong sense of connectedness to the other" (2004, p.159). This is not a simplistic or essentialising notion of relationality that gives women primary responsibility for caring and nurturing, but is a more all-encompassing "fundamental epistemology which underlies and undergirds the whole of a woman's spiritual journey" (2004, p.160). As we shall see in our research, though not expressed in female imagery, God is seen in comparable ways as a God of connection who asks believers to be co-creators, co-nurturers, co-responsible and relational, one to the other, locally and globally, in the pursuit of right relationship.

2.2.6 Moran on What Religion Denotes

Returning to understandings of religion, Gabriel Moran (no date, p.1) observes that "a 1912 book, *Psychological Study of Religion*, offered 50 definitions" of the term and underlines the

ambiguity of the word's usage. He points to two main but different understandings. The first was that which pertained from Cicero up until the sixteenth century and saw religion as

> a set of (true) practices of worship; what is false is simply not religion. Augustine, in his *On True Religion*, not surprisingly says that (the true) religion, which has existed since the beginning of the world, is now called Christian. (Moran, no date, p. 1)

The second understanding, which Moran says was a "near reversal in the meaning of religion", occurred between 1575 and 1625 and the occasion was "when someone first referred to Protestant religion and Catholic religion.":

> That distinction gave religion the meaning of different groups that claimed to possess true religion. The term religion now existed in the plural. In this new meaning of religion, the name referred to organizations or institutions. The old meaning of practices lived on; "true religion" might be claimed as the possession of Catholic or Protestant religions, or indeed by Jewish or Muslim religions. These new religions were political, social, economic institutions that contained "religion" in the older sense of the word. Both meanings float about in discussions of religion and are the source of constant confusion. (Moran, no date, p. 2)

2.2.7 Smart's Dimensions of Religion

The pioneer of religious studies, Ninian Smart, has variously categorised between six and eight main dimensions that are found to a greater or lesser degree in all religions. Arguably, these marry the old and new understandings of religion as outlined by Moran and include "ritual, mythological, doctrinal, ethical, social, and experiential" which he first identified in *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (1969), adding the "material" dimension over time (1989) and then the "political" in his later work (1998). The latter dimension has received less recognition since, it is argued, it was given inadequate attention by Smart, thus making it "rather ineffectual" while appearing to cover similar territory to his ethical dimension (Rennie, 1999, p.64). Hence, most attention has been devoted to his seven dimensions and it is to these we will refer here. The ritual or practical dimension includes acts of worship and private or communal prayer that "bring members into the sphere of the holy" (Elias, 2012). The mythological or narrative dimension refers to the stories that "bring out something concerning the invisible world" (Smart, 1969, p. 29), narrate the community's history and offer guidance on how life should be lived. The doctrinal or philosophical element denotes "the attempt to give system, clarity, and intellectual power to what is revealed through the mythological and symbolic language of religious faith and ritual" (Smart, 1969, p.19). Elias notes that

> these doctrines go beyond the myths and stories to offer explanations or interpretations of human life and events often of a rigorously intellectual nature. The theologians of some religions at times offer extensive explanations and systematic treatment of both central and peripheral beliefs of the community. (Elias, 2012, p.7)

The ethical or legal dimension of religion comprises the teachings, codes, laws, rules and regulations which, duly observed, generate an honourable, well-lived life. The social or organisational dimension includes the way the religion institutionalises or organises itself in terms of leadership and structures and how it interacts with the society in which it is located. The experiential or emotional dimension refers to the religious experience of members which may be described as **"**awe, dread, guilt, devotion, conversion, liberation, ecstasy, inner peace, and bliss" (Elias, 2012, p.7). The final material or artistic dimension refers to physical or aesthetic such as places of worship, works of art or sacred music.

Smart's work has been heavily criticised by some scholars of religion such a**s** Fitzgerald (2000), Barnes (2007) and Eaghll, (2017 p.129) who see it as being too aligned with the promotion of ecumenical theology and phenomenology and as lacking in critical analysis. Anthropologist Talal Asad (1993) argues that

> there can be no universal definition of religion, not only because its constitutional elements and relationships are historically specific, but because that definition is itself the historical product of discursive processes. (Asad, 1993, p. 9)

Bruce, however, challenges this argument by observing that

> the origins and development of a concept have no necessary bearing on the reality it purports to comprehend because discovery is not the same as invention. Newton's discovery of gravity was a 'historical product of discursive processes' but prior to its discovery people did not have trouble adhering to the earth's surface. (Bruce, 2011, p.108)

Sociologists are divided in their discussion of this topic along functional and substantive lines. Marx and Durkheim concentrated on the functional or consequential definitions of religion, the former famously seeing it as "the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people" (in McKinnon, 2005), with the latter defining it as a unifying force in the following terms:

> religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden -- beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them. (Durkheim, 1912, p.62)

Bruce (2011, p.112) however, focuses less on what religion achieves and offers a substantive definition of its core elements stating that religion "consists of beliefs, actions and institutions which assume the existence of supernatural entities with powers of action, or impersonal powers or processes possessed of moral purpose".

Kieran (2013 p.23) points out that belief can be broadly understood as "a firmly held conviction or acceptance that something is true" and like the understandings outlined above, when applied to religious beliefs it "usually engages the believer in self-transcending relationship with a deity or deities". However, she also makes the point that belief refers to a range of non-religious worldviews including "atheism, agnosticism, humanism and secularism" which do not presume the sacred or supernatural. Characterising belief as impacting the cognitive, ethical, ritual, affective, physical and spiritual domains, she highlights its personal, communal and cultural significance. Importantly, she cautions that the diversity by which it is understood and experienced must be treated with respect, "for distinctive traditions cannot be treated in a monolithic fashion" (2013, p.23).

While the debate from varying perspectives continues apace, given that the writing themes of the research cohort broadly coalesce with Smart's criteria, this researcher accepts his seven dimensions as being valuable for the purposes of definitional parameter in this research.

2.3 Exploring What Is Understood by Education

We turn now to consider what the academy understands by education, a concept which, no less than religion, has generated a dizzying array of literature across the academic disciplines. Contributors to the field are legion and there is much debate, if little agreement, on what the term education actually includes or excludes. For this reason, this literature review is unavoidably selective and limited in profiling the debate.

2.3.1 One Person's Learning is Another's Education

Practitioners such as Bass and Good (2004, p.162) see value in pointing to the etymology of the word education to illuminate its meaning. Quoting Craft (1984), they distinguish between the meaning of the two Latin roots of the word: educare, which means to train or to mould, and educere, meaning to lead out. Arguing that educational policy in most Western countries has favoured educare over educere, they deem each as equally important and call for parity of esteem.

> Education that ignores educare dooms its students to starting over each generation. Omitting educere produces citizens who are incapable of solving new problems. (Bass and Good, 2004 p.164)

Carr (2003a, p.4) has little time for the educare/educare distinction, calling it "well-worn and not noticeably promising", preferring to shed light on the nature of education by exploring its links with four related areas including firstly, the relationship between education and learning. In the latter regard he states that

> whatever is learned in the course of education or related enterprises could hardly be other than a matter of the acquisition of skills, capacities, dispositions or qualities not previously possessed - although it may also be a matter of the development of already given (innate) qualities or potentialities. (Carr, 2003a, p.4)

Secondly, he notes that any learning presupposes learners or "subjects of education as well as education in subjects". Thirdly, he considers the links between education, learning and teaching stating that "learning is often assumed (rightly or wrongly) to be a causal or other consequence of teaching, and the terms 'education' and 'teaching' are sometimes used interchangeably". Finally, he makes the association between education and schooling noting the tendency to "associate education with the sort of institutions in which education is held to occur" (2003a, p.4).

Throughout his writing, Carr advocates for theoretical refinement, plain prose and the avoidance of ambiguity. He is impatient with the educational philosophy of such as Wittgenstein (1953) and Dummett (1978) which shows scepticism about the availability of such refinement. He argues firmly that "disambiguation for the precise purpose of avoiding ambiguity is a sine qua non of coherent theory" and continues by claiming "it is possible to disambiguate for particular theoretical purposes in ways that do not require the formulation of strict definitions. By way of illustration he states

> With regard to education, for example, this can precisely be done by highlighting certain salient distinctions. I may not be able to define precisely either 'education' or 'learning', but I know that they do not mean the same thing, precisely insofar as I am able to point to cases of learning that are not also plausible cases of education. (Carr, 2003b, p. 197)

He qualifies this point by remarking,

> Rats, cats, bats and amoebas are all capable of some degree of learning, but we would not otherwise seriously speak of educating flatworms or of educated mice. (Carr, 2003b p.196)

Carr's demands for clarity has support from McKenzie and Harton who take a somewhat similar view believing that education

> is a process that occurs in an intentionally structured environment and involves the activity of a teacher, a learner or learners, and definite objectives that specify the manifest content of what is to be learned and the means by which learning is to take place. (McKenzie and Harton, 2002 p. 31)

Like Carr, they believe that "all education implies learning; not all learning implies education" (McKenzie and Harton, 2002, p.167) and argue strongly for a distinction to be made. They too discuss four types of learning to drive home their point. The first is random experiential learning which is unmonitored, unvalidated and takes place "in everyday activities outside of a school context" (2002, p.162). Next is other-managed or incidental, experiential learning whereby "learning occurs as a side effect of another process" (2002, p.31). The third is self-managed learning which "implies an intention to engage in a learning activity" (2002, p.165). They use the example of learning how to make a pudding where the "guidance of a teacher is not sought" and "learning outcomes are validated in terms of the learner's consequent experience" or in other words - was the pudding edible? (2002, p.165). And finally, teacher-facilitated learning which is associated with the classroom setting where "the sequence of learning is planned by a teacher or by a teacher and learners in collaboration" and where "discursive reasoning and reflection are predominant" (2002 p.166). McKenzie and Harton state that only "teacher-facilitated learning is called education" (2002, p.166) holding that "if education is descriptive of all types of learning - then education means nothing" (2002, p.166). Later in this literature review, we shall see Coombs and Ahmed (1974) use strikingly similar categories when defining formal, informal and nonformal education. This, therefore, raises the question of whether the most that can be done is to be clear about one's own operative definitions.

This researcher has some sympathy with McKenzie and Harton insofar as they see education as something that is often mediated in relationship with someone whether they are called teacher, facilitator, leader, counsellor or, taking account of our interest here, perhaps author. However, she would take issue with their narrow emphasis on the classroom or lecture room,

with its implication of aims, objectives, lesson plans, learning goals, measurements, validations and outcomes. as the locus of all education (2002, p.165-167). This emphasis does not admit as education any learning which occurs outside strict institutional parameters which, to some, seems an overly prescriptive stance. Scott calls McKenzie and Harton's conceptualization of adult education "reductionist", saying their view is "elitist and fosters a cult of professionalism" (2006, p.98). Elias takes a similar stance when referring to RE and referencing Chazan, he writes:

> Religious education is about perpetuating a religious literacy, lifestyle, and peoplehood. Formal schools are not the only venues where this happens. Religious education also takes places in homes, neighbourhoods, community centres, camps, retreats, places of worship; and through celebrations in the religious calendar, holidays, pilgrimages, group experiences, the Internet, and mentors. (Elias, 2012 p. 10)

Matheson and Matheson also challenge a view of education proposed by Lawson (1982) which is restricted to that which is "planned, intentional preparation" (cited in Matheson and Matheson, 1996, p.222). Pointing out that this narrow view excludes from education any learning that is unplanned, they say

> Contrary to popular belief, the discoverer in science rarely does so by methodical plodding, setting goals and attaining them, i.e. by what Lawson would term education. Instead s/he proceeds by intuitive leaps and by failing to attain goals. A case of the first is Einstein, much admired by certain logical positivists, and of the second, Michelson and Morley. These latter set out to find the speed of the medium through which light was thought to travel (the ether) and ended up by making the crucial discovery that the ether does not exist. In neither case would Lawson admit that 'education' had taken place. So, we might learn from our mistakes, but, for Lawson, we can never be educated by them! (Matheson and Matheson, 1996, p.223)

Fairfield also takes a more nuanced view than McKenzie and Harton arguing that

> the ambiguity of education directly reflects that of human experience in general. It is a quality that we must cope with and endeavour to clarify, but gaining clarity has its limits when the thing itself is no mere technical puzzle but belongs fundamentally to our experience of the world. (Fairfield, 2009, p. 1)

Defining education in broad terms, he calls it a transition "from relative ignorance to a condition as difficult to attain as to describe theoretically" but suggests: "intellectual agency, maturity, emancipation, or, more modestly, being informed" as possible indicators. (2009,

p. 1). Lee concurs saying education is "the broad process whereby persons learn something. Therefore, a person is always in the process of being educated at every moment of his waking life, and in a panoply of situations" (1971, p.6). Fairfield (2009, p.4) speaks of the educated mind as "open, and radically so, to new experiences and ideas that require critical reflection and, if adopted, a rearrangement of our prior opinions…..What education is not is a world unto itself, something divorced from experience outside the classroom or a realm of ideas disconnected from life".

2.3.2 The Influence of Dewey, Friere and Peters

In this latter point Fairfield draws on John Dewey who, though not without his critics, is considered by many to be "the most influential American philosopher and educationist of the 20th Century" (Sikander, 2015 p.191). Dewey's participatory, experiential methods of teaching rejected the existing authoritarian modes of his time where teachers taught and children listened. (Darling, 1994; Pring, 2007; Woods and Barrow, 2006). For Dewey, (1916, p.76) education was about the transformation of the learner through "that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience". It was also about the transformation, democratisation and social reform of society where "the common goods, among which are knowledge and social intelligence, are distributed fairly among all who participate in that society" (Berding in Sikander 2015, p.192). Dewey's emphasis was on the educative relationship as co-creative so that while "their primary roles differed - teachers transmitted established custom; students tested and sought ways to improve it - their shared purpose, the purpose of education itself, was to renew society" (Beckett, 2017, p. 383).

Writing half a century after Dewey, fellow philosophers, Paolo Freire and R.S. Peters, have too been pioneers in defining what good education should look like. Though approaching the issue from markedly different perspectives and contexts, and despite acknowledging undeniable differences between them, Beckett sees significant convergence in their respective understandings of the concept of education:

> All three begin by claiming that the dominant mode of teaching and learning limits and distorts education, describing it as subject matter operating from without (Dewey), the transmission of facts and skills (Peters), and 'narration sickness' (Freire, 1970, p. 52). Each goes on to describe a different aspect of education which the dominant mode neglects: student experience, learning and growth (Dewey), teaching for understanding and cognitive perspective (Peters), and teacher-student dialogue (Freire). And all three conclude their analyses with remarkably similar accounts of the concept of education. (Beckett, 2017, p.383)

While succinct description cannot do justice to the monumental scope and influence of these three philosophers' work, nor to the differences between them, within the limitations of this current study, the common ground that Beckett identifies between them provides a useful understanding of the participatory, co-creative, renewing and transforming forces that education is meant to unleash and these are criteria which this researcher will adopt when it comes to analysing whether religious book publishing holds significance in the educational endeavour:

> The lesson we can learn from Dewey…...a lesson taken up and explored by Peters when he based his synthetic sketch of education on the relationship between professors and graduate students, and by Freire when he conceived culture circles consisting of a revolutionary teacher-learner and oppressed students-teachers, is that, though their roles may differ, teachers and learners are, in the first instance, participants in education. And that by engaging each other, while working on problems which need everyone's attention, each bringing to the table their unique life experiences, together they can fulfil the purpose of education, which is, in a word, renewal, theirs as well as society's. (Beckett, 2017, p.388)

This assessment wins broad agreement from Groome who has defined education as

> the deliberate and intentional attending in the present to the future possibility of the total person and to the community. Education is a concerted attempt by people called educators to enable others, with themselves, to confront the limit situations of life and push beyond them. (Groome, 1978, p.10)

For Groome, education, at its heart, is a 'political activity' which influences

> how people respond to the deepest questions about what it means to be human, how to participate with others in the world, and the kind of future to create together out of their past and present. (Groome, 1991, p.106)

Gabriel Moran sees education as "a re-shaping of life's forms with end and without end" (1998, p.18). He clarifies this view by explaining:

> education is lifelong because of the tension between the two different meanings of 'end': an end to education can refer either to a purposeful direction that is always intrinsic to education or to a termination point that should always be resisted in education. And if education is to be lifelong, it has to be life-wide, that is a continuing interaction among the various forms of education. (Moran, 1998, p.18)

Such forms for Moran (1998, p.18) are "the main places where the reshaping of life occurs in relation to human purpose" including family which he sees as providing education in community; school which provides "literate knowledge"; one's job which offers education in work; and leisure which offers wisdom.

2.3.3 Views from the Irish Context

Writing from an Irish perspective, Murray also points to a broad, holistic understanding of education which is not narrowly focused on the needs of the workplace, important though skill acquisition is. Envisaging education's renewing role, he identifies five underlying elements for a philosophy of education which he names as: wholeness, truth, respect, justice and freedom (cited in Gleeson p.20). Emphasising the need for "balance and integration between the material and the spiritual, between facts and values, between preparation for a job and the development of the person" (Gleeson, 2010, p.20), he underlines his view that the purpose of education is to foster an appreciation of human dignity which serves personal and social change for the common good.

For Todd too, education is a humanising necessity:

> for it is because of our imperfection that we seem to need the civilising force that education appears to offer … Education tenders the hope that we can be rescued from the bed of destruction. (Todd, 2009, p. 1)

For her part, Cullen (2013, pp.14-16) defines education as active, interpersonal, relational, intentional and co-creative, the goal of which is "human flourishing", both personal and communal. Cullen's emphasis is on the more formal processes involved in classroom-based education. This is fitting given that her purpose was to discuss an appropriate religious education for future teachers of RE and, as Elias (2012, p.11) has pointed out, it is essential that "a disciplined study of religion, or any other subject, demands expert knowledge and skilful teachers". This researcher argues that aspects of her understanding such as active intentionality, relationality and co-creativity also apply outside the classroom setting and extend to the nonformal or informal settings.

These co-creative, relational, change-making, dignifying, civilising, transforming and renewing characterisations of Groome (1991), Murray (cited in Gleeson, 2010), Cullen (2013), and Todd (2009) echo the points of commonality identified earlier between Dewey, Peters and Freire. They are thus helpful for our purposes here in that such criteria allow us to assess whether there is convergence between them and what the study participants see as the point of their role as authors.

2.4 Lifelong Education or Lifelong Learning?

Having pointed to some of the definitional arguments around education and learning, we now turn to consider the terminology of lifelong education and lifelong learning. Here we find continuing tensions surrounding the meaning and application of terms that some see as synonymous while others vehemently disagree. Tracing its origins back to the 1960s, lifelong education (Tuijnman and Boström, 2002), as it was then called, was understood as "a comprehensive and unifying idea which includes formal, nonformal and informal learning…. so as to attain the fullest possible development in different stages and domains of life" (Dave, 1976, p.34). In their 1974 study, Coombs and Ahmed defined three forms of education as follows:

> *Informal education*….is the lifelong process by which every person acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from daily experiences and exposure to the environment - at home, at work, at play; from the example and attitudes of family and friends; from travel, reading newspapers and books; or by listening to the radio or viewing films or television. Generally, informal education is unorganized and often unsystematic; yet it accounts for the great bulk of any person's total lifetime learning-including that of even a highly "schooled" person.
>
> *Formal education* ….is the highly institutionalized, chronologically graded and hierarchically structured "education system", spanning lower, primary school and the upper reaches of the university.
>
> *Nonformal education*….is any organized, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children. (Coombs and Ahmed, 1974, P.8)

While the above definition emanates from the era before internet technology, it nonetheless provides a useful delineation with the recognition that digital and on-line learning opportunities are now included across all three definitions for our purposes here.

2.4.1 At Official Level, Lifelong Education Becomes Learning - Or Does It?

While the decades since the 1960s have witnessed an explosion in both policy initiatives and in scholarship into the nature of education and learning across all ages and stages (Faure, 1972; Delors, 1996), it was not until the mid-1990s that the term "lifelong learning" came into vogue. Described as an "overarching educational reform policy intended to address a wide range of issues" (Lee, Thayer and Mayan, 2008 p.445), it has become one of the most examined areas in the field of education (Centeno, 2011; Tuijnman and Boström, 2002). Endorsed by many governments and intergovernmental organisations including the

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the European Commission (EC) and the World Bank, amongst others (Field, 2011 p.20), it gained traction in Ireland during the education reforms of the 1990s (Fleming, Collins and Coolahan, 1999).

Acknowledging that its meanings are "many and varied", Field (2010 p.20) notes that "they usually emphasise learning as a ubiquitous process which takes place throughout the lifespan, and across a variety of life contexts…of which educational institutions are one among many". Coolahan stresses that it is

> not a synonym for adult education, but it embraces adult education as part of a radical concept of education and training for the whole spectrum of human living from the cradle to the grave. (Coolahan, 1996, p.22)

It is noticeable here that Coolahan chooses to speak of education and training across the lifespan rather than specifically using the term learning. It is also worth noting that he envisages the lifelong focus as embracing adult education rather than as replacing it. This is important and we will return to discuss adult educational theory below when exploring its contribution to adult RE.

2.4.2 Foundational Models for Lifelong Approaches

Underpinned by a plethora of lifelong approaches (Coffield, 2000; Green, 2006; Tuijnman, 2003), Regmi (2015) argues that all of them emanate from two foundational models. One is the human capital model which "views education as an investment through which individuals, corporations and nations can maximise their economic growth" (2015, p.134-5). The other, with its roots in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is the humanistic model which "aims to create a better world by alleviating social inequality, reducing social injustices and ensuring human rights for all" (Regmi, 2015, p.142).

For Dolan, the lifelong learning concept is based on "three principles which differentiate it from traditional notions of front-loaded formal education" (2012 p.464). Quoting Schuetze and Casey (2006, p. 279), she lists them as 'lifelong, life-wide and centred on "learning" rather than on "education" and on "educational institutions". However, as we have already seen, it is not always clear how either policy makers or scholars differentiate between the terms education and learning and this is no less so in this case. For instance, in its major study *Lifelong Learning for All* which gave much impetus to international educational and national policy development, the OECD's conceptual definition of lifelong learning refers

to both learning and education without establishing explicit distinctions between them, albeit seeming to imply that education is institutionally-based as

> a process of individual learning and development across the life-span, from cradle to grave - from learning in early childhood to learning in retirement. It is an inclusive concept that refers not only to education in formal settings, such as schools, universities and adult education institutions, but also to "life-wide" learning in informal settings, at home, at work and in the wider community. (OECD, 1996)

While the OECD description is not dissimilar to Coomb's and Ahmed's categorisation of informal, formal and nonformal *education* (1980) nor to McKenzie and Hart's categories of *learning* (2002), Tuijnman and Boström (2002 p.102-103) identify the change in wording from "education" to "learning" as representing an important shift in emphasis which "reduces the traditional preoccupation with structures and institutions and instead focuses on the individual. While many would see this as a positive in recognising individual freedom to identify and direct their own learning, others like Biesta are less than enthusiastic, seeing an individualistic conceptualisation as allowing governments and policy makers to place the emphasis on the economic goals of lifelong learning rather than on democratic or personal goals. In Biesta's (2006, p.170) view "learning to be" has been replaced with "learning to be productive and employable" and has become more of a duty to keep on learning than a right to be enjoyed in and of itself. In taking this stance, he has support from thinkers like Gustavsson (2002) who shares his concern that lifelong learning has been appropriated by market forces and vested interests which take what Elfert (2015, p.1) calls a "utilitarian view of education".

Acknowledging the tensions, Field (2001 p.12) takes a broad view and has this to say: "it is tempting to conclude, as some have done, that the semantic shift from 'lifelong education' to 'lifelong learning' marks a sharp turn towards vocationalism and away from emancipation…but this is to draw too sharp a line between terms that have often been used interchangeably". Field's acceptance of such interchangeability raises questions over the views of Carr (2003a) and others who see education and learning as close cousins but not as the same thing. Therefore, I note here Cropley's (1980) attempt to provide a distinction between the two in the context of lifelong learning. He defines learning as "a process of change occurring within people as a result of experience" while his definition of education is that it "involves the influences which guide or encourage learning" (1980, p.3). While not especially illuminating, the attempt at differentiation illustrates the foregoing observations

about the difficulties in definitional precision, a factor which is acknowledged by Dolan (2012) and Skilbeck (2004) and which has provoked scathing criticism from Matheson and Matheson (1996).

2.4.3 Dismounting the Merry-Go-Round

As the circular debate continues, for the purposes of this study we must set our own parameters. As has already been noted, seeing little distinction between the classification of learning offered by McKenzie and Harton (2002), and the understanding of different types of education as set out by Coombs and Ahmed (1974), this researcher adopts the latter criteria for the practical purposes of discussing the religious aspect of education that takes place throughout the lifespan, not least because seldom in the literature, or in common parlance, is RE (whether in the primary, post-primary, third level or the adult setting) discussed under the heading "religious learning" in any systematic way. Choosing to frame her study within LRE rather than religious lifelong learning is also done for the following pragmatic reasons which draw from important insights on either side of the definitional argument:

- education is a lifelong process that is not confined to the classroom (Coombs and Ahmed, 1974).

- learning is a primary goal of education so it is implicit when using the word education (Fairfield, 2009; Lee, 1971).

- while lifelong learning is the catchword of policy initiatives and the subject of vigorous research, the caution that it has become associated with utilitarian ends should not be dismissed nonchalantly. Though the human capital approach to education cannot be discounted, to elevate it above a humanistic approach is at odds with the hallmarks and aims of good education as espoused by Dewy (1916); Friere (2000, 2004); Groome, (1991); Cullen (2013) and others, whose understanding will be adopted for the purposes of survey analysis.

- Though this researcher agrees that holding rigid views in any debate can be unhelpful and it is possible here to appreciate the argument from both sides, since adult RE has not been privileged or resourced in the way primary and post-primary education has, this researcher sees value in retaining the word education for the purposes of this study. Moreover, because a range of terminology is already often used

interchangeably in the adult context such as adult RE, adult faith development, adult faith formation or adult catechesis, she sees little value in adding to the lexicon until such times as clarity of intended meaning can be achieved.

2.5 Observations on Religious Education Research

While the shortage of research by the academy into religious book publishing and religious authors has been flagged, research into RE is in better condition though scholars have highlighted gaps. Lawson writes that 'it is tempting to respond to the question of what research is needed in RE by saying, "Everything!" (2006, p.157). Acknowledging that this comment is intended to be somewhat tongue-in-cheek, he goes on to identify a need for comprehensive inquiry into theological, historical, philosophical and empirical research. In at least two of these areas he has support from Andrew Wright (2006). Other RE scholars have also addressed what they see as the pressing research priorities. Among them is English (2006) - also an adult educationalist - who calls for more qualitative research that is collaborative and practitioner-based and such issues feature strongly in her own collaborative meta-analyses of 2003 and 2005 which are tangentially related to my area of interest and focus on the content analysis of peer reviewed journals of RE. Cunnane also points to a dearth of academic research (2000, p.2) while Cullen observes a particular lacuna in her own context stating that

> 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. (Cullen 2013, p.5)

More recent years in Ireland have seen a proliferation of collaborative studies such as those brought together in Byrne and Francis (2019) and there has also been an increase in the number of doctoral graduates of RE in the Irish context. While undoubtedly significant, the bulk of the research has focused on formal primary, post-primary and third level settings and that which inquires into the adult perspective or setting remains limited.

2.6 Grappling with Terminology and Debating the Boundaries

In attempting to uncover what is understood by RE one again encounters a vast body of literature which suffers from the now familiar lack of definitional consensus. Cullen observes that the term is "contested" and "bruised" (2013 p. 6) while Cunnane laments a lack of clarity and refers to "a babel of languages". She notes that "although they possess varying meanings and different sets of assumptions, the words catechetics, religion, religious

knowledge, religious studies and religious education are judged to be synonymous, and in the literature are used interchangeably" (2000, p.2).

Renehan and Williams also acknowledge a potential for "misuse and misunderstanding" when, quoting from the *Report of the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism* (2012), they note that "a certain fluidity exists in the use of terms in relation to religious education" (2015, p.76).

In the U.S. context, Horrell has lamented that "in their efforts to articulate holistic approaches to RE many Christian educators began using language such as "formation," "faith development," "spiritual development," and "nurturing spirituality" (2018, 17). This, he worries, may have led "not to an expansion of the field but to a forgetfulness of its core educational commitments, a forgetfulness that has contributed to the development of the presents-day doubts about religious education" (2018, p.17).

In their 2009 statement the Congregation for Catholic Education does attempt to differentiate between "faith formation and catechesis" and "religious education". When talking specifically about RE in schools, it states that it is

> different from, and complementary to, parish catechesis and other activities such as Christian education or initiatives of ongoing formation of the faithful. Apart from the different settings in which these are imparted, the aims that they pursue are also different: catechesis aims at fostering personal adherence to Christ and the development of Christian life in its different aspects…..whereas religious education in schools gives the pupils knowledge about Christianity's identity and Christian life. (CCE, 2009, 17)

Both the GDC (2020) and SGN (2010) are also careful to differentiate between RE and catechesis, (2010, p.57) saying they are "distinct but complementary activities" (2010, p.59).

Nonetheless, that sacramental preparation which equates to "fostering personal adherence to Christ" continues to be within the remit of RE in the Irish primary classroom has caused some questions to be raised about the above distinctions as they apply in Ireland.

A related concern for Horrell (2018) is that RE's ability to imbibe and embrace language and insights from other disciplines within the religious domain has led to an additional and, for him, unacceptable blurring of boundaries which he believes has hindered RE's capacity to be seen as "a distinctive field of academic study". The consequence, in his view, has been

the development of a misplaced presumption that non-specialists can occupy the field. By way of illustration he says:

> I have…heard a religious education colleague identify himself as being in the field of theological education, and I know many religious educators who identify themselves as practical theologian. Additionally, I once had a conversation with a young scholar, educated in the field of religious education and now a self-identified practical theologian, who argued that practical theologians educated in such fields as spirituality, contextual theology, or Christian ethics and who have a scholarly interest in how people are formed in faith can be considered to be religious educators - even if they have never taken a course in religious education or engaged in the academic study of seminal religious education theorists or practitioners. (Horrell, 2018, p.17)

Horrell's desire to stress that RE sits "at the intersection of religious studies/theology and education" has legitimacy and soundness (2018, p18). Citing James Michael Lee's 1971, 1973 and 1985 works, he says "religious education should be envisioned as the social science that investigates the religious dimensions of life with a focus on their educational implications, and as such is a specialized form of educational analysis" (2018, p.8). Cullen (2013, p.127) also points out that "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". This latter view, however, is not necessarily incompatible with taking a broad view of who can be called a religious educator, especially if education is not seen as being confined to an institutional setting.

Perhaps part of the difficulty lies in how one understands the words intersection and specialised - for some, the former could mean a merging of roads where there is ambiguity about where one ends and the other begins; for others, it may imply an obvious boundary. Equally, the latter could be interpreted as particular and singular or it could mean highly informed in one or in a number of areas. Like so much in what we have already discussed, much of this hinges on one's perspective and so there may be value here in pointing to the work of earlier RE pioneers, Gloria Durka and Joan Marie Smith whom, it could be argued, were less concerned about protecting boundaries as about appropriating the best discoveries of other disciplines including theology, spirituality, psychology and the social and physical sciences in the service of RE. It is worth briefly considering some of their work here in terms of what it offers to concerns about demarcation lines and to understandings of RE.

2.6.1 Durka and Smith: Religious Education as the Proposing of Models Emerging from Faith and Informed by the Insights of a Range of Disciplines

Their work emerged in the mid-1970s when, not unlike present circumstances, the epistemological foundations of RE theory were being challenged by growing pluralism as well as the various responses to questions about "what do we know?" and "how do we know?" which were being probed by scholars across many disciplines (Smith in De Souza et al, 2006, p.51).

Smith posits that three different historical answers to these questions have shaped both our understanding of knowledge itself and our understanding of God. The first historical stage, lasting until the mid-seventeenth century, was that of revelation "marked by the conviction that we know only what has been revealed…God or the gods reveal to selected persons all that is needed to live a meaningful life" (in De Souza et al, 2006, p.51). The second stage, marked by realism, lasted until the twentieth century and "is characterised by the insight that we know only what we experience…. the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century led to the enshrining of this notion in the Enlightenment" (in De Souza et al, 2006, pp. 51-52). In the present age of pluralism, scholarship teaches that

> we cannot know in the classical sense. What we do is imagine and our most fruitful imaginings are called knowledge. 'Truths' seem to be no more than those beliefs about which there is consensus. (Smith in De Souza et al, 2006, pp. 51-52)

Such insights contributed to a theological milieu, arguably persisting to varying degrees in the present and characterised by

> a continuous tension between re-orientation and conservatism, between renewal of faith and loss of faith. People are afraid of losing the stabilities of bygone days, but are equally afraid of suffering a loss in their existential commitment to today's world. Many have become hesitant and doubting believers, straddling their way in a kind of borderland Christianity. (Durka and Smith, 1976b, p.57)

Seeking to address this, Durka and Smith (1976b, p. 12) proposed a theory of knowledge which argued that "faith is …the condition of our human interaction with all of reality. What we call knowing is actually a form of believing" and "what we believe is an interpretation of reality that seems to make the most sense of our experience" (1976b, p. 1). Put another way, and substituting the word "model" for our way of interpreting reality, "knowing…seems accurately described as the constructing of believable models".

Following on from this they see education as "commitment to more and more adequate models of reality" and the educated person as "one whose life is characterised by commitment to models worthy of shaping one's life" (1976b, p. 23). For them, rather than being rigidly information-centred or experience-centred, teaching is "the activity of proposing skills, information, and criteria for evaluating models" (1976b, p. 25) which are ever open to being replaced with better models. They expand on this line of thinking in their contributory volume, *Emerging Issues in Religious Education,* when they say that

> …in this framework, one cannot claim to know, information can only be proposed. Teaching styles must reflect the realisation that one does not have the truth. The attitude of proposing distinguishes teaching from preaching and indoctrination. (Durka and Smith 1976a, p.9)

> Underpinning this insight is process theology which sees faith as much more than assent to propositions or dogmas; it is itself a living process, a faith-ing. It is not fixed, but dynamic, always moving and developing. The Christian understands faith as a continual challenge to grow in responsibility and to surpass one's self. Faith-ing means never to arrive, but always to ask the further question: What more can I do? How better can I love? (Durka and Smith, 1976b, p. 73)

In their essay entitled *Challenging the Framework* they illuminate this idea further when they say:

> It seems obvious to us that the distinction between believing and faith-ing is legitimate and fruitful because faith is the dynamic which not only enables us to critique our believing but demands that we do so. It is faith that requires the construction and application of criteria to our believing. It is also faith which compels us to abandon a "good" model for a "better" one. (Durka and Smith, 1976a, p.9)

The implications of such thinking for religious educationalists was by way of a challenge to face up to the need for fresh approaches consistent with new discoveries across a range of disciplines, with each, by necessity, informed by theories of knowledge and education. This included taking cognisance of insights from developmental psychology and neuroscience about the power of the unconscious mind as well as new understandings on spiritual awareness (Durka, 2002, p.42) so that "religious education could be born from the intersection of good educational theory and sound theological study" (Durka and Smith, 1976b, p. 85). Important here is the implication that good educational theory is not the preserve of a single entity in the academy because by its very nature education cannot be corralled and therein lies an unavoidable tension. In all of this, Durka and Smith's work paralleled and was influenced by the thinking of religious education and theological theorists such as Gabriel Moran, (1967,

1968, 1970, 1997) developmental theorists such as Fowler (1981), and Erikson (1950, 1968) as well as contemporaries Maria Harris (1987, 1989) and Carol Gilligan (1982) who were writing from a feminist perspective.

With their emphasis on an expansive view of what faith implies comes the danger of relativism. To this the authors counter that "one model is not necessarily as good as another and that the criteria for judging one model over against another are, in the final analysis, aesthetic" (1976b, p.14). They claim that "a model may be considered to have aesthetic quality when the constituent elements acquire an enhanced existence because of their participation in the whole" (1976 b, pp.16-17) which in the final analysis for the Christian comes when tested against "how it affects practice, how it affects the quality and style of our living, or….the difference it makes in the rest of our lives" in terms of Christian living (1976 b, p.71).

This brief glimpse of the latter theorists' thinking is helpful to our discussion here, not so much in clarifying varying vocabularies but perhaps in leaving room to open the borders a little wider in terms of who is within and who is without them as a religious educator. Through incorporating learning from across a range of disciplines and perspectives, Durka and Smith showed themselves to be capable of embracing expansive approaches to RE in a way which evokes Le Tran's (2011, p.150) understanding of the field as an "embrace of multiplicity and paradox of meaning and form". In so doing they might be said to be bridge-builders, synthesisers and facilitators who could dialogue with, and make space for others to dialogue with controversial and challenging ideas. This too has also been the hallmark of Durka's subsequent work with women (1982), on inter-religious education (2010, p. 125), on addressing violence (2000) and in promoting the use of the arts in RE (Durka, 2002, p. 44; Durka and Smith, 1979, 1981). Echoing both the GDC (2020) and St Pope John Paul II in his "Letter to Artists" (1999), Durka has stressed how writers, poets, artists and filmmakers "stretch us to see what could and should be" (2014, p. 248). In perhaps less appealing terms, Albert Camus (1957) recognised this when he is reported to have said, "the purpose of a writer is to keep civilization from destroying itself" while Durka, in more positive language, and quoting Gabriel Moran, sees it this way: "art is a way of engaging the body, mind, and emotions in their unity, which is the long-term antidote to violence" (Moran, 2011, cited in Durka, 2014, p.248).

2.6.2 Religious Education as Dialogue for Transformation Animated by Spiritual Awareness

Anxieties over language and the tensions around boundaries noted, in the thinking of Durka and Smith, we see RE understood as an on-going dialogue and search for better ways of knowing and being in the world, which from their stance as Christians, promotes responsibility and growth. In her own doctoral research, Cullen also focuses on dialogue and concludes that "religious education is best conceived of as a conversational activity that is hermeneutical in nature" (2013, p.215). Apropos of our previous points, she sees this as especially important in the contemporary Irish setting where 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" (2013 p.214). Lane too, in common with our previous thinkers, characterises the relationship between education and religion as "critical dialogue" that involves "ongoing learning and searching for the truth" (2013a, pp. 31-32):

> Every human being is born out of dialogue into dialogue and the human is most human when he or she is *in* dialogue. Dialogue initiates a process of self-awareness and self-understanding, and dialogue is likewise the way in which that awareness and understanding is deepened. (Lane, 2013a, p.32)

Observing that this view of education has a long history dating back to Erasmus (1466-1536) and advanced in the twentieth century by Buber (1937), Lane (2013a, p.32) believes education denotes "a lifelong conversation about citizenship, participation in democracy, learning to live with cultural differences and learning to appreciate religious diversity". It involves change and reshaping in the light of shared experience and resonates with Durka and Smith's 1976b p. 23) idea of education as "commitment to more and more adequate models of reality".

Sharing a stance with what we have heard from Groome and Murray, McBrien sees the purpose of RE in all faith communities as

> to help people to discern, respond to, and be transformed by the presence of God in their lives, and to work for the continuing transformation of the world in the light of this perception of God. (McBrien, 1981, p.29)

Christian RE, which is the principal background to this research study, recognises Jesus Christ as "the great sign or sacrament of God's presence in human history" and, according to McBrien, is therefore concerned

> not only with the transformation of the individual and of the world in the light of Christ, but with the transformation of the Church, which is the primary context for our experience of God as Creator, as Redeemer, and as Reconciler. (McBrien, 1981p. 29)

2.6.3 Religious Education as Embracing Inter-religious Perspectives

RE, from a Christian perspective, needs to be neither insular nor complacent in its own viewpoints. This is evidenced in Lane's aforementioned stress on the importance of dialogue and of understanding diversity and it is a reality that has received growing attention in the academy and in civic society. It is also at the heart of Horrell's (2018, p.5) concern's that RE should not be seen as concentrating only on faith formation in a given tradition but must be "ecumenical and inter-religious, inclusive, and international". This outward looking stance is one endorsed by Jackson (2013, p..44) who sees it as an approach in the service of "tolerance and understanding". Vogel, recognising what she calls "the dilemma of balancing the desire to explore broad, all-inclusive questions of journeying in (any) faith against the need to own one's identity as a person of a particular faith" writes convincingly about the meaning-making potential available to all when remaining open to a dialogue hallmarked by generosity and a willingness to learn:

> I am a Christian…. but I am also a person who recognizes that there are many paths to faith and that my path is not the only, or even the only Christian, path. I desire to learn from others even as I hope my experience may be useful to those whose faith journeys are different from mine. (Vogel, 1991, p. xv)

She understands such openness, not as leaving the door open to syncretism, but like O'Hanlon et al. (2017), as a chance to draw from other faith traditions while holding to one's own story. She sees this as offering "an opportunity for those in other traditions to appropriate certain underlying principles and assumptions by filling them with their own faith-story content" so as to "add to the dialogue about making and discovering meaning" (Vogel, 1991, p.xv).

Lane recognises this as a commitment to not only to dialogue but also to mutuality which he reminds us was a core teaching of *Gaudium et Spes* (1965). This exchange not only applied to the Church and the world but also to

> the Church and other cultures, Catholicism and other churches, Christianity and other religions…. In effect, 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. (Lane, 2013b, p.18-19)

He also notes that the teaching and learning afforded by mutuality is now a cornerstone of all education, including RE (2013b, p.19), elsewhere making the point that "the drive behind inter-religious dialogue is a drive to understand the other" and that to be "authentically Christian will necessitate that one enter into respectful dialogue with other religions" (2011, p.18). At both global and local level, the academy has taken this advice seriously, as exemplified in the work of Engebretson et al. (2010) whose comprehensive volume on the theory and practice of inter-religious education includes seventy-two contributions written by Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Hindu scholars from around the world. Byrne and Kieran (2013) have also drawn together key practitioners and stakeholders representing all sides of the debate in the Irish context to discuss the relationship between religious pluralism and RE. This is taken further again in her 2019 work in which Kieran connects the voices of people of religious faiths as well as those of a secular, humanist, agnostic and atheist stance (2019).

2.6.4 Religious Education with Spirituality at Its Core

"Spirituality is an increasingly familiar if diffuse concept" (Tauber 2015, p.25). In recent decades it has become prominent in a way that "is reflective of a universal interest in spiritual matters" (English, 2009, p.1). English believes that although the religions have responded to this spiritual search in various ways, they have lost ground to "a wide range of spiritual expressions ranging from an amorphous, unreflected new age teaching, to co-optation of things spiritual by human resource developers…to fundamentalism (2009, p.1). Others, like Tisdell (2008, p. 29), have sought to distinguish between spirituality which she says is "primarily about an individual's personal experience with the sacred" and religion, which is "about an organised community of faith". She continues stating that "spirituality itself is always greater than that which can be described in language. When defined as a journey or an experience leading toward wholeness, everyone has a spirituality (including agnostics and atheists), but not everyone has a religion" (Tisdell, 2008, p.28). English (2009, p.5) offers the insight that "spirituality has come to be seen as somehow different and divorced from adult religious education". Alluding to the work of Ó Murchú (2005), she says "spirituality is viewed as the giver of meaning, and religion is seen as the giver of rules". This, she observes has led to an era of mutual suspicion between churches and proponents of the new age spiritualities we have mentioned. Nonetheless, she believes RE, and specifically adult

RE, needs spirituality that "aims to include all…. hence, the use of terms such as co-learning, and the deliberate attempt to break down clericalism, hierarchy, and irrelevant rule giving" (2009, p.6). For English, an inclusive approach to RE in the adult context does not overly concern itself with retaining or expanding church membership but "provides opportunities for adults to focus on their spiritual needs and their life questions, and boldly proclaims that individual members have value" (2009, p.5).

Durka (no date, p.58), referencing Rogers, argues that fostering spirituality is the primary purpose of all religious education. She envisages its core aim as "to deepen people's capacities to see and to be taken by the reconciling activity of God in our world and in our lives and to empower their capacities to participate in that activity with increasing fluidity". In placing spirituality as central, she also cites what she sees as RE's associated but more context-led aims. In so doing, she evokes the elements of religion as suggested by Smart above:

> Religious education is not primarily tradition-centred or scripture-centred. Its main purpose is not the transmission of a fixed tradition or knowledge of its sacred writings, even though these are vital to a religious community. Religious education is not primarily learner-centred or experience-centred, because its goal is not the nurturance of self-expression and personal experience of creative individuals. Nor is religious education mainly society-centred, even though working towards a just reign of God is a necessary dimension. Religious education is also not primarily church-centred, that is, it is not the initiating of members into the life of the church community. … Spirituality is at its core. (Durka, no date, p. 58)

Of relevance here, and also pertinent to advocating for a broad view of who might be termed a religious educator, Tauber (2015, p.26) gives particular mention to the work of Parker Palmer (2009) whom she notes has "encouraged adult educators of all backgrounds to honestly, passionately, and collaboratively examine the relationship of spirituality, teaching and learning". She admits that "his work does not contribute to the corpus of academic research, understood narrowly" but argues that "his extensive exploration of spirituality among adults, and with clergy and educators in particular, warrants attention" (Tauber, 2015, p.26). This researcher suggests a similar claim could be made for the work of participants in this study, some of which has undoubtedly contributed to the academic corpus, but much of which has also reached a wider readership.

2.6.5 Learning About, From and Into Religious Education

While each of these commentators agree on the transformative efficacy and "contribution to human emancipation" which RE offers (Hull, 2001), recent years have seen public opinion debate both the role and function of religion in society (Habermas, 2010), and the place of RE in schools, in particular.

Such deliberation is reflected in European initiatives which took place following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, 2001 and further subsequent attacks around Europe in the years that followed. As has been mentioned, one initiative was the 2008 recommendation made by the Foreign Ministers of the forty-seven Council of Europe member states that all young Europeans should learn about religious diversity including non-religious perspectives (Jackson, 2011). Another was the European Commission's REDCo project - (Religion in Education: A Contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict in Transforming Societies of European Countries) which took place between 2006-2009 and involved eight European countries in assessing the issues contained in its title. Alongside this was the publication by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe of the Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religion and Beliefs in Public Schools. Like the 2008 recommendation, these principles stressed the importance of teaching for intercultural understanding and balancing teaching about religion with teaching about non-religious worldviews. In tandem with the previous initiatives, the recognition behind these principles was the awareness that

> migratory processes and persistent misconceptions about religions and cultures have underscored the importance of issues related to tolerance and non-discrimination and freedom of religion or belief ….it is becoming increasingly clear that a better understanding about religions and beliefs is needed. Misunderstandings, negative stereotypes, and provocative images used to depict others are leading to heightened antagonism and sometimes even violence. (ODIHR/OSCE, 2007 p.1)

In 2014, the Council of Europe also published *Signposts: policy and practice for teaching about religions and non-religious world views in intercultural education.* Written by Robert Jackson, its aim was to assist policy-makers and practitioners in member countries with diverse circumstances to more fully implement its 2008 recommendation.

This brief outline of policy recommendations at European level form the backdrop to the Irish environment which, as the CSO figures indicate, was itself influenced by changing demographics, immigration growth during the Celtic Tiger years leading to increased multi-culturalism, a decline in the numbers of citizens who identified with a particular religion and

growing demands for plural approaches to schooling. Such changes led to calls for greater diversity of school provision to reflect a more plural and diverse society with church patrons of schools being called upon to divest the patronage of some of their sites.

Much of what caused contention is synthesised in the *Report of the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism* (Coolahan, Hussey and Kilfeather, 2012). Disagreement has pivoted on whether religion should be taught at all in schools funded by public money and if it is taught, where the emphasis should lie in terms of what it is trying to achieve. Where some argue for a neutral stance to be adopted on the faith claims of different belief systems and seek to teach about religion as a cultural reality which impacts society, others argue for cognisance to be taken of the spiritual nature of the person and wish to offer learners the opportunity to explore faith, their connectedness to Transcendence, and the place this might have in their lives, without necessarily attaching to any one faith tradition. Others then hold that it is legitimate to educate within a particular belief system and this would be the view of the Catholic Church which, at the same time, underlines its commitment to welcoming diversity, striving for inclusivity and promoting dialogue with those of other traditions (ICBC, 2008, p.8).

Lane (2013a, p.23) offers a helpful summary of what the foregoing range of views imply. He describes '*learning about*' religion which places the emphasis on "the presentation of information, facts, stories and rites" about religion"; '*learning from'* which stresses "the learning experience of the pupil" and involves "personal engagement with, reflection on and response to the religion being studied" (2013a, p.25); and *'learning into':* with the emphasis on introducing learners to a particular faith tradition… "opening up the possibility of a personal faith relationship with God" and "discovering the presence of an underlying reciprocity, relationality and mutuality between God and humanity" (2013a, pp.27-28).

These concepts of learning about, from and into religion have their foundation in the work of Michael Grimmitt (1973, 1987) whose pedagogy influenced RE practice in a multifaith environment in the UK in the 1990s and in the years following. They are also found in the interpretive approach of Jackson (1997, 2004, 2011, 2014) and the dialogical approach of Ipgrave (2013). The former "encourages a flexible understanding of religions and non-religious convictions and avoids placing them in a rigid pre-defined framework" (Council of Europe, cited in Jackson, 2008a, p.35). This approach, Jackson holds, "can be used with classes that are religiously and non-religiously diverse, and also in situations where class membership is less plural" (2008, p.35). Jackson, again quoting the Council of Europe 2008, describes Ipgrave's dialogical approach as enabling engagement "in dialogue with

other persons possessing other values and ideas" and believes it to be "especially useful in religiously and culturally diverse classes" (2008, p.35).

Hull (2001) sees value in *learning about* religion since it facilitates an outsider stance which takes a phenomenological, critical view of religion and tries "to create a purely educational religious education, one which will not be open to the charge of indoctrinating or giving an unfair advantage to any particular religion". This said, he recognises that the approach, while useful in plural and multicultural environments, has significant disadvantages in ignoring the lived experience of the learner and "often makes little or no explicit contribution to the pupils search for moral and spiritual values" (Hull, 2001). Lane agrees with this difficulty and says that in emphasising objectivity and detachment, it fails to recognise that "all religions include critical elements of subjectivity, personal engagement and affectivity" (2013a, p. 24).

Hull (2001) understands learning from religion as placing the focus on the learner with "the humanisation of the pupil" as its principal objective as it seeks to enhance "their moral and spiritual lives in a human direction which may or may not be religious". Learning about and from religion has gained much currency as the optimal model for a pluralist society in offering both information about differing belief systems and in providing for the holistic development of the learner without the risk of indoctrination (Jackson, 2004). Lane, and others such as Gearon (2012), point out that where many herald this as a strength in its intention to address complex and sensitive issues from an educational rather than a formational perspective, it may hold an inherent weakness because by concentrating on the self-development of the learner, it "fails to address…the 'object' of religion - variously called the Holy, the Sacred, the Other, or what Jews, Christians and Muslims name as God" (Lane, 2013a, p.27).

Learning into, for Hull (2001), indicates taking the insider view where the purpose is that learners "come to believe in the religion or to strengthen their commitment to it" in a manner which he characterises as "proceeding from faith to faith" by which is meant that the faith of the teacher influences the faith of the learner.

It could be argued that such clear demarcation lines, while useful for clarification purposes, do not need to exist rigidly and that there is no reason why all three approaches cannot co-exist, and do exist, in education which is faith-based and operating within a particular belief system. Such learning is also open to the critical study of its own and other traditions in such

a way as to foster freedom of choice and freedom to believe or not to believe. Indeed, both McGrady (2013 p.83) and as we have seen above, the Irish Catholic Bishops' pastoral letter, *Vision 08,* reinforce this point (2007, 4.3). So too does Lane (2013b, p.20) when he poses the question of whether it is possible to move "toward a higher synthesis of education about religion *and* education in religion? Can we not bring together a critical and creative engagement of both information *about* and formation *in* religion? Elsewhere, he answers his own question in the affirmative by saying:

> there is a logical and educational progression in learning about, to learning from, to learning into a particular faith tradition. This progression can go in either direction – what is important is the critical coherence and integration of the three-way movement. (Lane, 2013a, p. 29)

Such a view is close to the view of Moran who, in Cullen's (2013, p.18) words, sees RE as both learning "to be religious in a particular way" and as teaching "people to understand religion in as great a depth as possible".

This necessarily brief and selective overview has been useful in profiling the most prevalent understandings of RE. It has heard from theorists who are often responding to the debate as it affects teaching in the primary, post-primary or third level sectors. Since the focus of this study is RE across the lifetime, with a particular lens focused on extra-formal opportunities, we turn now to consider the literature as it addresses adult RE.

2.7 The Contribution of Adult Education Theory to Adult Religious Education

Sharan Merriam (2004, p.199) refers to the term adult education as "the glue that holds together an otherwise widely disparate field" with a diversity of settings, curricula and students which "have caused the field to be a sprawling- some would say incoherent- entity, united in the one common goal of facilitating adult learning". Bailey (2016, p.1) notes that in Ireland, as elsewhere, the meaning and raison d'etre of adult education is contested in much the same way as education. She also recognises that the years between 1997 and 2007 heralded a time of unprecedented policy development which, despite subsequent uneven governmental resourcing and implementation, saw it develop from its early roots in local voluntary, trade or religious groupings to become recognised as a key part of the wider education sector (2004, p.22-24; Coolahan, 1996). As the research findings will later highlight, the same cannot yet be said for adult RE, a deficit we will return to shortly.

2.7.1 Surveying the Theorists

Practitioners and theorists in adult RE have drawn from the contemporary theory of adult education which originates in the work of Houle (1961) who identified eleven categories of "educational situations" ranging from independent study through to mass education, Tough (1967) whose research and writing focused on the needs and style of the individual learner and Friere (2000, 2004) whose social justice or "conscientisation" approach to education influenced educational philosophy and liberation and feminist theologies from the 1970s onwards. As referenced earlier, Freire rejected the "banking" concept of education and advocated for a critical pedagogy which, like Dewey (1916) and Groome (1991), recognised the political nature of education and also emphasised the "knowing" and life experience of the learner:

> education makes sense because women and men learn that through learning they can make and remake themselves, because women and men are able to take responsibility for themselves as beings capable of knowing - of knowing that they know and knowing that they don't. (Friere, 2004 p.15)

Other influential thinkers include Knowles (1980, p.43) who developed the principle of andragogy. The latter originally defined this principle as "the art and science of helping adults learn" as opposed to pedagogy which he saw as "the art and science of teaching children". While initially viewing these two forms as quite distinct and as relevant either to adulthood or to childhood respectively, following critique from Elias (1979) and others, he later nuanced his understanding and acknowledged that they represented two ends of a continuum:

> andragogy is simply another model of assumptions about learners to be used alongside the pedagogical model of assumptions, thereby providing two alternative models for testing out the assumptions as to their "fit" with particular situations…. For example, taking the assumption regarding dependency versus self-directedness, a six-year-old may be highly self-directing in learning the rules of a game but quite dependent in learning to use a calculator ; on the other hand, a forty-year-old may be very dependent in learning to program a computer but completely self-directing in learning to repair a piece of furniture. As I see it, whenever a pedagogical assumption is the realistic one, then pedagogical strategies are appropriate, regardless of the age of the learner - and vice versa". (Knowles, 1980, p.43)

Among the strengths of the thinking behind andragogy is its respect for the accumulated prior experience of adults and its recognition of the self-directedness of the mature learner.

Wickett (1991, p.49) sees a weakness in its staying too close to the school-based learning model and comments that it also focuses on one cultural context only - that of middle-class adult learning. Brookfield (1986, p.91) too has commented on the model's weakness stating that since it was not based on empirical research "attempts to erect a massive theoretical edifice … on the foundations of a set of empirically unproved assumptions are misconceived".

McKenzie and Harton, take a softer stance noting that

> because periods or stages along the continuum of development tend to blend into one another, we must be content with differentiating them in broad terms. This is what andragogy attempts to do. (McKenzie and Harton, 2002 p.105)

In tandem with Knowles, Mezirow also focuses on the centrality of experience in his theory of transformative learning seeing the goal of education as perspective transformation through critical reflection and rational discussion on beliefs, actions, attitudes and emotions in order to bring about change. He sees learning as taking place in one of four ways:

> by elaborating existing frames of reference, by learning new frames of reference, by transforming points of view, or by transforming habits of mind. Perspective transformation…was the primary outcome of being able to critically evaluate the frames of reference that guide an individual. (Tauber, 2015, p. 22)

A complex, constructivist "meaning-making process that emerges from the way in which experiences are interpreted and re-interpreted" (Regan, 2002 p. 80), Mezirow (2009, p.22) describes it as: "learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open, and emotionally able to change". As a theory, transformational learning has many advocates, including Regan. In her own work she brings the personal transformation envisaged by Mezirow into dialogue with the societal transformation aimed at by Freire as effective approaches to adult RE and faith formation:

> The importance of emancipatory learning in adult education, and specifically in adult religious education or faith formation, is rooted in the church's mission of evangelisation. The goal is not simply enhancing membership or helping adults attain more knowledge about the faith; the goal is rooted in adults' membership in an evangelising community that understands itself to be engaged in the proclamation of the Good News and the transformation of persons and social structures to more clearly reflect God's reign. (Regan, 2002, p.80)

Others such as Howie and Bagnal, in perhaps overly dismissive tones, see Mezirow's theory as being

> conceptually problematic, except at the level of a conceptual metaphor, which latter renders its many inconsistencies inconsequential, and which explains, not just its continued popularity among educational practitioners, but also its largely being ignored as a subject worthy of serious critique. (Howie and Bagnal, 2013, p.3)

Nonetheless, his work has continued to attract many advocates, among them Kegan (2000) and also those who have continued to develop the theory in new directions such as Taylor and Cranton (2012) with some parallels also found in the work of Brookfield (1986, 1987, 2017).

2.8 Adult Religious Education: Facilitating an On-Going Quest for Meaning and Maturity

Though we have given necessarily brief mention to these pioneers of adult education, they are cited here because their scholarship has influenced their counterparts in adult RE in important ways. Mezirow (2009) and Friere (2000, 2004), in particular, in adopting a humanistic approach to adult education echo what we have heard from Groome (1991), Cullen (2013), and others above. Further, the centrality of "meaning" in Mezirow's work which has already been held as valuable by Regan, is key to the thought of Moran (Cunnane, 2000) and might also be said to have influenced Wickett (1991, p.7) who, like Regan, sees the real purpose of adult RE as being "integrated with the purpose of religion" and as an enabler of the two processes of "knowing" and "growing" in a religious context.

Noting that knowledge leads to growth, Wickett accepts that it can be difficult to separate the two processes and thus turns to McKenzie (1986) and Fowler (1981) who, like Mezirow also see "meaning" as "the critical component of the definition of these two related terms" (Wickett, 1991 p.7). For McKenzie, adult RE has three main purposes "to help individuals acquire meaning; to explore and to expand on this meaning; and to express meaning in a productive manner" (cited in English, 2009, p.1).

Fowler's Stages of Faith model, (1981) is also helpful in illuminating this crucial quest for meaning which both McKenzie and Wickett see as at the core of adult relgious education. For Fowler, faith pervades all aspects of life, whether consciously religious or not. It is a dynamic process and has seven stages denoting increasing maturity in faith which, in his

view, cannot be leap-frogged any more than can the stages of physical, emotional, psychological or moral development. As with Tillich (1969) and Niebuhr (1932), for Fowler faith is dependent upon the circumstances of our lives, on how we respond to challenge, how we are shaped by those who love us, or fail to love us, how we work out our value system, and whether we welcome or recognise initiatives of spirit or grace from God. While attracting much acclaim, it is not without its critics, some of whom have criticised Fowler for his androcentric bias, (Parks, 1990/1, p.108-109). Others, like Harris (1989) use the metaphor of the dance, speaking of steps rather than stages in faith development. These steps, though ordered and purposeful, can go backward or forward rather than in one-direction and attest to an organic, fluid process that offers an alternative to the more hierarchical regimented stages which Fowler proposes.

Like Fowler, we have seen Durka and Smyth emphasise faith as foundational to their understanding of both knowledge and RE. In this, they align with Mezirow and Freire's recognition of the student as one who "knows" and also with Slee who, in the study we highlighted earlier, placed emphasis on valuing and attending to subjective as well as objective ways of knowing (2004, p.173). To a degree, it also tallies with Groome's Shared Praxis model which has a holistic, integrative intent that he pithily encapsulates in the phrase "life to faith to life" (2011, p.262). This too is in tandem with the GDC (1997) which states that catechesis must promote a "correlation and interaction between profound human experiences and the revealed message" (par.153) for through this the gap is bridged "between belief and life, between the Christian message and the cultural context (par. 205)" (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997, cited in Groome, 2011, p.272).

Such integrative emphasis has echo in the work of adult religious educators such as Nancy Foltz (1986, p.233). who, in agreement with Elias and Lee, stress that the task of adult RE is "of bringing into harmony what we think, feel, act and live". Foltz differs in her approach by starting with tradition as her primary guide, unlike feminists like Slee (2004) who begin with experience first. However, her emphasis on tradition in dialogue with, and being challenged by, experience has perhaps the intention of arriving at a similar goal (1986, p.249-251). Elias, (2012 p.9), synthesising much of what other thinkers have suggested, posits that the goal of adult RE is maturity which "looks not only to external actions but also to interior intentions and motivations". It is characterised by stability and loving solidarity with the community to which one is connected" while at the same time being guided by the teachings

of Jesus on faith, humility, willingness to forgive others, and even love of enemies" (2012 p.9).

That education, and no less RE, cannot be seen to have end points has been highlighted by Moran in his lifelong, life-wide conceptualisation (Harris and Moran, 1998). This idea has also been emphasised in the work of Hull (1985), Fowler (1981), Tisdell, (2008, p.28), (Slee (2004) and Vogel, with the latter's1991 work using journey metaphors as model for adult learning and faith development (1984, 1988, 1991).

2.8.1 Culture and Context Shape Understandings

It is clear from what we have heard above that the adult religious educators that we have profiled here all operate from the position of being within a faith tradition which, in their case, is Christian. At this stage of the life spectrum, the debates about learning about, from and within are not so evident as they are in the childhood and teenage years. However, from what we will see below, it is apparent that some regions are more mindful of plurality and inclusiveness than others when defining understandings of adult RE. They also appear to differ in their views around whether it should operate in a formal, nonformal or informal space. These matters are illustrated in the literature by Elias' interesting analysis of the term as employed by Catholic church authorities in Australia, the U.S., Canada, England and Wales. Though dated, it is still useful in showing how context shapes understanding.

In Australia, where adult RE is described as adult education in faith, the following definition is given:

> a formal learning process in which adults assist each other to the following of Jesus in their own lives, in a way which respects and encourages the self-direction appropriate to adult growth. (1989, p.91)

Referring to adult RE, the U.S. describes an:

> intentional learning experiences that deepen, expand, and make explicit the learning in faith that is, hopefully, already part of the participative life of the believing community. They are an essential expression of the Church's educational mission that enables adults to become more fully human, more faithful disciples of the Lord Jesus. (1989 p.94)

In Canada, adult RE, is seen as

> the result of people working together to discern the needs of both the individual and the broader faith community to help adults develop in their understanding of and response to their faith. It is also the result of an

> assessment of the human and material gifts present in the community, thus enabling us to respond to the needs discerned. (1989, p. 97)

In England and Wales, the term is understood as Adult Christian education which is

> a ministry rendered by one pilgrim to a fellow pilgrim on the journey of faith. It involves a relationship, such as that one (the teacher/educator) offers the other whatever is meaningful in her/his life (her/his truth/values) in the certain knowledge that it may be of service and of value to the other. (1989, p.100)

Though space precludes elaborating on Elias' worthwhile analysis of these documents, it is valuable for our purpose here to note each individual definition so as to illustrate that emphases and understandings differ wherever one looks. All are explicit about operating within the Christian tradition with Australia, at least in its official documents, leaning towards an approach which is located in the formal setting, The U.S. and Canada take a less clear view on the envisaged setting while stressing a participatory approach which, it might be assumed, could be located in a formal, informal or nonformal arena. In England and Wales, the emphasis is placed more strongly on relationship and on the ministerial role of the teacher who offers their insight and knowledge as a service to the other. The thinking here may imply education in a formal setting but this is not made clear and so the question remains open.

In Ireland, from the Catholic perspective, adult RE is envisaged as faith development which, for most, takes place in the nonformal settings of parishes and dioceses with additional attention afforded to young adults at third level through university chaplaincies. SGN (2010) intimates that formal adult RE is directed mainly towards those in teacher training, pastoral workers or faith development co-ordinators, with distance learning potential also mentioned for parish volunteers (2010, p.213-214). Attention is given to these dimensions in this document with resource and implementation suggestions offered (2010, pp.101-217). With significance for this study, informal RE is given mention when the directory suggests that "books for adults dealing with catechetical and theological concepts in an accessible manner are essential" and that an indicator of achievement for the national and local church would be the availability of "a wide variety of reading materials for adults…to encourage them to delve deeper into their faith" (SGN, 2010, pp 216-217). This point is also reinforced in the GDC (2020) when it encourages the Synod of Bishops and Episcopal Conferences to develop "material produced on the local level….at the service of catechesis" (Vatican News, 2020).

We have seen earlier when examining understandings of education that Leon McKenzie takes the view that RE is a process which occurs in a formal setting. He understands adult RE as

> a formally structured process in which an educational agent, because of his religious convictions, enables adults to actualize their potentialities to the end that they become more fully liberated as individuals and more fully prepared to participate in bettering the life of the communities to which they belong. (McKenzie, 1975, p.14)

We have also noted in our previous discussion that Elias and Scott do not share this insistence on formally structured processes. Wickett (1991, p.26) too parts company with McKenzie on this point remarking that "the conjunction of adult education and adult RE is not immediately obvious to those who limit their definition of education to the activities which happen in formal educational institutions".

What Wickett and McKenzie do agree on is that adult RE addresses itself to both "the so-called profane needs of people or to the so-called sacred needs of people" and whether the subject matter is recognisably "religious" or whether it is "teaching the poor how to use food stamps more effectively", the intent or motivation of the educational agent is what (1975, p.14) is key. Concurring, Wickett (1991, p. 26) says that since it encompasses all of life, adult RE should not be limited to "those topics with specific religious application". He also makes the point that

> the narrow training of subject matter specialists can prohibit the understanding that religious education is capable of addressing the fundamental needs of the whole and not some compartmentalised version. Through the conjunction of education and religious experience, adults come to explore some of the most profound questions touching their humanity. (Wickett, 1991, p.26)

In expressing this view his thoughts are pertinent not only to what adult RE includes but perhaps also to our earlier discussion regarding who can appropriately facilitate it.

2.8.2 To What Degree is Adult Religious Education Available?

We have considered views on what adult RE can enable and mentioned differing views on the types of educational setting which might provide it. We now look at what the literature has to say about the attention it is afforded in practice.

Cunnane's view is that neglect has been the order of the day in this regard. Pointing to "little or no recognition of the adult population", she says:

> religious education is addressed almost exclusively to school-aged children and even at that, is considered to be an appendage to real education. Not considered to be of primary importance, schools and churches allocate a minimum of resources to religious education, while society remains unconcerned. (Cunnane, 2000, p.2)

Elias (2012 p.5) agrees, observing that "most religious organisations exert their greatest effort in the religious education of children". While he accepts that "this makes sense in terms of handing on the faith to the next generation", he also makes the patently obvious point that bears repeating, that if adults hold responsibility for the religious education of children they "can do this competently only if they are committed to and well versed in their religious faith" (2012, p.5). Miller (2005, p.224) subscribes to a similar view declaring that "Catholicism desperately needs adult education on a scale that is daunting", with Parent (2009, p.2) calling for "a critical sense of urgency" to be brought to the task. Citing Irigaray (2004), English (2009, p.3) bemoans "the inability of organized religious groups to consider seriously the challenges of modernity and to grapple with them in congregations, through adult education. She believes that many consider the adult programmes which do exist as "as static, immutable, non-feeling, non-cognitive sources of information that are oriented to the regurgitation of ideas from a past era" (2009, p.1). Part of the solution to the problem is one which speaks to the constructivist paradigm of this research, echoes the meaning-making purpose that we have discussed above, and as we will later see, aligns with significant points made by participants. Her proposal is that an authentic adult RE is "one that acknowledges the co-engagement of learner and educator, the constant state of becoming that characterizes the universe, and the key role of the adult educator in the meaning-making project". Warning against anthropocentrism, she says "whereas the God of modernity gave all meaning to humans (see Merriam et al. 2007), the God of postmodernism cannot. Hence, adult learners are compelled to become active agents in constructing meaning" (2009, p.4-5).

SGN states explicitly that RE is envisaged as being relevant to people at every stage of life and presents it as a holistic, critically reflective and transformative endeavour:

> 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. (SGN, 2010, p.57)

In recognising that it is not confined to a Church context, this document makes an important acknowledgment that it understands and accepts the tri-fold view of RE as outlined in our previous discussion. This noted, later in the document there are few further mentions of adult RE with, as outlined earlier, a preference given to faith development as "the overarching term…. to encapsulate all the different approaches to ongoing education" (2010, p.63) and indeed, an entire chapter is devoted to adult faith development. This is consistent with *Catechesi Tradendae* (CT, 1979, par. 43) which considers adult catechesis as "the principal form of catechesis" and this understanding is again reinforced in the GDN (1997, 2020). However, this emphasis does raise the question of whether the two other important aspects of what RE has to offer, which we have discussed at length, may also deserve some prominence in the adult context. This would be important so as not to lose sight of what Lane (2013a, p. 29) has earlier called "the critical coherence and integration of the three-way movement" or limit the vision of what is available to adults even within a denominational context with its own formation and catechetical purposes.

In the U.S., "the most pervasive adult RE taking place today is *informal education*" (Elias, 2012, p.10) and we have already pointed to parallels for this in the Irish context. Seeing informal education as being "less about cognitive understanding than about participating actively in various settings: family religious celebrations and festivals", Elias says that

> if informal religious education can be said to have a curriculum, it is one of experiences and values…. informal education is effective because it immerses learners in a specific religious culture: a way of living, seeing the world, eating, dressing, and relating to one another. (2012, p.10)

He describes *formal* adult RE as the "disciplined study" of "courses, sermons, lectures, directed study, discussion groups, seminars, forums, and symposia" (2012 p.10) and so includes here what Coombs and Ahmed (1974) would call nonformal education.

In Ireland, the formal RE of adults has largely been facilitated in urban centres like Dublin, Limerick and Belfast through colleges such as the new Institute of Education at Dublin City University which, since amalgamation in 2016, now houses the former Mater Dei Institute of Education, St. Patrick's College and Church of Ireland College of Education. Other

institutions, which like DCU, focus largely on teacher education, include Marino Institute of Education (an affiliated college of Trinity College, Dublin), Mary Immaculate College in Limerick, St Mary's University College in Belfast and St. Angela's College in Sligo, a college of NUI Galway. Other colleges such as St. Patrick's Pontifical Institute, Maynooth; the Loyola Institute at Trinity College, Dublin; the School of Religions, Theology and Ecumenics (also at Trinity College) and the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Mary Immaculate College between them offer an eclectic range of courses which include theological, scripture and spirituality education, amongst others. Alongside these is SpIRE (The Spirituality Institute for Research and Education), established in 2015 with the aim of serving "the spiritual seeking of people", and facilitating "the academic study of spirituality in higher education". (SpIRE, no date). University College Cork also houses a Study of Religions Department which offers non-theological and non-confessional religious education. Finally, the Priory Institute in Tallaght, Dublin, is recognised for pioneering a range of adult distance learning courses in theology, philosophy and biblical studies. In this latter regard, Frye (2012, p.14) argues that religious institutions are making increasing use of this means of learning to facilitate the education of clergy, forms of higher education and "lifelong learning opportunities for member of the laity". His belief is that "distance education and religious education go hand in hand" (2012, p.13) and his point has resonance with our earlier discussion regarding books being viewed as the one of the original forms of distance learning for adults. However, citing Rogers and Howell (2005, p.613), he observes that "despite expanding use of distance-learning by religious institutions, there has been little published on these international efforts" (2012, p.14) and it seems to this researcher that this too is an area that could benefit from research in the Irish context.

Current formal provision acknowledged, the closure of colleges such as Milltown Park in 2015, All Hallows in 2016 and the Marianella retreat centre, also in 2016, each having provided adult and faith-based education across a range of disciplines, has reduced the opportunity for on-going formal RE for citizens in Dublin and further afield.

Forms of adult RE in Ireland also occur outside the urban centres and are organised in more nonformal ways by individual dioceses, parishes, religious orders, smaller colleges and retreat centres according to local circumstances. Whether it is understood as faith development, spiritual development, theological reflection, RE, new evangelisation or otherwise, there is no doubt that much activity is happening at ground level. The latter concept, adding yet another term to a crowded lexicon, is described by Allen (2013) as the

third of "three different types of missionary effort" with which the Catholic Church involves itself. Citing Croatian Archbishop Nikola Eterović, he says that in the first place, evangelisation is understood as "a regular activity of the church, a lifelong process directed at practicing Catholics". Its second component involves "the first proclamation of Christ to non-Christian persons and peoples" and the third element, or "new evangelisation" is "outreach to baptized Catholics who have become distant from the faith…in the crowded lifestyle marketplace of the post-modern world" (Allen, 2013). While the concept of the new evangelisation and its relationship to adult RE has attracted limited scholarly attention in other parts of Europe (Stegu, 2015), this researcher had found little evidence of such in Ireland.

For decades, action to awaken the Catholic Church in Ireland to what Cardinal Ó Fiaich characterised as "the sleeping giant" of the laity (cited in Murray 2011, p.50) has been underway to a greater or lesser extent. Volumes have been written on the theme of church as a community in which all the baptised exercise priesthood, mission and ministry (O'Brien, 1994, Lyons, 1987, Cooper, 1993, Doohan, 1984, Whitehead and Whitehead, 1992). Parish renewal programmes focusing on "the evangelising parish" (Harrington, 2005, 2015) and collaborative ministry initiatives have emerged, each seeking to involve "every parishioner in the great call to build a vibrant community of faith where everyone is loved and cared for; where everyone is acknowledged as important" (Doherty et al, 2005, 2016). Programmes such as Alpha and encounter groups of every shape and form have sprung up. Diocesan synods, a favoured approach of Pope Francis which O'Hanlon (2018) characterises as holding revolutionary potential for renewal and reform, have taken place in some dioceses with the aim of "learning together" (Leahy, 2016). Movements such as Focolare, Cursillo and Communion and Liberation and others have developed alongside long-established groups like the Legion of Mary (Gately, 2012).

Nonetheless, little has been documented within or without the academy to help researchers grasp the extent or otherwise of the provision that exists, or to what degree the objectives outlined in SGN (2010) have been addressed or implemented.

It is true that as far back as 1983 attempts were made by Diocesan Advisers on Adult Religious Education in association with Veritas Publications to ascertain the type and level of adult RE that was available in Ireland. Envisioning it in broad and mostly nonformal terms they wrote of adult RE as taking place in "bible study groups, lay readers' courses, pre-baptism courses, parish renewal, youth encounter, personal development courses, Christian

awareness groups, leadership courses and so on" (Mulligan, 1983, p.656). In a letter published in *The Furrow* pastoral journal they invited readers to send descriptions of local initiatives with the aim of publishing a national directory of Adult Religious Education. It is not clear if this was ever brought to fruition and this researcher has been unable to find any record of this being so. The publisher in question, Veritas Publications, was unable to confirm that the project was brought to publication. Whatever the case, an information deficit remains.

To tackle this shortfall, since September 2018, a three-year research project, supported by The Mater Dei Centre for Catholic Education and the Presentation Sisters, North East Province, has been underway with the purpose of providing "a broad picture of current provision in adult religious education in Ireland" (DCU, 2018). Its stated aim is to conduct "quantitative and qualitative research into the educational needs of local faith communities and develop and deliver pilot projects to test new approaches to faith development, working with local faith communities throughout Ireland" (DCU, 2018). Given the gaps in knowledge about what exactly is available regarding adult provision in Ireland, and noting the emphasis on faith development within the Catholic Church, the importance of such a study cannot be overstated. Its results are awaited with interest in service of both accommodating the needs of adults and of facilitating a view of RE that is lifelong and life-wide.

2.8.3 In Search of Lifelong Religious Education

It will be noticeable in the literature that has been illuminated that the term "lifelong religious education" is one that is visible by its absence. This researcher has found that RE scholars have been slow to use the term to refer to continuing education in religion and have continued to employ terms such as adult RE, adult faith formation and adult faith development. Where the term is utilised, lifelong learning seems to be preferred, as witnessed in the work of both Rebecca Grothe (1998) and Reber and Roberts (2010).

As indicated, this researcher has chosen to use the term lifelong religious education for the reasons which she explicated in *2.4.3* above. Added to this, while all the epithets already mentioned have their own value, she is attracted to the term LRE because it offers the possibility of allowing for the three-fold process and two-way direction of learning about, from and within religion. It seems to her that this is a helpful approach in a plural society with a diversity of belief and unbelief where, as we have heard, the need to be ecumenical and inter-religious is of growing importance religiously, socially and politically. While it should be acknowledged that faith formation, faith development and catechesis do not

preclude employing the three-fold process we have discussed, as we have seen, in common usage the language of faith is often understood as mainly about learning about, from and within one tradition. Therefore, it is contended that LRE has the potential to be a semantically and operationally more all-embracing and inclusive term.

2.9 Conclusion

As has been stated, the aims of this study are two-fold. The first is to uncover the views of a range of authors who have contributed to religious book publishing in Ireland during the period 2005-2015 with regard to how they understand their role. The second is to discover if their work is considered by them to have made a contribution to LRE, and especially to the adult RE which takes place most prevalently in nonformal and informal settings.

In order to assist the first stage of our research journey, this literature review has attempted to situate religious book publishing within the context of the religious educational endeavour. It has demonstrated a lacuna in the available research surrounding religious books and their authors, alongside an absence of possible recognition of religious book authors as religious educators. It has offered a broad perspective on RE by profiling a variety of understandings of it as an educational activity which can operate in a range of contexts, with variable emphases, in the service of religious development, right relationship, and human flourishing throughout the lifespan.

In Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis, the views of the cohort are analysed and brought into dialogue with the literature on the various aspects of education we have profiled with the aim of helping the reader to make a judgement on whether the research question has been sufficiently addressed. It will also allow insight into participants' motivations, how they experience their role, and how they themselves understand education and RE in a lifelong context.

To these ends, in Chapter 3 we embark on the second stage of the research journey by turning now to consider the methodology and methods which contributed to the facilitation of a dialogue between the academy and the research cohort which, it is hoped, will make a contribution towards filling the gap in the literature as identified.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This study takes a post-positivist view of how knowledge is arrived at, a view first advocated in the work of Karl Popper (1979) and Thomas Kuhn (1962). The latter's seminal work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* popularised the discussion of paradigms and paradigm shifts. Kuhn saw all science as operating within defined paradigms which he described as "a concrete exemplar that functions as a guide to future research" (Wray, 2010, p.380). Put another way, it can be understood as "a disciplinary matrix" which influences how inquirers "should conduct scientific investigations, including theories and their applications, the method of observation…which instruments to use and how to apply them" (Devlin and Bokulich, 2015, p.2).

In this chapter, the research paradigm will be considered alongside the guiding theoretical framework and underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions. The means of cohort identification, choice of methodology and instruments of data gathering and analysis will also be described along with the safeguards utilised to protect trustworthiness and quality control.

3.1 The Descriptive Interpretivist Paradigm

This study is underpinned by a descriptive interpretivist paradigm which "tries to understand the social world as it is…. from the perspective of individual experience" (Rossman and Rallis, 2012, pp.43-44). In contrast to the positivist paradigm which asserts that reality is fixed, ordered and predictable, the descriptive interpretivist paradigm sees reality as made up of subjective, individual realities and its aim is to generate "thick description" of those realities (Geertz, 1973). As such, it relies on qualitative methods which concentrate "on linguistic rather than numerical data, and employs meaning-based rather than statistical forms of data analysis" (Polkinghorne, cited in Elliott and Timulak, 2005 p.147).

Descriptive interpretivism emanates from the philosophical traditions of Edmund Husserl (descriptive) and Martin Heidegger (interpretive). Husserl, considered to be the founder of twentieth century phenomenology, held that

> phenomenology suspended all suppositions, was related to consciousness, and was based on the meaning of the individual's experience (Creswell, 1994). The experience of perception, thought, memory, imagination, and

> emotion, involve what Husserl called "intentionality", which is one's directed awareness or consciousness of an object or event. (Reiners, 2012, p.1)

Though there is a distinction between phenomenology (the study of conscious experience), ontology (the study of being) and epistemology (the study of knowledge), Reiners, with some qualified agreement from Overgaard, contends that Husserl's primary interest was epistemological or in "what do we know as persons?" while Heidegger was more concerned with ontology or "being in the world rather than knowing the world" (Reiner, 2012, p.1). A student of Husserl, Heidegger developed the concept of Dasein, or 'Being there' and explored "the dialogue between a person and her world" (Groenwald, 2004, p.43). His focus was on unveiling the meaning of everyday human existence in the individual and social context in such a way that "both world and being are viewed as inseparable". His philosophy provides "the phenomenological researcher with the opportunity to inductively reveal meaning from the emic perspective" so that daily life can be understood as "something more layered, more nuanced, more unexpected and as potentially transformative when something is revealed of the extra-ordinary'' (Friesen et al., 2012, p. 33 cited in Horrigan-Kelly, Millar and Dowling, 2016, p.7).

A key difference between Husserl and Heidegger was in their articulation of the research process. In his descriptive model, Husserl believed that the researcher's own preconceived opinion or experiences could be set aside when describing or reporting on the phenomenon under investigation. By contrast, Heidegger argued that this was impossible because "humans are embedded in their world and the researcher cannot and should not negate their prior understanding and engagement in the subject under study" (Reiners, 2012, p.3). This researcher has most sympathy for Heidegger's view and agrees with Cullen (2013, p.13) who makes the point that "inquiry is always contextual, always interpretive, and always personal" and it is therefore difficult to claim researcher impartiality or to fully bracket bias in research. Nonetheless, with due deference to Husserl, it is also accepted that it is important to clearly acknowledge where preconceptions or prior experience may influence the research so that undue bias is minimised. This researcher also recognises the worth of Heidegger's "hermeneutic circle" of data analysis which, depending on the nature of the qualitative study, does not require the researcher to confirm findings with participants (Reiners, 2012, p.3). However, in the context of her own research, she preferences Husserl's requirement to return to participants for validation and sees this as key in reinforcing trustworthiness when it is possible to do so (Reiners 2012, p.2). In service of this, in the current study, all participants

were given sight of the results and findings prior to final submission. Each was afforded an opportunity to comment on how they were represented and to request amendments if they believed them necessary.

Though it is beyond the scope of this study to do justice to the respective contributions of Husserl or Heidegger to philosophy, suffice to say for our purposes here, the small aspects of their work which have been highlighted**,** offer guidance for the underpinning research paradigm. This paradigm, in turn, sheds light on the ontological and epistemological stances adopted in a study which hopes to illuminate something of what it is like to *be* a author of what might be called a religious book, and to reflect on whether the *knowing* which is revealed in the participants views and reproduced in their writing themes, might hold significance for LRE.

3.1.1 Ontological and epistemological assumptions

Ontology, or the nature of being and of reality, is an inexhaustible subject of discussion within the academy. At its most basic level, the debate occurs between those with a realist position and those with a nominalist perspective. Realism's broad view is that there is an independent reality which can be objectively described regardless of one's beliefs, perceptions or views:

> For the realist, the social world exists independently of an individual's appreciation of it. The individual is seen as being born into and living within a social world which has a reality of its own. It is not something which the individual creates - it exists 'out there'; ontologically it is prior to the existence and consciousness of any single human being. (Burrell and Morgan, 2005, p.4)

Nominalism, on the other hand, sees this position as too rigid, holding that reality is more complex and particular and does not believe that the naming of universals or abstract objects can be justified. The assumption is that

> the social world, external to individual cognition, is made up of nothing more than names, concepts and labels which are used to structure reality. The nominalist does not admit to there being any 'real' structure to the world which these concepts are used to describe. (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p.4)

Since this study is informed by a descriptive interpretivist paradigm and focuses on participants subjective views and opinions, it will be clear that its ontological assumption

shares more in common with a nominalist stance which holds that individuals construct their own reality out of reflection on lived experience. That is not to claim that there is no such thing as objective truth (there will always be realities which are can be argued as objectively true or objectively false regardless of perception, opinion or experience). However, it is to say that objective truth is not the only truth and that which cannot be measured, generalised or tested quantitively also has validity, and especially so when we are dealing with thoughts, perceptions and individual experiences.

The epistemological assumption underpinning this research flows from its ontological position. As can be understood from the above, a realist epistemology assumes that what we can know about it is observable and can be explored objectively with the researcher maintaining neutrality and standing apart from the research. It has traditionally employed quantitative research as a method to investigate large populations with the aim of producing explicable hard data and enhancing result generalisations (Guba and Lincoln Guba, 1994, p. 105). Emphasising measurement, correlation and causation, it aims to be "value-free, logical, reductionistic, and deterministic, based on a priori theories" (Yilmaz 2013, p.312).

This qualitative researcher however, recognises the "value-ladenness of facts" and concurs with Guba and Lincoln (1994, p.107) who argue that since "theories are themselves value statements…the value-free posture of the received view is compromised". Consequently, the epistemological stance of the current research is that knowledge cannot be claimed to solely arise from the neutral observation or measurement of objects and situations which exist "out there" (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p.4). Rather, it also involves experience and negotiated meaning and is created in subjective and partial ways by individuals who consider information based on their experiences, views, culture and context and so make an interpretation. Such a stance situates this research within the theoretical framework of constructivism which is "the philosophical and scientific position that knowledge arises through a process of active construction" (Mascolo and Fischer, 2005, p.49). The adoption of constructivism as the theoretical framework derives from the research paradigm or "basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways" each of which have been explicated above (Guba and Lincoln, 1994 p.105).

3.1.2 Constructivism as a Theoretical Framework

Von Glasersfeld (1996, p.2) describes constructivism as "a theory of active knowing, not a conventional epistemology that treats knowledge as an embodiment of Truth that reflects the

world “in itself”, independent of the knower. Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007, p. 297) describe it as a process of meaning-making as “an individual mental activity and a socially interactive interchange” which can be present in a range of learning situations including “self-directed learning, transformational learning, experiential learning, situated cognition and reflective practice”. Charmaz observes that constructivist inquiry

> starts with the experience and asks how members construct it. To the best of their ability, constructivists enter the phenomenon, gain multiple views of it, and locate it in its web of connections and constraints. Constructivists acknowledge that their interpretation of the studied phenomenon is itself a construction. (Charmaz, 2006, p.187)

Two main strands of constructivism are represented by Piaget (1972) who, in radical or cognitive constructivism, highlighted the primary, active role of the individual in constructing and appropriating knowledge from their ideas and experience, and Vygotsky (2020) who underlined the primacy of the social construction of knowledge through collaborative interaction with others. While Piaget held that the individual was the centre and locus of knowledge, Vygotsky’s contention was that knowledge must first be acquired in social contexts where, through interacting with others, shared meaning could be acquired. While differing in their emphases, both forms share much in common including the belief that reality must be represented in manifold ways, and from a variety of perspectives, so that the complexity of the world is not unduly simplified and so that comprehensive understanding becomes possible (Creswell, 2007, p.20). Such a standpoint is clearly important for educational research such as the current study when what is sought is “in-depth’ and “insight’ information” gleaned from the subjective views, outlooks and opinions of the research cohort (Thanh and Thanh, 2015, p.25).

While the academy has vociferously debated the respective merits of the Piaget versus the Vygotsky approaches (Kanselaar, 2002; Bailey and Pransky (2005), Brau (no date, p.6) sees constructivism’s strength as affirming that knowledge “is best gained through a process of action, reflection and construction” (no date, p.6). In common with this researcher, she sees value in both Piaget’s “focus on the interaction of experiences and ideas in the creation of new knowledge” and in Vygotsky’s exploration “of the importance of learning alongside peers and how culture affects the accommodation and assimilation of knowledge”. For her part, Cullen observes that the two representations of constructivism are “not easily distinguishable as individual meaning making occurs within social contexts and social contexts are comprised of individual meaning makers” (2013, p.12). In parallel with Burningham and Cooper (1999) she makes the case for a both/and perspective:

> 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. (Cullen, 2013 p.12)

In making this observation, we can recall Durka and Smith's (1976b p.12) theory of knowledge which, as we have seen in Chapter 2, describes knowing as "the constructing of believable models" which are subject to revision and adaption in the light of new information. Though clarity in discussing constructivism is made no easier when different scholars use varying terminology to denote similar concepts (Charmaz, 2006, Berger and Luckman, 1967), this researcher sees value in adopting the approach of contextual constructivism which "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" (Cullen, 2013, p.13).

3.2 Qualitative Inquiry

As has been indicated, the foregoing ontological, epistemological and theoretical standpoints signal a qualitative approach to data gathering. While scholarly definitions and understandings abound (Strauss and Corbin,1990; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Creswell 2007, p.37; Gibbs, 2007), Yilmaz captures the essential components of qualitative inquiry on which there is scholarly agreement:

> an emergent, inductive, interpretive and naturalistic approach to the study of people, cases, phenomena, social situations and processes in their natural settings in order to reveal…. the meanings that people attach to their experiences of the world. (Yilmaz, 2013, p.312)

Further, it is understood as:

> ….value-laden, flexible, descriptive, holistic, and context sensitive; i.e. an in-depth description of the phenomenon from the perspectives of the people involved… the qualitative paradigm views the relationship between the knower and the known as inextricably connected. (Yilmaz, 2013, p.312)

Rossman and Rallis (2003) in with agreement with Lincoln and Guba (1985) note that a distinctive feature of the method is that " the researcher is the means through which the study is conducted" (2003, p.5**)** so in this sense, and as we have already established, the researcher

cannot claim a neutral stance. Like Yilmaz, Rossman and Rallis underline that the learner is the constructor rather than the receiver of knowledge noting that

> the learner accumulates data, not reality itself but rather representations of reality. The learner then transforms these data, through analysis and interpretation, into information. When put to practical use - to address recurring social issues -information becomes knowledge. (Rossman and Rallis, 2003, p.5)

In their work, which largely parallels that of Creswell (2003, p.199), Spencer et al (2003, p.32) reiterate that a qualitative approach implies "a concern for micro-social processes" and "the development rather than testing of hypotheses". Such attributes, together with the features outlined above also imply "a respect for the uniqueness of each case as well as themes and patterns across cases" in what is a mainly "inductive rather than deductive analytical process" Spencer et al (2003, p.32).

As it has been established that this study is interested in the subjective experiences, opinions and understandings of individual authors of books related to religion, it is contended that the foregoing features are appropriate for this investigation in that they allow the researcher to "see through the eyes" of participants (Spencer et al, 2003, p.34) and "hear into speech" (Morton, 1985) their particular understandings.

3.2.1 Quality Control in Qualitative Inquiry

Those with an objectivist epistemology who try "to develop explanatory universal laws in social behaviours by statistically measuring what it assumes to be a static reality" (Yilmaz 2013, p.312) use certain main criteria to ensure quality in research. Such criteria include reliability, meaning "the results are consistent across repeated investigations in different circumstances with different investigators" (Gibbs, 2007, p.91; Spencer et al, p.40); validity, meaning "the explanations are really true or accurate and correctly capture what is actually happening" (Gibbs, 2007, p.91); objectivity, meaning that the researcher sees themselves as separate from and neutral in the research process; and generalisability, meaning that the results are "true for a wide range of circumstances" beyond a single research study (Gibbs, 2007, p.104). Such terms, vigorously debated and variously conceptualised, are found ubiquitously in quantitative research literature and also continue to attract significant mention in the qualitative realm. Some scholars, however, object to the use of such criteria in assessing the value of qualitative studies. There are those such as Smith (1984) who reject the need for "foundational criteria" while others retain the need for some concepts such as validity and reliability (Kirk and Miller, 1986), and still others call for the adoption of new

terms altogether. Such diversity of opinion has led to an array of differing positions with varying degrees of divergence and consensus on how quality can be assessed (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Emden and Sandelowski, 1998; Sparkes, 2001).

Perhaps the most consistently mentioned contribution to the debate is the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985) whom a range of scholars accept as having developed the criteria "gold standard" (Spencer et al, 2003, p.41) or "yardstick" (Yilmaz 2013, p.320) for establishing trustworthiness. As shown in Table 3.1 below, for them and others such as Creswell and Miller (2000), the scientific concept of internal validity (how rigorously a study is conducted) corresponds to the concept of credibility (whether the participants agree with the findings). They see external validity (or generalisability) as replaced in qualitative research by transferability which means that the findings may be applicable to other settings and this can be adjudicated on by the provision of thick description regarding all aspects of the study (Yilmaz, (2013, p.320). For reliability, they use the term dependability which is delivered through an auditing process whereby "the process of selecting, justifying and applying research strategies, procedures and methods is clearly explained and its effectiveness evaluated by the researcher and confirmed by an auditor" (Yilmaz, 2013 p.320). Other authors such as Gibbs (2007) and Miles and Huberman (1994) have each adopted similar understandings. Objectivity, for Lincoln and Guba, is paralleled by confirmability when findings are clearly supported by the data (which is capable of being examined by the auditing process) and any conclusions drawn are sound, explicable and clear.

Table 3.1: Lincoln and Guba's Key Quality Criteria

Aspect	Scientific term	Naturalistic term
Truth value	Internal validity	Credibility
Applicability	External validity or generalisability	Transferability
Consistency	Reliability	Dependability
Neutrality	Objectivity	Confirmability

Source: Cited by both Spencer et al (p.40) and Yilmaz (p.320) and adapted from Guba and Lincoln (1981) and Lincoln and Guba (1985)

Numerous scholars have amplified Lincoln and Guba's schema by adding their own understanding of what is required to enhance trustworthiness. Patton (1999), for example, while outlining similar criteria to the latter, also emphasises the importance of triangulation to aid what he terms "verification and validation" (1999 p.1193). He suggests four possible

types of triangulation: (1) methods triangulation, "checking out the consistency of findings generated by different data collection methods"; (2) triangulation of sources, or "examining the consistency of different data sources within the same method"; (3) analyst triangulation, meaning "using multiple analysts to review findings"; and (4) theory/perspective triangulation, or "using multiple perspectives or theories to interpret the data" (1999, p.1193). In the current study, triangulation was achieved through sources and analyst triangulation of which more will be said below.

Importantly, he notes that the point of triangulation is not simply to show that different data sources or methods will produce the same result, rather "the point is really to test for such consistency. Different kinds of data may yield somewhat different results because different types of inquiry are sensitive to different real-world nuances" (1999, p.1193).

Together with the need to demonstrate researcher skill competence, the academy emphasises the need for reflexivity when addressing issues of quality and credibility. (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Patton, 1999; Spencer et al, 2003, p. 32 and Creswell, 2003, p.182). This means that the researcher remains sensitive to and is explicit about how her own experiences, views or prior assumptions may shape the research, factors which it is hoped have been adequately attended to in Chapter 1. As Denzin points out:

> All researchers take sides, or are partisans for one point of view or another.
> ….all scholars are caught in the circle of interpretation. They can never be free of the hermeneutical situation. This means that scholars must state beforehand their prior interpretations of the phenomena they intend to investigate. Unless they clarify these meanings and values, the effects of the research on subsequent interpretations will remain clouded and may often be misunderstood. (Denzin, 2001, p. 43)

For her part, Yilmaz (2013, p.321), echoing Geertz (1973), highlights thick description as the basic criterion to judge the credibility of qualitative research. Like Spencer et al (2003, p.32), she stresses the need for close enough contact with the people and situation under investigation so that in-depth, empathic inside understanding is gained. Such understanding, or *Verstehen,* is core to qualitative inquiry and the descriptive interpretive paradigm whereby the researcher tries to acquire an understanding of participants on their own terms and in their own context (Schwandt, 2000c, p.191-193).

With Patton (1999, p. 1191) Yilmaz, (2013, p.321) too notes that once patterns and themes have been identified, consideration should also be given to rival alternative themes or the "negative cases" that don't fit the emerging pattern. She emphasises the need for member checking which allows participants to check that the study accurately portrays their views, as well as the safeguard of peer debriefing which involves another researcher reviewing the study report to ensure that it is fair and accurate. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.308) describe this as "a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind". Finally, the scrutiny of an external auditor who reviews the entire "process and product" of the inquiry to determine its trustworthiness (Miller, 1997, p.2) is a further quality and credibility mechanism. This researcher supports the use of an external audit in other circumstances which do not involve the promise of confidentiality**.** However, in the current study, in order to both safeguard participant privacy and to comply with data sharing ethics, it was deemed unethical to involve an external auditor who, in order to carry out a thorough investigation, would require access to the original unredacted questionnaires.

3.3 Data Gathering in a Qualitative Research Design

3.3.1 Justification of the Research Instrument

While a range of methods exist in qualitative inquiry including the use of grounded theory, ethnographic research, narrative or case study research, the method employed in this study took the form of a cross-sectional survey design. Within the limitations outlined below, it followed the checklist of quality criteria identified by Creswell (2012, p.405). They can be summarised as follows:

> A good survey study includes the identification of the population and the sample, contains an adequate-sized sample systematically derived, employs a cross-sectional or longitudinal design, specifies the instruments (and included sample questions), determines whether scores from them will be reliable and valid, uses appropriate data analysis procedures to answer the questions or hypothesis, and is written acknowledging ethical issues and using a standard structure. (Creswell, 2012, p. 406)

To a degree, in giving priority to the major form of data collection, gathering data sequentially and "using the secondary form of data to augment…the primary source"

(Creswell, 2012, p. 545), the research method employed also borrows the traits of an embedded mixed methods design. Choosing to adopt a survey questionnaire approach, followed by a small number of one-on-one interviews, was beneficial in facilitating the collection of more in-depth data on a broad range of questions from more participants than might have been the case if a different approach, such as a case study, had been used.

Rationale for the Questions Employed in the Survey Questionnaire

The number and phrasing of survey questions was influenced by the data required to address the two parts of the research question. We can recall that the concern of the first part of the research question was how authors of books associated with religion in Ireland understood their role. To facilitate a rounded picture of these author participants it was necessary to ask biographic and demographic questions. These can be seen in Q.1-9 of Appendix D. A portion of these questions were quantitative in nature with the variables of analysis paralleling the research carried out by English, D'Souza and Chartrand (2003, 2005a, 2005b) including third level academic institution (unnamed in this study to protect identities), gender, position, geographic location and number of books published during the timeframe. The researcher expanded this schema by adding the variables of age, denomination and religious conviction or otherwise. As noted, the purpose of these questions was to gather basic demographic information so as to facilitate a more expansive description and understanding of participants. Their inclusion recognises the point made by Newman and Benz (1998) and (Creswell, 2003) that despite the sometimes heated quantitative versus qualitative debates, in practice, research often lies on a continuum between the two so that "studies tend to be more quantitative or qualitative in nature" (Creswell 2003, p.4). This acknowledged, the majority of the questions were indeed qualitative thus allowing authors to express their thoughts and opinions freely. The aim was to

> describe and understand the phenomenon studied by capturing and communicating participants' experiences in their own words …. What is emphasised is the examination of the context that influences people's actions or interactions and the meaning that people ascribe to their experiences. (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 313).

Questions 10 and 11 sought information about the book category, title, publisher, publication date and available format of the book such as print copy or e-book. While the researcher was bound to protect identity and so could not reveal book titles, she was later able to use this data to both verify that the books listed by participants were relevant to the time period under investigation and to report on the number of titles published in each category during the

timeframe. She was also able to consult titles in an attempt to determine the educational setting that the participant may have been targeting.

Questions 12-23 inquired into participants' motivation, the core messages of their writing, what they hoped to achieve through publication and their role understanding. They were also asked to explain what they believed makes writing "religious" and what they understood by the term "religious author". The rewards and supports of being a religious author as well as disincentives attached were probed alongside information about events which may have influenced their writing between 2005-2015.

Questions 24-30 addressed the second part of the research question which concerned participants views on whether their published work contributed to LRE. Thus, it was important to ascertain what they understood by education, RE and LRE, as well as whether they considered their role as authors to allow them to assume the identity of religious educators. It was also necessary to directly ask if they saw their books as contributing to LRE and what priority this held for them. Participants were also asked to make recommendations which they believed might enhance LRE.

The last question of the survey inquired about participant availability for follow-up interview and a final section invited any further comments which participants felt were necessary.

The researcher envisaged that completing the survey would take approximately forty-five-fifty minutes of a participant's time.

Rationale for the Questions Explored at Interview

Semi-structured interviews, each lasting for no more than thirty minutes, were utilised in order to explore emerging findings from the analysis of the survey questionnaires and served the important purpose of triangulating data sources. Chapter 4 will show that such data analysis revealed that the word "religious" is a loaded word which is open to a range of interpretations and assumptions. Analysis also raised the question of how religious education is viewed by other related disciplines such as theology and spirituality. To explore this latter point, the first question posed at interview asked the cohort to indicate whether they believed that religious education is perceived as less than, or secondary to, other disciplines associated with religion. The analyse of participant responses can be found at ***4.1.5.***

Survey analysis also showed that six obstacles or disincentives are associated with the writing endeavour with close prevalence indicated across four of them. Therefore, each

interview participant was asked if these obstacles resonated and if so, to choose the one that affected them most and to briefly explain why. This is further explored in ***4.2.2.6.***

Chapter 2 has shown RE can be conceptualised as a three-fold, two-way process of learning about, learning from and learning into (Lane, 2013a; Hull, 2001 and Grimmitt, 1973). The survey questionnaire purposely did not ask participants to identify which of the definitions they might most closely align with in theory or practice. This was in order to allow the information to emerge naturally. This acknowledged, it was still possible to suggest, at least in their responses to Question 25, that participants expressed either implicit or explicit understandings which were open to categorisation. Since variety in emphasis emerged from this categorisation, this issue seemed ripe for further exploration at interview. Consequently, a third question put to interview participants asked them to identify which of the three understandings, or combination thereof, they believed their writing focused on. The result of such inquiry is further elaborated on in ***4.3.2.1***

Chapter 4 will show that emergent findings also revealed that the majority of the cohort believed or hoped that their published work had been of benefit to RE across the life continuum. However, it was not always clear from their responses whether informal, formal or nonformal education might be the target of their books. Further, the survey questionnaire did not explicitly ask participants to give an indication of their targeted educational setting or settings. As before, this was an intentional decision in order to see if this would emerge organically from the cohort's responses. Therefore, a fourth interview question asked participants to state which of the three, or combination thereof, that their own books targeted during the timeframe. Analysis of this issue is further elucidated in ***4.4.2.1***.

A final interview question emerged from an aspect of the survey analysis which revealed that when referring to adults, participants used a variety of terms to suggest ongoing religious maturity. Therefore, the researcher deemed it important to ask the cohort to state whether they saw adult religious education, adult faith formation and adult catechesis as the same thing and if not, to explain their understanding of the differences between them. (see ***4.4.3.4***). A complete list of questions explored at interview can be found in Appendix G.

3.3.2 Identification of the Population

The research cohort was chosen through purposive (also called purposeful) sampling, a non-probability technique selected for the practical considerations of the cohort's competence in addressing the research questions, availability, and willingness to participate. Etikan et al point out that

> unlike random studies, which deliberately include a diverse cross section of ages, backgrounds and cultures, the idea behind purposive sampling is to concentrate on people with particular characteristics who will be better able to assist with the relevant research. (Etikan et al, 2016, p.1)

Yilmaz concurs stating that

> the main aim of purposeful sampling in qualitative research is to select and study a small number of people or unique cases whose study produces a wealth of detailed information and an in-depth understanding of the people, programmes, cases, and situations studied. (Yilmaz, 2013, p.313)

Thus, the researcher sought authors who had published at least one non-fiction book in one or more of the following areas of religious book publishing in Ireland during the period 2005-2015: RE, theology, ethics, scripture, prayer, spirituality, pastoral care/support, church and social commentary and liturgical and parish resources. A final category of 'other' was included as a safety net for those books which did not fit into any of the foregoing. In choosing these categories, the researcher was employing the common types of publishing categories used by Veritas Publications and the former Columba Press. However, she acknowledges Hinds' caution that "the categories are the researcher's and may or may not reflect those of the respondent" (2000, p. 46).

By including authors involved in a broad range of religious publishing categories, the specific type of purposive sampling employed could be termed heterogeneous or maximum variation which "involves selecting candidates across a broad spectrum relating to the topic of study" (Etikan et al, 2016, p.3).

Identification of possible participants was achieved through the researcher's professional knowledge of the indigenous religious publishing field and by consulting the publishing catalogues and websites of the main Irish religious publishers. The researcher was able to access participant email or postal addresses from publicly available information such as diocesan websites, author websites and workplace or academic institution websites.

From the compiled list of potential authors, five who had published in each of the categories specifically named above were invited to assist the research, thus providing a potential total cohort of forty-five participants. Slee has observed that "research is always a compromise between principles and pragmatics" (2004, p.46) and consequently, the choice of this sampling technique was further influenced by the practical considerations of participant availability and data manageability. Notwithstanding the limitation of purposive sampling

which is considered below, it is a technique which enjoys widespread use in educational research.

3.3.3 Limitations

This researcher acknowledges that the survey sample, while significant, is nonetheless restricted and does not claim to be taken to be representative of all authors of religious books in Ireland or elsewhere who published during the specified time-frame. However, in employing purposive sampling, as noted, the intention was to identify and select participants "that are proficient and well-informed with a phenomenon of interest" who are available and willing to participate, who have sufficient knowledge and experience to contribute to the research and who will sufficiently illuminate the question under investigation" (Etikan et al. 2016, p.2).

Further limitations are imposed by the mix of qualitative and quantitative styles of questions employed in the questionnaire. While closed-ended questions allow more direct comparison between various participant's answers, they also fail to provide adequate information as to why a participant answered in a particular way. Thus, two cohort members may say "yes" to a particular question but both may have very different, even opposing reasons, for answering similarly. Open-ended questions are also problematic. Although they provide more information and greater insight into an individual's attitude, they are often very difficult to compare with other responses in order that clear conclusions can be reached. This is equally true of the interview situation and can lead to issues around demonstrating trustworthiness. Gillham (2005) recognises this and, in tandem with what we have already seen from Thanh and Thanh (2015) and Spencer et al (2003), points to the acknowledgement of subjectivity as a necessary safeguard for the researcher who is

> inevitably making some kind of interpretive construction of what the interviewee says. This is done with system, rigour and reflection, and with careful attention to representative selection from the interview transcripts. Specifying the evidence for the inferences does not alter the fact that a subjective construction is being made. Acknowledging this does not mean that we get lost, as researchers, in a welter of subjectivity, rather, that we have to consider the role of this dimension. (Gillham, 2005, p. 6)

Two related limitations to the research are imposed by the researcher's professional role in the religious publications industry. The first is that while the research is not directly focused on the researcher's current or former workplace, it does carry some of the risks of an insider

research study with the attendant challenges this poses. Some, like Kvale (1995) would argue that such research is open to a lack of distance which could impact negatively on credibility and trustworthiness. This researcher recognises that while taking every step to remain fair, she is invested in and is thus part of, and not separate from, the research (Slee, 2004, p. 59-60). She believes that the danger of bias is minimised by the safeguards she has put in place such as being clear about the parameters, intentions and purposes of the research, by being transparent about her position in relation to it and being rigorous in scrutinising underlining assumptions (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle 2009, p.59). Further, it is contended that trustworthiness is enhanced by the triangulation of data sources and by affording participants the right of review of findings. Trustworthiness is also enhanced by employing peer debriefing throughout the analysis process. The advantage of such debriefing, which was undertaken by a fellow doctoral student, was that it gave the researcher an opportunity to hold a mirror up to her understandings, clarify her interpretations and uncover blind spots in the manner advised by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.308). Trustworthiness was further augmented through the use of a second coder in the person of the academic supervisor who offered either verification or challenge to the researcher's coding in MS Word at Steps 1-3 of the analysis, a process which facilitated analyst triangulation.

Secondly, the risk of response bias is a possibility in this study given that some cohort participants have, at times, been professionally associated with the researcher. While effort was made to recruit participants who were not directly known to the researcher, given that religious book publishing in Ireland is a niche industry in which the same author can publish across a number of different publishing houses and genres, it was impossible, and indeed inappropriate, to insist that all, or even most of the participants were total strangers to the researcher. While it was difficult to completely remove the risk of response bias, every attempt was made to minimize such risk by informing participants that there was no perceived right, wrong or desired answer to the qualitative questions. It was also underlined that the research carries no incentives (aside from the possible benefits mentioned later in this chapter) nor threat of sanction. Further, unnecessary contact between the researcher and the participants was avoided in order to maintain appropriate boundaries.

A final limitation to the study was the requirement to protect the identity of participants. This necessitated a situation whereby the titles of books published by participants could not be directly linked with them when reporting on the study which, given its nature, may seem counter-intuitive. The researcher recognises that while unavoidable, it is regrettable that the

significant body of work published by the cohort, both during the timeframe of the study and beyond it, cannot be highlighted more obviously.

3.3.4 Exclusions

The publishing categories of primary and secondary RE and catechetical textbooks were excluded from the research for the reason that the study is principally focused on LRE which takes place outside the primary and post-primary classroom settings. The contributions of cohort participants to religious periodicals and academic journals were also excluded and this decision was questioned by three participants. While the researcher recognises the substantial contribution to the academic corpus made by members of the cohort, this choice was made in order to place parameters around the research and to avoid over-emphasis on academic religious publishing. This noted, it is acknowledged that the aforementioned education texts, as well as peer reviewed and periodical writing, are all areas of religious publishing which are ripe for further academic inquiry.

3.3.5 Choice of Timeframe

As already explored in this study's introduction, the decision to frame the study within the ten-year time period between 2005-2015 was made for a number of reasons. In the first place, it helps to focus the study and provides a snapshot of a particular period. In this case, the timeframe is important in that it denotes an episode of significant ecclesial, educational and societal change in Ireland. It also represents a time of increasing global discussion surrounding the role of religion in the public sphere (Habermas et al, 2010, 2013; Butler et al, 2011; Lane, 2013, O'Hanlon et al, 2017), and about the place of RE in the wider education system (Coolahan, Hussey and Kilfeather, 2012; Renehan and Williams, 2015).

Secondly, as we will see in Chapter 4, a total of 132 titles were published by members of the research cohort over this period. This potentially denotes a sizeable contribution to LRE, and especially to adult RE, at a time when options in this regard were shrinking through the closure of certain academic institutes and when there was an absence of available information about the extent to which adult provision was being addressed in individual dioceses.

3.3.6 Pilot Study

Having secured ethical approval for this research from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee (Appendix A), prior to issuing invitations to the research cohort, four authors who could potentially have participated but who did not form part of the research

cohort were invited to take part in a pilot study. This was carried out for the important purpose of evaluating all of the documents prepared for dissemination to participants and to ensure that "individuals in the sample are capable of completing the survey and that they can understand the questions" (Creswell, 2012, p.390). The pilot cohort was comprised of two men and two women with an equal ratio of lay and ordained/professed. Each made valuable recommendations to improve the clarity of the letter of invitation, the plain language statement, the informed consent form and the questionnaire. In this regard, two members of the pilot cohort usefully pointed out ambiguity of phrasing in one of the original survey questions. Another noted a few typographical errors and a fourth suggested that an unclear sentence be rephrased in the letter of invitation. The documents which were subsequently disseminated to cohort participants largely incorporated the suggested changes.

3.4 Research Execution

Each of the potential cohort of forty-five was invited to participate through a letter of invitation which briefly explained the nature of the research (Appendix B). Of those who were invited, five did not respond despite a follow-up reminder, and six declined, leaving a final cohort of thirty-four participants. As mentioned in Chapter 1, some of those who were unable to take part were members of the Church of Ireland and Presbyterian traditions.

3.4.1 Ethical Considerations

Having confirmed willingness to participate, each member of the cohort was sent a plain language statement and an informed consent form (Appendix C) outlining the parameters and nature of the research. This statement addressed the reasons why the research was being conducted, outlined what participants would be asked to do and also addressed ethical issues of how privacy would be protected, how data would be used and subsequently disposed of, and indicated the legal limitations to data confidentiality. While the nature of the research design precludes complete anonymity (in that the researcher and her academic supervisor were aware of participant identity), the cohort was promised confidentiality and therefore names do not appear in the final text. For the same reason, and as previously mentioned, the specific content of the books published by the cohort is deliberately excluded from the study though it must be acknowledged that this too is a fruitful area for further academic inquiry.

In line with the Data Protection Act 2018, the researcher has safeguarded the personal information of participants by ensuring that all soft data is stored on a password protected computer in a password protected folder to which only the researcher and her supervisor have access. In any consultations with the peer debriefer, participant identity was protected

through the numerical codes shown in Appendices E, F and G. Any hardcopy material generated by the research was stored in a locked filing cabinet in the office of Dr P.J. Sexton (principal investigator) in the School of Policy and Practice, Institute of Education. When the data is no longer needed, all records will be deleted. To ensure this, all paperwork will be shredded and files will be wiped in accordance with the recommended practices of DCU in force at the time and designated for such disposal. If otherwise than 5 years after the completed research. The researcher will carry out the shredding.

The electronic data will also be securely disposed of in such a way that the data can never again be constituted. At present, the standard for permanent data deletion is 3-4 overwrites of the data by a sequence of 1s and 0s (ones and zeros). Again, the researcher will carry out this degaussing.

The plain language statement further considered any risks that could be involved in participation and while such risk was low, it was acknowledged that a participant may regret use of certain phraseology or wording. Participants were assured that this, or any possible risk of misrepresentation, could be remedied through being given sight of the findings prior to submission with those taking part in interviews being given sight of their own interview transcript prior to analysis. This had the dual purpose of showing appreciation to participants for facilitating the research, and also of member checking the research findings. This is important because "if the investigator is to be able to purport that his or her reconstructions are recognisable to audience members as adequate representations of their own (and multiple) realities, it is essential that they be given the opportunity to react to them" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.314). Consequently, all thirty-four participants were given sight of the research findings and no queries were raised in respect of the findings by any cohort members.

In line with ethical research, members of the cohort were also asked to complete a consent form to ensure awareness of the scope of the study and to allow participants to give their informed consent while being assured that should they so wish, they would be free to withdraw such consent and all information submitted at any time (Blaxter et al., 2006, cited in Bell, 2014 p. 49).

3.4.2 Benefits of the Research

The Plain Language statement also considered the potential benefits of the research such as affording participants an occasion to contribute to knowledge while reflecting on their role as authors and on why they engage in the demanding process of book writing and publishing.

Participation also offered the possible benefit of allowing cohort members to consider their own understanding of what is meant by lifelong education and, in particular, LRE. Having taken part in the study, one participant said she experienced it as "a really good opportunity to think through the practice of publishing books" (P.17, AOC) while another said it has been "very worthwhile for me…as I have not published any books since 2014, it has been of benefit to me to revisit the experience through these thought-provoking questions" (P.31, AOC). Others expressed gratitude for "the challenging questions" and "invitation to input" (P.1, AOC) as well as the "opportunity to reflect…and contribute" (P.2, AOC).

3.4.3 Dissemination of Questionnaires

Once consent forms were signed and returned to the researcher, questionnaires were distributed to participants via email (Appendix D). Aside from the information provided in the written documents, no lengthy explanation of this researcher's understanding of the research study was entered into between the researcher and participants at the time of invitation to participate, or at the point of questionnaire distribution. This was in an effort to avoid any contamination of the survey results. However, all participants were provided with email and telephone contact details in the event of their wishing to discuss questionnaire content after they had an opportunity to consider the questions independently. One participant availed of this offer prior to completing the questionnaire. All cohort participants were asked whether they wished to make themselves available for a follow up interview and all but four responded in the affirmative. Participants were asked to complete and return the questionnaires either by email or by post within two weeks of reception. In the event, response times varied, and necessitated differing time limits for completion, the outcome of which was a one hundred percent response rate with all thirty-four questionnaires being returned within a two-month period.

3.4.4 Conducting of Interviews

Following the return of the questionnaires, participant responses were electronically collated in MS Word files as an initial step in becoming familiar with the data. With the research supervisor acting as a second coder as outlined, the data was coded using the steps delineated by Creswell (2012, pp. 261-262) which will be illuminated in 3.6 below. This was then cross-checked by employing the NVivo 12 software application which is also explained below. These steps allowed the researcher to begin to describe her findings and during this period of time, she carried out six one-on-one interviews which were voice-recorded. These interviews were semi-structured with pre-prepared questions (Appendix G) designed to

further probe information that was emerging from the data analysis as well as to address questions which had not been asked directly in the questionnaire.

3.4.5 Justification of Interview Cohort Sample Size

The thirty cohort members who were willing to be interviewed when initially surveyed included eighteen men (fourteen of whom were priests) and twelve women (two of whom were ordained ministers).

While it would have been optimal to interview all willing participants, the time lapse between the initial survey and the conducting of interviews meant that not all were now available. Added to this was the practical consideration of data management. As 48,558 words of data from the survey questionnaires had already been analysed, the researcher needed to probe emergent findings with a representative selection from the cohort while also limiting the amount of additional data for analysis. This follows Sandelowski's (1995, p.179) recommendation to ensure an interview sample size that is compact enough to manage and sizeable enough to provide "a new and richly textured understanding of experience". To interview too many participants would place an unfair burden on them if the researcher was unable to include a fair representation of all their views in the final thesis. To interview too few would not allow for a sufficient range of perspectives. While the literature provides widely varying suggestions regarding the number of interviews needed in qualitative analysis (Fugard and Potts, 2015), there is little available guidance on sample size when it comes to triangulation of data using interviews as a secondary source. Therefore, a subjective judgement had to be made. Again, employing the purposive sampling technique used for the survey questionnaire, this delicate act of balancing was approached on a gender and lay/professed basis. Thus, equal numbers of male and female participants and equal numbers of lay/professed were invited to participate. Since men outnumbered women in the survey questionnaire cohort, it could be pointed out that in seeking a gender balance, the sample was not representative. However, it is argued that since the male voice was heard more in the first round of research, and since it was remarked in the data that the female voice is not given parity in religion, it is acceptable to ensure parity on this occasion. Added to this is the fact that a question which needed to be probed at interview was that while having published on topics related to religion during the timeframe, some participants did not view themselves as religious authors, some did not see themselves as religious educators, and some viewed themselves as neither. More of the latter were women. Thus, it was important to try to include at least one female participant who did not see herself in one or other of these roles.

As indicated in ***3.3.1*** above, another question which emerged from the first-round data, and which deserved attention at interview was whether RE was considered to be on a lower rung of the academic ladder than, for example, theology in terms of critical thinking. Thus, it was important to include someone who worked or had worked in formal RE, as well as a theologian, in the interview cohort. While not all who were invited were able to take part, the final group of interviewees included three males: two priests, one of whom who was a retired theologian, and one lay man. Among the three women were a minister, another currently employed in formal RE and a woman who did not view herself as a religious author. In all of these cases expert purposive sampling was used in that each was able to address the emerging issues from the questionnaire data from the position of being experts in their own fields (Etikan et al, 2016, p.3).

3.5 Content Analysis as the Means of Data Analysis

While documents can be interrogated in many ways through, for example, narrative or critical analysis, this researcher has chosen to utilise content analysis because it holds an established, though not unchallenged, record as "a primary research methodology" since Harold Lasswell first pioneered its use in the 1920s in order to ascertain "who says what, through which channel to whom with what effect" (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996 cited in Macnamara, 2007, p.2). Credited with developing more than a research technique, Janowitz observes that "it embodies a theoretical perspective which seeks to assign a major role to communications in the analysis of social organization and political change" (no date, p. 649).

Drawing on Shoemaker and Reese (1996), Macnamara shows that the theoretical underpinnings of content analysis reside in two broad schools of thought or traditions - the behaviourist and the humanist. The former, as typified by Lasswell, is mostly concerned with identifying the future effects of media messages while the latter concentrates primarily on whether media content reveals existing truths about a culture or society:

> This dual view of the media…helps explain the age-old debate over whether mass media create public opinion, attitudes and perceptions (effects) or reflect existing attitudes, perceptions and culture. Most researchers agree that, with limitations, mass media do both. (Macnamara, 2007, p.3)

A favoured approach in media studies research, and therefore of relevance also to the book publishing realm, it also has an established reputation in adult education research, for example Taylor, (2001) and Mulenga, Al-Harthi and Carr-Chellman (2006) and in some RE

research such as that of English, D'Souza, and Chartrand (2003, 2005a, 2005b) and Schweitzer et al (2012). Though a popular approach - a fact which is evident from the sheer volume of its usage (Riffe and Freitag, 1997) - the academy is divided on whether, as a method, it is appropriate for both qualitative and quantitative research. Early advocates, such as Berelson (1952, p.18), saw it as a quantitative method describing it as "a research technique for the systematic, objective, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication". As has been made clear, this researcher has sympathy with those who question this objectivity claim on the grounds that no scientific method can make such a declaration and interpretation can always vary, especially when dealing with communication. (Berger and Luckman, 1967). In his definition, Krippendorff (1989, p.403), drawing on Holsti, (1969), took Berelson's characterisation a step further and, leaning towards a positivist view, described content analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context". Neuendorf (2002, p. 10) too sees it as primarily a quantitative method arguing strongly for "attention to objectivity-inter-subjectivity, a priori design, reliability, validity, generalisability, replicability, and hypothesis testing".

Despite its positivist origins, however, Shoemaker and Reese (1996) defend content analysis as being relevant for both qualitative and quantitative forms of research and over time, scholars have increasingly begun to appreciate its efficacy in describing latent as well as manifest content. In recent years it has been embraced as a qualitative method across the social sciences in areas such as nursing education (Elo et al, 2014; Graneheim and Lundman, 2004), in psychology of religion research (Mattis, 2003) and, to a limited degree, in RE/religious journal publishing research (Schweitzer et al, 2012).

In 2012, Schweitzer and his colleagues carried out a study which focused on the development of RE as an academic discipline. The samples studied were major German academic RE journals published between 1900 and 1975. The quantitative aspects of the study looked at which authors were contributing to the journals, their professional background and institutional and geographical location. (Schweitzer et al. 2012, p. 85). This schema, one similar to that adopted by English, D'Souza and Chartrand (2003, 2005a and 2005b) has relevance to this researcher's work in that parallel categories were used for the preliminary quantitative elements of her survey questionnaire. Though the Schweitzer et al study yielded valuable results, like the aforementioned English, D'Souza and Chartrand studies (2003,

2005a and 2005b), it suffered from omissions in failing to outline a theoretical framework or give a thorough explanation of the methodological protocols employed.

Lack of attention to theoretical framework and methodology has also been noted by Riffe and Freitag (1997) in their study entitled *Content Analysis of Content Analyses: Twenty-Five Years of Journalism Quarterly*. Here, they found that "just over a fourth (27.6%) of the articles involved an explicit theoretical framework. Under half (45.7%) involved explicit statements of hypotheses or research questions that guide research design and focus the analysis" (1997, p.877). Such deficits in theoretical underpinning were also identified by Kamhaioi and Weaver (2003).

Conversely, in a content analysis study of major adult education journals conducted by Mulenga, Al-Harthi and Carr-Chellman (2006, p.79), the authors state that their framework followed guidelines suggested by several respected scholars in the field and they also demonstrated their use of the Rourke and Anderson (2004) protocol, clearly articulating how they established inter-coder calculation and what the level of agreement there was between the two coders. (2006, p.79-80). Franzosi (2007, p. xxviii) underlines the need for transparency in this area when he points out that the coder is one of the instruments of measurement.

Though all but one of the content analysis studies mentioned immediately above were quantitative in nature, they bear mention for our purposes here given that the deficits identified offer caution for both qualitative and quantitative research. Consequently, in this chapter thus far, core paradigmatic, epistemological, ontological, theoretical and methodological stances have been elucidated as part of the arsenal of measures for achieving robustness and trustworthiness (Crotty, 1998; Denzin and Lincoln 1994).

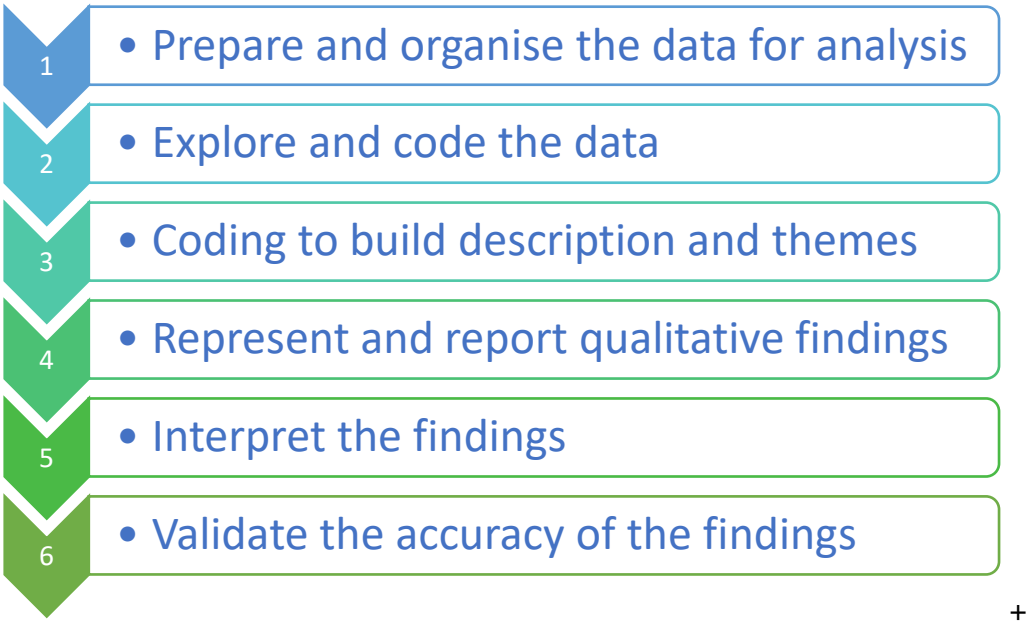
3.6 Qualitative Content Analysis in the Current Study

A major strength of qualitative content analysis is that it allows the researcher to stay close to the participants' own words and facilitates the thick description deemed so key by Geertz (1973) and others. As we have seen, it is viewed by some as primarily descriptive of manifest content. However, this researcher is persuaded by both Shoemaker and Reese (1996) and Graneheim and Lundman (2003, p.106) who argue for its interpretive strengths stating that "a text always involves multiple meanings and there is always some degree of interpretation". In this sense, content analysis in qualitative research can also be seen as form

of thematic analysis which is chiefly associated with the interpretation of latent content (Braun and Clarke, 2006 p.13).

Both qualitative and quantitative researchers have developed approaches to utilising this method of data analysis (Krippendorff, 2004 p.86; Hsieh and Shannon, 2005 and Creswell (2012, p.261-262). In the current case, this study will follow the six-step content analysis approach outlined by Creswell (2012, p.237 and pp. 261-262). These steps, which are depicted in Figure 3.1, are remarkably similar to Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach.

Figure 3.1: A Visual Representation of the Analysis Process adapted from Creswell, 2012, pp. 261-262



3.6.1 Step 1: Initial reading and re-reading of data including logging of impressions and identifying possible themes

At the outset of this process, the cohort was listed alphabetically and each participant was assigned a number from 1-34. The data was prepared for analysis by conducting a series of detailed readings and re-readings of the questionnaires in order to acquire a general picture of what was emerging. For the practical purpose of getting a complete view of the collective response to each individual question, participant responses were then collated together under each question. This process generated 48,558 words of raw data while interview transcripts generated an additional 4,499 words bringing the total to 53,057 words of data for analysis. These compilations were cross-checked for accuracy by the researcher's academic

supervisor as part of the auditing process. Each question, with its corresponding thirty-four responses, was then treated as a unit of analysis (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004, p.106) with each individual answer treated as a text segment. Each segment was probed asking questions such "what is being said here?" or "what do these statements take for granted or challenge?" (Creswell, 2012, p.244). A sense of what was being expressed was recorded in a word or short phrase in the right margin. In the left margin, possible emerging themes were noted. In total, there were 1,152 text segments. The researcher opted to carry out a hand-coding process in MS Word in the first instance in order to immerse herself even more fully in the data before moving on to also make use of the NVivo 12 software application. Gibbs advocates a similar approach in his own work observing that hand-coding allows for "creativity, flexibility and ease of access" (2007, p.40).

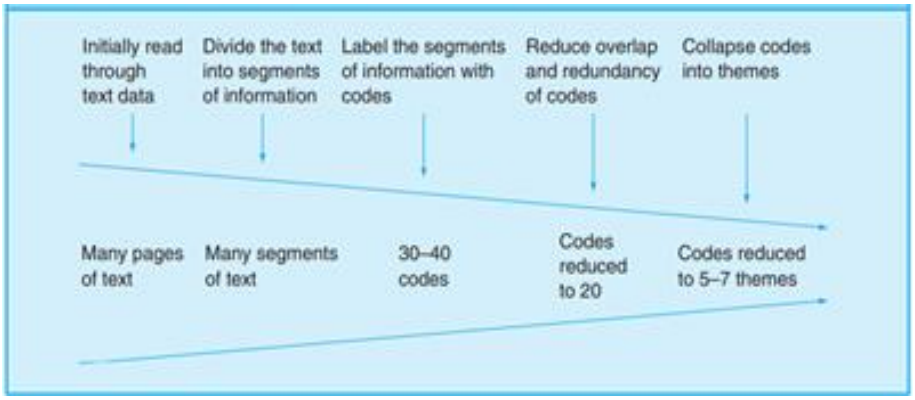
It is acknowledged that even at this early stage, themes were beginning to emerge and it is also recognised that emerging themes were strongly influenced by the structure of the questionnaire and the line of questioning it contained. For example, the first eleven questions of the questionnaire related to demographic and biographic details and so this immediately suggested the first sub-theme which relates to who becomes a religious author.

3.6.2 Step 2: Open Coding of Data

When this lengthy process was complete, the researcher moved on to Step Two which involved exploring the data through an initial process of open coding (Appendix E).

Elliott notes that with some exceptions (such as Richards, 2015, pp.103-124 and Saldaña, 2013), the process of coding is "remarkably undocumented" in the literature and relies on Creswell's definition of it as "the process of analysing qualitative text data by taking them apart to see what they yield before putting the data back together in a meaningful way" (Creswell, 2015, p. 156). Conceptualising it as "a decision-making process, where the decisions must be made in the context of a particular piece of research" (2018, p.2850), Elliot recognises, as does Creswell, that there are no strict guidelines for coding. Following Creswell (2012, p. 244), this researcher used the following main stages which are depicted in Figure 3.2 below:

Figure 3.2: A Visual Model of the Coding Process



Source: Creswell, 2012, p. 244

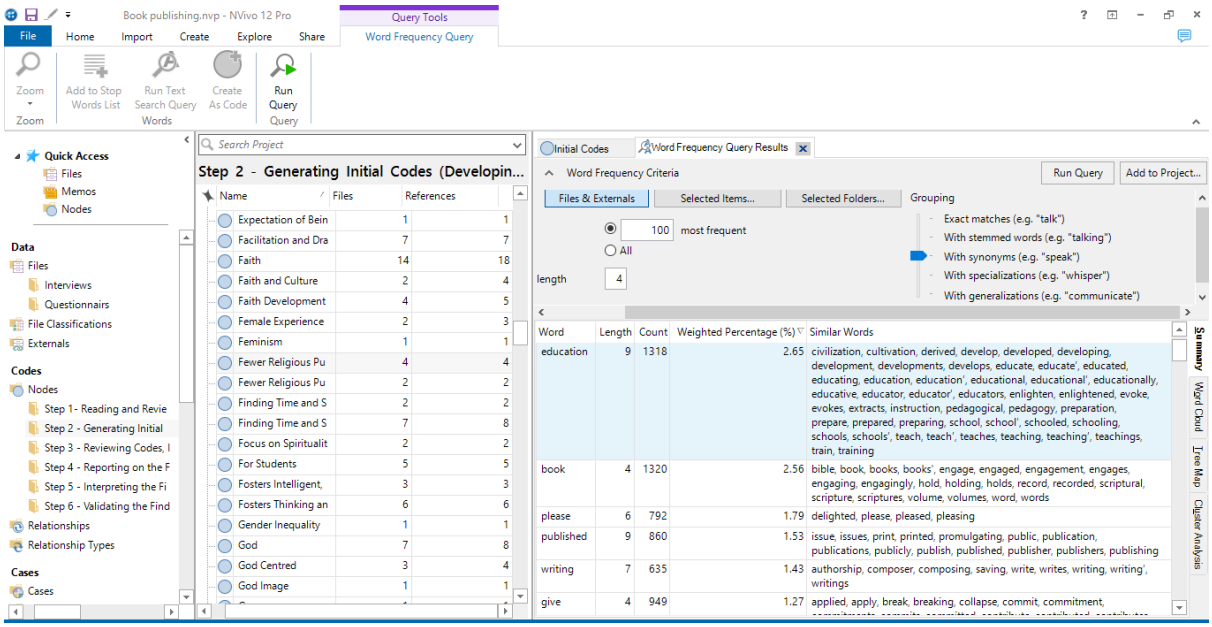
While there is varying opinion in the literature about the number of codes that should be used (Saldaña, 2013), there is consensus that since its purpose is to condense as well as to "discover" the data, coding should not be exhaustive (Elliot, 2018, p.2854; Creswell, 2012, p.244). Initially, this researcher experienced lean coding to be insufficient and found that she needed to code all individual responses (text segments) with quite a number containing multiple codes. However, this facilitated a subsequent process of lean coding in which overlap was identified between similar codes which were collapsed into one.

Creswell (2015, p. 160) believes that the best code labels are "in vivo" codes which use matching words to those of the cohort because "you start to build codes and later themes that resonate with your participants ….they move you towards the voices of participants, which you want to reflect in your realistic final report". Agreeing with this stance, the researcher tried, wherever possible, to adopt this approach while recognising that the chief purpose in coding is to capture "the essence of their content" so as to ensure clarity of meaning for the reader. (Elliott, 2018, p.2856). Put another way, it could be seen as "a process of shortening while still preserving the core" (Graneheim and Lundman 2004 p.106).

When this initial open-coding process was complete, the researcher moved to listing all the codes used, grouping similar codes together and looking for overlap or redundant codes in order to reduce the number further. This process was also assisted by utilising NVivo 12 which enabled the checking of word frequency and similarity through searching stem and synonym words. Figure 3.3 shows a screen grab of initial NVivo 12 codes giving an indication of such an investigation which was helpful in the early detection of word or idea

prevalence. Some researchers refer to this as the initial coding framework (Elliott 2018 p.2859) or “thematic framework” (Ritchie and Spencer cited in Elliot, p.2855).

Figure 3.3 Step 2 of the Content Analysis Process



Following this, the data was returned to and considered once more in light of the remaining codes, checking to see if new codes might emerge (Creswell, 2012, p.245). This process of checking for overlap continued throughout the first three steps.

3.6.3 Step 3: Identification of Themes and Sub-Themes

This foregoing process enabled a moving on to Step 3 and to the identification of the four themes and thirteen sub-themes which are presented in Table 3.2 below and explored in Chapter 4. As noted earlier, the identification of such themes and sub-themes was influenced by the structure of the questionnaire which allowed questions which could naturally group together to suggest themes. Thus, for example, in Theme 2 which explores the experience of being an author, it was logical at this point to group together questions 19 and 21 which explored the rewards and supports of book publishing, and now treat them as one unit of analysis, with questions 16 and 20 which addressed obstacles and disincentives, as another individual unit of analysis. This second collation process was carried out across all emerging themes and sub-themes both in Word and in NVivo 12 in order to strengthen the robustness of the analysis.

Table 3.2 shows the questions which, together with the previous rounds of coding, informed the theme and sub-theme construction. Open-coding helped to confirm what was emerging

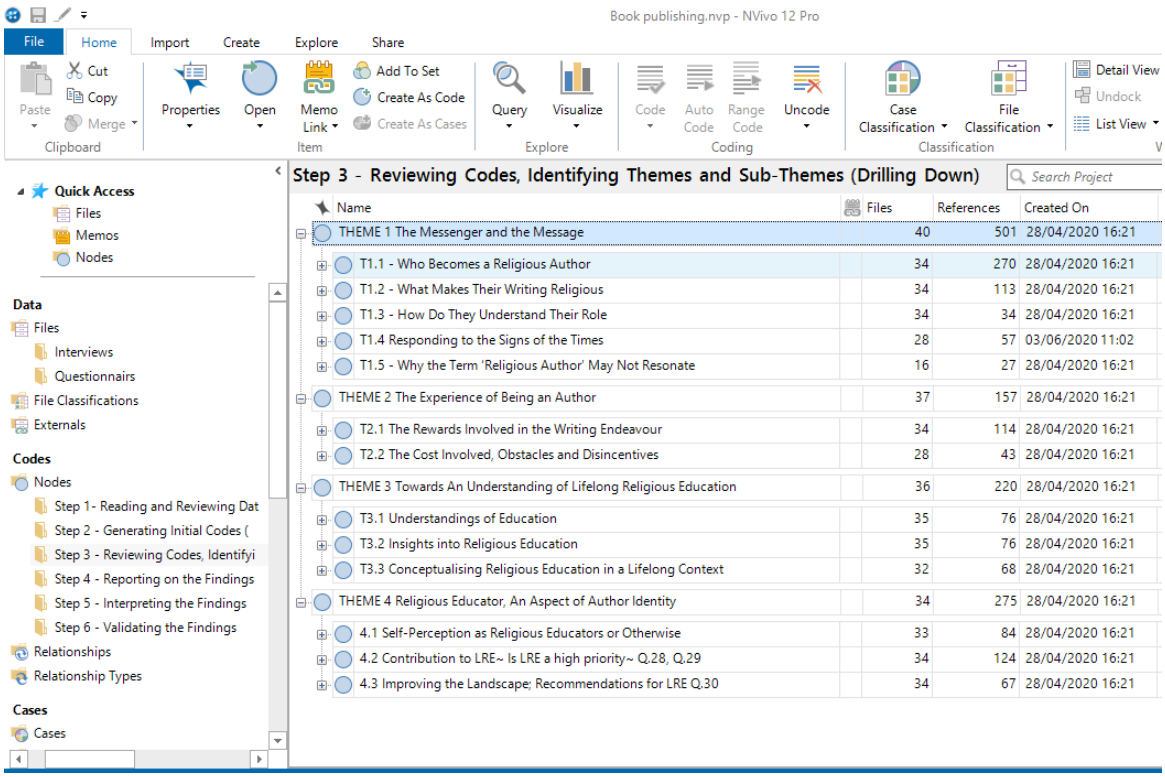
in that it again allowed an examination of code frequency and those which had the most evidence to support them. Indeed, it also revealed those which might have been less expected (Creswell, 2012, p.245). In the latter regard, Theme 1, sub-theme 5 is an example of what Yilmaz (2013, p.321) calls a "negative case" or alternative theme and the probing of it provided rich insight both at questionnaire and interview stage.

Table 3.2 Themes and Sub-Themes Emerging from the Analysis

Theme 1: The Messenger and the Message		**Survey Qs.**	**I/V Qs.**
Sub-theme 1:	Who Becomes a Religious Author?	**1-11**	
Sub-theme 2:	What Makes Their Writing Religious?	**12, 13, 14 15 17, 18**	
Sub-theme 3:	How Do They Understand Their Role and Purpose? The Emphases and Attributes of the Religious Author.	**12, 13, 14, 15**	
Sub-theme 4	Responding to the Signs of the Times.	**22, 23**	
Sub-theme 5:	Why the Word 'Religious' May Not Resonate.	**15, 18, 19**	**1**
Theme 2: The Experience of Being an Author		**Survey Qs.**	**I/V Qs.**
Sub-theme 1:	The Rewards Involved in the Writing Endeavour.	**19, 21**	
Sub-theme 2:	The Cost Involved: Obstacles and Disincentives.	**16, 20**	**2**
Theme 3: Towards an Understanding of Lifelong Religious Education		**Survey Qs.**	**I/V Qs.**
Sub-theme 1:	Understandings of Education.	**24**	**4**
Sub-theme 2:	Insights into Religious Education.	**25**	**5**
Sub-theme 3:	Conceptualising Religious Education in a Lifelong Context.	**26**	
Theme 4 Religious Educator – An Aspect of Author Identity?		**Survey Qs.**	**I/V Qs.**
Sub-theme 1:	Self-perception as Religious Educator or Otherwise.	**27**	
Sub-theme 2:	Contribution to Lifelong Religious Education.	**28, 29**	
Sub-theme 3:	Improving the Landscape: Recommendations to Enhance Lifelong Religious Education.	**30**	**3**

As Figure 3.4 below shows, utilising NVivo 12 at this point in the process involved assigning parent nodes to the themes and child nodes to the sub-themes. Coding was aggregated to the relevant parent nodes. This allowed the data to be graded in hierarchical form and made the task of merging nodes that were similar in content manageable and straightforward. In addition, the analytical tools of NVivo 12 allowed for verification of the researcher's own hand analysis, in effect, creating a parallel audit trail from data collection, to organisation, to final analysis. This proved useful in identifying occasional anomalies, particularly around frequency, in either MSWord or NVivo and facilitated checking and correction where necessary.

Figure 3.4: Step 3 of the Content Analysis Process



Appendix F shows the final codebook generated from NVivo 12 which contains a definition of the codes that informed the final analysis (Gibbs, 2007, p.40; Elliott, 2018). This labelling process facilitated the initial consideration of manifest content which describes the surface, noticeable aspects of a text which while also allowing for follow-up consideration of latent content which demands an interpretation of underlying meanings and themes. Chapter 4, which presents the themes and sub-themes in detail, is a further example of how manifest data informs the interpretive process and allows for latent or underlying meaning to emerge as "some level of patterned response" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Chapter 5, in discussing the findings in light of the literature, takes this one stage further and, through examining the implications of the findings, could be said to be a strong example of content analysis going beyond its association with number counting and facilitating the uncovering of latent meaning.

While some authors such as Graneheim and Lundman (2004) make a distinction between the terms "theme" and "category", Creswell sees them as one and the same, describing them as "similar codes aggregated together to form a major idea in the database" (2012, p.245). The former authors see *both* codes and categories as "an expression of the manifest content of the text" (p.107) which answer the question 'What?' while a theme addresses the latent meaning in the text and answers the question 'How?' (p.107). Numerous scholars note a

proliferation of terminological variances to refer to similar ideas (Elliott, 2018, p.2852; Gibbs, 2007, p.39; Graneheim and Lundman 2004, pp.106-107) but it seems to this researcher that the differences between the Graneheim and Lundman and Creswell schemas are little more than semantic since both utilise similar steps in their analysis in the service of arriving at comparable goals.

In adopting Creswell's approach in the current study, this stage in the process was inductive in moving from the initial to the more detailed coding of the collated data (including both descriptive and analytical codes) to the identification of more interpretive themes and sub-themes. The process was also iterative and cyclical at all stages, including at the point of seeking and collecting further data from the one-on-one interviews in order to dialogue with the initial questionnaire analysis.

The researcher carried out a similar process of coding on the typed interview transcripts. In this case, the process was more straightforward in that the interviews were used only to clarify questions that were not fully addressed in the questionnaires or to fill in gaps in the understanding of participants positions.

3.6.4 Steps 4 and 5: Representing, Interpreting and Discussing the Findings

Steps 4 and 5 of the Creswell approach include presenting a visual and narrative report together with an interpretation and discussion of findings. These appear in Chapters 4 and 5 which follow.

3.6.5 Step 6: Establishing Trustworthiness and Verifying the Findings

Trustworthiness in this study has been safeguarded in the following key ways:

- The assent of participants to the research findings has enhanced the credibility of the study. All thirty-four of the participants were given the opportunity to review the findings and no issues of concern were raised by any of them. One participant remarked that he particularly liked the results contained in Theme 4 (P.21), another found the findings "clear and thorough" (P.33) while others found it useful to understand "who is writing in this context and why" (P.2) and "to see why people publish and what they publish" (P.17). Contentment with the findings was expressed by the cohort in a variety of ways such as "I have no problem whatsoever with anything you have written" (P.7) "I assure you, straight off, that I have no reservations" (P.13), "nothing I would change (P.22), "it is a green light from me" (P.28) and "I have no questions or concerns so be at rest about me!" (P.1).

- Triangulation has been facilitated through data emerging from the one-on-one interviews, by thoroughly cross-checking analysis in both MS Word and in NVivo 12 and, as stated, crucially, by a review of findings by participants. Robustness was further enhanced by the analyst triangulation afforded by the peer debriefing and the use of a second coder which "reaps real rewards by bringing… an unequivocal, common vision of what the codes mean and which blocks of data best fit which code" (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña 2014, p. 84). It is true that some qualitative researchers question the need for a second coder, or for coder agreement, stating that "other researchers might well have devised alternative themes or developed different categories, but they should be able to see how the researcher(s) "got there" and be able to assess the value of the analysis" (Spencer et al., 2014, p.278 cited in Elliott, 2018, p.2859). While there is merit in this position, and though it is the case that few code changes were deemed necessary by the second coder, it was nevertheless a worthwhile process to undertake which sharpened the focus of the coding.

- Dependability has been demonstrated through the auditing process which shows "the process of selecting, justifying and applying research strategies, procedures and methods" (Yilmaz, 2013, p.320).

- Confirmability has been realised through participant approval and, it is hoped, through the presentation of findings, discussion and conclusions which are supported by the data.

- Transferability may be adjudged by other researchers by the provision of thick description throughout all aspects of the study.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has described the research paradigm, the underpinning theoretical framework and the researcher's ontological and epistemological assumptions. It has explored the qualitative research design, means of data collection, the analysis techniques and the means of verification which were employed to safeguard the trustworthiness of the findings.

In constructing the research methodology, and in conducting the analysis, the researcher endeavoured to abide by the systematic process outlined in the above six steps. That said,

she has sympathy for the position of Slee who, in assessing her own research methodology, comments that research is often less linear than may be intended. She observes that

> whilst the principles underlying the methodology are capable of clear enunciation, their translation into specific research practices was by no means straightforward…..it was only as a particular stage of the research process was tried out that I discovered whether or not it had worked, what data and meanings it was capable of eliciting, and what its limitations were. (Slee, 2004, p. 59-60)

In this study, the researcher found that an expansive questionnaire generated significant data and in Chapters 4 and 5 an analysis of its salient points are presented and discussed. It is hoped that justice has been done to what participants intended and this would seem to be the case given the positive response to the review of findings. Nonetheless, it is acknowledged that all was not plain sailing and that at the close of the survey one participant commented that he found some of the questions to be repetitive and another remarked on being tired having completed it. Therefore, the researcher accepts that in her endeavour to achieve clarity, she may have been somewhat over-zealous in her questioning. While the latter were not general complaints from the cohort, she believes it is important to note them for the benefit of other researchers. She also acknowledges that given the quantity of data, there may be areas which deserved more prominence which another researcher might have highlighted. She is encouraged, however, both by cohort response in this regard, and by Creswell's (2012, p.245) observation that "it is best to write a qualitative report providing detailed information about a few themes rather than general information about many". Her own limitations acknowledged, the generosity of participants in sharing their views has provided rich and worthwhile insights which are now explored in Chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 4: Results and Findings

4.0 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to consider religious book publishing in Ireland and to explore its possible significance for LRE. To achieve its purpose the research goes directly to authors who have published with indigenous publishers on issues related to religion in the period 2005-2015.

The research shines a light on two key areas of inquiry:

- how authors of religious books in contemporary Ireland during this period understand and experience their role
  and
- whether they view their published work as contributing to LRE.

These issues informed the line of questioning within the survey and follow-up interviews and now facilitate the thematic discussion of the findings under four main themes and thirteen sub-themes. These are shown below as follows:

Theme 1: The Messenger and the Message	
Sub-theme 1:	Who Becomes a Religious Author?
Sub-theme 2:	What Makes Their Writing Religious?
Sub-theme 3:	How Do They Understand Their Role and Purpose? The Emphases and Attributes of the Religious Author.
Sub-theme 4	Responding to the Signs of the Times.
Sub-theme 5:	Why the Word "Religious" May Not Resonate.

Theme 2: The Experience of Being an Author	
Sub-theme 1:	The Rewards Involved in the Writing Endeavour.
Sub-theme 2:	The Cost Involved: Obstacles and Disincentives.

Theme 3: Towards an Understanding of Lifelong Religious Education	
Sub-theme 1:	Understandings of Education.
Sub-theme 2:	Insights into Religious Education.
Sub-theme 3:	Conceptualising Religious Education in a Lifelong Context.

Theme 4 Religious Educator – An Aspect of Author Identity?	
Sub-theme 1:	Self-perception as Religious Educator or Otherwise.
Sub-theme 2:	Contribution to Lifelong Religious Education.
Sub-theme 3:	Improving the Landscape: Recommendations to Enhance Lifelong Religious Education.

In this chapter, in keeping with the need to stay close to the actual words of participants, frequent reference has been made to their testimony. In order to protect anonymity, each participant has been allocated a number from P1-P34 with quotations from participants referenced by indicating their number alongside the relevant survey question. To further protect privacy, the researcher is precluded from including the collated questionnaire data or interview transcripts in the appendices of this study.

4.1 Theme One: The Messenger and the Message

4.1.1 Who Becomes A Religious Author?

The data garnered from Questions 1-11 of the survey questionnaire revealed seven clear biographic and demographic findings which are presented below:

Finding1: The age profile of the cohort was predominantly 60 years plus with males outnumbering females by a ratio of 10:7.
Finding 2: All participants came from Christian denominations and were primarily Roman Catholic in background with very limited representation from other Christian traditions. Over half of the cohort (18 participants) were ordained priests or ministers.
Finding 3: The cohort showed a high level of academic achievement with more than half educated to doctoral level or above, over a third to master's level or above and the remainder to graduate level or above.

Finding 4: While eighty-five percent worked in full or part-time roles, the vast majority of those surveyed did not earn their living from writing with only five cohort members listing their occupation as writer.
Finding 5: Over three-quarters of the cohort had taught in a third level academic institution in a full-time, part-time or occasional capacity.
Finding 6: Leinster leads all other provinces in terms of author location with almost sixty-five percent of the cohort living in the east of the country.
Finding 7: Men in the cohort had been publishing books for significantly longer than women with one first publishing more than 50 years ago. However, more women than men began their publishing careers in the last twenty years. Between them, they had published 132 books in the timeframe under investigation.

4.1.1.1 Age and Gender Profile

We begin with some general biographic and demographic information which was informed by questions 1-10 of the survey questionnaire. As shown in Figures 1 and 2 below, of the thirty-four participants, there were twenty males and fourteen females. None were under 30 years. One female was in the 31-40 age range and another woman was in the 41-50 range. Nine participants, four women and five men, were aged between 51-60 while thirteen, eight women and five men, were in the 61-70 age range. Ten participants, all male, were over the age of seventy-one.

Figure 4.1

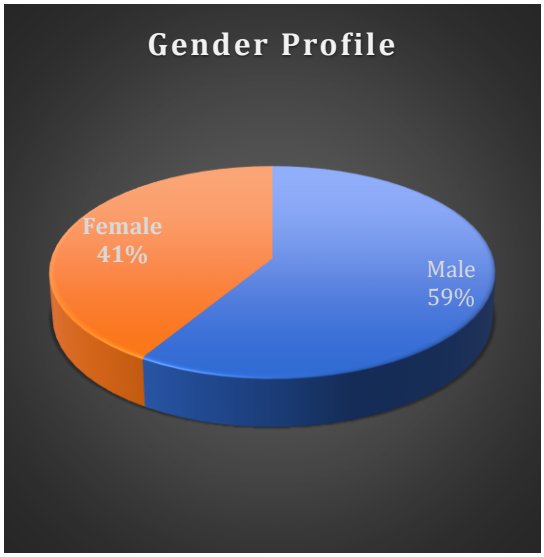
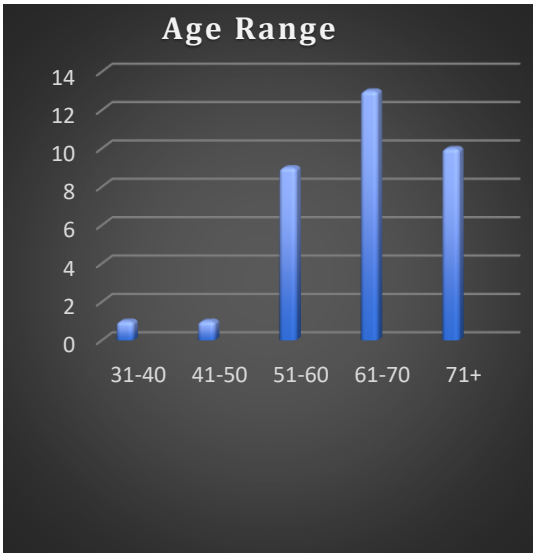


Figure 4.2



4.1.1.2 Religious Conviction and Life Status

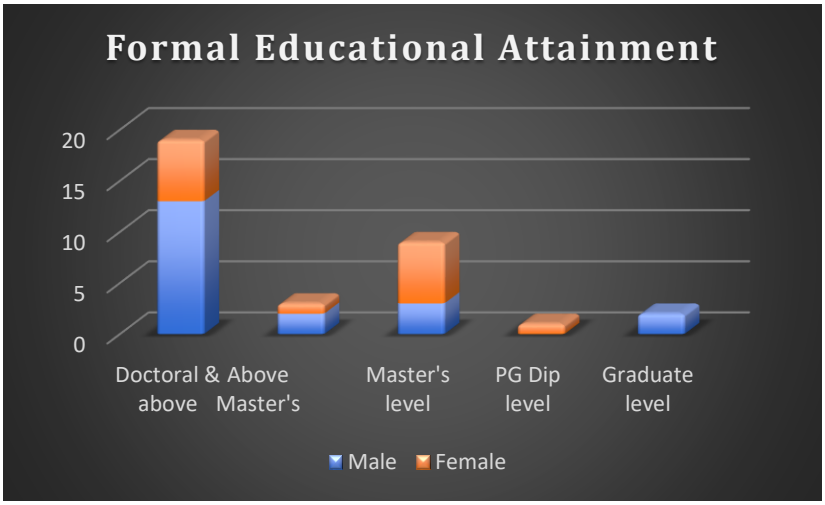
Asked in Question 4a if they would describe themselves as of religious faith or of secular conviction, thirty members of the cohort described themselves as persons of religious faith while one did not respond. Another stated that they held both religious and secular convictions (P18 Q.4a). One nuanced her response by stating that "I would describe myself as someone who has a secure sense of personal relationship with God …. I am not 'religious' in the sense that I practice the rites and rituals of any particular religion" (P24 Q.4a). Another participant answered by saying that she possessed "a deep spirituality that shapes the way I live my life*"* (P8 Q.4a).

Twenty-eight of the cohort gave their religious denomination as Catholic or Roman Catholic, two did not respond, one identified as "Roman Catholic by birth and Anglican by practice" (P32 Q.4b) while another described herself as "an ecumenical, post-denominational catholic Christian. A regular worshipper in the Church of Ireland for the last ten years and previously in the Roman Catholic Church" (P5 Q.4b). One participant gave their denomination as Methodist (P34 Q.4b) and another identified as a member of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (P28 Q.4b). Both of these were ordained ministers. Sixteen of the cohort were Roman Catholic priests, including one bishop/congregational leader (P25 Q.6). Of these, fifty per cent were diocesan clergy and the rest members of religious orders. Of the former, one participant clarified his religious denomination as "Christian, Roman Catholic, ecumenical and inter-religious" (P18 Q.4b). A similar emphasis was made by another cohort member who stated that she saw herself as "Catholic, Christian - for me the two belong together. Ecumenical and inter-faith aspects of my Catholic tradition are very important to me" (P17 Q.4b).

4.1.1.3 Formal Educational Attainment

As Figure 4.3 illustrates, nineteen of those surveyed, thirteen men and six women, were educated to doctoral level or above. This number included six women, five diocesan clergy, five priests of religious orders and three lay men. Three of the cohort were educated to above master's and below doctoral level. Among these were one woman, one diocesan and one religious priest. Nine participants were educated to master's level including six women, two priests and one lay man. One ordained minister was educated to postgraduate diploma level and two priests of religious congregations to graduate level.

Figure 4.3



4.1.1.4 Current Occupations

Of the total, twenty-four worked in full-time occupations: eight as full-time university academics (four lay women, two lay men and three priests, between them lecturing in RE, spirituality or theology). Two of the cohort worked in academic educational research. Two of the priests also worked part-time, one as a member of a parish team and one as a writer and superior of a small religious community.

Six others stated they were serving priests or ministers of religion, while three women and two men gave their current occupations as writers. The latter was also a diocesan consultant in RE. Four members of the cohort (two women, one priest and one lay man) occupied leadership or diocesan co-ordinator roles in the areas of biblical studies, catechetical formation and pastoral development. One woman worked as an environmental educator and retreat facilitator while one priest worked in a voluntary organisation.

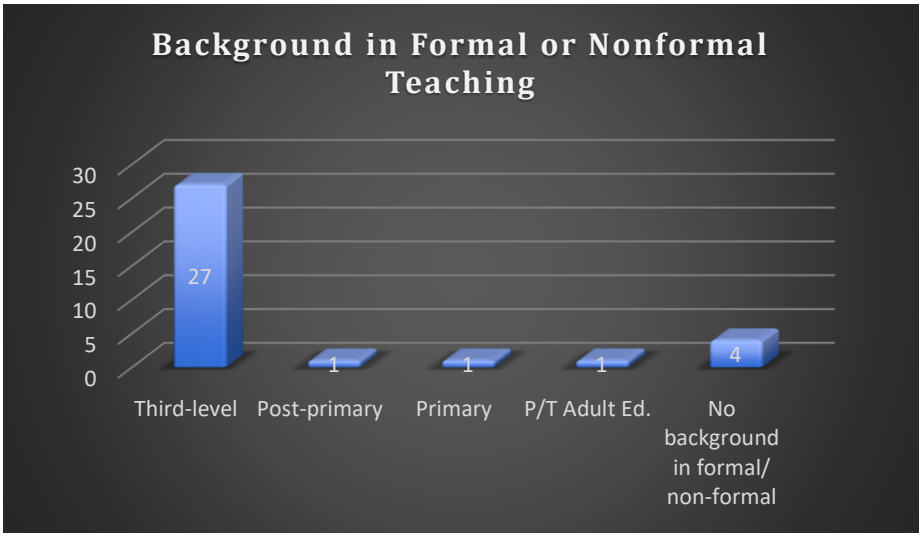
Ten of the cohort had retired from their full-time occupations but more than half of this number continued to work in part-time capacities. Of these, five were in the 61-70 age range and five in the 71+ range. Among them were six retired university academics (one lay woman and five priests who between them had taught biblical studies, liturgy, scripture and theology). Of these priests, two had continued to work as writers, one of them also working as a part-time parish chaplain, while another had continued to work as an editor. Two others were retired members of the Catholic clergy, one of whom continues to be "very involved in the Church Reform movement at a national and international level" thus implying he was not fully retired. Also, among this group was a man who had retired from the field of

broadcasting and a woman who had retired from full-time retreat work but who continued to work as a part-time adult tutor and youth retreat facilitator. More specific detail regarding occupation cannot be expanded upon further in order to avoid revealing identity.

4.1.1.5 Background in Formal or Nonformal Teaching

Over the course of their careers, the overwhelming majority of participants (seventy-nine and a half percent of the cohort) had at some time been employed by an Irish academic third level institution in a teaching role on either a full-time, part-time or occasional basis.

Figure 4.4



Of the seven who had not taught at third level, one had been a primary teacher and one a post-primary teacher (P29 and P3) in their early careers and one currently works in adult education on a part-time basis.

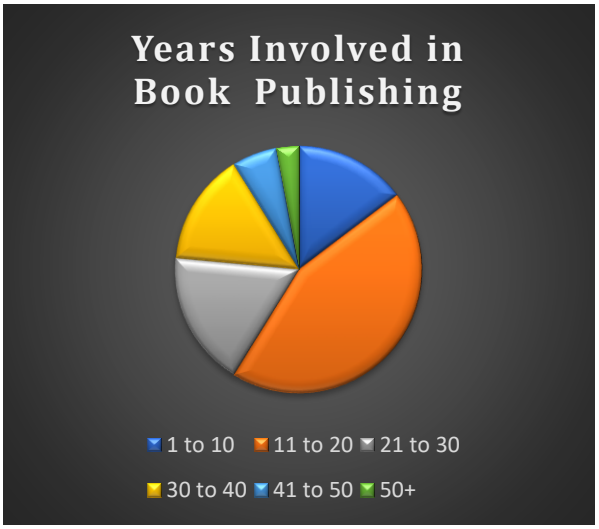
The majority of participants were located in urban areas with twenty-two in Leinster, five in Munster, four in Ulster and two in Connaught.

4.1.1.6 Years involved in Book Publishing

At the time of the survey, one participant, a priest, had first published as a book author 54 years ago, while two fellow priests had been publishing for between 41 and 50 years. In the 31-40 year bracket, three priests again featured along with one bishop/congregational leader and one lay man. In the 21-30 year range, the first female author emerged along with one lay man and four priests. As the years since first publication decrease, it is worth noting that in 11-20 year range, women, who up to now were close to conspicuous by their absence, begin to tip the scales in their own favour. In this range, the fifteen participants included

eight women and seven men of whom five were priests. Women feature singularly when it comes to publishing for ten years or less so that in this range, five female participants are present with no priests figuring for the first time. While it could not be claimed that this means that women are outstripping men when it comes to book publication, it is nevertheless interesting to note that in this specific cohort, more women than men began their book publishing careers in the last twenty years.

Figure 4.5 Years involved in book publishing



Years Publishing	Male	Female
1-10	0	5
11-20	7	8
21-30	5	1
31-40	5	0
41-50	2	0
51+	1	0

4.1.1.7 Categories of Publishing

Between them, participants published 132 books in the years 2005-2015. While each kindly listed all their book publications in Questions 10 and 11 of the survey questionnaire, and this was necessary in order to give the researcher an insight into the type or types of audience or educational setting that the books might coalesce with, preserving privacy precludes listing the book titles here. However, Figure 4.6 below shows the categories and numbers of books concerned. It must be acknowledged here that this researcher framed the book categories which were included and asked participants to identify where their books should be situated. She therefore recalls Hinds' earlier observation that the categories are mine (2000, p.46) and that the choice was limited to the range which were supplied. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the categories strongly corroborate and confirm the areas that participants refer to as what makes for religious writing which we will discuss below, and also that they align with Smart's (1989) dimensions of religion which provide a framework for the discussion.

Figure 4.6

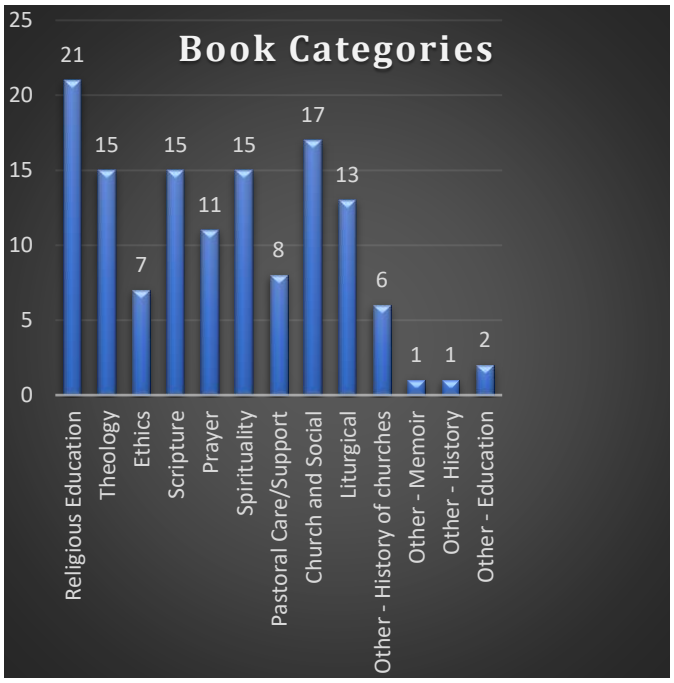
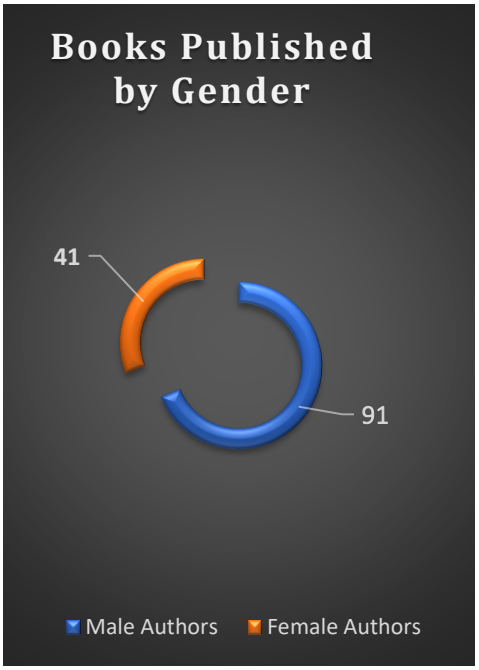


Figure 4.7



4.1.2 What Makes Their Writing Religious?

Question 17 of the survey questionnaire asked participants to give their views on what makes their writing "religious". Data analysis of this question, supplemented by comments made elsewhere in the survey, revealed that eighty-two percent of the cohort said their writing could be identified as religious for reasons which, when taken together, can be seen to echo what we have heard in the literature from both McBrien (1981) and Smart (1989). These reasons translate into two clear findings which are discussed in detail below:

Finding 8: Religious writing is implicitly or explicitly God-centred and reveals multiple images of God.
Finding 9: Again, implicitly or explicitly, it encompasses religion, and its dimensions, which include faith and belief, the spiritual nature of living, prayer, liturgy and scripture.

4.1.2.1 Religious Writing is God-Centred

Recalling McBrien's observation that "God's presence touches the whole person in the totality of the person's relationships not only with God but with all other persons, and with the whole cosmic order as well" (1981 p.251), almost half of the cohort emphasised the God-

centredness of their writing with both men and women, lay and ordained, using similar language to express their own belief in the manifestation of God in all of life. One participant spoke of his conviction that "God is to be found in all things… enriching our humanity and all creation and…challenging our injustices" (P26 Q.13) while another underlined "the profound presence of God in all things….nothing happens without God being part of it"(P19 Q.13). Expressing the hope for people to "see God in the 'muck and mess' of their everyday lives", a fellow participant wished "to give every person the opportunity to reflect and consider their human dignity as co-sharers in the Divine, and…as sisters and brothers of Jesus Christ" (P31 6 Q.13).

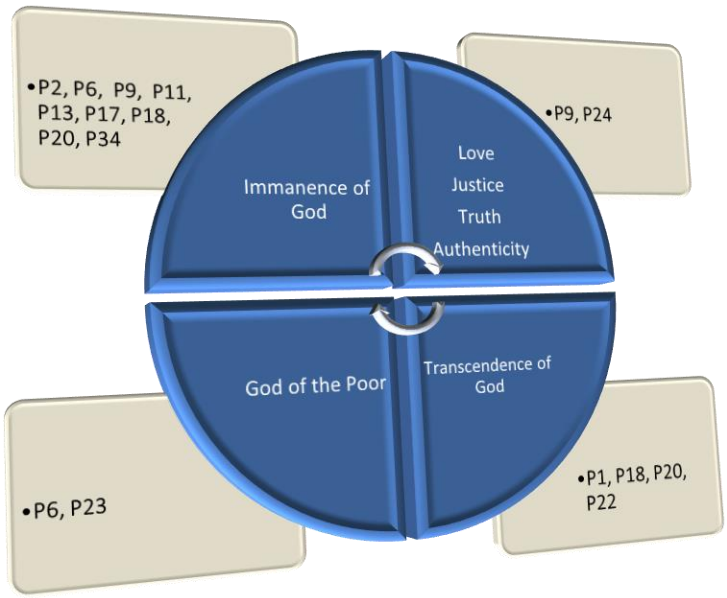
4.1.2.2 God Image

As can be seen in Figure 8 below, two salient features regarding the way participants wrote about God were the way in which they revealed overwhelmingly positive God-images and how multiple their images were. One spoke of the God in her writings as being "perfect Love, Justice, Truth and Authenticity" (P24 Q.4a) while others used terms which reflected the immanence and accessibility of Divine Love. Speaking of God as 'the sustainer of all life", one said "as a writer my voice comes from the roots of my being…., the God of love who is the horizon of my life" (P17 Q.17). Another put it this way:

> The intimacy of the Divine relationship with us is the most marvellous thing we can stumble on. Perhaps the original question for humans is: "Am I worthwhile, and if so, to whom?" Most people are doubtful on this, so if I can open a window onto Divine love for them, they can be more confident that they matter (P9 Q.17).

Quoting Pope Francis who, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, states that "when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved" (6), this same participant continued, "God invites us into this love: Christian living is to be a love affair! God also chooses to need us as his workforce to enable a better life for everyone" (P9 Q.13).

Figure 4.8: Multiple Images of God



4.1.2.3 A God of the Poor

Two fellow participants took up this latter idea of a God of action and compassion who requires believers to actualise love in the world through undertaking the work of justice amongst the excluded:

> The God in my writings is a God of compassion who preferentially reaches out to and is found especially among the poor, the suffering and all in need and who demands that we …. embrace the message of teachings such as Matthew 25 and the Sermon on the Mount. (P6 Q13)

This view was endorsed by another member of the cohort:

> Irish society, and much of the Western world societies, fail to support and help those who are poor or marginalised. The Gospel reveals a God who is on the side of the poor and marginalised. If we are living Christians, we should be passionately committed to creating a society in which inequality and poverty is minimised. (P23 Q.13)

That humankind is made in the image of God was underlined by two participants (P20 Q.13 and P34 Q.17) while two others commented that countering false images (P13 Q.13) and confronting “the residue of the negative images of God which prevailed before Vatican II” (P9 Q.16) had been key factors in their religious writing.

Images which evoke the "the breadth and the length, the height and the depth" (Eph. 3:18) of God’s love recall Elizabeth Johnson’s image of God as “love beyond all imagining” (Johnson, 2015). As we shall see below, her awareness of the “incomprehensible mystery” of God was also echoed in this study (Johnson, 2000, p.2; 2011).

4.1.2.4 The Transcendence of God

The ineffability of God had significant meaning in the writing of four of the cohort echoing the words of Augustine “if you have understood, then what you have understood is not God” (Augustine, Sermo 52, c.6, n.16 PL 38.360 cited in Johnson, 2000, p.9). One participant said that

> In writing I endeavour to express something of the mystery of God among us, yet infinitely more than we can imagine. I believe that this touches chords deep within people…enabling both me and them to continue to explore, to seek an ever more profound living out of the harmony in right relations in our current reality. (P22 Q.15)

Another remarked that “my writing does not deny reality, nor does it reject it; it simply opens it to another question and in doing that it becomes religious writing” (P1 Q.17).

Allied to mystery, was the simultaneous, paradoxical invisibility yet knowability of God expressed in Trinitarian language. This perspective was emphasised by two of the cohort with one noting “my writing is religious in so far as it talks meaningfully about transcendence, the mystery of the hidden God, and the Good News of Jesus Christ, and the enduring presence of the Holy Spirit within creation, history, culture and the arts, and communities” (P18 Q.17). Another commented that religious writing “captures the essence in some way of the mystery of human life and love and suffering and hope and the search for peace - and for me - in and with God, through Jesus Christ, encouraged by the Holy Spirit” (P2 Q.18).

Table 4.1: Elements Addressed in Religious Writing

	God / God Image	Religion	Faith and Belief	Spiritual Nature of Living	Prayer and Liturgy	Scripture
1	P1	P1	P1	P3	P2	P5
2	P2	P2	P2	P19	P4	P13
3	P6	P7	P3	P28	P5	P20
4	P9	P9	P4		P12	P21
5	P11	P10	P5		P15	P27
6	P13	P11	P8		P16	P28
7	P17	P12	P9		P19	
8	P18	P13	P11		P20	
9	P19	P18	P16		P21	
10	P20	P20	P20		P27	
11	P22	P21	P21		P31	
12	P23	P23	P22			
13	P24	P33	P24			
14	P26		P26			
15	P31		P27			
16	P34		P33			
17			P34			
18						

4.1.2.5 Religion and Its Dimensions

Expectedly, as Table 4.1 above shows, participants referred to religion itself, and the elements with which it is associated, as what categorised their writing as religious. One stated:

> It is religious in that it speaks to religious and spiritual experience, reflects on that experience, challenges people to think about religion, engage with religion, reflect on faith, on their faith and that of others, and seeks to encourage teaching and learning about, from and within religion. (P2 Q.17)

In words reminiscent of what we have heard from the Summa Theologica (II-II q.81, a.1 in McBrien, 1981 p.250), religion was described by another participant as "the area of humankind's relation with God" and as "a system and manner of life that unites us with God, that enables us to be Godly" (P4 Q.18). The latter point, regarding the intended effect of religion, was emphasised when another observed that "for me, religion is about this world and not the next" (P23 Q.17).

Two cohort members were keen to stress that religion opens up boundaries. One stated that "religions, and especially Christianity, open up horizons that would otherwise remain closed" (P18 Q.13), a perspective which had resonance in this comment: "I think my writing attempts

to show that religion, in every shape, opens the limits. Unlike science that defines the limits, religion extends the limits. Secularism is a boundary; religion is an outreach" (P1 Q.17).

Though we have seen McBrien (1981) link religion to explicit faith in God, participants varied in whether they saw religious writing as overt or tacit, with one, in agreement with McBrien, saying that his writing was religious in being "explicit in its focus on religious (including spiritual) dimensions of life" (P20 Q.17) and another expressing uncertainty as to the meaning of the term "religious author" but stating "I think it means someone who deals with religious subject-matter exclusively" (P33 Q.17). On the other hand, in tandem with Davis (cited in Goss and Aycock 1991, p.21) and Marty (cited in Smith 2002, p.1), three participants (P10 Q.18, P11 and P9) recognised that religious writing could be *both* implicit and explicit with one noting that "there are levels in 'religious writing' and I am on the explicit level, whereas Flannery O'Connor etc are on a more implicit level. I believe there is room for us all!" (P9 Q.15). Another agreed, saying that as well as writing whose subject matter is "religion/religious faith, religious spirituality, and theology and its ancillary disciplines", the term might also apply to "novelists, dramatists, poets who explore religious themes, provided they're not mere propagandists" (P11 Q.18).

In addressing what makes their writing religious, participants cited elements that suggest Ninian Smart's schema (1969, 1989, 1998) three of which will be addressed here – namely, experiential, ritual and mythological – with the remainder discussed in Theme 1, sub-theme 3 below.

4.1.2.6 The Experiential Dimensions of Religion

The experiential aspect of Smart's dimensions might be said to encompass dispositions of faith and belief, as well as experiences of spirituality, all of which were mentioned in the data as being aspects of what makes writing "religious" and which will be discussed below.

Faith and Belief

Again unsurprisingly, half of the cohort identified the concept of faith as being central to religious writing. On parity with Fowler (1981) and Durka and Smith who see faith as the "fundamental category of human existence" (1976a p.9), some spoke of the characteristics of a faith stance, referring to it as "an eminently intelligent reality" (P26 Q.14) which is "loving" (P2 Q.13), "rich" (P3 Q.13) and involves "journeying". (P20 Q.17). This latter descriptive would align with faith as movement as implied by both Fowler's stages (1981) and Harris' steps (1989).

One spoke about how faith does and does not manifest itself:

> The essence of Christian faith is based on grace, forgiveness, redemption. It is never rules and regulations or worse, punishing people by denying them the Eucharist, as some senior traditionalists maintain. (P4 Q.13)

In similar tone, another said that a feature of religious writing should be

> to unfold the riches of Christian faith and to help people appropriate them personally, so that even if the Church happens to be doing a poor job in nourishing people, they can still keep going. (P9 Q.15)

Somewhat relatedly, another cohort member underscored that for him, religious writing is both hallmarked by faith and subject to independent thinking: "it means writing for faith and from faith; but always open to the wider world and using our critical faculties" (P27 Q.18).

While most participants who mentioned faith referred to a personal faith stance as influencing their writing, one, who did not view himself as a religious author, nonetheless indicated that his writing might be called religious in that he "addressed the subject-matter that concerns faith-claims" and also "examined the historical and contemporary institutional expressions of faith" (P33 Q.17). This noteworthy response reminds us of Smith's contention that a book which "assesses religious belief or practice from an external, nonreligious perspective is not truly a religious book" (Smith, 2002 p2.). That the latter participant, however, seemed to acknowledge a grey area here again underlines how elusive an agreed definition can prove to be, something we have already seen signposted by Elinsky (2005 p.6). It also shows, and this will be reinforced later, that while writing a "religious" book is correlated with being a religious author, it is not necessarily a causative factor and much depends on the motivation and self-perception of the author, and indeed, the perception of the reading public, which is also something we will touch on in Theme 2.

In Questions 12 and 14 of the survey, when discussing their motivations and hopes when writing for publication, twelve of the cohort again endorsed the importance of the sharing and developing of faith to the author role. They reported that they were motivated to write in order to share their own faith journeys and faith perspectives so as to help people "to reflect on the place of religious faith in their lives, learn how to engage with its meaning for them and communicate its appeal and importance... to others" (P2 Q.14). Elsewhere, one noted that his central aim has been "an attempt to present Christian Catholic faith as an understandable and positive message, while trying not to ignore the difficulties that may

arise in human life" (P25 Q.13). Underscoring faith as "alive, evolving, always in process of becoming", another participant, again reminding us of Harris (1989), said she was motivated to write to highlight faith's dynamic flexibility which cannot be possessed as a "fixed and unchanging" commodity (P22 Q.14).

The need for cohesive and creative programmes of faith development, defined by one participant as a combination of "evangelisation, catechesis and religious education" (P2 Q.12), was highlighted by three participants as important reasons behind their own writing (P2 Q.12, P3 Q.14, P9 Q.22). Echoing Cunnane (2000, p.2), one in particular said his books were an attempt to mitigate what he called the "consistent failure of the dioceses to provide courses in adult faith formation":

> Poor nourishment was given to the People of God....until Francis arrived. I wrote to help put a bit of bread on the table for the starving. The fact that a small number of people hung in and wanted to find their own answers dictated the content and shape of my writing. (P9 Q.22)

Belief was a term used by eight of the participants when discussing what makes for religious writing with one stating clearly "I can only express what I believe" (P19 Q.15). Another also placed belief as central but defined a religious author as "either a person of belief in a faith tradition him/herself or who addresses the reader as a person of belief in a faith tradition". Though she goes on to state that "the belief in the faith tradition, or possibility thereof, is what characterises the authorship as religious", (P31 Q.18) her response seems to raise the question of whether belief *necessarily* needs to reside within the author or whether, as we saw in the literature review, that "empathetic outsiders" might still be able to claim the title of religious author (Oates Goss and Aycock, 1991. p.93). This noted, all others who mentioned belief spoke of it as emanating from the author's personal conviction as evidenced in the following statement:

> I write from an explicit focus on belief in God, and even when, in social commentary, attempting to use the accepted standards of public reason, I try to relate this to Christian faith. (P26 Q.17)

The Spiritual Nature of Living

Again, evoking McBrien's counsel that "one is not religious who does not think there is more to reality than meets the eye" (1981 p.251), three participants referred to "the spiritual nature of living" (P19 Q.18). One other, who considered her writing to be spiritual rather than religious, offered the opinion that "people need to engage a deeper reality than the

visible and tangible" (P22 Q.17), a view endorsed by a fellow cohort member who said that religious writing should point to "a level of awareness which takes us beyond the immediate physical perception to the reality of the spiritual world, and which challenges the idea that what we see is all there is to see - naive realism" (P3 Q.18).

4.1.2.7 Ritual as a Dimension of Religion

We have seen Smart categorise ritual as one of the key elements that constitute religion and this too is suggested by eleven participants who denoted prayer and liturgy as of importance when defining what makes writing religious and what gives it purpose. One participant identified this dimension as especially crucial saying "writing about liturgy is writing about worship and worship is a primary duty of the Christian" (P15 Q.17). Another's emphasis was to facilitate "the appropriate celebration of the liturgy… providing celebrants and others with material for preaching" (P21 Q.12). Focusing on prayer, a fellow cohort member spoke of his conviction that "all adults can be prayerful people when they are supported by words and images that touch into their experiences of life and love, joy and sadness in a way that speaks to them and encourages them to find space to reflect and learn to pray" (P2 Q.13).

4.1.2.8 The Mythological Dimension of Religion

As we have seen, Smart (1969, p. 29) defines the mythological element of religion as relating to the stories that "bring out something concerning the invisible world", as well as narrating the history of the religious community and giving guidance for life. Six of the cohort gave particular emphasis to this dimension. One participant acknowledged that while in her own case, writing about the Bible made her writing "religious", she also accepted that "academic study of the Bible can be done by anyone interested in ancient Near Eastern literature" (P5 Q.17). Another cohort member, using uplifting language, said that his writing was intended to illuminate "the truth and beauty and hopefulness of the biblical message" (P13 Q.14) and to promote a better understanding of the Bible "on the basis of sound modern scholarship" (P13 Q.12). Emphasising the urgency of the biblical message for current times, one stressed that a key part of his purpose was to convey the message that "the word of God matters; it can be understood…. I want people to experience the power of God's word today. As the church undergoes a painful regeneration, there can be no other genesis than the Scriptures" (P27 Q.13 and Q.14). The latter, with two others (P5 Q.13, P21 Q.12) raised accessibility as an issue which they sought to address in their writing by providing "biblical resources which are approachable and yet critical" (P27 Q.12) and "making material available in a popular form

for interested people who have not had the opportunity to undertake more academic study" (P21 Q.12).

4.1.3 How Do They Understand Their Role: The Emphases and Attributes of the Religious Author

Alongside the constituent elements of what makes writing religious which have been profiled above, this sub-theme details how members of the cohort understand their role as authors. Drawing from the data provided chiefly in Questions 13 and 15 which asked specifically about their core message and role perception, but also utilising responses to Questions 12 and 14 which asked about author motivation and achievement goals, the data reveals two overarching findings which each contain nine sub-findings. Together these uncover the main emphases or elements of role understanding as well as the attributes that members of the cohort associate with their role:

Finding 10: *Nine Elements of Role Understanding were reported including:*	**Finding 11:** *Nine Author Attributes were identified including being:*
• Supporting Religious, Theological, Biblical and Liturgical Education	• A Teacher
• Encouraging Critical Thinking	• A Translator
• Offering Pastoral Support	• A Searcher
• Offering Theological Reflection in the light of Vatican II	• A Story-Teller
• Advocating for Church Renewal and Reform	• An Iconographer
• Promoting Right Relationship	• A Motivator
• Communicating the Gospel	• A Bridge
• Promoting Dialogue and Inclusion	• An Evangelist
• Exploring Ultimate Questions	• A Catalyst

Explored under the headings of the remaining doctrinal, ethical, social and material dimensions of religion as outlined by Smart (1998) we begin with the first of the role emphases as indicated above.

4.1.3.1 The Doctrinal Dimension of Religion

We can recall from Chapter 2 that Smart's doctrinal dimension of religion is "the attempt to give system, clarity, and intellectual power to what is revealed through the mythological and symbolic language of religious faith and ritual" (Smart, 1969, p.19). In the latter regard, one

cohort member characterised his role as "to explain the Church's teaching and to give a reasonable and convincing account of the Christian faith" (P20 Q.15). As it transpired, this dimension commanded most attention in the responses of the cohort with five of their role emphases falling into this category. These include:

- Supporting religious, theological, biblical and liturgical education;
- Encouraging critical thinking;
- Offering theological reflection in the light of Vatican II;
- Promoting dialogue and inclusion;
- Exploring ultimate questions.

Though Table 4.2 below shows the role emphases in order of overall frequency of mention, they are examined here in terms of the dimension of religion to which they relate and within this ordering, prevalence is adhered to.

Table 4.2: Nine Elements of Role Understanding

	RE/ Theol/ Bible/ Liturgy Ed.	Critical Thinking	Pastoral Support	Theol. Reflection	Renewal /Reform	Right Relations	The Gospel	Dialogue /Inclusion	Ultimate Questions
1	P2	P1	P1	P5	P2	P1	P1	P2	P4
2	P4	P3	P3	P9	P3	P5	P3	P17	P7
3	P5	P7	P8	P11	P4	P6	P6	P18	P17
4	P8	P8	P9	P12	P6	P10	P9	P20	P18
5	P10	P10	P15	P13	P7	P18	P13	P28	P23
6	P12	P12	P18	P14	P10	P19	P18	P31	P26
7	P13	P17	P20	P15	P12	P22	P19	P34	
8	P14	P18	P24	P17	P13	P23	P20		
9	P15	P20	P28	P18	P17	P28	P25		
10	P17	P22	P29	P30	P18	P34			
11	P18	P25	P30	P31	P20				
12	P20	P26	P31	P32	P32				
13	P21	P27							
14	P25	P30							
15	P31	P32							
16	P33	P33							
17	P34								

Supporting Religious, Theological, Biblical and Liturgical Education

Half of the cohort cited supporting one or more aspect of education as significant for their purpose and role. In particular, eight participants spoke about resourcing RE at primary, post-primary, university and policy levels. One stressed the subject's vital contribution to personal and social development by opening "all young people to a deep sense of reflection, encouraging respect and helping to build up the individual, communities (including faith communities) and society" (P2 Q.13). Speaking of writing to support teachers and third level students of RE, another highlighted "the over-reliance on literature from abroad for the discipline of religious education at primary level in Ireland" (P14 Q.12). A similar lacuna

was noted by a fellow cohort member who remarked, "I was using texts that were speaking out of the English or American cultural context and there was nothing immediately relevant to the Irish situation" (P17 Q.12). The notion of serving the needs of students was felt as a motivational factor by each of this sub-group with one indicating "service" as her single barometer of achievement (P14 Q.14).

In the discipline of theology, the impetus to respond to students' need for academic texts at undergraduate and postgraduate level also featured in the responses of five of this sub-group. This was equally true in the area of scripture and biblical studies where three participants reported that their writing impetus came from the desire to resource their third level students. Similarly, with regard to the academic study of liturgy, one participant remarked that "teaching the subject called for a very practical way of celebrating the subject and that included writing about it" (P15 Q.12).

Encouraging Critical Thinking

Close to half of the cohort recorded the desire to foster personal and communal critical reflection as a driver of their decision to seek the publication of their work. Of this, seven said that writing helped them with their own cognition and engagement with ideas. For one, "the work of putting ideas into print helped greatly in clarifying for myself what I believed and where I stood on major issues" (P7 Q.12) while for others, writing for publication process helped to refine the ability "to articulate simply and intelligently my thoughts and opinions" (P20 Q.12).

A desire to communicate and "shape alternative modes of thinking and imagining beyond the givens" (P32 Q.14) was how one participant commented on her own goal in writing. Similarly, another expressed the wish to affirm" new ways of seeing" while "articulating perspectives that are hopefully life-giving" (P12 Q.14). One of those surveyed saw his aim as "a kind of Christian journalism" or the telling of stories "which might engage the imagination and 'keep the rumour of God alive'" (P3 Q.14). Hopes to "inform", "enable" and "challenge" (P30 Q.12), "to call people into the listening space" (P1 Q.14), to encourage readers "to see arguments and counter arguments", and "ultimately… to think" (P17 Q.14) were all key goals which shaped how they saw their purpose and role.

Reinforcing what we heard in the previous sub-theme about the need to uphold "accepted standards", another participant had this to say about the author's role:

> religious authors should be bound by the same canons of scholarship and intellectual integrity as other disciplines within the humanities: objectivity,

> research, accountability within the community of scholars and the Christian community, concern for the truth, attention to justice, and the importance of human freedom. (P18 Q.17)

Such remarks indicate that the questions explored, the thinking elucidated, and the conclusions proposed in religious writing should not be "propaganda" but rather "a thoughtful invitation to think through the human foundations of religious faith" (P21 Q.17), faith that is "not make-believe" but is instead "rooted in history, experience and culture" (P18 Q.13).

Offering Theological Reflection in the Light of Vatican II

Twelve of the cohort were explicit in their desire to promote and inform theological reflection so as to "share the rich theological tradition that I belong to" (P30 Q.12) and provide "resources for how people can enter into the new vision of church (P12 Q.15). One commented on the importance of making theology available in the face of what he saw as the indifference of Church leadership: "Irish church authority is less than enthusiastic about theology…yet I think it remains important to cater for people who continue to use their heads" (P11 Q.29). Two others spoke of the desire to help people to "flourish" and become informed "so they can become theologically literate and so gain confidence" (P30 Q.14). Her fellow participant put it this way: "I seek to empower people to view themselves as theologians with just as much valuable insights as those who are in ministry, or academically qualified in related areas" (P31 Q.14).

Six of those surveyed were specifically motivated by a desire to uphold the "richness and potential" of the ecclesiology and theology of Vatican II (P12 Q.13). One noted how her early adult learning coincided with the timing of the Council and "the response of theologians to the exciting call…. for a return to the sources and an adaptation of the Church's way of life to the contemporary world" (P5 Q.17). Another affirmed how Vatican II had "profoundly influenced" his image of Church: "I seek to foster the spirit of Vatican II and counter what I (and many others) regard as betrayal of that vision and spirit" (P13 AOC).

Echoing what we have heard earlier regarding scripture, several participants commented on their wish to make theology more accessible to the non-specialist reader by writing in a jargon-free way and "in a language people can relate to" (P12 AOC):

> I enjoyed theology and spirituality so much as a student that I determined, if given the opportunity, to share their riches with others who would not have the chance to do their own academic study or research…. I try to base my writing on sound theology, but to make it attractive. I had to choose early

> on between writing in academic or popular mode, and chose the latter. (P9 Q.12)

Promoting Dialogue and Inclusion

Linked to exploring questions which try to make sense of life's purpose in relation to God, others and the world, seven participants identified the need to foster dialogue and inclusion as part of this process and as integral to the religious author's role. One commented that while his own writing was grounded in the Catholic tradition, his intention was that it be "ecumenical, inter-religious and inter-cultural in vision and tone" (P2 Q.17). Another stated that in incorporating material from a variety of sources in her writing including "Christianity, Judaism and the Wisdom Traditions", she sought to "educate children to view life through a spiritual lens and to encourage them in the core values of respect for God, love of neighbour and the positive attitudes of understanding, fair play and compassion" (P34 Q.27). A fellow participant speaking passionately about the need for humility, welcome and attentive listening said, "we don't have all the answers but we're tasked with exploring those awkward and deep questions about life and engaging in dialogue with the other":

> I love the notion of dialogue. Dia-logue: inter-religious and inter-belief dialogue - God talk in a world where we are searching for new ways of communicating…. One of my key emphases is on listening to and learning from other traditions. Respecting the giftedness of the strange other - whether that be a gendered other (and with gender fluidity that's an increasingly challenging concept) or a religious or non-religious other…. I like muddying the waters by cross fertilising groups that might have been seen as disparate. I like reaching out to people who would perhaps not have seen themselves as belonging in the religious sphere or speaking to religious issues in ordinary language. (P17 Q.13)

Exploring Ultimate Questions

Closely allied to the importance of critical thinking, the challenge to think deeply about the "quest for meaning" (P18 Q.21) and the purpose of life also emerged when discussing the motivational forces behind their writing. Applying what Smart would call "intellectual power" to such matters as **"**the meaning of life, the presence of the Divine, the existence, or not, of an afterlife" was how one framed his own view (P7 Q.18). In similar vein, a fellow cohort member stated that the religious author is one who poses questions about such fundamentals, one who **"**challenges people to find answers" for themselves (P23 Q.18).

4.1.3.2 The Ethical Dimension of Religion

As we have seen, the ethical dimension of religion is associated with what it means to live an honourable, well-lived life. (Smart, 1969, Elias 2012). Three interrelated role emphases were identified which might be seen as falling within this dimension. These are discussed here in order of prevalence and include:

- Offering pastoral support
- Promoting right relationship
- Communicating the Gospel

Offering Pastoral Support

The intention to provide pastoral support through their writing emerged as a notable thrust of the author's role. In all, twelve participants alluded to this aspect of their work. They wished to "give people a reason to hope" (P1 Q.15); "bring joy and healing" (P24 Q.15); "provide readers with a sense of faith, hope and love" (P20 Q.15; P18 Q.17) and "to inspire, to generate reflection, to comfort and to energise" (P29 Q.17). One participant synthesised these pastoral emphases by describing his writing role as one that hopes to "nourish the heart as well as the mind…I have tried to follow through on Jesus' statement that he has come that people may have life, life to the full" (P9 Q.18).

Reminding us of the Golden Rule (Mt.22:38-39), one highlighted the work of peace and reconciliation in places of conflict as paramount in her own writing: "I believe I have something to say that just might give hope and courage" (P28 Q.12). Others expressed the wish to support families who have suffered the loss of a loved one to suicide as a catalyst for their published work (P8 and P24, both Q.13). For another participant too, the experience of bereavement had a significant impact on the content and purpose of her own writing. She reflected that such loss, alongside also becoming a mother, opened up "the context of family as a catechetical ground" so that consequently "much of my religious writing was aimed at families" (P31 Q.22).

Promoting Right Relationship

Allied to pastoral support, a focus on promoting right relationship, and on exploring what this might look like, was taken up again by ten members of the cohort as central to their role. One commented that "the religious author is most certainly not one who possesses the Truth but, like the reader, is on a spiritual journey seeking to discover, understand and articulate relationship with self, others and God" (P6 Q.18). This notion of discovering and articulating

together, in dialogue with readers, was also alluded to by a participant who said her role was to "inspire and encourage widespread inquiry and debate about meaning and purpose in life as we try to live in the harmony of right relations - self, God, other people and creation" (P22 Q.14).

The importance of creation and climate justice to right relationship was mentioned by four participants with one noting that one of her books was prompted by "concern about the ecological crisis and my conviction that I could help motivate believers in Jesus to see earth-care as essential to Christian faith (P5 Q.12).

Action for justice, including gender, climate and social justice was a key aim of this group of participants. One commented:

> as a religious author I see my role not simply as exploring, developing and articulating religious/theological/philosophical ideas but as encouraging debate and discussion leading to compassionate action. (P6 Q.15)

They made clear that writing for them was not envisaged as an end in itself but was aimed at transformation. The hope was to inspire "a different understanding of the meaning of the life and message of Jesus Christ from the conventional understanding…. to show the centrality of social justice in the Gospels: changing attitudes, and subsequently changing the policies and structures within which we live" (P23 Q.14).

Communicating the Gospel

Proclaiming the kerygma was the primary function of the author's role and though specifically mentioned by nine participants, it was clearly the underpinning foundation of much that was reported by others and the thread which connects the tapestry of author emphases. One stated, "I see that the Good News of Jesus Christ is the core Christian message and seek to promote it" (P13 Q.13). Another agreed that proclaiming the Gospel was the basis of the role "even if little attention is paid to it, it has a rightness about it. Success is God's problem, not mine!" (P9 Q.19). A fellow cohort member stressed the duty and responsibility attached to Jesus' command to "Go out to all the world and tell" (P1 Q.12). She said, "if there is no alternative reading for our time then our silence lacks integrity…. I do not accept that people are not interested anymore; I do accept that people are not interested because they are not told (P1 Q.20). Others emphasised that the telling must be done in ways that are "credible, modern, and appealing (P18 Q.12) as well as "relevant and necessary" (P20 Q.14).

4.1.3.3 The Social Dimension of Religion

Advocating for Church Renewal and Reform

According to Smart (1998), this element includes the way the religion institutionalises or organises itself in terms of leadership and structures and how it interacts with the society in which it is located. As we have seen in Table 4.2, a third of the cohort addressed this dimension when they identified an aspect of the religious author's role as entailing working and pressing for renewal and reform in the Catholic Church. Such change included pastoral renewal (P12 Q.12), promoting "collaborative work in local faith communities, involving priest and people" (P3 Q.22) and

> challenging those in leadership in the Church in Ireland to take mission and community seriously, not just in their words but in how they organise the Church and its resources, human and otherwise, to best use the talents and energy of committed people, while reaching out to those on the margins of Church and those of other belief systems. (P2 Q.15)

Ensuring that the female voice was heard was important to the role and purpose of four participants who each reinforced a similar point. One stated that her writing was motivated "by the sense that female experience had been and still was neglected in theology and I felt I had something to contribute" (P32 Q.12). Another said "I am a female in a field where … not many women, especially lay women, were empowered to speak and write in the past" (P17 Q.12) while another remarked that her writing was influenced by "the Catholic Church's refusal to acknowledge the equality of women. This has been articulated by Popes Benedict and Francis" (P10 Q.22). She continued, "I hope to persuade the reader that we do not live in a post-feminist world. I seek to give them the facts of women's inequality, showing the roots and causes used as justification for this inequality, and to provide an alternative vision" (P10 Q.22 and Q.14). Another commented that part of his work was "an attempt to bring about the means whereby women would play their full role in the decision-making processes of the Church" (P9 Q.22).

The need to challenge clericalism and legalism (P6 Q.13) and "to change and reform the Catholic Church from within" (P18 Q.15) were key to the roles and motivations of this sub-group. Saying that reform was the "first and main motive for the bulk of my writing" (P7 Q.12), one participant had strong words to say about an urgent need for reform:

> The Church is no longer effective at doing what is the only important purpose for its existence - proclaiming the message of Jesus. The institution has got too big and powerful, and has become an obstacle to the

> Message. I have consistently tried to highlight that fact in every way I could. (P7 Q.13)

Two others reinforced this point, one saying he was galvanised by the need "to struggle against iniquity in the church masquerading as authority" (P4 Q.21) while another revealed his "need, and duty, to challenge overly conservative stances and (contrary to the spirit of Vatican II) a hankering after a failed past" (P13 Q.21).

4.1.3.4 The Material Dimension of Religion

The final material dimension which, in Smart's categorisation, refers to the physical or aesthetic, such as places of worship, works of art or sacred music, did not feature prominently among participant response with regard to the author role. However, we do see these aspects emerge later when participants consider LRE. This noted, two cohort members did refer to resourcing liturgical music through their published work (P15 and P19) and one of them made the observation that writing provided

> a window into my world of music and creativity. Music helps to paint the picture through the creation of moods and words put a such an experience into a context**...**I would hope that in my writings I can help people to look at their own life experience and see how they too can influence and enrich our world. (P19 Q.14)

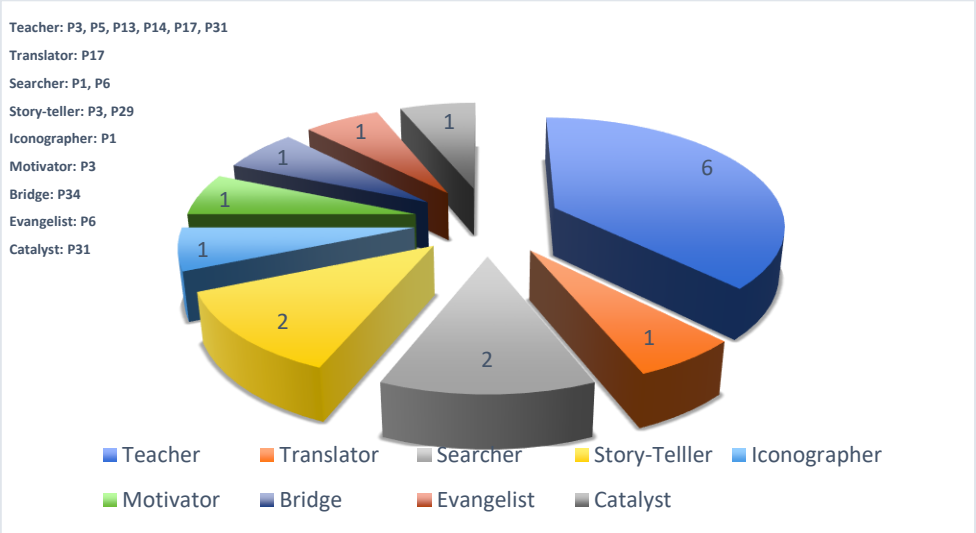
4.1.3.5 The Attributes of Religious Authors

Participants used a rich variety of adjectives to describe the attributes of the religious author and each amplifies the various understandings of role that we have outlined above. One of these attributes was being "a teacher". When first asked in Question 15 how they understood their role as author, three participants described themselves in this way with two referring to supporting RE as key to their author role (P2, P14, both Q.15). However, when responding to this question, another participant, also involved professionally in RE, characterised her role as author, as being that of "a translator":

> I take the Christian tradition and I am tasked with presenting it in a manner that makes sense to people who know little or nothing about it and who are not terribly interested in it. My job is to represent the tradition to the best of my ability and to also adapt it for the contemporary context. It's not just replicating a tradition or the ideas of the past. The task is to test ideas. To be honest. To be disappointed too and acknowledge failings – my own and others. To find new ways of speaking about traditional themes in a radically new world. (P17 Q.15)

Later in the survey, three others also used the self-descriptive of teacher (P13 Q.29, P17 Q.19 and P31 Q.22). As Figure 4.9 shows, two described themselves as "a searcher" (P1, P6 - both Q.18) while two others as "a story-teller" (P3 Q.15, P29 Q.15). One viewed her role as that of "an iconographer - drawn, not driven, given not making" (P1 Q.18) while a fellow cohort member viewed himself as "a motivator" (P3 Q.15). Being "a bridge between the traditional childhood experience of faith and a more thoughtful, responsible, mature pre-adolescent faith" (P34 Q.15) was how one of those surveyed characterised her role while another saw himself more as "an evangelist" or as "one who seeks to invite, challenge and inspire the reader to reflect on his/her…role in building the Kingdom of God" (P6 Q.15). Elsewhere in the research, the concept and importance of evangelisation was also referred to by two other participants, (P2 Q.13, P19 Q.19) as core to their work. Targeting a similar goal, another participant saw herself as "a catalyst" seeing her role as "initiating a conversation, inspiring self-reflection, posing questions, offering alternative perspectives…so as to give readers the confidence in their own questioning and reasoning abilities to explore God in their lives" (P31 Q.14).

Figure 4.9: Author Attributes



4.1.4 Responding to the Signs of the Times

In the preceding two sub-themes we have discussed what makes writing religious, and how authors understand their role and purpose. In sub-theme 1, we also saw the categories of writing which participants engaged in. However, since protecting identity precludes us from discussing the content of particular books, in an effort to shed more light on how those

surveyed understand the social and community responsibility attached to their role, Question 22 of the survey asked participants to talk about any specific events in church or society which had influenced the content of their writing in the decade between 2005 and 2015. Table 4.3 below gives a visual representation of factors which occasioned a response from members of the cohort during the timeframe in order of prevalence. Analysis of the data revealed the following four broad findings:

Finding 12: Responding to scandal, crises and decline were priorities.
Finding 13: Societal happenings at the intersection of faith and culture commanded attention.
Finding 14: Resourcing church events and the liturgical year were writing influences.
Finding 15 Developments in education and religious education prompted a response.

4.1.4.1 Scandal, Crises and Decline

Responding to the clerical sexual and institutional abuse scandals within the Catholic Church was identified as an animating force by twenty-nine percent of cohort members. One expressed a sense of impotency in trying to make a response when she said "the revelations about clerical sexual abuse left me feeling inadequate to the task of finding ways to articulate meaning into a time of anger and devastation" (P32 Q.22). Another recalled "a huge issue of confidence in leadership" and in the "moral authority of the Catholic church" (P17 Q.22). Others spoke of the "mis-handling" (P26 Q.22); "the cover up" (P10 Q.22); "the response of Church hierarchy" (P30) and of "a lot of disillusionment abroad, a loss of trust in the Church as an institution and consequent fall-off in the practice of religion" (P29 Q.22).

Seventeen percent also noted the decline in practice or what one called a "movement away from Church as dominant voice in people's lives" (P1 Q.22) as commanding attention in their writing with another noting "the disconnect between faith and religious ritual" and "the disaffection of many parents in the 35-45 age group" (P34 Q.22).

The fall in vocations to the priesthood, and "the urgent need to re-think priesthood in general" was a further issue of note (P7 Q.22) while the closure of institutes of theology and the demise of the religious book publisher, Columba Press, which as we have seen, has since

been reconstituted under new ownership as Columba Books, were listed as further evidence of decline which influenced members of the cohort (P30 Q.22).

Table 4.3: Issues Which Influenced the Cohort's Writing Between 2005-2015

	Clerical Abuse	Secularism/ Secularisation	Church Decline	Vatican Politics	Climate/ Ecology	Church Events	Terrorism/ Recession	Dev. in Ed./RE
1	P7	P1	P1	P4	P1	P2	P9	P2
2	P10	P3	P7	P6	P5	P7	P17	P14
3	P11	P11	P15	P7	P18	P15	P18	P17
4	P15	P17	P17	P13	P22	P21	P33	
5	P17	P18	P20	P17	P26	P27		
6	P20	P25	P30	P22				
7	P26	P31	P34	P26				
8	P29	P32						
9	P30							
10	P32							

Vatican Politics

Slightly over seventeen percent of the cohort referred to the election of Pope Francis in 2013 as having a positive influence on their writing. One noted that it gave him "great hope that the direction I have been struggling to follow is not quite so 'left-field' as sometimes is portrayed" (P6 Q.22) while others said they were encouraged by his papal exhortations and encyclicals including *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), *Misericordiae Vultus* (2015) and *Laudato Si'* (2015). One participant reported that aspects of his own writing had focused on the distinct understandings of church held by different popes, especially those which emerged from "the papacies of John-Paul II and Benedict, with their particular 'take' on ecclesiology, and the contrasting 'take' of Francis" (P26 Q.22). One cohort member indicated "various changes in the Vatican in that period, and their effect on the whole Church" as prompting his response (P7 Q.22) while another revealed that his writing was influenced by frustration with the "Vatican Curia and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith" (P4 Q.22).

4.1.4.2 Societal Happenings at the Intersection of Faith and Culture.

Certain other events in society in the decade under discussion brought "the dialogue between faith and culture" (P26 Q.12) into sharp focus and impacted the written deliberations of the cohort. Echoing Habermas' recognition of a need for the religious and secular voices to enter a new dialogue (2013), participants stressed the wish to "serve the culture of our time" (P1 Q.14); to "make sense of the Mystery of God in the public forum" (P18 Q.12); and drew

attention to issues of public concern which they wished to bring into conversation with "developments….in Catholic Social Teaching, not least in matters ecological" (P26 Q.22). Climate and ecological distress animated the writing of fourteen percent of the cohort with one emphasising the need to make connections between religious faith and how we operate in the world, how we "speak truth to power" (P22 Q.14):

> I believe my books have made and are making a valuable contribution to life as it unfolds. Why? They open the possibility of exploration re: mystery, truth, God, faith, the root causes of injustices and exclusion in our world and endeavour to challenge us to be our best selves as we together seek solutions in response to the cry of the earth, the cry of the poor. (P22 Q.28)

In their thinking, they evoke what Habermas calls "the stronger impulses towards action in solidarity" (cited in Lane, 2013a, p.15) which religion encourages, ethical impulses which he sees as lacking in the modern era of individualism governed by capitalist and consumerist forces. This has led him to advocate for what he calls a "post-secular" discussion reflective of "a shift in consciousness in largely secularized or 'unchurched' societies that by now have come to terms with the continued existence of religious communities, and with the influence of religious voices both in the national public sphere and on the global political stage" (Habermas, 2013, p.348). Though his language reflects a tolerance rather than a celebration of religion, his thinking offers a balance that challenges soloist secularist norms, which we will shortly discuss, to duet with communal religious dispositions in service of renewed societal cohesion and collective action.

Secularisation and Secularism

While open to a range of understandings and definitions, secularisation refers to

> the process pertaining to modern societies whereby religious doctrines and organizations experience diminished social influence because of the expansion of rationalism, science and technology that accompanies the process of industrialization and urbanization. (Pérez-Agote, 2014 p.886)

Its sister term, secularism, is less a process and more an ideology, or belief, that religion "should not be involved with the ordinary social and political activities of a country" (Cambridge Dictionary on-line). Twenty-three percent of those surveyed identified these concepts, which saw the "marginalisation of the religious voices in society" (P17 Q.22), as motivating forces for their writing. Responding to them prompted "a continuing impulse to

write to try and put something else in the scales so that the sacred is not banished from reflections about how we live and what we desire" (P32 Q.22). One participant also observed that the "rise in the secular voice in Irish public discourse" has been met with rebuttals from some religiously conservative commentators which have "done more damage than good for religious education and religious authors at present":

> I feel that the voices in Irish society who have been given space in the media to represent the religious perspective have not done so adequately……. This was clearest seen in the midst of the Marriage Referendum in 2015. Such events make it clearer to me that we need religious authors and religious educators more than ever. (P31 Q.22)

The Rise of Terrorism and the Global Recession

The growth of terrorism, including Islamic extremism, galvanised four participants to write in order to contribute to "the landscape of inter-religious dialogue" (P18 Q.22), explore "the problem of how God copes with evil and suffering" (P9 Q.22) and to "demonstrate the need for religious understanding to have a profile in civic education" (P33 Q.22). Similarly, the deep recession of 2008, with its attendant "unemployment… issues of homelessness and poverty and inequality" (P17 Q.22), was a catalyst for three of the cohort.

While one participant mentioned the "advent of the digital revolution" (P18 Q.22) as influencing his writing during the timeframe, it is interesting to note that when asked, the majority (seventy-three percent) reported that the arrival of e-books had little to no impact on them as authors. Although thirty-two percent expressed varying levels of support for e-books, seventeen percent said they either did not read them at all or that they preferred the print medium (Q.23).

Resourcing Church Events and the Liturgical Year

Two participants identified the need to resource both "the seasons of the Church's year" (P7, Q.12) and the liturgical changes that came about after the introduction of the Q.22 of the New Missal in November 2011 (P15 Q.22) as occasioning their writing. For others, the marking of significant anniversaries within the history of a religious order (P21 Q.22) and the resourcing of special church events such as Eucharistic Congress (2012) or the Year of Mercy (2016) were the focus of the publishing work of members of the cohort during the timeframe.

4.1.4.3 Developments in Education and Religious Education

Three participants reported that cultural changes within Ireland in general, and within RE in particular, were factors which impacted their writing. As one commented:

> The reality of diversity of religious beliefs in contemporary Irish society today and the growth of those who do not have, or live according to, a religious understanding of life has been one of the key indicators of a new Ireland that has developed over the last decade. (P2 Q.22)

Until 2011, ninety-six percent of primary schools in Ireland were under denominational patronage with the overwhelming majority under the stewardship of the Catholic Church (Coolahan, Hussey and Kilfeather, 2012). As demand increased for diversity of school choice in the education system it led to heated public debate, much of which focused on the "divesting of Catholic schools and contestation of school (Catholic) enrolment policies" as well as much discussion about "sacramental preparation in schools, Catholic management of schools [and] ownership of school buildings" (P17 Q.22).

The government-initiated *Forum on Patronage and Pluralism*, and its resulting report (Coolahan, Hussey and Kilfeather, 2012), paved the way for significant changes in primary school provision and patronage, saw the emergence of more Educate Together and Community National Schools, and impacted both the teaching of RE at primary level and the training of student teachers at third level. The role of religion in colleges of education also came under scrutiny and the right of third level pre-service teachers to opt out of teaching RE became enshrined and led to a need "for choice in all pre-service teacher courses between religious and ethical education modules/programmes" (P17 Q.22).

Such developments where "Catholic schools are now just one player in a wider market-place of primary schools" (P14 Q.22) had a key influence on all three participants with one commenting that she was driven by "the need to inform the wider professional community about the changed landscape of primary RE and of initiatives such as the new curriculum in that landscape" (P14 Q.22).

The new departures in primary RE were preceded by changes in the post-primary sector when in 2000, RE became recognised as a state-examined subject with the first examinations taking place for junior certificate in 2003 and subsequently for leaving certificate in 2005. This innovation, alongside the aforementioned shifts in primary provision, has afforded increased interest in RE and Catholic education both within the academy and within the public sphere. This, according to one participant, "influenced my books and other writings

as I have sought to contribute to recognition of religious education as a recognised subject, and tried to help people reflect on faith development as a significant contributor to personal wellbeing and for the up-building of faith communities" (P2 Q.22).

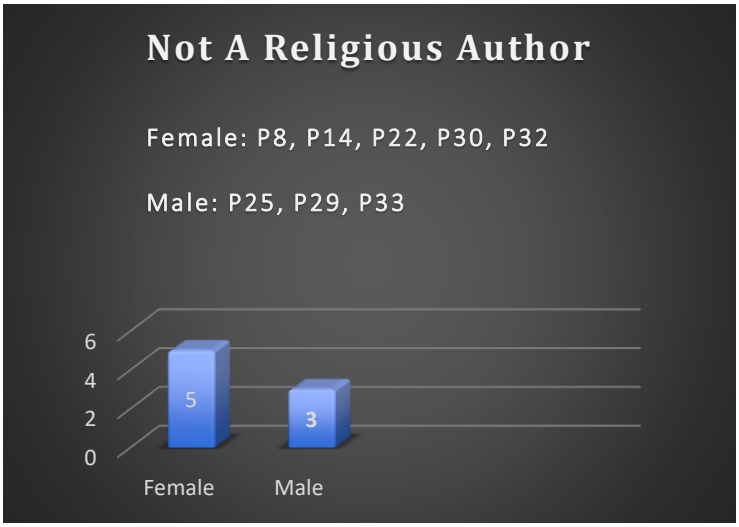
4.1.5 Why the Term 'Religious Author' May Not Resonate

While all the participants in the study had written books which could qualify as pertaining to some aspect of religion between the years 2000-2105, Figure 4.10 shows that eight of them did not consider themselves to be religious authors but viewed their writing, more properly, as an extension of other roles they held. This reality, and the reasons behind it, generated the final significant finding of Theme 1:

Finding 16: The word "religious" is an encumbered word for some. Twenty-three and a half percent of the cohort did not describe themselves as a "religious author" but seventy-six and a half percent were happy to assume the title.

One cohort member commented that "my role as a 'religious author' and my role as a teacher are synonymous…. I don't self-identify as a 'religious author' at all" (P14 Q.15) while another stated "I don't know that I would think of myself as a religious author. That is just one aspect of my vocation - to communicate the Gospel - as I try to do in my ministry, preaching, giving retreats and talks" (P25 Q.15). Similarly, three other cohort members said that because they addressed religious subject matters on occasion, this did not, in their view, make them religious authors. One noted that "most of my work does not have anything to do with religion" (P33 Q.15) while another said "I just see myself as an author who happens to write from a religious perspective at times" (P8 Q.15). Another participant remained open to the possibility that his work might fit into the categorisation but principally saw himself as "a writer whose 'role' is to tell stories, relate experiences, convey ideas which will hopefully cause the reader to reflect, maybe empathise, hopefully act on what they have read. If that makes me a 'religious author' so be it, but I don't see myself as such" (P29 Q.15).

Figure 4.10



Three participants expressed considerable discomfiture with the term with one remarking

> I don't tend to gravitate to books/writings by "religious" authors. Religion to me can be understood or heard narrowly, narrowly doctrinal or catechetical when it comes to RC religious writing…. I don't think of my writing as religious, but theological. (P30 Q.18)

Another participant, describing the category as "a hindrance" (P32 Q.19) commented:

> I am a writer interested in matters religious and theological and equally interested in the poetic…. I find the category of 'religious author' a limiting one…. when I use a professional description, it would be 'theologian and writer'. Theologian seems to include the aspect of critical thought which somehow seems missing from 'religious writer'. (P32, Q.15 and AOC)

One member of the cohort felt that for her "there is no such categorisation". She too used the word "limiting" when speaking about the term "religious" and preferred to see her own writing as spiritual in nature:

> The spiritual understanding, which is ultimately mystery, is best expressed as a way of life rather than a set of decrees or do's and don'ts. This way of life can be made somewhat explicit by contextualising it in the harmony in right relations…. particular religious beliefs can help some live these more authentically. (P22 Q.17)

Some participants, while themselves identifying with the religious author term expressed understanding that religious language or terminology can create obstacles. One remarked:

> I see that the language of 'religious writing' might put lots of people off. They bring to the word religion all kinds of assumptions… I think

> sometimes people see God or religion as a type of spiritual clingfilm that suppresses all originality and individuality and criticality. For me the religious is not a form of repression but a freedom for expression. (P17 Q.17)

Others observed that religion itself can be "good, bad or indifferent" (P4, Q.18) or "a barrier to creative union with God":

> It may lock us into a narrow, impoverished way. It may present an ungracious image of God. Jesus uttered his word, at once criterion and critique: "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath" (Mk 2: 27). In the context, 'sabbath' stands for strict observances of Tora, the Law; for religion, in short. Its full meaning is: 'Religion is in the service of men and women; men and women are not slaves of religion'. It is in this understanding of religion that I regard my writing as 'religious'. (P13 Q.18)

Even though the number of participants preferring to use the designation spiritual or theological writer was small, this researcher considered the preference to be worthy of further probing at the interview stage of the research. What emerged at interview shed most light on how RE (as opposed to the word "religious" itself) is perceived in relation to disciplines like theology and spirituality. However, the data analysis is included here because it demonstrates that the word "religious" when placed before "book" or "education" can be an encumbered word which is open to a range of assumptions and interpretations (Interview Q. 1).

Of those interviewed, all but one agreed that they thought RE was perceived as "the poor relation when viewed against theology" (P8) with the final interviewee saying she believed it was seen as something "confined to the school classroom or specific educational programmes of churches, and therefore as a bit restrictive". She continued, saying, "theology invites one to embrace a more challenging and academic world of, hopefully, exciting diversity. Spirituality is the open invitation to everyone to go on their own inner journey of exploration and deepening of faith" (P28). Speaking of RE being viewed as "a 'soft' area…not seen to be as academically rigorous as theology", another queried whether perhaps RE might have a perceivably higher status than spirituality (P8).

Clarifying his view, one spoke of RE as "different but not inferior", saying while theology is "faith seeking understanding", for him," RE is about conveying that understanding" (P11). Another remarked that "the issue is not whether one is superior to the other. The issue is the disconnect, the felt need to compare and contrast". In his view "an effective religious

education should have an organic relationship with theology, spirituality, and religious experience generally" (P3). Another, advocating for RE as a more all-encompassing discipline, said he believed that theology or spirituality did not necessarily imply a faith commitment whereas he saw RE as "about faith commitment and faith formation" (P6).

One cohort member, while agreeing that historically RE was viewed as being in a "minor" position vis-a-vis theology, expressed the view that "the tide was turning" saying that its renewed social relevance has attracted interest from other disciplines:

> …academics from different disciplines like law, sociology, journalism are becoming interested in religious education, because it's key in national policy. In terms of theology, numbers of students are going down…. religious education is on the ascent…. with the number of people doing doctorates and people studying RE and the government's emphasis on RE in new initiatives such as the 2020 framework curriculum. So, if you asked me 15 years ago. RE was secondary, and less than theology. Today, no. Theologians are getting interested in RE - there's more money for research in RE, and more relevance socially in RE. (P17)

Since the latter comment, while providing important insight, related mostly to the formal study of RE and to the view of RE within the academy, it does not tell us whether the academy is ahead of, or simply responding to broader perceptions of RE outside of formal structures. What the remarks of others suggest is that even in agreeing that RE has occupied a lower rung on the academic ladder, there is still quite a variety of understanding and opinion about what it is for and what it can offer, something we have seen highlighted by Cunnane (2000) and Cullen (2013) and is an issue that we will return to in Theme 3.

4.1.6 Summing Up Theme 1

The first seven findings which have emerged in this theme, while confined to this cohort alone, offer insights into the age, gender, denominational and occupational profiles of authors of books related to religion in Ireland during the period under investigation. They also shed light on educational attainment, employment status, regional location and link to academic institution.

Findings eight to fifteen can be said to strongly coalesce with the literature on what makes writing "religious" and to also illuminate in thick description how participants understand their role. In this sense these findings speak directly to the query contained in the first part of the research question.

The last finding in this theme also provides insight into why some participants do not consider themselves to be "religious" authors and their responses alert us to important perceptions around what is understood by "religious" and - as we have touched on above and will return to in Theme 3 - how this might impact understandings of RE.

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, as well as attempting to define the author's role, the researcher's intention was to gain a more a complete appreciation of that role by allowing participants to tell us what is like to *be* an author of books associated with religion, as well to tell us what they *know* the role to be. Influenced by both Husserl's epistemology of "what do we know as persons" (which has been clearly illuminated by participants), and by Heidegger's ontological concern for "being in the world", she believes it is important to now delve into this aspect and hear of the rewards and costs of being in the role.

4.2 Theme 2: The Experience of Being an Author

4.2.1 The Rewards and Supports Involved in the Writing Endeavour

This theme will be explored under two sub-themes. The first considers the rewards which are experienced by the cohort which support and sustain them in the writing endeavour. The second discusses the obstacles and disincentives that pertain when writing for publication in an area associated with religion.

As with previous themes, the data is mainly drawn from the particular questions which inquired into these areas. In the case of the first sub-theme, these are Questions 19 and 21. However, because relevant data from other parts of the survey is also utilised, all quotations in this theme are fully referenced in the text.

Data analysis suggested the following finding:

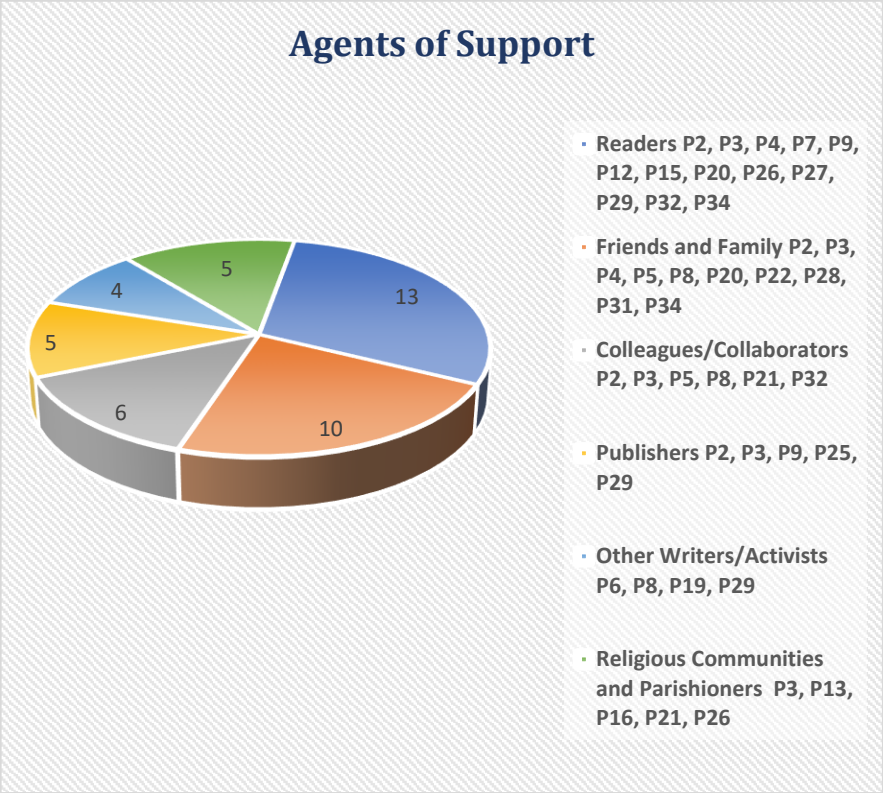
Finding 17: Seven rewards are linked to being an author of books related to religion:
• Receiving the support of others.
• Offering words of value, insight and comfort to others.
• Being strengthened by one's own faith.
• Contributing to the public conversation.
• Experiencing the joy in words.
• Being both a teacher and a learner.
• Career advancement and the leaving of legacies.

The identified rewards are examined in what follows in order of frequency of mention by participants.

4.2.1.1 Receiving the Support of Others

Seventy per cent of the cohort identified the support of others as being chief among the rewards and sustaining mechanisms when engaged in book publishing.

Figure 4.11



As Figure 4.11 shows, thirteen of the cohort reported that the response of readers was an important reward with one remarking that he was "happy to hear comment one way or other…. that keeps me going" (P15 Q.28). Encouragement from family and friends was valued by ten participants with one saying that "making my family proud is naturally an incentive to plough through the more challenging times" (P31 Q.21) while another appreciated the presence of "friends to encourage when the going gets tough!" (P8 Q.21). The support of colleagues and collaborators was also considered central by six of the cohort with two observing that "belonging to an academic community is a great support" (P5, P21 both Q.21). Five mentioned that encouragement and commissioning approaches from

publishers are rewards of the process. As one stated, “if someone else believes that a topic is worth writing on, then who am I to refuse?” (P9 Q.21). The writing of other authors which offers “reading that stimulates the imagination” (P8 Q. 21) was important to four participants while five spoke of the importance of the support they received from their religious communities or parishioners.

Table 4.4 gives a broader visual presentation of the participants who referenced the different rewards and supports while also showing the order of prevalence in which each was placed.

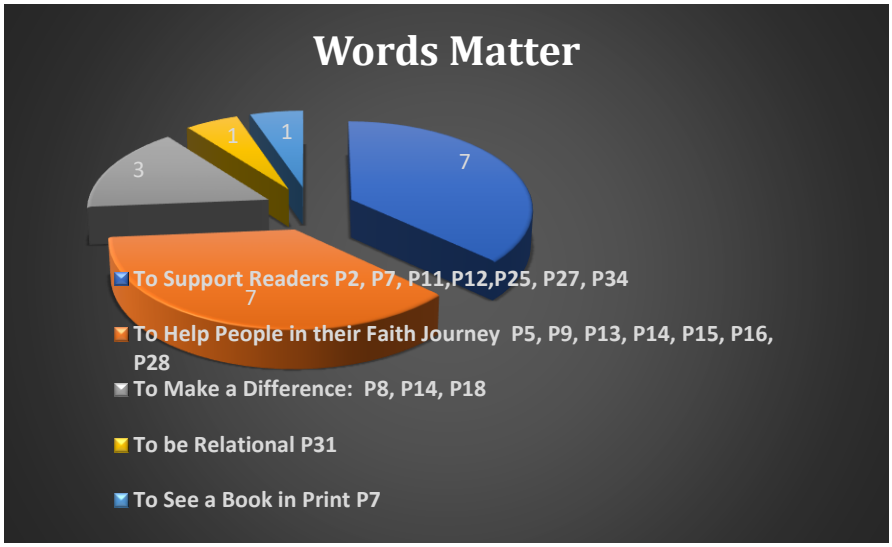
Table 4.4: Rewards and Supports

	Support of Others	Words of Value	Strengthened by Faith	Contributing to the Conversation	Joy in Words	Teaching & Learning	Career & Legacy
1	P2	P1	P1	P1	P3	P2	P1
2	P3	P2	P2	P2	P4	P13	P5
3	P4	P5	P4	P7	P7	P17	P9
4	P5	P7	P6	P8	P8	P18	P17
5	P6	P8	P9	P17	P13	P20	P31
6	P7	P9	P13	P18	P17	P22	P33
7	P8	P11	P15	P20	P20	P23	
8	P9	P12	P16	P22	P22	P30	
9	P12	P13	P19	P26	P26		
10	P13	P14	P20	P29	P27		
11	P15	P15	P24	P33	P31		
12	P16	P16	P28				
13	P19	P18	P29				
14	P20	P25	P31				
15	P21	P27	P34				
16	P22	P28					
17	P25	P34					
18	P26						
19	P27						
20	P28						
21	P29						
22	P31						
23	P32						
24	P34						

4.2.1.2 Offering Words of Value

As is clear, a sense of offering support, stimulation and challenge to other people was identified as a significant reward by half of the cohort. This is further segmented in Figure 4.12 below which shows those who had gained satisfaction and sustenance from being made aware that their work had been of benefit to readers. One participant, summing up the sentiment of others, said simply that he was encouraged by “people who tell me, credibly, that they’re helped by what I write” (P11 Q.21).

Figure 4.12



For others, helping people to understand their relationship with God was an incentive for them. Participants spoke of "the joy of hearing that your book helped someone to understand their faith better" (P5 Q.19); the satisfaction in assisting "even a small number of people to be in contact with the real God" (P9 Q.19) and of how "humbling and gratifying" it is "when people assure me that they have been pointed to a discovery of the Bible and to a richer appreciation of it" (P13 Q.19). Though not identifying as a religious author, one remarked that it was "personally rewarding when my work makes a genuine contribution to people's understanding of religious education or theology" (P14 Q.19). Others said the bonus for them came when they had a sense that the reader was "getting the message, seeing for the first time" (P15 Q.19) or having "a moment of recognition" (P28 Q.19) while "making a difference" (P14 Q.19) "both theologically and educationally, in the lives of people of faith and people of no faith" was key for fellow cohort members (P18 Q.19).

One commented on the "satisfaction in seeing your writings in book form" (P7 Q.19) while another spoke of "fulfilling one's duty to be relational" (P31 Q.19) as a recompense of the publishing process. Synthesising these views, one of those surveyed said that her perception of the rewards of writing on aspects of religion included a

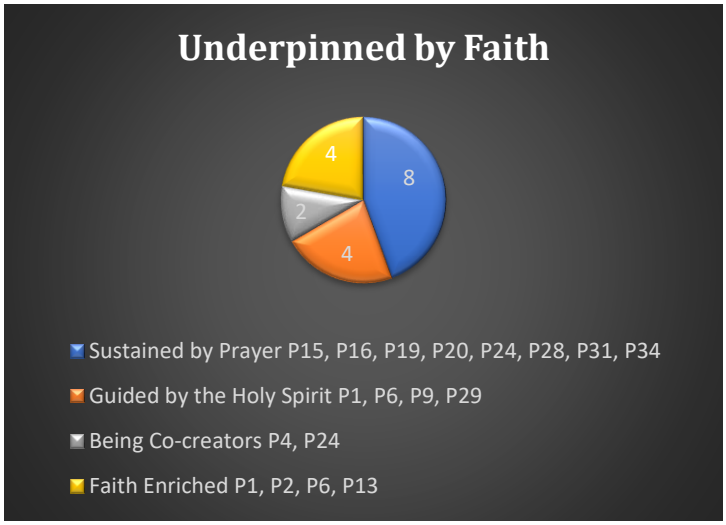
> sense of furthering the faith; satisfaction of exploring issues in the public domain; educating the reader; challenging the status quo; opening up a public debate on an issue; developing a religious concept and seeing that development make an impact on mainstream theology/religious education. (P8 Q.19).

4.2.1.3 Strengthened by One's Own Faith

As Table 4.4 above shows, almost half of the cohort experienced faith and personal prayer as underpinning and supporting the writing process and as something which was strengthened as a result of it. Again, this is broken down further in Figure 4.13 below which shows that eight participants reported that their own faith and prayer life was a prime sustaining factor. One called them "the bedrock of her writing" which afforded her a faith in the "ever-presence of God in my life" (P31 Q.21). Four spoke of the Holy Spirit or the "Holy Breath" (P1 Q.21) as inspiring and assisting them, an experience described as having "an inner imperative in me to write, for which I guess I can blame the Holy Spirit rather than some psychological compulsion!" (P9 Q.21). One of those surveyed felt a sense of satisfaction in contributing to what he called "the process of co-creation with God" (P4 Q.19), an idea that found echo in the words of another when she said that her reward lay in passing on to others

> what I see as my graced relationship with God, hoping that this would lead others to a deeper awareness of how God works in all our lives when invited to do so. Ultimately then, I would be - in my tiny way – a co-creator in building the Kingdom of God. (P24 Q.1)

Figure 4.13



Four of the group spoke of their faith as having been enriched through the process of writing. One said "I get more than I give when I write" (P1 Q.21) while another reported "it has led me into a more liberating and rewarding experience of religion" (P13 Q.19). Having developed as a writer and "in my own reflection on faith, religion, religious education and

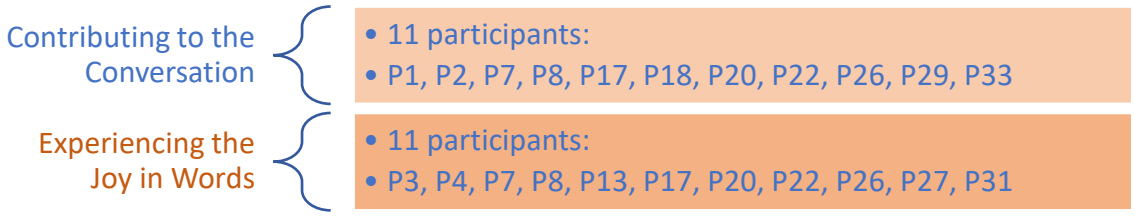
spirituality" (P2 AOC) was how one put it while another expressed his experience in these terms:

> I thoroughly love writing in this genre. It helps me enormously in my own relationship with God, leading me deeper into questioning/challenging my own faith and to a deeper understanding of my personal vocation and response to the call to be a follower of Christ. It allows me to articulate and understand my continual and ever-deepening encounter with a God who is always all around us and who reveals Himself in the 'cracks' and margins of life. (P6 Q.19)

4.2.1.4 Contributing to the Conversation

As we have seen in Theme 1, participants identified the wish to engage in the dialogue between faith and culture as a motivational factor that encouraged them to write. In the current theme, the opportunity to contribute to the public conversation, pertaining to both internal church affairs and to external societal issues, was also seen as a reward in itself. Around a third of the cohort identified the desire to "get my ideas out there, and maybe have some influence" as an incentive (P7 Q.21), relishing the act of "tussling with issues of ultimate meaning and engaging in a conversation with others on these issues" (P26 Q.19). With similar mindset, another characterised the reward for him as one of "making a contribution to the shared search for meaning among human beings" (P18 Q.19) while another spoke of "the pure joy and privilege of having the opportunity to research and articulate even a glimpse of God's creative energy, love and real presence among us as the entire community of creation" (P22 Q.19). "Sheer pleasure" was how one described being able to write in order to share "the ideas and experiences of a range of people who have reflected on their beliefs and who are honest, open and engaging on their tenets and the very reason for their existence" (P29 Q.19). Expressing the prize for her as partially contained within the risk, one participant characterised her writing as "an act of faith" which takes courage and "contributes to one's backbone and sheer indefatigable desire to be taken seriously in the act of publishing" (P17 Q.19).

Figure 4.14 Enjoyment in the Dialogue



4.2.1.5 Experiencing the Joy in Words

Again, as Figure 4.14 shows, a third of the cohort referred to "the love of writing" (P4 Q.21), "the joy in words", and the search for insight which "parallels the work of the poet" (P3 Q.21) as incentives to publish. Others spoke of "personal satisfaction" (P20 Q.21), "inner interest" (P26 Q.21), and the "sheer vitality" of the participant's specialist subject which he described as "always new and exciting" (P27 Q.21). Speaking of "an instinctive need to write" one spoke of the satisfaction gained from writing, reading and researching (P17 Q.12) while another said seeing her work published was a dream fulfilled

> I relished the idea when the opportunity for publication first arose. Every author's dream is to have his/her work move into the public space so that it may be read, appreciated, evaluated by others and be of benefit to the readers; [to] progress the debate on a particular issue; further the development of a concept etc. Writing can be a very solitary endeavour. Publication is one way of diminishing the isolation of the writing process. It puts the work 'out' there and that is very satisfying. (P8 Q.12)

4.2.1.6 Being Both a Teacher and a Learner

Eight participants referred to teaching and learning as part of the writer's reward. One remarked on the "huge symbiosis" between her own learning, her teaching and her publications:

> Publishing keeps you on your toes. You cannot rest on your laurels. There is always a new thinker. A recent review. A critical voice that disagrees. A contested theme and you have to go back to the drawing board. I like that. (P17 Q.19)

Another accentuated "a deep awareness that there is always more to discover and to learn, especially in the area of theology and religious education" (P18 Q.21). A fellow participant expressed the reward in terms of an increase in self-awareness:

> I learn so much about myself and about what I am writing about when I try and express it in terms that 'ordinary' people – as distinct from professional theologians – can understand. (P23 Q.21)

In similar vein, another observed that

> if one is going to write, you are brought in the process to think further, to reflect more fully, to find the right words, to know more exactly what you think, what you want to say and how you want to express it. (P2 AOC)

4.2.1.7 Career Advancement and the Leaving of Legacies.

Career advancement and the raising of one's profile in the academy was pointed to as a gain by four participants with one commenting that her book publishing career began when she converted her PhD dissertation into a book "in order to advance my career in the 'publish-or-perish' world of academia" (P5 Q.12).

Employment opportunity and the possibility of collaboration with others in a similar field were also pointed out as benefits by a small number (P31, P17, both Q.12). One commented that for her "the greatest joy of publishing…has been to work collaboratively with others" (P17, Q.12).

Grateful for valuable friendships which had been forged with co-editors and co-authors she said:

> We've had amazing conversations. Disagreements about content and style. Really rich learning opportunities. Writing books has enabled me to benefit from the expertise of other professionals. To work with publishers and professionals who give feedback and critique and encouragement. The positives far outweigh the negatives. (P17 Q.19)

Noting that "things snowball" and "books beget books" she also recognised that publishing can enhance a writer's access to publishers and to other career opportunities:

> There are great spin offs from writing books. I get people contacting me all over the world because they've seen something I've written in a book. I get invited to keynote at conferences internationally. I get invited to contribute to prestigious journals on the strength of a chapter I've written. (P17 Q.19)

A final recompense of writing for publication was summed up by one who proclaimed pithily that "writing lasts!" (P1 Q.21). This reward of leaving a tangible legacy was endorsed by another in these words:

> As a celibate religious who will leave no one nor anything materially worthwhile behind, there is a small consolation that my books may linger on for at least a while after I die. Non Omnis moriar' (I shall not die totally!). (P9 Q.21)

4.2.2 The Costs Involved: Obstacles and Disincentives When Writing for Book Publication

This sub-theme, mainly informed by Questions 16 and 20 of the survey, revealed the following finding:

Finding 18: Six obstacles or disincentives are associated with being an author of books related to religion. They include:
• Writing is a demanding task.
• It can be hindered by institutional control.
• There is limited access to Irish publishers in a niche market.
• It offers little financial reward.
• Authors operate in an unwelcoming environment.
• They risk being stereotyped and misjudged.

It must be acknowledged that initially seven participants reported no disincentives, two recorded having encountered no obstacles and one said she had experienced neither when writing for publication. Nonetheless, all but two subsequently went on to identify certain hindrances which are discussed below.

4.2.2.1 Writing is a Demanding Task

"Writing is not easy!" (P25 Q.16), is "hard work" (P20 Q.20) and can be "backbreaking …physically and emotionally draining" (P2 Q.20). It requires keeping up to date and remaining fresh in one's thinking so as to "convey the message with…challenge and attractiveness" (P28 Q.20). These were sentiments which were understood by a significant number of the cohort as is clear from Table 4.5 below. Chief among the challenges involved was the necessity of "getting on with the day job" (P2 Q.16) when writing is only one, largely unremunerated, aspect of a person's other professional and life commitments. Eleven of the cohort spoke of juggling time as being a constant issue with one pointing to the difficulty of writing "in a context which is, for the best reasons, continually distracting". However, he also noted that "the engagement with people which provides the distractions is essential if the writing is to be grounded and relevant" (P3 Q.20). Another remarked that because all his

writing was carried out in his spare time and outside of other duties, "it has taken me a year and more to write each of my books" (P9 Q.16). This balancing act of meeting "competing responsibilities and deadlines" (P20 Q.16) was placed into context in this way:

> My mum used to say "why do you bother writing those books?" I wrote mainly in my own time. At the weekend. In the evening. During the summer holidays. Getting up very early to meet deadlines. She'd say, "Give up those old books and concentrate on your family". She had a point… However, I struggle with this and I know that if I didn't write I'd be impoverished as an academic. I'd respect myself less. I'd be like a medical doctor who didn't continue to research the latest medical journals to treat their patients with the best contemporary medicines and practice. (P17 Q.16)

Table 4.5: Obstacles and Disincentives

	Demanding	Inst. Control	Access to Publishers	Little financial reward	Unwelcoming environment	Being stereotyped
1	P2	P4	P2	P5	P6	P6 j/v
2	P3	P6	P6	P6	P13	P8
3	P5	P7	P8 j/v	P7	P16	P17
4	P8	P8	P9	P9	P19	P22
5	P9	P9	P12	P14	P20	P29
6	P11 j/v	P10	P13	P17	P22	P32
7	P15	P11	P20	P19	P23	P33
8	P17	P13	P21	P20	P25	
9	P20	P18	P26	P21	P26	
10	P25	P26	P29	P27	P31	
11	P27	P31	P31			
12	P28	P33	P34			
13	P30					
14	P31					
15	P33					

4.2.2.2 Institutional Control

As we can see outlined above in Table 4.5, around a third of the cohort made reference to a culture of institutional control in the Catholic Church as both an obstacle and a disincentive when publishing books linked to religion. This experience, reminding us of what we have heard in Theme 1, was reflected in the responses of both lay (five participants) and ordained (seven participants) members of the cohort. Restrictions on freedom of expression were articulated in a variety of ways by different participants. One commented that "the institutional church tends to be overly-sensitive to critical comment" (P26 Q.20), another spoke of "the obsession by some bishops and lay people with orthodoxy rather than orthopraxis" (P18 Q.16), a third of "a reluctance to let go" of old approaches (P6 Q.16), and

a fourth mentioned “the need to exercise caution” (P33 Q.16) when working for a Catholic institution.

An awareness of the threat of sanction and “the danger of being dismissed as unorthodox, or heretical, by the institutional Church” (P18 Q.20) was raised as an issue, as was “strict control by Church authorities” which resulted in “pressure to keep to the 'official' line rather than write what the author really believes” (P7 Q.20).

Others referred to “the Vatican Inquisition” (P13 Q.16), “the latent presence of the Magisterium” (P18 Q.16) and “the prospect of the attentions of the CDF and various self-appointed thought police” as obstacles to their work. The latter continued saying, “these don’t, in the end deter me, but the thought of them can induce a paralysing rage” (P11 Q.20). A fellow participant argued “they should not be afraid of discussion and debate in the Church, and they should realise that the day when they can silence and suppress ideas is long gone” (P7 Q.16).

One of those surveyed observed that since religious discourse deals with existential questions, there were bound to be differences in standpoint:

> Since you are dealing with ultimates there will be many who will disagree with what you are writing about. If you can’t handle this, and even enjoy it, you should probably not be writing. (P4 Q.20)

However, he too reiterated the views of others with regard to an apparent pressure to conform:

> In the modern Western world, we can expect all kinds of opposition, not merely from the world, but, more hurtfully, from the senior members of one’s own church…. The way things are at the moment, there will be official opposition to authors who believe in the need for reform. So, unless you are writing books of good, safe conservative piety, you can expect opposition. (P4 Q.20)

4.2.2.3 Access to Irish Publishers in a Niche Market

Thirty-five percent of the cohort talked of the challenges involved in “selling” the idea to a publisher (P20 Q.16) in what is a niche and competitive market. One participant lamented that there are “few enough religious publishers in Ireland” and commented on what he saw as the narrow scope for a range of religious thinking to be represented

> Even when Ireland was ‘very Catholic/Christian’ there was little appetite for a more intellectual, adult approach to religion. Now that Ireland has

> become more secular there is even less interest in main-stream media in religious matters, except where there may be issues of controversy or scandal. And our digital, sound-bite culture makes nuanced commentary more difficult. (P26 Q.16)

Two others remarked on modest sales with one noting "this writing only reaches a limited audience" (P12 Q.20) and another estimating average sales at under one thousand copies. The latter also commented on a lack of marketing by publishers remarking, "I am not convinced that publishers do all that could be done to promote their wares" (P9 Q.20). This view won some agreement from others in the cohort, one noting that while his publisher was otherwise supportive of his book projects, "their marketing left much to be desired" (P12 Q.16). Another observed, "it seems difficult to get religious writing out beyond those who are already interested so sometimes I wonder if it is worth spending so much time and energy on writing. However, I think you have to take the long view and hope that you are contributing to a conversation that takes time to unfold" (P2 Q.20). Of the thirty-four participants, seven identified publisher invitation as part of their motivation for writing.

4.2.2.4 Little financial reward

Allied to the difficulties in securing publication and gaining exposure, twenty-nine percent of those surveyed indicated that little or no financial recompense can be both an obstacle and a disincentive when writing. The responses were strikingly similar and just a small selection is included here to give their flavour: "financially, almost nothing!" (P7 Q.19); "you wouldn't need to be making your living from this work!" (P9 Q.20); "definitely not money!" (P17 Q.19); "given the narrow field, it is impossible to earn a living from publishing only" (P27 Q.20) and "I do not think I have earned a cent from any of my publications" (P21 Q,19). One recalled wryly:

> In the early days I did get royalties but the money aspect is a tiny thing…for one book I got a cheque for 5 euro and it took me over a year to write the book with another academic. We laughed at that! You need a sense of humour while writing and publishing. (P17 Q.19)

Another agreed by saying

> The eventual royalty payments do not amount to anything like realistic remuneration…. One needs to be in the privileged position of having leisure time to spend on writing. … One also needs to resource one's writing by the purchase of books, subscribing to journals, membership of professional guilds, and attendance at conferences with presentation of papers on one's work-in-progress. This is quite a challenge for laity who are not sponsored by a diocese or a religious order. (P5 Q.16)

4.2.2.5 An Unwelcoming Environment

A similar percentage referred to an "apathetic" and sometimes "hostile" (P13 Q.20) environment in which "the religious voice is often looked at with suspicion and dismissal" (P6 Q.16). Participants expressed the views that "the atmosphere is becoming toxic for addressing some issues" (P25 Q.20), that there is "no great interest in or demand for religious material (P23 Q.20), and that they found meeting with "cynicism" (P20 Q.16) and "indifference" as challenging (P22 Q.16). One remarked on the cost of putting one's thought into the public domain saying "it can be a risky business as one commits to paper a little of oneself each time one writes. The words go into an unknown space in our world where God is not wanted by many today" (P16 Q.20). Another took the view that the status of a published religious work "is generally seen as lower than the status of… a general fiction / non-fiction novel:

> Religious authors, and religious educators in general, are often accused either latently, or in a direct manner of indoctrination, of being offensive to those with other worldviews, or of not being a 'real' author by merely promulgating fairy tales. (P31 Q.20)

While agreeing that secular culture can be both unreceptive and inhospitable, it was also remarked that Catholic culture in Ireland has "been slow to engage in theological debate - there is more interest in spirituality" (P26 Q.20), a point endorsed by a fellow participant (P11 Q.29).

4.2.2.6 Being Stereotyped and Misjudged

As well as identifying obstacles such as getting in one's own way through "self-doubt" (P24 Q.16), "reticence" (P28 Q.16), "fear of making an awful fool of myself" (P17 Q.16), lack of "energy and focus" or being unable to "stop rewriting" (P2 Q.16), again, twenty percent of those surveyed mentioned the disincentive of being "type-cast" (P33 Q.20) or "branded" (P8 Q.20) because of an association with religious themes. This idea of the word "religious" being a loaded one was raised in Theme 1 and it found emphasis again at this point. One participant said "being described as a 'religious writer' is a barrier" which can lead to "'pious' labelling; the expectation that one is 'churchy'. This can make it difficult to "open conversations with those of secular thinking" (P32 Q.16 and 20). In agreement, and also expressing unease with the being identified as a "religious author", another saw dangers in "finding the market and capturing the attention of the reader who might easily be put off by the term" (P29 Q.20).

Reflecting on the description "religious author", one participant summed up her own lack of enthusiasm for the term as coming back to "the ever-widening belief that 'religious' is restrictive, fairly predictable, thus lending itself to a more judgemental attitude and unfair labelling i.e. 'what else would you expect from that source?'" (P22 Q.20). Though having no personal difficulty with being called a religious author, another could identify with the labelling that it can engender:

> Sometimes people who don't know you take a word like 'Catholic' in the title and they assume that you have a type of conservative religiosity or indeed sometimes a homophobia or bigotry or intolerance for non-religious perspectives….Sometimes people don't want to know that you doubt your faith. That there are lots of grey areas. That you struggle with issues. The right wing of the church might see you as too liberal. The left as too traditionalist and conservative. (P17 Q.20)

The above analysis shows that the chief obstacle was that writing is a demanding task and that the least mentioned was the impediment of being stereotyped. However, as Table 4.5 above shows, the other four hurdles were mentioned with close to comparable frequency. Consequently, this researcher decided to investigate this further during interview (Interview Q. 2). Half of the interview cohort confirmed the demands of writing as the chief challenge (P3, P11, P28) with one elaborating on why this is so for him:

> To speak (in a lecture, or in a homily, for example) seems natural to me. The audience or congregation seem to draw a response from me. I rise to the occasion. To take on the added discipline of writing it down, in a careful, structured way, demands some form of stimulus. That might involve being commissioned to write something - e.g. to work up a lecture into a book - or simply to have a deadline, or both. (P3)

Another gave further insight into the process that must take place even before words are committed to paper:

> First of all, there's a question of selection of topic and theme, whether it's been done by somebody else, whether there's something useful you can say about it. And then there's the preparation and making sure you are sufficiently acquainted with whatever topic it is. And then there's just writing…. just to get down to doing it which can be extremely difficult. (P11)

One interviewee could resonate with the first four obstacles but singled out the first as the one which impacted most saying

> it takes every drop of my "essence" energy but, in retrospect, it is exhilarating. The other things are just like an annoying bluebottle whose buzzing can act as a distraction. (P28)

Two of those interviewed - the same participants in each case (P6 and P17) - identified being stereotyped and an unwelcoming environment as the two disincentives which affected them most. However, one offered the opinion that being branded or misjudged by association with religion was now what she called "a badge of honour" explaining that "as the church is in the descent, I think more people are glad to be countercultural, to stand up for what they believe" (P17). She also said that she believed that an apathetic environment is a difficulty that is not specific to religious authors or to religious educators: "…poetry, astronomy, geography…I think, writers in those areas could have the same things" (P17).

Institutional control was acknowledged as an obstacle by only one of interview cohort who said that writing is "not helped by any sort of consciousness" of the latter and "if that is what is prominent in somebody's head - it's the wrong thing to be prominent" (P11).

A lack of access to Irish publishers was also pointed to by one interviewee as the obstacle which impacted most when she remarked that "a greater access to Irish publishers would offer a writer greater scope; more competition; a wider variety of creative possibilities ….possibly a wider market to explore" (P8).

Table 4.6 Hindrances: Survey and Interview Percentages

OBSTACLES AND DISINCENTIVES	QUESTIONAIRRE	INTERVIEW
A Demanding Task	41%	50%
Institutional control	35%	16.6%
Limited Access to Irish Publishers	32.3%	16.6%
Little Financial Reward	29.4%	0%
An Unwelcoming Environment	29.4%	33.3%
Being Stereotyped and Misjudged	17.6%	33.3%

As is evident in Table 4.6, the further probing of this theme at interview did not produce a mirror image of the survey data if we compare percentages. However, this was not what was being tested since it is not claimed that the interviewee sample was a replica in miniature of the questionnaire cohort. Therefore, comparing percentages offers value only to the extent that it shows that with both research instruments, there is more alignment in two areas: (i.) that writing is a demanding task and (ii.) that some authors perceive themselves as operating in an unwelcoming environment.

4.2.3 Summing Up Theme 2

The seven rewards and supports together with the six obstacles and disincentives explored in this theme have contributed to a more rounded understanding of how the participants experience their role as authors of books related to religion. The findings we have considered here augment and illuminate what we learned in Theme 1 and add a further dimension which assists in answering the first part of the research question.

4.3 Theme 3: Towards an Understanding of Lifelong Religious Education

4.3.1 Understandings of Education

Question 24 of the survey asked members of the cohort to describe their understandings of education. Since all participant testimony in this sub-theme is taken from this one question alone, there was no necessity for references to include more than the relevant participant number. Their responses revealed four main understandings which are shown in Finding 19. Frequency of mention is also depicted in Table 4.7.

Finding 19: The cohort expressed four key understandings of education which they described as:
• Drawing out and adding to.
• Teaching and learning in the service of right relationship.
• Raising questions and fostering thinking.
• Involving religion.

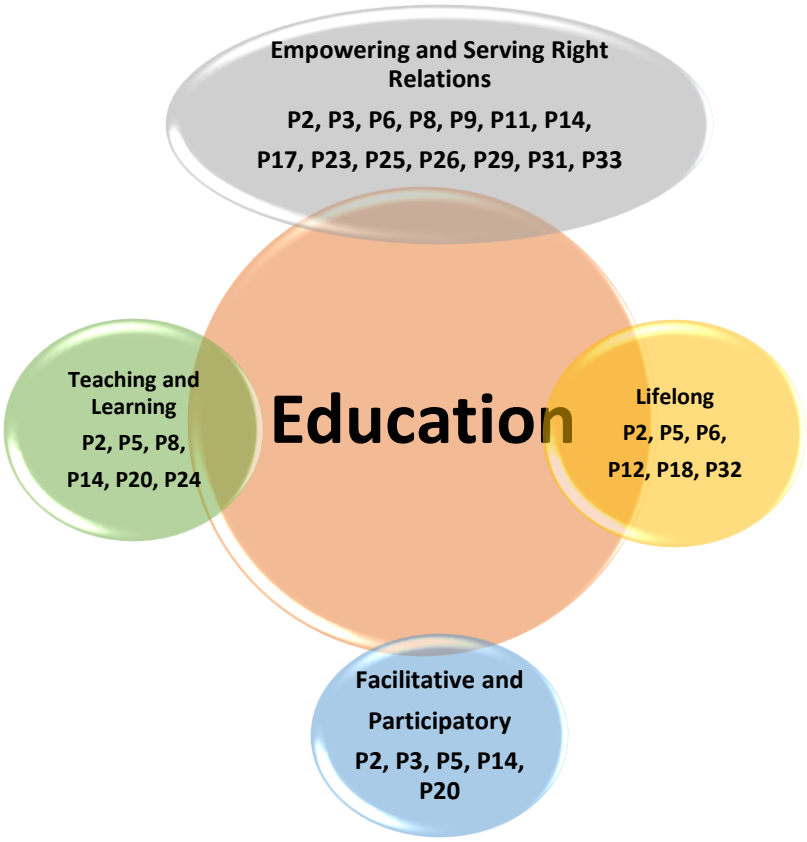
Table 4.7 Four Aspects of Education

	Teaching and learning for right relationship	Drawing out and adding to	Raising questions and fostering thinking	Involving religion
1	P2	P2	P10	P1
2	P3	P3	P13	P2
3	P5	P5	P14	P6
4	P6	P12	P17	P14
5	P8	P14	P22	P16
6	P9	P16	P30	P28
7	P11	P18	P32	P31
8	P12	P20		
9	P14	P28		
10	P17	P29		
11	P18	P32		
12	P20	P34		
13	P23			
14	P24			
15	P25			
16	P26			
17	P29			
18	P31			
19	P32			
20	P33			

4.3.1.1 Education as Teaching and Learning in the Service of Right Relationship

As Figure 4.15 below shows, the majority of the cohort envisaged education as a process of teaching and learning in the service of right relationship and, as we saw in Theme 1, these aspects were also seen as role emphases of the religious author. Six participants, in a manner reminiscent of Carr (2003), explicitly referenced the teaching and learning dimension, again reinforcing an author reward identified in our previous theme. One explained his understanding of education as "drawing forth learning, from within the student, the potential that is already there, and helping to put understanding and structure in place" thus meaning education "has to do with the student/learner *and* the teacher" (P20).

Figure 4.15 Teaching and Learning in the Service of Right Relationship



In the past, the power balance in education was seen as being held by the teacher and teaching was often viewed as "getting people to comprehend, showing them the right path" (P2). In this regard one participant expressed a view of education as "instruction in order to enlighten" (P24). However, the predominant emphasis is now more on facilitation and this idea was mentioned in the responses of four of cohort. Teaching understood as "being at the service of pupil participation and learning" was how one participant characterised facilitation when he observed that teachers

> have responsibility for creating a learning atmosphere but they cannot make the pupils learn. They facilitate pupil learning and, in their role, decide on specific learning outcomes associated with a lesson or series of lessons or with an adult education group. (P2)

The mention of learning outcomes here suggests education as being associated mainly with more formal, classroom-based activity, again a notion in line with Carr (2003) and McKenzie and Harton (2002). However, this participant, in a manner more in tune with Fairfield (2009) and Lee (1971) also acknowledged that while "school plays a big part in the education of young people" education is also "broader than schooling" (P2). The one other participant who specifically mentioned the "formal structured" settings of school or college when

describing education, also admitted a broader understanding saying "all of life is educational" (P12). Indeed, education was explicitly defined as a lifelong pursuit by six participants at this stage of the survey.

The definition of education as "the human practice of teaching and learning which seeks to sustain and enhance students' capacity to discover the meaning and significance of life and to develop as persons in community" (P14) was offered by another participant. This, as well as confirming the facilitative, participative understanding of education as discussed above, also reinforced the relational aspect which includes, but goes beyond, the educator and the learner and reaches out to the wider world. This, then, coalesces with thinkers such as Groome (1991, p.106), Dewey, Peters, and Freire with their emphasis on education as participatory, co-creative and transformative (2017, Beckett, p. 388).

The idea of education as "relationship" was supported by four others (P2, P8, P26, P31) with one saying that "education must first of all refer to one's own interest in learning and growing in knowledge and understanding to better relate with people and with the world in which we find ourselves (P2). Another echoed this saying that in her view, relationship was "at the core of all education":

> Relationship between the learner and the educator; between the learner and what is being learnt - the learner and his/her desire to learn and to be open to change and challenge. Education is fundamentally about 'curiosity'- about our humanity; our relatedness to one another and the world in which we live. (P8)

Education as a response to natural curiosity in the service of right relationship with oneself and others was also mentioned by a further three cohort members (P17, P26, P29). One of these defined it as "the development of our innate, pure desire to know, in the context of curiosity, wonder, mystery and the close connection between knowing and loving" (P26). The latter criterion of loving acts as a reminder that education is in the service of much more than the needs of the individual learner but is intended as the "civilising force" that we have heard Todd (2009, p. 1) refer to in Chapter 2.

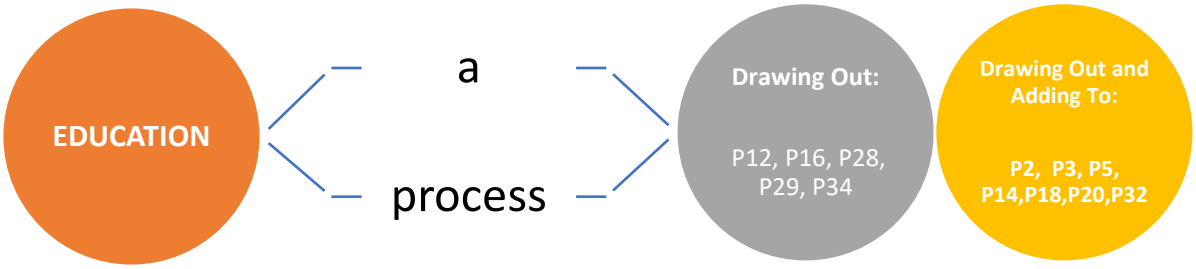
Closely allied to the idea of right relationship were the understandings of education as "enabling and encouraging" (P3), "empowering and liberating" (P6), "helping people to grow in understanding and freedom" (P11) and as "equipping someone for the challenges of life" (P9). Three others (P23, P25, P33) concurred that education was about "preparing people for life" (P25) or, as another expressed it, as "the cultivation of the understanding and skills necessary to secure human enrichment and to function in society" (P33). These

enabling epithets recall Groome's contention that a function of education is to enable others "to confront the limit situations of life and push beyond them" Groome, 1978, p.10).

4.3.1.2 Education as Drawing Out and Adding To

As can be seen in Table 4.7 above, more than a third of the cohort indicated that they saw the "drawing out" of human potential from within as one key aspect of the educational endeavour. Just under fifteen percent of the cohort expressed their understanding chiefly in this way with one commenting, "to me, it indicates a leading out into the wide-open spaces of God's love and mercy" (P28) and another seeing it as "awakening the wonderful possibilities that lie in each individual - à la Michelangelo, chipping away and removing all that is not the person within" (P29). One other, emphasising education as the owning of one's experience, questions and insights said that, for her, it is "that which remains after I've forgotten everything I've learned. It is what resonates deep within with enduring effect" (P22).

Figure 4.16: The Educational Process



As is evident in Figure 4.16, twenty percent of those surveyed put emphasis on what they saw as the two-fold nature of the educational process characterising it as one of "drawing out *and* adding to". One participant voiced this researcher's own view of education in this way: "I subscribe to the thesis that education entails a lifelong process of drawing out what is there in the nature of the person and, at the same time, adding to and developing that which is given" (P18). Another reiterated the unfinished and enduring nature of education by describing it as "a lifelong drawing out of potential for growth" (P32). Recalling what we

have heard from Craft (1984) three participants referred to the Latin etymology of the word (P12, P28, P34) with one remarking:

> As a linguist with a particular interest in French, Spanish and Latin, I view 'education' through a grammatical lens. The origin of the word is educĕre which means 'to lead/draw out'. Education, then, is designed to draw out what lies within the learner. In contrast, 'indoctrination' is derived from docēre which means 'to teach/to put in' – in other words, the process works in the opposite direction, going from the teacher to the learner. Long lasting learning which is positive, creative and organic, in my view, can only come from a relationship in which the focus is the student. The teacher's job is to create the context in which the learner is the locus of experience. (P34)

4.3.1.3 Raising Questions, Fostering Thinking

In tandem with what we have heard from Fairfield regarding the educated mind as being open to ideas that require critical reflection (2009, p.4), as we can see in Table 4.7 above, again twenty percent of the cohort defined education as a process of raising questions and fostering thinking. One participant stressed the centrality of challenge saying education "should not be a system that, simply, provides answers" (P13). Using words very close to those of Groome when he spoke of education as "a political act" (1991, p.106), another saw it as a way "to explain the present in the context of the past….to continue to seek for answers to the questions, what does it mean to be a human being and what are the best ways for human beings to live together" (P10). Probing such fundamentals was also raised by another who said

> Education fosters peoples' capacity to answer the questions: what is the truth? How do I know it is true? What does the truth mean? How should I live? What kind of person can I become? What kind of society should I help to create? And to what shall I commit myself. In other words, education enables students to decide what is true and what kind of human life it is good to lead. (P14)

One of those surveyed emphasised that developing the skills of critical appraisal through debate and dialogue are key to her understanding of education and referenced the theologian and philosopher Thomas Aquinas as one of her "key pedagogical models":

> His modus operandi is through the question and answer - in developing answers he engages with many possible good answers, takes into serious account a variety of different perspectives, as he seeks to come up with the best possible answer with the information he has to hand, at the time.

> Debate and dialogue are key to his methodology, and I think this is particularly important today. (P30)

Endorsing this need to dialogue, another, again reminding us of Fairfield's counsel that education can involve "the rearrangement of our prior opinions" (2009, p 4), had this to say about the humility at the heart of education:

> If one is educated one knows that one knows very little. It brings with it a mannerliness of listening to others. Not shouting them out. Not being threatened by what you don't know but seeing other people's knowledge as an invitation to engagement and learning. (P17)

4.3.1.4 Involving Religion

One in five also expressly included religion in their definition of what makes for a holistic education:

> Education fosters the maturity of pupils in a way that embraces their physical, intellectual, affective, aesthetic, spiritual, moral and religious development throughout their lives. It does so by helping them to acquire intellectual, moral and religious virtues that enhance their own lives and those of their friends and communities. (P14)

In agreement, another defined education as "a moral and sacred" endeavour which is "not simply a pedagogical, economic or politico-socio activity that is limited to the transfer and acquisition of skills, knowledge attainment, curricular development and so on" (P6).

A fellow cohort member stated that "education needs religion in the most vital of ways: for the stretch and the search and the thesis and the possibility and the potential". She added, "it is a myth of the worst kind to speak of education without religion as an equalizing system. Not to teach about a Divine essence is to teach another kind of religion" (P1).

4.3.2 Insights into Religious Education

This sub-theme considers participants' understanding of RE and relies chiefly on the cohort's responses to Question 25 which, following analysis, showed the emergence of four main understandings of what is meant when they talk about RE. Again, since analysis reflects the answers to a single question, only participant number is referenced.

Finding 20: Participants defined religious education in four ways seeing it as:
• Learning about, from and within religion(s) and beliefs. Forty-seven percent saw religious education as taking place within a faith tradition making this the most common understanding.
• Encompassing life in relationship with the Divine and all creation.
• Encouraging critical reflection.
• Involving holistic development.

4.3.2.1 Religious Education: Learning About, From and Within

All but three of the cohort characterised their understanding of RE as involving one or more aspects of learning about, learning from or learning into religious or belief systems. This can be seen in Table 4.8 below. Of these three, two gave no answer and a third commented that her understanding was "not so positive", holding a perspective on RE as tending "to teach facts or go off on 'interesting' discussions" (P30).

Table 4.8: Four Understandings of Religious Education

	About, From, Within	Life in Relationship with the Divine and all Creation	Holistic Development	Critical Reflection
1	P1	P1	P4	P5
2	P2	P3	P6	P13
3	P3	P6	P8	P17
4	P4	P8	P19	P25
5	P5	P10	P23	P26
6	P6	P11	P25	
7	P8	P14		
8	P9	P16		
9	P10	P17		
10	P11	P18		
11	P12	P19		
12	P13	P20		
13	P14	P22		
14	P16	P23		
15	P17	P25		
16	P18	P26		
17	P19	P28		
18	P20	P29		
19	P21	P31		
20	P22	P34		
21	P23			
22	P24			
23	P25			
24	P26			
25	P27			
26	P28			
27	P29			
28	P31			
29	P32			
30	P33			
31	P34			

One participant made the important point that "context…as well as content and method is important in understanding what is being suggested by the term RE. He offered three possible definitional categories which reprise what we have already heard in Chapter 2 from Lane (2013a), Hull (2001) and Grimmitt (1973, 1987). These include:

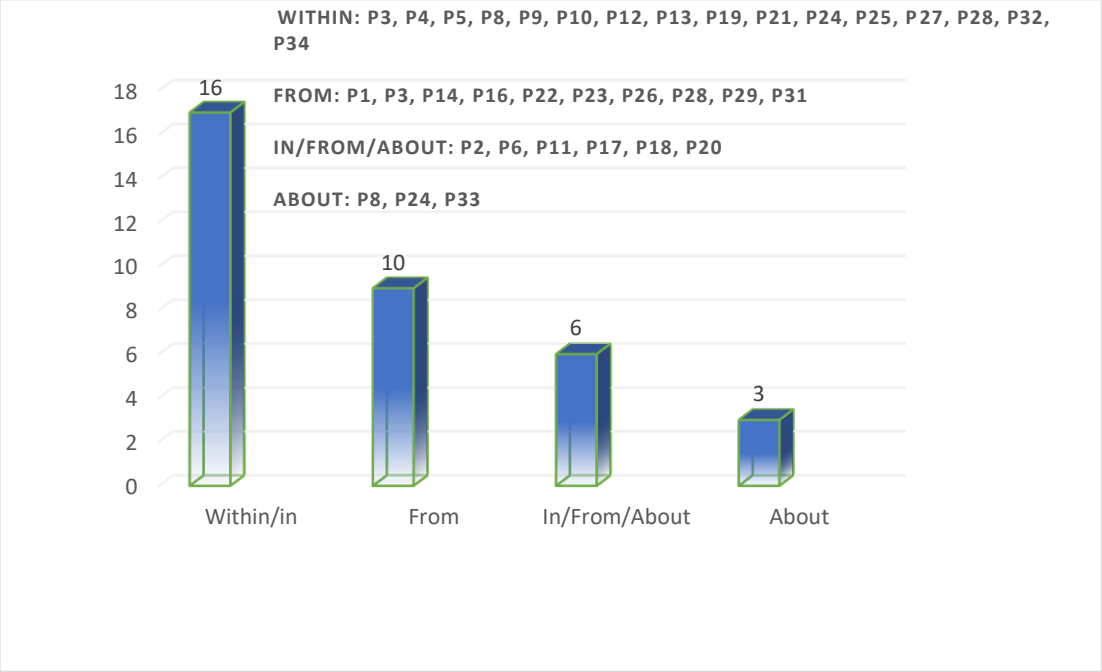
1. learning 'about' religion/s and belief/s which he described as "information about religions" which offer comparisons between different faith systems and world views;

2. learning 'from' religion/s and belief/s which means "reflecting on one's own experience of God and religion and learning from your own experience or that of others… to develop your own experience and belief system";

3. learning 'in', 'within', or 'into' religion or belief. This catechetical approach sees RE as taking place within a religious faith "with the participants seeking to … deepen their engagement within the faith community…and bring their faith to maturity" (P2).

It has been noted in ***3.3.1*** that during the survey questionnaire stage that the researcher deliberately chose not to ask participants to identify which of the definitions, or combinations thereof, they might most closely align with, preferring to see if this information might surface in their responses to Question 25. In the event, it proved possible to suggest such categorisation which was informed both by the analysis of the aforementioned question together with the analysis of the data provided by Interview Question 3. Implicit are discussed below with the caveat that this analysis is based purely on the content of responses to one questionnaire question and one interview question. Therefore, the assignment of a category was tentative and provisional until such times as all participants were in a position to review this analysis. In the event, no participant queried the categorisation.

Figure 4.17: Participants' Dominant Understanding of RE



Religious Education from Within a Faith Tradition

Figure 4.17 illustrates that the most common understanding saw RE as being of a catechetical nature and as taking place within a religious faith community. The responses of forty-seven percent of the cohort reflected this category.

Typical of the definitions offered were that RE "gives the intellectual content of a faith" and helps the person "to practice their faith" through "induction into prayer, worship, works of justice" (P9). Another expressed her understanding in the following terms: "religious education combines the transmission of a tradition together with a critical appraisal of that tradition and… is a lifelong journey of discovery" (P32). Two participants placed their emphasis on faith formation (P21, P12) with one defining RE as

> the formation of people in the faith, giving them its history, encouraging them to think through complex questions and to meet new challenges and giving them a sense of confident pride in their roots. (P21)

The other, showing some sympathy for the less favourable understanding of RE expressed earlier, had this to say:

> I don't tend to use the term. I associate it mainly with formally structured provision – school etc. – more information than formation – more children

> than adults. Terms like faith development, faith formation, catechesis suggest something more formative, as well as informative. (P12)

Learning From Religion

The second most common understanding related to learning from RE, a categorisation which was implied in the responses of just over twenty-nine percent of those surveyed. One framed it as "opening hearts and minds to the question of God, inviting each and every individual into a relationship with God" (P16) while another defined it as

> any educational process by which people are invited to explore the human religious traditions that protect and illuminate the experience of belief in transcendence/ the divine, leading to personal and social transformation. (P14)

Learning About, From and Within

Six participants referenced an understanding which encompassed all three categories of RE. One gave us the definitional categories as outlined at the opening of this sub-theme (P2). Another emphasised RE's distinction from what he called "religious studies" and spoke of it as a combination of the understandings of education already discussed in the preceding sub-theme "with religion and God added…being formed in the faith… including catechesis but also knowledge and understanding of other religious traditions and approaches" (P20). A third pointed out that RE also includes those who "interpret the world in a non-religious manner" and thus encompassed "atheists, agnostics, unbelievers, people of personal conviction, secularists… as they try and make sense of the world" (P17). Countering the charge that RE is more information than formation, she said,

> The goal of RE is not just a cerebral understanding of God or gods or the world……it is not a conceptual end game…. its goal from the Christian perspective is to live a loving life in relationship with God, others, self and world….
>
> RE should have a strong pastoral and spiritual dimension, fostering a living meaningful prayer life, engaging in the rich tradition of meditation, inviting people to participate in ritual… sustaining a sense of the sacred. In short, RE must be experiential and provide meaning at a personal and communal level. (P17)

Learning About

Aspects of three participant's understandings fell into the category of learning about religion with one commenting that RE was to enable an appreciation of "the role of religion as a source of meaning in human life" (P33) and another saying it was instruction about "the

various sets of beliefs and practices that are in the world" (P24). Two of this small group also acknowledged an understanding of RE as learning within or into a faith tradition.

While the understandings as profiled represent a snapshot in time in terms of how individuals responded to this question on a given day, they are discussed here at some length because the differences in categorical combinations and nuanced understandings profiled give us some insight into the importance of clarifying underlying assumptions when discussing a topic which, on the face of it, might seem to command a common understanding. Digging a little deeper, however, sees the uncovering of a range of emphases and again reminds us of Cullen's (2013, p.6) observations about the "contested" nature of RE and of differing attitudes regarding its aims "both within faith communities and in public discourse" (2013, p.214) which we briefly referenced at the close of Theme 1.

Since variety in emphasis emerged from the questionnaire analysis, this issue seemed ripe for further exploration at interview. Consequently, at this juncture, participants were directly asked to identify which of the three understandings, or combination thereof, they believed their writing focused on.

Half of the interview cohort reported that their books were focused on all three understandings (P6, P11, P17) but they each had varying views on the reasons for this. In tandem with the catechetical perspective outlined above and in Chapter 2, one felt that inviting people into the "possibility of a personal relationship with Jesus" was crucial and was also convinced that learning "about" RE had questionable purpose because the presentation of any subject cannot come from a neutral, value-free stance:

> it doesn't matter if you're doing art or geography or business studies or religious education, it's what lens you're viewing the world from….
>
> The very notion of value-free knowledge, I think, is frankly, dangerous. I go with Horkheimer and Adorno on this one. …the idea that you take this thing called knowledge, and then you apply it. There's something quite pernicious about that. (P6)

Another was initially unsure but then concluded that his books were focused on all three. However, he noted that much would depend on "what the reader wants to take" from a particular piece of writing:

> I was first inclined to think my books are more to do with learning *about*….but the learning about isn't just for the heck of it, in the back of my mind there is always the question - will this help the faith of somebody or facilitate somebody in seeing the sense or the point of something

> Christian? So, I now think that the writing also has to do with learning from – experiencing a faith connection. And of course, since I am conscious of working within the Catholic tradition …I think I am also trying to offer something to those who can learn from within it. (P11)

A fellow participant observed that while her early books began with an emphasis on "learning into", this focus had shifted over time to move in the trajectory of "learning into, learning from and then learning about, the more I wrote" (P17).

Two of those interviewed (P3, P28) saw their books as having a perspective of "from and into" with another participant identifying her own books as encompassing a perspective of "learning about" and "learning within" (P8).

4.3.2.2 Life in Relationship with the Divine and All Creation

While the above discussion saw understanding of RE as being on a continuum, as Table 4.8 above demonstrates, there was considerable convergence amongst almost fifty-nine percent of the cohort that RE was everything that has been said in the preceding sub-theme about education but with the added focus on the "the role of God as origin, sustainer and goal of education and human development" (P26).

Analogous standpoints were expressed with a number overlapping with what we have heard above when considering education as teaching and learning in the service of right relationship. One participant stated her understanding of RE as "about entering into a lifelong process of exploring our personal and shared humanity within the context of a belief in a God and particular faith system" (P8). Another made a similar point but also placed stress on the cultivation of interior skills, defining RE as:

> the process by which people learn, not just about visible reality, but about the deeper spiritual reality, and develop the deeper skills associated with thought, reflection, meditation, prayer, and creative and positive inter-personal relationships. (3OC)

The focus on interiority and right relationships was shared by a number of others, with one referring to it as leading people "beyond a head knowledge…into a heart knowledge of God" (P28), and another stating it thus:

> religious education builds on the nature and nurture dimensions of education, with a particular focus on the development of human transcendence, interiority, spirituality, ethics, ecology, and the subjective potential of every person. (P18)

Another of those surveyed, taking the view that "religion is caught not taught" (P22) said that more is conveyed by example than words. She said that RE, by virtue of its focus on action for the ethical living "enabled us to live "more from our essence…as we strive for the common good of all creation" (P22). The essence she spoke of was our innate goodness which comes from God and makes us

> good, blessed, holy – with the potential to mess things up and in constant need of reconciliation – rather than that we are primarily sinners in constant need of measuring up, albeit with the potential for good. (P22)

Two participants expressed the view that RE should be "far removed from indoctrination" (P29), seeing it as about "awakening wonder and curiosity, reflecting on the wonders of creation, and forming values of tolerance, understanding, gratitude and love" (P29) or as helping people to reflect "on the meaning and purpose of their own lives and the values by which they want to live" (P23).

4.3.2.3 Encourages Critical Reflection

The view expressed in the previous sub-theme that education should ponder ultimate meaning, raise questions and foster thinking was reiterated once again with regard to RE with five participants giving it attention. Again, this recalls an author role emphasis revealed in Theme 1, signalling a further point of synchronicity between the point of religious writing and of RE. One characterised this as "reflection on fundamental questions in a way that is enriched by the Gospel and by centuries of Christian faith and history" (P25) while another said it must be "critical and self-critical…..it must be open-ended and dialogue with a world that often misunderstands and rejects it" (P17).

Such emphasis on critical reflection was endorsed in this way:

> True religious education should free one and enable one to question and challenge assumptions of what is, often, too readily, labelled 'church teaching' while it is, in realty, a theological opinion. 'Because I say so' is not good enough anymore. Our faith should be enlightened. Religious education should help us to mature. (P13)

Commenting on the context of adult RE, another participant had this to say:

> I have found that people who may be highly competent and absolutely au fait with up-to-the-minute thinking in their professions have often not progressed in their understanding of Christianity beyond the ideas they imbibed in childhood. Sometimes their own innate wisdom has suggested

> that these ideas do not make sense, but they cling to them all the same, out of fear of losing their faith or of incurring clerical displeasure. I have found that adult religious education emancipates people from these fears and gives them the 'go-ahead' to think more intelligently and critically about theology, or the Bible, or the Church. In many cases this more critical and intelligent understanding is what they have actually been thinking privately for a long time but were afraid to voice. (P5)

4.3.2.4 Involves Holistic Development

Reminding us of the holistic definition of education which was elucidated in the previous sub-theme (P14 Q.24), another participant underlined it again, speaking of the need for a rounded approach to RE which attends to the "religious, psychological, emotional, physical, sexual and other areas of life":

> It cannot just be about a religious ethos that pertains only to a moral code but should encompass all areas of growth and well-being of an individual. Where is God found and how does his gospel influence *all* areas of one's life? (P19)

This point found some resonance in the remarks of two others who spoke particularly of their understanding of RE as it pertains to the ethos of Catholic schools. One commented that in this context, RE "must be more than 'the crucifix in the classroom' with prayers, assemblies, special ceremonies, masses and RE lessons" (P6)

> …the "religious element" must permeate, underpin and inspire everything that happens, is experienced and witnessed in the everyday life of the schools…..Religious education must seek to accompany each student in his/her professional, personal and spiritual development….It must reflect, at the very core of its practice, justice, inclusiveness, tolerance, friendship, celebration and love. (P6)

In similar fashion, another observed,

> a Catholic school is no longer defined as a school that teaches correct doctrine, (though that itself is, of course, expected). More importantly, the tacit dimension is what defines a Catholic school – its atmosphere, its values, informal contacts and much that is implicitly conveyed. (P4)

4.3.3: Conceptualising Religious Education in a Lifelong Context

4.3.3.1 A Continuing Journey

"When you cease to learn you have begun to die" (P 9) was how one participant encapsulated the on-going nature of RE. It is a quote attributed to Blaise Pascal, and ubiquitously to Albert

Einstein, and encapsulates an understanding shared by all thirty-two who responded to Question 26 which asked what participants thought was meant by the term LRE. Only two of the cohort did not respond to the question with the data revealing the four key definitional attributes shown in Finding 21.

Finding 21: Lifelong Religious Education is understood in four ways:
• As a continuing journey of movement and development in religious understanding.
• As a maturing of faith and "the beginning of lasting wisdom".
• As multi-facetted and not restricted to formal settings.
• As including a currently under-developed and under-resourced adult focus.

Reponses such as "cradle to grave" (P17), "womb to tomb" (P14), "ongoing" (P16), "the journey never ends" (P28) reveal a view of RE that is indeed "for life" (P22), always "open to learning"(P17) and "changing where necessary" (P4) in light of new information. In a manner reminiscent of what we have heard from Durka and Smith (1976b, p.73) who spoke of faith as "a living process…. not fixed, but dynamic, always moving and developing", one said she viewed RE "not as a 'finished system' but as a continuous dialogue between experience, culture and tradition" (P32). Others, again evoking Durka and Smith (1976), spoke of the reality of "movement and change in our religious understanding and perspectives" (P8) and emphasised the continuous search that is the human condition stating that "there are no absolute or permanent answers therefore RE is a lifelong quest" (P10). Reiterating a view that we heard earlier regarding the humility that lies at the heart of education, another cohort member saw LRE as showing "respect for the infinitesimally tiny grasp of human knowledge any of us gets to command and continuing openness to engaging with the great questions of our times" (P26).

One cohort member, repeating his primary understanding of RE as a subject to be learned *about* summed up his view of its lifelong element as the "need to keep abreast of developments in religious understanding and of inter-faith dialogue" (P33). Another expressed her view that it was also "some sort of ongoing teaching about religion - about the Catholic religion and practices" (P30). She continued that it "doesn't appeal to me, while lifelong formation in theological literacy sounds so different to my ears" (P30).

Another who was also unenthusiastic about the term LRE said it "sounds formal, cerebral, academic, as well as too associated with children and young people" (P12). However, he

added that the meaning of "disciple" means to be a learner, noting that: "being a Christian is to be on a lifelong learning curve about what it is to be a Christian" and emphasised that faith is "a journey rather than a possession (P12).

The idea of LRE being in the service of formation was also taken up by two others, one of whom defined it as "lifelong catechesis", thus associating it with taking place within a faith community (P6). Also referring to catechesis, another expressed it in terms of a continuum that responds to all life stages, that involves more than one discipline (for example, RE and theology) and is orientated towards those who are within, without or on the fringes of a faith community:

> Lifelong religious education, for me, should provide supports for people who want to delve a little further into their own religion, that of others and those who have none…
>
> It can be at the level of first awareness, initiation, catechesis, religious education, theological reflection or new evangelisation – for those who are well grounded, for example in the Christian community, for those on the margins, and to reconnect with those who have left Church for a period of time or simply drifted along unconnected in any substantial manner. (P2)

Table 4.9: Four Facets of Lifelong Religious Education

	Continuing Journey	Maturing Faith	Not Restricted to Formal Setting	Expanding an Adult Focus
1	P1	P2	P2	P2
2	P2	P3	P3	P5
3	P3	P5	P4	P6
4	P4	P6	P6	P9
5	P5	P8	P8	P12
6	P6	P11	P17	P20
7	P8	P12	P20	P25
8	P9	P13	P21	P34
9	P10	P16	P25	
10	P11	P18	P26	
11	P12	P19	P31	
12	P13	P20		
13	P14	P22		
14	P16	P24		
15	P17	P28		
16	P18	P29		
17	P19	P30		
18	P20	P34		
19	P21			
20	P22			
21	P23			
22	P24			
23	P25			
24	P26			
25	P27			
26	P28			
27	P29			
28	P30			
29	P31			
30	P32			
31	P33			
32	P34			

4.3.3.2 Maturing faith and "the Beginning of Lasting Wisdom"

That LRE is focused on a maturing in life and faith was an idea expressed by over half of the cohort. This too is visually presented in the sub-theme frequency table above (Table 4.9).

Characterised by one as "faith continuing to seek understanding" (P5), in like tone another saw its purpose as "a continuous broadening and deepening of one's understanding of the Gospel of Jesus, and what is imported by faith" (P11). Emphasising that "there is always more to discover about the God who is for us, alongside us and within us" (P28), participants talked of LRE as facilitating "new understanding of how God is working in the world" (P19), or put another way, as making space to develop "a maturing, adult faith for the long haul" (P34).

Reinforcing earlier observations that touched on how relatively little we know or can know, three other participants referred to LRE as illuminating an awareness of being "in the middle of MYSTERY" (P29). Pointing out that it is underpinned by theological insights such as "negative theology, analogical thinking, the apophatic tradition, and above all what medieval thinkers called 'learned ignorance' (docta ignorantia)", one shared the important insight that "the promotion of learned ignorance by religious education is the beginning of lasting wisdom" (P18).

This awareness also recalls Durka and Smith's (1976b, p.73) assertion that "faith-ing means never to arrive, but always to ask the further question: What more can I do? How better can I love?". The recognition that a maturing of faith does not equate to a once-and-for-all definitive stance or arrival hall was repeated by another of those surveyed who said her own spiritual journey was itself an exercise in LRE that led her to a place of "comfortable unknowing" (P24). Defining her understanding as "a response to our quest to understand the meaning of God, and the reasons that we are alive", she concretised her view thus:

> I found that the urgency that I had to understand God in my school years diminished with the preoccupations of growing up, career and then marriage and child-rearing. In my middle years I began to experience this quest for understanding once more, and set about "finding" God again. God hadn't gone anywhere, but I had. Eventually, I began to feel more and more comfortable with the sense that God is within me, and that I do not have to look any further for proof of God's existence. My urge to know who or what God is has become a comfortable "unknowing" now. (P24)

4.3.3.3 Lifelong Religious Education is Multi-facetted and Not Restricted to Formal Settings

Lending support to the expressed need to break understandings of RE free from formal primary, post-primary and third level interpretations, thirty-two percent of the group, specifically confirmed that, for them, LRE is "not defined by years or terms or structures" (P3), "extends beyond school and university" (P4), and encompasses "learning in the skin at every stage of your life everywhere"(P17).

Participants acknowledged a clear need for adult RE which "includes but goes beyond traditional formal education" (P31) with one giving his understanding as "*formal:* going to college or an institute or *informal:* parish courses etc" (P27). Another made a similar point by referring to LRE as embracing adults at a "general interest level *and* at a serious academic level" (P20).

Going beyond the formal to the informal and nonformal, two participants identified the celebration of liturgy and preaching (P20) as a source of LRE. In this regard, one lamented what he saw as the "dreadful pity" that "Catholic preaching…has run away from the challenge of using the spoken word as an agent of education." He continued, saying that "Sunday homilies, the most regular way in which people hear the word are increasingly bereft of serious content" (P21).

Extending the definitional parameters further, one participant defined his own view of LRE as "any form of personal development, in knowledge and awareness and spiritual growth, whether facilitated by a formal teaching process or by reading, listening, going on pilgrimage" (P3).

He was joined in his assessment regarding the importance of reading books as a means of LRE by another who remarked, "our faith should deepen, our religious experience mature. For this to happen, the learning process must be ongoing. Practically, this will be mainly through reading. Hence: books!" (P4).

4.3.3.4 Expanding and Resourcing an Adult Focus

In their responses, twenty-three percent of those surveyed specifically argued that a greater adult focus was needed in RE if it is to really achieve its full purpose. This reinforces earlier comments made in Theme 1 by P9 (Q.22) and P12 (Q.25) and we will see it raised again explicitly in Theme 4, sub-theme 3 and also implicitly in Theme 4, sub-theme 1 (when we

confirm that the majority see themselves as religious educators in a lifelong context through their role as religious authors).

One participant remarked that "we have allowed ourselves to think that RE can take place only, or even mainly, in schools. If we - parishes, dioceses - don't form adult Christians, where do we think they will come from?" (P25). Calling adult catechesis "one of the major issues facing the Church today", another said:

> The understanding of faith gained (often) at primary school will not sustain anyone throughout their adult life unless it is nurtured by meaningful religious education that matches the needs and expectations of post-school Catholics. Neither will 10-week courses organised at parish/diocesan level provide lifelong catechesis for most unless they are linked to a lived faith that does justice in the world and in people's lives. (P6)

His comments found resonance with another who spoke of "our inherited and often unquestioning understanding of the Bible and the Christian tradition", (P5), issues which she believed could find redress in properly resourced LRE, which in the words of one "must acknowledge the adult nature of the conversation and invite participants to find their way into the material appropriately" (P2).

4.3.4 Summing Up Theme 3

This theme has elucidated how participants understand education, RE and LRE. It is evident from the theme findings, and we shall discuss this further in Chapter 5, that participants view both education and RE as sharing remarkably similar features with significant overlap existing between both. It is also notable that these areas of convergence are very similar to at least four of the identified role emphases of the religious author which were uncovered in Theme 1. The insights provided by participants into these matters, together with the cohort's view of LRE as being hallmarked by the four key components that we have illuminated above, serve as critical precursors to our final theme which, taken together, will support us in addressing the second part of the research question.

4.4 Theme 4 Religious Educator – An Aspect of Author Identity?

4.4.1 Self-perception as Religious Educator or Otherwise

When, in Question 27, the cohort was asked to indicate whether, through their work as authors, they viewed themselves as religious educators, more than two-thirds agreed that this was indeed an aspect of their identity, a self-perception which provides us with Finding 22 of this study. Since participant testimony is drawn from Question 27 in all but one case in this sub-theme, additional referencing is given only where appropriate.

Finding 22: Seventy-six and a half percent of the cohort see themselves as religious educators.

Three of those surveyed identified with the term only in a broad sense and a fourth said it did not resonate with them. One did not give a clear indication either way. We can recall from Theme 1 that over three-quarters of the cohort (twenty-seven members) either currently teach or had previously taught in some capacity at third level with twenty-four of this number having taught in areas directly related to religion. Hence, it might offer little surprise that most participants, having all written on some aspect associated with religion, would be comfortable in adopting the nomenclature of religious educator. We will illuminate this here by returning to the area of academic interest indicated by individual members of the cohort in Theme 1.

Table 4.10 below is colour-coded to show the different disciplines which participants were involved in. Where the same person taught in two disciplines, such as in both theology and RE, theology is shown in green and RE is indicated in red via the participant number. We can see that of the twelve people who had lectured in one or other area of theology, eight held comfortable self-perceptions as religious educators. Those whose theological and RE academic roles had overlapped saw the two disciplines as especially complementary with one stating “good theology plays an important role in religious education and religious education challenges theology to engage with human experience and the reality of other religions” (P18).

Table 4.10: Do Participants Identify as Religious Educators?

	RE Educator	Only in Broad Sense	Not RE Educator	Neither yes or no
1	P1	P4	P19	P15
2	P2	P22	P29	
3	P3	P32	P30	
4	P5		P33	
5	P6			
6	P7			
7	P8			
8	P9			
9	P10			
10	P11			
11	P12			
12	P13			
13	P14			
14	P16			
15	P17			
16	P18			
17	P20			
18	P21			
19	P23			
20	P24			
21	P25			
22	P26			
23	P27			
24	P28			
25	P31			
26	P34			

Key to Table 4.10

	Theology
	RE
	Scripture
	Spirituality
	Outside Third- Level
	Catechetics
	Chaplaincy
	Scholastic Phil.
	Linguistics
	No/neither yes or no

Five others in this theology sub-group also seemed content with identifying as religious educators saying that "to educate is the purpose of being a religious author" (P10), "one only writes with a view to enriching the faith and the life of the reader" (P25), and "the books are more than just practical resources, they are intended to 'teach' in some sense, as 'theology' in the best sense" (P12). Again, raising the "learning" aspect of education, one participant commented that he could take on the identity "if education is also understood as being part of a community in which we are all learners as well as teachers and depend on one another to attain wisdom" (P26). He had fulsome support in this from two fellow participants with one commenting "as an educator I'm a learner and a lifelong learner" (P17) and another stating the hope that his work will "facilitate the process of lifelong learning… in the context of an individual reader, or as contributing to a structured process within groups" (P3).

Three of this sub-group were, however, much more tentative about claiming the role of religious educator, with one stating that she saw herself as an educator only in the broadest sense" (P22) and another commenting that while "one always hopes that what one writes will influence people…I would never set out to be a 'religious educator!"(P4). A supportive remark came from another of those surveyed who said "if some pieces I write give rise to thought and to conversation then that is a form of education but that is not my primary goal" (P32). A further participant did not fully clarify her position in her response but rather underlined her principal identity, stating that "as a theologian who writes, I hope I both inform and stimulate to think and to question" (P30), thus linking her response to her own definition of education (P30 Q.24). However, in an earlier response, this participant reported herself as being "not so positive" about religious education so it seems reasonable to assume that religious educator is not a self-descriptive she would choose to adopt.

One could assume that it might go without saying that all who had lectured in RE would be expected to identify as religious educators through their writing. It was nonetheless important to confirm this since not all continue to work in formal education. As it emerged, all agreed with the identity.

Of the cohort members who had lectured in scripture or biblical studies, all four saw themselves as religious educators with one stating:

> I regard the ability to study and to communicate what I have learned as a God-given gift, a talent. I believe that I have a teaching ministry in the church. It is a joy to find this ministry recognized when I am invited to be a regular preacher at the Sunday eucharist in Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin… and to preach on an occasional basis in various Church of Ireland parishes. (P5)

Similarly, those who had taught in other disciplines such as catechetics, spirituality, linguistics, scholastic philosophy and chaplaincy all identified as religious educators. One stated his belief that all committed Christians are called to be such by virtue of their baptism (P6) while another commented that "to read any book/text anywhere is education….anyone who puts something in writing, informed by the Gospel of Light and Hope and makes it available to the public is a religious educator" (P1).

Mixed views were expressed by others who had worked at third level with one, who had served in this capacity on an occasional basis, commenting that that he did not wish to be "arrogant" in assuming the title (P19), another expressing no clear opinion (P15), and a third saying that while he is an academic, he did not view himself as a religious educator (P33).

Of the seven participants who had not taught at third level, all but one accepted the description. The remaining cohort member declined the designation saying that he saw himself as "a conduit, channelling the ideas and experiences of interesting, reflective people to a wider audience.... I am not preaching. I am hopefully opening minds but maybe that's education!" (P29).

The percentage of those who identified as both religious author and religious educator was identical with only very slight variation between those who accepted only one or other classification. Table 4.11 demonstrates consistency between five participants (shown in red font) who viewed themselves as neither religious author or religious educator.

Table 4.11 Participants Who Did Not See Themselves as Religious Authors or Religious Educators

	Not a Religious Author	Not a Religious Educator
1	P8	P4
2	P14	P15
3	P22	P19
4	P25	P22
5	P29	P29
6	P30	P30
7	P32	P32
8	P33	P33

4.4.2 Contributions to Lifelong Religious Education

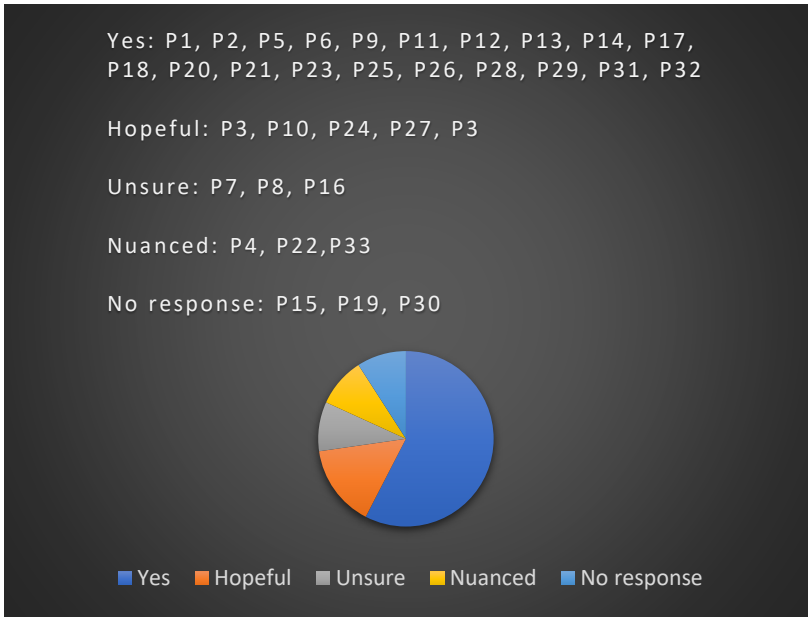
Plainly, all participants wished to make a positive impact on their readers through their written work. This intention has already been established and expressed in a range of ways, especially in Theme 1.

However, in Question 28, participants were asked if they believed that their books had made a contribution specifically to LRE while Question 29 explored whether contributing to it had a high priority for them. Analysis of their responses resulted in two clear findings as shown below. Unless otherwise indicated, in this sub-theme all quotations are taken from the aforementioned questions.

Finding 23: Seventy-three percent of the cohort believed or hoped their books had made a contribution to lifelong religious education.
Finding 24: Contributing to LRE was a priority for sixty-four percent of the cohort.

Of the thirty-one participants who answered the question, as is evident in Figure 4.18 below, twenty stated that they were either sure, or on the basis of positive feedback or reflection, believed that their work had been beneficial in this regard. A further five expressed the hope that their books had made a positive contribution, with three participants unsure. Three gave more nuanced replies and three others made no response. Those who were unsure of their contribution said they had no way of measuring this and that it was for others to judge.

Figure 4.18: Do Participants Believe Their Books Resource Lifelong Religious Education?



Participants said that favourable reviews (P5), requests to use extracts (P1) and direct dialogue with readers who "contact me to discuss what I have written" (P20) were all ways of assessing impact. We saw in Theme 2 that participants spoke of the support of readers as a reward of the author role. Positive comment from readers was repeated in the current theme by some of the same participants but a significant number of others concurred, with forty-one percent of the cohort indicating that reader feedback had helped them to assess their contribution: "I have been told by many people that they have been helped by things that I have written, even if I am myself always more conscious of what I don't know than of what I do know" (P26). Another commented that she believed one of her books in particular, through giving voice to women's experience, allowed her readers to "connect with their experience and thus … to make a shift in terms of how they understood their faith" (P32).

Two who earlier identified as being religious educators only in a broad sense said that they hoped their books were "helpful in various ways" (P4) and were "making a valuable contribution to life as it unfolds" (P22), thus remaining non-committal as to their impact on LRE. Another who did not see himself as a religious educator did, however, acknowledge the hope that his books have "enhanced the understanding of readers regarding the complexity of the nature and role of religion and of faith in the private and public spheres" (P33).

A notable response came from a participant who did not consider himself to be a religious educator but who nonetheless believed that his books did make a valuable contribution to the field:

> Responding to this questionnaire has caused me to re-examine and that exercise has caused me (pardon the lack of modesty) inordinate PRIDE. I have been privileged to have… ideas 'broadcast' to a wide audience through the wonderful medium of print. I genuinely believe that the readers…will have their 'lifelong religious education' enhanced. If only more and more people would read them. (P29)

4.4.2.1 Formal, Informal and Nonformal

We can recall from Chapter 2 that Coombs and Ahmed (1974) defined formal education as "spanning lower, primary school and the upper reaches of the university"; nonformal as "any organized, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning"; and informal as "the lifelong process by which every person acquires and accumulates knowledge" (1974, p.8). As we have seen, the majority of the cohort indicated that they believed or hoped that their published work had been of benefit to RE across the life continuum. However, it was not always entirely clear which educational setting, or combination thereof - formal, informal or nonformal - they had in mind when they spoke about their books or who may be reading them. Further, as signalled in ***3.3.1,*** the survey questionnaire did not explicitly ask participants to give an indication of their targeted educational setting or settings. As before, this was an intentional decision in order to see if this information would emerge organically from the cohort's responses. This acknowledged, the intended audience or educational settings were made explicit by some participants more than others. For example, the bulk of the published work of two of those who referenced resourcing classroom-based RE (P14, P17) seemed to target the formal sector. However, the latter, by saying elsewhere that "I do want to write for a general adult audience" (P17, Q.29) also indicated that she saw her books as having a wider reach which extended beyond the

formal teacher-training or practitioner setting. This view was confirmed at follow-up interview (P17, Interview Q.4). A fellow RE academic, sharing the intention to resource RE as a recognised discipline, also saw his books on spirituality as having a market beyond the academy with an apparent focus on the informal setting (P2).

Another participant, with the intention of nurturing the young in the formal and nonformal contexts said that "those who have copies of the books are mainly primary and secondary teachers, Sunday school teachers and youth leaders" (P34).

Others implied more informal and nonformal settings by mentioning that their books are used by "parish groups" (P21), to "facilitate a group/community process" (P3), or to offer support to those bereaved by suicide (P24).

From the responses of some participants, who said, for example, that "feedback would suggest that several of my books have figured in adult education" (P13), or "the theological books that I have written do contribute to lifelong religious education" (P18), it was not possible to say precisely whether they saw their work as aimed at one, two or all of the educational settings so categorisation was made on the basis of book content or publicity on the publisher's website.

Though it has been established that categorisation simply from participants responses to Question 28 might be done on the basis of incomplete information, the book titles supplied in Question 10 of the survey did assist this researcher in making provisional classification which was helped by either consulting the books themselves or, as indicated, by accessing the on-line information pertaining to them on publisher's websites. This classification is shown in Table 4.12 below. From this, we can see that the cohort has devoted attention to all three educational areas with almost fifty-nine percent (twenty participants) publishing books which could potentially cross all three educational settings. Seven have published mainly for both the informal and nonformal sectors, three for the informal only, two for the formal and nonformal, one for the formal and informal setting and one for the formal only.

Table 4.12: Educational Settings Targeted

	FORMAL	INFORMAL	NONFORMAL	ALL THREE
1				P1
2				P2
3		P3	P3	
4				P4
5				P5
6				P6
7		P7	P7	
8		P8		
9				P9
10		P10	P10	
11				P11
12				P12
13				P13
14	P14			
15				P15
16	P16		P16	
17				P17
18				P18
19				P19
20				P20
21				P21
22		P22	P22	
23		P23	P23	
24		P24	P24	
25				P25
26				P26
27				P27
28		P28	P28	
29		P29		
30				P30
31				P31
32		P32		
33	P33	P33		
34	P34		P34	

Why would such attempt at segmentation be important to scrutinise here? This researcher deems it so because it is essential that writers and educators identify, as precisely as possible from the outset, *who* they *principally* want to attract to their books, and *why*, in order for their content to be framed accordingly and for their target markets to be reached adequately. Attempting to reach everyone, or publicising a book as applicable to many settings, risks falling between stools unless clear and tailored messages are given to each segment of one's target market/educational setting as to why and how a book would be attractive to each. These observations are especially important for those more associated with writing books for the formal education sector who also intend to appeal to the other sectors. They are made in light of participants identification of low sales and poor marketing as obstacles to their work and are especially salient when speaking of RE in a lifelong setting. In other words, if

formal approaches to RE are not intended or expected to transfer in exactly the same way to the informal and nonformal arenas, the same might be said of books, unless careful attention is given, from the beginning, as to how this might operate. While the researcher acknowledges that these remarks are more appropriate to our final discussion chapter, they are included here to shed light on why she decided, for the purposes of member-checking, to ask the interview cohort which educational setting or settings they had in mind for their books. As it emerged, the researcher's categorisations proved to be on a par with the interview cohort's intentions. All other participants who were not interviewed were given the opportunity to verify or rectify the categorisation of their own work at the review of findings stage and no query was raised by any cohort member.

At interview, one categorised her books as targeting the informal setting (P8) while two others saw their focus as primarily informal and nonformal (P3, P28). Regarding the latter, one commented that he saw his books as "an outline", not in the sense of a short summary, but in the sense that they represented a starting out point which

> only came alive when…used as a process in a community setting, when real people brought themselves, their faith, and their sharing into it. In a way, it parallels the catechetical texts for schools, which only make sense when they are used to stimulate the interaction of teacher and pupils in the classroom. (P3)

Half of the interview cohort said that for them, there was not always a clear dividing line between one educational setting and another when it came to their target markets. One commented that he took a "a very holistic view" in this regard (P6) while another reflected that initially her books were aimed principally at meeting the needs of her third level students but that this had changed over time and now, while still writing for the formal setting, her latest books would be heavily focused on the nonformal and informal arenas

> I'm interested in people, in the public, in opening up and moving beyond a university or a kind of utilitarian focus - that 'this is going to be useful for a particular group'. … I think once I started to write, I had a growing appetite to respond to socio cultural, religious issues on a larger scale. (P17)

Another acknowledged his initial thoughts when writing might be that "this could be useful for a tutorial session, or a reading course seminar" but that he was also "usually thinking also of people who come under the heading of educating themselves informally or nonformally" (P11).

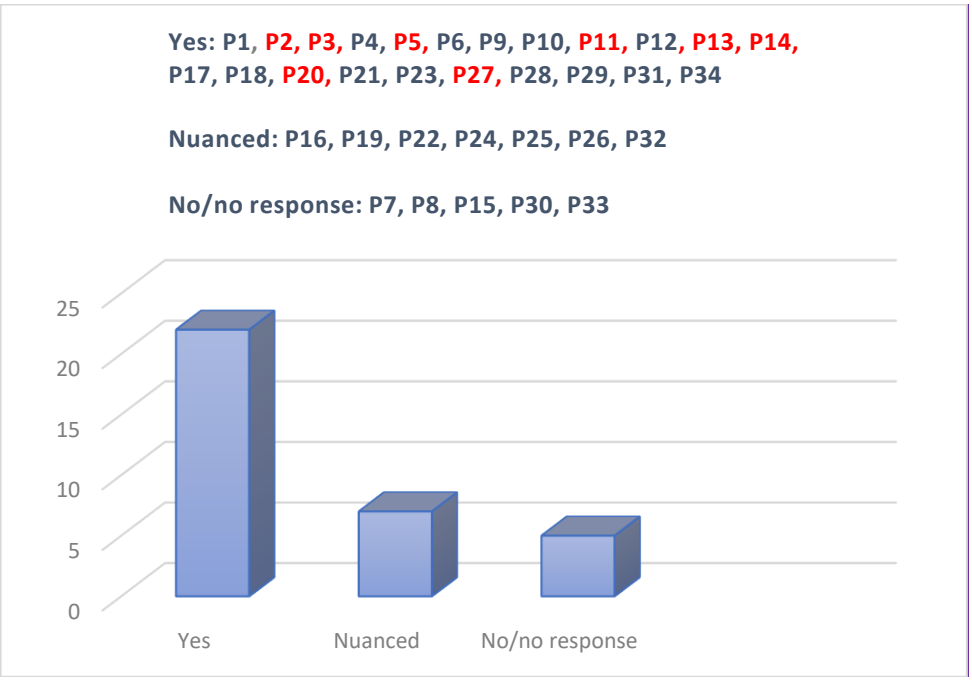
Professional experience tells this researcher that it is entirely possible that books written mainly with a formal or nonformal setting in mind are also read by the interested general reader in the informal setting of the home. Equally, books written with the individual general reader in mind can also find their way into the formal and nonformal settings. This reality does not dilute the importance of author and publisher being conscious of clear segmentation so that cross-fertilisation is not left to luck or chance. Further, the intended market or educational setting of the author and publisher is only one half of the issue. The other half is whether the author has good information on who is actually reading the work and how this information is mediated. This is important not only to give information on sales and readership but is crucial for the dialogical and participative commitment to education that we have heard reinforced by the cohort. As the latter half of the issue could only be fully adjudicated through further research into the purchasers and readers (who are not always the same) of the participant's individual books, along with data on those who borrow these books from libraries, it is an area which is recommended for future research in the service of enhancing the future of LRE which, as we shall now see, is a priority for a significant portion of the cohort.

4.4.2.2 Lifelong Religious Education: A Priority

When asked in Question 29, sixty-four percent of those surveyed reported that contributing to LRE through their writing was either a priority or a high priority for them. Seven participants gave more nuanced responses and five either said no or did not reply.

Resonating with what we have heard before in Theme 1, some saw their writing in this regard as an extension of their professional or ministerial roles. These participants are indicated in red font in Figure 4.19. One commented that he believed in "the value of making elucidation/reflection available in printed or electronic form. It makes it accessible…there is a strength when the published work is related to educational/pastoral processes" (P3).

Figure 4.19: Is Lifelong Religious Education Important to Their Work as Authors?



Another said it had sufficient priority for her "to spend hours, days, months and years on writing projects that make no financial sense, but, I believe, are part of my ministry within the Church" (P5). A fellow cohort member said simply, "I have always been a teacher…from the start, writing has accompanied teaching" (P13). One acknowledged that since her work is focused on young children or university students, "the concept of 'lifelong' religious education is not to the forefront of my mind as I'm writing". However, noting that "all RE builds on what went before" she conceded that "any religious education literature/material contributes to lifelong religious education" (P14). Not dissimilarly, another commented that although she did not have "an overarching plan" and just writes "as my life develops", she wanted to be "relevant to people at all stages of life" with her focus on religious and non-religious dialogue. She saw her task "as helping to clear up misunderstanding, challenge stereotypes, identify key issues, facilitate a rich range of voices to enter into debate and inform" (P17).

4.4.2.3 Not Primary Intention

Others who were surveyed, while also happy to make a contribution, did not necessarily categorise their principle intention as LRE. One remarked that she did not write in "this 'purposeful' way but am pleased if anyone gains any illumination (however slight) through

something I have written which enables them to move forward on their own path" (P32). Similarly, another said "I write as part of an inner need (put there by the Lord, I believe) to work things out for myself and then I want to share this with others and see what they make of it" (P26). Others wrote as a response to a request for liturgical resources (P16), to address particular issues at different times (P25) and to "pass on to others the easy availability of God's grace" (P24).

4.4.3 Improving the Landscape: Recommendations to Enhance Lifelong Religious Education

In Question 30, the concluding qualitative question of the study, the cohort made recommendations to enhance LRE. These divided into three broad areas and produced the final and twenty-fifth finding of the research which is examined below.

Finding 25: Three focal points were identified to enhance LRE
• Giving respect to freedom of thought, dialogue and inclusion.
• The provision of necessary resources.
• Focusing on adult religious education.

4.4.3.1 Give Respect to Freedom of Thought, Dialogue and Inclusion

"Tell people that questioning is good" (P9) and encourage them to "have a mind of their own and to use it" were points emphasised by two participants with the latter adding "as long as the Church demands that everyone think and believe exactly as they are told by the Magisterium in the Vatican, lifelong education is meaningless" (P7). Allied to this was the need to listen to "alternative, differing viewpoints" (P20) with an emphasis on "the teaching and learning that comes from shared dialogue and conversation" which, this participant believed the Catholic Church in Ireland could encourage "a lot more" (P26). Saying there was a need for "a more engaging and realistic church context at local community level", another called for greater acceptance of "where people are really at in their daily lives" (P8). Quoting the late Archbishop George Otto Simms, one cautioned "AUDI ALTERAM PARTEM" meaning "hear the other side" (P29). He had support from a fellow cohort member who advised, "Get into the streets as religious educators and engage with people and listen to them" (P17).

Others in this sub-group of twelve participants (see Table 4.12 below) focused on different aspects of inclusion with one calling for more emphasis on "what unites us as a faith community transcending denominations" (P28) and another expressing the view that "the primary focus of all religious education should be on the values inherent in all religious traditions and not on the over-arching claims of any one religion" (P10). Highlighting the need for a greater focus on eradicating the "terrible and enduring injustice of inequality – rooted in gender inequality", one of those surveyed said, "in the education endeavour, I experience this as akin to a bird trying to fly with one wing!" (P22). A related but somewhat different form of inclusion was referenced by another participant who said:

> I long to see the Roman Catholic Church permitting lay theologians and biblical scholars to preach at the Sunday Eucharist. I believe that this would not only enhance the people's liturgical experience, but would also 'showcase' adult religious education. (P5)

Learning from the example and practices of other religious traditions was also raised when, in referring to a need for "a greater understanding of spirituality in the world today", another participant made this point:

> In the past there was…. too much focus on morality and not enough in equipping students to develop their own interior spiritual life and journey. Our loss has been the growth in "Wellness Centres" and the whole area of meditation. This needs to become part of the lives of every young Christian… offering them the means to use such spirituality for their own enhancement and growth. Such a development could only help to serve our lifelong religious education. (P19)

Table 4.13: Three Priorities for Lifelong Religious Education

	Respect Freedom of Thought, Dialogue and Inclusion	Provide Resources	Focus on Adult RE
1	P4	P1*	P2
2	P5	P2*	P6
3	P7	P3*	P8
4	P8	P5	P9
5	P9	P8*	P12
6	P10	P11*	P13
7	P17	P13	P16
8	P19	P17	P20
9	P20	P18	P25
10	P22	P23	P34
11	P28	P25*	
12	P29	P27*	
13		P31	

4.4.3.2 Provide Necessary Resources

Financial resources to provide "personnel and materials" (P31); making use of advances in contemporary media, on-line learning, social media and "blended learning" (an asterisk in Table 4.13 above indicates the relevant participants), together with using art and the arts (P1, P17) were all identified as important to develop LRE into the future. Such points coalesce with Frye (2012, p.13) and his understanding of distance and on-line learning as "vitally important" for adult RE in particular, where the "separation of teacher and student in time and space" (Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner, 2007, p.39) is accommodated in a way, this researcher has argued, that has parallels with the author-reader relationship.

Indeed, participants did identify books as part of the mix of necessary resources. Specific focus was placed on those tailored to adult RE (P13) which are "in tune with contemporary culture and contemporary forms of spirituality (P14) and which avoided "theological clichés, concepts and expressions that are meaningful only to those 'on the inside'" (P23).

One participant suggested that the churches give more encouragement to writers of religious books "by funding annual prizes as is done frequently in the USA" (P5) while another, saying "books are really significant" stressed the urgent need for "high quality publications and scholarly work" to resource RE as a developing discipline. She commented:

> Many European colleagues say that relative to the UK there is little material available on RE and theology in Ireland. I think publishing books does a lot to redress that. I am glad that the discipline of RE is growing steadily and that a new generation is coming on board with new ideas and methodologies and publications. (P17)

With regard to scholarly book resources, one of those surveyed remarked that LRE could be enhanced by having "a more critically informed dialogue with theology, especially in the areas of ecumenism, ecology, and inter-religious dialogue" (P18).

4.4.3.3 Focus on Adult Religious Education

The need to prioritise adult RE and adult faith formation was mentioned by ten participants, echoing sentiments expressed in Themes 1 and 3. Participants identified a range of adult-focused requirements such as the "availability of more third level courses (P8), "appropriate pedagogy" (P20) and more training "on the ground in dioceses" (P16).

Adult RE was considered "a crying need" (P13) by one, while another, using the terminology of adult catechesis pointed out that "since Vatican II, the church has consistently reiterated

the stance that adult catechesis is the primary form of catechesis". However, he added that "in Ireland and probably elsewhere, there has been little more than notional assent to that" (P12).

Elsewhere in the survey, a fellow cohort member recollected his own efforts to resource adult religious and theological education in the years after Vatican II when he said:

> In the early days I used to think of my role as helping mediate Vatican II teaching to adults who hadn't had a religious education commensurate with their general education. To that end, I helped set up study groups, and took part in adult ed programmes around the country, for which there was a significant uptake until circa the mid-nineties. The writing came out of that experience and hoped to feed back into it. (P11 Q.29)

Individual, piecemeal and localised initiatives aside, there seemed to be little doubt that with the overwhelming focus being placed on child and teenage education, adult-centred requirements have taken a back seat, a reality acknowledged by this participant:

> We have, for years, neglected adult religious education. Share the Good News highlights this strongly. I am of the opinion that unless we can engage members of the Catholic community in lifelong religious education, we are in danger of seeing religious education and faith development as something we associate with children and teenagers only. (P2 Q.29)

He continued, reiterating what others have said, that many adults carry a childhood understanding of religion "rather than reflecting on…. how the various transitions that we live through as adults impact too on our religious and spiritual sensibilities and growth" (P2 Q.29).

Another called for an end to the "Pay up, Pray up, Shut Up' mentality" saying that "until the laity are called to mission in every area, they will not be motivated to learn more about their faith" (P9). However, in the words of a fellow participant, "if a diocese were to make a real assent to the primacy of adult catechesis, that could be transformational" (P12). Picking up on the idea of mission, one also stressed what he saw as the need to move "lifelong religious education outside of the 'tick-box' type of exercises that many parishes use around a series of talks detached from compassionate action outcomes" (P6).

Pointing to the importance of local communities as a primary locus of LRE, a cohort member observed that "in the end it will not be primarily about publishing but about communities, parishes, families and groups who will live in a way that is attractive" (P25). Another spoke

of the need to "go back to basics and reconsider a new lighter, more accessible kind of religious formation/education". This she envisaged as "small cell study groups in which each person has a part to play" and which gave preference to a "circular" model over a "pyramidal" model of church "where everyone can teach and learn together" (P34), echoing a recurring emphasis on participative, dialogical, inclusive approaches.

4.4.3.4 Revisiting the Vocabulary of Religious Education, Faith Formation and Catechesis in a lifelong context

Since the terminology of adult education, adult formation and adult catechesis continued to be employed by participants when responding to this final question of the study, and since in we have already noted the confusion which can arise when such vocabulary is used interchangeably, this researcher believed it to be worthy of further exploration at interview (Interview Q. 5) in order to ascertain what individual participants understood by the terms and what differences, if any, they saw between them. Interview cohort views are encapsulated in what follows.

Adult Religious Education

One of the interview cohort saw the three terms as being so overlapping as to make them the same. His view of RE was as being "about formation and that's the role of catechesis. It's not studying about something but it's studying into something and that's where I would seek to take it" (P6).

Others, while acknowledging intersection, saw distinctions which made adult RE "more content-related" (P3) with "a focus on religious knowledge…skills, rituals" (P8) and including "knowledge of different traditions, not just one tradition"

> there might be some introduction to practice or observances but that would be only be the purpose of acquainting someone with what goes on in the mosque or what goes in the church, it wouldn't be the same as what happens when you come to faith formation. (P11)

Somewhat similarly, another said that for her, adult RE was "the broadest term" which could incorporate a range of emphases which would not necessarily imply a link with one faith tradition:

> I think adult religious education would have a greater degree of a Christian focus, or a world religions focus, or a human search for meaning focus and a less institutionally linked focus, than perhaps adult catechism. (P17)

Adult Faith Formation

At interview, participants saw adult faith formation also as a "broad term" (P17) encompassing "commitment and personal experience as well as doctrinal content" (P3); the imparting of knowledge alongside "an introduction to prayer and to worship, and maybe … training towards a ministry like readers, or Eucharistic ministers" (P11), "ongoing support for growth or development in one's faith…possibly involving participation…in the faith community" (P8) and as an "all-encompassing thing embracing spirituality and some theology" (P28).

Adult Catechesis

This was seen as "the most focused and specific term" which in the Catholic tradition has the aim of "forming people in mature, faith…. explicitly interested in nurturing that faith in a way that connects us with the Catholic tradition" (P17). That catechesis is predominantly a Catholic term was confirmed by a participant from the Presbyterian Church who observed that "in my tradition we don't really speak of catechesis but would probably class it in with religious education" (P28). Two others spoke specifically of catechesis as initiation into a faith community (P8) noting that "historically, it was a matter of imparting doctrine…. preparing people for baptism". However, reminding us of a crucial role emphasis of the religious author, the latter emphasised that "the critical thing is the kerygma", the proclamation of the Gospel message which is ultimately life affirming

> whatever way the kerygma is going to be expressed… has to remember that it's good news and that, catechesis, if it's instruction, or talking about doctrines or whatever it characteristically is, should never be at the expense of giving people the impression that all that is involved in the Christian thing is about knowing stuff out of the catechism or knowing certain doctrines. (P11)

Referring to the definition of catechesis from the GDC (1997, par. 22) which states that it "should contribute to the gradual grasping of the whole truth about the divine plan by preparing the faithful for the reading of Sacred Scripture and the learning of tradition" another of those interviewed commented that "without diminishing the need for teaching and the precision of doctrine", it was also important to engage "the right side of the brain" (P3). In words close to what we have already heard from Moran (Moran, 2011, cited in Durka, 2014, p.248) and Durka (2014, p. 248) and from other survey participants who emphasised the importance of art and the arts, he spoke of the need for "creativity, listening, discernment, imagination" in catechesis. Quoting the artist Patrick Pye, he said "Religious

art does not tell us what to believe, it tells us what it feels like to believe". Therefore, he continued, "when people share their faith in a community setting, they are telling us what it feels like to believe" (P3).

4.5 Conclusion

In Theme 4, it has been established that the large majority of participants see themselves as religious educators, that they believe and hope their books have made a contribution to LRE and that, for sixty-four percent of them, the latter is considered a priority. Three main focal points to enhance LRE have also been identified.

In our penultimate theme we have also seen how those surveyed conceptualised both education and RE over the lifetime. When placed alongside the findings from Themes 1 and 2, which revealed how authors of books related to religion define religious writing, and how they understood and experienced their role as authors, we can see clear convergence between what the cohort believes religious writing sets out to achieve and what they see as LRE's intended aim. These themes and findings can be viewed in summary form in Appendix H. The finer detail of the themes and findings will now be brought into dialogue with the key literature identified in Chapter 2, in the concluding discussion chapter of this thesis.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

This study has set out to understand how authors of books associated with religion in Ireland in the period between 2005-2015 understand their role and to determine if they see their work as contributing to LRE. The findings of the research have allowed us, in some degree, to get to know the people behind the books they have written, to appreciate how they perceive themselves and their work and to "hear into speech" (Morton, 1985) beyond the pages of their books, what animates them to give of themselves, and to what purpose. In the concluding chapter of this thesis, in a unique conversation, we now bring what they have told us into dialogue with existing literature in the hope that such a discourse will amplify mutual understanding between an under-researched group and the academy.

In our first sub-theme of Theme 1, we addressed the question of who becomes a religious author in Ireland. Since there is a continuing absence of literature in this regard, the first seven of our findings are beneficial in going beyond what is anecdotal or assumed, giving us a profile, at least in terms of the current cohort, of the people who generate works related to religion.

5.1.1 Factors Influencing Age Profile and Gender, and the Impact of College Closures, Require Further Research

We have seen in *Finding 1* that the gender profile favours males by a ratio of 10:7 and in *Finding 7* that men began their publishing careers much earlier than women. On the other hand, more women than men began publishing books in the last two decades and feature singularly in this regard in the years under investigation. This finding seems to be a reflection of the historic predominance of ordained male clerics in positions of influence in the Christian churches, and therefore in religious publishing, which as we have seen, in Chapter 1, remains largely under Church ownership in Ireland. That women and some lay men feature more in recent decades may be a consequence both of the long-reported decline in the numbers of ordained clergy (O'Donovan, 2015, McGarry, 2014) and of the opening up of the academy to laity in terms of the various disciplines associated with religion in the years following Vatican II. In the foreword to Farmar's book T*he History of Irish Book Publishing*, Fergal Tobin makes the interesting observation that in the years between 1996 and 2012 "there were 27,116 accountants in the country. The equivalent figure for Roman Catholic priests and nuns was 6, 729". He continues with the wry comment "It tells you

something, that" (Farmar, 2018). What impact such decline, alongside the closures of some institutes of theology and spirituality, will have on religious book publishing and on the further formal LRE of ordained and laity alike remains to be seen. Given the likely detrimental consequences unless alternatives are put in place, this, together with the reasons for the emergence for more female authors, is something that is recommended for targeted research which may be informed by the academic inquiry that is already in train and which we highlighted in Chapter 2 (DCU, 2018).

5.1.2 Age Profile Represents Both an Opportunity and a Threat to Religious Publishing

Finding 1 also reveals a reasonably high age range and it is worth noting that only two participants are below the age of fifty. Though this is a clear strength in bringing life experience to bear on the content of religious books, it also represents a potential threat to the long-term future of Irish religious publishing if it is a matter which is left unaddressed.

Offering a different angle on this, however, is the analysis which led to *Finding 4* which highlighted that, while ten of the cohort had retired from their full-time occupations, more than half of this number continued to work in part-time capacities and this included writing for publication. As well as showing that retirement is increasingly a misnomer and may well be an epithet which could itself be usefully retired, it also suggests that writing offers a way to contribute to church and society beyond arbitrary age limits. Perhaps this is one area where ageism is being slowly conquered and where the wisdom of the elders is valued. Contingent on adequate research, it might therefore be considered for further support by Church leadership and religious publishers, alongside increasing the involvement of writers of a lower age group and, as we shall now discuss, those of other denominational and faith backgrounds.

5.1.3 Could Religious Book Publishing Benefit from Increased Inter-denominational and Inter-faith Cooperation?

Finding 2 shows that religious book publishing emanates chiefly from a Catholic authorship in Ireland. Again, as we have seen from Renehan and Williams (2015 p.67), this reflects the history of the state wherein the vast majority of the population were born into the Catholic Church, and of the development of religious publishing therein. Nonetheless, authors who are members of, or who practice in other Christian traditions such as Anglicanism, Presbyterianism and Methodism do feature in small percentage in the cohort. This is something that is important, especially in light of a number of participant's stated commitment to being inter-religious, ecumenical and dialogical which we see emphasised

in *Findings 14* and *15*. It is also something that religious publishers could be cognisant of developing further in the context of a changed and plural Ireland where, as participants have noted, the religious voice has been marginalised. It is also important so that the nonformal and informal RE settings are resourced in ways that parallel the formal which is taking measures to address a changing context.

Though recognising a clear need for individual traditions to produce materials which are intended to educate "into" their particular faith system or are, from a Catholic perspective, catechetical in nature, this does not preclude possible publishing co-operation across traditions. This, together with perhaps easing some of the real threats to Irish religious publishing which we have seen evidenced in the initial demise of Columba Press and the recent permanent closure of a number of Veritas retail outlets, might also provide a platform for the type of practical, inclusive, ecumenical dialogue which participants have highlighted as a priority.

5.1.4 Is Religious Publishing in Ireland Elitist?

Finding 3 of the research showed a high level of academic achievement amongst participants, something which is necessary and unsurprising given that experts in any field are equipped and well-placed to offer others the benefit of their insights and experience. This noted, when taken together with *Finding 4* which shows that for most of the cohort, writing is an added extra which operates alongside other work commitments, and with *Finding 5* which highlighted that over three-quarters had worked in formal education, it may suggest a possible elitism in religious book publishing which may make it more difficult to gain entry to it without a recognised academic profile. As we have also heard in *Finding 18,* religious publishing is not at all financially rewarding so this in itself makes it prohibitive for aspiring writers without an independent source of income. These factors raise two questions pertinent to each part of the research. The first is whether Irish religious book publishing has a viable future (given what we have heard above about the age profile of authors, lack of financial reward, publishing house and book shop closures, and what we will hear later of low print runs, and concerns of inadequate marketing). The second question is whether there may be too much of a divide between those who write and those whose main option is to read in order to contribute to the conversation. This is an important consideration when planning for RE in a lifelong context in that it asks by what mechanisms learners are facilitated to become teachers, and vice versa. It also speaks to what we have previously discussed in Chapter 4

regarding the importance of knowing one's audience and allowing a true dialogue to take place between the author and the reader if reciprocity and participation are to be optimal.

5.1.5 Leinster-centric Religious Publishing May or May Not Speak to the Whole Nation

That *Finding 6* showed a bias towards the Leinster region is unsurprising in that the area holds the largest centre of population and houses most of the Irish publishing industry. Nonetheless, it again raises the issue of whether there is sufficient synergy between the lived experiences of those writing, if they mainly reside in one region, and those of the hoped-for wider readership countrywide. Again, this is an area which would benefit from further research focusing on both reader demographic and reader review.

5.1.6 Religious Writing Embraces Many Names for God

As indicated in Chapter 4, safeguarding privacy precluded mention of the titles of the 132 books written and published by the cohort during the timeframe. However, we have observed that the categories wherein the books fell coalesce with what participants themselves identified as what makes writing religious. It is to this aspect we now turn and it is clear that *Finding 8* confirms the thinking of both McBrien (1981) and Oates who defined a religious book as that which explores "the presence of God through writing' (Goss and Aycock, 1991p.93).

We can also gather from the data that participants had varied ways of imaging, thinking of and speaking of God. The language they used confirmed the literature in aligning with biblical images of justice and truth (Ps. 89:14). Relational images of God's immanence, closeness and connection, expressed in metaphors of love or as the "sustainer of all life", were also important and recall the work of both Thurston (1995) and Slee (2004) and the latter's work on meaning-making in the faith lives of women. Understandings of God as integrity and compassion and on the side of the poor are evocative of what we have already heard from Condren (2005, p.44). Such images also recall what we have heard in the literature regarding Friere whose "conscientisation" approach to education impacted not only educational philosophy but also liberation and feminist theologians such as Johnston (2000, 2011), Fischer (1993), Grey (2001), Slee (2004) and Condren (2005).

The cohort's references to the transcendence of God, showing how unfathomable and beyond containment is the Divine Mystery, also converge with Johnston (2011) as does the conceptualising of the God in the three persons of the Trinity (2000, p.19). It is also interesting to note that the participants' God language was principally inclusive with few

references to God using the male pronoun. In tandem with the literature, participants showed a complexity in their understanding of God that does not admit itself to simple categories and their responses showed a preference for non-personified imagery (Pegis, 1955), (Grey, 2001, p. 38). What is in no doubt is that their perception of God is positive, that their sense of God imbues and vitalises their lives and is accessed in relationship, in the work of justice, and in prayer.

5.1.7 Definitions of Religious Writing are Influenced by Both Content and Perception

Finding 9, which showed that religious writing encompasses religion and its dimensions, had clear parallel with the literature in aligning with Smart's schema (1989, 1998). It also supported Davis (cited in Goss and Aycock 1991, p.21) and Marty (cited in Smith 2002, p.1) in recognising that it could be implicit and explicit and include the work of "novelists, dramatists, poets (P11 Q.18). In this, Gioia's contention that "the greatest misunderstanding of Catholic literature is to classify it solely by its subject matter" is also given credence (2013). That writing from an external perspective excludes a book from being seen as religious remained a grey area as did the personal faith stance of the writer (Smith, 2002, p.2). Most saw a personal faith stance as integral to what makes writing religious but there was at least an acknowledgement that this may be a debatable point, something which, as we have noted in Chapters 2 and 4, reinforces Elinsky's acknowledgment of how difficult achieving definitional precision can be (2005 p.6). As previously indicated, and will be reinforced when considering *Finding 16,* much is influenced by author personal perception and also by public perception. This research, however, tells us nothing of the latter and, alongside what has been recommended in ***5.1.2*** above, is also an issue which could inform future research.

5.1.8. Concerns About Gaps in Provision for Adults Alongside Deficiencies in Church Leadership First Emerge When Discussing Faith and Belief

It has been signalled in Chapter 4 that by placing faith and belief as chief among the elements of religious writing, the cohort has aligned with the literature from Durka and Smith (1976a p.9) and with Kieran's understanding of belief in the religious sense (2013, p. 23). Participant understanding of faith as dynamic, changing and maturing also found resonance with what we have heard from Fowler (1981) and Harris (1989) and these connections have been recognised in Chapter 4.

This granted, what was also notable when participants spoke of faith and belief was their recognition of the absence in Ireland of adequate adult provision, variously called faith

development, catechesis, formation and RE, and such acknowledgement began to emerge at this point in the research. As we have seen, "poor nourishment" of the faithful was highlighted (P9 Q.15) while church authorities were chastised for legalistic and disciplinary attitudes which were felt to hinder proper understanding and appropriation of Christian faith (P4 Q.13). Both these issues, the need for appropriately resourced adult catechesis, and a need for deficiencies in church leadership to be addressed, would become recurring motifs as the study progressed. Indeed, with regard to the latter, in *Finding 10* we see over a third of the cohort prioritise theological reflection in the light of Vatican II as an author emphasis, with participants reinforcing the richness of the Council and the aggiornamento it heralded in documents such as *Lumen Gentium* (1964) with the renewed vision of Church and leadership that it facilitated.

With regard to the former, in *Finding 25*, we were further reminded that adult catechesis was defined in *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979, par. 43) as "the principal form of catechesis (P12, Q.30). The need to reclaim such an emphasis was again raised in sub-finding four of *Finding 21* when adult RE was considered as an under-developed and under-resourced constituent of LRE. We have explored the vocabulary of RE, faith development and formation and catechesis in both Chapters 2 and 4 and will return to this issue again below. For now, in agreement with Cullen (2013), Cunnane (2000) and Renehan and Williams (2015), it seems reasonable to say that with some using the various terms interchangeably, and others seeing distinctions between them, the language continues to suffer from an ambiguity which would cause considerable difficulty for Carr (2003), Horrell (2018) and others who argue for disambiguation.

5.1.9 The Cohort Aligns with Smart's Dimensions of Religion in Their Writing with the Material Dimension Less Prominent Than Others

Described as "a primary duty of the Christian" (P15 Q.17), we have seen thirty-two percent of those surveyed identify prayer and liturgy as a core focus of religious writing. This converges with both Smart's ritual dimension of religion (1969, 1989 and 1998) and Moran's (no date, p. 1-2) definition of religion. Other designated aspects of religious writing, including exploring scripture and the culture and context of Biblical texts, and the spiritual nature of living, also tally with the literature in respectively relating to Smart's mythological and experiential dimensions. That only three of the cohort gave specific mention to spirituality when discussing what makes writing religious is conspicuous. However, it is contended that it was nonetheless implied in the responses of most others in that their

discourse about God, faith and belief, prayer and liturgy was predicated on an awareness of there being "more to reality than meets the eye" (McBrien 1981, p.251).

That the material dimension of religion did not feature prominently may be as a result of the make-up of the cohort and it begs the question as to whether the researcher under-represented such writers in her sample or whether there is a lack of material in this regard. The researcher would argue that that books on the physical or aesthetic dimension of religion are generally less represented in Irish religious publishing. However, she notes that a book entitled *O Sing Unto the Lord*, by Andrew Gant, published by the U.K. based Profile Books, and described as "a highly enjoyable, informed, anecdotal survey of English church music" (Battersby, 2015) was listed among the Irish Times best non-fiction books of 2015. Consequently, she suggests that it may be worthwhile to further inquire into whether writers who concentrate on the material dimension of religion find it more difficult to gain publication in Ireland than those exploring other dimensions.

5.1.10 A Corrective is Offered to Perceptions of a Preoccupation with Personal Sin and Imperfection

In the third sub-theme of Theme 1, the research explored how participants understood their role and uncovered the central emphases and attributes of the religious author. As Chapter 4 shows, five of these emphases correlated with Smart's doctrinal dimension of religion, three with the ethical dimension and one with the social dimension.

It can also be said that certain aspects of the role emphases also agree with what we have heard from Gioia (2013) regarding Catholic writers as seeing all reality as "charged with the invisible presence of God" (communicating the Gospel); as regarding "nature as sacramental" (promoting right relationship with God, others and creation); as being "intrinsically communal" (promoting dialogue and inclusion) and as taking "the long view of things" with a view to the Paschal Mystery and the eschaton (exploring ultimate questions). However, his estimation that Catholic writers are imbued with "a deep sense of human imperfection" would seem to be over-stating things, at least regarding this cohort, and we have seen them show pastoral concern and empathy for the human condition and, with Jesus, emphasise the mercy and compassion of God over judgement and condemnation. Indeed, it is arguable that the emphasis of participants is more on structural, societal and leadership flaws which require critique and change rather than on individual flaws or personal guilt. This is clearly evident in *Finding 13* with its attention to climate justice, challenge to secularism and secularisation, analysis of poverty and social injustice and focus

on the importance of inter-religious dialogue. It is apparent too when Church authority itself comes in for particular criticism and we are reminded in *Finding 10* of the phrase favoured by Barth "*ecclesia semper reformanda*" (the church must always be reformed). To pursue such a reform agenda is classified as an important role of the religious author by over a third of the cohort.

The attention to transformation is in line with McBrien's concern that RE should focus not only on "the transformation of the individual and of the world…. but with the transformation of the Church" (1981, p.29) and it offers us our first point of confluence with the role of the religious author and that of the religious educator. Participant attention to promoting equality for women in the Church as part of the reform programme also calls to mind what we have seen from Durka who, with others like Johnson (1994, 2000, 2011), Harris (1989), Fischer (1993) Grey (2001), Slee (2004) and Condren (2005) have worked to challenge the reality that "the religious lives of one-half of humanity were never adequately studied" nor adequately represented at leadership level in the institutional church (Durka, 1982, p. 163).

5.1.11 Role Emphases Underline the Educative Focus of the Religious Author but Raise Questions Over Whether Non-RE Specialists Can Be Called Religious Educators

That, in *Finding 10*, fifty percent of the cohort identified supporting religious, theological, biblical and liturgical education as integral to their concerns as authors shows further affiliation with the educator's role. However, since we have heard Horrell (2018, p.17) dispute whether those operating in related disciplines outside of RE can claim to be religious educators, and he has some agreement on this from those in the cohort who eschew the term, it is worth examining this in a little more depth and reminding ourselves of how he has expressed his concern:

> some academics have assumed that any scholar in theology or religious studies who has educational interests can be considered to be a religious educator. It has also been the case that religious educators who identify themselves as practical theologians have sometimes been unable to articulate how they, as religious educators, have a distinctive scholarly outlook that distinguishes them from practical theologians who are scholars in such fields as pastoral care and spirituality. (Horrell, 2018, p.21)

While Horrell's unease has validity in seeking to ensure that RE is recognised as "a distinctive field of academic study" (2018, p.17), the difficulty that this researcher has with

his point is that he seems to imply that other disciplines' appreciation of educational theory and practice is of a very different order to that of RE but presents no clear reasons why this might be so. The researcher can appreciate his worries if those of other disciplines were to have no regard for RE's intention to accommodate education that is about, from and within religions and beliefs and were to present catechetical or confessional RE as the exclusive form, for example. However, if one is educating from a theological or spiritual perspective, aware of one's pedagogical or andragogical stance, and has clearly explained this perspective and stance to partners in the exercise, is it accurate to say this is not RE but must be called something else? Could the descriptive "religious education" perhaps act as encircling term which does not replace but works alongside the particular specialism or discipline whether it is theology, spirituality or another field related to religion?

What seems to be more important than arguing for a narrow, protected remit for RE, is ensuring that those engaged in it, as teacher and learner, know which particular form or forms of RE they wish to work out of. This researcher has already argued for a need for this in Chapter 4 from the perspective of knowing one's audience.

As Cullen clearly points out, historical context is important here and "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" (2013, p.104). Therefore, rather than banishing such understandings beyond the RE pale, perhaps an opportunity exists to continue to identify, discuss and apply them where they fit, so accommodating them in the service of the tri-fold approach which welcomes plurality and dialogue.

This is especially pertinent when it is observed that the debates over what RE is and what it is not tend to focus exclusively on the primary, post-primary and teacher education domains. Outside of these, the language of theology, spirituality, RE, faith formation, catechesis and faith development seem to co-exist and intermingle without too much ado so that in the same documents we can see combinations of these words refer to what seem to be the same thing. For example, we have seen SGN (2010) speak of RE as "a process that contributes to the faith development of children, adolescents and adults" (2010 p.57). Elsewhere it encourages adults to engage in "ongoing education and training to further their own faith development and….to minister more effectively, one to the other" (2010, p.102). It is also is careful to differentiate between RE and catechesis (2010, p.57). However, as we have referenced, in its chapter devoted to adults, faith development, rather than RE, is referred to exclusively (2010 pp.101 -129), thus giving the impression that when it comes to adults, differentiation of terms is unnecessary. This is true too of Regan (2002) and Parent who refer to Catholic

adult education and adult faith formation as much the same (2005, p. 1) which, for him, they are, while for others this may not necessarily be the assumption. In the research cohort too, we have seen a small number hold a preference for the words of faith formation and faith development when it comes to adults, others seem content with adult or LRE, and still others prefer theological or spiritual education.

Added to this, Horrell addresses his remarks to formal and nonformal educative situations only and gives no attention to the informal. Does this mean that like McKenzie and Harton (2002) and others, he sees RE as classroom-based only? If so, what then of contexts such as the Irish one where there is little enough emphasis on broad provision across the three education settings for those beyond childhood and teenage years? Is LRE a hope for them only when there are enough "professionally educated religious educators" (Horrell, p.19) to provide for them, and only then in the larger urban centres offering third level RE which is still largely geared towards formal teacher-training?

And what of the view of participants who see themselves as religious educators, who understand RE as taking place in a range of contexts and who display demonstrable understandings of their educational philosophy? Are they misguided? And if so, by whom? Might it be unwise, perhaps, for a developing field in the Irish context to apply new understandings of itself in a retrofit manner which might inadvertently minimise the fact that what education and RE imply remain widely contested, a reality for which Cullen gives substantial evidence (2013).

Therefore, this researcher suggests that a necessary fluidity may need to be respected and maintained, especially for those adults who may not seek to be examined on the subject in a state or ecclesially-monitored way. None of this is intended to downgrade the field of RE as distinctive in its own right. It is to argue that fluidity and accommodation for a tri-fold understanding which is enthusiastically interdisciplinary, even multidisciplinary, may be a strength rather than an inherent weakness, depending on the situation. It is also to argue there may be some value in flexibility to avoid the "cult of professionalism" that Scott warns against (2006, p.98) for in trying to protect the field, Horrell's views are in danger of placing too much focus on the professional teacher and on the educare component of education. Arguably, they may also undervalue religious book publishing as one of the relatively small number of areas where, in the view of a sizeable portion of the cohort, adult RE is ubiquitously offered and is not focused narrowly on any one educational setting. Horrell's stance may also undermine options for the LRE to be developed and advanced unless one is an insider to academic RE.

5.1.12 Role Confluence with Education and Religious Education Continues to Emerge

Returning to other areas where the cohort's educative focus is evident and we can see the encouragement of critical thinking as a further area of convergence with the purpose of education and RE. Close to half of those surveyed saw this as part of their author role. This same focus emerges again in *Finding 19* when just over twenty percent define one aspect of their understanding of education as being "the raising of questions and fostering thinking" and almost fifteen percent see good RE as involving the encouragement of "critical reflection" in *Finding 20*. The exploring of ultimate questions is a close cousin of critical reflection and we saw this too identified by seventeen percent of those surveyed as part of the author's role.

This firm commitment to questioning, reflecting, and to the exploration of meaning has much resonance not only with Mezirow (2009) and McKenzie and Harton (2002) but also with what we have seen from Fairfield (2009, p.4) who described the educated mind as "open, and radically so, to new experiences and ideas that require critical reflection and, if adopted, a rearrangement of our prior opinions". It tallies with the observations of some participants that religious writing should not be "propaganda", that RE should not be "indoctrination", and that humility in the face of how little we know is an ingredient of the educated mind. This type of thinking is in line with Moran's view of RE as about being more than formation into a faith tradition but is equally at the service of educating people to understand religion and its cultural significance. It is also accepting of liberal approaches to RE as described by Hull (2001) and which influences the more phenomenological approach to RE which predominates in the United Kingdom's state sector (Jackson, 1997, 2014). It also recalls (Durka and Smith 1976b p. 23) who characterised education as "commitment to more and more adequate models of reality", and the educated person as "one whose life is characterised by commitment to models worthy of shaping one's life".

Further linkage with the literature, with what participants see as the author's role, and with what they have identified as core to RE is also seen in the emphasis given by just over twenty-nine percent of the cohort, at this juncture, to the promotion of right relationship. This is then echoed across themes so that again in *Findings 19* and *20*, when we come to outlining their understanding of education, we see teaching and learning in the service of right relationship as their main focus with almost fifty-nine percent identifying this as crucial, and the same percentage giving it prominence when speaking of RE. Such emphasis on the transformative, justice-oriented nature of the Gospel message has clear parallels with

what has already been identified in the literature as the essence of good education when we hear Groome describe it as "political act" (1991, p.106); Todd speak of it as a "civilising force" (2009, p. 1) and Murray refer to its five core elements (in Gleeson, 2010). It is also reminiscent of the humanistic model of lifelong education which "aims to create a better world by alleviating social inequality, reducing social injustices and ensuring human rights for all" (Regmi, 2015, p.142); (Biesta, 2006).

An awareness of the growth of pluralism and the need to dialogue with difference emerged across themes in the research and provided a further parallel with the role of the author and the aims of RE. We saw it identified as a component of the author role in *Finding 10* with slightly over twenty percent identifying it as key. It emerged again in *Finding 13* when we heard of the desire to dialogue with other beliefs, faith traditions and perspectives, and also of the necessity to be aware of how religion can be "good, bad or indifferent" (P4, Q.18), as witnessed in the distortion of Islam through Islamic terrorism and the failures surrounding child sexual and institutional abuse in the Catholic church. It emerged again in *Finding 15* when discussing the resourcing of RE at primary, post-primary and third level in light of pluralism, and was also raised as the chief concern of *Finding 25* when thirty-five percent recommended that respect be given to freedom of thought, dialogue and inclusion as a means to enhance LRE.

Such author/educator convergence also reaffirms what we have heard from Dewey, Friere, Peters, (Beckett, 2017, p.383), Groome (1978, p.10) and Cullen, 2013 p.14-15) regarding education as a conversational and participatory act with the goal of "human flourishing" (Cullen, 2013 p.16). It also recalls Lane's thoughts on the relationship between religion and education which he described as "critical dialogue" (Lane, 2013, p.32).

We have discussed above that the spiritual nature of living was a foundational awareness on the part of the religious author and here too we see a meeting point between the author and religious educator as we recall Durka's contention that fostering spirituality is the primary purpose of RE (Durka, no date b, p. 58). Comment from one participant regarding past failures to give sufficient emphasis to the "interior spiritual life and journey" (P19, Q.30) which, in his view, have led to people seeking alternative spiritual paths have echoes in what English has observed (2009, pp 1-6). In addition, Ó Murchú's remark that that spirituality has come to be viewed "as the giver of meaning, and religion is seen as the giver of rules" (2005) has resonance with another cohort member who spoke of religion's association with "a more judgemental attitude" (P22 Q.20).

When we also consider that offering pastoral support was deemed important to the author's role by thirty-five percent and we note that holistic development - which involves attending pastorally to emotional and psychological growth, as well as to academic, spiritual and religious advancement - was identified by seventeen percent as a component of RE, we can again see synchronicity between author and educator. These humanistic, enabling intentions again recall the work of educational theorists such as Mezirow (2009) and Friere (Beckett, 2017, p. 383), and religious educationalists such as Wickett, (1991) and McKenzie and Harton (2012) with their emphasis on knowing, growing and meaning-making in, and for, all aspects of life.

Finally, the religious author's role in communicating the Gospel and the religious educator's role in teaching and learning about, from and/or into religions and beliefs unite, with varying emphases depending on the context, as both seek, in the words of the cohort, to understand what it means to live life in relationship with the Divine (if one believes in such) and with all creation.

In considering author role emphases, distinct areas of congruence emerge between the role of the religious author and the constituent elements of education and RE as defined by both the literature and by those surveyed. This leaves us with little surprise then that in *Finding 22* over three quarters of the cohort identified with the role of religious educator, despite the reservations of some cohort members and some in the academy. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that the description of themselves as teacher that we see first in *Finding 11* is only specifically mentioned as an aspect of the author's role by three participants initially. It is as the study progresses that the identity of educator comes increasingly to the fore. Nonetheless, it might be said that many of the other author attributes that were mentioned are also features of the relationship between teacher and learner through the telling of stories, the mutual search for answers, the translation of tradition and experience, the bridging of gaps in understanding, the hopes to animate growth and fulfilment and the desire to actualise good news in all its meanings.

5.1.13 Need for Church Renewal and Reform is a Recurring Refrain Across Themes with Pope Francis Seen as a Signal of Hope

In *Findings 12-15* we see the cohort responding to the signs of the times in four main ways, one of which we have referred to above (*Finding 13*). While resourcing the church seasons and other church events was an area that was addressed, it was not a main focus for most

participants with only fourteen percent of those surveyed directing attention to this. Rather, the chief concern of the cohort was to respond to issues of church scandal and decline with a combined total of thirty-five percent attending to one or both of these matters. The failures of leadership and systemic dysfunction that were remarked on here echo what we heard above when we discussed participants' focus on church renewal and reform. Similar issues regarding how authority is exercised come to the fore again in *Finding 18* when institutional control and being branded by association with religion are raised as difficulties. These matters, as well as the various indicators of decline which animated participants in this sub-theme, provide further reminder, if one were needed, of McBrien's (1981) insight as quoted above.

5.1.14 Pope Francis' Priorities Intersect with Those of the Cohort with Regard to Social and Climate Justice and Secularisation

While Pope Francis was seen as being a positive catalyst for renewal by just over seventeen percent, his legacy was not left unchallenged with one participant (P10, Q.22) left unimpressed by the lack of progress for "the neuralgic issue of how women are treated in the Church" (2018, O'Hanlon, p.9). This acknowledged, Francis' positive leadership, preference for synodality, pastoral sensitivity, emphasis on mercy, prioritisation of earth and climate care and the corrective he offers to secularisation and consumerism - evidenced in his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013) papal encyclical*, Laudato Si'* (2015) and bull of indiction, *Misericordiae Vultus* (2015) - have brought with them with a new tone in religious discourse. These, it can be contended, have helped to restore a certain respect for the religious voice in the public square which we have seen endorsed by Habermas (2013), and arguably, have assisted the concomitant aims of the cohort in this regard and which we saw highlighted in *Finding 14*.

5.1.15 The Word "Religious" Suffers from an Image Problem for a Small but Significant Percentage

In *Finding 16*, the final finding of Theme 1, it emerged that the word religious can be an encumbered word and the data analysis uncovered various reasons why this might be so. For a small number, it was perceived as limiting or as implying a lack of critical thought, even as others in the cohort saw it as a function of the religious author to encourage critical thinking and as a component of RE across the lifespan to do the same. This is clearly shown in *Findings 10, 20* and *25*. Nonetheless, that the word religious could lead to branding or

stereo-typing was a concern that arose in Theme 2, *Finding 18* and when we reach *Finding 22,* we see that the same percentage (twenty-three and a half percent) did not view themselves as religious authors as were uncomfortable with the identity of religious educator. Of these, as we saw in Chapter 4, Table 11, five participants, three women and two men, were consistent in eschewing both identities. Beyond the reasons given by participants, it is not possible to identify any further underlying factors which may have influenced their perspectives. However, given that women were less represented in the total cohort, this researcher wonders if there may be any significance attached to more women than men, albeit very marginally, being reluctant to take on either descriptive and suggests that this may be an area for future research.

5.1.16 Through Their Writing, They Come to Serve

Theme 2 of the study produced two findings which outlined seven rewards and six obstacles associated with writing books related to religion which were explored in *Findings 17* and *18*. Though the literature provides us with little by way of comparison given that authors of non-fiction religious books are an under-researched group, what we can say is that the data provided by participants gave valuable insight into their experiences and enabled the "thick description" we have referred to often and which is considered so critical to qualitative research (Geertz, 1973).

What the cohort revealed about themselves is that they are an impressive and enthusiastic group of people who take pleasure in writing and who are marked by a generosity which motivates them to give of their sagacity and knowledge. People of vision, they are also people of faith, prayer and spirituality who believe passionately in the Gospel message and in embedding an ethic of right relationship across church and society for the benefit of individuals and communities. It is this which informs why they write and what they write. They seek to contribute to the public conversation, not in dogmatic, insular ways, but from a position of service, reflection and informed knowledge which, as we have seen holds an eagerness to "hear the other side" (P29, Q.30) and displays a humility which recognises that there is always more to discover. While all are committed to the Christian faith, and most to the Roman Catholic tradition, they are not blind to the flaws of that tradition and approach faith and belief from a position of inquiry and an openness to learn and to question. They are also unafraid to adopt the role of loyal opposition should the need arise.

Motivated by offering support to others, they also value the receiving of support and appreciate hearing that their words and insights have been of value, with feedback being especially important in what can often be the solitary occupation of writing. Reaction, in whatever way it comes, whether through book reviews, reader comment or publisher response, offers the dialogical opportunity that is so important to them, and as we saw, to all education, religious or otherwise. In Chapter 4 we have already discussed the importance of knowing one's audience and have outlined the reasons why this is so. The value of this audience awareness, or put another way, of recognising clearly one's partner in conversation, is one that the researcher has elaborated on previously and reiterates here in light of the cohort's identification of receiving the support of others as of significance for them.

As we have previously discussed, the majority see themselves as both teachers and learners, and we will return to this when considering their understandings of education and RE in a lifelong context in *Findings 19-21*. Suffice to say at this point is that they possess a sincere appreciation for education as reciprocal and relational, something which is in tandem with the literature we have referred to above in *5.1.12*, and there is a marked absence of conceit in their self-understanding as either authors or educators.

For a small number of the cohort, career advancement was experienced as a reward but it was not given substantial mention and this, in itself, corroborates the perception of a group not only motivated by the poignant recognition that "writing lasts" (P1 Q.21) but by a faith-fuelled altruism that helps mitigate the costs experienced when writing. Such costs are significant and real and it is to these we now turn.

5.1.17 Writing for Religious Publication is not for the Faint-Hearted

"Backbreaking" (P2 Q.20) was how one participant described the experience of writing and this was reported by close to half of the cohort as the most demanding aspect of the book publishing endeavour. Finding time, balancing commitments when, for most, this is only one of a number of roles they hold, in a context where there is little prospect of financial reward and no guarantee of publication were other issues. Then, if publication occurs, there is the drawback of sometimes questionable marketing on the part of publishing houses, all in an environment which can be unreceptive and unwelcoming where it takes courage to give of oneself, to put one's thoughts into the public domain and, in effect, to relinquish control of words which are personal and self-revelatory. When one considers all of this, and then realises that participants remain resolute regardless, a picture emerges of people who

show admirable fortitude and resilience alongside dedication to what they believe is worth sharing.

In conjunction with these obstacles was the additional hindrance of institutional control which was considered a difficulty by over a third of those surveyed. While this, as was noted, did not deter participants, it is worth considering the toll that it can take. It is evident that some felt diminished by it. It can cause employment and reputational damage and is experienced as a burden by some and an irksome distraction by others. Even if one is in a position where one may not be hit hard by the potential financial sanctions of institutional reprimand, the emotional and reputational trauma is significant. For those who do not actually experience reprimand, the shadow looms large and there is a keen awareness of the risk one takes.

A sense of finding this culture of control quite inexplicable and unjustifiable is evident from the remarks of the cohort, since it is clear from their reported motivations that there is nothing to fear from their work and their intention is to improve and renew rather than to damage or tear down, a motivation in line with the transformative and change-making focus that we have heard from Friere (Beckett, 2017 p. 388) and Groome (1991, p.106). Reflecting on the obstacles faced, one gets a sense that for some at least, they experience being caught between the rock of magisterium control and the hard place of a secular culture - a culture with which members of the cohort wish to constructively engage - but which can be indifferent or hostile to the religious perspective. This may shed further light on why the word "religious" can be an encumbered word and why it is a concern for some to avoid being branded by something which can be perceived as controlled, restricted or closed off in a social environment where the concept of choice is elevated across all domains of life.

5.1.18 Understandings of Education and Religious Education Converge in Three Key Ways

We have pointed to the areas of commonality between the religious author and the religious educator roles in *5.1.11 and 5.1.12* above. What must also be specifically stated is that, in *Findings 19* and *20*, we can see that the cohort's perceptions of education and of RE are so close as to be almost mirror images in three areas: on the one hand, education is described as teaching and learning in the service of right relationship while on the other, RE is viewed as encompassing life in relationship with the Divine and all creation. Where education is understood as raising questions and fostering thinking, its religious counterpart is defined as encouraging critical reflection. Finally, education is seen as holistic development that

encompasses religion where RE is viewed as the development of the whole person in all their dimensions.

It must be acknowledged that there is a danger in presenting the parallels between the two as so close as to be merging because this could suggest that the cohort sees no difference between the two fields. This would give an inaccurate impression suggesting a mono-cultural, mono-faith perspective which is not at all the agenda of participants, a number of whom emphasised their inter-religious and ecumenical self-understanding. While it is true that all come from a Christian, and indeed principally Catholic perspective, what their responses convey is an awareness that the underlying values of good education coalesce with the foundational purpose of good RE but they do not seek a narrow application of either, repeatedly stressing critical, reflective, dialogical and inclusive approaches to issues of life and meaning.

Recalling the first point of confluence: we have noted in Chapter 4 some resonance with Carr (2003) and his attention to both teaching and learning as key to education. However, unlike Carr, the cohort would also have sympathy for Craft's (1984) understanding with more than a third emphasising one or both aspects of his definition. With slightly more seeing education as an amalgamation of both, we again see the participatory, reciprocal approach given preference.

Their valuing of this nature of education has been alluded to already, and, as mentioned, shows clear resonance with Groome (1991, p.106), Dewey, Peters, and Freire (2017, Beckett, p. 388). This echo is amplified further given the emphasis of almost fifty-nine percent of them on right relationship as a key component in both education and RE and there would seem to be more concern among participants for the individual and societal effect that education has than for the environment in which it takes place in, again coalescing with Todd's (2009, p.1) and Murray's (in Gleeson, 2010) characterisations.

That education and RE both involve the exploration of ultimate questions of meaning and the development of critical thinking has been discussed above in *5.1.12* with the links to the work of Mezirow (2009), McKenzie and Harton (2002), Fairfield (2009, p.4) and Durka and Smith (1976b p. 23) highlighted.

The cohort's identification of holistic development as an essential feature of both education and RE recalls Wickett's (1991, p.26) observation, when speaking of adult RE, that it encompasses all of life, McKenzie's view that it should not be limited to "those topics with

specific religious application" (1975, p. 26) and Moran's contention that it be "life-wide" (1998, p.18).

With due regard for Horrell (2018), it also evokes his observation that the emphasis on holistic approaches may have contributed, in part, to the plethora of terminology and various understandings of RE which abound. His comment that "in their efforts to articulate holistic approaches to RE, many Christian educators began using language such as "formation," "faith development," "spiritual development," and "nurturing spirituality" (2000, p.3) is worth repeating here since we have seen this given some credence in the current study when we hear of some participant's preference for words like faith formation over RE and theological or spiritual writing over religious writing.

We have seen the understanding that RE takes place within a faith tradition (whether they called it called formation, catechesis and/or RE) as one which was held by almost half the cohort. Cullen (2013, p.43) explains the historical antecedence of this and notes that the term RE began usage in Ireland surrounded by assumptions of its catechetical nature. Consequently, it may be reasonable that there would still be varying understandings of what it implies. That said, as the first sub-finding of *Finding 20* shows, that the remainder saw it as the totality of, or as some combination of the approaches outlined by Lane (2013a), Hull (2001) and Grimmitt (1973), shows that the cohort's emphasis on holistic development gives necessary respect to views which see it as including more than one approach. Again, this implies some sympathy for the views of Moran in this regard (in Cullen, 2013, p.18).

While the researcher maintains that flexibility around definitions of who can be regarded as a religious educator is necessary, in ***5.1.11*** above and in Chapter 4, we devoted some time to discussing the importance of clarifying positions surrounding professed and operative views about what is meant by RE by demonstrating why such clarity is important when contributing to the field through book publishing. As Cunnane (2000), Cullen (2013) and *Findings 16* and *20* show, an awareness of the lexicon does matter and, as is clear from the public discourse about the place of RE in Irish schools (Byrne and Kieran 2013), and from the work of Jackson (2014) and others in the European context, the absence of such can lead to confusion at best and conflict at worst. From a childhood and teenage perspective, it is important so that all parties to the education process are clear on what needs to be, or what can be, on offer. Similarity, as stated earlier, this is equally true from an adult RE perspective so that those planning for it whether as learner, teacher or both, know which kind of RE they seek. Highlighting the importance of clarity is not the same as arguing that RE should

replace all other terms such as formation or development. It is simply to recognise that one needs to be explicit about exactly what one intends by the terms in any given context.

5.1.19 LRE: A Little-Used Term Which Commands Widespread Understanding, Brings Adults in From the Cold and Accords Parity of Esteem to All Educational Settings

Though lifelong education and lifelong learning are now generally recognised (Field, 2010, Coolahan 1996), the term LRE is not one that is found in the literature nor is it used in common parlance. Yet it is important to observe that *Findings 23* and *24* show that when asked, seventy-three percent of the cohort believed or hoped their books had made a contribution to LRE, while for sixty-four percent, doing so was a priority for them.

Added to this, ninety-four percent of the cohort expressed a very clear understanding of the concept as a continuing journey which, recalls Moran's (1998), Hull's (1985), Tisdell's (2008) and Vogel's views of adult RE (1984, 1988, 1991). This being the case, it leaves us with the conclusion that there is an urgency for LRE to intentionally cater for adults across all three sectors. That this is so was indicated in the fourth sub-finding of *Finding 21* and the third of *Finding 25*. In the former, we saw twenty-three and a half percent of the cohort specifically express their view of LRE as including an under-developed and under-resourced adult focus while in the latter, over twenty-nine percent raised the deficit again when discussing recommendations to enhance the field.

The cohort's perceptions regarding under-development have support in the literature when we consider the views of Elias (2012), Miller (2005, p.224), Parent (2009, p.2), English (2009, pp 1-6) and Cunnane (2000, p.2) who speaks of "little or no recognition of the adult population" when it comes to RE (2000, p.2).

While it is true that the percentages of those who explicitly referenced the need for an improved adult emphasis varied, and the percentages were moderate, this researcher argues that the majority support for a greater adult focus is strongly implied. As previously stated, the evidence for this is the fact that almost the entire cohort saw LRE as continuing throughout life, it is further bolstered by *Findings 23* and *24* which respectively saw seventy-three percent hoping that their books had made a contribution to the field, and sixty-four percent seeing resourcing LRE as a priority for them.

We also noted the highlighting of an under-resourcing of LRE across sectors in *Finding 21*. This point is reinforced by thirty-eight percent in *Finding 25*. Their recognition of the deficiency in this regard finds support with Elias (2012, p.10) when, speaking of his own

U.S. context, he observes that where adult RE does takes place, the focus is often on the informal aspect which he believes is "less about cognitive understanding than about participating actively in various settings: family religious celebrations and festivals" (2012, p.10). In Ireland too, the literature has also demonstrated a lack of precise information regarding what exactly is happening on the ground in relation to adult RE despite SGN (2010) emphasising it as a priority. Therefore, the results of the research being carried out under the auspices of The Mater Dei Centre for Catholic Education and the Presentation Sisters will be particularly pertinent in this regard and may pave the way for adult RE to begin to catch up with its adult education counterpart which, as we have seen, has undergone a period of "unprecedented policy development" in recent decades (Bailey (2016).

We have established that the cohort shares much in common with the literature regarding each of the aspects of education we have discussed and this continues with the view expressed in sub-finding three of *Finding 21* when thirty-two percent of those surveyed indicate that LRE can be conceptualised as both multi-facetted and not restricted to formal settings. This would seem to hold sympathy with Merriam (2004) and shares some parallel with Houle and his ideas about a spectrum or range of different educational situations (1961, 1972). While they are less inclined towards either Carr's or McKenzie and Harton's view of where education takes place (2002, p.31), they do share commonality with the views of Coombs and Ahmed (1974), Fairfield (2009), Scott (2006) and Matheson and Matheson (1996) in this regard. They also part company somewhat with the Australian understanding of adult RE which concentrates on a more formal focus. The cohort's view, however, would seem to be more in line with the admittedly vague, but more expansive and participatory definition offered by Canada (Elias 1989 p.95) and would also have some sympathy with the England and Wales perspective, though the latter does place a heavy emphasis on the educare element of education.

The differences in wording and emphasis depending on culture and context show that the "educare/educere" debates do not disappear as the educational target age increases. However, questions around learning "about, from and within" religion seem less to the fore in the adult domain with an emphasis, especially in church documents placed on learning within a particular faith tradition. While this is perfectly reasonable, adult RE is in a prime position to learn from the current debates surrounding school-based RE and, as participants favour, to be vigilant and intentional about its welcome for diversity and differing perspectives (Lane, 2011, 2013, 2013a; Vogel, 1991; O'Hanlon et al, 2017).

5.1.20 LRE Implies Travelling with a Query: God, Can It Really Be True, That the Doubts and Questions, Are You?

Returning to the understanding of LRE as a continuing journey towards better religious understanding, we find agreement once again in the literature for a conceptualising of it as a process of making and remaking, alongside an awareness of knowing and unknowing. The resonance here with Durka and Smith's (1976) ideas of change and movement in religious development have already been signalled above and in Chapter 4, and there is confluence too with the thinking of Fowler (1981) and Harris (1989). The latter's descriptions of journeying - seen as stages or steps - in a continual process of "becoming" - parallel what over fifty percent of those surveyed said about LRE facilitating the maturing of faith and "the beginning of lasting wisdom" (P.18 Q.26). With the emphasis on this wisdom-seeking, and through their firmly established commitment to right relationship, the cohort also strongly aligns with Elias' view that the goal of adult RE is maturity that "looks not only to external actions but also to interior intentions and motivations" which are based on social solidarity and "guided by the teachings of Jesus on faith, humility, willingness to forgive others, and even love of enemies" (2012, p.9).

Allied to all of this, when we hear participants speak about being more conscious of what they don't know than what they do know (P26 Q.28); of there "always being more to discover (P28 Q.26); of being in the midst of Mystery (P29 Q.26); and of apophatic theology's respect for "learned ignorance" (P.18 Q.26), we are reminded of Freire who wrote of men and women constantly remaking themselves in the light of new learning and as people capable of "knowing that they know and knowing that they don't" (2004, p.15).

Such awareness also underlines the relevance of Knowles' insight into andragogy which recognised the accumulated prior experience of adults in a learning situation but also acknowledged that there will always be areas when a more pedagogical approach will be appropriate. This awareness is in tandem with participants understanding of teaching and learning as operating as a dialogue, a two-way transmission where both parties to the relationship both teach and learn in a cyclical sharing process.

Reciprocity, mutuality, respect for on-going questions and an awareness that no-one person or group has all the answers is raised again in the first sub-finding of *Finding 25* whereby over a third of the cohort state that LRE must give respect to freedom of thought, dialogue and inclusion. Attending to the advice to always 'hear the other side' (P29 Q.30) means listening attentively and respectfully to those with whom one differs within one's own faith community, within secular society and within other faith traditions. It means being willing

to question if one is right and being more willing to be wrong. It means exercising leadership (whether officially charged with it or not) with humility and a deep awareness that the best answers, as Aquinas discovered, are found in the freedom to think, debate and dialogue (P30 Q.24). These participant insights share sympathy with O'Hanlon et al (2017) and their calls for "constructive engagement" across all sections of society, as well with as the case made for synodality and collegiality at leadership level (O'Hanlon, 2018). They confirm Lane's contention that "the human is most human when he or she is *in* dialogue" (Lane, 2013a, p.32) and recall his commitment to mutuality (2013b, p. 19) and ecumenical and inter-religious exchange (2011). They also remind us of the work of others in this regard such as Vogel (1991), Engebretson et al. (2010), Byrne and Kieran (2013) and Kieran (2020) in their efforts to explore RE in a diverse and plural society. Finally, they evoke Slee (2004) Johnson (1994, 2000, 2011) and others with their emphasis on allowing experience to dialogue with and challenge tradition.

5.2 Conclusion

This study began with two main questions:

i. to discover how authors of religious books in Ireland between 2005-2015 understood their role
   and
ii. whether they viewed their published work as contributing to LRE.

In the foregoing chapters, the research has been presented as follows: in Chapter 1, the rationale, scope and context of the study has been delineated, the research question examined, the personal educational philosophy of the researcher outlined and the researcher's role considered.

In Chapter 2, religious book publishing in Ireland has been explored. We have considered how the literature defines religion and religious books, explored the academy's contested understanding of education, RE, lifelong learning versus lifelong education, and adult education and adult RE.

In Chapter 3, the research paradigm and theoretical framework was explored, the researcher's epistemological and ontological assumptions elucidated and her reasons for employing qualitative inquiry explained. This was alongside clarification of the choice of data gathering methods and the means and conduct of data analysis and verification of findings.

In Chapter 4, twenty-five findings which emanated from the study have been illuminated and in the current and final chapter, we have discussed these findings and brought them into dialogue with the literature identified in Chapter 2. This exchange has resulted in the twenty discussion points which have been offered above in this final chapter. These findings and the conclusions which derive from them go some way towards answering both aspects of the research question and bear testimony to the significance of this study.

5.2.1 Contribution to Religious Education

In shining a light into Irish religious book publishing, this research offers unique insight into the self-perceptions and experiences of some of the authors whose work allows the religious book publishing industry in Ireland to function. It is singular in exploring the linkage of the writing of such authors to LRE and its findings show a clear regard for and appreciation of the latter. As such, it adds to the emerging narratives about religious education in Ireland.

In making the distinction between formal, nonformal and informal LRE, the research is significant in highlighting how little attention the academy has paid to the formal and extra-formal adult setting and suggests that this be addressed through future research.

In highlighting the variety of terminology used to describe the on-going quest for religious maturity in the adult domain (such as religious education, faith formation, faith development and adult catechesis), it also alerts us to a continuing lack of clarity surrounding religious education and its relationship to faith. This is a significant factor which the researcher considers important for the academy and for diocesan leaders to note.

This lack of clarity is perhaps reinforced when some preference is expressed for the words "theological" or "spiritual" over the word "religious". As has been shown, this also raises questions about how RE is perceived in relation to other disciplines associated with religion and unveils limited but noticeable territorial tension between these disciplines. In so doing, the research challenges all parties to probe the cause, extent and implication of such issues and is therefore significant not only for religious education, but also has import for the disciplines of theology and spirituality.

This noted, it must also be reiterated that such issues, while present, were not prominent and the findings of the study also offer a contrasting and alternative perspective which demonstrates RE's distinctive potential to be a harmonising or uniting force capable of embracing and bringing together a range of different disciplines associated with religion, and indeed other academic specialities. This is demonstrated when the majority of the

participants, writing across a range of categories, identified with the role of religious educator and saw LRE as a central focus of their published work. Though the specific content of their books could not be addressed in this thesis, it bears repeating that during the timeframe alone, participants contributed one hundred and thirty-two individual volumes of work covering a broad spectrum of categories related to religion. These were the categories of RE, theology, ethics, scripture, prayer, spirituality, pastoral care/support, church and social commentary and liturgical and parish resources. The final category of "other" allowed the sub-categories of history, church history, education and memoir to emerge and, while only church history might fall within the designated territory of what might be deemed by many as a "religious book", it is arguable that they all contribute to religious education in its fullest sense. The range of subjects that their books address, and the way in which the findings explicate their role understanding and view of LRE, suggest Le Tran's (2011) "embrace of multiplicity" which is able to accommodate formal, nonformal and informal educational approaches, as well as the various disciplines associated with religion, such as theology, spirituality, scripture and liturgy, without needing to dilute the particularity of any one of them. Importantly, and as intimated, the accommodation that this researcher speaks of, and which a number see LRE as implying, is not confined to those who are recognisably "religious". With McKenzie, it opens its doors beyond the apparent and is interested in what is intended (1975, p.26). It is a place which does not water down separateness or difference, nor does it try to place RE as higher than others on the academic ladder which was referred to in Chapter 4. Rather, it suggests a change from the imagery of hierarchy and competition to one of dialogue, conversation and understanding which is also evocative of Cullen's characterisation of RE as providing a conversation space or a "semi-permeable membrane" wherein a range of voices can be heard and welcomed (in Shanahan 2016, pp.26-37; Cullen, 2013).

This research also holds significance for religious education in offering an understanding of LRE, a term that is not known for its presence in the literature. Participants conceptualised LRE as a transformational pursuit with a critically reflective focus. They described it as expansive in nature, not inevitably bound by classroom, creed or calendar years. Holding necessary esteem for formational approaches, members of the cohort firmly underscored the efficacy of dialogue within and without faith traditions. Respecting the travelling together with questions as well as with answers, the research shows LRE as in service of justice, the common good and the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus which sought to unite and never divide. In these respects, Lane's (2013a) understanding of RE as

tri-fold and two-directional could be said to be of key importance for future scholarship about adult religious education and LRE.

Finally, this chapter has made a number of recommendations for further research into both religious book publishing and RE. The research clearly identifies the former as being a contributor to LRE across all three educational settings, at least in the eyes of study participants. These recommendations are outlined in points ***5.1.1; 5.1.5; 5.1.15*** above. In Chapter 2, in ***2.8.2***, inquiry into distance-learning in religious education for adults in the Irish context was recommended and in the previous chapter, in ***4.4.2.1***, research into the purchasers, readers and borrowers of non-fiction books on themes related to religion was also suggested as an area which might also benefit from research. The latter is important to reiterate at this juncture in service of "hearing the other side" and also of attending to the participative, dialogical focus that participants have identified as central to LRE.

5.2.2 The Personal Learning of the Researcher

This researcher's personal learning has been enhanced in numerous ways during the course of this study. Sharing much in common with the cohort's conceptualisation of education and RE, her belief in the efficacy of RE as the tri-fold, two-directional process which has been previously referenced (Lane, 2013a), was strengthened further by the research. Reflecting on these three inter-related understandings led her to see that much of her own formal and professional experience of RE has been largely centred on "learning within" or "into" her own faith tradition. While firmly committed to this tradition, the research process has strengthened her commitment to encouraging and furthering a more complete understanding which recognises the need for an intentional and vigilant appropriation of all three approaches to RE. Operating in tandem, and with varying emphases, these complimentary approaches can be sensitive and responsive to the life-stage, experience and needs of the learner who is also teacher.

The researcher's professional experience had developed her awareness of the need for clarity when using particular terminology or vocabulary. The literature employed, the data analysis, and the findings which emerged from this process, confirmed and enhanced the researcher's prior appreciation of the need for such clarity and of its importance for LRE.

The study also alerted the researcher to listen carefully and attentively to all voices - those in the majority and those in the minority. In terms of the former, this has paid dividends in showing the convergence between the religious author and religious educator roles. With

regard to the latter, it has opened up discussion about why “religion” and “religious” might be understood as encumbered words.

The researcher gained much from the experience of planning, executing and reflecting on each stage of the research process. She learned of her strengths, one aspect of which is the resilience required by anyone who undertakes such a project. She also learned what she might do differently, an example of which is to be conscious of posing questions which have the capacity to attract similar responses or to be perceived as repetitive. Finally, she was fortunate to be energised and invigorated by the research experience. Borrowing from one participant’s understanding of education (P8, Q.24), such animation was released when the curiosity of the researcher met the relationship so graciously offered by the research cohort.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University

DCU

Ms Donna Doherty School of Policy and Practice

DCU Institute of Education

20 April 2017

REC Reference: DCUREC/2017/051 Proposal Title: Religious book publishing and its possible significance for lifelong religious education Applicant(s): Ms Donna Doherty, Dr P. J. Sexton

Dear Donna,

Further to expedited review, the DCU Research Ethics Committee approves this research proposal.

Materials used to recruit participants should note that ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee.

Should substantial modifications to the research protocol be required at a later stage, a further amendment submission should be made to the REC.

Yours sincerely,

Donal O' Gorman

Dr Dónal O'Gorman
Chairperson
DCU Research Ethics Committee

DCU
Research & Innovation

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Appendix B

Dear

I am a doctoral student undertaking research at the Institute of Education, Dublin City University (DCU). I am writing to invite you to take part in a survey, the results of which will form part of my Doctorate in Education thesis. Ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee. I accessed your email address by contacting St. Mary's Priory.

The purpose of my research is to explore religious book publishing and its possible significance for lifelong religious education. It seeks to do this by investigating how authors of religious books in contemporary Ireland understand their role and whether they view their published work as contributing to lifelong religious education.

Religious book authors are a significant group to research in that they have a platform, through publishing their work, to share their views and insights in the public arena and in so doing, to potentially influence the thinking, the knowledge, and perhaps the religious education of their readers.

All participants in the research study will all have published at least one religious book in Ireland within the decade between 2005-2015. While the nature of the research design precludes full anonymity, at no time will the identities of participants be available to anyone other than myself and my academic supervisor. Therefore, participant's names will not appear in the final thesis and codes will be used in place of names. If you agree to participate, you will be sent a plain language statement which reiterates the purpose and parameters of the research. You will also be asked to sign, have witnessed, and return an informed consent form. Following this, and with your agreement, you will be sent a survey questionnaire which will be emailed to you and should take no more than 45-50 minutes to complete. You will also be asked to indicate whether you would be willing to make yourself available for a one hour follow-up interview at a time and place of convenience for you. Participation in the survey questionnaire alone, or in both aspects of the survey, is completely voluntary.

It is hoped that by giving participants the opportunity to express the reasons why they engage in the process of religious book writing and publishing it will 'hear into speech' an

important aspect of the author experience. As stated above, the research will also allow participants the opportunity to assess whether and how they see their work as contributing to lifelong religious education. Participation also provides the benefit of contributing to knowledge and it is hoped that the research will also provide foundations for further research into religious publishing which is an area that is under-represented in the research literature.

With sincere thanks for giving this invitation your consideration. Should you have any queries in relation to any aspect of the research, or about your own involvement in it, I can be contacted as follows:

Landline [redacted] (from ROI)) [redacted] (from UK or NI)

Mobile: [redacted] (ROI) [redacted] (UK/NI)

Email: [redacted]@mail.dcu.ie

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

DONNA DOHERTY

Appendix C

PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT

Religious Book Publishing and its Possible Significance for Lifelong Religious Education: An investigation into how authors of religious books in contemporary Ireland understand their role and whether they view their published work as contributing to lifelong religious education.

The above research study is being conducted by myself, Donna Doherty, a doctoral student at Dublin City University (DCU), in its Institute of Education, under the supervision of Dr. P.J. Sexton. This study will form part of my Doctorate in Education thesis. Ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee.

My contact details are: [redacted]

Landline: [redacted] (from ROI)) [redacted] (from UK or NI)

Mobile: [redacted] (ROI) [redacted] (UK/NI)

Email: [redacted]@mail.dcu.ie

Dear

As part of my doctoral studies in religious education at Dublin City University I am undertaking a research study which will investigate how religious book authors in Ireland understand their role and whether they see their published work as contributing to lifelong religious education.

Why is this research being conducted?

While religious publishing, with its varied strands and categories, has had a notable presence in Ireland for many decades, to date, no research has been carried out into the possible significance of religious book publishing for lifelong religious education or into how religious authors understand their roles.

This study intends to explore definitions and understandings of what is meant by lifelong religious education which takes place outside the formal setting of the classroom or seminar room. As stated, it will specifically examine this concept by uncovering the views of the authors of religious books regarding how they understand their role and how their work may or may not contribute to lifelong religious education.

Religious book authors are a significant group to research in that they have a platform, through publishing their work, to share their views and insights in the public arena and in

so doing, to potentially influence the thinking, the knowledge and perhaps the religious education of their readers.

What will you have to do?

To participate in the research study, you will have published at least one religious book in Ireland within the decade between 2005-2015. As part of the study you are being invited to complete a survey questionnaire. It may take around 45-50 minutes to complete. Please be assured that you do not need to answer any question with which you may feel uncomfortable. When I have received the signed and witnessed consent form which follows this plain language statement, I will forward the questionnaire to you. It would be of great assistance if the completed questionnaire could be returned electronically to me at the email address given at the top of this form. Should this not prove possible, a hard copy will be gratefully received and should be sent to me at [redacted] Should you wish to discuss the questionnaire prior to completion, I can be contacted on telephone numbers and email address given above.

As part of the questionnaire you will be asked if you are willing to participate in a one-to-one interview, conducted by myself, which can take place at a mutually agreed venue. The interview will take no more than one hour of your time and will be recorded on audio tape. The transcript of audio recordings will be provided to you in advance of analysis for the purposes of accuracy and context. If you do not wish to be audio recorded but are willing to be interviewed, this can be accommodated through written note-taking.

It is envisaged that interviews will be arranged at authors' convenience throughout 2017. If you are willing to complete the questionnaire but are not willing to take part in an interview, please feel under no obligation to do so. The purpose of the interviews will be to clarify issues that may emerge from the responses to the questionnaire.

How will your privacy be protected?

While the nature of the research design precludes full anonymity, at no time will the identities of participants be available to anyone other than myself and my academic supervisor. Therefore, participant's names will not appear in the final thesis and codes will be used in place of names. Added to this, all data provided will be kept secure and will be accessed only by myself in consultation with my supervisor. The confidentiality of the participant's identity will therefore be protected to the fullest extent possible.

Legal limitations to data confidentiality

As outlined in the accompanying informed consent form, an important caveat that should be re-stated in relation to this is that privacy can only be protected within the limitations of the law - i.e., it is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting by some professions. All data will be destroyed when it is no longer needed. The recommended time for data to be held by researchers is a maximum of 5 years.

What are the potential benefits of this research?

This research gives participants the opportunity to express the reasons why they engage in the process of religious book writing and publishing. It also allows participants the possibility of assessing whether they see their work as contributing to lifelong religious education. Participation also provides the benefit of contributing to knowledge and it is hoped that the research will provide foundations for further research into religious publishing which is an area that is under-represented in the research literature.

Are there any risks involved?

While most research carries a certain level of inconvenience or potential risk, those associated with this study are small.

It is possible that a participant may regret use of certain phraseology or wording. This, or any possible risk of misrepresentation, can be remedied through being given the opportunity to amend answers after having sight of interview transcripts prior to analysis. Participants will also be given sight of the final thesis prior to submission.

Your right to withdraw

Participation in this research study is entirely voluntary and you will be free to withdraw your consent and to withdraw any information submitted at any time. The research is not linked to the work of any individual publishing house and carries no incentive other than the benefits already outlined. The esteem in which you are held by this researcher will not be affected whether you agree to participate or not.

How will the data be used and subsequently disposed of?

The data will be used to contribute to my doctoral thesis. It may be used for the purposes of writing articles for publication in academic journals and for making presentations at academic conferences on religious education or religious publishing.

When the data is no longer needed, participants should be assured that all records will be deleted. The electronic data will also be securely disposed of in such a way that the data can never again be constituted. Any paperwork will be shredded by myself and files will be wiped in accordance with the recommended practices of DCU.

How will participants find out what happens with the project?

I commit to ensuring transparency by giving all participants prior sight of the thesis before final submission to DCU. All those who take part in interviews will also be given prior sight of their own interview transcript. prior to analysis. This process is to ensure that the rights of all who are related to the research are respected.

Contact details for further information

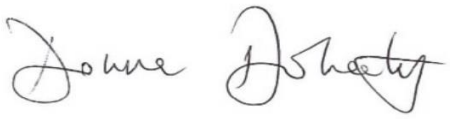
If you have any further questions about this study, I can be contacted by post, email or at telephone number given at the top of this form.

Should you have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel: 01 7008000

With many thanks.

Yours sincerely,



INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Consent from Participant:

Religious Book Publishing and its Possible Significance for Lifelong Religious Education:

An investigation into how authors of religious books in contemporary Ireland understand their role and whether they view their published work as contributing to lifelong religious education.

The above research study is being conducted by myself, Donna Doherty, a doctoral student at Dublin City University (DCU), in its Institute of Education, under the supervision of Dr. P.J. Sexton. Ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee.

My contact details are: [redacted]

Landline: [redacted] (from ROI) [redacted] (from UK or NI)

Mobile: [redacted] (ROI) [redacted] (UK/NI)

Email: [redacted]@mail.dcu.ie

Please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)

- I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me).
  Yes/No
- I understand the information provided.
  Yes/No
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study.
  Yes/No
- I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions.
  Yes/No
- I am aware that my interview will be audiotaped unless I indicate that I would prefer not to be recorded. Yes/No

- I understand that my anonymity cannot be guaranteed because of the nature of the research. Yes/No

Voluntary Involvement in the Research Project

- I am aware that I may withdraw from the Research Study at any point. Yes/No

Privacy:

- Donna Doherty and her supervisor will be the only people with access to the data. The information will be stored in a secure location for a period of 5 years or as the University determines. At all times the project will be conducted within best practice guidelines for academic research and will adhere to the legal requirements for the holding of data. Please note that privacy of data can only be protected within the limitations of the law - i.e., it is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting by some professions.

Signature:

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researcher and I have a copy of this consent form. I consent to taking part in this research project.

Participant's Signature: _____

Name in Block Capitals: _____

Witness: _____ Date: _____

Appendix D

Religious Book Publishing and its Possible Significance for Lifelong Religious Education

An investigation into how authors of religious books in contemporary Ireland understand their role and whether they view their published work as contributing to lifelong religious education

Dear Respondent,
I am carrying out a survey into how authors of religious books understand their role and whether they view their published work as contributing to lifelong religious education. Ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee.

I would be most grateful if you could complete the following questionnaire electronically and return it to me by email at [redacted]@mail.dcu.ie by _____ If it is not convenient to return by email, please return a hard copy to Donna Doherty, [redacted]

The allotted space may be expanded in the Word document where necessary. When responding, it would be appreciated if you could confine your answers to no more than 200 words, if possible. Thank you for your co-operation.

Q.1 Name:

Q.2 Age:

Please tick where relevant.

21-30	◯
31-40	◯
41-50	◯
51-60	◯
61-70	◯

71+ ◯

Q.3 Gender: Male ◯

Female ◯

Q.4 (a) Would you describe yourself as someone of religious faith or of secular conviction?

Q.4 (b) If appropriate, give details of your religious denomination

Q.5 Last level of formal education:

2nd level ◯

3rd Level ◯

4th Level ◯

Other ◯

Please give details

Q.6 Please give details of your current occupation.

Q.7 Please state the county in Ireland where you are located indicating whether you are in an urban or rural location.

Q. 8 Are you now, or have you ever been employed by a third level academic institution in a teaching role?

Yes ◯

No ◯

If yes, please give details of the capacity in which you were employed.

Q.9 How many years have you been writing as a published author?

Q.10 Please list all the books you have published between the years 2005-2015. Please list the category, book title(s), publisher(s) date of publication and state whether the book is available as an e book. You may include as many categories as is appropriate.

Books Published <u>Between</u> 2005-2015

Book Category e	**Book title**	**Publisher (inc. foreign editions)**	**Publication**	**Available as an book? (please state yes or no)**
Religious education				
Theology				
Ethics				
Scripture				
Prayer				
Spirituality				

Pastoral care/support				
Church & Social Commentary				
Liturgical & Parish Resources				
Other (please specify)				

Q.11 Please list any additional books you have published outside of the period 2005-2105. Please list the category, book title(s), publisher(s) date of publication and state whether the book is available as an e book. You may include as many categories as is appropriate.

Books Published <u>Before or After</u> 2005-2015

Book Category e	**Book title**	**Publisher (inc. foreign editions)**	**Publication**	**Available as an book? (please state yes or no)**
Religious education				
Theology				
Ethics				
Scripture				
Prayer				
Spirituality				

Pastoral care/support				
Church & Social Commentary				
Liturgical & Parish Resources				
Other (please specify)				

YOUR ROLE AND PURPOSE AS AN AUTHOR

Q. 12 Please give up to three main reasons why you are/were motivated to write for publication?

Q.13 What would you define as being the core message or messages of your writing?

Q.14 What do you hope to achieve through your writing?

Q.15 How do you understand your role as a religious author?

Q.16 Have you encountered any obstacles to fulfilling your role?

Q.17 Can you explain what makes your writing 'religious' writing?

Q. 18 Can you define what you understand by the term 'religious author'.

Q.19 What would you consider are the main rewards of being a religious author?

Q. 20 Are there any disincentives to being a religious author?

Q.21 What sustains or supports you in writing?

Q.22 Between 2005-2015, were there any particular events in church or society which influenced the content of your writing? If yes, please elaborate.

Q. 23 What impact, if any, has the development of e-books had on you as an author? Please give reasons for your answer.

YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF LIFELONG RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Q.24 Please describe what you understand education to be.

Q.25 Please define your understanding of religious education.

Q. 26 What do you think is meant by the term lifelong religious education?

Q.27 In your role as a religious author, do you see yourself as a religious educator? Please give reasons for your answer.

Q.28 In your opinion, would you say that the books you have written have made a contribution to lifelong religious education? Please give reasons for your answer.

Q.29 Does contributing to lifelong religious education through your writing have a high priority for you? Please elaborate on your answer.

Q. 30 Are there any recommendations you would make that you believe could enhance lifelong religious education?

Q 31. Please indicate if you would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview which will take no more than one hour.

Yes ◯

No ◯

Any other comments?

Thank you for completing this survey.

Appendix E

Step 2 of Content Analysis- Generating Initial Codes	Questionnaires Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
Total Units of Meaning Coded	**34**	**900**
About Life, Relationships and the Divine	13	15
Academic Resource	1	1
Academic Writer	4	4
Accessible Language	1	1
Accessible Religious Experience	1	2
Action	1	1
Adult Focused	3	3
Adult Religious Education	2	2
All Christians called to be Religious Educators	1	1
Always more to Learn	12	12
Apathy Hostility	6	6
Art	3	3
Attributes	5	7
Being Branded	6	7
Being Relational	1	1
Belief	5	6
Books	2	2
Bridge	1	1
Broad Definition	3	3
Career	4	6
Catalyst	1	1
Catholic Social Teaching	1	1
Childhood and Young Adults RE provide the Seeds	1	1
Church Events - Decline - Closure of Theological faculties- Rel. Publications	1	2
Church Events - Decline in Practice	6	7
Church Events - Decline in Vocations	1	1
Church Events - Diaconate	1	1

Church Events - General	5	5
Church Events - Pope Francis	6	6
Church Events - Scandals	10	10
Church Events - Vatican II	2	2
Church Renewal - Reform	5	6
Church Support	5	5
Clarified Yes	5	5
Climate Change	2	2
Co-creator	2	2
Collaboration	2	2
Communicate the Gospel	9	13
Community	4	4
Concern re: the Future of Religious Publications	1	1
Consumerism	1	1
Contribute to the Conversation	10	11
Demanding	4	5
Dialogue between RE and Theology	1	1
Dialogue-Inclusive	4	5
Digital Revolution	1	1
Divine Love	5	7
Doesn't Resonate	2	2
Don't Know	2	2
Don't Read them or Prefer Print (e-books)	8	8
Drawing out and Adding to	3	3
Educated Laity	1	1
Education	2	2
Educational	1	1
Employment	1	1
Enabling	6	7
Enabling in the Context of a Religious Tradition	2	3
Engage Imagination	2	3
Engagement	1	1
Enjoyment	10	15
Evangelist	1	1
Expansive	2	2

Expectation of Being the Expert	1	1
Facilitation and Drawing Out	7	7
Facilitator	1	1
Faith	14	18
Faith and Culture	2	4
Faith Development	4	5
Female Experience	2	3
Feminism	1	1
Fewer Religious Publishers	4	4
Finding Time and Space	2	2
Focus on Spirituality	2	2
For Students	5	5
Fosters Intelligent, Critical Reflection	3	3
Fosters Thinking and Engagement	6	6
Gender Inequality	1	1
God	7	8
God Centred	3	4
God Image	1	1
Grace	1	1
Has been costly	1	1
Has Lasting Resonance	1	1
High Priority	7	7
History Resource	1	1
Hope So	9	11
Implicit and Tacit Knowledge	3	4
Includes Religious Perspective and is holistic	5	6
Inclusive	1	1
Inclusive, Adult-Focused	1	1
Institutional Control	6	6
Instruction	1	1
Islamic Extremism	2	2
Learned Ignorance	3	3
Learning About, From and Within	13	14
Legacy	2	2
Life Experience	3	3

Little Financial Reward	6	6
Little or No Impact	25	25
Made in God's Image	1	1
Make Accessible	6	8
Maturing	9	9
Media Online	5	5
Myself	5	5
Mystery	4	6
Neither Yes nor No	3	3
Niche Market	4	4
No Answer	1	1
No Binaries	3	3
No Disincentives	8	8
No Obstacles	7	7
No Overarching Plan	1	1
No, Not a Priority	3	3
No, Not Religious Writer	2	2
Northern Ireland	1	1
Not a Religious Author	8	13
Not Purposely	2	2
Not restricted to Formal Setting	7	7
Nuanced Yes	4	4
Ongoing, Changing	22	23
Parish Ministry	1	1
Part of my Role	3	3
Pastoral - To Help	7	9
Positive Response	14	14
Prayer and Worship	5	5
Preaching	2	2
Preparing People for life	3	3
Printed Word	9	11
Promote Change	6	8
Properly Resourced	2	2
Publisher Invitation	7	7
Qualified No	1	1

Qualified Yes	6	6
Raise Awareness	1	1
Recession	3	3
Relationship and Curiosity	3	3
Religion can be Off-Putting	2	2
Religion Implicit Explicit	11	13
Religious Education	1	2
Religious Publishers	1	1
Religious Voice in the Public Space	2	2
Respect	8	8
Right Relationship	9	16
Rise in Suicide	1	1
Risky	1	1
Same Sex Marriage	2	2
Scripture Based	3	3
Secularisation	2	3
Secularism	4	4
Selling the Idea	3	3
Sexism in the Church	1	1
Sharing Knowledge - Understanding	16	21
Spiritual World	4	5
Staying Fresh	1	1
Support of Others	20	20
Support RE	3	9
Support Them	11	12
Supports own Faith	11	11
Teach	6	6
Teacher	3	3
The Holy Spirit	3	3
The power of the Medium	1	1
Theological Reflection	1	1
Theology	1	1
Think and Reflect	18	27
Third Level	1	1
To Collaborate	1	1

To Inspire - Help	1	1
To know I've Helped	18	19
To Learn	4	5
To Support	6	8
To Support Liturgy	3	3
Traits	1	1
Trinity	2	2
Ultimate Questions	4	6
Unappealing Term	4	5
Vatican II	6	6
Written Word	3	3
Yes, Contribute	7	7
Yes, LRE a Priority	19	19
Yes, Religious Writer	20	20

Appendix F

Nodes\\Step 3 - Reviewing Codes, Identifying Themes and Sub-Themes (Drilling Down)

The researcher has listed the codes assigned to the data in this research. Brief descriptions are given to ensure clarity.

Name	Description
T.1.1 - Who Becomes a Religious Author	A profile of participants to build a picture of age range, gender, occupation, academic history and location.
1.1.1 Age and Gender Profile	
T.1.1.1 Age	Five age bands were assigned: 31-40, 41-50,51-60,61-70 and 71+
T1.1.1.2 Gender	The cohort is made up of 20 men and 14 women.
T1.1.2 Religious Conviction and Life Status	Participants were invited to indicate if they held a religious conviction or a secular conviction and whether they were lay or professed.
T1.1.2.1 Denomination	The faith tradition to which the participants expressed affiliation.
T1.1.3 Formal Educational Attainment	Participants hold a broad range of qualifications across a variety of disciplines. Emerging categories were: doctoral level or above, above master's and below doctoral level, master's level, postgraduate diploma level and graduate level.
T 1.1.4.1 Current Occupations	An exploration of the employment of the participants. This aims to show the variety of skills in the cohort. Points of interest include how many are employed in education or church-affiliated institutions - parishes, theological institutes etc.- how many are retired and how many have worked, or currently work, in other areas.
T1.1.4.2 Background in Formal and Nonformal Teaching	Building a picture of the range of the cohort's links to formal, nonformal or informal education.
T1.1.5 Years Involved in Book Publishing	Responses are categorised in the following bands; 1-10, 11-20, 21-30, 31-40, 41-50 and 50+
T 1.1.6 Categories of Publishing	Categories; Religious Education, Theology, Ethics, Scripture, Prayer, Spirituality, Pastoral Care/Support, Church and Social Commentary, Liturgy. The final category, Other, was split into four sub-categories; History of churches, Memoir, History and Education.

Name	Description
T1.2 What makes their writing religious?	The authors reflect on what makes their writings religious and touch on areas such as God image and how people encounter the Divine in their lives.
T1.2.1 Religious writing is God-centred	The writing focuses on God and understandings of the Divine. It explores how people encounter/translate the presence of God in the world.
T1.2.2 God Image	Authors of religious books explore multiple images of God, from Creator to the God of Love.
T1.2.2.1 Love, Justice, Truth, Authenticity	Non-personified Images of God.
T1.2.2.2 Immanence of God	Closeness and accessibility of Divine Love.
T1.2.3 A God of the Poor	The biblical image of God as the God of the poor and oppressed is explored.
T1.2.4 The Transcendence of God	Belief in the mystery of God which surpasses human understanding is conveyed in participant response.
T1.2.5 Religion	The participants address religion and how the religious and spiritual nature of human beings opens new horizons in understandings of reality.
T1.2.6 The Experiential Dimension of Religion	Many participants write from the context of their own religious faith and their spiritual motivation. However, commenting on religious subject matters alone does not, of itself, qualify writing as religious in the view of some.
T1.2.6.1 Faith and Belief	Faith and Belief needs to be in constant dialogue with the world around us. Religious writing engages both the faith and the critical faculties of the author.
T1.2.6.2 The Spiritual Nature of Living	Engaging with a deeper reality than that which meets the eye and takes us beyond the physical nature of things.
T1.2.7 Ritual Dimension of Religion	Worship and prayer as a means of exploring relationship with the Divine.
T1.2.8 The Mythological Dimension of Religion	Cohort members see religion as being concerned with "the invisible world" (Smart, 1969) and with message of the scriptures, the power of the Word of God, and the origins and history of faith communities.
T1.3 How authors understand their role and purpose	This is concerned with authors' self-understanding and what they aim to achieve in their writing. The range of motivations that drive them comes to the fore.

Name	Description
T1.3.1 The Doctrinal Dimension of Religion	"The attempt to give system and clarity…..to what is revealed through the mythological and symbolic language of religious faith and ritual" (Smart 1969, p.19).
T1.3.1.1 Supporting Religious, Theological, Biblical and Liturgical Education	Providing education resources is a key concern for the cohort.
T1.3.1.2 Encouraging Critical Thinking	Enabling people to think independently and to ask questions that probe religious and societal issues has importance.
T1.3.1.3 Offering Theological Reflection in light of Vatican II	Recalling what some see as a neglect of the spirit of Vatican II and its renewing instinct is another feature of import in participant writing.
T1.3.1.4 Promoting Dialogue and Inclusion	Dialogue with and outreach to others of different beliefs, religious and secular, emerges as significant for over twenty percent of the cohort.
T1.3.1.5 Ultimate Questions	Some see their role as posing questions of meaning and purpose and inviting their readers to embark on a quest to find their own answers.
T1.3.2 The Ethical Dimension of Religion	Offering guidance to those seeking to live a good, moral life and to advocate for right relationships in the world.
T1.3.2.1 Offering Pastoral Support	Some see part of their role as to offer pastoral support and help people to grow in all aspects of their lives.
T1.3.2.2 Promoting Right Relationship	Living in harmony with self, God, others and the planet. Challenging anthropocentrism.
T1.3.2.3 Communicating the Gospel	Spreading the message of Jesus and making the gospel message assessable and relevant.
T1.3.3 The Social Dimension of Religion	Addressing church governance and how it organises itself as an institution including its models of leadership. Advocating for renewal and reform in the Catholic Church, and in society in general, is considered an important aspect of the work of the cohort.
T1.3.4 The Material Dimension of Religion	The role of the aesthetic, including music and art, in religious worship and in religious education is a feature of some a small number.
T1.3.5 The Attributes of Religious Authors	Members of the cohort use various images to convey different aspects of the religious author to try to convey the many facets of the role:

Name	Description
T1.3.5.1 Teacher	Supporting RE directly through writing.
T1.3.5.2 Translator	Making ideas and truths accessible to today's readership.
T1.3.5.3 Searcher	Seeking truth and meaning, testing new ideas.
T1.3.5.4 Story-teller	Conveying messages through story.
T1.3.5.5 Iconographer	Icons were used as an educational tool in the early church – drawing out, responding to an image. The image communicates.
T1.3.5.6 Motivator	Seeking to energise and enthuse readership.
T1.3.5.7 Bridge	Reaching across divides.
T1.3.5.8 Evangelist	Communicating the Gospel, the core of the Christian message
T1.3.5.9 Catalyst	Facilitating reaction and response, initiating conversation and reflection.
T1.4 Responding to the Signs of the Times	Exploring the ecclesial and societal issues and events that formed the backdrop to the work of the participants during the period under consideration.
T1.4.1 Scandal, Crisis and Decline	The decade in question was turbulent for the church and Irish society which had to confront a dark history. The moral authority of the church was severely shaken.
T1.4.1.1 Clerical and Institutional Abuse	Both the issue of abuse itself and the handling of the issue by church authorities had a profound impact
T1.4.1.2 Vatican Politics	The oversight of Vatican authorities is examined alongside their ecclesiology. The shift in emphasis in the vision of Pope Francis is welcomed as a positive influence.
T1.4.1.3 Church Decline	Witnessing a decline in practice and in the numbers engaged in ministry.
T1.4.2 Societal Happenings at the Intersection of Faith and Culture	Authors are involved in a dialogue between faith and culture and this involves being a voice urging an ethical response to the issues confronting society such as social justice, equality and care for the environment
T1.4.2.1 Secularisation and Secularism	Participants approach secularisation and secularism sometimes to challenge but also to dialogue with these values.
T1.4.2.2 The Rise of Terrorism and the Recession of 2008	The need to address issues of dialogue and understanding between world religions and especially Islam was also acknowledged.

Name	Description
T1.4.2.3 Resourcing Church Events and The Liturgical Year	A small number of participants write to provide resource materials used for prayer and worship throughout the church year.
T1.4.3 Developments in Education and Religious Education	Changes in the primary and post-primary education sector reflect the new diverse Ireland that is emerging with the role of the church in education facing unprecedented challenges
T1.5 Why the Term "Religious Author" May Not Resonate	Some participants reacted to the term "religious author" as unappealing and reject the term as applying to them.
T2 The Experience of Being an Author	The authors outline the factors that support and sustain them in their work and also the challenges of writing on religious themes.
T2.1 The Rewards Involved in the Writing Endeavour	What supports and sustains the participants in the writing endeavour?
T2.1.1 Receiving the Support of Others	Participants are supported by family, friends and colleagues.
T2.1.2 Offering Words of Value	Participants produce their work in the belief that what they offer is of worth to readers in a range of ways, including supporting people on their faith journey.
T2.1.3 Strengthened by One's Own Faith	This work is done in a context of having a strong personal faith and prayer life.
T2.1.4 Contributing to the Conversation	Religious books form part of an ongoing dialogue between faith and culture.
T2.1.5 Experiencing the Joy in Words	Some participants are enthusiastic about their love of writing – they feel that they have a gift that they are compelled to use.
T2.1.6 Being Both a Teacher and a Learner	A reciprocal understanding of education
T2.1.7 Career advancement and the Leaving of Legacies.	A small percentage see writing as a path to career advancement while to others it is a part of their legacy.
T2.2 The Cost Involved: Obstacles and Disincentives	The challenges that authors experiences in producing and publishing their work
T2.2.1 Writing is a Demanding Task	Writing demands huge effort and commitment.
T2.2.2 Institutional Control	The institutional church, particularly in the Catholic tradition, can be overly alert to opinion perceived as unorthodox.

Name	Description
T2.2.3 Access to Irish Publishers in a Niche Market	Few Irish publishers available in a publishing environment which attracts limited interest.
T2.2.4 Little Financial Reward	Writing in such a specialist area does not offer the author realistic remuneration for the time and effort expended. This fact would exclude writers who could not afford to work in an unpaid capacity to produce books.
T2.2.5 An Unwelcoming Environment	The societal environment can be apathetic or hostile to publications associated with religion.
T2.2.6 Being Stereotyped and Misjudged	Negative perceptions about religion can lead to jaundiced views about those who write for religious publication.
T3.1 Understandings of Education	The cohort give their understanding of education and note that education is lifelong and is a facilitative and participatory process.
T3.1.1 Education as Teaching and Learning in the Service of Right Relationship	The ethical dimension of education. Education empowers and liberates individuals and societies and the planet.
T3.1.2 Education as Drawing Out and Adding To	Educare/educere - drawing out of human potential, adding to and developing it. The teacher facilitates the learner in an interactive, mutual process.
T3.1.3 Raising Questions, Fostering Thinking	Promoting critical reflection – not delivering easy answers. The educator is understood to be also a learner and the learner is seen as a co- learner/teacher and participant in the learning process.
T3.1.4 Involving Religion	The centrality of the religious impulse in holistic education.
T3.2 Insights into Religious Education	Members of the cohort shared their understanding of RE.
T3.2.1 Religious Education - Learning About, From and Within	A view of Religious Education as involving aspects of these three understandings was shared by a majority of the cohort.
T3.2.2 Life in Relationships with the Divine and All Creation	The interconnection of all of life; the shared responsibility to tell Good News and to live good news.
T.3.2.3 Encourages Critical Reflection	Those participating in religious education should be encouraged to be both reflective and self-reflective
T3.2.4 Involves Holistic Development	Religious education attends to all areas of human life and cannot be narrowly focused or be limited to one dimension.

Name	Description
T3.3 Conceptualising Religious Education in a Lifelong Context	As education is ongoing so too is religious growth.
T3.3.1 A Continuing Journey	In religious education, as in life in general, there is always more to learn. Faith is understood as a living, ever-changing process.
T3.3.2 Maturing Faith and 'the Beginning of Wisdom'	Developing a mature, adult faith that can accept that the more one knows, the more one realises how little one know.
T3.3.3 LRE is Multi-Faceted and Not Restricted to Formal Settings	Educational possibilities in formal and extra-formal settings. Books were seen as an important tool in deepening spiritual knowledge and spiritual growth.
T3.3.4 Expanding and Resourcing an Adult Focus	Seeking greater attention for adult religious education. The understanding of RE gained in childhood needs to be enhanced by and developed by education throughout adulthood. Limited opportunity in this regard is highlighted.
T4.1. Self-Perception as Religious Educators	Members of the cohort were invited to explore if they perceived themselves as religious educators.
T4.2 Contribution to LRE	Views on whether the participants' work contributes to LRE. Self- perception together with feedback from readers assists participants in determining their contribution to LRE.
T4.2.1 Books target Formal, Informal and Non-formal	What sectors do books target? Are participants conscious of this?
T4.2.2 LRE: A Priority	The majority see it as a priority in their writing (sixty-four percent).
T4.2.3 LRE Not Primary Intention	LRE not the main purpose for around a third but more than half of these are still content to contribute to LRE.
T4.3 Improving the Landscape: Recommendations to Enhance LRE	Three recommendations emerge.
T4.3.1 Give Respect to Freedom of Thought	Emphasising the importance of encouraging informed, mature critical reflection.
T4.3.2 Provide Resources	Money, personnel, materials, new media, blended-learning, books all identified as important to develop LRE into the future.
T4.3.3 Focus on Adult Religious Education	An adult focus is seen as a priority but participants use differing vocabulary to express their understanding of what they envisage.

Name	Description
T4.3.3.1 Adult RE	RE seen as having a broad focus and involves learning about more than one tradition.
T4.3.3.2 Adult faith formation	Adult Faith Formation is understood as focusing on religious experience, personal commitment and some doctrinal content
T4.3.3.3 Adult catechesis	Adult Catechesis is a specifically Catholic concept oriented towards a maturing in Catholic faith.

Appendix G

"Why do you bother writing those books?"
Religious book publishing and its possible significance
for lifelong religious education:

An investigation into how authors of religious books in contemporary Ireland understand their role, and whether they view their published work as contributing to lifelong religious education.

Interview Questions

All of the participants in the study had written books published by non-academic publishers which could qualify as pertaining to some aspect of religion between the years 2005-2015. While the majority of the cohort did view themselves as both religious author and religious educator, some participants did not identify with one or other role and some identified with neither. The reasons for this varied:

Some saw their role as author simply as an extension of their primary occupation as a teacher, a priest, or as a writer who happens to write from a religious perspective at times.

Others saw religion and the term "religious" as too narrow, catechetical or limiting with an implied absence of critical thought. In the latter cases, participants preferred to denote themselves as theological or spiritual writers.

In other cases, participants preferred the terminology of faith formation over religious education, seeing lifelong religious education as too related to children and young people and too linked with information-giving.

These perspectives show that the word "religious" itself is a loaded word which is open to a range of interpretations and assumptions. They also raise the question of how religious education is viewed by other related disciplines such as theology and spirituality.

1. **In order to probe this later point a little further, in your experience, can you say whether you think religious education is perceived as less than, or as secondary, to other disciplines like theology or spirituality? Please give brief reasons for your answer.**

The research shows that participants viewed the following to be obstacles and disincentives that affect the writing endeavour:

- Writing is a demanding task
- Institutional control can hamper freedom of expression
- Limited access to Irish publishers in a niche markt

- Little financial reward
- An unwelcoming/apathetic secular environment
- Being stereotyped and misjudged (by association with religion).

2. **If these resonate with you, can you choose the one that affects most and briefly say why?**

Religious Education can be defined as:

Learning about: with the emphasis placed "on the presentation of information, facts, stories and rites" about religion and beliefs (Lane, 2013a, p.23).

Learning from: with the emphasis on "the learning experience of the pupil" and involving "personal engagement with, reflection on and response to the religion being studied" (Lane, 2013a, p.25).

Learning into: with the emphasis on introducing learners to a particular faith tradition and "opening up the possibility of a personal faith relationship with God" and "discovering the presence of an underlying reciprocity, relationality and mutuality between God and humanity in experience and history" (Lane, 2013a, pp.27-28).

3. **Can you say which of these, or combination thereof, that you believe your writing focuses on?**

In the study, different types of education are defined in the following three ways:

Informal education….is the lifelong process by which every person acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from daily experiences and exposure to the environment-at home, at work, at play; from the example and attitudes of family and friends; from travel, reading newspapers and books; or by listening to the radio or viewing films or television

Generally, informal education is unorganized and often unsystematic; yet it accounts for the great bulk of any person's total lifetime learning-including that of even a highly "schooled" person.

Formal education ….is the highly institutionalized, chronologically graded and hierarchically structured "education system, "spanning lower, primary school and the upper reaches of the university.

Nonformal education….is any organized, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children (Coombs and Ahmed, 1974, p. 8).

4. **Can you say which of the three, or combination thereof, that your own books target? Please confine your answer to books published between 2005-2015 and only those published with non-academic publishers.**

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5. **Do you think adult religious education, adult faith formation and adult catechesis are the same thing? If not, can you explain the differences between them?**

Appendix H

"Why do you bother writing those books?"
Religious Book Publishing and its Possible Significance
for Lifelong Religious Education:

An investigation into how authors of religious books in contemporary Ireland understand their role and whether they view their published work as contributing to lifelong religious education

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Theme 1: The Messenger and the Message
Sub-theme 1: Who Becomes a Religious Author?
Finding 1: The age profile of the cohort was predominantly 60 years plus with males outnumbering females by a ratio of 10:7.
Finding 2: All participants came from Christian denominations and were primarily Catholic in background with very limited representation from other Christian traditions. Over half of the cohort (18 participants) were ordained priests or ministers.
Finding 3: The cohort showed a high level of academic achievement with more than half educated to doctoral level or above, over a third to master's level or above and the remainder to graduate level or above.
Finding 4: While eighty-five percent worked in full or part-time roles, the vast majority of those surveyed did not earn their living from writing with only five cohort members listing their occupation as writer.
Finding 5: Over three-quarters of the cohort had taught in a third level academic institution in a full-time, part-time or occasional capacity.
Finding 6: Leinster leads all other provinces in terms of author location with almost sixty-five percent of the cohort living in the east of the country.
Finding 7: Men in the cohort had been publishing books for significantly longer than women with one first publishing more than 50 years ago. However, more women than men began their publishing careers in the last twenty years. Between them, they had published 132 books in the timeframe under investigation.

Sub-theme 2: What Makes Their Writing Religious?
Finding 8: Religious writing is implicitly or explicitly God-centred and reveals multiple images of God.
Finding 9: Again, implicitly or explicitly, it encompasses religion, and its dimensions, which include faith and belief, the spiritual nature of living, prayer, liturgy and scripture.

Sub-theme 3: How Do They Understand Their Role and Purpose? The Emphases and Attributes of the Religious Author.	
Finding 10: *Nine Elements of Role Understanding were reported including:*	**Finding 11:** *Nine Author Attributes were identified including being:*
• Supporting Religious, Theological, Biblical and Liturgical Education	• A Teacher
• Encouraging Critical Thinking	• A Translator
• Offering Pastoral Support	• A Searcher
• Offering Theological Reflection in the light of Vatican II	• A Story-Teller
• Advocating for Church Renewal and Reform	• An Iconographer
• Promoting Right Relationship	• A Motivator
• Communicating the Gospel	• A Bridge
• Promoting Dialogue and Inclusion	• An Evangelist
• Exploring Ultimate Questions	• A Catalyst

Sub-theme 4: Responding to the Signs of the Times.
Finding 12: Responding to scandal, crises and decline were priorities.
Finding 13: Societal happenings at the intersection of faith and culture commanded attention.
Finding 14: Resourcing church events and the liturgical year were writing influences.
Finding 15 Developments in education and religious education prompted participant response.

Sub-theme 5: Why the Word 'Religious' May Not Resonate
Finding 16: The word "religious" is an encumbered word for some. Twenty-three and a half percent of the cohort did not describe themselves as a 'religious author' but seventy-six and a half percent were happy to assume the title.

Theme 2: The Experience of Being an Author
Sub-theme 1: The Rewards Involved in the Writing Endeavour
Finding 17: Seven rewards are linked to being an author of books related to religion:
• Receiving the support of others.
• Offering words of value, insight and comfort to others.
• Being strengthened by one's own faith.
• Contributing to the public conversation.
• Experiencing the joy in words.
• Being both a teacher and a learner.
• Career advancement and the leaving of legacies.

Sub-theme 2: The Cost Involved: Obstacles and Disincentives
Finding 18: Six obstacles or disincentives are associated with being an author of books related to religion. They include:
• Writing is a demanding task.
• It can be hindered by institutional control.
• There is limited access to Irish publishers in a niche market.
• It offers little financial reward.
• Authors operate in an unwelcoming environment.
• They risk being stereotyped and misjudged.

Theme 3: Towards an Understanding of Lifelong Religious Education
Sub-theme 1: Understandings of Education
Finding 19: The cohort expressed four key understandings of education which they described as:
• Drawing out and adding to.
• Teaching and learning in the service of right relationship.
• Raising questions and fostering thinking.
• Involving religion.

Sub-theme 2: Insights into Religious Education
Finding 20: Participants defined religious education in four ways seeing it as:
• Learning about, from and within religion(s) and beliefs. Forty-seven percent saw religious education as taking place within a faith tradition making this the most common understanding.
• Encompassing life in relationship with the Divine and all creation.
• Encouraging critical reflection.
• Involving holistic development.

Sub-theme 3: Conceptualising Religious Education in a Lifelong Context
Finding 21: Lifelong Religious Education is understood in four ways:
• A continuing journey of movement and development in religious understanding.
• A maturing of faith and "the beginning of the wisdom".
• As multi-facetted and not restricted to formal settings.
• As including a currently under-developed and under-resourced adult focus.

Theme 4 Religious Educator – An Aspect of Author Identity?
Sub-theme 1: Self-perception as Religious Educator or Otherwise
Finding 22: Seventy-six and a half percent of the cohort see themselves as religious educators.

Sub-theme 2: Contribution to Lifelong Religious Education
Finding 23: Seventy-three percent of the cohort believed or hoped their books had made a contribution to lifelong religious education.
Finding 24: Contributing to LRE was a for priority sixty-four percent of the cohort.

Sub-theme 3: Improving the Landscape: Recommendations to Enhance Lifelong Religious Education
Finding 25: Three focal points were identified to enhance LRE:
• Giving respect to freedom of thought, dialogue and inclusion.
• The provision of necessary resources.
• Focusing on adult religious education.