Encounters with Truth: The Hermeneutical Task of Religious Education in the Republic of Ireland

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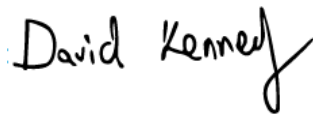
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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Explanation
CPPREC	Catholic Preschool and Primary School Religious Education Curriculum
CNS	Community National Schools
1 Cor	1 Corinthians
DES	Department of Education and Skills
ET	Educate Together
ERB	Education about Religions and Beliefs
Ex	Exodus
GIL	Grow In Love
IECON	Irish Episcopal Conference
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
SGN	Share the Good News: The National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland
RE	The Curricular Subject Religious Education
FR	The Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*
Jn	The Gospel of John
Lk	The Gospel of Luke
GS	The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*

Abstract

Encounters with Truth: The Hermeneutical Task of Religious Education in the Republic of Ireland – David Kennedy

This study claims that the question of truth is central to religious education. It contends that there are two broad approaches to how the question of truth is considered in religious education in the Republic of Ireland. These two approaches can be broadly described as follows: [a] approaches that operate from the presumption that objective truth exists, and [b] approaches that are sceptical of any claim to objective truth. The research argues that each of these approaches, in their current manifestations, are found wanting when confronted with the challenges that face religious education in a contemporary pluralist classroom.

This research takes account of the theological as well as philosophical sensitives that characterise religious education. It proposes that another way forward for religious education presents itself by way of a greater appreciation for the hermeneutical turn that has emerged in contemporary theological and philosophical discourse. To this end the study engages with Pollefeyt's consideration of religious education and its emergent hermeneutical turn; Boeve's post-modern reflections on tradition and the need for an open narrative; Marion's understanding of givenness and hermeneutics in the context of a God-beyond-being; a critical realist approach to religious education; and, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics to arrive at an understanding of religious education that operates from a theologically and philosophically informed position that religious education *qua* religious education facilitates encounters with truth.

This study offers an account of the hermeneutical task of religious education which places the question of truth at its centre. It argues for an understanding of the hermeneutical task of religious education as being orientated towards facilitating 'truth-events', moments of truth whereby the 'happening' character of education as well as its transformative nature are appreciated through meaningful encounters with the particularity and difference of the other. The study concludes by identifying seven correlating insights that emerge from the conversation between Catholic theology and Gadamerian philosophy and five key principles that may assist in future developments in religious education in the Republic of Ireland and beyond.

Chapter One

The Research Question, Assumptions and Procedures

1.1. Introducing the Research Question

1.1.2. Purpose and Scope of Study

This thesis claims that the question of truth is central to religious education. The recognition of this insight carries significant implications for religious education, particularly in terms of the discernment of its hermeneutical task in the Republic of Ireland. This research identifies that there are two broad approaches to the question of truth in religious education in the Republic of Ireland. These two approaches can be broadly accounted for as follows: [a] approaches that operate from the presumption that objective truth exists, and [b] approaches that are sceptical of any claim to objective truth. It will be argued that each of these approaches, in their current manifestations, are found wanting when dealing with the challenges encountered by religious education when confronted by the reality of diversity as well as the plural nature of contemporary Irish society. In this context, any claim to truth in many respects is shrouded by a certain degree of scepticism or agnosticism, particularly if such knowledge is not acquired using the modern scientific method, i.e. a mode of objective knowledge acquisition.

Knowledge acquired in the various disciplines of the humanities or those of the social sciences is often considered invalid and inconsequential precisely because such disciplines do not always adhere to the methods of modern scientific rationality. The presuppositions of the modern scientific method underpin what is referred to in this research as secular reason. Such reason argues that one can occupy a detached, neutral, observer stance in relation to the question of truth. Contrary to secular reason, religious

reason claims that truth itself is relational, dynamic and participatory, and therefore, such a detached position is viewed as an impossibility. Religious reason, therefore, is receptive to encounters with truth that occur beyond the bounds of the limitations imposed by the modern scientific method on secular reason. This emphasis on the modern scientific method has led to a narrowing of the conception of reason in secular societies today. This thesis will explore the intricacies of this complex relationship between secular reason and religious reason, particularly in terms of the question of truth, and its effects in the context of religious education in the Republic of Ireland. It will do so with a view to discerning a possible way forward beyond the polemical discourse, i.e. faith-based and non-faith-based, that often surrounds religious education in the Republic of Ireland. In this introductory chapter, therefore, the methodology, key concepts and structure of the thesis will be articulated, defined and outlined.

Social theorists Jürgen Habermas, particularly in his later writings (Habermas, 2010; Mendieta, et. al, 2011), has called for a "new dialogue between religious reason and secular reason" (cited in Lane, 2013, p. 13). Habermas proposes such dialogue in light of what he perceives as "the ethical decline of modernity, liberal democracies, the excesses of the later hyper-capitalism and an emerging self-questioning within secular reason itself" (Lane, 2013, pp. 13-14). Such a narrowing of reason, according to Jean-Luc Marion (2008), is 'the most profound crisis of our era' as this restricted rationality has little to say about the human condition, about what we are, what we can know, what we must do, and what we are allowed to hope for. While there are reservations regarding the conditions for dialogue proposed by Habermas, it is important that the proposition of such dialogue is welcomed if a contemporary society is to be understood as diverse, pluralist and inclusive (Kieran, 2013; Byrne, 2013a). From this standpoint, however, it

can be argued that the character of religious truth is being seriously eroded, particularly within the context of religious education in the Republic of Ireland. The position that the truth(s) of a particular faith tradition may actually be true, at least in some substantial objective sense, is being clouded by the view that such truth(s) are merely some non-cognitive attitude or emotional response to the deep mystery of the created order (Carr, 1994). An example of how such an approach may be taken up can be seen in the context of recent developments and proposals set out in Irish education (NCCA, 2015; NCCA, 2018; NCCA, 2020; DES, 2018a; DES, 2018b). Such initiatives seem to be animated by a deep current of scepticism concerning religious belief and its place within the public sphere (Nieuwenhove, 2013).

It can be argued that such actions give voice, consciously or less so, to the positivist claim that religious statements are meaningless because they are unverifiable (Wright, 2004). Such scepticism is directed at those implications of religious belief that appear to be at odds with rational scientific knowledge. Yet, it must be recognised too that such scepticism is animated by a principal opposition to those implications of faith-formation which appear to be at variance with contemporary social views about the freedom of the individual (Carr, 1994).

It is evident that ethical, social, political and religious differences frequently have socially divisive, even combative consequences – not least in social contexts in which the plural nature of society is increasingly pronounced and the reality of diversity is recognised among the value preferences of their members (Kieran, 2013). In this manner, liberal democratic forms of political administration and organisation can be regarded as strategies for what it is hoped might be impartial arbitration and negotiation

between different potentially conflicting moral, social and religious perspectives (Carr, 1994). Such strategies are often designed to limit and curtail what might be understood as the clamorous demands of particular sectarian interest groups within a given society (Nieuwenhove, 2013).

All of this is achieved by the adoption of a particular stance of 'detached neutrality' with respect to what may be believed in substantive terms by different social, political and religious parties (Carr, 1994, p. 226). Such detached neutrality insists that the claims of one party to a knowledge of what is true, right or good in the realm of socially significant beliefs or opinions are treated as no more or less worthy of a serious hearing than those of another. A consequence of this strategy is that it can all too easily become a procedural agnosticism that routinely dismisses the truth value of religious claims and beliefs (Hogan, 2017, p. 88). In the context of public schooling in the Republic of Ireland the liberal state's desire for neutrality, or to minimise offence, means that religious beliefs are treated with scepticism (DES, 2018a; DES, 2018b).

1.1.2. Research Question

In taking account of the points outlined above, when distilled down to its most basic elements, the central concern of this thesis is a consideration of the capacity of religious education in the Republic of Ireland to meaningfully address questions of truth and ultimate meaning in an era best described as being both post-Christian and post-Secular. This thesis asks:

> Is truth at the centre of religious education and, if so, how is it to be encountered
> in religious education in the Republic of Ireland today?

In addressing this research question a series of sub-questions must be addressed:

[a] in what way does the question of truth present itself in the context of religious education in the Republic of Ireland today?

[b] what hermeneutics are at play and how do we deal with restrictive hermeneutics that are often present in religious education today?

[c] given the context of religious education in the Republic of Ireland, what does Catholic theology contribute to discourse surrounding encounters with truth, tradition and a God-beyond-being?

[d] given the emergent hermeneutical context in the Republic of Ireland, what does philosophical hermeneutics contribute to understandings of the encounter with truth?

In offering an account of the hermeneutical task of religious education, this thesis offers five key principles that should be taken seriously if religious education is to be attentive to the character of religious truth and, thereby, sustain its capacity to meaningfully engage in a truthful treatment of religion, religiosity or any other fundamental life option.

1.2. Methodological Considerations

1.2.1. Approach to the Study

There is no definitive methodological basis for *doing* philosophy, as Reichling (1996) notes, "philosophy aspires to more than its method can render because philosophical problems are never finally solved" (p. 124). The method for this thesis emerges in and through the study, as a philosophical work, which must be accounted for in its own manner of expression. In taking account of this point, it can be said that, all of the objectives of a philosophical work are unable to be adequately accounted for in advance

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of the study, rather they unfold as the study progresses. A philosophical research study, therefore, must refrain from conforming to any methods that claim to be definitive or *the* method for *doing* philosophy, especially in advance of a study being conducted (Reichling, 1996).

Taking this insight seriously does not imply that no method is present in philosophical writing. Rather, it implies that philosophical writing ought to avoid positivistic tendencies which leave philosophical studies open to the "fatality of facticity, the finality of formula, and the stricture of structure" (Reichling, 1996, p. 124). The research method utilised in this thesis consists of reading and critically engaging with literature from contemporary discourse in philosophy, theology and religious education that is relevant to responding to the research question. This approach is most aptly described as conceptual analysis (Grice, 1991).

As far back as the early dialogues of Plato, conceptual analysis is arguably one of the most prevalent methods utilised in philosophical research, i.e. studies which are predominately theoretical as opposed to empirical (Kipper, 2012). The ideal goal of a conceptual analysis is to arrive at some manner of definition or analysis of the pertinent X which is usually formulated as an indispensable bi-condition which offers necessary and sufficient criteria or conditions for being X (Kipper, 2012; Grice, 1991). Although untenable when one considers the counter examples offered by Edmund Gettier (1963), an example of the theoretical as opposed to the empirical character of conceptual analysis is imbued in the classical position that knowledge consists of 'justified, true belief', i.e. [1] *S* knows that *p* is true, [2] *S* believes that *p*, and [3] *S* is justified in believing that *p* – criteria [1] to [3] offer independent but jointly sufficient criteria or

conditions for knowing *p* (Grice, 1991). It must be acknowledged, however, that although each of the components of the traditional understanding of conceptual analysis outlined above are, to a certain extent controversial, conceptual analysis continues to guide a significant quantity of philosophical research.

In terms of the question of truth, this research assumes that there is such a thing as truth, and not merely truths. It negates the nihilistic position that "there are no facts, only interpretations" (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 267). Such a Nietzschean perspective presents a very limited understanding of hermeneutics by reducing it to a mere methodology – a view that is less than adequate for it fails to appreciate that hermeneutics is far more than a methodology. This thesis refrains from taking up the epistemological approach of a *thick* postmodern constructivism in which the case is made that all truth claims are of equal value (Barkin, 2010). This thesis, however, does not embrace an exclusively realist or critical realist epistemology either, as such an approach reduces questions of truth (especially religious truth) to a mere falsification and verification various propositions and statements of faith (Wright, 2007b; C. Go, 2019). Rather, this thesis approaches the question of truth from the position that there is such a thing as ultimate truth, and although conceding that truth is encountered in a contingent and partial manner, insists that a relativistic position need not be fostered as the very particularity of the event of truth negates such tendencies (Gadamer, 2013; Boeve, 2003).

The epistemological approach taken up by this research is perhaps best accounted for as a realist-constructivism such as that accounted for in the international relations theory of J. Samuel Barkin (2010). Recent attempts to develop a realist constructivism at least signal to the notion of an objective reality by way of the notion of inter-

subjectivity. Contrary to a wholly '*thick*' postmodern constructivism, a neo-classical or '*thin*' constructivism acknowledges an inter-subjectivity within which there is at least the potential to integrate a mode of philosophical realism, i.e. the world exists independent of our observations of it, while at one and the same time acknowledging that not all parts of this objective reality are directly observable to the person in any wholly objective manner.

In terms of methodology, therefore, this thesis is insistent on exact thinking, by way of the defining of terms and concepts, and clearly naming any pertinent distinctions where there is a risk of abstruseness, or conflation. This research moves towards conclusions, and is transparent in terms of any assumptions made so that persons can discern points of disagreement or agreement with the research. The insistence on the exercise of accuracy is emphasised in this thesis not only to circumvent any cross purpose argumentation, but also to safeguard against fluctuating between, or alternatively, consolidating independent concepts.

1.2.2. Positionality of the Researcher

At this point, it is important to consider the positionality of the researcher. Kim England (1994) states that " research is a process, not just a product" (p. 82). In this process, research presents itself as being a communal space, influenced by both research and participants. The identities of the researcher and research subjects are capable of influencing the research process itself. The research process is impacted by the researchers' biases which serve as "checkpoints along the way" (Bourke, 2014, p. 1). In acknowledging one's biases, it is assumed that one acquires insights into the manner in which one may in fact approach a research setting, members of particular groups, i.e.

race, age-group, gender etc., and the manner in which the research might engage with a research subject (Bourke, 2014). In positionality theory, as Adrianna Kezar (2002) notes, it is recognised that persons possess a variety of intersecting identities and, therefore, persons "make meaning from various aspects of their identity" (p. 96).

The researcher works as a teacher-educator who specialises in Catholic religious education at primary level in the Republic of Ireland. The researcher's educational background is principally in the Catholic theological and philosophical tradition. In this regard, the thought of classical theological and philosophical thinkers such as St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Plato and Aristotle, as well as more contemporary theologians and philosophers such as Herbert McCabe, Dermot Lane, Bernard Lonergan, Jean-Luc Marion, Karl Rahner, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and religious Educationalist such as David Aldridge, Patricia Hannam, Andrew Wright, Didier Pollefeyt, Gareth Byrne, Patricia Kieran, Anne Hession, and Sandra Cullen have exerted a particular influence on the researcher's thought and work to date. These influences have come to both implicitly and explicitly shape not only the way in which the researcher has structured the argument of this thesis, but also the choice of thinkers. The work of such thinkers is addressed with the view to adequately respond to the research question. This engagement moves towards exploring the question of truth in religious education in such a way that, whilst informed by Catholic theology and philosophy, speaks not only to Catholic religious education but also beyond to non-faith based educational contexts.

1.2.3. Limitations of the Research

The following limitations of this research must be acknowledged: [1] in terms of the question of 'truth', this thesis does not claim to offer an exhaustive treatment of truth nor a definitive account of truth. Rather, it attempts to offer an account of the hermeneutical orientation of religious education in the Republic of Ireland as being orientated towards encounters with truth, particularly religious truth. [2] This research does not offer a thorough analysis of the various approaches or programmes that are currently used in Religious Education (hereafter RE to refer to the curriculum subject) in the Republic of Ireland. The thesis posits the question of truth as it presents itself in the context of religious education in the Republic of Ireland, but its consideration of the question of truth is not limited nor restricted to the programmes and approaches used in religious education in the Republic of Ireland. [3] Although their understandings of a hermeneutical approach may differ in particular aspects, thinkers such as David Aldridge (2017) and Gert Biesta (2016) call for a hermeneutical approach to religious education, i.e. a hermeneutical approach as a distinct approach in and of itself to religious education. This thesis is not positing another variation of such an approach. Rather, this thesis is concerned with the discernment of the hermeneutical task of religious education and not the development of another variation of a hermeneutical approach to religious education.

1.2.4. Contribution to Knowledge

The thesis offers an understanding of the hermeneutical task of religious education that is both philosophically *and* theologically tenable in the context of the Republic of Ireland. Traditionally, religious education has been shaped significantly by Catholic theology in the Republic of Ireland and, although philosophical discourse is never far

from theological discourse, the philosophical dimension of religious education has been less influential in religious education when compared to the impact of Catholic theology. Although Gadamerian accents are evident in the discourse about religious education in the Republic of Ireland – particularly in the work of Dermot Lane (2013) and Sandra Cullen (2017), this research engages with Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics in a more detailed manner. In giving such attention to the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer and bringing such philosophical insights into conversation with Catholic theology in relation to truth, tradition and the possibility of a God-beyond-being, this thesis arrives at seven correlating insights that inform the account of the hermeneutical task of religious education offered by this research – an account that is both theologically and philosophically viable in the Republic of Ireland. In doing so, this thesis also contributes to contemporary discourse in religious education by further introducing Gadamerian hermeneutics to the field of religious education in the Republic of Ireland.

This thesis embraces the Platonic overtones evident in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics in terms of his treatment of the experience of truth as opposed to following other thinkers who interpret this aspect of Gadamer's work in an exclusively Heideggerian sense i.e. truth as *aletheia*. In this way, this research also contributes to discourse in the hermeneutics of religious education by taking up a novel interpretation of Gadamer's account of the experience of truth. In offering this novel account of the hermeneutical orientation of religious education, i.e. one that is theologically *and* philosophically viable, this thesis contributes to the field of religious education in the Republic of Ireland by promoting the introduction of the concept of *truth-events* to contemporary discourse.

The final contribution of this thesis rests in its discernment of five key principles which move toward assisting religious education in navigating between the absolutising of truth claims and the snare of relativism that is evident in approaches to the question of truth in religious education in the Republic of Ireland. This thesis, therefore, contributes to the further development of religious education in the Republic of Ireland by offering an account of the hermeneutical task of religious education that speaks both to religious and secular educational environments.

1.3. Key Concepts

1.3.1. Religious Education

In this thesis, religious education is understood as a broad educational enterprise that speaks to both religious and secular educational environments in which it is apprehended as an educational process by which people are invited to explore the human religious traditions, philosophical beliefs and world views that protect and illuminate the spiritual and ethical dimension of the human experience. It enables people to come to an understanding of religious traditions, philosophical beliefs and worldviews and their relevance to life, relationships, society and the wider world. Religious education invites people to acquire the knowledge, forms of knowing, attitudes, values, skills and sensibilities that are involved in being a religiously and belief literate citizen whether one belongs to a faith community or not. Such an educated citizen would, therefore, be capable of participating in and contributing to a pluralist society in a respectful and ethical manner.

Religious education uses a variety of cognitive, affective and active pedagogical approaches, focused in particular instances, on learning *into, learning from,* and

learning about religion and belief (Hull, 2001). Each of these are philosophically and educationally justified approaches that contribute to the process by which people are nurtured in a particular religion or towards a greater understanding and appreciation of religious traditions, philosophical beliefs and worldviews. Religious education contributes to the holistic development of people as individuals and as members of communities and society, and is engaged with and conscious of the age, stage of development, interests and needs of the participants.

1.3.2. Objective Truth

In the Republic of Ireland, religious education has been shaped principally by the Catholic tradition which assumes the existence of objective truth which can be known as God and from which all other truth claims flow. Faith-based religious education, regardless of the specific faith tradition, assumes the existence of such objective truth. Such a designation, i.e. God as objective truth, is not and cannot be made by other non-faith based approaches to religious education. Rather, such approaches replace God as objective truth with human rights, or with the paradoxical postmodern designation that the only objective truth that exists is that there is no such thing as *the* truth (obviously an inherently contradictory position). If one is to understand faith-based religious education then one must appreciate that, contrary to non-faith approaches, faith-based approaches to religious education assume the existence of an objective truth known as God.

Such a view does not imply that other approaches do not assume the existence of objective truth, but rather they do not and will not designate this objective truth as God. Furthermore, the acceptance of the existence of objective truth does not imply that

knowledge of this objective truth can approached in a detached manner akin to some mode of pure objectivity. The existence of objective truth, or even the possibility of its existence, forces the person to respond to the claim being made by way of a truth response. An understanding of objective truth as accounted above, refutes any conception of neutrality in relation to the question of truth, not only in religious education but also in the wider educational enterprise as well as in wider society.

1.3.3. Hermeneutics

In this thesis hermeneutics is understood as the science of interpretation. Contrary to nihilist understandings of hermeneutics which are imbued with the Nietzschean maximum that there are no facts only interpretations, in this thesis hermeneutics is understood to be something far more than a mere methodology. Hermeneutics is central in the context of historical religions. The charismatic or prophetic origin of historical religions is shrouded in particularity. This particularity is evidenced by the fact that such origins are always "connected to a specific people, contexts, events and circumstances, which occurred at a given place, at a given time" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 3; Boeve, 2009). While this genesis can be explored, the historicity of the religion itself is cherished as a sacred frame of reference and an assurance for reliability and credibility (Eliade, 1998). Shifting cultural and social contexts, however, perpetually confront and "challenge the continuity of the original inspiration and revelation" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 3). In this context, it is evident that hermeneutics is indispensable to the daily practice of religion, precisely because of the centrality of historicity.

Hermeneutics presents itself as being intrinsic to the particularity and peculiarity of the human condition. Although there are vestiges of the Divine in animals (Thompson,

2017), for the person the God-self, as Levinas (1969) articulates it, is mediated by way of the face – in the disclosure of a radical otherness, interdeterminacy and fragility or vulnerability which transcends the physical features (Pollefeyt, 2020, p. 116). Persons, therefore, have an innate facility to encounter and receive meaning. For example, one can discover the lustre of life and attribute meaning. The person also possesses the capacity to recognise and acknowledge others as 'like me', as "individuals in search of, longing for, and absorbing meaning" (p. 116). When speaking of the human subject, this space can be referred to as the 'hermeneutical space'. It is characterised by a radical "openness, freedom, sensitivity, self-transcendence, and of receptivity for otherness and for a rich plurality of implicit and explicit meanings and interpretations" (Pollefeyt, 2020, p. 116; Marion, 2013). In particular, it is the space within which God can reveal God-self as the ultimate, fulfilling, wholly Other (Levinas, 1969; Marion, 2018).

From this standpoint, Christian theology is, in its most profound sense, best understood as a hermeneutic theology - one that continually transcends itself through hermeneutical action framed by the relationship between human experience and divine revelation (Marion, 2018). For instance, Pollefeyt (2004) states that in terms of the interpretive structure, "the transmission and the mediation of Christianity not only condition the relationship of God with people, but also touch upon God's intimate life itself" (p. 3). Institutionalised religions have tended to focus their efforts, understandably so, upon stability and continuity in a bid to manage the precarious nature of old traditions thus rendering them static and thereby in no need of further interpretation (Boeve, 2003a). Such efforts have been futile as religions are continuously called to revisit their genesis, and cultivate novel insights and articulate new interpretations in order to ensure or safeguard their future (Boeve, 2007c).

The evolving diversity and plurality among people demonstrates the context of opportunities that are offered by an open or inclusive society for situating oneself sharply towards established and assumed social, cultural, religious, and ethical traditions (Lane, 2011; Cullen, 2017). The person finds themselves situated in a 'fragile hermeneutical space' where reality, even one's inner reality, is "radically marked by a form of polyphony, by a multiplicity of voices, by plurality" (Pollefeyt, 2020, p. 117). It is within this rich frame of reference that hermeneutics in the thesis is understood as something broader than textual hermeneutics (Bowie and Cole, 2018), and something more inclusive of the wider human experience of truth and ultimate meaning.

1.3.4. Secular Reason

Modernity has ultimately led to the separation of both scientific knowing [i.e. objective] and religious knowing [i.e. participative]. In this way, secular reason has taking on a sufficiency and autonomy that has been subject to significant criticism (Lane, 2011). Such critiques do not deny the intrinsic validity of secular reasoning or its extraordinary success over the centuries. Rather, such criticisms are directed in particular at secular reason's failure to recognise its own assumptions. The autonomous quests of secular reason are rooted in a range of assumptions that must not be ignored – for example, the assumption that there is an order in the natural world or that there is meaning in the natural world, or that the natural world is intelligible. In this way, secular reason is far from detached or neutral. Rather, secular reason is equally value laden and subject to its own particularly as any other form of rationality – religious or otherwise.

Such assumptions are the stimulus of secular and scientific reasoning (Lane, 2011). In failing to acknowledge that its quests are not detached, and therefore, separating

objective knowing from participatory knowing, and prioritising the former over the latter, modernity has led to a narrowing of reason. This criticism issues not only from theology, but also from a host of secular philosophy – particularly the philosophy of science. Secular reason is grounded in the positivistic assumptions of the modern scientific method of observation, verification and explanation and takes up the classical empiricist distinction between facts and values. In this thesis secular reason is understood as that modus of reason which moves towards the privatisation and tranquilisation of religious truth.

1.3.5. Religious Reason

All truth, particularly religious truth, has the ability to bring people together, to unify them (Lane, 2011). Truth is, therefore, relational for it constitutes connections between persons that move beyond their differences. Truth carries the potential to alter persons, particularly the truth encountered in the other. Truth, particularly religious truth, can be therefore understood as being "one, relational, transformative and dynamic" (Lane, 2011, p. 124). In this thesis religious truth is understood as universal, but also bifocal. Religious truth, for example, not only accepts an apprehension of that which is truly human, but also an apprehension of the heart of religion often accounted for as "the Ultimate, a 'no-thing', the Holy, the Sacred, the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, God" (p. 124).

Religious truth is also pragmatic in that it emerges from the practice of dialogue and works towards freedom and the liberation of others (Tracy, 2010) . In this way, religious truth is never merely an informative detail, an explanation of the world in which one dwells, nor simply a theory about existence. Religious truth, therefore, should not be

understood in the same manner as the truth of empiricism, science or of 'pure' propositions or geometric statements. Religious truth, as Lane (2011) explains, is "relational, dynamic and above all participatory" (p. 124). Religious truth is not available for scientific examination or inspection for it is only encountered by way of the experience of personal participation. Following from this account of religious truth, this thesis understands religious reason to be open to the transcendent, the interplay that exists between faith and reason. The dialogue between faith and reason needs not result in one side being impoverished for the benefit of the other, but yields benefits for both faith *and* reason. In taking account of this dialectic, i.e. a two-way process or *conversation* between faith and reason, such conversation or dialogue can effect a reciprocal relationship of self-correction (Ratzinger, 1984). The Christian understanding of truth argues that truth is not only partial and unaccomplished, but is eschatological, and therefore presents a broader horizon within which truth is actively sought out by both faith and reason in a dialogical manner. It is within the particularity of this horizon that this thesis understands religious reason.

1.4. Structure of the Thesis

For the purpose of addressing the proposed research question, this thesis will be structured as follows:

Chapter Two considers the question: in what way does the question of truth present itself in the context of religious education in the Republic of Ireland today? It will be demonstrated that religious education in the Republic of Ireland has struggled in its relation to the question of truth. Chapter Two will argue that there has been an erosion of objective truth in religious education and that religious education has been forced

into polemical positions in its relation to truth, i.e. those that accept the existence of objective truth and those that deny its existence. In taking account of this insight, Chapter Two claims that there is an urgent need to attempt to identify the hermeneutical task of religious education in a manner that speaks to both religious and non-religious educational environments in the Republic of Ireland. Such a hermeneutical treatment is justified in Chapter Two by way of an analysis of the philosophical underpinnings of religious education in the Republic of Ireland.

In taking account of Chapter Two's argument that religious education is best understood as a hermeneutic activity, Chapter Three addresses this conception of religious education as a hermeneutic activity in greater detail and asks: what hermeneutics are at play and how do we deal with restrictive hermeneutics that are often present in religious education today? It will be argued that hermeneutics presents a constitutive turn in religious education. In recognising hermeneutics as a constitutive turn in religious education, the ground is laid for a critique of the hermeneutics of modern religious education. Chapter Three will argue that modern religious education fails to adequately address the question of truth as a consequence of the restrictive hermeneutic found at its centre. Whilst recognising that a variety of approaches to religious education have been offered in response to this restrictive hermeneutic that is often found at the heart of modern religious education, the proposals of a critical realist approach to religious education are explicitly considered. It will be argued that such an approach falls short – particularly in terms of its caricature of religions as mere true or false propositions. It will be posited that contemporary Catholic theology – particularly in terms of its treatment of truth, tradition, and the possibility of a God-beyond-being –

have something offer in terms of grappling with the question of truth in religious education.

Given the context of religious education in the Republic of Ireland, Chapter Four asks what Catholic theology contributes to discourse surrounding encounters with truth, tradition and a God-beyond-being? Chapter Four will demonstrate that contemporary Catholic theology presents a meaningful treatment of truth. It must be noted that this presentation of Catholic theological discourse on the question of truth is not exhaustive. From this analysis, it will be shown that truth, particularly in relation to religion, is only ever encountered in particular historical events and specific cultural forms and interpretations of experience. Following from this point, the centrality of tradition is discussed from the perspective of contemporary Catholic theology. By addressing tradition in this way, Chapter Four will illustrate that truth is always tradition specific, but tradition should be considered as living as opposed to something that is unchanging or static. Tradition, it will be argued, is subject to change as a result of contemporary encounters with revealed truth. Chapter Four will posited that the Christian narrative it is best understood as an open as opposed to closed narrative – one that not only fosters an openness to encountering truth or the Other, but to the change that ensues as a result of such encounters.

From this standpoint, Chapter Four will argue that one must refrain from a domestication of God – where God is reduced to the limited existence of finite beings and the limitations of their linguistic and cognitive capacities. Chapter Four, therefore, will demonstrate that there is much to be garnered from an exploration of the post-Heideggerian de-ontological theology. It will be demonstrated that such postmodern-

theology has much to offer in terms of its treatment of God and truth. In particular, Jean-Luc Marion's reclamation of an apophatic approach, albeit from a postmodern phenomenological perspective, challenges one to transcend the limitations of modern or enlightenment rationality and to embrace a God without being. Chapter Four will show that the fragile hermeneutical encounter between the person and the wholly Other is best understood as an event in which the givenness of God or truth moves towards the person.

Given the emergent hermeneutical context in the Republic of Ireland, Chapter Five asks: what does philosophical hermeneutics contribute to understandings of the encounter with truth? It will explore Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, especially his account of the emergence of truth in the experience of art. In particular, Gadamer's reconstruction of the question of hermeneutics and his response to the charge of relativism will be addressed. In order to equip the reader for a meaningful engagement with Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, Chapter Five will begin by firstly offering an account of: [1] hermeneutical circles, and [2] what is a 'philosophical' hermeneutics. By addressing these two themes the ground is set for a meaningful consideration of the question of truth and philosophical hermeneutics. Chapter Five will secondly address Gadamer's reconstruction of the question of hermeneutics. Thirdly, Gadamer's response to the charge of relativism is considered. In taken account of these aspects of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, Chapter Five offers the philosophical foundation that will ultimately orientate the attempted articulation of the hermeneutical task of religious education in the Republic of Ireland.

Following from this philosophical foundation, which is ultimately grounded in Gadamerian insights, Chapter Six will argue that religious education is a space in which the *happening* character of education manifests itself by way of a hermeneutical orientation towards meaningful encounters with truth, i.e. truth-events. In this context, Chapter Six draws upon the rich theological insights raised in Chapter Four and the insights of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics outlined in Chapter Five to assist with this effort by identifying seven key correlating insights. Chapter Six will attempt to offer an account of the hermeneutical task of religious education in the Republic of Ireland that is not only philosophically, but also theologically viable. The account that is offered in Chapter Six will serve as the source from which key principles can be discerned that may assist in the future developments of religious education in the Republic of Ireland. Chapter Six will argue that these five key principles must be taken seriously in religious education if it is to adequately address the question of truth.

Chapter Two

The Question of Truth and Religious Education in the Republic of Ireland

2.1. Introduction

This chapter will consider the question: in what way does the question of truth present itself in the context of religious education in the Republic of Ireland today? It will argue that religious education in the Republic of Ireland is challenged in two directions. These trajectories are discerned by way of the following headings: [1] a post-Christian and post-secular context, [2] the erosion of objective truth in religious education, and [3] faith-based RE or non-faith based religious education. It will be demonstrated that religious education takes place in an age that is best characterised as a *post*-Christian and *post*-Secular age. Within this context, this chapter will illustrate that the question of truth is of central importance to religious education. In this regard, it will be shown that there has been an erosion of objective truth in religious education in the Republic of Ireland. It will be argued that, the current post-Christian and post-Secular context as well as the erosion of objective truth have challenged religious education in the Republic of Ireland in two broad directions in terms of the question of truth. In discerning these two broad approaches to the question of truth, this chapter will argue that there is a need for a treatment of the hermeneutical dimension of religious education in the Republic of Ireland.

This chapter offers a justification for such a hermeneutical treatment through an analysis of the contemporary context of religious education in the Republic of Ireland under the following four observations: [1] irruptions from the periphery and the return to religion, [2] the theological matrix, [3] the status of religion, and [4] the position of students and teachers in religious education classes. From this analysis, it is discerned

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that the need for a hermeneutical approach presents itself as an emerging issue within the realm of religious education in the Republic of Ireland. It will be argued, therefore, that religious education is best understood as a hermeneutic undertaking. It will be claimed, however, that before one can develop the concept of religious education as a hermeneutic activity, it is necessary to recognise two key precursors to such an understanding: [1] multi-disciplinary frame of reference, and [2] the institutional context of religious education. In giving attention to these two key features, the ground is laid for a more detailed treatment of religious education as a hermeneutic activity and analysis of the hermeneutics of contemporary religious education in Chapter Three.

2.2. Religious Education in the Republic of Ireland: Challenged in Two Directions

This section argues that religious education has followed two broad but distinct approaches to the question of truth – 'education in religion and spirituality from the inside' and 'education in religion and spirituality from the outside' (Hession, 2015, pp. 111-119, Hanan Alexander and Terence H. McLaughlin, 2003, pp. 356-373). It argues that reason and enquiry in the context of religious education, as in other areas of education, are reliable routes to meaning, knowledge and truth. While there is more to religious education than the pursuit of religious knowledge and truth by way of religious or spiritual enquiry, this section proposes that at a fundamental level there has been a failure to appreciate the claim to truth of religious education, particularly in terms of the validity of religious belief in any objective sense in the Republic of Ireland. It is argued that such positions are a consequence of the contemporary context in which religious education is taking place in the Republic of Ireland, a context which has ultimately led to the erosion of objective truth in terms of religious belief.

Consequently, such an erosion has significant implications in terms of which religion(s), if any, young people are introduced to or *how* they are introduced to it.

It is reasonable to expect that any traditional academic subject should be capable of being made good sense of as a rational form of knowledge or enquiry focused upon the discernment of truths of one sort or another concerning the world or human affairs. For a variety of ecclesiological, theological, epistemological, social, ethical and pedagogical reasons, however, the curricular area of RE has internationally been somewhat problematic in this regard (Kieran, 2013; Byrne. 2013; Cullen, 2017; Anderson et. al., 2016). While the context of religious education in the United Kingdom is different to that of the Republic of Ireland, David Carr (1994) suggests that such problems arise from the fact that there has been significant confusion, prompted by the work of empiricists, positivists and deconstructionist thinkers, which has been allowed to obscure the nature of religious enquiry as a viable rational enterprise.

In the Republic of Ireland, religious education has been shaped principally by the Catholic tradition which assumes the existence of objective truth which can be known as God and all other truth claims flow from this objective truth, i.e. God. Faith-based religious education, regardless of the specific faith tradition, assumes the existence of such objective truth. This designation, i.e. God as objective truth, is not and cannot be made by other non-faith based approaches to religious education. Rather, such approaches replace God as objective truth with human rights, or with the paradoxical postmodern designation that the only objective truth that exists is that there is no such thing as *the* truth (obviously an inherently contradictory position). The acceptance of the existence of objective truth does not imply that knowledge of this objective truth

can be approached in a detached manner akin to some mode of pure objectivity. The existence of objective truth, or even the possibility of its existence, forces the person to respond to the claim being made by way of a truth response. An understanding of objective truth as recounted thus far, refutes any conception of neutrality in relation to the question of truth, not only in religious education but also in the wider educational enterprise as well as in wider society. The validity of ultimate truth claims, as well as the manner in which one engages with them, has been influenced dramatically by accelerated secularisation, de-traditionalisation and pluralism of belief. This contemporary context has come to be referred to as a *post*-Christian and *post*-Secular context; it is within this horizon that the two trajectories taken up in religious education to the question of truth have taken shape in the Republic of Ireland, i.e. [a] approaches that operate from the presumption that objective truth exists, and [b] approaches that are sceptical of any claim to objective truth.

2.2.1. A Post-Christian and Post-Secular Context

In attempting to give an adequate account of the contemporary context within which religious education finds itself in the Republic of Ireland, a useful comparison presents itself by way of the context that has emerged in Belgium and Flanders. For instance, both the Republic of Ireland and Flanders have followed very similar trajectories in terms of demographic change, particularly in the movement from having a predominately Catholic population to an increasingly diverse and plural society (Anderson, et al., 2016; OCED, 2006; Smyth et al., 2009). The influence of Catholic theology in the development of religious education in Belgium and Flanders is also, to a certain extent, comparable to religious education in the Republic of Ireland (Nieuwenhove, 2013). Theologians such as Lieven Boeve (2012) describe the

contemporary context in which educational discourse is taking place across Europe as being "*post-Christian* and *post-Secular*" (Lane, 2013; Franck and Thalén, 2020; Bengston, 2016). The term '*post*' as used in this context does not imply 'after', that is that both realities and their effects have disappeared. Rather, in Europe, there has been a significant shift in the way in which people relate to religion and to the secularisation thesis. Within this cultural context, the above categories, and the use of the term '*post*', are attempting to convey that the way which the person and wider society relate to the Christian faith and to secularisation has changed (Boeve, 2012). Boeve (2012) states that the category 'post-Christian' suggests that:

> Although the traces of Christian faith in our society and culture, in our collective and individual identity formation, are still present in abundance, at the same time the Christian faith is no longer the obvious, accepted background that grants meaning. (p.145).

The category 'post-Secular' directs attention to the fact that "the presuppositions of the secularisation thesis no longer apply" (p. 145). In other words, the central presupposition of the secularisation thesis, that modernism in society leads to the almost inevitable disappearance of religion, has emerged as being an erroneous position. The categories '*post-Christian*' and '*post-Secular*' have not escaped criticism. Theologian, Dermot Lane, has expressed a discomfort with such categories. Lane (2013) argues that to talk about a 'post-secular-society' is problematic insofar as "it implies a chronological development where religion went away for a time and has now come back" (p. 8). Whilst expressing this concern Lane concedes that one can empathise with writers in using such categories, particularly when the complexity of the reality that they are attempting to mediate is recognised.

The emergence and complexity of this new European context has a direct correlation with the growing influence of postmodern culture during the late twentieth century and the early twenty-first century (Hogan, 2017; Irwin, 2017; Anderson et al., 2016; Kieran, 2013; Nieuwenhove, 2013). Postmodern culture is characterised by a worldview that is sceptical of explanations claiming to be valid for all groups, cultures, traditions or races (Tuohy, 2013, p. 177). Rather, it emphasises the importance of the relative truths held by each person. Consequently, there is a dismissal of metanarratives and an elevation of the concrete experience of each individual. Put simply, from a postmodern perspective there is no validity to claims of 'Ultimate truth'. Rather, each person interprets reality for themselves and it is through this hermeneutic, this 'construct', that the person 'creates' meaning. Such a position gives rise to fallible and relative understandings by way of a total denial of any manner of philosophical realism, i.e. that the world exists independent of our observations of it.

According to David Tuohy (2013) the effects of this postmodern approach can be observed in four aspects of modern culture: [1] pluralism of beliefs, [2] individualisation, [3] secularisation, and [4] radicalisation. In a similar manner to Tuohy (2013), Boeve (2012) suggests that the current context is better spoken of in terms of "detraditionalisation, individualism and pluralisation" (p. 144). This analysis of the current context demonstrates a significant shift in perspective: "from an analysis in terms of secularisation (that extends religious positions on a continuum between practising Christian' and 'convinced atheist') […] to an analysis in terms of detraditionalisation, individualisation and pluralisation of religion, in which these three processes take advantage of and strengthen each other" (p. 144).

As a consequence of this shift, Boeve (2003a) states that "coming to terms with the problem of meaning in today's world is a matter that obliges us to account for the fact that religions and worldviews are characterised by their plurality" (p. 3). In other words, one is confronted with "a plural field of a multitude of positions, which are related to each other, which possibly influence each other, learn from each other, question each other, conflict, even repudiate and fight" (Boeve, 2003a, p. 145; Cullen, 2017). Within this contemporary context, one must recognise the fundamental difference between "the *social processes themselves* ['–isations'] and the various *ways by which these processes themselves are evaluated and handled* ['-isms']" (Boeve, 2012, p. 145). The social process of 'detraditionalisation', as Boeve (2012) describes, is "the process by which traditions, religious as well as other traditions [gender, family, professional context], no longer naturally transfer from one generation to another" (p. 145; Tuohy, 2013). He notes that this process [detraditionalisation] "presses ahead in our society independent of individual preferences and decisions" (Boeve, 2012, p. 145).

Detraditionalisation is not axiomatically the same as nihilism and/or the loss of tradition. For example, Boeve (2012) highlights that "traditions often remain, in changeable forms, as horizons of meaning in which identity is devised and found" (p. 145; Mc Guckin et al., 2014; Cullen, 2019). In this way, detraditionalisation indicates that the manner in which people relate to tradition has changed. Boeve (2012) argues that this change emerges from the fact that "tradition no longer has an obvious character, [thus] it becomes potentially more reflexive" (p. 145). This point also pertains to those who make "traditional, classical choices today" [i.e. partner relations, child rearing, ethical and religious positions] in that such "choices are no longer self-evident" (p. 145). Boeve (2012) claims that "it is precisely this refusal of the reflexive

character of belonging to a tradition, which contains a combination of involvement and distancing, which characterizes a neo-traditional*ist* or fundamental*ist* association with tradition" (p. 145; Kieran, 2008).

On this point it is important to consider that other side of detraditionalisation – individualisation. Individualisation expresses "the structural given that identity is assigned, but that it should be actively taken on in increasing measure" (Boeve, 2012, p. 146). 'Individualisation' presents itself as the other side of detraditionalisation. Individualisation presents identity as something that is 'constructed'. Here, one must distinguish between the process [-isation] and the manner in which the process is evaluated or handled [-ism]. Of particular importance to this discussion is the distinction between individual*isation* and individual*ism.* For instance, individualism "stands for a specific way of dealing with the process of individualisation, namely one in which the individual's preference constitutes the all-determining norm" (p. 146; Irwin, 2013). Boeve (2012) explains that "individualisation does not preclude the possibility that individuals, in constructing their identities, might choose precisely against individualism" (p. 146). Similarly, individualisation does not imply that there are no determining hidden influences or environmental factors with regard to identity construction (p. 146; Mc Guckin et al., 2014; Kieran, 2008).

Pluralisation and pluralism are not interchangeable terms. Boeve (2012) in making this point states that "plural*isation* is [not the same as plural*ism* and/or relativ*ism* [with neo-traditional*ism* and fundamental*ism* as counter reactions]" (p. 146; Nieuwenhove, 2013). Boeve (2012) outlines that "pluralisation implies that each identity is structurally challenged to conceive of itself in relation to difference and otherness – especially to

the effect of other truth claims to its own claim" (p. 146). He argues that "this is a necessary step to be taken by all religious positions, and also has implications for the organisation of the public realm in a multicultural society" (p. 146). It is specifically within this context that one encounters the question of equal and mutual recognition of religious positions [i.e. religious truth claims, or claims of Ultimate truth] (Cullen, 2017). Boeve (2012) notes that it is also where "the different reactions of intolerance, passive and active tolerance manifest themselves" (p. 146). These three processes as outlined by Boeve "both determine and apply to classical religious and atheistic positions" (p. 146).

Boeve (2012) highlights that "against the background of detraditionalisation and pluralisation identity construction occurs here also in an individualized manner" (p. 146; Cullen, 2019; Mc Guckin et al., 2014). This does not, however, "preclude that what is analysed individually-structurally as an individualized choice is experienced on a religious-spiritual level, for example, as a vocation [being chosen]" (Boeve, 2012, p. 146). Nevertheless, it can be said that, if the question of truth is to be adequately addressed it is necessary not only to acknowledge the important distinction between –*ism* and –*isations*, but to acknowledge the centrality of the three –*isations* or processes: detraditionalisation, individualisation and pluralisation to the contemporary context in which one posits the question of truth.

As noted earlier in this discussion, Habermas (2010) argues that there is a need for a novel dialogue between religious reason and secular reason. Other theorists such as Judith Butler et al., (2011), however, have reservations about the conditions laid down by Habermas for such dialogue in that the translation between the religious and the

secular appears to be only one way. Such writers claim that Habermas proposes a context for dialogue that fails to recognise that religion cannot be translated into a secular language without a remainder, i.e. religion is stripped of its unique transcendent reality, its otherness. Anglican theologian, Nigel Biggar (2009) reaffirms this point, stating that 'the translation proposed [by writers such as Habermas] eliminates the strangeness, difference and otherness that religion brings to the table' (p. 317).

The translation proposed by Habermas gives expression to a narrowing of reason. Such a narrowing of reason, according to Jean-Luc Marion (2008), is 'the most profound crisis of our era' as this restricted rationality has little to say about the human condition, about what we are, what we can know, what we must do, and what we are allowed to hope for. While many writers have reservations regarding the conditions for dialogue proposed by Habermas, it is important that the proposition of such dialogue is welcomed if a contemporary society is to be understood as diverse, pluralist and inclusive (Kieran, 2013, Byrne, 2013a). A truly inclusive horizon in such a pluralist context is not always achieved in the context of the Republic of Ireland. This point is affirmed by Marie Céline Clegg (2019) who observes that there exists "an understandable tendency to focus on minority or alternative groups" that can often times lead to "lesser emphasis on the rights of long-established groups" (p. 21). It must be recognised, therefore, that the conditions laid down for dialogue between religious reason and secular reason present significant implications for religious education.

2.2.2. *The Erosion of Objective Truth in Religious Education*
The insights raised above suggest that the objective character of religious truth is being seriously eroded. The position that the truth(s) of a particular faith tradition may

actually be true, at least in some substantial objective sense, is being clouded by the view that such truth(s) are merely some non-cognitive attitude or emotional response to the deep mystery of the created order (Carr, 1994). The wider genesis of this dispute can be found in: [1] Schleiermacher's claim that religious beliefs are merely expressions of religious experience as opposed to realistic cognitive propositions, and [2] Kant's position that knowledge is determined by the mind acting in response to phenomenal experience (Wright, 2004).

An example of how such an approach may be taken up can be seen in the context of recent developments and proposals set out in Irish education (NCCA, 2015; NCCA, 2018; NCCA, 2020; DES, 2018a; DES, 2018b). Such initiatives seem to be animated by a deep current of scepticism concerning religious belief and its place within the public sphere (Nieuwenhove, 2013). Such actions give voice, consciously or less so, to the positivist claim that religious statements are meaningless because they are unverifiable (Wright, 2004). This scepticism is directed at those implications of religious belief that appear to be at odds with rational scientific knowledge. Yet, it must be recognised too that such scepticism is animated by a principal opposition to those implications of faith-formation which appear to be at variance with contemporary social views about the freedom of the individual (Carr, 1994; Nieuwenhove, 2013).

It is evident that ethical, social, political and religious differences frequently have socially divisive, even combative consequences – not least in social contexts in which a high degree of plurality and diversity is attained among the value preferences of their members (Carr, 1994; Kieran, 2013). In this manner, liberal democratic forms of political administration and organisation can be regarded as strategies for what it is

hoped might be impartial arbitration and negotiation between different potentially conflicting moral, social and religious perspectives (Carr, 1994). Such strategies are often designed to limit and curtail what might be understood as the clamorous demands of particular sectarian interest groups within a given society (Nieuwenhove, 2013). All of this is to be achieved by the adoption of a particular stance of 'detached neutrality' with respect to what may be believed in substantive terms by different social, political and religious parties (Carr, 1994, p. 226). This detached neutrality insists that the claims of one party to a knowledge of what is true, right or good in the realm of socially significant beliefs or opinions are treated as no more or less worthy of a serious hearing than those of another.

A consequence of this strategy is that it can all too easily become a procedural agnosticism that routinely dismisses the truth value of religious claims and beliefs (Hogan, 2017, p. 88). In the context of public schooling the liberal state's desire for neutrality, or to minimise offence, means that religious beliefs are treated with scepticism (DES, 2018a; DES, 2018b). A similar point is made by Michael Hand (2004) in his treatment of whether non-confessional religious education is logically possible. Hand (2004) identifies himself with the realistic turn in contemporary religious education accepting the premise that "understanding a unique form of knowledge involves holding certain presuppositions of that form to be true or false" (p. 25). In other words, to understand religion is to hold particular propositions to be either true or false. In this context, Hand is speaking of truth claims such as the reality of God, or some other transcendent being or ultimate reality, as such claims are either affirmed or rejected by the religious believer or the atheist.

Hand's work is significant in that it challenges any restriction of RE in the public sphere to the study of religion as some historical, psychological and socio-cultural phenomena. He argues against an approach that either completely ignores the realistic truth claims affirmed by religious traditions or at best merely offers a description of them. This even greater agnosticism about whether there can in fact be any rational basis for articles of religious faith beyond the disposition of the faithful to confess them is fortified further by the old empiricist distinction between 'facts' and 'values'. Empiricist philosophers work out of the theoretical tradition know as empiricism. This philosophical tradition argues that sensory experience is the foundation of all knowledge (Cottingham, 2008). This distinction (i.e. between facts and values), which operates within the context of liberalism with particular ease, is commensurate in empiricism to a distinction between what is rational and objective in human enquiry and preference (i.e. fact) and what is, by contrast, subjective and non-rational (i.e. value) (Carr, 1994, p. 226).

The culmination of all of the above is that it has come to be quite commonly held that religious views should not be taught in schools in any way which suggests they might be true for what would appear to be a confused mixture of two reasons: [1] on the liberal ground that particular religious beliefs are matters of personal preference rather than common interest concerning which individuals are entitled to their own, potentially opposing opinions, and [2] on the epistemologically sceptical basis that such beliefs are the sort of personal opinions for which there can be no reasonable or rational foundation (Carr, 1994; Hand, 2004; Nugent and Donnelly, 2013). When one takes the above discussion into account, it becomes clear that it has become inevitable that the critiques of realist epistemologies, and the emergence of non-realist theories of knowledge, such as those of pragmatists and coherentists (James, 2019; Thagard, 2019), would come to

exercise influence on the work of educationalists with regard to the nature of teaching and learning (Irwin, 2013).

This post-modern or new age marriage of philosophical and psychological views has led to what is commonly referred to as a *constructivist* concept of knowledge acquisition. Of particular interest here is the epistemological perspective of a radically 'thick' postmodern constructivism (Barkin, 2010, p. 26). Such a position emphasises the Nietzschean slogan that "there are no facts, only interpretations" (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 267). This perspective presents a very limited understanding of hermeneutics, the science of interpretation, by reducing it to a mere methodology. This view is less than adequate as it fails to appreciate that hermeneutics is far more than a methodology. Contrary to realist epistemologies which view knowledge as being based on 'what is out there in the world', i.e. the world is real and not constructed, the epistemological perspective of a radically postmodern constructivism moves that all knowledge including that of science is constructed. In a wholly thick postmodern constructivist horizon of knowledge-acquisition any meaningful criterion of objective enquiry and truth such as the kind considered by classical epistemological realists evaporates. A wholly constructivist approach is predominately an exercise of the creation of personal models of reality. These models possess little in terms of supporting an appeal to any manner of objectivity beyond that of the internal coherence of the experiences of what constructs them.

It is important for educationalists to be clear about the pitfalls and dangers of such constructivist thinking, i.e. 'thick' postmodern constructivism (Barkin, 2010). In particular, educationalists need to heed caution in terms of this 'thick' constructivist

mode of knowledge acquisition, its pedagogy and initiation into religious enquiry as it is common to encounter an apology or defence of something akin to a notion of religious education that is perhaps best accounted for under the generic rubric of 'personal search'. No unique issues emerge, for example, concerning the objective truth of religious knowledge from a radically constructivist position, at least not in realist terms. This point follows from the fact that no such problems can emerge within a thick constructivist horizon, not only about religious knowledge but about *any* form of knowledge. Even those so-called 'precise' forms of scientific knowledge, i.e. physics, mathematics etc., are to be considered as mere social constructs. Social constructs are no more answerable to some independent order of objective reality than any of the allegedly less exact moral and social sciences.

On this point the following question must be raised: is it not a rather exorbitant cost to incur for the apology of religious enquiry as a valid pathway to human knowledge to call into doubt the objectivity of all those forms of natural scientific investigation that have come to be commonly considered as being so successful concerning the explanation and understanding of an order of independent objective reality? It must be recognised too, however, that constructivist approaches such as those of neo-classical constructivism or even recent attempts to develop a realist constructivism at least signal to the notion of an objective reality by way of the notion of inter-subjectivity (Barkin, 2010, p. 26). Contrary to a wholly 'thick' postmodern constructivism, a neo-classical or 'thin' constructivism speaks of an inter-subjectivity within which there is at least the potential to integrate a mode of philosophical realism, i.e. the world exists independent of our observations of it, while at one and the same time acknowledging that not all

parts of this objective reality are directly observable to the person in any wholly objective manner.

From this discussion, it is evident that, if any understanding is to be arrived at in terms of the difference between knowledge that is capable of speaking to an objective world and that which speaks only to a constructed world, it is necessary to uphold a significant distinction, as Carr (1994) explains,

> …between subjective human experience as expressed in this or that epistemic state and a world of independent objective reality by reference to which it is possible to judge such states to be true or false, correct or incorrect (p. 225).

If this distinction is not upheld the epistemological subject is confined and constrained within the circle of his or her own thoughts, as Carr (1994) affirms,

> …either solipsistically on individualist accounts of knowledge acquisition or, in the case of social or intersubjective conceptions, as the member of a given epistemological community (p. 225).

In such a context, any possibility of a truly meaningful encounter with the other is removed, and therefore, so too any possibility of being transformed by the other. In this way, then, if any understanding of knowledge is to be considered adequate or at least respectable, it is essential that the notion of objective truth is considered to be a central goal of human enquiry (Topley, 2008; Lonergan, 1983). This point is fundamental to the acceptance of the proposition that a person's enquiries may bring them somewhere by way of an appreciation of that "which exists beyond the otherwise uncertain contents of one's mind" (Carr, 1994, p. 225). On this point, the folly of embracing a wholly

postmodern or 'thick' constructivist position becomes clear – one finds oneself in the grips of relativism thereby utterly eroding the particularity that is so characteristic of religious truth claims.

This section is not proposing that the pursuit of religious knowledge and truth through religious or spiritual enquiry is *all* that there is to religious education (Byrne, 2017; Sullivan, 2017; Hession, 2015). Rather, the point being made here is that it cannot be a matter of indifference for religious education which religion(s) or fundamental life option, if any, young people are introduced to or *how* they are introduced to it; not, that is, if reason and enquiry are to make the same sort of sense in religious education as they undoubtedly should in other areas of education – as reliable routes to meaning, knowledge and truth. In taking seriously the realistic truth claims affirmed by religious traditions, a critical openness is sustained within religious education (Topley, 2008). This openness is facilitated by shifting the orientation of religious education away from the array of moral challenges encountered by open democratic societies in addressing the existence of a plurality of religious and secular traditions and towards the pursuit of ultimate truth.

In this way then, it can be argued that if effective dialogue is to occur between religious reason and secular reason, religious knowing must be understood as being a necessary condition to facilitate an appropriate recognition of the *difference* that exists between religious reason and secular reason. This approach enables not only '*learning about*' religions and belief, but also '*learning from*' and '*learning into*' religions and beliefs by being open to the other (Hession, 2013; McGrady et al., 2008; Hull, 2001). From this standpoint, it is clear that an approach to religious education that facilitates

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'religious knowing' by way of encounters with truth presents a richer understanding of religions and fundamental life options. It also suggests a more dynamic hermeneutic, one that is receptive to revealed truth, i.e. truth that exists independent of the interpreter, but is ultimately disclosed or given in the encounter with truth, by being open to genuine diversity and inclusion in a pluralist society through its accommodation, recognition and openness to difference.

2.2.3. Faith Based RE or Non-Faith Based RE?

A central question in the Republic of Ireland has been whether RE should take a faith-based or a non-faith based approach. There are significant conversations currently taking place within the primary sector in the Republic of Ireland in terms of redeveloping the whole primary school curriculum (NCCA, 2020). As outlined earlier in this discussion, the experience of Belgium and Flanders presents a useful comparison when considering the contemporary context of religious education in the Republic of Ireland (OECD, 2006; Emer Smyth et al., 2009). In the context of Belgium and Flanders, Boeve (2012) outlines that many thinkers have become critical of the 1999 religious education curriculum concerning its preferred option for the Christian faith. He states that such critics argue that "the time has come for a non-confessional religious education that introduces the various religions/fundamental life options that a pluralised field recognises" (p. 147). Furthermore, such critics identify themselves as taking up an "active-pluralist position" and emphasise that the time has arrived for a shift to occur "from 'education into religion' to 'education about religion(s)'" (p. 147).

2.2.3.1. The Active Pluralist Approach

While thinkers have proposed a variety of differing formulations of this proposal, such as J. De Groof et al. (2010) and Patrick Loobuyck and Leni Franken (2009) among others, their work ultimately leads to the same conclusion: "it would be better to replace the confessional RE courses provided by the Roman Catholic Church, and by the other religious groups; or at least to complement them with a general religious education that no longer has a privileged tie to one specific religious tradition" (Boeve, 2012, p. 147). Boeve argues that a new curriculum "would be the logical consequence of the changed religious context, because only in such a course can young people be adequately prepared for an active-pluralist society" (p. 147; Franken and Loobuyck, 2017; Irwin, 2013).

Furthermore, active pluralists call for a reciprocal and active recognition of plurality and difference, "against, on the one hand, secularism (which has no place for religion in the public space) and, on the other, religious intolerance" (Boeve, 2012, p. 147). J. De Groof et al. (2010) argue:

> A decent society asks along with reciprocal recognition of secular and religious views for forms of reciprocal recognition which go further than passive tolerance […] No one has to give up his/her own truth, but reciprocal willingness to listen and learn is certainly a condition for a peaceful coexistence and social cohesion (p. 8).

Briefly stated, "such a general religious education should deal with the religious literacy of the pupils and assist them in identity development, so that they will not fall into religious indifference" (Boeve, 2012, p. 147; Irwin, 2013). On this point, Boeve (2012) argues that one should heed the following warning: "such a programme does not necessarily follow from the analysis proffered [see above discussion], but that it is

already one specific answer to the current situation [post-Christian/post-Secular age]" (p. 147). The proposals of the new curriculum, Boeve claims, "fit just as well in a value-laden programme" and what is more, "these alternative proposals are no less value laden than the 1999 RE Curriculum" (p. 147; Hession, 2015).

Boeve (2012) discerns that an inherent shift is operative in the proposal of establishing an active-pluralist religious education that aims to introduce pupils to all of the religious traditions, namely: "a shift from description to programme" (p. 147). Such a proposal is far from neutral in relation to "religions and fundamental life options, because it holds very clear ideas regarding the way in which religions should deal with their own truth claims" (Boeve, 2012, p.147; Flannery, 2019; Nieuwenhove, 2013; Merrigan, 2013). Further, it presupposes religions and fundamental life options that are already capable of dealing with plurality and difference (Nieuwenhove, 2013).

Boeve (2009) recognises that he is likewise engaging with such questions by way of a theological approach. He argues, however, that his approach is no less value laden than that being proposed by active-pluralists (Boeve, 2012; Hession, 2015; McGrady, 2013). Boeve's (2012) approach is far from neutral: "it presupposes a very specific set of values in which dialogue, openness to others, recognition of plurality; respect for singularity and difference, are central" (pp. 147-148). Boeve (2012) claims that this set of values sets itself apart from "secular neutrality, religious indifference and relativism, and religious fundamentalism" (p. 148). From this standpoint, a number of questions present themselves regarding the value-laden character of the active-pluralist proposal.

In terms of the proposals offered by active-pluralists one is faced with the following questions: from where do these values originate? Are such values merely evident in the religious sphere as a mode of meta- or instantaneous level above or between a range of fundamental life options and religions? Are they part of a single tradition, or do they come from a variety of traditions? Are these values some kind of common wisdom that have been constructed in light of the conflicts that occurred between fundamental life options? Do said values exist separately from the tradition(s) out of which they grew? Or does the relation to such traditions remain necessary to sense these values, to take them on and to enhance them? Moreover, is it rather presumptuous, if not precarious, to assume that any manner of consensus could be arrived at in relation to such a set of values?

In giving attention to such questions, another question is encountered: if religious education is to set about practicing such a set of values, is an education merely 'about religion' sufficient in and of itself? For instance, Boeve (2012) asks:

> Is Religious Education that is limited to learning about religious traditions not *too narrow,* if it is not paired, at the same time, with a reflection on one's own religious position and the manner in which one deals with diversity and difference (both on the level of knowledge and of commitment)? (p. 148)

If such reflection does not occur on the level of commitment as well as knowledge, a Religion Education curriculum could ultimately move toward "religious relativism or indifference" (Boeve, 2012, p. 148). This raises an even more pressing question: if religious education is conceived and practiced as such, i.e. as a broad religious education about a range of fundamental life options and religions, does it not present itself as merely but a variation of the neutral-secular manner of addressing religious

plurality: one which fails to recognise its own value commitment? Or, as Boeve (2012) asks, "does such Religious Education aim precisely at contributing to a specific religious position of its own kind – a position that fits with a kind of vague religiosity which is cobbled out of a plurality of traditions?" (p. 148). If so, such an approach would become yet another confessional RE in its own right, one directed towards the service of *post*-Christian and *post*-secular religiosity.

Another question presents itself concerning the manner in which RE as conceived above addresses the tension that is evident between "individualised identity construction and adherence to tradition" (Boeve, 2012, p. 148). In particular, one must ask whether the active-pluralist proposal actually takes account of what individualisation means? Boeve (2012) outlines that the active-pluralist proposal suggests that there is a large majority of highly individualised persons who construct their own identity, freely and autonomously using material from classical traditions and other sources. Such persons, therefore, possess a non-tradition bound identity. Active-pluralists contrast such persons "with a smaller group of 'orthodox' people whose identity is determined by a single religious tradition" who, therefore, possess a single tradition-bound identity (p. 148). When this proposal and its contrast with the smaller cohort are considered in greater detail, it is apparent that there are contours of, or even a new version of, the secularisation thesis at play and evidenced through its zero-sum theorising. Such an approach, for example, proposes that "the more individualisation, the less tradition, and the opposite: the more tradition, the less individualisation" (Boeve, 2012, p. 149).

As outlined earlier in this discussion concerning de-traditionalisation and individualisation, the above active-pluralist position fails to grasp the complexity of the current context. This position fails to recognise that reflexive belonging operates within the context of those who construct their identity from a single tradition. This point is of particular importance to the manner in which one approaches religious education. This point is also highlighted by Boeve who argues that "it will be precisely that kind of religious position that will have acquired the ability to deal with difference, dialogue and mutual recognition from the perspective of its own religious tradition" (Boeve, 2012, p. 149; Flannery, 2019; Byrne, 2013b). On this point it becomes apparent yet again that the active-pluralist position, if it proceeds with the proffered position (NCCA, 2015; NCCA, 2018; NCCA, 2020; ET, 2011; CNS, 2018), cannot claim to take up a neutral position in relation to religious traditions or any tradition for that matter. Rather, Boeve (2012) states that "it is a position of its own kind, itself to be situated as only one position in the field of religious diversity" (p. 148).

Finally, there is another tension worth considering in terms of the proffered active-pluralist position: namely, the tension that exists between the lack of real identity formation or construction that has emerged from de-traditionalisation on the one hand, and on the other, "the conditions for the possibility of an active-pluralist conversation, which in one way or another presupposes a degree of identity construction" (Boeve, 2012, p. 149). This point is further explicated by Boeve who asserts that if one is to be capable of taking part in a dialogue between religions and fundamental life options, and therefore, be capable of arriving at a dialogical identity construction in mutual recognition, then diversity and difference must be explicitly present. Interestingly, Boeve (2012) notes that in Flanders "such diversity is most obvious when people from

religions other than Christianity are involved in the conversation, but it is, in principle, to be made no less visible among Christians, post-Christians, atheists, agnostics, the indifferent etc." (p. 149).

From this standpoint, Boeve (2012) voices a word of caution in terms of dialogical identity formation. He outlines that if the "majority of people today do not arrive at a well-formed identity, pluralism – let alone active pluralism – is out of the question, and interreligious, dialogical identity construction remains but a beautiful dream" (p. 149). In other words, a dialogical, reflexive identity can only come to be when one brings their identity into relationship with the identity of the other (Cullen, 2017). In taking this point into account, it is clear that pupils ought to move towards perceiving their own truth claims within the context of their relationship to the other.

Such learning needs to move between the absolutising of pupil's own truth claims and the snare of relativism with the view to opening up a middle way. It is imperative, therefore, that plurality and difference are recognisable and "brought into a dialogical learning process, in the course of which each one's religious position is an issue, including the teacher's and the school's" (Boeve, 2012, p. 149). The antidote in terms of religious literacy, therefore, offers little consolation with regard to religious indifference. Rather, as Boeve (2012) outlines, it "remains knowledge without commitment if not involved in such a dialogical learning process" (p. 149; Cullen, 2017; Lane, 2013). The dialogue called for by Boeve (2012) presents significant challenges for religious education in the Republic of Ireland as elsewhere. It assumes that individuals are sufficiently grounded in their particular tradition prior to participating in such dialogue. Such an assumption does not correlate with the current

classroom context in the Republic of Ireland in that there is a significant degree of variation evident in this regard amongst pupils and teachers (McGrady et al., 2019a; Mc Guckin et al., 2014).

2.2.3.2. Moving Beyond 'Active Pluralism'

From this discussion, it is evident that the view that a non-faith based approach, such as that offered by an active pluralist perspective, provides an alternative or even superior approach to religious education than a faith-based approach finds itself in a rather precarious position (Tillson, 2011) – particularly in terms of addressing diversity and plurality. From the conclusions made in terms of an analysis of detraditionalisation, individualisation and pluralisation, and the set of values it moves towards realising, Boeve (2012) argues that "it is no longer clear why the proposed active-pluralist position alternative [to a confessional approach to RE] should be necessary – let alone superior" (p. 150). In fact, he suggests that "in principle, all Religious Education should be able to do so, when engaged in the dialogue of one's own tradition within the current context of plurality and difference" (Boeve, 2012, p. 150). A RE curriculum, therefore, should lead pupils "to become conscious of the inescapable religious character in every manner of human thinking, acting and living, and of the plurality which this involves" (Boeve, 2012, p.150; Marion, 2013; Lane, 2011; Lonergan, 1983).

In this way, then, as part of a faith-based RE curriculum pupils are invited and encouraged to consider their own identity within the context of engagement with other witnesses, "with a preferred position for the Christian faith, which is brought into the religious communication in a reflexively-engaged manner (at least by the teacher)" (Boeve, 2012, p. 150; CPPREC, 2015; Hession, 2013; Byrne, 2013b). Therefore, in

such a curriculum each pupil is moved "to arrive at religious maturity and interreligious conversation, whether they now are Christians, post-Christians, agnostic, Muslim, indifferent etc…" (Boeve, 2012, p. 150; SGN, 2010; CPPREC, 2015).

According to Boeve (2012) "if all (non-)confessional Religious Education curricula did this as well, there would be the additional advantage of also including the organised religions and world views in becoming reflexive" (p. 150). This is made possible by the fact that "all of them then would be challenged to work at reflecting upon their own truth claims in relation to diversity and difference" (p. 150). This position offers, perhaps, the most efficacious countermeasure to inclinations towards "neo-traditionalism and fundamentalism, which are often present in all of them" (p. 150). From this discussion, it is evident that in the current post-Christian and post-Secular European context, religious education is challenged in two directions. For Boeve, this challenge is characterised by a caring disposition in terms of the future of the Christian tradition, as well as a desire to meet the needs of the contemporary context which moves away from "the Christian culture and pluralises religiously" (p. 155; Boeve, 2004a).

In the context of the Republic of Ireland, the two dominant directions taken up by religious education can be discerned in broad terms as 'education in religion and spirituality from the inside' and 'education in religion and spirituality from the outside' (Hession, 2015; Hanan Alexander and Terence H. McLaughlin, 2003), or in more specific terms, as a denominational approach (i.e. predominately the approach of the Catholic Church and other organised religions), and a multi-denominational but increasingly non-denominational approach, (i.e. the approach of Community National Schools, Educate Together and evidenced in recent NCCA (2015; 2020) proposals).

Each of these approaches occupies a specific position in terms of the question of truth, none of which are value-free or neutral.

2.2.3.3. Freedom to Choose to Accept Faith

There appears to be an emergent position amongst many contemporary religious educators in schools that in no instance should a child be *intentionally* initiated into a given faith or taught that such a faith might be true because of a fear of indoctrination (NCCA, 2015; NCCA, 2020; CNS, 2018; ET, 2011). Rather, some educators would suggest that children may be taught *about* a faith only as an account of what many people have chosen to believe which should leave it open for pupils to accept the faith only if they so choose. The freedom of the individual to choose to accept faith is a central pillar to a Catholic approach to religious education. Faith *qua* Faith is a gift that must be *freely* accepted by the individual. For instance, in *Gaudium et Spes* one reads that humankind is "from the very circumstance of [its] origin… already invited to converse with God" (*GS*, par. 119). This point is emphasised by Karl Rahner (1963) in his notion of the 'supernatural existential'. He states that the human being "possesses an ontic and spiritual-personal capacity for communicating" with God (pp. 240-241).

Rahner speaks of the person, for example, as the hearer of the message and defines the hearer as a person and a subject. Fisher commenting on Rahner notes that the word 'person' signifies, "that the hearer cannot be reduced to a mere product of the forces that have shaped him or her" (Fisher, 2004, p. 7). In fact, the hearer not only has the ability to listen, "but to freely respond" to the message (p. 7). As expressed in the Gospel of John "No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me, and I will raise that person up on the last day" (Jn 6: 44). Moreover, the word 'Subject' also

has a technical meaning (Lonergan, 1983; Lonergan, 1972). Subjects are human beings capable of reflecting on themselves. The person has the capability to ask himself or herself what they really are, and as Fisher notes, about "what is their true self" (Fisher, 2004, p. 7).

The words of Rahner present human existence as being orientated towards the transcendent. According to Rahner, the hearer or person is a transcendent being. This point implies that humankind recognises that it is limited. It is by virtue of this awareness, however, that human beings imagine how they can surpass their limitations. It is this transcendence that presents choices. When a person chooses the better alternative, s/he is not only acting freely and responsibly, but s/he is realizing what God has called them to be. Thus, it is the message, which invites human beings to become what God means them to be, which is to be 'agents of salvation'. Such an understanding informs a Catholic approach to religious education in that pupils encounter the message of God revealed in Christ, but are free to respond in their own way. This freedom is not accommodated in approaches to religious education that attempt to bracket out '*learning from*' or '*learning into*' a particular tradition.

2.2.3.4. Values-Neutral Education

Such an attempted bracketing out is evidenced by the introduction of 'Education about Religion and Beliefs' (ERB) programmes across Europe, highlighting the challenges faced by education systems in attempting to accommodate the diversity that is evident within schools (Jackson, 2013). These programmes focus on 'learning *about*' different religions and beliefs, but do not facilitate 'learning *from*' or learning *into*' religions and beliefs as they seek to adopt a neutral stance regarding the validity of truth claims by

utilising the approach of ideological pluralism (Donovan, 1993). This approach moves that for a programme to be 'pluralist' it ought to take up an ideological project which strives to neutralise any authentic recognition of diversity by imposing a totalitarian apprehension of truth, i.e. there is only one truth, the truth of pluralism (Merrigan, 2013, p. 66).

It is important to note, however, that some think that there is no such thing as a value neutral education (Freire, 2005). On this point one is not implying that pupils should be *indoctrinated* into any particular faith. As outlined thus far, to force one to belief defeats the very notion of faith that is proclaimed by the Christian tradition. Rather, this point merely suggesting that to present religious truth as just that, 'truth', is not to move towards indoctrination (Topley, 2008). It must be recognised too that whether or not one takes a faith-based or non-faith based approach to religious education, both involve 'learning into' a particular tradition, i.e. a particular religion, philosophy, worldview etc. This insight is essential if the person is to not only enter into a meaningful conversation about the area of religious education, but also in terms of adequately addressing the post-Christian and post-Secular context in which religious education now finds itself. This point is also made by Boeve (2012). He outlines that such specificity or particularity must be openly acknowledged if religious education is to adequately address the contemporary pluralist context within which "each identity is structurally challenged to conceive of itself in relation to difference and otherness – especially to the effect of other truth claims to its own claim" (p. 146).

2.2.3.5. Epistemological Pluralism

This point can be observed when one recognises that each school community makes a unique contribution to the public square by virtue of the fact that every school educates from a particular worldview. In Ireland, each school is recognised as having its own 'ethos' or 'characteristic spirit'. The ethos of a school has a direct correlation with but is not limited to the way in which a school approaches RE (Hession, 2015). For instance, Catholic schools utilise a particular approach to RE, one that makes an explicit claim to ultimate truth. Further, contrary to an ERB programme, a Catholic approach to RE utilises the perspective of epistemological pluralism (Hession, 2015; Dillon, 2013). This approach moves that an authentic understanding of diversity is central if one is to be 'pluralist'. Epistemological pluralism recognises the existence of contrary truth claims, and proposes that the cause of truth is best served by way of discussion and argument (Merrigan, 2013, p. 66). This proposition is central to an appropriately contemporary approach to RE, particularly if it is to accommodate the "strangeness, difference and otherness" of religion (Biggar, 2009, p. 317).

In taking up the approach of epistemological pluralism, both 'participative knowing' and inter-faith engagement are central to Catholic religious education (Lane, 2011, p. 48; James, 1974). The transformation of one's 'prejudices' is at the centre of participative knowing and is brought about through dialogue with the other. This relationship between transformation and dialogue signals the value of inter-personal conversation in religious education, particularly in the area of inter-faith engagement. Contrary to an approach to religious education that moves solely towards the acquisition of a detached knowledge about religions or the *accents* of religions, such inter-personal conversation promotes an approach that moves towards facilitating an

openness to deeper relationship with the other through participation in a process of interpretation and understanding.

From this standpoint, a case can be made regarding the centrality of religious experience to a holistic religious education. For instance, if an approach to religious education utilises a mode of reason that operates solely towards acquiring 'religious knowledge', which is evident in the approach taken by ERB programmes (NCCA, 2015), the development of 'religious knowing' that is facilitated by religious experience is not accommodated. Rather, it is perceived as somehow irrational, and, therefore, not valid knowledge. Yet, 'religious knowing' is indispensable to one's understanding of religious reason in that 'religious knowing' presents reason as being inseparable from tradition (Gadamer, 2013). This point finds a unique yet clear articulation in the words of Karl Jaspers (1954) who asserts "thought which breaks away from tradition tends to become an empty seriousness" (p. 12).

2.2.3.6. Encountering the Fragile Hermeneutical Space of the Person

Religious education moves towards delving into the fragile hermeneutical space that is peculiar to the person. This is a fragile hermeneutical space where reality, even one's inner reality, is "radically marked by a form of polyphony, by a multiplicity of voices, by plurality" (Pollefeyt, 2020, p. 117). Religious education, it can be argued, should move towards opening this hermeneutical space up for children and young adults with the view to developing their capacity to interpret reality through both a philosophical and religious lens and encounter the truth that nothing is obvious, normal or simple. This understanding of the person operates from the perspective that each person, "without exception, religious or nonreligious, Christian or otherwise, is characterised

by this hermeneutical openness and that, by way of this openness, this indeterminacy, the given of existence, everyone has to sort out his or her own thinking" (p. 116). This anthropology purports that the human subject can "create, discover and exchange sense, meaning and orientation within this openness, and that it is by way of "this shared openness that all people are also structurally linked as relational beings" (p. 116; Lane, 2015a).

In taking account of this discussion, it can be argued that, the hermeneutical task of religious education is an area that is in need of urgent attention in the Republic of Ireland. While the hermeneutical dimension of religious education has received significant attention across the United Kingdom and Europe – by thinkers such as Didier Pollefeyt (2020), Lieven Boeve (2012), David Aldridge (2011), Andrew Wright (2020), and Patricia Hannam (2019) to name but a few – it has received little, if any, attention in the Republic of Ireland. Although the hermeneutical space has received limited attention in the Republic of Ireland (SGN, 2010, n.116), and Irish thinkers such as Dermot Lane (2011), Anne Hession (2015), and Sandra Cullen (2017) have attempted to address the hermeneutical dimension of religious education, their treatments have either been carried out through an explicitly theological lens or have attempted to move beyond this gaze but remain limited in terms of addressing the hermeneutical area. The contemporary context within which religious education finds itself, however, presents an implicit emergence of the centrality of hermeneutics in the realm of religious education.

2.3. Hermeneutics Emerging in the Realm of Religious Education

This section, therefore, maps the various ways in which a hermeneutical approach to religious education is emerging as a potential way forward in the realm of religious education in the Republic of Ireland. It is shown here that this position emerges implicitly from the specific context of religious education in the Republic of Ireland and that this emergence can be discerned by way of the following four observations: [1] irruptions from the periphery and the return to religion, [2] the theological matrix, [3] the status of religion, and [4] the position of students and teachers in religious education classes. In attending to these four areas, it is argued that the area of hermeneutics in religious education is in need of urgent treatment in the Republic of Ireland. The case is also made that such engagement can assist one in working towards the development of an understanding of religious education that not only takes the question of truth seriously, but one that is also sensitive to the range of complexities that this question carries in the contemporary context of religious education. Prior to engaging with the four observations outlined above, it is important to recognise the centrality of hermeneutics to the daily practice of religion as this acts as a contextually significant avenue into a discussion of the four observations outlined above.

Pollefeyt (2004) highlights that the charismatic or prophetic genesis of historical religions is shrouded in particularity. This specificity is evidenced by the fact that such origins are always "connected to a specific people, contexts, events and circumstances, which occurred at a given place, at a given time" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 3) While this genesis can be explored, the historicity of the religion itself is cherished as a sacred frame of reference and an assurance for reliability and credibility (Eliade, 1998). Shifting cultural and social contexts, however, perpetually confront and "challenge the

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continuity of the original inspiration and revelation" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 3; Marion, 2018). In the living out of a religious life, the person is forever challenged to bring their faith into conversation with the world in which they dwell and vice versa. In this context, it is evident that hermeneutics is indispensable to the daily practice of religion, precisely because of the centrality of historicity.

The centrality of hermeneutics emerges as being even more pertinent when one recognises the particularity and peculiarity of the human condition. Although there are vestiges of the Divine in animals, for the person the God-self, as Levinas (1969) articulates it, is mediated by way of the face – in the disclosure of a radical otherness, interdeterminacy and fragility or vulnerability which transcends the physical features (Pollefeyt, 2020, p. 116). The person, therefore, has an innate facility to encounter and receive meaning – to discover the lustre of life and attribute meaning. The human subject has the capacity to recognise and acknowledge others as 'like me', as "individuals in search of, longing for, and absorbing meaning" (p. 116; Cassidy, 2004). This context, that is peculiar to the human subject, can be referred to as the 'hermeneutical space'. It is characterised by a radical "openness, freedom, sensitivity, self-transcendence, and of receptivity for otherness and for a rich plurality of implicit and explicit meanings and interpretations" (Pollefeyt, 2020, p. 116; Marion, 2013). It is the space within which God can reveal God-self as the ultimate, fulfilling, wholly Other (Levinas, 1969; Marion, 2018).

Pollefeyt (2004) states that in terms of the interpretive structure, "the transmission and the mediation of Christianity not only conditions the relationship of God with people, but also touch upon God's intimate life itself" (p. 3). From this standpoint, Christian

theology is, in its most profound sense, best understood as a hermeneutic theology – one that continually transcends itself through hermeneutical action framed by the relationship between human experience and divine revelation (Marion, 2018). Institutionalised religions have tended to focus their efforts, understandably so, upon stability and continuity in a bid to manage the precarious nature of old traditions thus rendering them static and thereby in no need of further interpretation (Boeve, 2003a). Such efforts have been futile as religions are continuously called to revisit their genesis, and cultivate novel insights and articulate new interpretations in order to ensure or safeguard their future (Pollefeyt, 2004; Boeve, 2007c). This point is evidenced further by conflicts such as those between Byzantium and Rome, Jerusalem and Athens, the Reformation and Counter-Reformation as well as those between atheist ideologies and religious faith.

The current diversity and plurality among people demonstrates the context of opportunities that are offered by an open or inclusive society for situating oneself sharply towards established and assumed social, cultural, religious, and ethical traditions. Persons, therefore, find themselves situated in a 'fragile hermeneutical space' where reality, even one's inner reality, is "radically marked by a form of polyphony, by a multiplicity of voices, by plurality" (Pollefeyt, 2020, p. 117). From this standpoint, the Second Vatican Council expression 'the signs of the times' (*GS*, par. 4) provides a hermeneutical key for re-interpreting the prophetic significance of religious traditions (Lane, 2015b; Drumm, 2015). Many within the Church contemplate the meaning of these 'signs' and it is within this context that one proposes the four observations outlined above as a means of explaining why the hermeneutical issue is of importance to contemporary religious education in the Republic of Ireland.

2.3.1. Irruptions from the Periphery and the Return to Religion

There are numerous examples to which one can turn with the view towards demonstrating the significance of interpreting emerging authentic forms of the Christian faith (Lane, 2008). The past decades, as Pollefeyt (2004) suggests, demonstrate just "how much a new awareness, new needs of vast populations, and new opportunities for exploring God's presence are at the core of the present evolution" (p. 5; Cassidy, 2004; Lane, 2013). Here, Pollefeyt is alluding to the fact that a twofold process is unfolding in that the institutional structures and bureaucratic rule are losing credibility, while at one and the same time, emerging or new religious movements and initiatives animate people to look for continuity. Elementary misunderstandings direct one's attention to the complexity of the shifts that confront and challenge religious people in contemporary society. Of particular interest to believers in this context, for example, is the confrontation between what Edmund Chia refers to as peripheral "irruptions" (Chia, 2003, p. 29), explicit practices or reactions to critical local issues, and the standardised options of the Vatican.

A serious 'irruption' that disrupts Christian churches and confronts religious educators as well as pastoral ministers in Western Europe is the colossal disaffection that young people and middle-aged adults possess towards religious practice and affiliation with religion (Gee, 1994). This is illustrated by the empirical research conducted by Andrew McGrady et al. (2019b), on the religious identity of 16- to 19-year-old Catholic school leavers in the Republic of Ireland: "well over half of these young Catholics perceive their own religious trajectory to be moving away from the religious profile of their parents" (p. 173; CSO, 2016). An over simplistic and superficial analysis or conclusion on this point gravitates towards the concurrent blaming of catechists and teachers of

religion for falling short of what is expected of them in terms of presenting Church teaching, appropriate methodologies, and for surrendering to contemporary society concerning individualism and relativism.

Yet, when this above insight is considered in greater detail, it is evident that a fundamental shift has taken place in Western consciousness – a shift "from a metaphysical conception of reality to a hermeneutical perception" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 7). Empirical research such as that conducted by McGrady et al. (2019) illustrates that the cohort of young Catholics between the ages of 16- to 19-years old in the Republic of Ireland are moving away from the religious profile of their parents. Of the 3,526 participants (N=1,231 male/1,648 female) 62% of male participants and 57% of female participants self-assessed as being religious (p. 174). It is all too obvious a diagnosis to place the undeniable disaffection of young people and adults towards their particular church or religion at the door of teachers of religion (Mc Guckin et al., 2014). A new self-awareness of the subject, however, presents itself as a significant hermeneutic constituent of growing up: "the real self emerges from a subjective appropriation of the objective social reality" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 7; Boeve, 2012). This insight is far from novel. It was discerned in the late 1960s along with the challenges encountered in terms of the status of religious education in schools and religion in wider society. This necessitated that teachers of religion cooperate with their students in a more authentic and forthright manner (Hession, 2015; Byrne, 2013b; Anderson et al., 2016; Dineen, 2008).

One of the main issues facing institutional religion is in fact that it has become but one life option among many with regard to meaning within a society. As Aiveen Mullally

(2018) states "religious pluralism is identified as a new reality in Ireland that needs to be addressed and catered for by the educational system" (p. 17). While the Republic of Ireland has always been diverse, Hession (2015) highlights that "increasing immigration into Ireland from the 1990s onwards has led to an increase in the number of people espousing differing, religious and ethical worldviews" (p. 16). In this globalised world, children are encountering a plurality of ideas, values, models and alternative stances for living. In this context the term 'plurality' is used as a descriptive term that signifies the actual cultural and religious diversity present in Irish society. Its usage points to the fact that institutionalised religion, particularly Roman Catholicism, is no longer understood as being an exclusive source of meaning within Irish society and, even for some, no longer a legitimate one (Cullen, 2019). The development of "a universal capitalism or a democratic world order moves towards reinforcing the secular nature of the global governance of this world" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 8; Lane, 2013; Habermas, 2016).

Religious authorities actively work alongside secular movements. The suggestion is to formulate criteria for discernment and decision-making in matters with direct implications for people at the deepest level of their existence. The experience of this historical process motivates one to consider the hermeneutic question as a central and unavoidable issue for religious education. In attempting to overcome the current impasse, scholars are anxious to move into new liberating grounds that facilitate the univocal potential of religious truth to affect and orientate young generations. From this standpoint, it becomes clear that religious efforts must be creative in adapting to unique issues and concerns that are evident at all levels of the social reality (Falk, 2001). For instance, Kieran (2013) states that "schools are key locations where citizens are

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educated about diversity of belief and religious pluralism" (p. 28). Mullally (2018) reaffirms this point, "concepts of religious pluralism and the skills associated with it are essential to educating children towards building a democratic society in a plural context" (p. 17).

2.3.2. The Theological Matrix

According to Pollefeyt (2004) the constitutional turnover from an absolutist (Catholic) State to a liberal system in France towards the end of the eighteenth century brought the crises of a world of beliefs (i.e. 'what' is to be believed) and divine law into greater focus. This shift also elicited questions concerning the appropriate place for religion in a civil society – how does one operate a republic or democracy of believers? When governing this world, how do believers address the principle of rationality and radical autonomy? This often-contentious encounter between the political order, religion, and the secular sustained itself well into the twentieth century.

The sciences of religion are largely acknowledged for arranging "the obvious shifts within the religious sensitivities" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p.9). For example, the work of François-André Isambert demonstrated the intricacy of the religious societal mutation (Isambert, 1982). Similarly, the insights of Marcel Gauchet brought together a growing appreciation in the Western world in terms of the significant structural changes concerning the manner in which one attempts to interpret their relationship with institutional religion (M. Gauchet, 1999). This 'disenchantment of the world' (*désenchantement du monde*) places significant emphasis on the rearrangement of the religious reference system as both a political and social reality (Pollefeyt, 2004, Lane, 2008).

Lane (2013) brings this conversation to the fore within the context of the Republic of Ireland. He outlines that a significant symptom of the new context in which education and religion finds itself across Europe, and particularly in the Republic of Ireland, is what he describes as "the declining influence of the modernity narrative" (p. 10). Religion and education have moved into a "new space which exists somewhere between modernity and post-modernity, or what some have called a new, second modernity, or even a late modernity" (p. 10). In this new context the superiority of the modern narrative, i.e. the assumption that one size fits all in relation to education and religion, is understood as problematic having exerted "a negative influence on the self-understanding of education and religion" in the Republic of Ireland" (p. 10).

This negative influence has been felt at several levels across mainland Europe and the Republic of Ireland: "[1] a narrowing of reason, [2] the presence of spirit-stifling practices, [3] a contraction of the social and religious imaginaries, and [4] the privatisation of religious faith" (Lane, 2013, p. 10). From this standpoint, it is evident that the supremacy of the modern narrative has been challenged and transformed by the post-modern critique. Post modernity prioritises the particular over the universal, the local over the global, and directs attention to "the provisional character of all knowing and understanding" (p. 10). In this way, post-modernity facilitated the realisation that there is no neutral, value-free approach to knowledge and understanding. Rather, it enabled persons to recognise that "all knowledge is tradition-specific, and that the personal enters into all knowledge and self-understanding" (p. 10). This insight brings another pivotal point in the development of this new context for education and religion both across Europe and the Republic of Ireland to the fore – the shift within the anthropological structure of religion.

The intimate relationship that exists between the self, the person, and the 'Other' was rearranged as a consequence of secularisation and modernity. Here, one is referring to the fact that the anthropological structures of religion had traditionally found their foundations in transcendence, but now as a result of the 'disenchantment of the world', find their roots in immanence (Tracy, 1994; Bergo, 2005; Hampton, 2018). This is in keeping with the shift from positivism to constructivism in education, and the move to student centred approaches. Traditionally, the anthropological structures of religion centred on transcendence which necessitated submission on the behalf of the individual to the external mediated Other. In this new context, however, the contemporary move towards transcendence in immanence makes for the interiorisation of the Other in the individual and the emancipation of the individual in terms of one's relationship with the Other, and, thereby bringing said relationship into an existential context (Hampton, 2018; Bergo, 2005).

The transcendent, as Pollefeyt (2004) outlines, is a "dimension of the human consciousness and refers, in the Old Testament, to the invisible God and the radical otherness of God" (p. 10). Although God remains hidden in the Old Testament, one finds the Jewish people apprehending His manifestations. The Jewish people appreciated "the interdiction of any figurations of God" (p. 10). When treated in this manner the transcendent, that is to say, the other dimension, is regularly portrayed as an external authority. Following from a transcendent worldview, the 'Other' possesses authority with regard to "the life of individuals and communities" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 10; Bergo, 2005; Wach, 1972; Otto, 1958). In this manner, then, the institution mediates between the external authority (i.e. the 'Other') and the individual. Contrary to this perspective, the Immanent is concerned with the human world referring to the self as

the dynamism of understanding. This view argues that the meaning and *telos* of life are to be found within the concrete existential reality – thus, authority is an affair of human discernment and decision-making. In contemporary society, therefore, the significance of the Other is apprehended in terms of an increasingly inductive or existential approach to the quest for the meaning of life (Todd, 2003).

This existential or inductive approach leads to an emancipation of the individual that, in turn, prompts an interiorisation of Other in the individual. Antoine Vergote (1990) further explicates this point. He outlines that the immanent and transcendent are two portrayals – as in a polar dialectic system, both offer the symbolic scheme for conceptualising the interactions of humankind with the divine reality, i.e. the totally Other (Vergote, 1990, p. 545). For Pollefeyt (2004), "the assimilation of the totally Other dimension (i.e. the Other), proper to the traditional understanding of religion, causes a fundamental hermeneutical problem" (p. 10). At the theological level, as well as at the anthropological, a double shift has led to persistent confusion and recalcitrant misapprehensions. In conversations among religious educators and theologians confused views inhibit those involved in the discussions from adequately addressing the disintegration of uniformity and conformity in a religious community (Lane, 2013; McGrady, 2013; Kieran, 2013).

While this conflictive encounter with the difference between the transcendent and the immanent continues to cause tension within religious communities, it also motivates people to attempt to bridge the apparently irreconcilable opposition (Tracy, 1994). Nevertheless, the redesign of the religious universe outlined above stimulated a shift in the content of beliefs as well as the social status of religion (Hervieu-Léger, 1993; Lane,

2011; Tracy, 1994). It appears, however, that on a level akin to the instinctual those persons who present themselves as being 'immanence-oriented' show all the characteristics of one who feels "that religion organised around an external, foreign, and distant Other is alien to the daily experience and quest for meaning" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 10). Immanency has regularly been subject to criticism in terms of reducing the particular and *sui generis* character of traditions and religious belief to merely natural or human interests (Vergote, 1990, pp. 527-529).

This criticism emerges from the fact that modernity views the individual as the centre point of the existential reality. Thus if there is a 'God', following from this modern premise, the earthly reality and the individual provide all the appropriate signs of God's existence. In taking account of the above discussion, it is evident that while post-modernity brings its own unique set of problems, there is merit to the view which Lane (2013) offers from an Irish perspective in that post-modernity presents some important insights in its critique of modernity that are significant for how one approaches the question of truth not only within the context of religion, but also education.

In response to the new context in which education and religion exists Lane (2011) attempts to reconstruct a theology that recognises the contextual, embedded, and social nature of human beings and affirms the transformative power of participatory knowledge that is derived from self-transcending encounters with others. Through this reconstruction it emerges that there are a variety of complex challenges facing contemporary theology. Such challenges arise from the "precarious existence of theology, caught between modernity and post modernity, and […] the suggestion that it may be possible, indeed necessary, for theology to engage with a new, second

modernity" (p. 47). From this standpoint, it can be argued that it is necessary for one to possess "some sense of the nature of knowledge, the activities of reason, and the praxis of faith that is peculiar to theology and religions" (p. 47).

The Enlightenment paradigm of knowledge had the effect of sideling religion within the public space. This is not only evident across mainland Europe, but also in the Republic of Ireland. For example, Lane (2011) outlines that "the kind of knowledge that theology offered became suspect in the eyes of modernity, and therefore regarded as of little public consequence in the affairs of modern life" (p. 4). This point finds even greater clarity when the view of theology taken by modernity is expressed: the modern, scientific paradigm of knowledge stresses the significance of detachment, objectivity and concentration on empirical proofs, whereas theology, from the perspective of modernity, appears to be concerned with the mere personal, the subjective, as well as the utterly transcendent dimensions of existence. Lane contends that this perspective is rather unjust as theology "must also attend to the data of human experience, history, revelation, texts and rites" (p. 4). Religion, perceived with such suspicion across Europe, came to be understood by many as a "purely private and personal matter that is best left on the margins of public discourse" (Lane, 1997, p. 360).

This relegation of religious knowing arises from the fact that the unprecedented progress in knowledge inaugurated by modern science since the Enlightenment, particularly in terms of the natural sciences, medicine and the cosmologies, has motivated modernity to hold up the scientific method as 'the gold standard' or norm of all knowing (Lane, 2011). Theology, in response to this claim of modernity, has argued that there is more than one manner of knowing. It claims that there is another mode of

knowing, one that ought to be considered as an equally valid form of knowledge, one that is founded on "the personal participation, engagement and involvement of the individual in the subject matter under review that applies to the Arts, Humanities and Religion" (pp. 47-48). Lane is critical of this rigid compartmentalisation or division of knowledge between "the objective and the subjective, between the detached and engaged, between the neutral and participative knowing" (p. 48). Such a separation or division is far from clear. A degree of caution should be exercised.

All knowing necessitates a critically important hermeneutical event, a moment of interpretation. In truth, therefore, there is no such thing as entirely "detached knowing, nor is there such a thing as simply attending to the facts without some value-laden process of selection and interpretation of the facts" (Lane, 2011, p. 48). Hermeneutics, the science of interpretation, makes clear that "one cannot step outside of history, location and culture in the process of interpreting the data, texts, history and religion" (p. 48). Lane, building on the work of twentieth century philosopher, Hans-Georg Gadamer, who developed the science of interpretation into a fine art, claims that the time has come to overcome "the prejudice against prejudice" (Gadamer, 1975, p. 272) within modernity. The influence exerted by Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, particularly his work on the emergence of truth in the experience of art, on contemporary theological approaches to the question of truth and understanding has been significant. The approach taken by Lane in his attempt to reconstruct a theology that is fitting to this new context where knowing appears to be caught between modernity and post-modernity, is heavily influenced by Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

On this point, it is important to highlight the writings of the early twentieth century religious thinker, William James, who actively defended the value of participative knowing in his work *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (James, 1974), originally published in 1902. While James still has much to say that is important for religion, particularly his emphasis on the importance of religious experience, there are a variety of theological deficits in his treatment of religion. Amongst these deficits is James' expression of an explicit disdain for the institutional, ritualistic and sacramental aspects of religious experience (Lane, 2011). The significance of James' work finds its clearest expression in the fact that he makes a case for the validity of other forms of knowing besides that of modern science. The work of William James is emphasised by Lane as it is of importance when one considers Charles Taylor's radical rehabilitation of James' writings in *Varieties of Religion Today: William James re-visited* (Taylor, 2002).

In making his case for the validity of forms of knowledge other than modern science, James engages with the work of his contemporary, William Clifford who proposed that: "it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything on insufficient evidence" (Taylor, 2002, p. 45). Clifford argued that religion and morality as well as science should be held to account with regard to this principle. James (1974) refers to such an approach as an example of an "agnostic vetoes upon faith" (p. 204) which emphasises that one must not believe anything unless there is compelling evidence. James responds to the arguments made by his contemporaries, such as those made by William Clifford, by outlining that there are "domains in life in which truths will remain hidden unless we go at least half-way towards them" (Lane, 2011, p. 49). In particular, James (1896) directs one's attention to the point that there are "cases where a fact cannot come at all, unless a preliminary faith exists in its coming" (p. 47).

In his rehabilitation of James' work, Taylor (2002) claims that on this point James is further developing an Augustinian perspective in that certain domains of life, self-opening and love facilitate us in coming to understand that which we would never otherwise grasp. For James (1974), participation and self-surrender are essential: "it is only in the act of personal participation and self-surrender to a particular experience or event or text that its full meaning and light and truth actually emerges" (Lane, 2011, p. 49). This experience of the discovery of new knowledge through personal engagement is revealed most clearly in the areas of human relationships. Human relationships provide the most appropriate analogy for understanding what occurs in religious knowing. For example, to dismiss the areas of life, such as human relationships, "to the margins of the world would be to relegate the drama of existence as expressed in the arts, the humanities and religion to the sidelines of life" (p. 49). Rather, as Lane outlines, the form of knowing that one is considering here must be acknowledged as possessing "its own validity alongside the knowing which belongs to the scientific method of the enlightenment" (p. 49). While the former context of knowing characterises religious and theological knowledge, i.e. 'participative knowing', Lane claims that it would be inappropriate "to polarise or separate these two modes of knowing" (p. 49). Rather, he suggests that "they should be seen as complementary" emphasising that "it is debateable whether one can happen without the other" (p. 49).

This does not imply that detached knowing does not exist in some capacity. In formal logic and mathematical reasoning, for example, it is clear that disengaged reasoning is operative to a certain extent or degree. Similarly, it is apparent that some level of detached knowing takes place "in the scientific method of observation, verification and explanation" (Lane, 2011, p. 50). However, he outlines that in the context of the

scientific method, "the matter is not as clear-cut as some suggest" (p. 50). In the process of observation, verification and explanation, for example, "certain conceptual assumptions or imaginative frameworks are at work as the philosophy of science has highlighted" (p. 50). These assumptions and frameworks animate the work of science and, therefore, this work "can hardly be described as detached or disengaged" i.e. purely objective (p. 50). This point finds further support when one considers that "these assumptions or frameworks change from time to time through paradigm shifts" (p. 50).

It is evident, therefore, that if one polarises or exaggerates the difference between scientific knowing and religious knowing, it would be to misinterpret the complexity and delicacy of these forms of knowing and a clear failure in terms of apprehending that the difference between them is not as great as many would have one believe in that for some, the concept of 'detached knowing' is self-contradictory (Taylor, 2011). Both scientific knowing and religious knowing place truth at the centre of enquiry, therefore, truth for both the scientific and religious enquiry is as a genuine goal. As will be demonstrated in Chapter Four, however, this revitalised sense of the complex relationship that exists between scientific and religious knowing has led some contemporary thinkers, such as Marion and Habermas, to question the self-sufficiency of secular reason.

Thus far the theological matrix, as evidenced across Europe and in the context of the Republic of Ireland, has been shown to be significantly complex. Such complexity has a significant bearing on the manner in which RE has progressed to date within the context of the Republic of Ireland. In particular, it brings into sharper focus the confusion that surrounds not merely understandings of what constitutes religious

education, but also its viability as a valid pathway to human knowledge. This point will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter Four, but of particular importance to this discussion is the recognition that the Christian tradition occupies a rather precarious position within this new context or space that education, particularly religious education, and religion now find themselves.

As noted thus far, one of the first things learned by children through the religious socialisation processes of contemporary society is the precarious character of the Christian tradition (Cullen, 2019; Mc Guckin, et al., 2014). Hence, teachers of religion are to a great extent bewildered in the face of the current context in that they are expected to act as the representatives of a solid, universal tradition with eschatological expectations and aspirations in an epoch that is highly sceptical of such assumptions (Dineen and Lundie, 2017; Tillson, 2011). Religious educators encounter significant challenges from the pupils they meet within the institutional context as they are reluctant to enter into the above position, i.e. to accept Christianity as a solid, universal tradition with eschatological expectations and aspirations, as increasingly more parents refrain from, or opt out of, initiating their children into the Christian tradition.

When faced with this reality, it would be remiss of one not to ask the following question: if the opt out culture of parents continues to increase in terms of initiating their children into the Christian tradition, will the action of schools and parishes make up for the shortfall or be successful in maintaining the tradition from generation to generation? On this point, Danièle Hervieu-Léger (1993) notes that a continuity has emerged amongst generations – a continuity among generations 'without memory' (Cullen, 2019). He highlights that if religious persons are stripped of or deprived of

memory, institutional religions are leading a precarious existence in that they are at risk unless continuity is reinvented (Hervieu-Léger, 1993, pp.177-238; Boeve, 2003; Boeve, 2007c).

Over the past number of years there has been a gradual awakening amongst adults to the relativity of a religious belonging in that one's connection with the Protestant or Roman Catholic Church is to a significant extent dependent upon rather arbitrary conditions (Mc Guckin et al., 2014). Across Europe, the social control once exercised by religious practice has weakened if not disappeared. In fact, peer control amongst young people has contributed significantly to their hostility towards a religious lifestyle. Likewise, "the 'spiral of silence' excludes personal religious convictions from the public sphere" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 11). This 'post-traditional social order' is not one in which tradition is wiped from existence. Rather, as Jean-Paul Willaime (1996) notes denominational cultures continue to be more influential than one would gather from a superficial observation, particularly in terms of supporting the collective identity.

In this new post-traditional social order traditions must explicate themselves, to become open to interrogation and discourse (Schrijver, 1998), to become 'open narratives' (Boeve, 2003a). When considered in this way, it becomes clear that the manner in which one interprets the religions of the world has diversified and different statuses assigned to religion co-exist. In interacting with his/her environment, i.e. the media, fragments of one's religious heritage, public opinion, the individual reaches a decision considering what is to be ranked as of prior significance, when and where.

2.3.3. The Status of Religion

Following from this insight, it is important to consider the way in which the status of religion has changed across Europe and the Republic of Ireland. When one considers the contemporary context in which religious education now finds itself one must ultimately ask: in a pluralist, open, democratic society what status is granted to legally recognised religions? Likewise, in terms of social position what, if any, might a particular religion attribute to itself? In addressing these questions regarding the status of religion one can discern five unique points of view. Each perspective is dependent upon differing sources, works towards different educational goals, commits itself to a different hermeneutical key, and calls on the educator/teacher to reflect a distinct profile in his or her relations with pupils.

2.3.3.1. Cultural and Historical Perspective

The first viewpoint understands religion as being merely a cultural and historical heritage. This view argues that religions should be preserved and valued as the historical beginnings and resources of a particular civilisation are represented in religion. From this standpoint, it follows that the main disciplines that are to be depended upon for clarifying the role of religion in society, for studying the religious traditions, and choosing the appropriate information to be given to subsequent generations are the sciences of religion [i.e. anthropology, sociology, philosophy, psychology… of religion] (Tillson, 2011; Irwin, 2013). The main motivation of this mode of religious education is to form a religiously educated person: "one who knows about the religious traditions and integrates, as a cultivated person, a sense of religion" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 12; Hession, 2015; Kieran, 2013).

The central hermeneutical key of this viewpoint is cognitive understanding. Following from this perspective then, educators of religion are called to encourage and promote "a documented insight into the historical reality of religions" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 12). This approach is taken up in Community National Schools (CNS) and Educated Together Schools (ET) in the Republic of Ireland. In taking up this approach, these school contexts are spaces within which the broad category 'education in religion and spirituality from the outside' manifests itself most clearly. Contrary to such an approach, this cognitive dimension presents itself as being but one dimension of a faith-based approach to religious education in the Republic of Ireland. For instance, the *Catholic Preschool and Primary School Religious Education Curriculum* (2015) (hereafter, CPPREC), Junior Cycle (NCCA, 2018b) and Senior Cycle (NCCA, 2003) RE specifications emphasise the importance of student's exploration of the human religious traditions, philosophical beliefs and world views that protect and illuminate the spiritual and ethical dimension of the human experience. This important aspect is often referred to as learning '*about*' religion in the Republic of Ireland and is evident not only in the primary sector but also in the post-primary sector (NCCA, 2018b). This important dimension of religious education is alluded to by Patricia Kieran (2013). She emphasises that "schools are key locations where citizens are educated about diversity of belief and religious pluralism" (p. 28). It is important here to recognise that this is but one dimension of Catholic Religious Education.

Faith-based approaches are transparent in terms of their starting point with regard to learning about other religious traditions, philosophical beliefs and world views. Such an approach always operates from the perspective of a particular religious tradition. It is evident, therefore, that such an approach takes up the approach described in broad

terms as 'education in religion and spirituality from the insider'. While utilising the aforementioned broad terminology to assist in terms of analysis of the contemporary context, such broad categories are limited and fail to acknowledge the complexities arising from the fact that all approaches are necessarily insider approaches. In other words, all approaches operate from and within a particular value laden position, hence, it is the responsibility of all educationalist to be able to give an account of where said values come from i.e. religious tradition, philosophical beliefs, word views (Meehan, 2008; Freire, 2005). These categories, however, are helpful in terms of mapping the two trajectories that are evident in the Republic of Ireland in terms of the question of truth with regard to religious education.

Recent proposals (NCCA, 2015; NCCA, 2020) within the primary education sector in the Republic of Ireland have placed this cognitive aspect at the centre of religious education. Proposals such as the consultation document on *Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics* (2015) as well as the more recent *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* (2020) present a rather impoverished and narrow understanding of the *telos* of religious education. The latter even suggests that religious education be removed from the core curriculum and be placed in a curricular category called 'flexible time' alongside daily tasks such as roll call. It is also interesting to note that the term 'religious education' as a distinct category does not appear in the draft curriculum, but rather the document uses the terminology of 'patron programme' (NCCA, 2020). Such proposals are imbued with the judgement that religious education is insignificant in terms of the educational enterprise. Such actions are also open to the charge outlined above – a failure to not only acknowledge, but also give an account of the values that laden their approach. By placing this cognitive dimension at the centre of religious education or

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by the removal of religious education from the core curriculum, these proposals fail to adequately appreciate the richness of the contribution made by religious education to the person and wider society.

2.3.3.2. Community of Faith Perspective

The second point of view comprehends religion as a fundamental aspect of the members of a community of believers. Religion is understood from this perspective as a life style response to a living and self-revealing God – religion as an experiential event (Byrne, 2013b). From this standpoint, the theology proper to a particular religious tradition presents itself as the central source upon which religious belonging is developed and sustained (O'Connell, 2017; Hession, 2008). Such an approach is often referred to as catechesis in the Republic of Ireland or learning '*into*' religion (CPPREC, 2015; SGN, 2010). Catechesis is but one aspect of contemporary Catholic RE in the Republic of Ireland (SGN, 2010). Many commentators seem to consider this dimension of traditional faith-based RE as the sole focus of contemporary faith-based religious education (Irwin, 2013; Tilison, 2011).

In the Republic of Ireland, religious education has been historically understood as contributing to initiation into a tradition – specifically, the Roman Catholic tradition. In other words, the *telos* of such RE moved exclusively toward the formation of committed believers within a specific religious tradition, i.e. Roman Catholicism, Church of Ireland etc. The hermeneutical key in such an approach to religious education presents itself in terms of what is commonly referred to as the *anamnesis* – "the living memory of the original events and charismatic involvement of the living Spirit" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 12). Such a position calls on the teacher to be a witnessing

representative of the believing community. Such a demand is simply untenable for faith-based religious education in schools in the public sector in the Republic of Ireland not only due to employment legislation for the sector, but also when one considers the shifts amongst young people, i.e. future educators, in terms of religious belief (Mc Guckin et al., 2014; Cullen, 2019; Dineen and Lundie, 2017; Rami, 2006). Hence, no such requirement is placed on religious educators in faith-based schools within the public sector in the Republic of Ireland (Hession, 2015; Kieran, 2013; Byrne, 2013a).

2.3.3.3. Aesthetic Perspective

The third point of view associates religion with the aesthetic dimension of life. Towards the close of the eighteenth and start of the nineteenth century, some thinkers argued that persons required a 'sensible religion', one that is typified by "monotheism of reason and heart and polytheism of imagination, which is most sensibly expressed in the arts" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 12). In its most extreme form such a position claims that art is a substitute for religion thereby making religion superfluous. From this perspective, one merely appreciates artefacts, objects, historic sites, buildings and liturgical events associated with religion within a purely aesthetic capacity.

In this context, the hermeneutics of such realities are consider art as "an experience of truth with ethical, social, and religious value" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 13). When one comprehends art in this manner it can be argued that art has come to take the form of something akin to a secularised religion. For example, consider the work of German painter and sculptor Anselm Kiefer (1943), who emphasises through his work the potential of art to refigure, re-imagine the sacred for the post-modern age. In other words, art has the potential to "re-figure the unimaginable" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 13).

Within the context of this discussion aesthetics is considered in terms of its religious implications and, therefore, in this way aesthetics concerns disciplines such as archaeology, art history, philosophy, theology of art and religious education. Following from this point, it can be said that, the *telos* of such aesthetic religious education moves towards the formation of transcendent aesthetic understanding. Thus, *pathos* presents itself as the hermeneutical key and the religious educator can be understood primarily as an aesthete (Pollefeyt, 2004).

2.3.3.4. Liberation Perspective

The fourth perspective presents religion as a long-term process of liberation, of emancipation throughout the history of humanity (Pollefeyt, 2004; Hession, 2015; Drumm, 1998). From this standpoint, all that contributes to the emancipation of the person from oppression, underdevelopment, slavery, injustice, exploitation, dependence and illiteracy is considered to be an act of religion: "re-establishing the dignity of the person, man and woman, in view of the transformation of human life on earth and of its final, eschatological fulfilment" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 13; Byrne, 2013b). Following from this perspective one is to recognise the *kenosis* of the incarnation in the efforts to establish a fully human world, in the experience of the unexpected occurrence of the ultimate meaning and gift of charity – the gift of love (Johnson, 2011; Marion, 1991).

In this way, then, it is clear that emancipation emerges from disciplines such as ethics, politics, philosophy, theology and andragogy (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 13; Lane, 2015a). Such an approach is evident in faith-based approaches to religious education which operate from a particular anthropology informed by the Paschal Mystery (SGN, 2010;

CPPREC, 2015). Such an anthropology understands the person as being hope-filled, relational and capable of moving beyond their limitations by openness to the transcendent (1 Cor 3:16; Lane, 2015a). The educational *telos* or goal of this approach to RE moves towards the formation of a liberated and socially committed religious person (Hession, 2015). Hence, the hermeneutical key is the critique of various disciplines helping to attain the authentic discernment of religious truth. The religious educator, therefore, is proficiently establishing a consciousness raising processes and actions for change as mediation of the eschatological hope (Pollefeyt, 2004).

2.3.3.5. Inter-Religious Perspective

Finally, the fifth position views religion as a culturally based system that moves towards addressing the fundamental search for meaning and fulfilment, as elucidated in the world religions and traditional religions of non-Western civilisations and cultures (Grenham, 2012). The central focus of this position is the recognition of the religious promise in different religious traditions. Such a perspective, therefore, elucidates from a variety of disciplines such as anthropology, history of religions, comparative study of religions, theology of religion(s) and theology of dialogue (Chia, 2003). In line with this position, religious educators move towards the promotion of the praxis of inter-religious dialogue (Cullen, 2017; Lane, 2011; Byrne, 2013b; SGN, 2010). The hermeneutical key, therefore, presents itself as the assumptions of various religious traditions (Pollefeyt, 2004).

In each of these five positions religion is assigned a specific social position in society, or permits itself a particular function in said society. In this context a particular hermeneutical problem is encountered. In contemporary society persons come from a

multiplicity of backgrounds, each one referring to various sensitivities, experiences and presuppositions concerning their understanding of 'religion', or connection with the sacred, the transcendent, or the refusal of it. This situation presents another argument in favour of understanding hermeneutics as one of the key dimensions of religious education in all educational settings in the Republic of Ireland.

In many contexts a religion that once exercised a significant role in the development of a certain state or nation maintains a particular value within the collective memory, in the identity of said state's or nation's population (Pollefeyt, 2004; Cullen, 2019; Clegg, 2019; Tuohy, 2013). All religions move towards discovering their organic status in society (Pollefeyt, 2004; Lane, 2013). While the European Union in its new Constitution (2004) refrains from acknowledging the historical process of specific religions that contributed to the present context, democratic societies still guarantee religious freedom irrespective of the historical role that these religions exercised in the development of a continental identity (McDonagh, 2019; Meany, 2019; Jackson, 2014). Furthermore, the 'religious heritage' is recognised as a trait of Western civilisation and as an aspect of the overall educational program (Pollefeyt, 2004). This can be observed in the context of the Republic of Ireland both in an Bunreacht na hÉireann as well as in the Education Act (1998) (McDonagh, 2019; Clegg, 2019). For example, Article 44 of the Irish Constitution sets out to guarantee the religious freedom of Irish citizens:

> The State acknowledges that the homage of public worship is due to Almighty God. It shall hold His Name in reverence, and shall respect and honour religion […] freedom of conscience and the free profession and practice of religion are, subject to public order and morality, guaranteed to every citizen (Bunreacht na hÉireann, Article 44.1-2).

Religious freedom is also safeguarded in an educational context in the Republic of Ireland through the recognition of the parents as the natural and primary educator their children:

> The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children (Bunreacht na hÉireann, Article 42.1).

Furthermore, in the Education Act (1998) the status of religion in terms of the ethos of the school is guaranteed in terms of the functions of the Board of Management of schools. The Board of Management is tasked with upholding, and being accountable:

> … to the patron for so upholding, the characteristic spirit of the school as determined by the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school, and at all times act in accordance with any Act of the Oireachtas or instrument made thereunder, deed, charter, articles of management or other such instrument relating to the establishment or operation of the school (Education Act, 1998, 15.b) .

In taking account of contemporary Irish society, which is perhaps best understood as a pluralist society, religion has taken on "a different hermeneutical meaning in comparison to recent history when religion functioned as the cement or cornerstone of society at large" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 15). This shift is best understood as a historical turnover. One must be attentive, therefore, to the fact that it is essential in this contemporary context for one to initially clarify the exact status that religion is granted in a particular discourse or civil institution. On this point, one could argue that religion no longer boasts meaning and authority autonomously. Rather, religion may permit

itself a specific authority within its particular horizon and in the social context (Pollefeyt, 2004). Furthermore, religion also may be permitted some manner of authority by other external social and political institutions.

There is another significant historical turnover that must be highlighted, one that is brought into focus by way of the move from a transcendent to a 'transcendence in immanency' perspective. This move brings a particular hermeneutical problem to the surface. The participants in a 'religious event', for example, relate either consciously or unconsciously to one or more particular ways of recognising the theological or social significance of religion (Pollefeyt, 2004). In this way, understandings of religion may differ on a basic level and, consequently, persons tend to adopt various pragmatic strategies for addressing religion's presence in the public sphere (Hannam, 2019). Therefore, it is not difficult to concede that religious discourses presuppose or involve the learning process all the while – there is "a clarification of the status granted to the religious reality" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 15).

In this way, it is clear that it is not necessary for one to emphasise that "the distinctions may partly overlap and co-exist in the vision and practice of a concrete person, an institution, or a theory of religious education" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 15). Thus far, three observations have been considered that point to the emergence of a potential way forward for religious education in the Republic of Ireland by way of a hermeneutical approach: [1] irruptions from the periphery and the return to religion, [2] the theological matrix, and [3] the status of religion. At this point, it is important to attend to the fourth and final observation – the position of students and teachers in religious education classes.

2.3.4. The Position of Students and Teachers in Religious Education Classes

The movement towards immanency as the most credible context for reclaiming the Other and the transcendent, as well as the existence of numerous social stand points assumed by religion, challenge religious education with plurality (Meehan, 2019). In a European context, the vast majority of participants in religious education in schools were considered homogenously 'Protestant', 'Catholic', or 'Jewish' roughly before 1990 (Pollefeyt, 2004; Tuohy, 2013). This premise was the starting point from which the majority of religious education programmes, textbooks, media and methods were developed (Mc Guckin et al., 2014; Alive O, 1996-2004). In the Republic of Ireland, the highest percentage of Roman Catholics was recorded in 1961 where 94.9% of the population self-professed as Catholic (CSO, 1960).

During the 1960s, with the rise of the Catholic working class, Irish society witnessed significant increase in religious practice (Inglis, 1998). This assumption, i.e. that a person was Catholic or religious at the very least, exercised significant influence regarding the recruitment of teachers across Europe and the Republic of Ireland. While from a sociological perspective such an assumption may not be accurate, it has been accepted that shared religious roots were considered to be a valid starting point for constituting and formally establishing religious education in schools (Pollefeyt, 2004; Hession, 2008).

Since the record high number of practicing Catholics of the 1960s, Ireland has been subject to substantial societal change (CSO, 2016; McGrady et al., 2019b; Mc Guckin et al., 2014; Rami, 2006). With the arrival of the European Union, Irish society came to experience a rapidly changing social and economic structure, and changing

demographic patterns emerging from immigration and emigration (Mullally, 2018; Devine, 2011; Darmody, 2011; Faas, 2015). During the 1970s a movement towards a more secular perspective emerged in the vocabulary of religious education, particularly in Germany but also in other European countries regarding the long established concept 'Catechetics' as confessional religious education to 'religious education theory' (Pollefeyt, 2004).

This shift towards a significantly more 'secular' or 'professional' perspective demonstrates an important change amidst religious educators, particularly surrounding the goal of their religion education classes. Religious educators began to question whether initiation into faith should be a central goal of religious education (Irwin, 2013; McGrady, 2013; Dineen and Lundie, 2017). For example, the first multi-denominational school better known as the Dalkey School Project was established in the Republic of Ireland in 1978 (Project, 2021). While a secular perspective was gaining greater acceptance across Europe, such perspectives did not garner as much support in the Republic of Ireland until the 1980s and 1990s (Project, 2021). This shift corresponds with the beginnings of a twenty-five-year period of significant religious change in the Republic of Ireland (CSO, 2016). Between 1991 and 2016 the number of self-professed Catholics decreased to 78.3% of the population. This equates to a 13.3% decrease over a twenty-five-year when compared to the figure of 91.6% recorded by the CSO in 1991 (CSO, 2016). The extent of the demographic change experienced by primary schools in the Republic is evidenced in research conducted by the Archdiocese of Dublin (Archdiocese Survey, 2004). The Archdiocese found that in ninety-two of its schools there were one-hundred-and-four nationalities enrolled and twenty-eight religious traditions (Rami, 2006; Archdiocese Survey, 2004).

Amongst religious educators a dissatisfaction emerged regarding the historically held position that theology, supported by appropriate 'teaching methods', ought to be the exclusive resource subject for teaching religious education (Dineen and Lundie, 2017; Heinz, 2013; Byrne, 2005). Religious educators were critical of such a conviction as there was a growing appreciation for the insights emerging not only from theology, but also the human sciences and the sciences of religion which assisted in expanding the horizon for addressing religion within an educational context (Pollefety, 2004; McGrady, 2013). This openness to the human sciences and the sciences of religion in religious education is evident in recent post-primary reforms set out by the NCCA in the Republic of Ireland, such as in the revised *Junior Cycle Religious Education Specification* (NCCA, 2018b). For instance, there is a recognition that it is necessary for religious education to "engage critically with belief systems and principles of moral behaviour which can serve as a foundation for decisions" (NCCA, 2018b, p. 6).

This renewal of religious education came to place particular importance on the process of learning (NCCA, 2018b; CPPREC, 2015). This shift towards process emphasises that the outcome of learning is the consummation of a specific individual's original learning process. One of the most significant obstacles faced by this renewal of religious education, particularly in relation to the management of teaching and learning processes, is the way in which one overcomes the distance that has emerged between the historical reality of the Christian tradition, i.e. beliefs, institutional settings, texts, rituals, practices, life style, vocabulary, etc., and the attitude of secularised contemporary society (Irwin, 2017; Pollefeyt, 2004; Mc Guckin et al., 2014; Heinz, 2013). A contributing factor to the challenge of overcoming this gap between historical reality and contemporary society presents itself by way of misunderstandings that

emerge during the 1990s within the context of teacher and pupil interactions (Dineen and Lundie, 2017).

In the context of teacher and pupil interactions it is evident that a distorted presupposition exerts a particular negative influence in terms of overcoming of the gap between historical reality and contemporary society – that the pupils encountered by teachers represent a homogeneous group of people with a Catholic or Christian background where in fact they actually are a group that is representative of a plurality of backgrounds (Cullen, 2019; Mullally, 2018; Mc Guckin et al., 2014). The challenges posed by such plurality became clear when teachers turned to programmes and didactics that were ill equipped to address such plurality, particularly in their engagement with matters such as "the meaning of life and moral behaviour" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 16).

In the Republic of Ireland, for example, the Catholic RE programme used in primary schools during the 1990s and 2000s, *Alive O,* faced challenges in terms of its usability for a new generation of teachers (Dineen and Lundie, 2017; Heinz, 2013). Such programmes were ill equipped to adequately address the plurality encountered not only in terms of the changing religious demographics evident amongst the pupils in classrooms (Rami, 2006; Archdiocese Survey, 2004), but also in relation to the changing religious demographics evident amongst those entering the teaching profession (Heinz, 2013) – particularly in terms of their ability to meaningfully engage with differing religious tradition or even the Christian tradition for that matter (Dineen and Lundie, 2017). The CSO (2016), for instance, recorded that across all three levels of education the highest increase of persons who designate themselves as having 'no religion' (including Atheist and Agnostics) was at third level. Between 2011 and 2016,

there was an increase of 8.1% in this category amongst students in third-level with 21.9% in 2016 compared to 13.8% in 2011 (CS0, 2016). These figures are inclusive of students enrolled in initial teacher education (CSO, 2016). Hence, if contemporary religious educators are to appropriately engage with matters of such fundamental importance to the flourishment of the person as the meaning of life and moral behaviour, they must recognise and accept that the pluralist composition of school populations is a fundamental and unavoidable reality of contemporary educational contexts (Dineen and Lundie, 2017).

This point is reaffirmed by Pollefeyt (2004) who notes that this view presents a significant shift in relation to the foundational presuppositions of religious education curricula development as well as for the teaching strategies utilised by such curricula (McGrady et al., 2008). He states that "[N]o longer can the teacher rely upon the common ground or a homogeneously oriented group for his/her work in the classroom" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 17; Dineen and Lundie, 2017). As a consequence of the plurality of this new classroom context pupils speak different languages, refer to a variety of experiences, they employ different vocabularies, and represent a range of differing connections with the Christian tradition, other denominations or world views (Pollefeyt, 2004; Mc Guckin et al., 2014).

Attempts to adequately address such plurality are evident amongst the various religious education programmes currently being utilised in primary schools in the Republic of Ireland, such as *Goodness You, Goodness Me* used in Community National Schools, *Learn Together* used in Educate Together schools, *Follow Me* [an adaptation of *Alive O*] used in Church of Ireland schools and *Grow in Love* used in Catholic primary

schools. Even recent NCCA (2015; 2020) proposals at primary level demonstrate the challenges faced by the sector in addressing such plurality, particularly in terms of the need to respect the particularity of the ethos of each school in terms of attending to the plural nature of Irish classrooms.

The contemporary landscape in the Republic of Ireland is radically different to that of the old landscape evidenced by the presuppositions of the past (Mc Guckin et al., 2014), i.e. the homogenously Catholic or Christian group setting, and brings with it a renewed appreciation and recognition of the important role of hermeneutics in contemporary religious education. For instance, the contemporary teaching and learning experience moves towards bringing into focus "the presuppositions of each one of the subjects when they start to share their convictions, insights, behaviour, their familiarity with religious, philosophical or ethical life options" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 17; Byrne, 2013b).

From this standpoint, academically speaking, it is postulated that the formation of a common foundation for comprehending each other in dialogical contexts creates the necessary and appropriate conditions to afford access to the religious quest, to religious traditions and particularly to Christianity (Lane, 2013; Cullen, 2017; Byrne, 2013b). Such an approach is evident in the Catholic religious education curriculum for pre-schools and primary schools in the Republic of Ireland (CPPREC, 2015). Within the learning group participants, through their efforts to communicate, should be gradually and continuously introduced to a complex and diverse range of religious traditions (CPPREC, 2015). From this standpoint, it is clear that the hermeneutical key is not exclusively situated in the interpretation of old texts. Rather, the hermeneutical principle rests firmly in the possession of young people themselves and is reflective of

a far a broader gamut than 'experience' alone. This contemporary spectrum, therefore, is inclusive of familial background, peer groups, youth culture, media, Information and Communication Technology to name but a few (Pollefeyt, 2004; Cullen, 2019).

Thus far it has been demonstrated that religious education has encountered significant challenges when faced with the complexities brought forth by a pluralist context. Amidst the complexities of this context four key observations point to the need for an exploration of the hermeneutics of religious education: 1] irruptions from the periphery and the return to religion, [2] the theological matrix, [3] the status of religion, and [4] the position of students and teachers in religious education classes. From engaging with these four areas it is clear that any approach to religious education that is to adequately address the educational needs of the contemporary context in the Republic of Ireland, such an approach must first and foremost take the question of truth seriously. Hence, the status given to such truth claims, as well as the way in which one approaches them, is of central importance to educators and pupils in religious education.

As outlined above, the concurrent diversity and plurality among people demonstrates the context of opportunities that are offered by an open or inclusive society for situating oneself sharply towards established and assumed social, cultural, religious, and ethical traditions. The person finds themselves situated in a 'fragile hermeneutical space' where reality, even one's inner reality, is "radically marked by a form of polyphony, by a multiplicity of voices, by plurality" (Pollefeyt, 2020, p. 117). In taking account of this insight, it is clear that religious education in the Republic of Ireland is in need of attention in terms of the discerning its hermeneutical task. If such a treatment is to carry

any weight in terms of its offerings, it follows that one must firstly recognise that religious education is best understood as a hermeneutical undertaking.

2.4. Opening A New Horizon for Religious Education in the Republic of Ireland

In giving further attention to the matter of hermeneutics in contemporary religious education, it becomes clear that the role of hermeneutics is more pervasive than one might originally consider. It is necessary, therefore, for one to consider the importance of appreciating and recognising that religious education is itself a 'hermeneutic activity'. While this unique dimension of religious education will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter Three, prior to such a discussion it is necessary for one to address a key dimension of this new horizon for religious education in the Republic of Ireland – the need for a multidisciplinary frame of reference.

2.4.1. Multidisciplinary Frame of Reference

In addressing the hermeneutical task of religious education scholars often refer to a variety of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. Such a multidisciplinary frame of reference has not only become widely accepted, but offers a far broader horizon than "the technical support offered by didactics or educational sciences" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 36). On this point, one is prompted to consider the following question: what are the queries that teachers are challenged by which necessitate such a range of experts from such an array of disciplines? What manner of context causes a teacher to struggle in such a way that they are moved to acquire a deeper understanding concerning the human subject and society? For a religious educator, is it not clear that his/her subject matter ought to place God's revelation and the Judaeo-Christian tradition at its centre as Church authorities persistently emphasise?

Pollefeyt (2004) notes that "for centuries the 'catechism' was the masterpiece of religious socialisation and is still regarded as the primary instrument guaranteeing the continuity of Christian living" (p. 37; Hession, 2008; Mc Guckin, et. al., 2014). For instance, as Gareth Byrne (2013b) states, the National Directory for Catechesis, *Share the Good News* (2010; hereafter, SGN), is "transparent" in this regard (p. 147). It sets down a "framework for the presentation of and engagement with the Good News of Jesus Christ" (Byrne, 2013b, p. 147). In many respects the catechism is still considered to be the definitive instrument for protecting doctrinal discipline and for accomplishing unity among believers as it is intended to support the "supposedly, highly ritualised, devotional and sacramental life of the faithful" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 37). This is evident in SGN (2010) which attempts to present "the vision, organisation and planning associated with evangelisation, catechesis and religious education from the perspective of the Catholic Church" (Byrne, 2013b, p. 147). However, the contemporary context within which religious education is operating is far more complex than one might initially imagine and, such complexity brings with it significant critiques of such traditionalist approaches to religious education. According to Jacques Haers (2004), the intricacy of the contemporary context inhibits one from acquiring any manner of transparency concerning an overview of our world.

2.4.1.1. Disturbing Complexity

Haers (2004) states that "we live in an extremely complex world; issues have become so entangled that we lose perspective" (p. 314). While matters are becoming more volatile and human life across the world has become increasingly precarious, "technological advancement is such that we are not able to keep up and a new elite of

'those who know and understand' is being constituted" (pp. 314-315). From this standpoint, Haers notes that "the so-called positive sciences, new ways of thinking are explored" (p. 315). Amidst the complexities of this contemporary context, one hears "talk about indeterminacy, chaos-theory, fluctuations and their influences" (p. 315). Of particular importance, for Haers (2004), is the loss of the individuals sense of immediate security in a time where "world politics and the media enlarge the image of an internationalised and globalised society" (p. 315; Lane, 2015a).

Pollefeyt (2004) argues that the current predicament in which one finds themselves is intrinsically connected to the principal development in philosophy concerning the position of questions-of-truth or "the conflict between metaphysics and recent trends in hermeneutical philosophy" (p. 37; Marion, 2013; Bengtson, 2016). Consequently, any discussion surrounding the hermeneutical nature of religious identity and religious education ultimately leads to a direct encounter with the humanities, social sciences, and other sciences (i.e. physics or cosmology) (Byrne, 2019; Sullivan, 2017). This debate, according to Pollefeyt (2004), desperately requires a different manner of "theologising in order to re-interpret the real fact of the matter regarding religious upbringing" (p. 37; Kieran, 2013; Meehan, 2017).

Halbfas (1971) was one of the first scholars to direct attention to the need for a profound break with the 'by-catechesis-alone' hypothesis. His book *Theory of Catechetics: Language and Experience in Religious Education*, was in many respects a manner of emancipation that was essential to freeing Catholic religious pedagogy from the limitations that were imposed by its dogmatic heritage (Mette, 2004). In this work of liberation, Halbfas (1971) calls for a novel and inclusive approach to religious

education - one that "takes into account the whole subject area of religious pedagogy" (Mette, 2004, p. 60). This move brought him into line with his Protestant contemporaries who had already chosen hermeneutics as an alternative framework for teaching religion in school.

This significant deviation from the 'by-catechesis-alone' hypothesis widened the horizon of interests for both educators and pupils. In this new horizon, it is evident that religious education must refrain from any limitations that trap it within the confines of purely "existential learning processes within single individuals" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 38; McGrady, 2013). As noted by Pollefeyt (2004), this new horizon clearly demonstrates that "the historical, social, scientific and cultural domains must be included as integral parts of fostering the desirable type of understanding specific to religion" (p. 38; Lane, 2013; Topley, 2008). The approach called for by Halbfas places central significant on a multi-dimensional comprehension of reality. In taking his lead from Halbfas (1971), Norbert Mette (2004) emphasises the importance therefore of the inclusion of a curiosity for language, symbols, mythos and logos, history and all questions of current interest to humanity in the teaching-learning process (p. 62).

When the hermeneutical approach is considered from a traditional perspective, i.e. of being purely 'text-interpretation' or as being useful merely in the context of biblical teaching, it lends support to "the deductive, linear model of teaching religion" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p.38; Bowie and Cole, 2018). In taking account of a more contemporary hermeneutic understanding of religious education, however, or with the integration of Peirce's insights regarding the abductive model by thinkers such as Chris Hermans (2004), one's understanding of a hermeneutical approach moves in a novel

direction. With the view towards widening the horizon for both educators and pupils a significant number of educators have instinctively integrated data from a range of disciplines (NCCA, 2019; Byrne, 2019; McGrady et al., 2019b; Mc Guckin et al., 2014). A multi-disciplinary curiosity, therefore, has emerged within the context of the frame of reference of religious education.

2.4.1.2. Multi-Disciplinary Curiosity

The multi-dimensional approach towards reality, including religion, called for by Halbfas (1971) and Mette (2004) necessitates a multi-disciplinary background for religious education. Such a multi-disciplinary frame of reference marks a "radical rupture with the linear, hierarchical model of programmed teaching" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 38; Byrne, 2019; NCCA 2019). In coming to terms with this new context, educators utilised stimulating documentation from a range of sources as they strived to provide content that would offer their pupils opportunities for discerning the significance and relevance of religious life visions (IECON, 2017; Hurley, 2017; Carr, 2007).

In this context it is interesting to note that "the studies of the religion's evolution in contemporary society, the crisis of religious instruction in schools and the development of alternative theories of religious education relied heavily upon many disciplines" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 38; Lane, 2008). A perfect example of this shift is evident when one considers the fact that 'theology' is now aligned or associated with the more secular 'religious studies' thereby systematically integrating the sciences of religion i.e. psychology of religion, sociology of religion or philosophy of religion. While the multidisciplinary background of religious education is agreed upon, in both practical as well as theoretical dimensions amongst many of the thinkers discussed above, such

scholars also echo a word of caution concerning the multidisciplinary background as it is not without its risks or misunderstandings (Pollefeyt, 2004; Lane, 2013; McGrady, 2013). The understanding of religion in the broadest sense of the word within the context of the humanities and social sciences is familiar in the academy. Such an understanding of religion is easily accessible through bookshops, popularised scientific literature, libraries, magazines and the media. There is a sphere of uncertainty, however, across the majority of discourse about meaning concerning "what is proper to a religious worldview, on the one hand, and what a genuine understanding of the human reality represents, on the other hand" (Pollefeyt, 2004; p. 39; Hession, 2015; Cullen, 2017).

In considering the methodological dimension of religious education Leslie Francis (2004) calls attention to the insights raised by Michael Grimmitt (2000) in his review of eight pedagogical approaches to religious education developed since the 1970s. In particular, Francis (2004) states that Grimmitt (2000) illustrates rather conclusively that there has been an absence in terms of relevant competencies amongst theologians to shape religious education in schools. Francis (2004) states that "during the second part of the twentieth century, religious education in England and Wales has been shaped more actively by educationalists than by theologians" (p. 355). At the level of practice, educationalists have been at the forefront in terms of forging "both the content of religious education and the pedagogical methodologies for delivering content" (Francis, 2004, p. 355). Arguably, the opposite has been the case in the Republic of Ireland (Alive O, 1996-2004; CPPREC, 2015; Lane, 2015a; SGN, 2010; GIL, 2015-2019).

When considering the insights raised by Francis (2004) and Grimmitt (2000), as well as the influence exerted by theologians in the Republic of Ireland, one must consider the question: what is the authority, particular to theologians and the Church, concerning the specific aims or goals of religious education? While one must recognise that the authorities charged with the responsibility for religious education determine the formal and structural dimension of the discipline, one must too acknowledge that individuals who are fully involved in the actual religion lessons, the pupils first and foremost, exert a particularly definitive influence upon the development of religious education (Mc Guckin et al., 2014; Byrne, 2019; Dineen and Lundie, 2017).

Although a range of observational methods from communication sciences as well as social psychology can be particularly helpful resources in terms of discerning the appropriate logic and the actual impact of the various actors, and of their pertinence with a larger environment, "the different disciplines are not to be used to solve the paralysis as regards the 'convincing transmission' of a faith tradition, or of theological content" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 39; Mc Guckin et al., 2014). For instance, as has been outlined earlier in this chapter, what is at stake here is of crucial importance – the status of religion in society. As Pollefeyt (2004) outlines "the hermeneutic nature of religion and religious education is not about a successful application of the 'inductive' approach in opposition to a doctrinal, deductive way of teaching" (p. 39). Hence, the modus of interpretation of religion/philosophy of life that ought to be preferable in the current context requires more detailed consideration.

In this context a multi-disciplinary curiosity provides a rather stable foundation for one to recognise the emerging truth that is appropriate to the religious discourse (Pollefeyt, 2004). This point is affirmed by Boeve (2004a), but he also notes that such a foundation

necessitates that one respects each discipline's unique perspective. He states that "there is no straight theological line between the universally human and the particularly Christian" (Boeve, 2004a, p. 243; Lane, 2011). By way of example, Boeve (2004a) explains that "it is not because humans can be universally defined as ritual beings that Christian sacraments – indeed ritualising the lives of persons and communities – are therefore legitimate, meaningful and/or true" (pp. 243-244). In other words, (secular) reason does not need to first of all recognise nor constitute or establish the truth of Christian faith in order for such truth claims to be maintained (Lane, 2011; Taylor, 2007). It would demonstrate significant naiveté, however, for one to argue that the contributions proffered by philosophy and the human sciences about human reality do not influence the theological interpretation of tradition, and thereby tradition itself (Boeve, 2003a; Gadamer, 2013) Rather, the reciprocal relationship between the disciplines is undeniable. On this point it directs attention to the insights of Roger Burggraeve (2004).

For Burggraeve (2004) the input of the sciences, particularly the human sciences, is validated entirely by an inductive approach in ethical reflection and communication. He argues that said sciences, by way of proper method, enable a truer and deeper comprehension of human behaviour and decision making. The human sciences merely signal the realities that improve ethical reflection concerning the work of humanisation. The human sciences, therefore, cannot be prescriptive. One can anticipate, however, some benefit from the use of the human sciences in a realistic ethical discourse. Burggraeve (2004) strongly contests any position that would suggest that inter-disciplinarity be used for simply practical purposes or for demonstrating leniency to individual or collective interests (p. 395). The unique value of a particular religious

tradition cannot be reduced to personalised visions and interests (Lane, 2011; Boeve, 2013a). Such an approach suppresses the innate potential of tradition to "lead to a breaking open of a renewed future" (Burggraeve, 2004, p. 396). Rather, religion must be studied in and of its own right and a variety of disciplines are called upon to achieve this *telos* (Burggraeve, 2004, pp. 395-396; Byrne, 2019; Cassidy, 2004).

2.4.1.3. Scientific Relativity

As outlined above, Chris Hermans (2004) sets out to go beyond misunderstandings surrounding the opposition between inductive and deductive reasoning by way of Peirce's (1974) process of idea generation, or 'retroduction', whereby the 'consequence' of reasoning is drawn retrospectively from unknown 'antecedents' (Hermans, 2004, p. 112). In his consideration of the rediscovery of Peirce (1974) in the United States of America, Pollefeyt (2004) makes the case that interest in Peirce's work is connected to "the concern of scientists to consider the 'sociological' circumstances of their scientific work" (p. 40). In particular, he argues that their curiosity stemmed from the fact that "the war in Vietnam and the military commitment in general offered opportunities for exploring the social and political relevance of their scientific work" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 40). From this standpoint, it is clear that the pertinence of Peirce's thinking today is initially connected to the 'historicity' of science (Vattimo, 1997).

For Pollefeyt (2004) the connection between theology and religious education should be made in a similar manner: "inter-disciplinarity legitimates the hermeneutical importance of the human sciences, including ethics and theology" (p. 40). Both ethics and theology are also embedded in a particular and political context (Tuohy, 2013; Habermas, 2010; Lane, 2013; Hannam, 2019; Freire, 2005). From this perspective,

Pollefeyt (2004) argues that it follows then that "the hermeneutic interest should be related with the worldwide introduction, and its development, of democratic systems" (p. 40; Lane 2013; Hannam, 2019; Habermas, 2010; Taylor, 2007). In this context, not only the technocrat or expert may provide input, but the civilian too can contribute concerning issues linked to their real or concrete life circumstances (Cullen, 2017; Lane, 2015a; Kieran, 2013). On this point institutional religious education encounters "a process of democratisation, which also affects the content of the discourse" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 41). In particular, this process unfolds when institutional religious education encounters one of the core aspects of contemporary consumerist society – cultural relativism.

The utilisation of scientific methods of investigation in theology or the systematic study of religion integrates a novel comprehension of significance of religion in a changing environment (Byrne, 2019; Mc Guckin et al., 2014). There is a the need for clarity, however, concerning the role that is to be given to empirically based observations about religious behaviour or about the evolution of religion in society (Pollefeyt, 2004; Cullen, 2019). For example, is there an argumentative significance or even a normative value concerning the empirical data and the conclusions drawn from said data? Considering the speculative nature of traditional theology, if empirical observations meddle with said nature, what manner of theological discourse is still possible? What kind of theological consideration will be capable of appropriately addressing the difference between what is fancied to be the reality, and the empirical data or the factual behaviour of persons, the faithful, initially?

In considering religious education as an appropriate exercise for practical theology, Leslie Francis (2004) argues that the methodological position of empirical theology proffers proper academic tools with which practical theologians can critique and assist in establishing the public appearance of religious education (Byrne, 2019). He claims that if this is to be effective it is necessary "to establish the identity and integrity of empirical theology and to distinguish empirical theology from related fields, especially from the social scientific study of religion" (Francis, 2004, p. 356; Byrne, 2019). For Francis (2004), one must recognise that there is an underlying assumption evident in the above discourse in terms of fostering a dialogic hermeneutical approach to religious education. Such an approach, follows from the assumption one takes up "a serious study of the attitudes, beliefs and values (the presuppositions and prejudices) of the learners" (p. 356; Byrne, 2019).

Educators might be somewhat curious or inclined towards learning about 'scientific' facts, i.e. clearly defined realities, as it would assist them to manage the aims of religious education as well as the planning of teaching and learning (NCCA, 2015; Hession, 2015). It is important for educators to be made aware that a positivistic comprehension of scientific investigation is not the most secure option (Pollefeyt, 2004). Thinkers such as Lane (2011), Nieuwenhove (2014) and Burggraeve (2004) argue that many Christians are tempted all too easily by the results of scientific investigation without an appropriate comprehension of its limitations. It is important here that one recognises that even in situations where the results of scientific investigation are 'definitive' i.e. empirical sociology, a scientific 'fact' is always a 'construction' (Burggraeve, 2004; Lane, 2011). Furthermore, statistical data concerning the rising spread of behaviours moving away from social norms

unintentionally promotes, for many, a willingness to take up a critical stance against previously legitimate value positions (Burggraeve, 2004; Byrne, 2019; Mc Guckin et al., 2014; Dineen and Lundie, 2017). Such willingness promotes a readiness to break with the norm for a new behaviour, which is more aligned with the largest part of the statistical evidence (Burggraeve, 2004; Byrne, 2019; Mc Guckin et al., 2014).

When attempting to introduce a multi-disciplinary background, religious educators need to be aware of the classical and recently stimulated debate between the so-called 'natural' and 'human' sciences (Pollefeyt, 2004; Lane, 2011; Gadamer, 2013). The significance of this debate emerges when one is consulting data from different disciplines. Modern hermeneutic philosophers emphasise that the type of scientific thinking exercised by both the natural sciences and the human sciences requires that both co-exist and enter into an ongoing dialogue (Pollefeyt, 2004; Lane, 2011; Habermas, 2010). In this context an interesting question emerges – does Hutsebaut (2004) provide further support for the view that there are no facts, but only interpretations? Or as, Gianni Vattimo (1997) affirms, truth for hermeneutics is not principally the conformity of statement to object, but the opening within which every conformity or deformity can emerge (p. 16).

Thus far, it has been argued that a necessary precursor to apprehending religious education as a hermeneutic activity is the recognition of the need for a multi-disciplinary frame of reference. While religious educators in the Republic of Ireland have been exercising a multi-disciplinary curiosity, such interest needs to be guided by the disturbing complexity that the contemporary context brings to the fore. It has been shown that such curiosity carries a necessary requirement for one to be attentive to contemporary discourse and debates amongst the disciplines, i.e. the revival of the

classical debate in terms of the validity of the truth claims arrived at by way of the type of thinking, or reasoning, that is involved in either the natural sciences or the human sciences.

2.5. Conclusion

In conclusion, it has been demonstrated that religious education in the Republic of Ireland is taking place in an age that is best characterised as a *post*-Christian and *post*-Secular age. Within this context, it has been illustrated that the question of truth is of central importance to religious education. In this regard, it has been shown that there has been an erosion of objective truth in religious education. As a result of the current post-Christian and post-Secular and this erosion of objective truth, religious education in the Republic of Ireland has been challenged in two broad directions: 'education in religion and spirituality from the inside' and 'education in religion and spirituality from the outside'. In taking this point into account, it has been argued that pupils ought to be invited to move towards perceiving their own truth claims within the context of their relationship to the other in religious education. Such learning needs to move betwixt and between the absolutising of pupil's own truth claims and the snare of relativism with the view to opening up a middle way. It has been demonstrated that religious education should move towards delving into the fragile hermeneutical space that is peculiar to the person.

As noted earlier in this chapter, this research contends that religious education should move towards opening this hermeneutical space up for children and young adults with the view to developing their capacity to interpret reality through both a philosophical and religious lens and encounter the truth that nothing is obvious, normal or simple

(Pollefeyt, 2020). This apprehension of the person claims that each person is characterised by such hermeneutical openness, religious or nonreligious, and that by way of this receptivity, this indeterminacy, the givenness of being, it is the responsibility of each person to arrange their thinking or reasoning. In other words, such an anthropology purports that the human subject can "create, discover and exchange sense, meaning and orientation within this openness, and that it is by way of "this shared openness that all people are also structurally linked as relational beings" (Pollefeyt, 2020, p. 116; Lane, 2015a). In taking this insight into account, it has been shown that the hermeneutical task of religious education is an area that is in need of urgent attention in the Republic of Ireland.

As mentioned earlier in this discussion, the hermeneutical dimension of religious education has received significant attention across the United Kingdom and Europe – by thinkers such as Didier Pollefeyt (2020), Lieven Boeve (2012), David Aldridge (2011), Andrew Wright (2020), and Patricia Hannam (2019) to name but a few – but it has received little, if any, attention in the Republic of Ireland. While it was recognised that Irish thinkers have attempted to address the hermeneutical dimension of religious education (Lane, 2011; Hession, 2015; Cullen, 2017), such treatments have taken up an explicitly theological gaze or have attempted to move beyond this lens but experienced limited success in terms of addressing the hermeneutical area. From this standpoint, it has been argued that there is a need for a treatment of the hermeneutical dimension of RE that not only moves beyond an exclusively theological gaze, but one that also moves into a more accurate and meaningful engagement with Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

In advocating for the need for the above treatise in RE in the Republic of Ireland, it was demonstrated that such an approach is justified by a closer examination of the context of religious education in the Republic of Ireland. It was argued that there are four key observations that need to be taken seriously in this regard: [1] irruptions from the periphery and the return to religion, [2] the theological matrix, [3] the status of religion, and [4] the position of students and teachers in religious education classes. By engaging with these four areas, a case was made in favour of such hermeneutical engagement in that it can assist one in working towards the development of an understanding of religious education that not only takes the question of truth seriously, but one that is also sensitive to the range of complexities that this question carries in the contemporary context of religious education. This research contends that any approach to religious education that is to adequately address the educational needs of the contemporary context in the Republic of Ireland must first and foremost take the question of truth seriously. Hence, the status given to such truth claims, as well as the way in which one approaches them, is of central importance to educators and pupils in religious education.

It was shown that the concurrent diversity and plurality among people demonstrates the context of opportunities that are offered by an open or inclusive society for situating oneself sharply towards established and assumed social, cultural, religious, and ethical traditions. The person finds themselves situated in a 'fragile hermeneutical space' where reality, even one's inner reality, is "radically marked by a form of polyphony, by a multiplicity of voices, by plurality" (Pollefeyt, 2020, p. 117). By way of this insight, it was argued that religious education in the Republic of Ireland is in need of attention in terms of the discerning its hermeneutical task. It was argued that if such a treatment

is to carry any weight in terms of its offerings, it follows that one must firstly recognise that religious education is best understood as a hermeneutical undertaking.

In taking this point seriously, it was argued that a necessary precursor to apprehending religious education as a hermeneutic activity is the recognition of the need for a multi-disciplinary frame of reference. It was highlighted that religious educators in the Republic of Ireland have been exercising a multi-disciplinary curiosity, but that such interest needs to be guided by the disturbing complexity that the contemporary context brings to the fore. It has been shown that such curiosity carries a necessary requirement for one to be attentive to contemporary discourse and debates amongst the disciplines, i.e. the revival of the classical debate in terms of the validity of the truth claims arrived at by way of the type of thinking, or reasoning, that is involved in either the natural sciences or the human sciences.

In sum, this chapter has demonstrated that there is a need for a treatment of the hermeneutical dimension of religious education and that such a treatment should not only move beyond an exclusively theological gaze, but also towards deeper engagement with hermeneutics. It was discerned, therefore, that the need for a hermeneutical approach is an emerging issue within the realm of religious education in the Republic of Ireland, and as such, religious education is best understood as a hermeneutic undertaking. In given attention to the need to embrace a multi-disciplinary frame of reference, the ground has been laid for more detailed engagement with and articulation of an understanding of religious education as a hermeneutic activity. In the following chapter, therefore, a detailed account of religious education as a hermeneutical undertaking will be offered.

Chapter Three

Towards A Response to Restrictive Hermeneutics in Religious Education

3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, it was demonstrated that religious education is best understood as a hermeneutic activity. This chapter will consider the question: what hermeneutics are at play and how do we deal with restrictive hermeneutics that are often in religious education today? It will be demonstrated that an understanding of religious education as a hermeneutic activity is best considered by way of the topics: [1] paradigm shifts in religious education, and [2] subjectivity and contextuality. In given an account of religious education as a hermeneutic activity, it will be argued that hermeneutics presents a constitutive turn in contemporary religious education.

In recognising hermeneutics as a constitutive turn in religious education, the ground is laid for a critique of the hermeneutics of modern religious education. For the purpose of this critique this chapter will primarily consider the hermeneutics of modern religious education in the United Kingdom. This chapter will argue that modern religious education fails to adequately address the question of truth. This critique is structured by way of the following headings: [1] Wittgenstein and religious language, [2] romantic hermeneutical theory and religious education, and [3] main issues and concerns. Following from this critique, it will be proposed that while a variety of approaches to religious education have been offered in response to the restrictive hermeneutic found at the heart of modern religious education, there is much to be gained from giving particular attention to the critical realist approach to religious education.

The analysis of the critical realist approach to religious education is conducted by way of the following themes: [1] two-fold distinction: truth and truthfulness, [2] a working framework from a critical realist perspective, and [3] a critique of the critical realist approach to religious education. By way of these themes, this chapter will argue that while the critical realist approach to religious education takes the question of truth seriously, it falls short in terms of its treatment of both religion and truth. In giving attention to this, the chapter will suggest that Catholic theology has significant insights to offer that can assist contemporary religious education not only in terms of an understanding of its hermeneutical task, but also in terms of developing an appreciation for the way in which the person relates to faith and reason, tradition, and the Ultimate Other, the Transcendent, God.

3.2. Religious Education as a Hermeneutic Undertaking

In this section an understanding of religious education as a hermeneutic activity is considered by way of the topics: [1] paradigm shifts in religious education, and [2] subjectivity and contextuality.

3.2.1. Paradigm Shifts in Religious Education

Chapter Two demonstrated that modernity and the associated phenomenon of the secularisation process inaugurated a shift in the relationship between human consciousness and religious traditions (Pollefeyt, 2004; Boeve, 2012). Modern society brought with it not only different lifestyles, social contacts and means of communication, but a novel consciousness in terms of values, meaning, religion and art. In taking account of this shift, the sciences of religions have embraced a range of

categories and analytical models to assist in the interpretation of the "re-composition of the religious world" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 21).

In addition, it has been noted, that the study of post-modernity has brought an even greater appreciation of the 'interruption' or 'estrangement' with the long-established continuity of religious and cultural traditions in any given society to the surface (Pollefeyt, 2004; Pollefeyt, 2020; Boeve, 2012). The way in which the person relates to religious and cultural traditions has changed. This point is affirmed by Friedrich Schweitzer (2004) in relation to the authority that religious traditions once possessed concerning the daily life of people and organisations. Such authority, according to Schweitzer, has come to be appreciated from the perspective of a radically pluralism. Such a position argues that a single "tradition can no longer claim a special authority" in matters pertaining to the daily life of people or organisations (Schweitzer, 2004, p. 79).

Religious educators do not have many options or choices, at least not any that would be deemed ultimately sufficient or adequate, in terms of addressing this newfound void and ambiguity that is so characteristic of the contemporary context within which religious education is taking place. Rather, such educators are confronted with unexpected shifts in their pupils' attitudes and opinions (Cullen, 2019). Pollefeyt (2004) notes that, at least initially, religious educators search for pragmatic solutions. At one and the same time, however, said educators also search for insights that will assist them in attempting to comprehend the reality that is unfolding. Religious educators search for perspectives that they can carry into the future, for insights that will support them as confident teachers who strive towards fostering inclusive forms of cooperation with

young people in the religious education classroom (Mullally, 2019; CSP, 2015). From both a theoretical and practical standpoint, therefore, it can be argued that religious educators cultivate and create operational steps in reaction to specific discords, misinterpretations, opportunities or difficulties encountered in concrete reality.

In spite of the fact that the ensuing options present both agreement in particular aspects as well as plurality and fundamental disagreement in others, it is evident that the academic subject of religious education over the recent decades has moved, or is moving towards, a novel conceptual paradigm (Pollefeyt, 2020; Hannam, 2019; Aldridge, 2017; 2018). A variety of questions present themselves concerning religion, religious education, and hermeneutics in this novel paradigm. For example: What is religion concerned with? What is religious education concerned with? What should religious education be about? Does the experimentation in religious education transcend adaptation to circumstances or momentary concerns? Does hermeneutics present itself as a radically different mode of comprehension in terms of what religious educators ought to be doing in religious education?

In attempting to address such questions, several ideas have been considered by religious educationalists. Originally, the teaching of a dogmatic system was abated by the proclamation of the *kerygma* of the gospel and by the examination of intrinsic links between divine revelation and human experience (Pollefeyt, 2004; Franchi, 2017). Following from this approach, an emergent political sensitivity is evident concerning the initiation of people into the authentic meaning of the Christian tradition (Franchi, 2017). This emergent position developed from an understanding of religion that holds at its centre the view that religion, particularly the Christian tradition, presents an

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undeviating invitation for the person to analyse distinct issues in society and to ally themselves with the oppressed and needy in society (Gutiérrez, 1988; Groody, 2008). This chartered a radically different approach to the initiation of persons into the meaning of the Christian tradition (Pollefeyt, 2004; Franchi, 2017; Byrne, 2013b). It is precisely in this context that one encounters the awakening of believers to the other, and therefore, the Wholly Other. (Todd, 2003; Buber, 1987; Levinas, 1969).

This approach ultimately leads to encounters with a plurality of cultures. These encounters carry a necessity for genuine inculturation. Believers, therefore, were awakened to the 'other' who had already been affected by the living God but in a different way (Pollefeyt, 2004; Lane, 2011; Dupuis, 2001; Buber, 1987). This acknowledgement of religious plurality as well as the importance of inter-religious learning brings new theological questions to the fore and a need for a different kind of dialogue (Pollefeyt, 2007; Merrigan, 2007; Lombaerts, 2007).

On this point it is interesting to consider the insights of Hubertus Halfbas (1971), particularly those raised in his consideration of the traditional concept of religious instruction (*Katechetik*) based upon the official Catholic doctrines and teachings that are focused upon the appropriate interpretation of truths revealed in the Bible. This approach, according to Halbfas, must be considered antiquated in terms of addressing the needs of the public school. Following from this line of reasoning, he attempts to develop a general religious pedagogy that moves towards overcoming such traditional approaches, particularly those that are closely connected to the Church. The more educators, Halbfas (1971) argues, move away from such traditional or institutionalised

approaches "the more consciously the religions of the world consider what they have in common and what separates them" (p. 13).

Of particular interest here in terms Halbfas' proposal is that in addressing this shift away from institutionalised models, he does not propose that educators should take up a secular or quasi-neutral approach (Irwin, 2013; NCCA, 2015; Nieuwenhove, 2013; Merrigan, 2013). Rather, Halbfas (1971) claims that the frame of reference for this fundamental religious pedagogy might be provided "by the religions and denominations themselves" (p. 13; Boeve, 2012). For Halbfas, religious education should be grounded in a hermeneutic approach to religions as opposed to dogmas of faith and the foundation for this may be provided by the rich traditions of the religions and denominations themselves. In his consideration of the work of Halbfas, Norbert Mette (2004) notes that the emergence of such hermeneutical thinking marks a particular historical turning point in terms of the Catholic debate surrounding religious education. Mette (2004) notes that religious education until 1968 in Germany had been shaped principally by a dogmatic approach had which was commonly known and referred to there as the "*materialkerygmatische Ansatz*" (p. 58).

The doctrinal approach, i.e. learning the teaching of the Church, is but one model that has been offered down through the centuries by the Church (SGN, par. 100). Other models have been offered such as the kerygmatic approach which centred on coming to know and love Jesus Christ, or the anthropological or experiential approach which embraced the circumstances and experience of the learning subject, or the more recent pastoral model which has exerted positive influences in Catholic schools: "a deeper awareness of the connection between home, parish, and school; a vision of the parish

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community as a catechetical community; recognition of the ongoing need for the spiritual care of all educators, parents/guardians, teachers, parish ministers; and greater sharing of ideas, responsibilities, and resources at diocesan and parish levels" (SGN, par. 100).

Of fundamental importance for Catholic religious education in school contexts, therefore, was the potential offered by the theological perspectives, such as those promulgated in the documents of the Second Vatican Council (1963-1968), i.e. *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965)*, Lumen Gentium* (1964)*, Nostra Aetate* (1965)*, Gaudium et Spes* (1965), which paralleled the developments in confessional religious education during the twentieth century. Across Europe intentional faith education, as Pollefeyt (2004) highlights, came to be carried out within the context of the family and the parish and was to be distinguished from religious education which was to be carried out within the school context. New sensitivities emerged between teachers and students within the school context. The prejudices held with regard to agreements between Church and State about the status of traditional religious instruction in school contexts, for example, failed to meet the needs of the contemporary classroom (Pollefeyt, 2004; Byrne, 2019; Cullen, 2019).

Two distinct dimensions can be discerned in terms of such sensitivities: [1] comprehending the meaning of a religious tradition, and [2] dialogical engagement between secular society and religions (Pollefeyt, 2004; Habermas, 2006; Ratzinger, 2006). The hermeneutical technique is representative of a variety of approaches that move towards enabling pupils to understand and translate the significance or meaning of any particular reality as well as to reflect in a systematic manner on the utilised in

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the process (Pollefeyt, 2020; Hannam, 2019; Aldrige, 2015). It is evident that contemporary society is characterised by an interactive dynamism (SGN, par. 100). The contemporary mind calls for a different manner of comprehending past events, traditions of old and their sacred texts (Pollefeyt, 2004; Boeve, 2004a).

Not only is it reasonable, therefore, that religious education has come to embrace a more hermeneutical orientation, but that the Christian reality within the contemporary school context has come to be an object of critical reflection as opposed to "the unquestioned object that is transmitted through teaching and education" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 23; CSP, 2019; CPPREC, 2015; SGN, 2010). From this standpoint, it can be argued that hermeneutics is not merely a method or technique utilised to interpret historical sources – it is more than exegesis. Hermeneutics is best understood as a matter that is existential, and, therefore, of principal importance to the way in which one approaches religious education as well as to the discernment of its *telos* as a hermeneutical undertaking.

3.2.1.1. Continuity and Distortion

Religious education, according to Cyril de Souza (2004), needs to be understood as being more verb than noun in that its task should be an activity. In particular, he explains that its task should dynamically involve "Christians by inviting them to re-formulate their faith anew, making use of the terminology and language of their proper cultural context" (De Souza, 2004, p. 259). In this context one must consider the following question: is it possible for hermeneutics to meaningfully contribute to a novel Christian reality? A reality that would reveal in a creative fashion its deep meaning for people today? The convolution of religious traditions and human experience, often

referred to as the correlation hypothesis evident in the anthropological or experiential approach of 1960s (Devitt, 1992), emerged being the analyst of the implications of modern and post-modern society in terms of the content of Christian faith itself (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 24). Consequently, it also appropriated the same role in terms of religious education.

The fragile character of the debate arises from the variety of manners in which "educationalists both organise the field of correlating dimensions and evaluate the outcomes" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 24). The concept of 'experience' presents itself in this context as being particularly complex. In terms of its anthropological comprehension, for example, experience signifies a fundamental category enabling humankind to learn about reality. In this regard, the openness of future generations as well as their willingness to integrate the Christian faith is of paramount importance for Catholic religious education. This point is also affirmed by Cyril de Souza (2004). The young generation of believers should be encouraged, according to de Souza (2004), to provide a faith interpretation not only to their experiences, but also to the hopes and aspirations that are generally found in their culture. It is evident, therefore, that the *telos* of religious education is necessarily of a hermeneutic orientation. In taking this point into account, de Souza (2004) highlights that hermeneutics provides a way, or better yet, a process by which to move the interpreter (i.e. religious educator) from the text to contemporary existence and from contemporary existence back to the text – this movement is known as the hermeneutical circle.

Pollefeyt (2004) states that "the experiential dimension, often identified with spiritual or religious sensitivity, causes specific problems when related with 'religion' in our

present context" (p. 24). Thomas Ruster (2000), for example, outlines that the presence of 'experiential dogma' proposes that experience is intrinsically connected to religion. He argues, however, that once the experiential dogma of religious pedagogy is in need of revision as one "cannot trust in today's pupils' [spiritual] experience" (Ruster, 2000, p. 200). In fact, Ruster (2000) claims that one cannot trust in "anybody's religious experience anymore, simply because our experience refers to the wrong type of religion" (p. 200; Mette, 2004). This 'wrong type of religion', for Ruster (2000), is the belief in the values of capitalism or money as a "reality that everything is defined by" (p. 200). This point is reaffirmed by Pollefeyt (2004), who argues that "the concrete lived experience of people today affect and disturb the 'content' traditionally associated with religious experience" (p. 24). On this point, Mette (2004) argues that one should therefore speak of the 'spiritual dimension' as a fundamental anthropological aspect of humankind. In this way, as Pollefeyt (2004) explains, the person unavoidably possesses some knowledge (experience of faith) of the spiritual reality: "a profound spiritual dimension is part of every single human being and this aspect of our personality desires communication" (pp. 24-25). For Mette (2004), therefore, this assumption is of central importance for the hermeneutic approach to religious education (p. 68).

According to Bert Roebben (2004), "the didactics of correlation, as an educational theory, specifically as '*Korrelieren-lernen als Fragen-lernen*' and not as a form of theology, is revitalised and expanded by young people themselves" (p. 220). This point raises significant questions, for example: does this imply that young people perceive a latent affinity between the Christian faith and the universal human sensitivity? Or must one recognise that Christian faith continues to exercise its transforming power for young people today? On this point, Roger Burggraeve (2004) highlights that it is

important to recognise that the view that everyone is invited to accept the Christian faith and its message, *'kath' holon'*, is a central 'catholic' conviction. Such a belief necessarily implies, therefore, that "the ethical insights, which are developed by Christians out of their faith, have a general human significance and scope" (Burggraeve, 2004, p. 381).

In response to Burggraeve's (2004) affirmations it is reasonable for one to ask, for example: is the perpetuation of the correlation hypothesis in religious education even permissible anymore? This question finds itself in particularly unstable ground, however, when it is encounters the disruption that has emerged concerning the traditional manner of relating the human reality and the Christian vision of life (Pollefeyt, 2004). The precise meaning or representation of 'correlation' is no longer apparent within the current context – how can one, therefore, begin to speak of maintaining the correlation hypothesis. This challenge to the correlation hypothesis is also recognised by Mette (2004). He argues that it is necessary for one to embrace a thoroughly different thesis, an archetypal transformation: there is no option apart from a hermeneutic religious education (Mette, 2004, p. 70). It is necessary, Mette (2004) states, for a wholly other approach to be developed in order to embrace religion in educational processes that are operative externally to the Church. Such development is needed particularly in terms of students at school as many of them, according to Mette (2004), require an initial introduction to the religious sphere in order to appreciate the relevance of religion today, as they are raised in a-religious environments (p. 66).

In taking account of these points, it is important that attention is given to the insights of Lieven Boeve (2004) as he provides a particular diagnosis of the challenge of

sustaining the reciprocal relationship between human experiences and Christian faith as a didactical principle. Boeve (2004) states, for example, that "the *factual overlap* between culture and Christianity constituting the horizon behind the correlation of Christian faith with modern culture *has disappeared*" (p. 243). Correlation strategies and their presumptions are subjected to significant pressure as a consequence of the process of de-traditionalisation – as discussed in Chapter Two. The general agreement or continuity between modern culture or society and Christian faith, Boeve (2004a) argues, "is no longer plausible nor does it function within the pastoral domain" (p. 243). In fact, he denotes the modern correlation method as a counterproductive systematic-theological and pastoral approach. The orientation of new curricula for religious education, according to Boeve, must therefore "substitute the modern paradigm of correlation for a postmodern paradigm in which the acknowledgement of plurality, particularity, narrativity, and a radical-hermeneutic consciousness are of paramount importance" (p. 233).

3.2.1.2. From Certainty to Possibility, from Homogeneity to Plurality

According to Pollefeyt (2004) a dogmatic frame of reference, when treated as the exclusive norm for religious education, "enhances security, uniformity, homogeneity and dependence upon a fixed tradition and centralised authority" (p. 29). Such an understanding of the science of interpretation implies that hermeneutics is answerable to rigid rules and promises to achieve the conformity of interpretations with the objective truth, with reproduction and stability" (p. 29). The beatified truth of the past endures "as the norm for the future" (p. 29). There is, however, an alternative. Hermans (2004) directs one's attention, for example, to the insights of Nicholas of Cusa. Hermans (2004) states that, for Nicholas of Cusa, "God is everything which he is able-

to-be (*posse est*). God alone is all he can be; human beings are not, because only in the Beginning are possibility and actuality identical" (Hermans, 2004, p. 109). In line with his contemporary interpreters, Nicholas of Cusa's most influential and most significant achievement in terms of the renewal of religious thinking, according to Hermans, was "the shift from actuality to possibility" (p. 119). In other words, it could be argued, that Cusa's desire is to "define the Ultimate before or beyond the need for the possible to become actual, in order to manifest itself as possible. For human beings, this need drives life in a continuous flux of becoming" (p. 119).

On this point, it is evident that the mainstay of the hermeneutical religious education paradigm is one that comprehends hermeneutics as a "discovery of possibilities and as openness for the future" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 29). It is feasible here to connect this conceptual motif with the thought that from a hermeneutical standpoint there can be only interpretations and no facts (Nietzsche, 1968). This point is argued by Hermans (2004) in his account of abductive hermeneutics. He states that "there is no absolute knowing (with a capital K), because there are no uncontested premises to build on" (Hermans, 2004, p. 120). It is important, however, to tread with an air of caution in considering these points as it is abundantly clear that hermeneutics is more than a methodology (Tracy, 1991). Further, hermeneutics does not necessitate that a relativistic epistemology be considered the only feasible model of knowledge acquisition. This point is significant in terms of the hermeneutical paradigm of theology, particularly when subjective involvement in tradition is recognised as an indispensable instrument in theological understanding.

According to Schweitzer (2004), for example, if hermeneutics can be called a paradigm or a 'condition' for all of theology, hermeneutics refers to the general circumstance of engaging "with a tradition, which will only be accepted or appreciated and appropriated by contemporary people if it makes sense to them" (p. 79). In this context, a significant instrument for comprehending 'meaning' is one's subjective involvement with the tradition. This point is further emphasised by Hermans (2004) in that he too agrees that in a postmodern context people desire to experience the significance of things for themselves – "a truth that is not 'felt' is not believed. The only truth that can be found is at the end of a quest" (p. 119).

While the analogy of a journey of development is a common phrase used in explaining the religious situation in our contemporary society, the religious truth that is discoverable is "not a comforting truth of a God-who-is, but a God-who-may-be" (Hermans, 2004, p. 120; Kearney, 2001). Persons can move towards understanding it, but their final understanding will always remain an informed guess" (Hermans, 2004, p. 120). Lieven Boeve (2004a) speaks of a similar idea. The total acceptance of the particularity of Christian discourse is not a refutation of the truth, according to Boeve (2004a), it is "the condition of possibility for it" (p. 250; Kearney, 2001). For Boeve (2004a), "it is only through the incarnation that God becomes fully revealed" (p. 250). This implies that "each Christian narrative stands under God's judgement and can only bear witness to God in a radical-hermeneutical manner" (p. 250). It is specifically in this tension that the Christian truth claim is held.

From this discussion it is evident that many shifts are unfolding at varying levels, for example, from "the normative dogmatic system to a narrative theology, from certainty

to uncertainty or possibility, from homogeneity to plurality, from linear continuity to re-contextualisation, and from order to iconoclasm" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 30; Tracy, 1991). These developments permeate not only religious education, but all areas of life. Pollefeyt (2004) suggests that such shifts are "the result of many influences, which affect the basic presuppositions regarding institutionalised religions in contemporary society" (p. 30). Religious education is particularly vulnerable in this regard. For example, as Pollefeyt (2004) notes religious education, which is intrinsically identified with denominational schools, is especially vulnerable to and affected by the unruly "evolution of society upon formal and compulsory education" (p. 30). The exchange of such a variety of influences as well as the appeal to freedom of thought, action and speech establishes a novel context within which hermeneutics is the leading discipline used in terms of establishing a "constructive educational processes" (p. 30). This paradigm shift or turn towards hermeneutics, therefore, is not merely an interpretation nor a matter of opinion – it is *fait accompli*.

3.2.2. Subjectivity and Contextuality

In taking account of this discussion, it is important to remain attentive to the fact that the position of persons involved in religious education is intrinsically connected to "the history of educational institutions (schools in particular) and to the historical context in which they emerged" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 31; CSP, 2019). An example of this inherent relationship presents itself by way of the diversification and multiplication of social services according to religious traditions or non-religious worldviews across Europe that has unfolded since the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. The commonly known 'polarisation' or 'division' of society, i.e. the organisation of society from cradle to grave according to the ideological orientations of the people, according to Pollefeyt

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(2004), addressed the ambitious desire evident amongst Christian denominations to: [a] govern the cognitive processes, and [b] practices of believers and to regulate social life. Wolfgang Reinhard and Heinz Schilling (1995) present in rather clear terms the manner in which the German '*Konfessionalization*' or French '*confessionalisation'* epitomise the institutions and organisations of the 16th–17th centuries and, in this way, continued to influence, even determine, the structure of European society. It is important for one to recognise, therefore, that the impotence of organisational and personal denominational background in relation to exerting influence on social life is a rather novel reality as it has only come to the fore during recent decades. From this standpoint, an abundance of politicians argue that a European Constitution should cut all ties with the religious heritage of European populations. Such politicians profess their intention to govern the European Union as "a neutral and secular democracy" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 31; Habermas, 2016). As has been demonstrated thus far in this research, this neutrality is impossible by virtue of the historical condition of the person.

It would be disingenuous to insinuate, however, that perspectives such as the autonomy of the so-called all-knowing rational subject coupled with the individualism that is so characteristic of postmodern culture have not exerted particular influence on European society (Habermas, 2016; Ratzinger, 2005; Habermas, 2005). The dynamism for political perspectives such as those mentioned above, for example, arises from the prominence of the view that the individual chooses and is ultimately accountable for his or her personal beliefs, "values, lifestyle, ethical behaviour and social and religious alliances" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 31). While it was customary for the doctrinal tradition in religion to feel it could determine the meaning of life and evaluate a person's worth,

there is greater focuses now on the individual in that "the person and his or her context are at the centre of the process of discernment" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 31).

Although religion was previously a public component and operated as a governing aspect in European society, in the current European context persons are taught to be discrete and tolerant in terms of personal religious identity (Pollefeyt, 2004; Dupuis, 2001). Such developments have significant implications for religious education, particularly in terms of "the status and the role of teachers and their pupils in the religion class" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 31). Likewise, this evolution directly influences formal aspects of education such as "the aim, the curricula, the communication style and the outcome of religious education in schools" (p. 31). As highlighted thus far in this research, the aspects of immanence and plurality establish a unique hermeneutical reality.

In this context significant questions arise, for example: what specifically is the role of the teacher? In what way is one to delineate the relationship that exists between teachers and students? Who adjudicates meaning or value of commitment? Or better yet, who has the *right* to determine meaning or value of commitment? In taking account of these questions, particularly in the context of the move from subjectivity to contextuality, the contemporary transition from conformity towards individual wandering is particularly significant if one is to arrive at an adequate appreciation of religious education as a hermeneutic activity.

3.2.2.1. From Conformity to Individual Wandering

In this section, an account is offered of the emergent movement away from an emphasis on the need to conform to a particular religious tradition and towards a greater receptivity to the voices of young people in religious education. This account is structured by way of the following headings: [1] personal involvement and denominational religious education, and [2] cultivating an openness to the voice of students.

3.2.2.1.1. Personal Involvement and Denominational Religious Education

'Personal involvement' is customarily an overburdened trait of evangelisation, particularly in relation to Christian education and religious education (Pollefeyt, 2004). In Ireland, for example, this trait is evidenced by the emphasis on: [A] the proclamation and witness to the Gospel message (*kerygma/martyria*), [B] the building up of a caring Church community grounded in Gospel values (*koinonia*), [C] the celebration of faith in worship, prayer and through liturgical participation – in communion with God, in Jesus Christ, and with one another (*leitourgia*), and [D] service to neighbour, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, the work of justice (*diakonia*) (SGN, par. 36). In taking account of these themes, it is evident that personal involvement in the Christian tradition is a key aspect of evangelical dimension of Christian religious education (Pollefeyt, 2004). Ritualistic action (*leitourgia*), articles of faith (*kerygma*) and service to those in need (*diakonia*) in the interest of religious convictions (*koinonia*) are treated as being the most steadfast "criteria for surveying populations as regards their proximity to a particular religion" (p. 32). In considering these criteria in this way, it can be said that, if any breakdown or falsification between words and practice was to occur it would lead to the ultimate deception of religion itself (Pollefeyt, 2004).

In taking these insights into account, the religious educator often encounters a rather displeasing paradox in the contemporary context. Whilst contingent on the parameters of the educational context, the paradox in question is concerned with the fact that while religious educators are viewed by some of their students as living witnesses of their specific tradition, those same students distance themselves from associating with a religious institution and its teachers (Cullen, 2019; Mc Guckin et al., 2014). Such students entrust upon themselves the right and freedom to decide on their path in life and to individually manage the type of integrity that they value (Pollefeyt, 2004; Boeve, 2012; Lane, 2011). In this context, as noted by Cyril de Souza (2004), teachers often feel as though they are being subtly and cordially silenced. On this point one encounters the following question: should a religious educator be expected to give witness to their personal religious affinity in the context of the contemporary religious education classroom – a classroom that is characterised by a radical plurality that is evidenced amongst its pupils by way of their culturally and religiously diversified family backgrounds?

It would be neglectful, however, if one did not at least highlight that a rather charged presupposition is brought to the fore by way of this question – that one can actually separate who they are from what do (Flannery, 2019; Gadamer, 2013). Such a position fails to adequately consider the nature of the person in terms of one's total personality as well as their total worldview, be it religious or otherwise, and how these aspects affect the educational or teaching process as it is carried out by the person. The exchanges between a variety of stakeholders participating in the educational process is a central issue for hermeneutical religious education. By concentrating on the active

subject, it is possible to recognise that both teacher and student are actively doing the hermeneutics (Schweitzer, 2004). It must be asked, therefore, as Schweitzer (2004) does: "who is the interpreter of tradition and the contemporary world – solely adults or also children?" (p. 81).

When educators move towards participating in an open dialogue with their students, it emerges that their students have a different way of seeing things to them (Cullen, 2019). When one considers the plurality of fundamental life options as well as the array of contexts "it is no longer acceptable that one interpretation be presented or imposed as an exclusive doctrine with absolutist aspirations" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 33). Paul Vermeer (2004), for example, consistently emphasises the need to maintain the appropriate balance between student agency which is required to facilitate the sharing of personal experiences, and teacher agency and responsibility which is necessary to ensure students are familiarised with central stories of a particular religious tradition.

It appears that the institutional context of religious education organises itself in conformity to the appropriate distinction between denominational, multi-denominational, inter-denominational, non-denominational education. In his consideration of the risks of religious education, Jeff Astley (2004) outlines that in the context of education for religious faith the context and content are of central importance. For Astley (2004), neither the context nor the content are neutral or austere, but self-involving. In this way, such an educational enterprise can often include confrontational learning in that pupils are challenged by something other than themselves, i.e. different perspectives, ways of living and claims to truth. In a similar manner, Roger Burggraeve (2004) outlines that the audience participating in religious

education does not view the teacher as neutral. While there is no expectation from pupils for their teacher to witness to the universally human, there is an expectation that their teachers give themselves in the name of their unique particularity (Burggraeve, 2004). In taking the current open interaction between actors into account, it could be assumed that such a context is a more suitable environment for pupils to ask questions that they may have previously been reluctant to ask their teachers. For example, students might ask their teachers what they believe themselves? Whether they practice what they teach to their students as being the normative aspects of being a non-confessional humanist, or a Catholic, or a Protestant, or a Jew or a Muslim?

3.2.2.1.2. Cultivating an Openness to the Voice of Students

In cultivating an openness to the perspectives and contributions of pupils in the learning process, one must not only remain open to the diversity that can emerge from such interactions but maintain a wiliness to integrate such diversity. This interaction, as noted by Pollefeyt (2004), possesses its own particular and appropriate narrative that ought to be acknowledged as a resource for learning. Jacques Haers (2004) often speaks, for example, of the uniqueness of the 'playground' in a school context as well as the importance of its metaphorical significance. Haers (2004) highlights that the pupils, when outside the classroom, allow their thoughts and imagination to flow freely in a manner of free play. Such informal experience exerts greater influence than those formal teaching experiences of the timetable. He states that the school is a "space of togetherness, a concrete community of people and a laboratory for playing, for exploring and designing the society at large and for preparing people for the future of this society" (Haers, 2004, p. 325). In taking this understanding of 'the school' seriously, the whole school community is established in such a manner that it usually

comprises fewer exclusion instruments than its correlating wider society. In school playgrounds "children from all backgrounds are playing in the same frontier space" (Haers, 2004, p. 325). Informal learning and communication emerge, therefore, as a hermeneutical presupposition in terms of what pupils will eventually learn.

Young people crave an open and inclusive environment that facilitates and encourages them "to explore and to experiment beyond the safe confinements and stability of the family context" (Pollefeyt, 2004, p. 33). This point is also affirmed by Haers (2004). Schools are in a constant state of change and evolution, i.e. new technologies, pedagogies, environments etc. and so too are moral attitudes. Schools should not strive to achieve some manner of controlled environment that is adaptable to the learning processes of pupils. Rather, as Haers (2004) notes, "young people do not enjoy the protection of a secure, controlled environment" (p. 315). The school environment and the various interactions that pupils participate in with their peers in a variety of circumstances reveal the potentiality of such schooling.

Evolving and changing contexts, such as those noted above, provide opportunities for pupils to seek out personal options and viable exchanges with others and institutions. Hence, in his consideration of religious maturity, Dirk Hutsebaut (2004) outlines that young people tend to make differing decisions at different points in time, over varying time periods. Hutsebaut (2004) states that "the pattern of these different choices holds the answer to the fundamental question, 'Who am I?'" (p. 350). Yet, one must ask the question: is it appropriate for one to take this as being that person's final choice? The answer is not decisively yes or no, rather it is both yes and no. This is dependent, as Hutsebaut (2004) notes, on the particular situations such as individual or personal

experience as well as a person's social network or acquaintances. Such circumstances or realities cannot and should not be assumed for they are unpredictable aspects of life. Research conducted by Byrne et al., (2019), for example, highlights a correlation between the religious commitment of parents and the religious identity and affiliation of a young person in the Republic of Ireland. The voices of young people themselves, however, point to "their own identity-making that may or may not be congruent with the key influences in their lives" (Cullen, 2019, p. 277).

If the perspective of young people is to be adequately understood, it is essential to take account of the way in which they experience contemporary culture and consume mass-media in all of its modes (film, television, video-clips, advertisements, music, art) – all of which are central contributors to what is commonly known as 'youth culture'. These influences, as Cyril de Souza (2004) notes, are the reason why young people have their own sets of values and priorities. Young people subconsciously establish their own visions of reality, that are more often than not, moving in a different direction, or even a confrontational one, to official ecclesial visions of reality (de Souza, 2004). In taking account of this point, significant questions emerge, such as: what kind of acumen do young people require? To whom do they turn to as trustworthy guides either voluntarily or involuntarily? To what extent should teachers go in challenging personal stories with the narrative dimension of history?

Dirk Hutsebaut (2004) claims that it is essential that young people are taught how to recognise and think about a range of religious and fundamental life options. Young people are "learning to negotiate their many contexts and construct a meaningful identity for themselves" (Cullen, 2019, p. 277). Similar to Lieven Boeve (2003),

Hutsebaut (2004) argues that religious education should move towards teaching pupils to enter into conversation with an open narrative. It is imperative, however, for one to recognise that such a view does not imply that "all options should be considered as equal because this could lead to pure relativism which cannot be the purpose of religious education" (p. 351). Rather, religious education may openly present a preference for one of the possible fundamental life options. Religious education, as Hutsebaut (2004) notes, must teach pupils to know "the difference between latent and manifest elements of each option" (p. 351). In particular, religious educators should educate their pupils in terms of the meaning of 'interpretation' and the foundational trait of symbolic thinking. Religious education, as Cullen (2019) states, "is increasingly an activity that is done with young people rather than for them" (p. 281) In taking account of these points, it is important to appreciate the fact that religious education involves multiple hermeneutical fringes and recognising their existence and use is essential if religious education is to attempt to adequately address the contemporary context with all of its complexities.

3.2.2.2. *Multiple Hermeneutical Fringes in the Religious Education Classroom*

Thinkers such as Marianne Sawicki (2004a) are reluctant to give their full confidence to the intellectual process of interpreting the sources of a tradition. Sawicki (2004a) suggests that such an intellectual process is not the focal activity for overcoming present challenges concerning the interpretation of old texts. Rather, according to Sawicki, there is a need to broaden the human potential for understanding and learning within the context of formal education. Taking his lead from the pragmatist insights of American philosopher, logician, mathematician and scientist Charles Sanders Peirce, Hermans (2004) incorporates 'abduction', a term that was coined by Pierce (1974), in

his educational vocabulary with the view towards highlighting the need for a dynamic and creative process in religious education.

For Peirce (1974), the term abduction refers to process of idea generation. He argues that 'abduction' is superior to both induction and deduction. While deduction indicates that something *must* be and induction demonstrates that something *actually* is actively working, "abduction merely suggests that something *may* be" (Peirce, 1974, p. 171). Hermans (2004) explains that abduction can then be understood as a mode of reasoning that "involves conjecture towards a new idea" (p. 113). He states that it begins with an "irritation of doubt, which is not necessarily caused by not knowing what to do, but is caused by a doubt associated with a violation of an expectation" (p. 113).

Teachers are viewed in this context, as Pollefeyt (2004) notes, as valuable participants that provide their expertise as well as their experience to navigate, advise and escort the learning process. It should be highlighted, as Boeve (2004a) does, that the only power or authority that is acceptable in this space is relative, dialogical authority. Teachers become learners within the teaching process. As experts and navigator's within the teaching and learning process teachers, according to Boeve (2004a), are afforded greater opportunities for engagement and interaction with what is in jeopardy within the classroom context and to move towards discerning, defining and understanding the important questions that are raised by the students. It is imperative that emphasis is placed by the educator on their role as participant in the process of exchange or transmission that unfolds with regard to fundamental life options in the classroom (Boeve, 2004a). This process, therefore, inevitably invites a teacher or educator to be a witness to their own faith as opposed to imposing the onus of such witness on them or

their students. In taking account of these points, it is clear that there are multiple hermeneutical fringes that contribute to the learning process in the religious education classroom. These fringes manifest either by explicit or implicit encounters in the learning process between the various stakeholders in education – i.e. teachers, students, parents, schools, Boards of Management, Patrons – and their own positionality in relation to other stakeholders, curricula and wider society.

Whether or not the options discussed above are the innovative or progressive understandings of religious education is a matter of historical context. Yet, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Four, dialogical communication is an inherent aspect of the Judaeo-Christian worldview. The foundational aspirations of religious education that are in concert with the expectations of pupils, as has been noted above, also possess a unique and indispensable theological basis. Yet, it could be argued that the quest to discern life's meaning assumed from a scriptural basis of one's Christian faith suggests almost as many roads as there are individual believers.

In discussing the shifts that have taken place in religious education as well as the move towards subjectivity and contextuality, it is evident that religious education is best understood as a hermeneutical activity. This acknowledgement merely speaks to the fact that religious education, regardless of the particular approach taken, will forever have to address the perennial pedagogical issue of knowledge acquisition – finding the balance between a positive object of knowledge and a learning subject. The move towards a more efficient hermeneutical approach marks a constitutive turn in contemporary religious education. This turn is something to be welcomed considering the complexities that our contemporary context carries for religious education. It is

important that this constitutive turn to hermeneutics in contemporary religious education is further explored.

3.3. Hermeneutics: A Constitutive Turn in Modern Religious Education

In considering the insights raised thus far, it is clear that a central question at the core of the debate about hermeneutics and religious education is one raised by Jeff Astley (2004) "What is religion?" (p. 399). This question is of the utmost importance as it is precisely in addressing this question that religious education can easily go wrong within the institutional context of learning religion. Astley (2004) poignantly warns that education can destroy religion. From this standpoint, one might ask what manner of education would best address the particular concept of religion, and comparatively, what kind of theologizing would correspond with a particular concept of religion? In considering these questions one arrives at the core of the hermeneutical problem: there is no absolute concept of religion, education or theology only interpretations.

This act of interpreting is not resigned to one actor, but to many actors involved in religious education. In accepting that pure objectivity or purely objective knowledge does not exist, one must then search for the most appropriate interpretation. It is interesting to note here that one is not implying that one truth claim cannot be more true than another, or that one interpretation cannot be more appropriate than another. To suggest that objective knowledge does not exist is not to propose that all that can be known is merely matters of opinion or subjective preferences. Rather, it is merely a recognition of the limitations of the human condition in terms of 'coming to understanding' and the partiality of human reason. Following from this point, it can be argued that the hermeneutical turn in religious education stands as a paradigm shift in

that the basic aspects of the educational circumstances are chosen and integrated in a significantly different manner.

In recent times the legitimacy of religious education has been called into question by political authorities. In many countries the relationship between church and state was renegotiated. In doing so the democratic society integrated the autonomy of the individual in a more significant manner. At one and the same time, stakeholders in education, particularly teachers and students, have expressed a desire for religious education to be able to meet their aspirations and curiosity as a source of credibility that legitimized its place in the timetable. In this way, both teachers and students have exerted significant influence upon the development of religious education as a curricular subject.

While the formal structures may remain the same or are emphasised by official political validation, teachers are encountering a radically different context to that of some thirty years ago. Teachers are encountering the tension, for example, that emanates from the fact that the required flexibility required for adjusting to the concrete reality of the classroom is at odds with the formally set traditional conception of religious education as initiation of pupils into the religious world. In taking up a hermeneutical approach with the view to influencing religious education in this regard, one is responding to the dramatic shift that is evident in terms of the contextual and official components of institutionalised religious education. From this standpoint, it can be argued that both teachers and students are on equal footing in terms of searching for truth as both attempt to untie the knots presented by the contemporary quest for the meaning of life, that is

in direct confrontation with the long-standing cultural, religious and philosophical traditions.

As discussed thus far in this chapter, the rationalistic direction of the Enlightenment entered into disagreement with the propensity of the Church to utilise the Bible and tradition as the sole resources in terms of coming to know the meaning of life and organising society. It must be acknowledged, however, that many theologians refuse to place confidence in the humanities and social sciences or accredit a normative value to empirical data with the view towards overcoming the impasse encountered in the contemporary church and religious education. Yet, it must be asked – is this disagreement between interpretations merely a matter of discerning the correct balance? Many of the thinkers discussed above alluded to the fact that the dialectic debate between the two poles is connected to philosophical questions about truth, the meaning of being, language, art, ethics, religion, science and the very essence of what one calls reality. In taking this point into account, it is important to consider further what is implied by the term hermeneutics?

From the above discussion it is evident that the account of hermeneutics as the art of interpretation does not appropriately address this question. The Nietzschean slogan, 'there are no facts but only interpretations' (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 267) is also open to criticism as a result of its closeness with nihilistic hermeneutics. This point is reaffirmed by Vattimo (1997), he emphasises that the ultimate answer to the problem in terms of overcoming essentialist metaphysics is not to be found in Nihilism. In this sense, the emergence of hermeneutics is inseparable from modernity, as a process of

secularisation, and to the discernment of the historicity of all knowledge or understanding.

The authors discussed above, such as Mette (2004) and Pollefeyt (2020), are critical of understandings of religious education that present it as a linear, narrowly defined and dogma based form of indoctrination. The reason for this critique emerges from the view that in acknowledging official doctrine one is purporting that the objective, canonical truth exists and ought to be taught and learned as the principal strategy for achieving consistency in thinking and behaviour, social discipline and commitment to a centralised authority. The view that hermeneutical religious education demonstrates a paradigm shift purports that the theme of said studies is related to a rejection of objectivist metaphysics. The daily practice of religious education is more in line with existentialism, which moves towards awarding priority to meanings embodied in the sensuous imaginary and concrete experiences of individuals in conversations with the array of fundamental life options encountered in the search for meaning.

In constituting hermeneutics as the basis for the whole field of modern religious pedagogy, religious education comes to be aligned with an understanding of hermeneutics as the philosophical theory of the interpretative character of every experience of truth (Derrida, 1998). This is a type of metatheory of the play of interpretations concerning which historicity is to be recognised explicitly, i.e. there are many ways which one can experience truth. The truth of hermeneutics as *the* philosophy of modernity, "may be wholly summed up in the claim to be the most persuasive philosophical interpretation of that course of events [modernity] of which it feels itself

to be the outcome" (Derrida, 1998, pp. 9-10). It is the story of a circumstance or 'epoch', of a provenance, which is itself a history, and an interpretation.

The vast majority of the authors discussed above find their philosophical stimulus in the writings of great thinkers of hermeneutics in the twentieth century, and are therefore aligned with Gianni Vattimo's definition of hermeneutics as "that philosophy developed along the Heidegger-Gadamer axis" (Derrida, 1998, p. 2; Vattimo, 1997). Although selectively as well as with differing accents, both Heidegger and Gadamer are cited repeatedly throughout the work of the authors discusses above. The work of Husserl and Jaspers is also evident as well as a wider spectrum of philosophers such as Paul Ricœur, Jürgen Habermas, Richard Rorty, Charles Sanders Peirce, Richard Kearney, Edith Stein, John Caputo and representatives of linguistics such as Algirdas Julien Greimas or Ferdinand de Saussure. These references demonstrate the fact that the same philosophical school of interpretation, of contemporary hermeneutics, constitutes the fundamental stimulus for rethinking religious education.

In taking this point seriously, further clarification must be provided in terms of the connection between hermeneutics and religion. In this context, it can be argued that the Judeo-Christian tradition offers a path of rediscovery for hermeneutics. This point is affirmed by Derrida (1998) who states that the possibility for hermeneutics to rediscover its "own authentic meaning as nihilistic ontology" is only possible, "if it rediscovers its substantial link, at its source, with the Judeo-Christian tradition as the constitutive tradition in the West" (p. 48). Modern hermeneutic philosophy finds its genesis in Europe, for example, not merely as there is a "religion of the book that focuses attention on the phenomenon of interpretation, but also because this religion

has at its base the idea of the incarnation of God, which it conceives as *kenosis*, as abasement and, in our translation, as weakening" (Derrida, 1998, p. 48). As thus far in this chapter, the challenges encountered in previous decades' are a source of distress in Europe as the normative pertinence of the Christian tradition for Europe's future is contested both politically and legally. Gadamer (1998) refers to the emerging alternatives as the religion of the world economy or dogmatic atheism, or as an atheism of indifference. In this sense, he is referring to the point that western Christianity has failed to persuade the secular world of the value of its tradition in terms of influencing a new world order. It must be asked, therefore, if it is possible for the other world religions, coming from a different history and culture to be successful in terms of arriving at a different answer to this issue?

The writers discussed in thus far make ample effort to address this question in their work. Philosophers, educationalists and theologians are working to arrive at differing solutions and options to address this problem. As outlined above, however, the contemporary hermeneutical endeavour offers a way forward, one that opens up a novel exploration of the existential search for meaning, spirituality and religious faith for humankind. The idea of abasement also directs one's attention to another line of thought. In attempting to establish religious education in such a way that it is relevant to the participants involved, which would therefore greatly affect the learning experience of participants, it is evident that existential circumstances are central to hermeneutical learning. Efforts to reinterpret religious education as such, are analogous to a re-interpretation of the incarnation, i.e. reading the signs of the times as an eventuality, a possibility of God's revelation and redemption.

In this discussion, the playground is discerned as a frontier space. Any discovery or learning that occurs in the context of the playground, therefore, operates as a pre-understanding or root-experience for perceiving the reality of the school as a whole (Pollefeyt, 2004). The 'tinkering-mode' adopted by young people as an approach to survival in a threatening world is related to social trends amidst larger society. This approach to survival may well be considered a learning process as well. Another existential commitment presents itself in the form of the preferential option for the poor and the suffering. This commitment illustrates the historicity of human life, meaning and purpose, but also the definitive battle between life-giving and life-taking interpretations and practices, i.e. liberation is facilitated by the incarnation of Jesus and by the *kenosis* of God.

As outlined earlier in this chapter, families, institutions and people that are entrenched in the Christian tradition, experience fundamental conditions for encountering transforming growth, emancipation and Christian community building (Haers, 2004). Such circumstances involve a call and a response – they require consensus for movement into frontier habitats and they move against all manner of predetermined meaning. Such frontier habitats, are spaces where the quality of the truth experience enhances the articulation of meaning, expressing the memory of other exceptional, enduring interpretative events accounted for throughout history. In this way, the hermeneutical orientation of religious education that is considered above is certainly representative of a paradigm shift.

3.4. The Hermeneutics of Modern Religious Education

At this point of this discussion, therefore, it is important to consider this hermeneutical shift in greater detail – particularly the hermeneutics of modern religious education. In this section, the hermeneutics of modern religious education in the United Kingdom are explored and critiqued. The hermeneutics of modern religious education in the United Kingdom are a useful comparison for the context of religious education in the Republic of Ireland. This section, therefore, offers [1] an account of the key dimensions of modern religious education, and [2] a critique of the hermeneutics of modern religious education.

3.4.1. The Key Dimensions of Modern Religious Education

Philosophers, theologians and educationalists in the United Kingdom outline that religious education, in a historical context, has comprehensively assumed a confessional agenda in the United Kingdom (Hannam, 2019; Cooling, 2004; Cooling, 2000; Cooling, 1997). Such an approach, as Andrew Wright (2004) notes, takes "the enculturation of children into the belief patterns, liturgical practices and normative values of the religious community" as its primary objective (p. 181). From its onset, but particularly during the 1960's, modernity has compelled confessional religious education to confront a novel set of issues and challenges (Hannam, 2019; Wright, 2004).

In particular, three problems or challenges present themselves as being of the utmost importance: [1] the depreciation of religious belief to mere subjective opinion which challenges the validity and position of religious knowledge (Wright, 2004; Hand, 2004; Carr, 1994), [2] the confrontation between the use of enculturation as the principle

pedagogical method of religious teaching and modernity's scepticism of received tradition and its commitment to autonomous reason (Nieuwenhove, 2013; Wright, 2004; Hand, 2004; Carr, 1994), and [3] the ensuing challenge from the liberal principles of freedom of belief and tolerance of the beliefs of others to the moral rectitude of any mode of religious education that makes an exclusive truth claim, i.e. the ultimate truth claim of any particular religious tradition (Laborde, 2017; Nieuwenhove, 2013; Boeve, 2012; Wright, 2004).

Modernity did not slow in its marginalisation of religion. It similarly made haste to direct its gaze towards religious education. One of the original founders of modern religious education in the United Kingdom, Edwin Cox (1983), emphasises the urgency surrounding the necessity to facilitate the subject within the cultural norms of modernity. One of the most immediate challenges facing religious education concerns its identity and validity vis-á-vis modernity (Wright, 2004; Cox, 1983). The retention of religious education within the public education system in the United Kingdom, therefore, has been hard fought by religious educators (Hannam, 2019; Wright, 2004, Hand, 2004, Cooling, 2000, Grimmitt, 2000, Carr, 1994, Grimmitt, 1973, Cox, 1983).

The quest to provide a sufficient response to this challenge, as David Day (1985) notes, has acted as a key motivating factor for the subject in recent decades. In terms of responding to this challenge, what presents itself as a discussion about the character of religious education is actually a conversation about curriculum politics. In this way, in the quest for survival and position the method of legitimation presents itself as an all-consuming force (Day, 1985). The crucial task encountered by modern religious educators in the United Kingdom, therefore, was the need to establish a mode of

education that moved beyond what was perceived as a narrow Christian confessionalism towards a form of education that is positive in its relation to the foundation meta-narratives of modernity (Hannam, 2019; Aldridge, 2011; Hand, 2004; Wright, 2004; Carr, 1997).

In establishing a positive orientation towards the foundation meta-narratives of modernity, religious educators in the United Kingdom followed a three-fold strategy: [1] in keeping with the rationalistic wing of the Enlightenment, religious educators made a distinction objective facts and subjective beliefs, i.e. religious facts *versus* religious beliefs (Wright, 2004; Hand, 2004; Carr, 1994) – this distinction provided educators with the foundation for the transmission of knowledge *about* religion that enabled them to take up a *pseudo*-neutral perspective towards the diversity of belief systems evident in the wider society (Nieuwenhove, 2013; Wright, 2004; Hand, 2004; Carr, 1994), [2] in response to romanticism's acknowledgement of the centrality of religious experience, such educators sought to nurture the innate spiritual sensibilities of children in a way that steered clear of any suggestion of indoctrination into any particular religious tradition (Wright, 2004) and [3] following from the above, religious education came to be developed within a moral framework of that was influenced significantly by liberal principles. Religious education moved towards awakening its students to need for acceptance in terms of their personal freedom of belief as well as the need for tolerance of other beliefs (Laborde, 2017; Wright, 2004).

In taking account of the need for a positive reception of foundational meta-narratives of modernity, it is perhaps no surprise that one encounters modern religious educators embracing the naturalistic-romantic dualism of modernity, and therefore, intentionally

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taking advantage of the split between an education that is customarily subject-centred and a child-centred progressive education (Wright, 2004; Cox, 1983; Grimmitt, 1973). The distinction between 'religious understanding' and 'understanding religion', as Edwin Cox (1983) notes, is a classic example of such exploitation. Understanding religion, for example, involves a somewhat detached knowledge of the externals of faith. Such knowledge, if presented in a manner that is assessable to any rational being, i.e. in a purely academic and objective mode, will have little to no effect in terms of meaningfully impacting the way in which students live their lives (Cox, 1983). Religious understanding, therefore, stands in sharp contrast to understanding religion. It necessitates an existentially committed process that is, as Cox (1983) explains, significantly more penetrating than that which is involved in a mere understanding of religion. This existentially committed process necessitates that one encounters the quality of a particular faith traditions beliefs and practices as well as a sensitive response to a specific faith traditions cult objects, and a capacity to view and respond positively to a particular faith traditions ultimate function.

It often follows that a person of a particular faith tradition would suggest that their understanding of their particular religious tradition is of a different kind or standard to that of someone who is observing from outside of their specific faith tradition (Cox, 1983). This point can be appreciated further by way of the following analogy: while the stained glass windows of a church are a wonderful artistic expression of the spiritual tradition of the Church, it can be said that their true beauty can only be appreciated from inside of the church as opposed to outside of it.

This distinction between understanding religion and religious understanding, as Wright (2004) highlights, is at the centre of modern religious education. The work of Michael Grimmitt (1973) is a good exemplar of the way in which this distinction is taken up by religious educators. He makes an explicit distinction, for example, between what he refers to as 'dimensional' and 'experiential' modes of religious pedagogy. For him, the dimensional mode of pedagogy is concerned with addressing the phenomenon of religions – i.e. the mythological, ritualistic, ethical, doctrinal, community dimension as well as the spectrum of spiritual encounters of religions. The experiential mode of religious pedagogy moves toward the cultivation of existential insights that are required if any meaningful manner of religious understanding is to be arrived at (Grimmitt, 1973; Wright, 2004).

It is from the above tradition or line of reasoning that modern religious education syllabuses in the United Kingdom have come to integrate a central distinction between 'learning from' and 'learning about' religion. Many critics of modern religious education claim that with the introduction of modern religious education "one form of confessionalism was renounced for another" (Barnes and Wright, 2006, p. 67; Nieuwenhove, 2013; Boeve, 2012). Of particular concern for thinkers such as Andrew Wright (1997) is that modern religious education has taken up the insights of the traditions of romanticism and post-modernism uncritically which has severely compromised its integrity. It is necessary to offer a critique of the hermeneutics of modern religious education with the view to laying the ground for a consideration of a critical realist approach to religious education which has been capturing the interest of educationalist such as Andrew Wright (2020; 2007a; 2007b; 2004) and Johnny C Go. (2019).

3.4.2. A Critique of the Hermeneutics of Modern Religious Education

In this section the hermeneutics of modern religious education are subject to critique. This critique is structured by way of the following headings: [1] Wittgenstein and religious language, [2] romantic hermeneutical theory and religious education, and [3] main issues and concerns.

3.4.2.1. Wittgenstein and Religious Language

In this section, Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1961) philosophy of language is drawn upon for the dual purpose of both orientating and assisting in the critique of the hermeneutics of modern religious education. Wittgenstein's linguistic philosophy is used in this way for it has significantly influenced romantic hermeneutical theory which has in turn been so effective in terms of the hermeneutical development of modern religious education. The early writings of Wittgenstein (1961), such as the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, exhibit – at least to a certain extent – the naïve realism of logical positivism. Such realism understands the fundamental role of language to be merely an exercise in depicting states of affairs in the world. While his early philosophy is reflective of logical positivism, Wittgenstein refrains from adhering to the positivist position of relegating the realm of religion to that of mere meaningless superstition. Although the sphere of the sacred must be 'passed over in silence', he notes, it is possible for one to encounter – albeit in a quasi-mystical way – the power and authority of the sacred.

The tradition of romantic hermeneutics is somewhat more explicit on this point in that it asserts that language can give expression to the human encounter with the transcendent realm (Wright, 1997). Authentic religious understanding, therefore, must transcend the exteriority of religious language and culture with the view to addressing

the core of numinous encounters (Wright, 1997; Otto, 1958). In his later and more mature philosophy, such as that presented in his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein (1968) moves away from his initial naïve realism and adopts a deeper sensitivity in terms of the variety and intricacy of language. Contrary to his early writings where he proposed that words merely picture states of affairs in the world and bring to expression inner personal experience, in his later writings Wittgenstein (1968) claims that if one is to grasp the way in which language functions then they must be cognisant of the social context of interpersonal communication. In other words, language acquires its meaning from its usage in a variety of 'forms of life' and 'language games'.

It must be noted that there is not universal agreement with respect to how Wittgenstein is to be understood on this point, i.e. language's acquisition of meaning by way of its use in varying forms of life and language games. A postmodern interpretation of Wittgenstein in this point, for example, understands localised individual communities as the source of 'forms of life' and 'language games' (Wright, 1997; Winch, 1964; Hunter, 1968; Philips, 1970; Gier, 1977). The archetypal primitive community utilises 'language games' with the view to establish the myths and narratives that ultimately give that community a mutual socially constructed reality (Wright, 1997). Following from this postmodern perspective, such a socially constructed worldview is then "celebrated in ritual 'forms of life' specific to the community" (p. 204). It would be erroneous to raise the question of ultimate truth in this context for the meaning of language is dependent upon the communal life of the tribe. In other words, a particular community's worldview cannot be assessed by any external criteria. This interpretation of Wittgenstein has been exploited in support of a post-modern hermeneutic that ratifies

relativity and negates any possibility of the reaching objective truth (Hannam, 2019; Wright, 1997). Understanding in this context necessitates inflating the capacity to celebrate a variety of artefacts, languages and traditions without the requirement to wrestle with questions of truth – at least not in any realistic sense (Wright, 1997).

In contrast, a critical realist response to Wittgenstein's invitation to address the variety of modes and circumstances within which language is utilised by the person with the view of making sense of the world, presents a significantly different reading of Wittgenstein's (1961) 'forms of life' and 'language games'. In line with a critical realist perspective, 'forms of life' and 'language games' possess universal provenance as "request, exclamation, exhortation, pleading, description, prayer, etc. are forms of communication common to all humanity" (Wright, 1997, p. 204). From this standpoint, critical realists argue that 'forms of life' and 'language games' open up the possibility of one comprehending the language of others as opposed to hindering it precisely because they have universal and not localised provenance. The ability to understand the language of the 'primitive tribe' arises from the fact that they use their language in modes and circumstances that are recognisable. This point is affirmed by Wright who states "human beings use symbol, myth and story not to create a private communal reality, but to try to make sense of the world as it actually is" (p. 204). This position involves a realism that is not naïve. Such realism recognises the complexity of reality and that the mere labelling of its various elements falls short of what its required to give an adequate account of reality. The world is utterly complex, therefore it requires an intricate linguistic system in which metaphor, model and narrative are indispensable elements if one is to adequately understand it.

Although this diversity of worldviews provides a plurality of incompatible or conflicting accounts of one world, thinkers such as Wright (2020; 2007a; 2007b; 2004) and C. Go (2019) argue that this does not lead inevitably to relativism. Rather, such thinkers believe that it is possible for to make an informed judgement – even if tentative and conditional – between differing accounts of reality. Contrary to a postmodern perspective, this particular reading of Wittgenstein (1961; 1968) advocates for the hermeneutic of critical realism. Understanding, in a critical realist hermeneutic, involves the capacity to move into the process of discovering more authentic explanations of the world within which we dwell (Wright, 2007a; C. Go, 2019). This position finds much support when one reflects on romantic hermeneutical theory and its influence on modern religious education in greater detail.

3.4.2.2. Romantic Hermeneutical Theory and Religious Education

Modern hermeneutics, as Wright (1997) notes, emerged as a response to a particular issue: in what possible manner can a historical text in its reading – be it religious, legal, literary – elucidate its immediate relevance for a reader? A more accurate phrasing of the question or dilemma to which modern hermeneutics is responding to is as follows: in what possible manner can a historical text in its reading – be it religious, legal, literary – elucidate its immediate relevance for a reader if the emergence of historical criticism had not consolidated the view that such historical texts are merely of interest in some antiquarian sense? Since the nineteenth century, from the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1977; 1997; 1998), through to Wilhelm Dilthey (2010a; 2010b) to Edmund Husserl (2001a; 2001b), the romantic tradition has attempted to address this question by way of emphasising the centrality of experience.

The romantic tradition of the nineteenth century developed within a broad Kantian framework which distinguishes between the world of appearance, i.e. the phenomenological, and the world of ultimate reality, i.e. the noumenal world (Wright, 1997). The romantic tradition utilised a hermeneutical approach that requires the interpreter to move beyond the world of appearance, i.e. the surface appearance of things, with the view to comprehending the world of ultimate reality, i.e. a deeper hidden reality (Wright, 1997; Schleiermacher, 1977; Dilthey 2010a; Husserl 2001a). When one considers this hermeneutical approach in greater detail, however, it is evident that the interpreters task is actually achieved by way of romantic experience. Such a romantic approach emphasises that aesthetic, moral and religious sensitivity are of greater effect in terms of providing insight into the core of human existence in matters where objective scientific reason is attenuated and blind. Schleiermacher (1977) makes a distinction in the process of interpretation between what he refers to as 'grammatical' and 'psychological' stages. In interpreting or reading a text, for Schleiermacher (1977), the interpreter or reader not only understands the language used in a text, but also bring the words to life by way of a sensitivity to the human experience that they express. Genuine or authentic understanding, therefore, requires an experiential sensibility that possesses the capacity to move beyond language towards a sensitive apprehension of the author's original psychological experience (Wright, 1997).

In taking account of these insights, romantic hermeneutics emphasises that the ultimate meaning of language or a word is not rooted in its reference to external facts, but in its capacity to express internal spiritual experience (Wright, 1997). This basic insight is utilised and reproduced by Dilthey (2010a; 2010b), particularly in his affirmation that culture and history should be interpreted as the expression of lived experience.

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Similarly, Husserl (2001a; 2001b) carries this forward by way of his distinction between the objective account of immanent phenomenon and the eidetic vision which enables one to sensitively understand the transcendent noumenal nature of said phenomenon (Wright, 1997, Otto, 1958). In other words, the interpreter must move beyond the surface appearance of the object of interpretation – be it history, culture or a text – as real understanding must transcend the world of appearance with the view to access the world of ultimate reality, i.e. the internal experiential centre of the object of interpretation.

Schleiermacher (1977), therefore, worked towards developing a romantic religious hermeneutic that was capable of transcending the tensions existent between modern and Christian worldviews (Torrance, 1968a; Torrance, 1968b; Carliss, 1993). By interpreting the biblical text as an expression of religious experience, Schleiermacher (1977) avoids any challenge posited by literalism. In doing so, he transcends a literalist reading of the biblical text with the view to arriving at a more meaningful, quasi-allegorical, spiritual interpretation. In recognising the mythological character of many aspects of the Biblical story, best practice suggests that a reader or interpreter approach it as offering deep spiritual insights into the sphere of religious experience as opposed to an erroneous history or some manner of *pseudo*-science (Wright, 1997).

It is evident, therefore, that the dynamism of romantic hermeneutics presents itself by way of a defensive concern to validate and justify religious faith in a modern context (Wright, 1997). The approach of romantic hermeneutics can be accounted for as follows: [1] a denial of literalism for a literalist interpretation of religious texts may cause conflict with the naturalism of modern science, and [2] the assertion that any

interpretation of a religious text must bring the internal spiritual significance of the object of interpretation – be it by denial, translation or transcendence – into union with romanticism's commitment to the explicatory power and authority of moral, aesthetic and religious experience (Wright, 1997). Religious education found the resources it required in romantic hermeneutical theory by way of its denial, translation and transcendence of literalist religious language to address the demands placed by the foundation meta-narratives of modernity. The influence of romantic hermeneutical theory on modern religious education in the United Kingdom, particularly in terms of its [1] hermeneutic of deletion, [2] hermeneutic of translation, and [3] hermeneutic of transcendence, is most evident in the practice of religious education during the 1960s and 1970s (Wright, 1997).

3.4.2.3. A Brief Synopsis: Main Issues and Concerns

It has been demonstrated that modern religious education, particularly in terms of its commitments, is grounded in Enlightenment rationalism and post-Enlightenment Romantic theology. Following from this, it is necessary to offer a clear and concise account of the main issues and concerns that modern religious education and its commitments presents. In taking account of the insights raised thus far, it is evident that modern religious education in the United Kingdom has presupposed a false antagonism between faith-based religious education and phenomenological religious education, tradition specific convictions and neutrality, indoctrination into a specific tradition and education, and between secular (public) knowledge and religious (private) knowledge (Barnes and Wright, 2006). From this standpoint, eight issues and concerns can be discerned in regard to modern religious education, particularly in its relationship to romantic and post-modern hermeneutics:

[1] modern religious education has been subjected to a threefold divide – (a) the tradition of romanticism, (b) its exploitation in post-modernity, and (c) that of critical realism (Wright, 1997). Modern religious education has persistently turned to (a) as opposed to appreciating the potential resources that (c) has to offer.

[2] Romantic hermeneutics, which modern religious education consistently draws upon, takes up a limited comprehension of language. As outlined previously, romantic hermeneutical theory understands the function of language or words to be the mere naming of objects or giving expression to experiences (Wright, 1997). Such an understanding of language, i.e. the naming of objects, diminishes religious language the realm of *pseudo*-science and the latter, i.e. the expression of experience, presents religious language as an emotivism that is possible emptied of any cognitive content (Wright, 1997). Contemporary philosophy, however, has rediscovered a revitalised awareness in terms of the variety of language and the intricacy of its usage. Science and theology, for example, utilise metaphor and story to offer an accounts of reality that are critical as opposed to naïve. This broader understanding of language offers greater hermeneutical potential for religious education compared to the limited comprehension that is operative in modern religious education.

[3] Modern religious education places significant emphasis on romantic experience. This experience takes up an individualism within which identity is characterised by self-determination and disconnection from wider reality (Wright, 1997). Contemporary philosophy and theology, however, recognise the centrality of relationship in determining identity (Boeve, 2004a; Levinas, 1969; Levinas, 2009; Wright, 1997). The person is not who they are as a result of mere introspection, but by way of their

relationality - their relationship with others in the community. Self-understanding, therefore, is not reliant upon personal (private) experience, but on shared collective meanings ingrained in linguistic traditions (Wright, 1997). Modern religious education fails to take account of this shared model of identity, hence, the implications of this model need to be discerned by religious educators and accounted for in religious education.

[4] The hermeneutical approach taken up by modern religious education emphasises the need for understanding to be rooted in a union between the interpreter and the object of interpretation (Wright, 1997). Knowledge necessitates that the essence of the text, or the object of interpretation be reinterpreted for the purpose of aligning it with the interpreters pre-existing interpretive framework. Modern religious education leaves little, if any, space for transformative understanding for it requires the interpreter to alter their experience to align it with that which they strive to understand. It can be argued, therefore, that modern religious education moves towards a limited and restrictive mode of understanding which ultimately leads to the closing of one's mind due to the fact that it offers a closed hermeneutical circle (Wright, 1997).

[5] Historically, Christian apologetics provided the grounding for romantic hermeneutics in which to understand inferred that one merely recognise the value and relevance of the object of interpretation, i.e. the religious text (Wright, 1997). While Christian confessionalism and neo-confessionalism has been strongly rejected by the majority of religious educators in the United Kingdom, it could still be argued that religious education necessitates a recognition of its conformity with the affirmation that religion possess an intrinsic universal value. The romantic hermeneutic of modern

religious education carries with it an apologetic hermeneutic. It can be argued that modern religious education infringes on pupils in terms of offering a critical, sensitive and systematic access to a range of types of naturalism and atheism, and potentially to a view that religion is intrinsically pathological (Wright, 1997).

[6] Modern religious education operates from the idealistic assumption that the preference of individuals is always correct. In this postmodern hermeneutical context, modern religious education fails to offer criteria by which pupils can exercise their capacity to critically judge interpretations of reality (Wright, 1997). Modern religious education places significant emphasis on the development of pupils in terms of their experiential sensitivity, but fails to equip them with the linguistic capacities by which to demonstrate discernment and discrimination in terms of their interpretation of said experience. In negating its responsibility to develop pupils in their ability to make moral, aesthetic and religious judgements in a manner that transcends the above idealistic assumption, modern religious education leaves pupils open to abuse and manipulation in terms of interpreting accounts of reality.

[7] In prioritising experience over language, any possibility for critical understanding breaks down in modern religious education (Wright, 1997). In taking up the position that language is disposable, modern religious education promotes a perspective that ultimately necessitates the collapse of the western education tradition which is rooted in conversation, dialogue, analysis, differentiated language and assessment (Wright, 1997). It could be argued, therefore, that modern religious education, in its emphasis on unadulterated pre-linguistic experience, attempts to move the person into some pre-

critical epoch within which the person is not required to be a critical and reflective being.

And, lastly, [8] while an educational hermeneutic that is rooted in the centrality of individual experience and consciousness possesses the capacity to make use of a rhetoric of freedom, it can be argued that, modern religious education in the United Kingdom deceptively moves towards the indoctrination of pupils into the dogma of romantic modernity and post-modernity (Wright, 1997). In asserting absolute freedom on the questionable grounds that the pupil is always correct, i.e. all truth is constructed by the individual and does not speak to any external reality, the educational hermeneutic of modern religious education infringes upon any possibility of critical engagement with ultimate truth. In taking account of the issues and concerns raised above, it is evident that modern religious education is found wanting in terms of its philosophical and theological viability – particularly when one considers the restrictive hermeneutic that is at its centre.

3.5. Critical Realism and Religious Education: A Way Forward?

In response to the varying challenges outlined thus far, religious educationalists have offered a variety of alternative approaches to religious education. An interpretive approach – often referred to as a socio-cultural approach – to religious education is offered by thinkers such as Robert Jackson (2017; 2014; 2013; 2009; 2008a; 2008b; 2004). While this approach is positive in the sense that it aims to ensure that pupils have a genuine experience of a particular religious tradition, it is problematic in terms of its claim to be "epistemologically open" (Jackson, 2012, p. 3) circumventing any

engagement with problems of 'truth' preferring the distancing manoeuvres of anthropology (Hannam, 2019).

Thinkers such as Clive Erricker (2010; 2006; 2001; 1987) call for a conceptual enquiry approach to religious education which moves towards the teaching of Christianity within the context of a world religions approach with a view to enabling pupils to both recognise and respond to "the diversity within Christianity, both theologically and anthropologically" (Hannam, 2019, p. 50). This approach is subject to criticism by thinkers such as Wright (2001). In particular, Erricker's conception of a 'postmodern spiritual pedagogy' receives specific criticism from Wright (2001) who argues that "it is incoherent on its own terms and, as a result, both internally unstable and vulnerable to external attack" (p. 120). It is not the purpose of this research to engage with these approaches in greater detail. Of particular interest to this research, as will emerge, is the potential offerings that a critical realist approach to religious education, such as that advocated for by Wright (2020; 2007a; 2007b; 2004) and C. Go (2019), provides in terms of critically engaging with the question of ultimate truth in religious education.

In response to the breakdown of Christian confessionalism, and what thinkers such as Boeve (2012) and Barnes (2009) refers to as but another form of confessionalism, i.e. "the pluralist doctrine that all religions are valid public expressions of private encounters with the divine" (p. 9), religious educators such as Wright (2020; 2007a; 2007b; 2004) and C. Go (2019) advocate for a critical realist approach to religious education. Such thinkers attempt to address the theological problem offered by the liberal Protestant doctrine that universal encounter with the transcendent is possible. In line with this doctrine, all religions are granted equality in terms of their validity, but

there is no attempt to take seriously their differing truth claims (Hannam, 2019). The approach to religious education offered by Wright and C. Go is particularly important as, in the absence of a comprehensive philosophy of Catholic education, the emergent philosophy of critical realism is being utilised by Catholic educators – as evidenced in the recent work of C. Go (2019). C. Go, for example, attempts to bring the critical realist commitment to judgemental rationality and ontological realism into conversation with the Christian concept of *sensus fidei* for the purposes of establishing the centrality of critical thinking in Catholic education in a manner that is viable in terms of both contemporary philosophy and theology.

For the purpose of this research, a critical realist approach to religious education requires more detailed attention as it presents an approach that attempts to meaningfully situate critical engagement with ultimate truth at the centre of religious education. It must be noted, that it is not the purpose of this research to present a critical realist approach as the way forward for religious education, even if it has been presented as such by Wright and C. Go. Rather, it is important to address this approach in greater detail as a potential framework for religious education is offered its advocates, one which they argue brings pupils into meaningful critical engagement with ultimate truth. It is important to consider the two-fold distinction between truth and truthfulness that is at the centre of a critical realist approach to religious education.

3.5.1. A Two-Fold Distinction: Truth and Truthfulness

In Chapter Two, it was noted that Jeff Astley (2004) suggests that the most important question for hermeneutical education is: what is religion? A critical realist approach to religious education is rooted in view that a religion is best understood as a collection of

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propositional truth claims that imply some manner of actual reality, i.e. truth. From this stand point, to be religious not only necessitates the adherence to such truth claims, but also an openness on the part of the adherent in terms of allowing them to influence the way in which one lives their life: Wright (2007b) refers to this as truthful living. Religious education should enable pupils to engage in a meaningful way with ultimate truth (Wright, 2007b).

In the contemporary context, the mere mention of truth claim invokes a certain level of suspicion, particularly claims of ultimate truth. This suspicion emerges at the mere mention of truth for it conjures visions of secular totalitarianism, religious extremism or fundamentalism, and educational indoctrination. Such images are a depiction of distortions and aberrations of truth as opposed images of truth (Wright, 2007b). Societies that utilise such depictions as their point of departure in addressing truth are impoverished for they employ approaches of equivocation over rehabilitation in addressing truth (Wright, 2007b). Truth is a precious commodity, but it is a deeply contested matter. Religious education, therefore, should not impose beliefs on pupils but move towards giving students agency to seek truth in a manner that is both informed and critical. There is a distinction being made here between truth and truthfulness. It is important, therefore, to explore the twin concepts of truth and its cognate truthfulness in greater detail as they are central to the thesis of a critical realist approach to religious education.

3.5.1.1. Truth

The question 'what is truth?', according Wright (2007b), can be broken down into three questions: [1] what is reality? [2] how do we experience reality? and [3] how do we

judge whether such experience is authentic? In addressing the question of truth, thinkers such as Wright (2020; 2007a; 2007b; 2004) and C. Go (2019), draw upon the emergent philosophy of critical realism. In particular, such thinkers turn to the insights of original or basic critical realism, such as that of Roy Bhaskar (2006; 2002; 1977), as opposed to dialectical critical realism or the philosophy of meta-reality. Wright (2020; 2007a; 2007b; 2004) and C. Go (2019) defend the follow three concepts as offered by basic critical realism: [1] ontological realism, [2] epistemic relativism, and [3] judgmental rationality (Margaret S. Archer et al., 2004; Sayer, 2000).

These three notions can be expanded as follows: [1] ontological realism argues that the entirety of all that is, i.e. reality, is not dependent upon one's experience – i.e. reality exists independently of one's capacity to experience it (Wright, 2007b). [2] epistemic relativism argues that experience is always context specific – i.e. one's experience of reality is forever restricted to the specific circumstance in which one finds themselves (Wright, 2007b). And, [3] judgmental rationality argues that in spite of such restrictions one still possesses the capacity to make an informed judgement about their experience which allows one to assert relatively secure – but always partial and never completely certain – knowledge of reality (Wright, 2007b).

The critical realist William Alston (1996) explains that following the line of reasoning offered by ontological realism a proposition, a belief or a statement can only be considered to be true if, and only if, what it states to be the circumstance is in fact the circumstance (Devitt, 1997). Following this logical process, therefore, the statement 'Dublin is the capital of the Republic of Ireland' is true if, and only if, Dublin is actually the capital of the Republic of Ireland. Similarly, the assertion that God created the world

from nothing (*ex nihilo*) – is true if, and only if, the world was in fact created by God from nothing (*ex nihilo*) (Wright, 2007b). This point is explicated with particularly clarity by Wright (2007b) – "statements are true only insofar as they relate appropriately to the ontological reality of a world that exists independently of our ability to apprehend and describe it" (p. 8). While one commonly refers to 'true propositions, statements or beliefs', it must recognised that these statements only attempt to describe a particular reality. Truth, therefore, only resides in such statements themselves in a secondary capacity, for truth principally resides in the reality that such propositions themselves attempt to describe (Wright, 2007b). These statements, propositions or beliefs are merely *bearing witness* to the truth.

In taking account of these insights, it is evident that the way in which the word 'truth' and its relatives operate, i.e. making reference to the way in which 'things' actually are in the real world, is a common aspect of everyday life (Wright, 2007b). Ontological realism establishes the common-sense apprehension of truth that is generally agreed upon or accepted by the majority of human beings in a range of varying geographical and historical contexts (Wright, 2007b). Although there is significant difference evident amongst accounts or descriptions of reality, there is a collective or shared cross-cultural acceptance in an exterior reality, i.e. that there is an actual reality 'out there', that needs to be described or accounted for (Wright, 2007b). This insight finds much support by way of a simple thought experiment. Consider for a moment, what way might people behave if they sincerely believed that there is nothing beyond, or external to, their sentient minds – the world, conceived as such, would be a mere figment of one's imagination and would carry no requirement on the part of the individual to interact or engage with it in any way.

With the exception of people who are chronically ill and find themselves in an unconscious state, it is otherwise a commonly held assumption that the person interacts and engages with some manner of reality that is external to their sentient minds (Wright, 2007b). Even the Buddhist, for example, who perceives the 'present' as but a mere illusion from which s/he seeks to be emancipated, assumes that this world actually is momentary and therefore responds accordingly to it (Wright, 2007b). From this above discussion, it is evident that the solipsistic repudiation of ontological reality is disconnected from everyday life, and, therefore, finds itself in the sphere of speculative philosophy. This insight, however, carries a particular caveat with it – an ontological dualism between 'self' and 'world'.

To speak of an external reality, i.e. 'a real world out there', implies an ontological dualism between self and world. Human beings, however, are inseparable from the world within which they exist and, as such, are indispensable components of the reality which they strive to describe (Wright, 2007b; Bhaskar, 1977). This non-dualistic ontology proposes that whenever one acts or thinks, they bring about a change in the entirety of the actual order-of things. This non-dualistic ontology points to a particular question of interest – in what way does this non-dualistic ontology relate to the assertion that reality exists independently of one's ability to experience or encounter it? The answer to this question is one of degree (Wright, 2007b). It is true, for example, that regardless of the act that the individual performs in the world, the individual invokes a change in the order-of-things. Such alterations are so small in the order-of-things, however, that when interpreted in the context of the entirety of all that exists, i.e. in reality, they are of little ontological significance (Wright, 2007b; Bhaskar, 1977).

If I were to pass away this evening the effect, for example, no matter how painful for those closest to me, would not resonate to any significant degree. In spite of my particularity or uniqueness, I am but one of more than 6 billion human beings living on this planet at present, a planet that completes one revolution around one of 70 sextillion *perceivable* stars – by way of example, there are ten times the amount of stars as there are grains of sand in the world's beaches and desserts (Wright, 2007b). It is evident, therefore, that while it is true that when one encounters an object the world changes marginally as a consequence, it is no less true that reality, in all important respects, exists independently of an individual's capacity to perceive it (Wright, 2007b; Bhaskar, 1977). The epistemic relationship between the person and ontological reality is central to a critical realist approach to religious education.

Such thinkers argue that the epistemic relationship between the person and ontological reality is contingent upon their specific cultural context (Wright, 2007b; C. Go, 2019). The person does not possess the capacity to discern the entirety of all that is, i.e. the totality of reality, nor the ability to understand its essence, extent, order and purpose – rather, that ability resides only with God (Wright, 2007b). An account of reality will always be incomplete, contingent and often wrong. This position is a fly in the face of the modernist vision of the person as an all-knowing rational subject as well as its dream of constituting totally secure and certain knowledge (Wright, 2007b). It is evident, therefore, that an epistemic distance exists between reality and one's view of reality.

The critical realist, Roy Bhaskar (2006; 2002; 1977), provides further clarity concerning the epistemic distance that was alluded to in the above point. Bhaskar (1977) identifies three interrelated ontological domains: [1] the empirical, [2] the

actual, and [3] real. These three interrelated ontological domains can be expanded as follows: [1] the 'empirical' domain comprises all that one has ever experienced, [2] the 'actual' domain comprises the entirety of objects and occurrences in the world – including one's experiences – that exist and happen in spite of one's awareness of them or not, and [3] the 'real' domain comprises of the entirety of objects, events, and experiences, along with the attention and instruments that make them possible, and which offer the possibility of generating new arrangements of the actual world (Wright, 2007b; Bhaskar, 1977).

From this standpoint, a common error presents itself – the epistemic fallacy of associating reality with experience which, subsequently, forces the world into the confines of one's epistemological processes (Wright, 2007b). A clear example of this fallacy can be observed in logical positivism which confines or "limits truth to that which is directly verifiable through the senses" (Wright, 2007b, p.10). While some propositions, for example, are verifiable through one's sense experience, and, therefore, can be considered true on the basis of such evidence, other propositions are frankly unverifiable by such means.

From a logical positivist position, therefore, moral, aesthetic, and religious assertions are merely emotive expressions that are empty of any manner of cognitive relation with the real world because one is unable to hear goodness, taste beauty, or see God (Wright, 2007b). There is no suggestion made by logical positivism that one's epistemic processes may require alteration in response to the realities that one encounters in the world (Wright, 2007b). Rather, according to logical positivists, reality must comply with one's pre-established ways of knowing. Logical positivism diminishes reality to

the empirical domain and circumvents the actual and real domains. Critical realists, on the contrary, argue that reality is for the most part independent of epistemological concerns as regardless of the nature and extent of the world, it exists independently of the person's capacity to know it (Wright, 2007b).

William Alston (1996) affirms this point. The statement that gold is pliable is true, and can only be true according to Alston (1996), if gold is in fact pliable. It is impossible for there to be any epistemic conditions in terms of the truth of such a statement (Alston, 1996). It is not a condition that any individual or social grouping, therefore, regardless of their definition, know that gold is pliable "to be justified or rational in believing it" (Alston, 1996, p. 5). If God did create the world from nothing (*ex nihilo*), then creation itself was an act – a real event – and, therefore, it makes little difference to the ontological reality of this act whether any other sentient life forms, be it human or otherwise, are aware of this fact (Wright, 2007b). One is assisted in coming to appreciate this point by way of a brief consideration of the nature of language.

In taking account of the nature of language, a variety of questions are encountered. Of immediate importance to this research are the following: Of particular interest to this present discussion are the following: In what way do propositions or statements interact with the actual order-of-things? And, in what manner can one tell the difference between a true or false proposition or statement? Any responses to such questions must be transparent in terms of their recognition or awareness of the intricacy of language. Seldom does one encounter between words and objects a basic one-to-one relationship. Human beings are reliant upon an intricate array of metaphors, modes and stories to interpret the world (Wright, 2007b).

The person is not a detached or neutral observer aspiring to offer an account of an external world. Rather, the person is inseparable from the world in which they dwell. The person is an active participant in reality. Language is more than a mere tool used by human beings to depict their world, it is the central instrument by which the person lives out their life (Wright, 2007b). It is important, therefore, that every effort is made to ensure that our language correlates with reality. If language is deprived of this relationship with reality, one's attempts to relate properly to the actual order-of-things breakdown (Wright, 2007b). When one professes their fidelity to God, for example, and respectively strives to structure their lives in alignment with this profession, one places everything on the conviction that their creed appropriately discerns, in-spite of its partiality, divine reality (Wright, 2007b). This decision is far from simple, if one is incorrect their entire life will be established on a false premise (Wright, 2007b). It is evident, therefore, that the question of truth is central to an understanding of the nature of language, particularly in terms of the words that one not only speaks but also builds their life upon.

The actual realities that language moves towards addressing, according to Wright (2007b), are what established the origin and foundation of truthful statements. On this point, it is important that one is alive to the noticeable hazard of potentially falling into a semantic mode of the epistemic fallacy, i.e. the equation of language with reality. While not all forms of postmodern philosophy are susceptible to this danger, some indubitably are exposed to this fallacy (Wright, 2007b). Such vulnerability emerges from the prevalent scepticism that is evident in a postmodern epoch in regard to the limitations of one's ability to acquire knowledge of reality.

This scepticism reaches its climax in postmodern philosophies that give an account of the human endeavour to offer an account of reality as merely frivolous language games. The mere suggestion that one can know anything of the world breaks down, for the aforementioned assumption suggests that language and reality are equal for one is incapable of knowing anything beyond their linguistic constructions (Wright, 2007b). This position, therefore, presents reality as a mere *construct*, something that one *creates* using language. A realist understanding of truth, in contrast, argues that language operates to not only *describe* reality, but to *respond* to it as opposed to *create* it (Wright, 2007b; C. Go. 2019). The ontological reality, therefore, is for the most part independent of one's capacity to identify it. Statements or propositions are only true insofar as they appropriately interact with real states of affairs in the world (Wright, 2007b). This does not imply that language is not constructed, but rather that one's construction may be either true or false. During the Cretaceous period, long before the emergence of human life on earth, small, bipedal, feathered carnivorous dinosaurs existed on earth. Palaeontologists, for example, coined the name 'Velociraptor' for the purpose of *depicting* as opposed to *creating* such creatures.

From this standpoint, it is possible to discern that philosopher, Harvey Cormier (2001), comes perilously close to succumbing to the epistemic fallacy when he states that "we didn't make the dinosaurs, but we did make the truth about them when we generated the concept dinosaur and satisfactory beliefs involving it" (p. 64). It is a foundational *ontological truth*, for example, that human beings did not *create* the dinosaur, but it is only a secondary *semantic truth* that human beings *produced* the concept dinosaur (Wright, 2007b). It is evident, therefore, that the ontological reality of dinosaurs is largely autonomous of any palaeontology discourse. The truth of the fact that human

beings coined the term dinosaur, as Wright (2007b) notes, is equivalent to the fact that one's discussions *about* dinosaurs have credibility solely to the extent that such conversations correctly depict a prior state of affairs on the planet earth.

In taking account of the example of dinosaurs, it is clear that the description 'dinosaur' is merely a practice by way of which one tries to depict one particular component of reality, and the precision or imprecision of one's depiction has little to no effect on the reality or actuality of such pre-historic specimens (Wright, 2007b). Epistemic relativism therefore implies that it is impossible for one to restrict the order-of-things to their capacity to know it, or diminish reality to the totality of one's true propositions or statements (Wright, 2007b). This juxtaposition of *ontological realism* and *epistemic relativism*, therefore, implies that one must depend on *judgemental rationality* to interpret the world in which one dwells (C. Go, 2019).

In considering the insights raised above, one must consider the following question: if it is possible for one to be incorrect from time to time, in what way can one be confident that they are not incorrect all of the time? In the context of this question, some philosophers interpret such judgements as an invitation to lapse into a state of radical scepticism. Where modernity strove to remedy this issue by an appeal for unequivocal certitude in terms of one's knowledge, postmodernity answered by elevating agnosticism to a position of righteousness. If knowledge is contingent upon the community that generates it, and unequivocal certitude a condition for knowledge, it can be said, therefore, that one has no access to *any* knowledge of the world in which they dwell (Wright, 2007b).

A clear-cut choice between certainty and scepticism is not the only possibility available in terms of responding to the fact of epistemic relativism. In contrast to those who take up a wholly sceptical perspective, it is apparent that one does in fact possess somewhat secure knowledge of the world in which they dwell, for if circumstances were not as such, one would be unable to carry everyday activities such as the menial, i.e. the boiling of a kettle, or the skilled, i.e. brain surgery, or the aesthetic, i.e. recognising the beauty of a sea-shore, or even the moral, i.e. the denunciation of nuclear war or mass murder as evil (Wright, 2007b). Yet, in contrast to those up take up the perspective of unequivocal certitude, it is equally true that one's knowledge of the world in which they dwell is partial and conditional. It is evident, therefore, that one can be certain of little while, at one and same time, knowing a great deal about the world in which they dwell. In taking account of the insights raised in the above discussion, it is necessary to give further consideration to the work of Roy Bhaskar (2006; 2002; 1977).

An important distinction must be both made and sustained, according to Bhaskar (1977), between intransitive and transitive domains of knowledge. In the intransitive domain, for example, objects have an autonomous ontological reality, i.e. they are not created nor reliant upon the actions of persons. If human beings "ceased to exist sound would continue to travel and heavy bodies fall to the earth" (Bhaskar, 1977, p.21), even though according to the hypothesis proposed nobody would be there to know they continued to travel or fall. In the transitive domain, however, objects have epistemic reality, i.e. they are created and reliant upon the actions of persons. Such objects of knowledge, according to Bhaskar (1977), include the constituted "facts and theories, paradigms and models, methods and techniques of inquiry" (p. 21) that are accessible to a specific school of science or scientist.

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It is possible, as Bhaskar (1977) highlights, to envision "a world of intransitive objects without science," but impossible to envision "science without both intransitive and transitive objects" (p. 22). The object of study and the rewards of one's enquiry both possess ontological reality. Human understanding and action in the transitive domain is reliant on the intransitive domains, i.e. the empirical, actual and real (Bhaskar, 1977). Although relative to the observer, knowledge is dependent on some manner of interaction between the person and an autonomous ontological reality (Bhaskar, 1977; C. Go, 2019). As transitive and intransitive objects of knowledge are distinct, but at one and the same time, necessarily connected, it is possible for one to make a critical judgement concerning the relationship that exists between both transitive epistemic claims to truth and intransitive ontological reality that such claims attempt to interact with (C. Go, 2019). In this context, it becomes clear that the religions of the world not only make claims to ultimate truth, but also offer paths to enlightenment or salvation by means of a truthful life. This discussion has given particular attention to the former, i.e. truth, therefore, it becomes necessary to consider the latter of the two-fold distinction at the centre of a critical realist approach to religious education – truthfulness.

3.5.1.2. Truthfulness

While the religions of the world make claims of ultimate truth about one's place in the actual-order-of-things and about the purpose of life here on earth, they also offer paths to salvation or enlightenment as well as guidance on the way in which one can lead a *truthful* life. Living life *truthfully*, according to Wright (2007b), means that the person is living harmoniously with ultimate reality. A religious education that takes truth seriously, therefore, must also concern itself with the call to live a truthful life (Wright,

2007b). It is interesting here to reflect on the infamous question posed by Pontius Pilate as recounted in the Gospel of John, at the trial of Jesus of Nazareth: "What is truth?" (Jn 18:38). The irony, as Wright (2007b) also highlights, is recognised all to easily by John's readers for they are already alive to the fact that Jesus himself is "the way*, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6). On this point, it is interesting to consider biblical scholar, Charles Barrett (1955), and his insights regarding the Greek term '*aletheia'* meaning 'truth. While the term '*aletheia*' is often used in the Gospel in its standard Greek sense to refer to that which correlates to fact, a more accurate interpretation of the term in this context points to "the Christian revelation brought about by and revealed in Jesus" (Barrett, 1955, p. 139) – i.e. as the incarnate Word of God, Jesus is "full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14).

This above association of truth with divine mercy and grace, Wright (2007b) notes, has its origin in the Hebraic idea of God's loyalty and fidelity to his chosen or covenant people (Ex 34:6). There is significant distinctness evident between an understanding of 'truth' as a constant and detached correspondence with reality, and 'truthfulness' as a dynamic and attached interaction with the world. In this context, the Hebrew term '*yada*' meaning 'to know' yields particular insight as it discerns a knowing as being of a particularly dynamic and personal character. In his consideration of the term '*yada*', Groome (1980) outlines that knowing does not emerge by way of a detached standing back from reality for the purposes of observing it, but by the dynamic and deliberate interaction in lived experience. In the Septuagint, as Groome (1980) notes, the term '*yada*' was translated as '*ginoskein*', a term that is commonly translated as an 'intellectual looking at' an object of study and, therefore, carries overtones of objectivity.

It is important, however, that one refrains from over-emphasising the difference between the Greek and Hebraic schools of thought in terms of the above context (Wright, 2007b). The work of Plato, for example, does not present knowledge of the truth of the ultimate order-of-things as being merely an academic issue (Plato, 2011; Plato, 2007; Plato, 1977). Rather, the Platonic Forms offer fundamental guidance for both human action and individual flourishment. In the Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures, as Wright (2007b) highlights, the personal character of truthfulness necessitates knowledge of the authentic reality of God, as this reality is revealed in God's covenantal relationship with his chosen people, the Israelites. It is evident, therefore, that the relationship between truth and truthfulness is not one of autonomous concepts, but rather that of interdependence. An intrinsic relationship exists between both truth as external objective reality and truthfulness as internal subjective responsiveness to said reality (Wright, 2007b).

To be *truthful*, according to Wright (2007b), is to conduct oneself in a dependable, devout, forthright and righteous manner. How might one calibrate or access what it means to be truthful as just described? One might begin, as Wright (2007b) notes, from the perspective that a true person is someone that is true to themselves, or to some manner of external measure such as the shared set of values of a community that they associate themselves with, or to the God they have faith in. This proposition, however, raises some fundamental questions and issues. For instance, consider these rather crude examples, a serial killer may be true to oneself, a large number of Hitler's followers were true to the ideals of Nazism, and many extremist terrorists are true to the God that they believe in. In taking account of these exemplars, one cannot circumvent the following question: are the values by which one evaluates truthfulness suitable to the

authentic nature of reality? One's apprehension of the nature of reality instructs one's judgements (Wright, 2007b). If the ultimate source of goodness is God, for example then the 'truthful' life is one that is lived harmoniously with the divine will of God. If God does not exist, however, and there no transcendent origin of value exists, it can be said then, that one is ultimately accountable for their own sense of goodness, that one ought to evaluate their life against the intentions that one sets for themselves, either with an individual or communal context.

From this discussion, it can be discerned that an intimate reciprocal relationship exists between the pursuit of truth and the practice of truthfulness. A truthful life is one that is lived harmoniously with the manner in which things genuinely are in the world in which one dwells (Wright, 2007b; Bhaskar, 1977). The British moral philosopher, Bernard Williams (2002), also affirms this point. Contemporary society, according to Williams (2002), brings together a passionate commitment to the practice of truthfulness and a profound scepticism concerning the pursuit of truth. It is important here for one to make a distinction between the practice of truthfulness and the pursuit of truth. The practice of truthfulness, for example, is best understood as being concerned with the way in which one lives out his/her life in the social space. In other words, the practice of truthfulness is ultimately interested in the integrity of one's actions, the kind of person one is, the way in which one demonstrates virtues such as trustworthiness, sincerity and honesty (Williams, 2002; Wright, 2007). The pursuit of truth, however, is best understood as being concerned with one's understanding of the world. The pursuit of truth, for example, is interested in one's political principles, metaphysical beliefs and religious commitments.

For Williams (2002), it is becoming progressively banal for to assume that there is no necessary relationship between truthfulness and the pursuit of truth, i.e. that one can live a truthful life in spite of the specific character of their wider beliefs and worldviews. A tolerant perspective towards a wide spectrum of beliefs stands alongside a reluctance to concede when evaluating matters of personal integrity (Wright, 2007b). This position implies, therefore, that one evaluates truthfulness against their own integrity and the distinguishable integrity of others as opposed to against a wider value system. This commitment to truthfulness, according to Williams (2002), is rooted in a penetrating scepticism, a zeal against being tricked, a fervour to cut through appearances to witness the authentic systems and reasons that are to be found behind them.

This angst concerning duplicity is operative in a postmodern society, according to Williams (2002), that is both particularly sceptical of the legitimacy of truth claims, and assured in its position that the Enlightenment has produced unparalleled systems of oppression as an effect of its conviction in an external objective, truth about both individuals and wider society. Aligned with this position, the pursuit of truth presents itself as a serious threat to the practice of truthfulness for one is sceptical of any pledge to any exterior power because there is the conviction that such external authority will weaken personal integrity (Wright, 2007b). This position suggests that one need only be true to oneself, what one believes in is of little consequence for all that is of concern is what the kind of person you are. This position is precarious and brings with it a range of difficulties.

The precarious character of the above position is affirmed by Williams (2002). Such a polarisation of truth and truthfulness, as Williams (2002) argues, generates cynicism

and apathy. Scholars who absolve themselves from the pursuit for truth are liable to slide, according to Williams (2002) "from professional seriousness, through professionalization, to a finally disenchanted careerism" (p. 3). In spite of such pardon, a divide between truth and truthfulness is ultimately unsustainable for is eventually going to ask: if one does not trust in the existence of truth, then what is the ardour for truthfulness actually an ardour for? From this standpoint, it can be argued, that the exercise of truthfulness necessitates some measure of truth against which to assess its success or failure, i.e. in the pursuit of truthfulness, what precisely is one purported to be true to?

In considering this question, it is evident that, the repudiation of science as simply the exercise of power, in the conviction that its false claims to bear the truth are found wanting as a result of the social causes that regulate its function, contributes little to the clearing of a path for more truthful living (Williams, 2002). Rather, such a clearing requires that one make the extraordinary assumption that the sociology of knowledge is best placed to bear truth about science than science is to bear truth about the world in which one dwells (Williams, 2002). In recognising this insight, Wright (2007b) argues that the deconstruction of scientific truth leads to a different and far less tenable account of truth as opposed to truthfulness. The contemporary interest in truthfulness usually implies the truth claim that autonomy establishes as the highest human good.

There is particular irony evident in the truth claim that personal integrity necessitates one to refrain from assenting to truth claims (Wright, 2007b). This point is also reaffirmed by Williams (2002) for truth has an inescapable role to exercise in one's attempt to live a truthful life in that the value of truthfulness takes up the requirement

to discover the truth, to cling on to it, and proclaim it – especially to oneself (Williams, 2002). The requirement to guarantee that the convictions which necessarily inform one's attempt to live a truthful life, to the best of one's aspirations, is consistent with the manner in which things genuinely are in the world in which one dwells.

Persons strive to understand the world and live truthfully within it as interested participants as opposed detached bystanders (Wright, 2007b). Colin Gunton (1983) further explicates this point. As the world transcends one's capacity to comprehend it in its totality it is, therefore, impossible for one to arrive at 'God's-eye-view' of knowledge – one that is purely objective, detached and with airs of perfection. A substantial understanding of the world can still be arrived at, however, which implies that the fact that knowledge is contingent, fallible and forever partial does not undermine its claim to be knowledge (Gunton, 1983). This position, as Wright (2007b) notes, carries with it the potential of moving towards an understanding of one's true place in the ultimate order-of-things, and therefore, enable one to live a truthful life in a manner that is consistent with reality – one that is also furnished with all of the restrictions and favourable circumstances afforded by the limitations of one's experience of reality. Such an endeavour, as Gunton (1983) outlines, has an indispensable linguistic dimension for words are not mere mirrors of reality but the way by which one takes part in reality.

The accounts of the world offered by humankind, according to Wright (2007b), carry profound implications with them in terms of the manner in which one attempts to conduct their life, and the narratives that offer life meaning possess serious consequences in terms of one's comprehension of the essence of reality. From this

standpoint, it is evident that one's interaction with reality by way of the medium of language brings about the collapse of the distinction between objective factual propositions or statements and those so-called subjective value-landing propositions or statements. This separation of the natural and moral worlds, for Gunton (1983), is perhaps the biggest calamity of the Enlightenment and the most pressing challenge encountered by modern humanity.

The dualism of fact-value is grounded in the epistemic fallacy, i.e. the outcome of a groundless distinction between the supposed objectivity of scientific knowledge and the supposed subjectivity of one's value judgements (Wright, 2007b). Despite this insight, the fact that the manner in which one comprehends reality carries fundamental consequences concerning the manner in which one conducts their life is unavoidable. This point holds true regardless of whether one perceives "the natural order as a value-free, self-generating entity, or as a purposeful, meaning-laden creation of a personal God" (Wright, 2007b, pp. 17-18). It is evident, therefore, that the pursuit of truth and the practice of truthfulness are intimately interrelated.

A particularly useful way of imagining this relationship is in terms of appropriate proportion or correct balance – akin to the manner in which one speaks of a 'true square' in carpentry, or a 'true note' in music (Wright, 2007b). If one is to lead a truthful life it is imperative, therefore, that one's convictions and behaviour are consistent with reality, or at the very minimum with the reasonable convictions that one maintains about reality. If God exists, for example, one's actions ought to be in harmony with the divine will for one's life to be truthful. Or, if God does not exist and reality is nothing more than an impersonal series of events, i.e. a mere sequence of cause and effect in

the natural order, then one's actions ought to be in harmony with the laws of nature and with the values that a human being – as the highest being produced by the process of evolution, to the best one's knowledge at least – is free to make for oneself (Wright, 2007b).

In the contemporary pluralistic context, within which there is no general agreement about either truth or truthfulness, to attempt to offer a definitive answer to enduring issues identified with such concepts, and then to present them as a foundation for religious education, according to Wright (2007b), would ultimately lead to a return to some mode of confessionalism. In taking account of this point, and the insights raised thus far, Wright (2007b) discerns a working framework that is informed by the insights of critical realism to support and guide the ongoing discussion about truth and truthfulness amongst religious educators and pupils.

3.5.2. A Working Framework from A Critical Realist Perspective?

Wright (2007b) offers a working framework to assist religious educators and pupils in their engagement with the ongoing discussion of truth and truthfulness in religious education. The proposed framework is offered with the view to assist in establishing a frame of reference by which a religious education that takes the question of truth seriously might coordinate its thought and practices. While the proposed framework is informed by the insights of the emergent philosophy of critical realism, according to Wright (2007b), such a framework must be flexible enough to embrace a range of differing worldviews, but sufficiently focused to assist in arranging and coordinating the ongoing discussion.

The framework offered by Wright (2007b) contains seven key propositions or statements that operate as stimuli in terms of the discussion as opposed to fundamental principles: [1] truth is the entirely of all that is, [2] one's knowledge of reality is forever partial and contingent, [3] critical judgements can be made between differing accounts of reality, [4] reality is structured, intricate and versatile, [5] to pose questions about ultimate meaning and purpose is reasonable, [6] the ultimate essence of reality is a disputed matter, and [7] to live a truthful life is to live harmoniously with ultimate reality. The seven key propositions or statements can be expanded as follows:

[1] *truth is the entirely of all that is* – truth is basically the summation of the reality of all things which have being, had being previously, or carry the possibility or prospect for being in the future either in the physical world, in the confines of one sentient mind, or in transcendent dimension of some kind (Wright, 2007b). This reality, therefore, presents itself as the central objective of study, existing to the greater extent autonomously of one's encounter with it. [2] *one's knowledge of reality is forever partial and contingent* – knowledge is restricted by one's specific cultural circumstance and the errancy of human beings (Wright, 2007b). It is possible to acquire some manner of knowledge of the real order-of-things, however, in spite of one's inability to claim any 'God's-eye-view' of reality.

[3] *critical judgements can be made between differing accounts of reality* – the acceptance of the contingency and partiality of knowledge of reality does not imply that one's belief and worldview is to be considers utterly frivolous (Wright, 2007b). All domains of knowledge it is possible, and customary, to make informed or rational judgements between differing accounts of reality or truth claims. [4] *reality is*

structured, intricate and versatile – it is evident, at least to some extent, that there is some degree of order in reality (Wright, 2007b). The intricacy of the variety of academic disciples is evidence of the intrinsic intricacy evident in reality itself. In offering correlative accounts of identical phenomenon, the varying disciplines give expression to the fact that reality is also versatile. [5] *to pose questions about ultimate meaning and purpose is reasonable* – in that certain components of reality are of greater significance than others, and some instruments are more fundamental than others, there is every justification to attempt to discern the ultimate coordinating force, form of being that explicates the components of reality with regard to the whole (Wright, 2007b). God, some alternative type of transcendent reality, shared-communal human values, the natural order, and personal longings are, to name but a few, contenders for the position of ultimate explanation.

[6] *the ultimate essence of reality is a disputed matter* – the religions of the world as well as secular traditions provide a spectrum of incompatible accounts of ultimate reality (Wright, 2007b). In spite of this fact, there is commonly overlap, to a certain extent, as well as consistency amongst such accounts, i.e. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have a fidelity to a creator God. It must also be recognised that there is also a certain extent of conflict evident between them, i.e. regardless of their shared monotheism, Jews, Christians, and Muslims follow irreconcilable comprehensions of Jesus of Nazareth – while Jesus may be a fantastic moral educator, the Word incarnate, or a prophet of Allah, it is not possible for Jesus to be all three at one and the same time (Wright, 2007b). And, lastly, [7] *to live a truthful life is to live harmoniously with ultimate reality* – although reality exists autonomously from one's sentient mind and physical body, one still participates in reality, and strives to live within reality by

coordinating their life in purposeful arrangements of convictions and actions (Wright, 2007b).

It is sensible, therefore, to order one's life in a manner that is consistent with that which, to the best of one's capacity, one identifies as the ultimate source of meaning and value, i.e. the divine will of God, social traditions, the natural world, or one's deepest longings. Here, an important caveat must be recognised, the act of 'metaphysical rebellion' whereby one chooses to reject that which has been identified as the ultimate source of meaning and value in the universe (Wright, 2007b). A secular humanist, for example, may be of the conviction that reality is ultimately a meaningless process of cause and effect in the natural world, but at one and the same time, strive to live a meaningful life whilst being conscious of the fact that to live as such is to live against the current of reality. Likewise, it is also possible for one to believe in the existence of God, but refrain from offering worship as an act of protest against the degree of suffering evident in the world in which they dwell (Wright, 2007b).

3.5.3 A Critique of the Critical Realist Approach to Religious Education

The seven key propositions or statements comprised in the working framework embrace the insights of critical realism. This framework as well as the whole critical realist approach to religious education has received significant criticism from thinkers such as Patricia Hannam (2019), David Aldridge (2017; 2018) and Geoff Teece (2005). The critique issued by such thinkers confronts a critical realist approach to religious education with particularly significant challenges in terms of its claim to bear a path forward for religious education in terms of adequately addressing the question of truth. It is important at this point of the discussion to consider such criticism in greater detail.

From the above discussion, it is clear that thinkers such as Wright are deeply dissatisfied with modern religious education – particularly in terms of its relationship with Enlightenment rationalism and nineteenth century romantic hermeneutics. In recognising the limitations of the hermeneutic that is found at the centre of modern religious education, Wright attempts to open up discussion and exploration of hermeneutical theory with the view to highlighting what it can offer religious education in terms of overcoming the limitations of it modern concerns. Of particular importance in this regard is the acknowledgement that the question of truth is of central concern for religious education.

Hannam (2019) is particularly critical of Wright's approach to religious education in terms of its claim of offering a non-confessionalist approach. C. Go (2019) makes no claim of offering a non-confessional approach to religious education. He takes up a critical realist approach in the context of confessional religious education with the view to situate critical thinking in Catholic religious education in a manner that is philosophically and theologically tenable in the contemporary context within which faith-based religious education is taking place in the Philippines.

As demonstrated earlier in this chapter, the critical realist approach to religious education takes up a realist conception of truth. Wright attempts to circumvent any criticism of the turn to a realist conception of truth, particularly the charge that it is but another form of confessionalism, by turning to the emergent philosophy of critical realism which recognises the need for epistemological relativism (Hannam, 2019). In taking up the position that religion is constructed as a matter of true *versus* false claims about knowledge, according to Hannam (2019), the critical realist approach to religious

education cannot avoid confessionalism. This approach cannot separate itself from conforming with the assertion that religion possess an inherent universal value which, in itself, is a type of confessionalism. In taking up an either/or conception of 'ultimate truth' that is more aligned with models of truth found in the Judeo-Christian theology, according to Hannam (2019), the critical realist approach is more aligned with religious confessionalism as opposes to non-confessionalism. The critical realist approach is, perhaps, best understood as a neo-confessionalist approach within which the capacity to appreciate plurality, as well as other aspects of religious importance in terms of human existences, is restricted.

Wright's critique of pluralism develops in part from his critique of romantic hermeneutics, such as the hermeneutics presented by John Hick (1995). Geoff Teece (2005) is critical of Wrights analysis of Hick (1995). Such a critique, Teece (2005) argues, is unfounded for two reasons: [1] Hick (1995) is not a theological romantic, and [2] it would be erroneous for one to hold the view that romanticism underpins pluralism in general. Furthermore, Hannam (2019) argues that Wright's approach to religion implies an "uncritical acceptance of the essential goodness of religion" (p. 47). Wright's approach is overly confident in terms of religions' ability alone "to guide human beings to ways of 'truthful living'" (Hannam, 2019, p. 47). While Wright asserts that collective intentionality precedes the intentionality of individual followers, Hannam (2019) argues that, generally speaking, Wright is not entirely persuasive in his claim that "truth is the most significant element of religion or what it means to live a religious life" (p. 47).

As outlined thus far, Wright (2007b) discerns several philosophical dimensions that are of great importance to religious education, including: [1] understanding the ultimate nature of reality (ontology), [2] the way language is used to express this ultimate reality (semantics), [3] the process of understanding different truth claims (hermeneutics), and [4] the ability to judge between conflicting truth claims (epistemology). Hannam (2019) argues, however, that Wright under interrogates a philosophical account of religious truth and instead restates Christian theological assumptions about the nature of authority and salvation. Such an approach is particularly problematic, according to Hannam (2019), when Wright moves towards developing such Christian assumptions about the nature of authority and salvation into religious education. Wright (2007a) suggests that "critical realism questions Descartes' dualistic distinction between the material and mental as separate substances" (p. 341). This point is contested by Hannam (2019). It is impossible for Wright's distinction, according to Hannam (2019), to achieve what is hoped for as in a critical realist perspective the insistence remains on the observed (positive object of knowledge) as opposed to the observer (learning subject). Hannam argues that Wright (2007b) maintains the Platonic and Cartesian dualism as opposed to offering an alternative perspective which he intends.

Following significant consideration, Wright (2007b) proposes that critical realism can resolve the question of plurality in terms of religious truth. Wright (2007b) is clear, however, that he does not want the "conflict between idealism and nominalism to set the parameters of the debate" (p. 153). Rather, he argues that critical realism can respond to questions of whether or not religion reveals realist accounts of reality or if religion consists of social constructs (Hannam, 2019). Wright (2007b) discerns the need to move beyond the experiential to recognise the forces and systems that make reality

what it is. As Hannam (2019) highlights, however, "no alternative to critical realism is examined" (p. 48) by Wright. There is no examination of James' more demanding analysis of idealism, for example, nor any consideration given to the manner in which the 'pragmatic method' opens up the ability to question the assumptions made regarding the "rationality of the hypothesis of the absolute" (Woell, 2012, p. 128). Even if it were possible, therefore, for matters arising from religious plurality to be adequately addressed by discerning an appropriate epistemological theory, Wright's thesis would still benefit from more detailed analysis of different approaches to both "absolutist and relativist assumptions about the absolute order" (Hannam, 2019, p. 48). Such analysis would have not only strengthened Wrights position, but also carried with it the potential to open other paths between his philosophical and theological assumptions.

In addition to the above criticisms, Hannam (2019) identifies another problem with Wright's thesis. In taking account of Wright's assumptions concerning 'truth' at the centre of religion and his turn to critical realism in order to find a possible resolution of problems encountered as a result of religious plurality, another significant issue emerges – the ability of critical religious education in terms of its translation into educational practice (Hannam, 2019). Although Wright addresses the relationship between liberalism and religion with regard to wider society in terms of education, Hannam (2019) argues that his analysis of questions concerning the intention of education within a plural democratic society is inadequate. While accepting the two objectives for religious education offered in the work of Grimmitt (1973) as well as the related educational tasks, Wright fails to sufficiently address either the concept of 'educational tasks' or the assumptions within which it finds its grounding.

Hannam (2019) argues that Wright's failure to address such matters results in the emergence of further issues leading to the establishment of the position that "education can be equated with the child's completion of particular tasks" (p. 48), thereby potentially slipping into the snare of promoting individualism which Wright actively attempts to counteract. The incoherence evident between Wright's theory about religion and the variation theory of learning, according to Hannam (2019), constitutes a crucial fault in Wright's thesis in terms of educational purpose. It can be argued that, the educational dimension of the critical realist approach to religious education, particularly that of Wright, is insufficiently developed (Hannam, 2019).

Wright also fails to offer insight in terms of the manner in which religious education is to manage "either external or inner plurality of religion in an educative context independent from a Christian one" (Hannam, 2019, p. 48). In sum, for Hannam, Wright's reliance on critical realism as an epistemological theory capable of resolving the problems raised by religious plurality carries with it a particular understanding of knowledge and knowing – one that positions that 'which is to be known' as the central the point of concern. Wright's thesis ultimately leads, therefore, to an overemphasis on the content and externals of religion (Hannam, 2019).

While Wright gives some attention to particular political considerations, a number of outstanding questions remain in terms of liberalism's ability to address the question of plurality (Hannam, 2019). The same concern can be raised in terms of Wright's treatment of the notion of freedom. He grounds the concept of freedom in epistemological and ontological comprehensions as opposed to education in the public sphere which further limits his proposal (Hannam, 2019). In spite of engaging in a

significant hermeneutic exploration of modern religious education, Wright fails to give sufficient consideration to the relationship between pupil and teacher or the accusation of neo-confessionalism (Hannam, 2019). While Wright's religious and philosophical positioning finds its genesis in Cox's (1983) earlier acknowledgement that there are two different ways of understanding religion, i.e. for the believer compared to the non-believer, Wright fails to address Cox's (1971) concern "that religious education has perhaps more than any other subject to show that it is a worthwhile educational activity" (p. 3). The subsequent lack of advancement of educational theory further limits Wright's thesis. In particular, in failing to connect his approach with a theory of learning, Wright's thesis is weak in terms of "the practical exemplification of what the teacher's role is in the classroom" (Hannam, 2019, p.50). It can be argued, therefore, that when religious education is arranged in the manner suggested by Wright, significant limitations emerge concerning the 'educational worthwhileness' of the project (Cox, 1971).

Another significant critique of Wright's work is offered by David Aldridge (2017). In bringing both the ontological and universal dimensions of philosophical hermeneutics to the fore by way of sustained consideration of the development of hermeneutics from Heidegger towards Gadamer, Aldridge (2017) argues that while Wright demonstrates sustained engagement with Gadamer, "the specifically ontological significance is not fully recognised" (p. 73). Wright's failure to recognise the ontological significance in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, Aldridge (2017) argues, leads to a "denial of the universality and a restriction of the scope of hermeneutics" (p. 73). As demonstrated earlier in this chapter, for example, a far broader vision for hermeneutics has been proposed in the literature of religious education across Europe (Pollefeyt, 2020).

3.6. Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is evident that religious education is best understood as a hermeneutic activity. This hermeneutical conception of religious education marks a radical shift in perspective, it presents a constitutional turn in modern religious education that ought to be embraced by religious educationalists in attempting to address the complexity that the contemporary context within which religious education takes place brings to the fore. It has been conclusively illustrated that the hermeneutics of modern religious education are found wanting in terms of adequately address such intricacy – particularly when one recognises the limitations of the hermeneutic that is found at its centre which ultimately leads to an insufficient treatment of religion and the question of truth. Furthermore, in giving detailed attention to the critical realist approach to religious education, such as that offered by Wright and C. Go, a potential framework was discerned with the view to supporting a religious education that move towards meaningful critical engagement with truth and its cognate truthfulness.

In taking account of the critiques offered by Hannam (2019), Aldridge (2018; 2017), and Teece (1995), it is clear that although the motivation to establish a critical religious education ought to be welcomed, there are significant theological, philosophical, hermeneutical and educational issues evident in the critical realist approach to religious education offered by Wright. As noted earlier in this discussion when considering Aldridge's critique of Wright's reading of Gadamer, particularly his neglect of the ontological significance of Gadamer's hermeneutics, a far more dynamic hermeneutic is being proposed across Europe by thinkers such as Pollefeyt (2020). In recognising the limitations of the hermeneutic operative at the heart of modern religious education in the United Kingdom, and significant theological, philosophical, hermeneutical and

educational issues that are evident in the critical realist approach to religious education offered by Wright, there is a need to offer a novel treatment of religious education.

According to Aldridge (2017), for example, "Heidegger is virtually ignored in the philosophical treatment of religious education in England and Wales, except as an implicit influence on various 'postmodern' positions in the debate" (p. 73). In contexts where hermeneutics is invoked, Aldridge (2017) outlines "it is not as a development of these rich educational and philosophical traditions but rather as an imported methodological concern from an academic discipline considered to pertain to the subject matter that is being taught" (p. 73). While thinkers such as Aldridge (2017) are speaking to the context of religious education in England and Wales which has developed along different lines to religious education in the Republic of Ireland, there is much to be garnered from such hermeneutical considerations in said context.

As outlined earlier in this research, there has been a notable absence of any meaningful hermeneutical discussion in the context of religious education in the Republic of Ireland. In particular, there has been little attempt to invoke hermeneutics in such a manner that would be deemed philosophical or theologically viable. There has been little effort made in terms of drawing upon the rich insights of postmodern theologies such as those developed by Boeve (2004; 2003) or Jean Luc Marion (2018; 2017; 2013; 2012; 2002), and fewer still have offered an explicit treatment of the untapped reservoir of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and its potential contribution to religious education. Thinkers such as Lane (2013) and Cullen (2017) are notable exceptions. Cullen (2017) attempts to develop, by drawing on Gadamer's insights, an understanding of religious education as a 'conversational activity'. Cullen's (2017)

work, however, whilst positive in terms of its orientation is still limited in terms of its engagement with Gadamer. This gap in the discourse of religious education in an Irish context is matter that is in need of urgent consideration and this research moves towards bridging this gap.

It should be noted that this research does not move to develop a comprehensive approach to religious education in the Republic of Ireland. Rather, it moves towards the discernment of the hermeneutical task of religious education, and, in doing so, it offers some key principles that an approach to religious education needs to take account of if it aims to be philosophically, theologically, hermeneutically and educationally viable in terms of addressing the needs of the contemporary pluralistic context within which religious education takes place in the Republic of Ireland. With the view to achieving this, the following chapter turns its attention to the insights raised by contemporary Catholic theology – particularly those concerning truth, tradition, and the question of God in a post-Heideggerian epoch.

Chapter Four

Catholic Theology: Truth, Tradition, and A God Beyond Being?

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter demonstrated that religious education is best understood as a hermeneutic undertaking but that modern religious education has a restrictive hermeneutic at its centre. The critical realist approach to religious education was also considered but it was argued that it too falls short, particularly in terms of its caricature of religions as mere a composite of true or false propositions. Instead, it was posited that contemporary Catholic theology – particularly in terms of its treatment of truth, tradition, and the transcendence of God in a post-Heideggerian epoch – has a significant contribution to make in terms of opening up the question of truth in the context of religious education.

This chapter, therefore, will consider the following: given the context of religious education in the Republic of Ireland, what does Catholic theology contribute to discourse surrounding encounters with truth, tradition and a God-beyond-being? In the first section of this chapter, it will be argued that contemporary Catholic theology presents a meaningful treatment of truth. This presentation is not exhaustive but will address contemporary theology and its treatment of 'truth' by way of the following themes: [1] Question the Self-Sufficiency of Secular Reason: Expanding Horizons, [2] A Call for Dialogue: Modernity an Unfinished Project, [3] *Fides et Ratio* (1998): The Catholic Philosophical Tradition Redefined, [4] Faith and Reason: A Dialogical Relationship, [5] Dialogue A Shared Quest for Truth, and [6] Dialogue between the Particular and the Universal. This analysis will suggest that truth, particularly in relation to religion, can only ever be encountered in particular historical events and specific

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cultural forms and interpretations of experience. In arguing for the particularity and historicity of religious truth, the centrality of tradition is discussed in the second section of this chapter from the perspective of contemporary Catholic theology by way of the following three themes: [1] Interruption: Recontextualisation, Modernity and the Rupture of Tradition, [2] Diversity, Identity, and the Interruption of the Encounter with the Other, and [3] Faith in a Postmodern Context: Towards an Open Narrative. Tradition, it will be argued, is subject to change as a result of contemporary encounters with revealed truth. The Christian narrative is best understood as an open as opposed to a closed narrative – one that not only fosters an openness to encountering truth or the Other, but to the change that ensues as a result of such encounters. In this way, it is argued that any domestication of God – where God is reduced to the limited existence of finite beings and the limitations of their linguistic and cognitive capacities – must be resisted.

Finally, the third section will consider the contribution of post-Heideggerian de-ontological theology. Such post-modern theology has much to offer in terms of its treatment of God and Truth. Jean-Luc Marion's reclamation of an apophatic approach, albeit from a postmodern phenomenological perspective, challenges one to transcend the limitations of modern or enlightenment rationality and to embrace a God without being. This exploration will be carried out by way of the following themes: [1] a theological reading of the western critique of onto-theology, [2] A God-Without-Being, [3] the Withdrawal and Giving of the Christian God, and [4] Phenomenology and Hermeneutics: Four Moments in Givenness. From this standpoint, it will be demonstrated that the fragile hermeneutical encounter between the person and the

wholly Other is best understood as a saturated phenomenon – one in which the givenness of God or Truth moves towards the person.

4.2. Truth

In Chapter Two, it was argued that the contemporary context in which contemporary religious education is taking place, and, therefore, where one also posits the question of truth, is best understood a post-Christian and post-Secular age. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated thus far that enlightenment rationality presents a restrictive understanding of 'knowing'. In this section it will be demonstrated that secular reason fails to facilitate 'participatory' knowing. It is argued that secular reason is open to critique and disrepute in terms of its claim of self-sufficiency. Following from this analysis, it will be demonstrated that thinkers such as Jürgen Habermas, in response to this critique, argue that modernity is an unfinished project and call for renewed dialogue between religious reason and secular reason. In taking account of this debate, it is illustrated that Catholic theology's understanding of the relationship between faith and reason has much to offer in terms of such a narrowing of reason. From this standpoint, it will be argued that dialogue is best understood as a shared quest for truth. A quest that must recognise the particularity of religious traditions if it is to be open to encountering truth.

4.2.1. Questioning the Self-Sufficiency of Secular Reason: Expanding Horizons

Modernity has ultimately led to the separation of both scientific knowing [i.e. objective] and religious knowing [i.e. participative]. In this way, secular reason has taking on a sufficiency and autonomy that has been subject to significant criticism (Lane, 2011). Such critiques do not deny the intrinsic validity of secular reasoning as well as its

extraordinary success over the centuries. Rather, such criticisms are directed in particular at secular reason's failure to recognise its own assumptions. The autonomous quests of secular reason are rooted in a range of assumptions that must not be ignored – for example, the assumption that there is an order in the natural world or that there is meaning in the natural world, or that the natural world is intelligible (Lane, 2011). In this way, secular reason is far from detached or neutral. Rather, secular reason is equally value laden and subject to its own particularly as any other form of rationality – religious or otherwise. Such assumptions are the stimulus of secular and scientific reasoning. In failing to acknowledge that its quests are not detached, and therefore, separating objective knowing from participatory knowing, and prioritising the former over the latter, modernity has led to a narrowing of reason. This criticism is issued not only from theology, but also a host of secular philosophies – particularly the philosophy of science.

On this point, French philosopher and theologian, Jean-Luc Marion (2008), provides a striking account of this narrowing of reason. In the French newspaper, *Le Monde*, on the eve of Pope Benedict XVI's visit to France, Marion describes the modern restriction of reason as the "most profound crisis of our era" (p. 15). This crisis, according to Marion, is the one least talked about and has led to the "the dilution, the evanescence, perhaps even the disappearance of a rationality" (p. 15) that possesses the capacity to elucidate questions that transcend the mere provision and generation of objects. Questions, for example, that speak to or suggest how one ought to live or die have been eroded.

The difficulty posed by the restricted form of rationality outlined above can be observed in the fact that it has very little to say to humankind with regard to the human condition. In fact, it could be argued that, seldom has philosophy or 'science had so little to offer regarding the human condition – "about what we are, what we can know, what we must do, and what we are allowed to hope for" (Marion, 2008, p. 15). A similar concern is raised by Charles Taylor (2007) in terms of this narrowing of secular reason. Calculating secular reason, according to Taylor (2007), severs one's ties with a compassionate union with others. Modern rationality and disciplined order, therefore, as Taylor (2007) notes, has resulted in the reasoning mind (secular reason) being separated "from his own desiring nature, from the community, which thus threatens to disintegrate, and from the great current of life in nature" (p. 315). This concern for the role of reason, i.e. the narrowing of secular reason, is a significant theme in the work of Jürgen Habermas (2006a; Schuller, 2006; Ratzinger, 2006).

4.2.2 A Call for Dialogue: Modernity an Unfinished Project?

For Habermas (2006a), modernity is "an unfinished project" defended against attacks from post-modernity (Schimdt, 2010, p. 4). In his earlier work, Habermas proposed that the responsibility of social integration, a function once exercised by religion, has since been transferred to secular reason, particularly in the face of growing secularisation – "the authority of the Holy is gradually displaced by the authority of an achieved consensus through secular reasoning or what Habermas prefers to call 'rational communication'" (p. 4). In particular, the ethical foundations of democracy are of principal concern for Habermas (2011). Under the circumstances of global capitalism 'the political' ability, for Habermas (2011), to protect "social integration are becoming restricted" (p. 15). It is with particular anguish, therefore, that he directs attention to the

fact that 'the political' has been transformed into a self-sufficient administrative sub-system which is ultimately leading to the view that democracy is merely a façade, thereby leaving social integration behind as an instrument viewed to be far too cumbersome to implement.

It is difficult, therefore, for secular reason to achieve its moral commitments in the modern project (Habermas, 2016). Similar to Marion (2008), Habermas (2016) speaks of a narrowing of modern reason. Arising from the post-modern critique of modernity, as Habermas (2016) notes, a particular defeatism dwells within modern reason. On this point, he is referring to the inclination to diminish reason for profitable ends under the constraints of the capitalist conditions of exchange (Habermas, 2010; Habermas, 2008; Habermas, 2006b). He argues that the reign of the economic imperative on secular reason is pressuring individuals to increasingly retreat or withdraw into the sphere of their personal private affairs. As a result, as Habermas (2011) notes, a burning doubt glows in terms of any manner of enlightened self-understanding by modernity.

From this discussion, three recurring themes can be identified in the later work of Habermas: [1] the deterioration of the ethical foundations of democracy, [2] the overindulgence of market-motivated capitalism, and [3] the narrowing of reason (Lane, 2013). These three concerns move Habermas (2010) to call for greater dialogue between secular and religious reason, society and religion, and between faith and reason. Secular morality, according to (Habermas (2010)), is not intrinsically ingrained in shared communal practice, at least not in the same manner as religious morality. He, therefore, turns to religion as, for him, it can provide greater inclinations towards action in solidarity. Such solidarity can assist in overcoming the weakness of a purely rational

mortality in terms of its ability to motivate, and can also give life within community with the view to sustaining secular morality.

Habermas (1978) calls on the religions of the world to contribute to our understanding of the human condition. Among modern societies, according to Habermas, solely those societies that are capable of integrating into the secular domain the essential components of their religious traditions which gaze beyond the merely human dimension towards the transcendent possess the capacity to rescue the substance of the human (Schimdt, 2010). He implicitly acknowledges that secular reason requires the insight offered by the religions if it is to better understand the significance and potential rescue of the human condition. Such responsibility rests not only with modern secular society, but with the religions of the world – particularly with inter-religious dialogue (Lane, 2011).

Habermas (2016) reaffirms the need for a new dialogue between modernity and the major world religions in his dialogue with representatives of the Jesuit School for Philosophy in Munich in 2007. If such dialogue is to be successful, according to Habermas, it is necessary to move beyond a superficial dialogue 'about' each other, and begin to converse 'with' the other. This dialogue called for by Habermas carries with it certain conditions. Two presuppositions, for example, must be accepted if such dialogue is to be successful: the authority of 'natural' reason, must be embraced on the part of the religious, as the imperfect outcome of the institutionalised sciences and the foundation on which the elementary conditions of universalistic egalitarianism in law and morality are rooted (Habermas, 2016), and [2] although secular reason can only embrace that which it can translate into its own, in theory universally accessible,

rhetoric, secular reason must refrain from electing itself as the authentic judge of religious truth claims (Habermas, 2016).

In taking account of these presuppositions, it is evident that Habermas (2016) is challenging religion to translate its sophisticated theological insight into a rhetoric that is not only open or accessible, but meaningful for all within the public sphere. Habermas' challenge to the religions of the world, according to Lane (2011), is to translate their religious insight into a secular rhetoric, that is a discourse that is 'independent of revealed truth' and freed from 'dogmatic encapsulation'" (p. 16). Habermas (2006a) offers an example of such a translation in his dialogue with the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (2004), now Pope emeritus Benedict XVI: "the translation of the concept 'man made in the image God' into that of the identical dignity of all men that deserves unconditional respect" (p. 45). When one considers this sample translation offered by Habermas (2006a), it is could be argued that such a translation presents itself as yet another manifestation of the narrowing of reason that prompted Habermas' call for dialogue initially.

Theologians are also not necessarily satisfied with the demand for translation laid down by Habermas (2016). Maureen Junker-Kenny (2011; 2009), though sympathetic to Habermas' (2016) proposals, argues that his demand severs religion's ties with its genesis, or original transcendental context as the gift of faith animated by God. She asserts that Habermas' demand keeps reason below its potential, particularly when one considers that for Habermas the penultimate hope for humanity is restricted to reason alone (Junker-Kenny, 2011; 2009). Judith Butler et al. (2011), have reservations about the conditions laid down by Habermas as the translation between the religious and the

secular appears to be only one way. Such writers claim that Habermas (2016) proposes a context for dialogue that fails to recognise that religion cannot be translated into a secular language without a remainder. Anglican theologian, Nigel Biggar (2009), reaffirms this point arguing that "the translation proposed [by writers such as Habermas] eliminates the strangeness, difference and otherness that religion brings to the table" (p.317). Stanley Fish (2010), who is distinctively critical of Habermas' proposition, notes that the religions of the world are called upon as preventatives or to surmount social disturbance and once they have served this purpose, they should retreat and refrain from confronting us with uncomfortable cosmic demands. Despite reservations, such as those outlined thus far regarding the conditions for dialogue proposed by Habermas, Lane (2011) suggests that dialogue on the nature of reason as well as the potential for novel dialogue between reason and the religions of the world confronts all religions with a new intellectual challenge that should be welcomed.

Although the dialogues of Habermas provide draft guidelines with regard to the manner in which the dialogues between reason and the religious are to be carried out, the primary significance of the conversations proposed by Habermas is the secularist's recognition of the limitations of secular reason and the necessity for a novel dialogue to take place "between enlightened self-understandings of modernity and the theological self-understanding of religions" (Lane, 2011, p. 54). The dialogues proposed by Habermas make clear that it is necessary too for the religions of the world to take the findings of secular reason seriously. Such a proposition, however, raises significant questions concerning what mode of relationship can and should exist between faith and reason. It is important, therefore, to consider Pope John Paul II's encyclical letter, *Fides et Ratio* (1998), in this regard.

4.2.3. Fides et Ratio (1998): The Catholic Philosophical Tradition Redefined

Pope John Paul II's attempt to redefine the Catholic philosophical tradition in dialogue with the signs of the times in *Fides et Ratio* (1998) has much to offer in terms of an understanding of the relationship between faith and reason which is found at the heart of the Catholic philosophical tradition. The account of the encyclical letter offered in this section is assisted and orientated by Alasdair MacIntyre's (2011) reading of *Fides et Ratio* (1998).

A tradition can only discern the unity of its project retrospectively, and thereby redefine itself in dialogue with the challenges that confront it from the outside. Such challenges invoke a revitalised awareness amongst those whose lives and work are rooted in the tradition, both in terms of their collective inheritance and of the matters that now require resolution if their tradition is to be sustained into the future (MacIntyre, 2011). This double sided consciousness is evident in *Fides et Ratio* (1998) by way of its invigorated awareness of both the range of accents of the Catholic philosophical tradition and of the secularist challenge that confronts it. While expressing such awareness, Pope John Paul II begins not with a treatment of tradition against the secularist challenge, but with a presentation of what philosophy is and of the role of philosophy in human existence. The rationale for such an opening becomes clear when one recognises that a central argument of the encyclical is that the Catholic philosophical enterprise is not merely another competing mode of philosophical enquiry, but an enterprise within which philosophy – when it is true to its own highest standards – is conducted as it ought to be conducted (MacIntyre, 2011). But what, therefore, is philosophy?

In every culture, persons raise basic existential questions concerning the order of things, the nature of the person, and the place of the person in the order of things. The religions of the world offer answers to such questions, i.e. "Who am I? Where have I come from and where am I going? Why is there evil? What is there after this life?" (*FR*, par. 9). Philosophy is called upon to systematically and interminably address these questions with a concern for truth by way of the exercise of reason (MacIntyre, 2011). A defining characteristic of human beings is the asking of such existential questions, and as such, philosophers find themselves absorbed with matters of truth, meaning, and rational justification which all find their goal and intention in the quest to answer such existential questions. Due to the fact that its enquiry is emphatically systematic, the outcome of philosophy has commonly been the establishment of this or that philosophical scheme that are always partial and fallible in their accounts of the reality that philosophers attempt to address. While philosophy presents itself as a mode of enquiry that aims towards the discernment and development of eternal truths, of the universal conditions, both theoretical and practical, of appropriate reason, such discernment and development invokes novel questions so that philosophy continually has to renew itself, moderately by turning to its history (MacIntyre, 2011).

If philosophers neglect their responsibility to sufficiently achieve this task of philosophy, the church must discern the need for renewal and call upon the philosopher to satisfy this need (MacIntyre, 2011). While belief in answers offered by God's self-revelation in and through the scriptures and the teaching of the church to such existential questions is an indispensable component of the Catholic faith, the church possesses a persuasive concern to maintain philosophical enquiry. The encyclical explains, for example, that to deduce that the philosophical enterprise is unnecessary

due to the aforementioned faith commitment would be erroneous for two reasons: [1] reason has its own unique manner of addressing the mystery of God's existence by way of systematic questioning, i.e. God's self-disclosure to Israel and in the Incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ, does not assume nor imply that such philosophical question is needless (*FR*, par. 8), and [2] revelation arouses and evokes novel questions by bringing about an awareness amidst persons in terms of the various aspects of their existence as well as the relationship that had not been acknowledged to date – philosophy, therefore, is confronted by more tasks that require its attention (par. 8-9).

In this way, philosophical enquiry starts by meditating on what it is to understand the order-of-things correctly and thereby moves towards asserting the existence of God (*FR*, par. 8). Philosophical enquiry, however, finds a subsequent starting point in its meditations on the way in which one ought to understand the order-of-things now that God's self-revelation has been discovered (par. 8-9). It is evident, therefore, that both theology and philosophy require and accompany each other by way of an interdependent relationship (MacIntyre, 2011).

In taking account of this insight, two aspects of the opening chapters of the encyclical merit further attention. Firstly, the encyclical pronounces that the questions that philosophers ask are first and foremost raised not as professional philosopher, but as a person (*FR*, par. 32-33). Such existential questions, therefore, are not particular to the philosopher, but are asked by all human beings – philosopher or not – and as such each person has the potential to be a philosopher. Philosophers, in posing those questions in a systematic and interminable manner, carried out their craft on behalf of all persons (*FR*, par. 33). The philosopher, therefore, shares with all people the necessity for, and

the quest for, *truth*, i.e. "for the truths of everyday life, for the truths to be discovered by scientific research, for the truth about human goods and about the final human good" (MacIntyre, 2011, p. 167).

Secondly, another component of the encyclical that requires further attention is its treatment of the relationship between philosophy and theology (*FR,* par. 14; 15; 40; 64; 70; 101). While insisting on the interdependence of philosophy and theology as well as the need for each to be more receptive of the other, the encyclical is unapologetic in its affirmation of the autonomy of philosophy as a secular enterprise in the quest for truth (par. 30). The encyclical is clear, therefore, in its assertion that those who practice the teaching authority of the church are ultimately responsible for calling on philosophy to return to its principal tasks if it fails to carry them out sufficiently. This responsibility is motivated by the concern of such practitioners for truth.

The fourth chapter begins by offering an account of one of the most infamous periods in the history of the relationship between Christian theology and philosophy (*FR,* par. 36-74). Between these sections the encyclical celebrates the work of Aquinas in terms of his theological apprehension of the relationship that exists between philosophy and theology, particularly his notion of and passion for truth as the key to such theological understanding (*FR,* par. 43). It is not merely truth that one yearns for or needs, but truth appropriately conceived, i.e. truth as conceived by Aquinas (MacIntyre, 2011).

For a variety of reasons truth, as conceived by Aquinas, is indispensable to the overall thesis of *Fides et Ratio* (1998). Firstly, in orientating ourselves towards truth one orientates themselves towards the transcend or God. The type of care a person has for

truth, the manner in which a person describes the achievement or defect of truth as a success or failure, cannot be facilitated within any solely naturalistic understating of human nature (MacIntyre, 2011). Truth is achieved by the person only insofar as their judgements of how things are is determined by the manner in which things actually are as opposed to their physical structure or their psychological composition.

The fifth chapter of *Fides et Ratio* (1998) explains why those who practice the teaching Magisterium in the church have to interrupt philosophical discussion and enquiry at times with the view to direct the attention of philosophers towards types of thought that confront or threaten their intellectual quest (MacIntyre, 2011). During the nineteenth century, philosophical principles that overestimated the capacity of reason achieved particular success, i.e. idealism and positivism. Philosophers attempted to offer a response to questions on issues about which only the theologian, who contemplates God's self-revelation, can adequately address. This over estimation of the capacity of reason was soon followed in the twentieth century by an under estimation of the capacity of reason by way of the philosophical proclamation of the end of metaphysics. This depreciation of reason has ultimately led to increased fideism in theology, i.e. an over reliance on faith at the cost of reason.

In taking account these insights, it is reasonable to ask – in what way are philosophy and theology related? All theology, as MacIntyre (2011) notes, assumes a particular set of philosophical conditions and, it is precisely for this reason that, philosophy must always find a space in the education of theologians (*FR,* par. 64-79). The theologian, by way of philosophy, learns about the essence of language and the notions through which the teaching of the faith is enunciated as well as the relationships of said language

and notions to the philosophical arguments and schemes in which they find their origin (par. 64-79). In theological discourse a range of philosophical notions are operative.

At this point of the treatise, the encyclical returns to the original concerns outlined in the opening paragraphs (*FR,* par. 1-5). In a similar manner to those existential questions that provide it with its point and purpose, philosophical enquiry is from its outset comfortable in differing cultural contexts (MacIntyre, 2011). While western philosophy is characterised by the traits of its origin in ancient Greece, it is important to be conscious of the fact that there are also modes of philosophical enquiry that find their genesis in ancient India and ancient China that theology must also meaningfully address. In addressing such modes of enquiry, it is evident that the similar relationships between philosophy and theology are found in each culture. For example, one finds a progression from the theological starting point, i.e. the word of God revealed in history, towards an increasingly less imperfect apprehension of said revelation. This progress brings theologians into dialogue with others that seek the truth by way of philosophical enquiry.

The underlying agreements of the Catholic philosophical enterprise, as outlined in *Fides et Ratio* (1998), are primarily concerned with either the point of departure of said enterprise or the nature of its *telos* which, if it were to be achieved, would correct and accomplish the enterprise itself (MacIntyre, 2011). The points of departure, as outlined above, are from thinkers in a variety of cultures. Each raising in their own dialect existential questions that are noticeably similar or at the least closely related. The *telos* of the Catholic philosophical enterprise is the accomplishment of a sufficient apprehension of the realities about which these original existential questions are raised.

From this standpoint, it is evident that any philosophical treatise or position that refutes the importance of such primary existential questions, either by implying or affirming that such questions are impossible to answer or inconsequential, ultimately strips the Catholic philosophical enterprise of its point and purpose (MacIntyre, 2011). This point also holds true in terms of any philosophical treatise or position that is inimical concerning the notion of the mode of apprehension that is to be accomplished or the manner of truth that is to be acquired. It is clear, therefore, that the encyclical's denouncement of relativism (*FR*, par. 5; 80; 82), positivism (par. 46; 88; 91; 94), and idealism (par. 46; 59) is far from inconsequential in terms of the Catholic philosophical enterprise. These philosophical doctrines are at odds with the Catholic philosophical enterprise for they strip it of its beginning and end – one is unable to depart from where the enterprise starts nor finish where they aim or hope to end.

From the perspective of Catholic teaching, it is significant that philosophical mediation and enquiry are of central importance to the person regardless of their cultural context (MacIntyre, 2011). It is precisely this insight that situates Catholic teaching in opposition to the predominant culture of secularised modernity. Philosophy, in the cultural context of secularised modernity, is considered as merely another specialised mode of academic activity significant only to those whose curiosity tends towards that kind of thing, but is of little consequence to pragmatic matters, something to which the majority can remain ignorant without incident and, therefore, consider it utterly dispensable component of an adequate education.

It is the position of the church, therefore, that even these convictions and views of philosophy possess philosophical assumptions, assumptions that, if neglected in terms

of articulation and critique, render any manner of meaningful and scrupulous consideration of those original existential questions impossible – questions to which the recognition of God's self-revelation provides the only sufficient answer (MacIntyre, 2011). The cultural challenges encountered by Catholics carry both theological and philosophical responsibilities. *Fides et Ratio* (1998) states, philosophical enquiry is required "to clarify the relationship between truth and life, between event and doctrinal truth, and above all between transcendent truth and humanly comprehensible language" (par. 99). In taking account of this insight one is confronted by a number of significant questions: in what manner should Catholic philosophers respond to the encyclical? In what terms should they define the current circumstance, in terms of the antagonism and disputes with the Catholic tradition itself, in terms of their antagonism and disputes with philosophers from outside of and hostile towards the Catholic tradition, and in terms of the cultures in which they dwell? What does it mean to be Catholic philosopher today?

4.2.4. Faith and Reason: A Dialogical Relationship

In taking account of the insights raised in the encyclical letter, *Fides et Ratio* (1998), particularly its account of the relationship between philosophy and theology, it is evident that the word 'and' is perhaps the most indispensable word in Christian theology. This unifying word takes on such significance for it demands and necessitates a relationship whenever and wherever it appears. It could be argued that the most significant context in which this simple word appears in the Christian tradition is between the terms 'faith *and* reason'. The close relationship between faith and reason, as Lane (2011) notes, is one of the most enduring themes over the course of the history of Christianity. In fact, it could be argued that this theme is only matched in the

Christian tradition by its emphatic insistence that the relationship of faith and reason be respected. This emphasis on the relationship between faith and reason is also evident in Greek philosophy. Aristotle, for example, argues that "whoever wishes to understand must believe" (Panikkar, 1979, p. 220, n. 14). Similarly, one reads in the Book of Isaiah, "if you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all" (Is 7:9).

The interplay that unfolds between faith and reason finds its classical expression, therefore, in the work of Augustine – "believe, so that you may understand" (*Crede ut intelligas*) and "understand, so that you may believe" (*Intellige ut credas*) (Panikkar, 1979). The relationship that exists between faith and reason is a permanent theme in Catholic theology and is addressed in the documents of Vatican I, Vatican II, in *Fides et Ratio* (1998) as discussed above, and in Pope emeritus Benedict XVI's address at Regensburg on 'Faith, Reason and the University' (12 September 2006). It was with the advent of the Enlightenment and the establishment of a particularly modern account of reason, however, that an explicit split emerged between faith and reason (Tracy, 1994; Ratzinger, 1984).

It is evident, therefore, that for over a thousand years one of the principal philosophical questions has been the move towards discerning what the most appropriate relationship ought to be between faith and reason. The above Aristotelian maxim came exert particular influence on the work of patristic and scholastic thinkers, namely, Augustine and Aquinas (Panikkar, 1979). In this way, an explicit emphasis on the relationship between faith and reason is evident not only in the Patristic period in the works of Augustine, but later in scholastic theologians revitalised engagement with Patristic theology, particularly in the work of Aquinas.

The classical relationship between faith and reason finds its genesis in a coherence that is evident between Hellenistic philosophy and biblical revelation (Lane, 2011). This affinity between philosophy and faith can be found in the revelation of God in Judaism, for example, the "I AM WHO I AM" (Ex 3:14) epiphany of Exodus. Similarly, it is encountered too in the Johannine theology of the Word (*Logos*) – "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Jn 1:1), that for Christians enlightens all and is made flesh in Jesus – "and the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14). Such decisive revelations are mediated accordingly by way of the categories of 'existence' and reason/*logos* which carry significant overtones in the history of Hellenistic philosophy.

The dynamic of this living relationship between faith and reason is a matter that is still subject to significant theological and philosophical debate. A central feature of this theological and philosophical debate, as Lane (2011) notes, is the manner in which one translates the verb *credo*. The verb *credo* is commonly translated as merely 'I believe'. An issue emerges, however, in terms of this English translation of the verb *credo*. Translation has the potential to cause confusion in terms of the personal act of faith and the substance of that act as communicated by way of propositions. An alternative translation of the verb is offered by Lane (2011) in which *credo* is recognised as a compound of two words – *cor, cordis* meaning heart, and *do* which chiefly means to put or place, or potential to give. The verb *credo*, therefore, implies or communicates something more dynamic than that which is expressed by the English translation 'I believe'. When this translation is taken into account, i.e. *cor, cordis, do*, the verb *credo*

is best translated as to place one's "heart in the object of faith, namely God, or making a personal commitment or placing one's trust in" (Lane, 2011, p. 55). Faith can be understood, therefore, as being mainly a personal act of trust and adherence to the Mystery of God (Smith, 1979; Wainwright, 1985).

The actual relationship between faith and reason, as Lane (2011) notes, is "dynamic, reciprocal, convergent, and mutually illuminating" (p. 55). This motif of reciprocal understanding between faith and reason and between the world and the Church – i.e. the signs of the times, faith and culture and other religions (Dadosky, 2008), is addressed in the documents of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), i.e. *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965)*, Lumen Gentium* (1964)*, Nostra Aetate* (1965)*, Gaudium et Spes* (1965). This model of mutual understanding is central to an interpretation of Vatican II. John Dadosky (2008) advances this approach of mutual understanding in a rather convincing manner. Among other things, Dadosky demonstrates the way in which mutual understanding opens up a process of mutual self-mediating identities and connections between the churches and other religions.

In taking account of the above insights, it is evident that the unique manner in which faith and reason is considered above – i.e. as model of mutual understanding – carries deep affinities with some of the proposals offered by Habermas (2016) in relation to the dialogue between enlightened reason and the religions. In the light of the above model of mutual understanding, the dialogue between faith and reason one side need not be impoverished for the benefit of the other – rather, there can be benefits for faith *and* reason. The dialectic is a two-way process for both faith and reason are in *conversation* with each other. When carried out in an open and honest way, therefore,

this conversation or dialogue can effect a reciprocal relationship of self-correction (Ratzinger, 1984).

As outlined by *Fides et Ratio* (1998), faith without reason leads to fideism and idolatry, and without faith, reason leads to nihilism and relativism. Faith has the potential, therefore, to expand the horizons of reason by emphasising the limits of reason, i.e. that reason alone cannot deliver all things, and reason has the power to safeguard faith from fideism and ideology. Faith offers a significant critique of the myriad of differing types of rationalism as well as the politics of secular self-sufficiency. From the perspective of Christian faith, therefore, not only is one's grasp of truth partial and unaccomplished, but truth itself possesses an eschatological dimension that both faith and reason collectively seek. In this way, faith offers a significant critique of the modernist presentation of purely objective truth and its presentation of the person as an all-knowing rational subject mediated both of which find expression in the Cartesian 'I' of Enlightenment philosophy (Ratzinger, 1984).

From the above discussion, it is evident that faith and reason are held together by the unifying nature of truth (Ratzinger, 1984). It is imperative, therefore, that the interactive unity between faith and reason as outlined above be advanced. Such advancement can be achieved in a manner akin to Cardinal John Henry Newman. In Sermon 11 of his Oxford University Sermons, Newman (2001) affirms that the act of faith "is an act of reason but of what the world would call weak, bad or insufficient reason, and that, because it rests on presumptions more, and on evidence less" (n. 202, par. 3; Burrell, 2009). Contrary to a solely empirical view of reason that is restricted to evidence, in this context Newman (2001) is using the concept of reason in an expanded sense. For

Newman (2001), therefore, the act of reason in faith is far greater than that arising in 'paper logic' or 'smart syllogism' (n. 202, par. 15).

According to Newman (2001), an act of faith is an act of reason which stands on what he refers to as 'presuppositions' as opposed to evidence. Without reducing faith to rationality in *A Grammar of Assent*, Newman (1874) outlines the presuppositions that for him comprise the rationality of faith. Amidst the presuppositions attaching to the act of faith as an act of reason, three events or periods are evident in the journey of faith as described by Newman (1874). These moments or phases consist of [1] the call to conscience, [2] the presence of first principles, i.e. passion for truth, justice, and respect for others, and [3] what Newman (1874) refers to as antecedent probabilities or instruments of belief in religious matters. These antecedent probabilities, according to Tom Norris (2004), are "previously-entertained principles, views, and wishes deriving from one's first principles" (p. 244). They are like a lens through which one evaluates "all moral and spiritual issues, and so uniquely what is proposed in revelation" (Norris, 2004, p. 244).

Bernard Lonergan (1972) discerns in Newman's position a 'breakthrough' from a classical approach to the concreteness of method – "the issue is a transition from the abstract logic of classicism to the concreteness of method" (p. 338). For Lonergan, from the perspective of the abstract logic of classicism, "what is basic is proof", whereas, from the standpoint of the concreteness of method "what is basic is conversion" (p. 338). Lonergan (1972) argues that "proof appeals to an abstraction named right reason," whereas, "conversion transforms the concrete individual to make him capable of grasping not merely conclusions but principles as well" (p. 338). Contrary to the thesis

of modern rationalism, Newman (2001) is unequivocal in his position that there is no manner of thing as what modernist call 'pure reason' or 'reason alone' for all thinking involves presuppositions. This point is further affirmed in Sermon 15 of Newman's Oxford Sermons: "almost all we do, every day of our lives, is on trust, that is faith [in] the sense of reliance on the words of others […] After all, what do we know without trusting others?" (n. 190). In other words, Newman asserts that not only theological contemplation, but also scientific meditation involves presuppositions.

What becomes apparent is that the dialogue between faith and reason need not result in one side being impoverished for the benefit of the other, but yield benefits for both faith *and* reason. In taking account of this dialectic, i.e. a two-way process or *conversation* between faith and reason, such conversation or dialogue can effect a reciprocal relationship of self-correction (Ratzinger, 1984). The insights of Newman (2001) and Lonergan (1972) make clear that there is no such thing as an utterly detached mode of reason as all thinking involves presuppositions. The Christian understanding of truth not only as something that is partial and unaccomplished, but as something that is eschatological presents a broader horizon within which truth is actively sought out by both faith and reason in a dialogical manner. In taking account of this point, as well as the model of mutual understanding advocated for in the documents of Vatican II – i.e. between faith and reason and between the world and the Church, faith and culture and the Church and other religions – dialogue can be understood as a shared quest for truth. As such, it is important to consider this shared quest for truth in greater detail.

4.2.5. Dialogue: A Shared Quest for Truth

Although rhetoric concerning non-Christian religions began to soften prior to Vatican II, as Alexander Berger (2013) notes, there was still a ways to go in terms of offering validation to the convictions of non-Christians. Vatican II, particularly in *Nostra Aetate* (1965) and *Ad Gentes* (1965), contributed significantly to a revitalised spirit within the Church that would culminate in deeper theological reflection in terms of salvation for those outside of the Church (Berger, 2013). In the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate* (1965), for example, one encounters the novel declaration that the Church "rejects nothing that is true and holy" in non-Christian religions and "regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teaching which, though differing in many aspects from the one [the Church] holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men [and women]" (par. 2). Similarly, in the Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes* (1965), explicit reference is made to the need to "gladly and reverently lay bare the seeds of the Word which lie hidden among" (par. 11) non-Christian religions.

In recognising the above contributions to the spirit of the Church, thinkers such as Jacque Dupuis (2004; 2002; 2001), Dermot Lane (1999), Paul Knitter (1985), and David Nicholls (1991), depict Vatican II as a radical watershed between two eras, particularly in terms of inter-religious relationships. This dialogical imperative is at the heart of an authentic and relevant Christian theology post-Vatican II, i.e. a revitalised appreciation of the potential to encounter truth in other cultures and religions. This novel position is central to the quest for truth in inter-religious dialogue as it promotes a shared search for the truth amongst those involved. At the centre of this communal

quest for truth is the recognition that in encountering the other, there is always the potential for participants to uncover new truth about themselves, their religious commitment and new truth about the other participant and their religious commitment (Tracy, 1990).

The search for truth, therefore, remains central to dialogue in spite of the difficulties encountered in attempting to offer an adequate account of the concept of truth, particularly religious truth. Whilst not claiming to have answered the question of truth, it is still possible to offer some account of the quality of truth that one strives towards in dialogue (Tracey, 1990). All Truth, particularly religious truth, has the ability to bring people together, to unify them. Truth is, therefore, relational for it constitutes connections between persons that move beyond their differences. Truth carries the potential to alter persons, particularly the truth encountered in the other. Truth, particularly religious truth, can be therefore understood as being "one, relational, transformative and dynamic" (Lane, 2011, p. 124).

In this context religious truth is understood as universal, but also bifocal. Religious truth, for example, not only accepts an apprehension of that which is truly human, but also an apprehension of the heart of religion often accounted for as "the Ultimate, a 'no-thing', the Holy, the Sacred, the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, God" (Lane, 2011, p. 124). Religious truth is also pragmatic in that it emerges from the practice of dialogue and works towards freedom and the liberation of others (Tracy, 2010). In this way, religious truth is never merely an informative detail, an explanation of the world in which one dwells, nor simply a theory about existence. Religious truth, therefore, should not understood in the same manner as the truth of empiricism, science or of

'pure' propositions or geometric statements. Such an account of religious truth is evident in a critical realist approach to religious education. Religious truth, as Lane (2011) explains, is "relational, dynamic and above all participatory" (p. 124). As such, religious truth is not available for scientific examination or inspection for it is only encountered by way of the experience of personal participation.

In *Nostra Aetate* (1965), *Ad Gentes* (1965) and *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991), the *telos* of dialogue is not merely a shared understanding amongst the religions of the worlds, but the emphatic proclamation of truth, particularly of the truth of a particular faith. In this context, it is evident that there is an intimate bond between action, religious truth and personal participation. In the practice of inter-religious dialogue one eventually arrives at the juncture where one must proclaim the truth of their faith – this responsibility rests with both Catholics and non-Catholic involved in dialogue (Tracy, 2010). This context, proclamation of the truth of one's faith is not equivalent to the mere assertion of propositional statements of the truth: it is about giving authentic witness to the truth in both word and action. The truth of one's faith is not only encountered in propositions, conceptual paradigms or specific theological stances, but more emphatically in the power of said truth to bring about personal and social transformation as well as liberation from idolatry (Lane, 2011).

The truth of religion is therefore eventually discovered embodied in the practice of liberation and salvation. On this point it is important to clarify between historical and eschatological truth. The tension that exists between the historical and eschatological in religious truth is alluded in the following question raised by Ratzinger (1984) "must not the answers concerning the ultimate questions by their very nature leave room for

the unexpressed and the inexpressible?" (p. 354). In addressing religious truth, persons must account for the historical '*already*' and the eschatological '*not yet*'. It is precisely in this context that potential pitfall or possible fallacy that tempts all religion presents itself, the misalliance of historical truths of a particular faith with the totality of truth that awaits all religions at the end of days. In this context, the partiality of a person's knowledge of religious truth presents itself.

While one moves towards the truth, one does not ever control or fully acquire the totality of religious truth. This position does not refute the historicity of religious truth, i.e. that the gift of religious truth offered in the history of Revelation or that that the truth for Christians is revealed definitively in Jesus as the Christ/the Word of God incarnate, and that this encounter of God in Christ works to deepen the quest for the totality of truth about God (Marion, 2018). While persons search for religious truth, paradoxically, it is not something that persons find. Rather, religious truth discovers the individual. It is, therefore, not something that one creates, for its seizes the individual, nor is it something that one projects, for it is that which grasps the individual, nor is it something that one controls, for it is something that is received (Marion, 2018). Religious truth, therefore, is best understood as that which is given and disclosed for it is both a gift and grace.

Religious truth manifests and reveals itself in a variety of ways: "in creation, in history, in Israel, in the person of Jesus, in the Christian community, in prayer and ritual, in human relationships and in other religions" (Lane, 2011, p. 125). This point is further explicated by David Tracy (1981) who argues that the realised experience of the truth character of the religious classic is an encounter of its wholly given character, its

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position as an event – a happening manifested to one's experience that is not determined by nor generated by one's subjectivity. Therefore, to the extent that a person respects experience itself, according to Tracy (1981), a person "may accord this experience status of a claim as the manifestation of a 'letting be seen' of what is, as it shows itself to experience" (p. 198).

Tracy (1990) brings another important insight about truth to the fore, one which follows directly from an understanding of religious truth as gift. The truth of religion, according to Tracy, is akin to "the truth of its nearest cousin, art, primordially the truth of manifestation" (p. 43). For him, the value of truth as 'manifestation' is that it borders so intimately with conceptions of 'revelation' and 'enlightenment' or 'luminosity' as encountered in a range of religions. It is evident, therefore, that religious truth is not the same as the truth of "correspondence, coherence, or empirical verification or falsification" (Lane, 2011, p. 126). In this context, it can be argued that truth as 'manifestation' directs one's attention to the fact that the disclosure of religious truth is more often than not more attuned to the dynamics operative in aesthetics for it arrives, in unexpected ways, as a disarming gift. In taking account of such an understanding of religious truth, it is important to give further consideration to its embodied nature and the interplay that exists in every religion between the particular and the universal.

4.2.6. Dialogue between the Particular and the Universal

In the context of religious education, particularly in terms of inter-religious education, it is important to uphold the following epistemological principle – "there is no such thing as religion in general, or universal essence of religion unalloyed, or pure religion" (Lane, 2011, p. 126). Religion exists solely as something that is embodied in specific

historical happenings and particular cultural forms and interpretations of experience. Historical events as well as their cultural interpretation, therefore, are precisely what captures and mediates one or other universal trait of religion. This is an intimate interplay that exists in every religion between the particular and the universal, the local and the global, the concrete and the absolute, personal experience and the interpretation of that experience. Prompted by the recognition of this, Paul Tillich (1959) notes that culture is a mode of religion and religion is thereby the substance of culture.

The more religions distance themselves from their historical particularity, the greater their risk of making overstated or overblown claims. Further affirming this point, Karl Jaspers (1954) asserts "thought which breaks away from tradition tends to become an empty seriousness" (p. 12). This insight is further supported by Stephen Duffy (1989): "a faith can survive only if its particularity and universality do not cancel one another as they do in deism and fideism" (p. 158). The particular narratives and practices of a religion reveal or make available to humankind the core truths of religion. This insight carries significant implications for inter-religious dialogue, and by proxy inter-religious education, particularly in terms of the manner in which it is conducted. This point implies that the manner in which inter-religious dialogue is conducted, as well as its companion inter-religious education, must take on the historical evidence not merely as an end in and of itself, but as an instrument of the universal significance of religion.

The historical evidence for the majority of religions, including Christianity, is only accessible by way of the delicate memories of religion as embodied in certain texts, rituals and traditions and their contemporary expression. In maintaining the idiomatic and self-correcting bond that exists between the particular and the universal, it is

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necessary to transcend the polemical stances of historicism and religious positivism. Both the theological and the historical, therefore, need to be maintained in an equitable relationship that links with contemporary experience and interpretation (Tracy, 2010). Sustaining this relationship is of the utmost importance, particularly when one recognises that a certain level of continuity must be maintained not only between experience and interpretation in the faith and practices of religion, but also between the past and the present, and between history and religion.

The post-modern critique of modernity raises many interesting insights – some negative and some positive. A particularly positive aspect that has emerged from post-modernity is its sensitivity to the local and the particular (Lane, 2011). While this appreciation for the local and the particular emerged from the post-modern distain for the universal claims and meta-narratives of modernity, it must be recognised that if taking on its own post-modernity is of ephemeral value as it fails to move beyond the particular and the local. In responses to the limited capacity of post-modernity, thinkers such as Lane (2011), stress that there is a need for a "critical correlation between modernity and post-modern approaches to religion, an interaction between the Enlightenment and contemporary experience that moves towards the possibility of a second modernity, or a critical modernity" (p. 127). If this advance towards a 'second modernity' or 'critical modernity' is to be successful, as Lane notes, it will require that persons take up a revitalised awareness of the structural injustices that beset modernity.

The above principles have an explicit relevance for Christianity as they have come to play significant roles in a range of old, new and ongoing quests concerning the particularity of the historical Jesus (Duffy, 1989). When one considers such quests for

the historical Jesus (Wright, 2003; Crossan, 1999), it is evident that the Jesus recalled is available solely in the New Testament proclamation of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ who is the Word of God incarnate, and presently embodied in the living tradition as well as in the praxis of faith and teachings of the Christian Church (Lane, 2011). It is only possible for Christianity to make claims concerning the definitive disclosure of God in Jesus of Nazareth in the light of the historical particularity of Jesus as recalled in the New Testament witness. It is evident, therefore, that Christians can only begin to discuss the divinity of Jesus by attending to the particularity of the historical humanity of Jesus.

The above point is also affirmed by Lane (2011) by way of his assertion that any determination concerning the "divinity of Jesus is only possible in and through a concentration on the particular humanity of Jesus of Nazareth" (p. 128). The Christian faith, for example, can only confess that the infinite Word of God was exclusively and definitively incarnate in the person of Jesus of Nazareth by appealing to the concreteness and particularity of the historical life of Jesus. It is important to note that it was and is this extraordinary claim that moved theologians in the early centuries to speak of 'the scandal of particularity' that finds itself linked to the doctrine of the Incarnation. Connors (2009) argues that this 'scandal of particularity' should maintain its ability to shock and disturb. It was precisely this 'scandal of particularity' that forced many critics of Christianity, namely Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1889; 1893) and Aldous Huxley (1947), to give up on Christianity. The assertion that God moved to disclose God's self to the world in a particular character, at a specific historical moment, and in an exact place, proved to be an overly excessive claim for such critics, i.e. Rousseau and Huxley, to embrace. What such critics failed to grasp, as Lane (2011) notes, was

that the particular possesses the capacity to assume universal significance. Tillich (1959), for example, speaks about Jesus as the Christ who is 'the concrete universal' of history with the view to sustaining the idiomatic relationship between the particular and the universal.

4.2.7. A Brief Synopsis

From the above discussion, it is evident, that both modernity and secular culture have led to a narrowing of reason which ultimately brings the secular claim of self-sufficiency into disrepute. While the conditions for dialogue between religious and secular reason proposed by thinkers such as Habermas in response to this narrowing of reason are at best dubious and questionable, the need for dialogue between the religions and secular reason is certainly necessary if the horizon of secular reason is to be expanded. If such dialogue is to be advanced in a meaningful way there is much to be gleaned from the model of mutual understanding advocated for in the documents of Vatican II, i.e. *Nostra Aetate* (1965) and *Ad Gentes* (1965) as well as in post conciliar theologies such as those informed by *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991) and *Fides et Ratio* (1998), particularly in terms of both the reciprocal relationship of self-correction that exists between faith and reason and the recognition of possibility to encounter Truth in non-Christian religions, i.e. the other.

If dialogue is to be successful between the religions and secular reason, it must be conducted in a manner that takes account of, and is informed by, the unifying and eschatological character of truth. The account of truth, particularly religious truth, offered by contemporary theological discourse makes clear that it cannot be reduced to mere informative details, or basic explanations of the world in which one dwells, nor a

simple theory about existence. Religious truth, therefore, must not be understood to be one and same as the truth of empiricism, science or of 'pure' propositions or geometric statements. Such an account of religious truth is evident in a critical realist approach to religious education. Rather, religious truth is not available for scientific examination or inspection for it is only encountered by way of the experience of personal participation. Religious truth, therefore, is best understood as relational, dynamic, and above all else, participatory. Such truth, however, is always encountered in an embodied state, within a living faith tradition as well as in the praxis of faith and teachings of a particular religious tradition.

The above exploration of contemporary Catholic theology in its treatment of truth offers significant insights for religious education, particularly in terms of the accommodation of 'religious knowing'. From these insights, it is evident that if religious education is to be successful in its facilitation of 'religious knowing' it must be conscious of the hermeneutic that operates at its centre. Such a hermeneutic must be capable of not only taking account of the particular and local embodied reality of religious traditions as well as the local's capacity to assume universal significance, but also recognise the complexities, subtleties and delicate nature of religious truth as encountered in an embodied state in living religious traditions. On this point, it is necessary to consider further the importance of the relationship between tradition and religious truth.

4.3. Tradition

In this section the contribution of Catholic theology to the treatment of tradition as a point of encounter between humankind and the Other, Truth, God is explored. To assist with this discussion, the theology of Lieven Boeve serves as an exemplar and, as such,

orientates this section's treatment of tradition. In this context, topics such as the post-modern critique of meta-narratives of modernity, the authority of tradition, cultural and religious diversity, identity formation and the call to engage with the other are discussed by way of the following themes: [1] Interruption: Recontextualisation, Modernity and the Rupture of Tradition, [2] Diversity, Identity, and the Interruption of the Encounter with the Other, and [3] Faith in the Postmodern Context: Towards an Open Narrative. In doing so, it will be demonstrated that religious truth, as encountered in one tradition or another, necessitates that persons embrace the position of an open-narrative within their own tradition. It will be argued that such a position is indispensable if persons are to remain open to the gift of truth embodied in human history and our living traditions.

4.3.1. Interruption: Recontextualisation, Modernity and the Rupture of Tradition

The influence of modernity and post-modernity continues to exert significant pressure on the Christian tradition across Europe. Lieven Boeve (2004b) argues, as noted in Chapter Two, that in terms of culture "tradition has been interrupted" and the Christian tradition, therefore, is "no longer unproblematically handed down" (p. 299). It is evident, therefore, that such a diagnosis ultimately leads to the inescapable deduction that an ever-expanding rift exists between contemporary culture and the Christian faith (Boeve, 2003a). A contributing factor to this rift presents itself by way of the emergence of what Boeve (2012) refers to as 'radical plurality' in Europe. Such 'radical plurality' or 'ideological plurality' is not the same as 'radical pluralism'. As outlined in Chapter Two, it is imperative that one maintains an attentiveness to the distinction between the –isations and the –isms. Therefore, when Boeve (2003a) speaks of the contemporary context as being characterised by an ideological plurality, he is referring to the *fact* that persons are confronted by a variety of different worldviews or fundamental life-choices.

Ideological plurality, therefore, is not the same as 'radical pluralism' for the latter attempts to deal with pluralisation from a particular perspective.

The perspective of radical pluralism has been criticised by thinkers such as Lane (2011), Merrigan (2013; 2007; 2004), and Boeve (2012; 2003a; 2004b) who each take issue with radical pluralism in terms of its relativization of the particular truth-claims of Christianity and its diminishment of the historicity of the Incarnation of God in Jesus to the domain of 'myth' in the pejorative modern sense of the term. The incarnation, from a radical pluralist perspective, is diminished to the level of general religious truth as determined by the conditions of radical pluralism, i.e. the unbridgeable gap between Noumenon and the phenomena (Lane, 2011). The particularity of the Christ-event is adjuvant to a more general or universal view of religion (Boeve, 2007a; Boeve, 2007b; Boeve, 2007c; Merrigan, 2013). As demonstrated in section *4.2.6.*, such a universal or general view of religions or universal essence of religion unalloyed, or pure religion, does not exist. Radical pluralism offers a new perspective in terms of identity formation, i.e. a movement from a dependency on shared custom to the contingency of individual choice.

Boeve (2004b) argues that radical pluralism is a consequence of accelerated secularisation, or more accurately stated de-traditionalisation, that is unfolding across Europe. The religious or Christian contribution to politics, commerce, law, education, medicine – each of which possess their own institutions and experts, their own rhetoric and logic, their own occupations and applicability in society – is becoming of less significant regardless of whether this is advantageous or not (Boeve, 2004b). European society has become internally pluralised. In this context, a view is operative that

recognises the existence of a variety of forms that give meaning to people's lives and co-existence, but insists that it is not evident whether or not one of the forms can legitimately claim primacy over any other to become the measure against which all the others are to be evaluated, i.e. radical pluralism (Boeve, 2004b). Socially speaking and therefore autonomous of one's personal individual choice in the circumstance, the person is confronted by a variety of forms of partner relationships, parental and educational, leisurely hobbies, career development, preferred values as well as fundamental life options in contemporary European society (Boeve, 2004b).

Both secularisation and plurality offer their own specific critique of Christian identity (Boeve, 2004b). They raise questions, such as: what is the significance of being a Christian? What is the significance of belonging to the Church? What is the significance of being a Christian or Roman Catholic school? In what way is this identity conserved? Is it necessary for Christians to adapt to the current culture as non-Christians are no longer able to understand them? Is it necessary for Christians to seek a new language, one that continues to speak to people, especially young people? Will such a search and accommodation ultimately run the risk stripping Christianity of its particularity? Consider such accommodation in the context, for example, of the deliberation on the validity of the particularity of Jesus in relation to Moses, Muhammad, and Buddha. Are they not of equal status? Such an equation necessitates that Christian tradition incur a significant cost – the price of which is the loss of an integral component of the Christian tradition, namely that God is revealed in Jesus Christ in a manner that is unmatched by any other in history (Boeve, 2004b). In their search for self-identity, as Boeve (2004b) notes, Christians can choose another option and establish themselves against the present culture for it is not Christian anymore.

Christian identity is then uncompromisingly anchored to the resolute obedience to [the letter of] a person's own tradition and [exclusivity of] faith community. This reaction is not something peculiar to the Christian tradition. Other religious traditions have responded in a similarly traditionalist or fundamentalist manner to (post-) modern culture for they do not expect anything good from (post-) modern culture (Boeve, 2004b). Traditionalists or fundamentalists rarely reject the scientific or technological advances of modernity, but rather its emancipatory inclinations. In fact, a significant number of such traditionalist and fundamentalist groups are very engaged in scientific and technological fields, and, therefore, make good use of modern techniques, i.e. the media and the financial world (Boeve, 2004b). It can be said, therefore, that events such as the terror attacks of 9/11 are a severe consequence of such activity on the part of traditionalist and fundamental groups. In this context, one too must ask if Christian identity has ultimately been annihilated for faith has consistently embraced culture and society (Boeve, 2003a).

In taking account of these insights, it is interesting to consider the work of Belgian theologian and philosopher, Antoon Vergote (1989; 1990; 1999), particularly his distinction between the shared religious characteristics of myths, prayers (of petition, praise, thanksgiving, guilt and reconciliation), rites, symbolic presentations of divinity, ethics and religious experience. The interplay between the aspects discerned by Vergote (1989), that must be considered in relation to each other, discloses that religion possesses an ultimate and all-inclusive nature upon which every component of human life is contingent. Similar to the individual who finds themselves positioned within a given 'language', the religious individual or community finds themselves positioned

within a given religion that can never as such be constructed (Boeve, 2003a). Like the 'family' within which a person is positioned, religion similarly structures the relational sphere of religious individuals and communities.

Boeve suggest that in its own *sui generis* way, Christianity also mirrors the familial characteristics of religions identified by Vergote (1989). He rejects an unrefined account or depiction of Christianity that suggests that it is a 'cultural religion'. The God of Christianity, as noted by Boeve (2003a), is considered to be wholly Other apropos of the world, i.e. creator and creation are utterly distinct from one another. In line with this affirmation, the Christian faith is radically de-mythologised, and, as a consequence, makes a decisive departure from what one understands to be cultural religion. Christianity does not, nor should it allow religion and culture to be considered as being but two sides of the same coin. This understanding of religion and culture runs contrary to the core distinction which flows at the heart of the Christian religion – "God [as the Other], on the one hand, and the person, the world, nature and culture, on the other, the latter are deprived of divinity (the sun and the king, for example, are no longer considered to be divine)" (Boeve, 2003a, pp. 10-11). While aspects of culture can refer beyond the earthly to the Wholly Other, in line with Christianity's core distinction, they no longer represent the divine in any substantial manner. Briefly stated, "religion becomes faith" (Boeve, 2003a, p. 11). In this way, religion does not presume itself to be taken up in the all-embracive religious reality within which the divine is emphatically present and in which each individual and community exercise an inescapable role.

For Vergote (1999), 'believing' in the specific meaning of the term, is concerned primarily with the personal assent of an individual who freely engages themselves in support of their beliefs and who implies by their assent that they are aware of being subject to the claim of a message that leaves space for dissent or non-believing response. Cultural religions do not leave space for such dissent, rather the individual in question is taken up in a religious system from which it is not possible for them to withdraw. This point is reaffirmed by Boeve (2003a) who asserts that religion is transformed into an individually and communally encountered and articulated faith that is orientated towards a personal God that is encountered and articulated as love. It is evident, therefore, that the dissolution of a specific culture does not inhibit the Christian religion from advancing in, and inculturating itself in, a different culture. It is as a direct result of this shift, i.e. from cultural religion to faith religion, that culture and religion are no longer conjoined, thus establishing the precondition for a religiously motivated critique of culture (Boeve, 2003a).

Vergote's (1989; 1990; 1999) ascription to Christianity at the organisational level, i.e. that Christianity is by its nature a 'religion of faith' as opposed to a cultural religion, only emerged as such during the modern period. In the premodern epoch, an era within which Christianity found itself occupying an undisputed majority status, the Christian faith was extensively ingrained in Christian cultures and, despite attempts to sustain the distinction between God and the world, society and nature remained intimately connected to the religious and the divine (Boeve, 2003a). From the sixteenth century, Christian faith and modern culture went in their separate ways conclusively. The Christian faith was considered increasingly less credible from a cultural perspective as

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it required more and more a leap of faith, an authentic, real, conscious option (Boeve, 2003a).

In considering these insights closely, it is evident that, the volunteer Church of post-modernity came to replace the cultural Christianity of modernity (Boeve, 2003a). This volunteer church is characterised by its desire to take up a middle way betwixt and between the poles of relativism and fundamentalism. As this separation between contemporary culture and the Christian faith grows, it is evident that a novel dialogue between tradition and context presents itself as the only means to any manner of future. Tradition, as Boeve (2004b) accurately identifies it, is not something that is passed on down unchanged through the centuries. Rather, 'interruption' presents itself as an essential element of a living tradition.

Every change in context issues a challenge to the Christian tradition confronting it with the need to redefine itself in conversation with the relevant context. This recontextualisation of tradition is, at one and the same time, entangled with the real life of faith, with concrete faith encounters and the tradition that has been passed on (Boeve, 2003a). Novel and contextually accessible forms of thought as well as narrative content and approaches to things are incorporated and, therefore, contribute to a contextual explanation of that which one encounters as Christian identity (Boeve, 2003a). As contextual shifts occur, therefore, the specific actualisation of the tradition is challenged by the question of further recontextualisation.

The outcome of such recontextualisation is not necessarily an increase of tradition, but rather the establishment of a different tradition (Boeve, 2003a). Contingent on the

particular context, for example, one's perspective and the specific archetype with which one encounters and gestates both faith and tradition is utterly transformed (Boeve, 2003a). In terms of the contemporary situation, therefore, the increased consciousness of plurality in a person's encounters with reality is a principle determinative condition that calls into question the customary truth claims of the Christian faith (Boeve, 2003a).

Christians are not only the heirs to the inheritance, i.e. the Christian tradition, but also its testators. Living tradition is also the Christians' responsibility. By way of recontextualisation the Christian is not only called to encounter and contemplate the meaning offered by Christianity to life and coexistence, but also to hand it on (Boeve, 2003a). This does not infer, however, that tradition surrenders itself to context and time. Rather, it implies that one is perpetually challenged by every time and context to give form to the message of God's love disclosed in the Incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ, in a contemporary manner (Boeve, 2003a). In negating this responsibility, the Christian runs the risk of slipping into a state of inauthenticity.

It is important for one to consider the radicality of recontextualisation. Persons must reflect and ask themselves, for example: does the narrative of God and Jesus Christ that Christians hand on remain unchanged when persons engage in the development and hermeneutics of tradition? Considering that our context is fundamentally altered, is it even possible to comprehend the motive of the evangelist, or the patristic, medieval or existentialist theologian, for example, or even support what they have said? In keeping such questions to the front of one's thinking, Boeve (2003a) proposes that "it is only via our present-day awareness and our contemporary frames of interpretation that we can hope to discern the intentions of the past" (p. 32). This view does not imply that the

study of tradition is unproductive or meaningless, but rather that what one encounters in traditions – that which corresponds or endorses one's ideas as well as that which catches their attention, captures them, challenges and critiques them, moves them, and even pressures them to arrive at novel insights – is forever irreducibly experienced within the context of current frames of interpretation (Boeve, 2003a). When persons study a theological text from an older context, for example, persons always encounter said text under the conditions of the present context.

When the importance of context to our interpretations and engagement with tradition is considered some particularly radical sounding questions are encountered. For example, Do Christians believe in a somewhat *different* God and Christ than the Christians of the fifth, sixth or thirteenth century? Do Christians continue to belong to the same community? Does a person's inescapable participation in an exclusively historically-determined context place unsurpassable barriers between the Christian and the tradition of the past? In response to these questions, it is perhaps more accurate to say that a person's current context pressures them into contemplating God and Christ in a different manner (Boeve, 2003a). It is evident, therefore, that the context has altered to the degree that one is unable to observe the same event or formally interpret the same texts in the same way as before. This proposition carries significant implications for theology. If this statement is true, it implies that, despite the fact that the words a person reads are identical – this is also a contested issue – it is no longer the same Bible that a person reads. Furthermore, it also implies that people believe differently within the temporal articulations that follow from such readings (Boeve, 2003a).

The identity between the stages of tradition, as Boeve (2003a) states, is "contracted at some indeterminate point, meaning that it can no longer be properly elaborated except in a context bound and highly particular language" (pp. 33-34). Regardless of the epoch in which they dwell, all persons of faith and their faith communities use the 'same' texts and commonly the 'same' words in seeking the mysterious and, therefore, ultimately incomprehensible centre of the Christian faith on the grounding of their own contextual consciousness and interpretative paradigms (Boeve, 2003a). Such a contraction, therefore, not only makes the task of expressing one's identity more challenging, but suggests that such expression will invariably be contextual, and hence fleeting and forever partial. In spite of this point, when a faith community has thrown the charismatic relationship between tradition and context into a novel mode, the community maintains its narration of the Christian narrative (Boeve, 2003a). Paradoxically, in this new mode the Christian narrative should be understood as being the same narrative as before, while at one and the same time, no longer the same as before.

In considering this insight further, it is apparent that, both identity and rupture possess a unique relationship. This *sui generis* relationship can be discerned as follows: [1] the community adheres to the original or authentic inspiration of the tradition and advances the same narrative specifically by giving novel expression to this inspiration in an altered context, and [2] it would be difficult for the community to live out their faith within the confines of the older form of the tradition, particularly when one recognises that many its components, i.e. images, symbols, rites, narratives, terminology, ideas, concepts, have been embraced in the new expression of the tradition despite the fact

that some members of the community perpetuate the older form of the tradition (Boeve, 2003a).

From this discussion, it is apparent that tradition is undergoing a process of development. It is also evident, however, that a person's understanding of tradition is also embedded in a well-defined conceptual horizon – a person's way of looking at tradition is contextually-contingent. Similar to Lane's proposition concerning 'participatory knowing', Boeve (2003a) notes that the person does not possess the capacity to take up a detached, disengaged, autonomous observer perspective. The point receives further justification when one considers the fact that each person participates or is a part of history, thus, making such detachment impossible. The discovery of plurality in the Christian tradition itself on account of its establishment as well as the indisputability and validity thereof, as Boeve (2003a) notes, is indeed unique or peculiar to the contemporary era. It is precisely within this context that one encounters a '*recontextualised*' understanding of tradition. Such a (r)evolutionary view on tradition is novel to the degree that previous perspectives, which were grounded in different theological paradigms, embraced a perspective which proposed that only partial *cumulative* development occurred in terms of the transmission and living out of tradition are concerned (Boeve, 2003a). If one considers, therefore, the Christian tradition as a living tradition, one that is not static but a continuous process of development in spite of/thanks to discontinuity, then modernity's rupture with tradition brings such discontinuity into particular focus.

The rupture with tradition posed by modernity and the change of context that is ushered into being, unlike previous former contextual shifts, confronts the Christian tradition

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not only with questions but fundamentally challenges the 'tradition-based' Christian narrative in terms of its basic right to exist (Boeve, 2003a). As outlined earlier in this chapter, from the sixteenth century onwards arenas of activity took on an increasingly distinct and independent existence, i.e. sub-systems such as, science, economy, politics, labour, law, education etc., focusing on the promotion of one specific social function – otherwise known as "functional differentiation" (Boeve, 2003a, p. 38).

Such functional differentiation was also alluded to above in relation to the work of Jürgen Habermas on the process of modernisation. Habermas (1981) describes the process of modernisation as the rationalisation of the life-world in which the life-world is relieved of its responsibility for its functions by sub-systems on the one hand, and on the other, the life-world and traditions become reflexive. Tradition is no longer viewed as a valid justification for beliefs and value perspectives, rather such perspectives need to be justified by way of rational yes or no propositions (Boeve, 2003a). In other words, convictions and value perspectives are no longer accepted on the grounds that they stem from tradition, but need to the determined by way of secular reason.

In the context of functional differentiation, persuasive secular argumentation is considered the only legitimate position concerning truth and value as opposed to any reference to tradition, i.e. 'it has always been so' (Boeve, 2003a). Any conviction or value propositions that found its grounding in the tradition came to be separated, dislodged and detached from said traditional foundation. The structural organisation of functional differentiation also affected the manner in which persons view the world in which they dwell. In the wake of the collapse of the all-encompassing and integrating nature of the religious traditions, novel modes of integration were demanded (Boeve,

2003a). In response to this incumbent call for new modes of integration, modernity offered what are commonly referred to as the 'master narratives' of modernity which were give their definitive form in the modern ideologies of the nineteenth century. Such master narratives not only established a response to the collapse of human existence into varying and diversified sub-systems, but also constituted instruments of self-legitimisation in the sphere of fundamental life-options.

The secularisation of social activity, i.e. its separation from the religious domain, as Boeve (2003a) notes, has ultimately resulted in the emergence of a view of the person within which both human *activity* and *responsibility* are of central importance. The view that reality is open to being controlled or manipulated, for example, arose from the modernity's insistence on human responsibility and technical know-how (Boeve, 2003a). The master narratives of modernity contain, each in their own way, various blue-prints for what they deemed to be a better society in which the human desire for progress and emancipation were legitimised. On this point, it is interesting to consider the French postmodern philosopher, Jean-Francois Lyotard's (1979), designation of the master narratives of modernity to the following two categories: [1] the master narratives of knowledge, and [2] the master narratives of emancipation. From this model, the relationship between knowledge and emancipation takes the following designation from the point of view of the latter – "knowledge stands at the service of emancipation" (Boeve, 2003a, p. 41). A plurality of ideologies emerged, i.e. capitalism, communism, liberalism, conservatism, anti positivism etc., each of which established a range of efforts to integrate, legitimate and guide the acts of differentiation.

Each of the above ideologies of modernity or '-isms' were inclined to arise from a particular sub-system – or from the human life-world – with the view to obtain a broader point of view in terms of the differentiated whole (Boeve, 2003a). Each of the '-isms' of modernity, therefore, in their own way absolutized the logic of their particular sub-system. In this way, the master narratives of modernity exhibited an all-encompassing nature that not only moved towards encompassing society, but also towards guiding every mode of individual real or concrete idea and behaviour (Boeve, 2003a). Each of the '-isms' or master narratives of modernity, therefore, attempt to govern and regulate the process of modernisation in a manner that is aligned with its own particular aims. It is evident that each of these ideologies, as post-traditional discourses, situate themselves against the background of the ideological market as manufactured systems of meaning (Boeve, 2003a).

In considering the insights raised thus far, it is important to note that the religious sub-system was not exempt from this process. Religious sub-systems established their own unique socially orientated master narratives that position themselves against the other master narratives of modernity (Boeve, 2003a). This process presents tradition with serious challenges, in fact, it confronts the very position of tradition itself. From a standpoint of already-given indisputability religion, as the all-encompassing horizon of meaning and value, now found itself in the place of *fundamental questionability* (Boeve, 2003a). In situating itself on the ideological market alongside the various other master narratives of modernity, all of the '-isms' came to view religion as merely another contender and moved to refute its legitimacy and validity (Boeve, 2003a). Religion also took up such a stance towards the '-isms' by insisting upon its own traditional origins as well as its authority when confronted by the various ideological

critiques of religion (Boeve, 2003a). The radical critique of tradition offered by the '-isms' as well as their adamant apology ultimately led to disputes between the various master narratives of modernity as each attempted to claim universal significance over the other.

It is evident, therefore, that modernity not only pressured religion as well as religious tradition into an apologetic position in the socio-cultural domain, but also in the sphere of *fundamental life options* (Boeve, 2003a). For thinkers of the Enlightenment as well as those modern thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, religions as well as its constrained tradition-based notion of truth were viewed as a barrier to the establishment of science and emancipation. The master narratives of science, for example, perceived religion as nothing more than childish superstition. Similarly, the master narratives of emancipation took up an equally negative apprehension of religion as a cause of oppression and alienation.

Immanuel Kant (1996), for example, in his response to the question – what is the Enlightenment? – insisted that religion, traditionally speaking, was the primary stumbling block to the enlightenment, i.e. the emancipation of persons from an infantile state of being in the world, a mode of being for which the person themselves are principally responsible. For Kant (1996), absolute faithfulness to religious tradition interfered with and obscured every type of betterment and change. In terms of human advancement in the area of knowledge and freedom, Kant argues that the past must never obstruct the present nor should the present inhibit the future. One era cannot restrict itself and then collude to place the subsequent era, according to Kant, in a position that would ultimately prevent it from growing its cognitions and from purging

them of error, i.e. advancing in enlightenment. In sum, the Kantian position argues that as faithfulness to tradition restricts research and advancement in the present, it has to be understood as being devoid of potentiality, and therefore, calamitous to humankind (Boeve, 2003a). In considering these Kantian insights further, it is evident that the person as conceived by modernity is only able to obtain the appropriate space to advance enlightenment by breaking away from tradition (Boeve, 2003a). In the way, then, tradition-critique and modernity are inseparable.

The great ideologies of science and emancipation, from the nineteenth century onwards, embraced an offensive approach in terms of their attack (Boeve, 2003a). The positivism of Auguste Comte (1871, 1974), for example, perceives religion to be the first phase, i.e. infancy, of human development towards the real knowledge of the sciences. Similarly, liberalism positioned the individual independence of the modern person in the both the political and moral domain against the power exercised by church and state. Furthermore, both socialism and communism perceive religion as a conservative authority operative in the oppression of the worker, an authority that assisted in justifying and legitimatising the current state of affairs (Boeve, 2003a). Karl Marx (1955), for example, argues that religion is the opium of and for the people. *Of* the people, for religion could appease itself with the intolerable situation of existence in the here and now by offering comfort under the guise of 'hope', i.e. the expectation of a far better future after death. And, *for* the people, for it is the mechanism of those in positions of authority that is wielded to maintain oppression of the people by way of obedience.

The process of modernisation evoked a double-sided apologetic reaction from Christians, and both sides are of central importance to the notion of tradition (Boeve, 2003a). In terms of the relationship that exists between Christianity, i.e. tradition, and modernity, the *traditionalist* approach that emerged in response to the process of modernisation insisted on Christianity's own particular narrative as well as its correlating truth claims. In particular, a great Christian anti-modern counter-narrative, based on its own premodern past, was established in contrast to the modern master narratives of science and emancipation. From a *traditionalist* approach, therefore, the affirmation of the truth encountered by way of tradition was of principle importance.

In contrast, the *modernising* approach did not aim as such to defend the truth on the basis of tradition, but rather to discern points of contact in the master narratives of modernity (Boeve, 2003a). Followers of the *modernising* approach strove to maintain the offer of truth of the Christian narrative by connecting it with the master narratives of modernity (Boeve, 2003a). The theology of secularisation, for example, argues that modernity was the logical outcome of the Christian faith. Such *modernising* approaches unrelentingly eliminated any aspect of tradition that counter-acted the modern master narratives. *De facto*, the Christian narrative came to be merely another modern master narrative.

Both the *traditionalist* and *modernising* approaches outlined above are at fault, according to Boeve (2003a), because each of them address only one dimension of the relationship with tradition. Traditionalists overstate the notion of being heirs to an inheritance, i.e. the Christian tradition, that is conserved and handed on as a whole, unchanged, but the creative and life-giving acceptance of tradition is barely referenced.

Similarly, the modernising approach is inclined towards insisting on the notion of being contextual donors, the inherited tradition was *modernised*, integrated and, where required, amended in the light of the modern critique of tradition. The traditionalist approach to tradition abandoned the charismatic process of recontextualisation (Boeve, 2003a), and in the case of the modernising approach, tradition as the giver of meaning is ignored. The Christian narrative ran the risk, therefore, of turning into a justifying duplicate of the modern master narratives.

Both of these approaches present the extreme ends of the spectrum, and, as a result, the essential relationship and interaction between tradition (i.e. that which is to be passed on) and context (in principle or in reality) seized to exist. As demonstrated earlier in this discussion, genuine recontextualisation moves towards sustaining interaction between tradition and context. Genuine recontextualisation, according to Boeve (2003a), presupposes a theological-animated critical consciousness with respect to each. Arising from the encounter of both, is the view that any specific explanation of this critical consciousness must only be the outcome of a real – to be implemented – recontextualisation within which the critical motives – as such available – of the Christian narrative can only be expressed by being ingrained in the specific context.

As noted thus far the category of interruption places the dynamic of discontinuity at its centre. Anyone who upholds the perspective of continuity in the present context, therefore, advances modern secularisation. In particular, adherents of this view advance the secularisation of the revealed nature of the Christian at the behest of a general or universal human religiosity, i.e. the human being as an *animal religious* (Boeve, 2003b). Revelation, in this context, can only be considered as a specific duplication of

that which already exists in the general human domain, commonly as a narrative interruption thereof (Boeve, 2003b). From a theological perspective, such a view is far from persuasive or convincing. For the Christian subject revelation principally directs one's attention to its ingrainedness in the very fabric of one's relationship with God who has disclosed himself in history through Jesus Christ. This implies "its standing in an answering relationship towards God, to an Other who cannot be reduced to its subjectivity" or encountered or approached without this subjectival individuality (Boeve, 2003b, p. 412).

This category of interruption assists in developing what Boeve (2005b) refers to as an 'open narrative'. In developing this conception of tradition as an open narrative, Boeve (2005b) remains attentive not only to the specificity of Christianity and its understanding of faith as a response to the Other, God, who interrupts human history, but also offers a novel approach to the question of truth in his attempt to discern a middle ground between the extremes of relativism and fundamentalism. The process of modernisation has not only exerted significant influence on the relation between tradition and context as well as the process of recontextualisation, but also on the process of pluralisation. At this point of this discussion, it is important to attend to the process of pluralisation in terms of the role of the other and its relation to the process of recontextualisation in its establishment of an 'open narrative', i.e. a narrative that is capable not only of being interrupted, but also interrupting the present context in which the person dwells.

4.3.2. Diversity, Identity, and the Interruption of the Encounter with the Other

The grand narratives of modernity, as demonstrated thus far, are evidence of humankind's attempt – since the Enlightenment – to control both nature and society and to design them it to its own ends. Over the past century, however, the master narratives of modernity have suffered a severe blow for not only could said narratives not deliver that which they claimed to, more often than not, said narrative slipped into their antitheses (Boeve, 2004b). This is the paradox, according to Boeve (2004b), of the postmodern era – in a context that is overflowing with knowledge and capability, the limits of said context are all too apparent.

Paradoxes, however, should not be feared. Søren Kierkegaard (2009), for example, argues that "one should not think ill of paradoxes, because the paradox is the passion of thought, and a thinker without a paradox is like a lover without passion: a poor model" (p. 111). The paradox discerned above should stimulate as opposed to inhibit a person's thinking, particularly when the insights of postmodernity and its recognition of uncontrollability which is inherent to postmodern critical consciousness are considered. Postmodern thinkers point out that the grand narratives of modernity are not attentive to the uncontrollable and direct one's attention to the fact that the 'other' perpetually and repeatedly establishes the boundary of the 'one' and that this insight is central to postmodern consciousness (Boeve, 2004b). Only the 'one' that takes account of the 'other' at its boundary, according to Boeve, the one who is aware of the manner in which to relate to it in one guise or another and is open to being confronted by it, that 'one' alone is capable of avoiding the dangers of master narratives. It is evident, therefore, that the master narratives of modernity are best understood as 'closed narratives' for they do not possess or foster an openness or receptiveness to the other.

Each master narrative of modernity established approaches so as to refrain from taking account of the other either by embracing it in one way or another, i.e. diminishing the other to more of the same, or by rejecting the other (Boeve, 2004b). Marxism, for example, embraced the other as proletarian and therefore revolutionary, or instantly rejected the other as bourgeois and therefore counter-revolutionary. The 'other' or the 'others' have fallen victim to the dictatorship of the proletariat, with the gulag archipelago' of Stalinism as its product. Another example, and perhaps more appropriate in the context of this research, is the positivism that science possesses a definitive norm of. In this context, the 'other' is only validated or legitimised by its obedience to scientific laws or – to the degree that – it is capable of taking on the form of the object of scientific research. In any other context the 'other' is considered to be irrational, unreliable, irrelevant, nonsensical, or mere superstition (Boeve, 2004b). From a postmodern perspective, therefore, persons have learnt that they are no commander of reality or society, a person is not even the master of their own identity.

From a postmodern perspective one's narratives are repeatedly challenged, according to Boeve, with an other–than–ourselves. One's narratives are merely particular attempts at addressing life, coexistence and reality – *de facto*, such narratives can never be absolutized, i.e. considered to be *the* narrative. Each narrative is, according to Boeve (2004b), "historically grown, contextually embedded, the fruit too of many coincidences" (p. 309). As a result, greater sensitivity has emerged in terms of the *diversity* of narratives.

The person, as outlined thus far, is confronted by a variety or diversity of varying fundamental life options. The encounter that such diversity carries, however, presents a challenge not only for the identity of Christians but for all identities. It is specifically in diversity itself, according to Boeve (2004b), that the other, other to oneself and therefore its boundary is to be viewed.

This attentiveness to diversity and otherness, as Boeve (2004b) notes, is simultaneously connected to an astute sensitivity to the specificity of one's own narrative. One is defined by the specificity or particularity of their own narrative. In appreciating diversity as well as its overwhelming character, it is evident that such recognition does not inevitably end in relativism. Although no individual stance can raise itself above the bustle of diversity, i.e. one cannot separate themselves from diversity for one is intrinsically involved in it, it also stands that no single position can embrace another position without becoming a new position (Boeve, 2004b). It is evident, therefore, that relativism is but one option among many as opposed to an all-encompassing perspective. It can be said, therefore, that in the wake of the loss of credibility of master narratives there emerged a revitalised appreciation for diversity and otherness (Boeve, 2004b).

In considering these points, it is evident that the other, i.e. that which is different, no longer provokes an immediately negative or defensive reaction. Rather, such encounters with difference or the other stimulate, fascinate and challenge the one in their own narrative. In a unique manner, this revitalised sensitivity for otherness and diversity has led Christians to become more conscious of the specificity of their own positions as Christians. In coming to appreciate that other religions and fundamental

life options can contain worthwhile and genuine ways of living, Christians have come to learn that their way of life is but one option among a spectrum of options. Christians have come to understand that they are simply another competitor on the field of a variety of religions and fundamental life options that have their own narratives, customs, traditions, and communities (Boeve, 2004b). This perspective does not imply that all religions are the same or exchangeable with one another, i.e. that it is of no consequence whether one in a Christian, Buddhist or atheist. Rather, the difference between these truth claims is specifically that the Christian faith is just that, the particular faith of Christians, and this faith will forever be the starting point for Christians in observing reality, or as in the context, the diversity of religions.

In this context, the notion that one can take up a neutral position in viewing the world or any aspect of said reality for that matter, i.e. the concept of neutrality in terms of the question of truth, presents itself as being definitively impossible. This point is affirmed by Lane (2011) and Boeve (2004b) who also insist on the fallibility of the notion of neutrality, particularly in matters pertaining to the question of truth, for no member of any fundamental life-option, Christian or otherwise, is capable of retreating from participation in reality to assume the position of a detached observer. Christians are aware of themselves, for example, as a result of their particular fundamental life option which has been situated in the context of diversity. It follows, therefore, that other fundamental life options and religions present themselves as the other/different precisely as a result of the fact that Christians are already Christians, i.e. by the particularly of their narrative (Boeve, 2004b). By encountering the other, Christians discover something about themselves, about their place on the religious pitch, about how to set themselves in the world and observe it. Despite both tradition and identity

being interrupted, there is no justification for Christians to merely surrender to cultural cynicism.

From this standpoint, the category of interruption operates as an exponent of contextual critical consciousness in that the encounter with other truth claims invigorates the Christian narrative by alerting it to the specificity of its own truth claim and thereby interrupts it in terms of any semblance of absolutism (Boeve, 2004a). In an era where belief is no longer apparent and an explicit choice is required on the part of the believer, the Christian is more aware of the particularity of their identity. The Christian is called to observe their particular way of life from the standpoint of diversity and otherness in fundamental life options (Boeve, 2004b).

This charge carries with it a double task: [1] a rejection of relativism by taking their own particular narrative seriously, and [2] a rejection of fundamentalism by respecting the various other religious and non-religious positions (Boeve, 2004b). The significance of this charge emerges when one considers that in encountering diversity and otherness one's own faith narrative is persistently interrupted. It should be noted that, one's own faith narrative also has the potential to close itself off, i.e. become a closed narrative by way of rejecting the other, and in doing so make victims – the first of which is the God in whom they proclaim their faith (Boeve, 2004b).

In this context, interruption becomes a theological category. A theology of interruption is inclined to establish a hermeneutics of contingency or possibility with the view of sustaining the radical historicity and particularity that is specific to the character of the Christian tradition (Boeve, 2004b; Kearney, 2001). It is evident, therefore, that both a

respect for the complexity of the identity of one's personal Christian narrative and for the difference or otherness of the spectrum of varying religious and fundamental life options can co-exist, accompany, and bolster one another (Boeve, 2004b). It is apparent, therefore, that even in a pluralised world narratives continue to be told. If tradition is to survive in such a context, it must therefore foster an openness and respect for the other – it must become an open narrative as opposed to a closed narrative akin to the master narratives of modernity. It is important, therefore, to give specific attention to the notion of an open Christian narrative.

4.3.3. Faith in the Postmodern Context: Towards an Open Narrative

In this section the move to establish an open Christian narrative is considered in greater detail. This analysis will be guided by way of the following themes: [1] the framework of an open narrative, [2] the structure of an open narrative, and [3] an open narrative: from model to reality.

4.3.3.1. The Framework of an Open Narrative

Traditions that have been able to survive in a pluralised world, according to Boeve (2003a), may possess the capacity to offer some guidance for individuals. Those traditions that have survived in such a context have taken the form of a (postmodern) *open narrative* as opposed to the form of modern or anti-modern master narratives (Boeve, 2003a). The open narratives of post-modernity are not only aware of the fact that identity formation occurs at present in an individualised and pluralised context, they have also taken heed of the fate suffered by the master narratives of modernity. The open narratives of postmodernity are not only aware of their own historical

specificity and dependency, but also view their meaning and truth claims against the truth claims of other narratives.

Persons who view themselves as belonging to such an open narrative, one in which they discover meaning, are no less conscious of the pluralisation of society. Rather, such persons are conscious of the fact that their personal meaning-giving narrative is merely one among a range of other narratives and that – at the organisational level at least, their involvement in said narrative is an exercise of free-will, a matter of choice (Boeve, 2003a). An open narrative, therefore, must facilitate plurality in the context of one's own life is such a way that plurality itself is not eulogizing it or allowing it to collapse one's life into a state of indifference (Boeve, 2003a). Traditions, therefore, that carry the potential to alter themselves into open narratives in the postmodern context cease to be a barrier to authentic engagement with the world. Unlike various strands of traditionalism, such traditions in becoming open narratives become paths by which humankind can view and participate in the dynamic assemblage of postmodernity.

In being influenced by the process of individualisation, even when Christians are conscious of the optional character of their faith choice, many continue to interpret this decision as a vocation (Boeve, 2003a). The Christian faith, therefore, persists in its ability to contain a call on the part of a transcendent reality for such persons. Grounded in their initiation into the Christian tradition, persons who answer this call learn to speak of this transcendent reality as the God of love who revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. The organisationally irrefutable individual-reflexive choice to believe, therefore, can be encountered in faith as a vocation – a gift, a grace (Boeve, 2003a). The faith choice, therefore, is encountered from within as an obligation to make a decision. While the

option to dissent or not believe presents itself as a possibility for Christians, it implies an option for inauthenticity from a faith perspective. In bringing this insight to bear on the tradition, it is evident that the *telos* of the tradition is not merely to repeat the truth, but to actively seek the truth, i.e. it necessary for one to initially be an heir to inherit something if they are to be the testator and pass on their inheritance.

From this standpoint, one must ask the following question(s): is it possible for the Christian narrative to open itself up to being interrupted by difference or otherness, particularly that of other religions, fundamental life options, individuals and communities? Is it possible for the Christian narrative, therefore, to be an *open* narrative, one that has learnt to foster an openness not only to that which is different or other, but to being challenged by otherness? But, is Jesus not professed as 'the way, the truth, and the life? Are Christians not inevitably persuaded by their own truth claim for they have been called by God? Should the Christian not be concerned primarily with correcting those who understand matters differently to them? If Christians possess the truth, does this imply that others ultimately cannot have the truth? But, if everyone possesses the truth, is this equivalent to saying that truth does not exist?

The interruption of the other in one's own Christian narrative can be a powerful and fruitful encounter. In such encounters, a path presents itself to the Christian by which to revitalise their appreciation of their personal belief in a God who is both disclosed in history and "takes on the lot of history" (Boeve, 2003a, p. 313). Are these encounters not the way in which God questions Christians today? By way of encounter with the other? Is it not the case that God has consistently been the Other in our narratives, most definitely when said narratives are in jeopardy of closing in on themselves? In

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considering these questions, it is evident that, the entire analogy and charism of the Christian narrative is imbued with the interruption of its own narrative and identity with the encounter with the Other, God (Boeve, 2003a). From this standpoint, the Christian narrative cannot become a closed narrative for if it threatens to do so God will ultimately break through and open it once more.

In this context, interruption yet again presents itself as a theological category. Jesus Christ is the paradigm of the open narrative both in language and action, but primarily by way of his life story. To follow Jesus, for example, carries with it the challenge to actively "seek out the other who interrupts our narrative" (Boeve, 2003a, p. 314). Due to the surrounding effects of de-traditionalisation, the cultural interruption of the Christian narrative presents Christians with the opportunity to transform their narrative into an open narrative. It must be recognised too, however, that such a transformation does not necessarily guarantee that the Christian's particular narrative is in fact genuinely or authentically open.

Nevertheless, an open – interrupted – Christian narrative can, therefore, be considered not only justified in terms of culture but also theologically credible (Boeve, 2003a). The Christian then lives out their specific narrative as a result of the interruption that the encounter with the other evokes. Christians proclaim that God has disclosed Himself definitively in Jesus as one who forces open their narrative so that they can also be open narratives. The dialogue with contemporary culture and the encounter with the diversity of religions and fundamental life options, as Boeve (2003a) notes, gives the Christian an authentic hermeneutical key to engage with the particular character of the Christian narrative for today.

From this analysis, it is evident that the framework of an open narrative is characterised by the following four principles: [1] an open narrative is always conscious of the indisputable plurality in which it dwells – as such, there are no detached observers, only participants, [2] this sensitivity to plurality ultimately leads to an astute awareness of the specificity or particularity of one's own narrative, i.e. it is *our* narrative not *the* narrative about the humankind and the world in which we dwell – our narratives are therefore historically and contextually contingent as well as a determinative standpoint on reality, [3] recognising that our narrative is grounded in a contingent particularity does not necessarily lead to relativism. Rather, an open narrative is conscious that it must be taken seriously on its own grounds, and [4] plurality necessarily involves conflict and irreconcilability. Narratives, therefore, are consistently challenged to relate to plurality. Narratives are specifically confronted by the stance they assume in relation to the complex otherness – that is concretised by other narratives – that presents itself as the interruptive boundary of the individual's personal narrative (Boeve, 2003a).

4.3.3.2. The Structure of an Open Narrative

Following from this analysis of the framework of an open narrative, it is necessary now to give attention to the three-part structure of the open narrative: [1] an open sensitivity towards otherness, [2] attempts to express its interruption in words and deeds, and [3] the critical praxis of an open narrative. In addressing this three-part structure, an explanation of the manner in which this key to postmodern critical consciousness operates is offered.

1. An Open Sensitivity Towards Otherness

Firstly, an 'open narrative' is generated by a particular unprecedented and sophisticated attentiveness to that which interrupts. This foundational attitude manifests itself in one's capacity to be open to "strangeness, otherness, the unexpected" (Boeve, 2003a, p. 95). This attitude implies that one must be sensitive to periphery encounters, interruptive events, marginality, encounters that disclose that one's specific narrative is not all-encompassing (Boeve, 2003a). It challenges one to respond to the call for a disposition of trusting submission which flows counter to one's definitive longing to safeguard oneself against the unanticipated. An open narrative, therefore, requires a foundational disposition of openness and susceptibleness, i.e. both an attentiveness to 'what is occurring', and a radical rejection of any instant integration of 'what is occurring' into one's own narrative (Boeve, 2003a).

2. Attempts to Express its Interruption in Words and Deeds

An open narrative gives witness to otherness, as Boeve (2003a) outlines, for it presents itself in view of the narrative's receptivity and therefore at the same time recognised its own limits. This second aspect of an open narrative, therefore, follows directly from the first as the fundamental open attitude itself implies a suggestive acknowledgement of the other (Boeve, 2003a). In spite of how improbable it may appear, with respect to one's own specific and concrete narrative, an open narrative tries to articulate its interruption by way of both word and deeds, and life in its entirety. One structures their own particular narrative by way of their encounters with otherness which one is able to make their own.

In this way, absorbed by its own particularity, one's own narrative is therefore forced open so that it can offer witness to that which in essence alludes one's necessarily specific witness (Boeve, 2003a). By discerning differences in fundamental ethical attitudes and lifestyles, for example, one points to their own particular narrative while, at one and the same time, highlighting its limitations, i.e. religion/ethics is greater than *our* religion/ethics. In a Christian context, for instance, by perpetually insisting on the otherness of God, the Christian perspective is both asserted as a specific point of view or access and shown to be extremely particular – one of many potential points of view (Boeve, 2003a).

3. *The Critical Praxis of an Open Narrative*

One's attentiveness and authentic witness to the other begins to function in what may well be spoken of as the critical praxis of the open narrative (Boeve, 2003a). The interruption of the other cultivates a critical consciousness that takes shape in profoundly "*self-critical* and *world critical* judgements and actions" (Boeve, 2003a, p. 96). This critical praxis is encountered in the sphere of one's decision-making. The critical praxis, as Boeve (2003a) notes, makes one sensitive to the otherness of the other(s) and imbues a defiance against any negation of such otherness, i.e. when the other is diminished to a mere object of *my* satisfaction in a sexual-relationship or when God takes on the position of the definitive and instantaneous legitimisation of *my* truth. The critical praxis of open narratives also safeguards against one moving towards the tendencies of close narratives, such as the master narratives of modernity or the master narrative of marketization in postmodernity. In other words, and perhaps in more technical language, where the other is actively included or excluded, and therefore, not

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respected in his/her/its otherness, one's attentiveness to the other results in a critique of close narrative motifs (Boeve, 2003a).

4.3.3.3. An Open Narrative: from Model to Reality

The three-structural aspects of an open narrative outlined thus far are interconnected. This point is affirmed by Boeve (2003a), who argues that, in the praxis of the open narrative one's foundational openness to the other as well as one's witness to such otherness is actualised, i.e. becomes real. Although this three-part structure of an open narrative does not itself exist, it is given concrete expression in a range of extremely specific narratives, for example, the postmodern, recontextualised Christian narrative (Boeve, 2003a). As mentioned earlier, *the* open narrative does not exist in itself. A variety of existing religious traditions, fundamental life options, and specific narratives such as the Christian narrative, may in fact possess the ability to embrace this attentiveness to otherness and to generate an *openness* to the other in their own particular narrative context and, therefore, reconstruct themselves as open narratives.

While the foundational attitude towards the other is central to an open narrative, one must not neglect the aspects of praxis and witness for all three aspects should be allowed to take form within the context of a specific narrative (Boeve, 2003a). Such narratives, therefore, offer a degree of consistency that can live through the interruptive discontinuity of the other as otherness exists primarily as a result of the fact that there is particularity (Boeve, 2003a). Following from above analysis of the specific and narrative component of an open narrative, it is necessary to give attention to the aspect of openness as such which is the concern of much postmodern critical consciousness. This treatment of openness in the context of postmodern critical consciousness is

orientated by the following four themes: [1] dialogue and tolerance, [2] addressing plurality and otherness in a non-totalising way, [3] openness to particularly as an offset to relativism, and [4] a multitude of small open narratives.

1. *Dialogue and Tolerance*

It is specifically as a result of this openness that genuine mutual tolerance and dialogue between persons of differing religious traditions and fundamental life options is generated (Boeve, 2003a). While all forms of all-inclusive and appeasing meta-narratives might well be beyond the limits of possibility, the acknowledgement of reciprocal kinship in the context of the open framework of one's personal narrative – which moves towards greater appreciation as opposed to destruction of specificity – persists as a potential outcome (Boeve, 2003a). Dialogue and tolerance are central to the dimension of openness that is the focus of much postmodern critical consciousness.

2. *Addressing Plurality and Otherness in a non-totalising way*

This openness ought to allow specific narratives to address plurality and otherness in a non-totalising manner (Boeve, 2003a). In taking heed of the loss of credibility or plausibility of modern master narratives, it evident that respect for alterity or the absence thereof establishes the primary condition for enabling one to discern between totalising and less totalising narratives. It is only when one considers this condition in this manner, therefore, that the defiance of the latter form of narrative can be consider to possess any extent of reflexive validity. It must be recognised, however, that a sharp distinction between the aforementioned types of narrative, i.e. totalising and less totalising, is not explicitly evident, at least, not to the extent that one might have initial considered. Self-criticism, rather, persists as the principle criterion for open narratives

(Boeve, 2003a). Such criticism is a key feature of the openness that is the focus of much postmodern critical consciousness.

3. *Openness to Particularity as an Offset to Relativism*

This openness must offset the postmodern maxim of 'anything goes' as well as any mode of relativism (Boeve, 2003a). In this way, the master narratives of post-modernity, akin to those of modernity, are inclined to be similarly incapable of taking the other in his/her/its otherness seriously, for they assume him/her/it to be merely 'more of the same' (Boeve, 2003a). As noted in section *4.2.6.*, Karl Jaspers (1954) affirms this point stating that the "thought which breaks away from tradition tends to become an empty seriousness" (p. 12). The significance that the particularity of the tradition or narrative carries for it is precisely because of such particularity that otherness exists. It is only when such particularity is coupled with a genuine openness to otherness that one can deal with the other in a serious and meaningful manner. It is only when the concrete specific narratives are explicit in their concern for otherness in the concrete other who confronts them that will such narratives "avoid being submerged by particularism and contextualism" (Boeve, 2003a, p. 98).

4. *A Multitude of Small Open Narratives*

Finally, in taking seriously the insight that one's identity as well as the identity of communities are constituted by a plurality of narratives as opposed to a single narrative, it could be argued that, a myriad of 'small open narratives' offer shape and precision in terms of one's relation to plurality and otherness (Boeve, 2003a). In recognising this point, one's understanding of the openness that is so characteristic of postmodern

critical consciousness is enriched. In taking account of the points outlined above, it is necessary to consider what their implications in terms of the question of truth.

4.3.3.4. The Question of Truth

While each of these themes provide greater clarity in their consideration of the openness that is of central focus to much postmodern critical consciousness, there are some whom will argue that one's abdication of the detached observer point of view inevitably implies an emphatic relativism concerning the question of truth (Boeve, 2003a). Open narratives, as demonstrated thus far, refrain from making any claim to an all-inclusive objective truth *per se*. In fact, the inability to integrate the other or otherness implies that truth has ceased to the be the point in question for a single all-inclusive-narrative, much less a plurality of specific narratives. While this need not imply that all things are true – and, therefore, truth ceases to be a question deserving meaningful consideration – it does imply that truth ceases to be bound solely to the 'truth *content*' of a narrative (Boeve, 2003a). Rather, truth as a point of issue becomes more a matter of *living in the truth*, of entering into relationship with the truth that no specific narrative can exhaust.

While narratives should live and bear witness to the truth, they also *live the truth* when they are capable of doing so, from within their personal specificity, so as to direct one's gaze to the mysterious other, i.e. to that which remains elusive to them, which carries an incumbent to bear witness whilst simultaneously evoking razor-sharp self-criticism (Boeve, 2003a). Truth is best understood in this context not only as a matter of entering into an appropriate relationship with incomprehensible truth, but of bearing witness to this Truth in the fullness of an appreciation of the fact that such truth is inevitably inexhaustible, intangible and inexplicable (Boeve, 1997). As mentioned earlier in this

discussion, in professing that Christ is the interruption *par excellence* of history for Christians, it is specifically this God and this interruption that the Christian narrative gives witness to, "a witness that never attempts to apprehend or comprehend this God or this interruption" (Boeve, 2004a, p. 250). In contexts where the Christian narrative is inclined towards closing, it is forced opened once again by this God. It follows from this point, therefore, that a wholly embraced specificity of the Christian discourse does not deny truth, it is the necessary condition of possibility for truth.

For the Christian, God is revealed entirely and definitively in the incarnation of the Word of God in the person of Jesus Christ. Each Christian narrative, therefore, is placed under the judgement of God and is only capable of giving witness to God in a radical-hermeneutical manner (Kearney, 2001). It is in this specific tension that the Christian truth is held. From a theological-epistemological perspective, the encounter with the other presents itself as the space in which God's interruption is disclosed and the limits of one's own Christian narrative, i.e. in naming this God, can be discerned (Boeve, 2004a). It is not theologically viable for a Christian narrative to close itself. It is precisely for this reason that inter-religious communication is not only a contextual requirement, but a theological necessity. On this point, the peculiarity of the Christian truth claim comes to the fore in that Christians are unable to claim the truth, but at one and the same time, are forever already living in relation to the truth in the context of a radical-hermeneutical tension that both concerns and is interrupted by God. It is evident, therefore, that the Christian tradition is capable of surviving as a living tradition in a pluralised world, for it is capable of recontextualising itself is such a manner that it is not "submerged by plurality nor hardened against it" (Boeve, 2003a,

p. 100). The Christian tradition is capable of constituting meaning and providing guidance in both individual and communal domains.

4.3.5. A Brief Synopsis

Boeve presents a novel approach to the question of truth by way of a recontextualised understanding of the Christian tradition as an open narrative. In considering detraditionalisation, individualization and pluralization, which ultimately leads to a recognition of the need for one to enter into dialogue with diversity and difference, it has again been demonstrated that there is no such thing as a neutral approach to the question of truth. This is of the utmost importance, especially if one wishes to avoid lapsing into relativistic inclinations or tendencies of indifference concerning the truth claims of religious traditions or fundamental life options. Any relation to truth that is to be considered viable in the contemporary postmodern epoch must foster an openness to the other, his/her/its otherness and difference. This position is not only philosophically justified, but also theological necessary if the Christian tradition is to be understood as a *living* tradition capable of bearing authentic witness to the Truth, i.e. the God in whom Christians profess to have carried out the historical interruption *par excellence* in the incarnation of Christ.

At the centre of this recontextualised understanding of the Christian tradition as an open narrative is the appreciation of its inability to exhaust the truth, i.e. that *our* narrative cannot claim to be *the* narrative as the totality of truth is ultimately incomprehensible to the person and, therefore, unable to be definitively articulated in the accounts offered by a single tradition. This does not infer, however, that there is no such thing as truth or that one ought to take up a relativistic position. Rather, such relativistic tendencies

are negated by way of an authentic recognition of the particularity of the Christian narrative. This recognition of specificity is a necessary condition for the existence of the other. It is by way of the acknowledgement of particularity that one is capable of discerning the other, and it by way of encounters with the otherness of the other that the limits of a specific narrative present themselves as the boundary of the other. In taking account of these insights, it is evident that the question of truth, particularly religious truth, cannot be reduced to the mere falsification and verification various propositions and statements of faith (Wright, 2007b; C. Go, 2019).

From this standpoint, it is evident that the question of truth cannot be adequately addressed by way of a hermeneutical approach that is concerned primarily with textual interpretation (Bowie and Coles, 2018). Rather, the question of truth, as demonstrated thus far, ceases to be exclusively concerned with the 'truth-*content*' of a narrative, but rather the matter of *living in the truth*, of entering into relationship with the truth that no specific narrative can exhaust (Boeve, 2003a). It is evident, therefore, that an inherent dynamic is operative in such an understanding of the Christian tradition as an open narrative – i.e. the need to accept the ultimate otherness and alterity of the Truth, and as such, the limits of the Christian narrative.

By fostering an openness to truth the Christian accepts that they can indeed know something of the truth, but embraces at the same time a recognition that *their own* narrative is incapable of offering a comprehensive account of the *entirety* of truth, and therefore, cannot be elevated to the position of *the* narrative. In taking account of the insights raised above, it is important to note that the Christian tradition presents a rich source of stimuli that can enhance one's appreciation of the complexity of truth,

particularly the insights found in the rich tradition of apophatic or negative theology. Such *theologia negativa* finds its contemporary expression in the work of French philosopher and theologian, Jean Luc Marion (1991; 2013; 2018), specifically in terms of his theological response to post-modernity. It is important to consider his understanding of a God-without being and its insights in terms of one's hermeneutical relation to religious truth.

4.4. The Possibility of a God-Beyond-Being?

As has been demonstrated earlier in this chapter, Christian theology has been suffering from a profound internal conflict over its proper response to modernity. Thus far, it has been outlined that such conflict is characterised by two fundamental theological approaches taken up in response to modernity: [1] an attempt to correlate the claims of reason and the disclosures of revelation, and [2] the view that reason operates best in theology when used to establish concepts and categories to better understand theology's sole foundation in revelation. Given that revelation is the exclusive foundation of theology any effort to accomplish the correlation suggested by the former presents itself as at the least a categorical mistake, and at the most, the domestication of the reality of God by way of reason and being.

In responding to post-modernity, Marion embraces the second theological strategy outlined above, i.e. a revelation-based approach to Christian theology, with the view to overcome the limitations imposed by onto-theology. Prior to engaging with Marion's post-modern theological project, a theological reading of the critique of onto-theology will be offered. Such a reading will set the ground for an exploration of Marion's post-modern theology which will be structured by way of the following themes: [1] God

without being, [2] the withdrawal and giving of the Christian God, and [3] givenness and hermeneutics. In this way, it will be demonstrated that, in considering the key insights raised thus far in this chapter, for example, the relational and embodied character of religious truth as well as the need to remain open to the other by way of a Christian open narrative, Marion's theological project has much to offer in terms of embracing the possibility of God and its hermeneutical implications for the person from the perspective of a postmodern Catholic theology. On this point, it is important to address the critique of onto-theology by way of a theological lens.

4.4.1. A Theological Reading of the Critique of Onto-Theology

When one considers the often times fervent refutation of postmodernism by a variety of philosophers and theologians, it is evident that 'post-metaphysical' and 'non-foundational' theologies present themselves as a significant shift in theological thinking (Ambrose, 2012). Such critiques of postmodern thinking traditionally take issue with postmodernism's insistence on the following five points: [i] there is no absolute order to reality that can be apprehended by reason, hence, any possibility of the acquiring any mode of objective knowledge of the universe is undermined, [ii] human knowledge is determined exclusively by perspectival contexts and language in conjunction with being subject to power and interests, therefore, knowledge is thoroughly politicised, [iii] the paradoxical claim that postmodernity embraces difference and otherness, while at one and the same time, presenting itself as particularistic, and by denying any common ground, postmodernism supports a tribalism which effectively makes any dialogue with the other meaningless and redundant, [iv] in spite of its critique of scientism, postmodernity perpetuates the Enlightenment position which refutes spirit and exclusively acknowledges the material world (body) and a

intersubjective/subjective world (mind), and lastly, [v] is the most common critique, by way of its assentation of relativity (relativism) of knowledge, value, and meaning, postmodernism presents itself as a performative contradiction.

There are also theological versions of these criticisms, for example, [i] can be understood as a denial of the Christian doctrine of creations, [ii] can be apprehended as a rejection of *imago dei* and the dignity of the person, and [v] a radical denial of the objective value and revealed nature of the Christian Truth. Whilst nonfoundational theologians recognise such criticism, there are observations with regard to language, knowledge, and human experience that cannot be so easily dismissed. Some postmodern critiques as well as their mode of critique have proved to be quite useful when attempting to address contemporary issues. It is important to recall that postmodernity is principally a critique of modernity along with its Cartesian or Enlightenment paradigms. The impact that postmodern thinking has had on theology is not surprising, particularly when one considers the uneasy relationship that theology has maintained with modernity.

The constitution of postmodern nonfoundational theologies, according to John Thiel (1994), can be understood as the unavoidable reaction to the movement of ideas between the secular academy and theology, i.e. the theological embrace of contemporary philosophical concepts, explanations and worldviews to mediate religious insight. Christian theology itself appears, as Glenn Ambrose (2012) notes, to be "ready-made for the reception of postmodern ideas" (p. 21) – at least to a certain extent. This receptivity emerges not only as a consequence of the complex relationship that exists between theology and modernity, but also as there are "inherent theological

principles embodied in the Christian tradition that are nonfoundational and even 'deconstructive' in spirit" (p. 21). As Theil (1994) outlines, the synthesis enacted by patristic, medieval and contemporary theologians alike between philosophy and theology, namely, Augustine with Plato, Aquinas with Aristotle, and Rahner with Heidegger, did not amount to mere synthesises of appropriation. 'Nonfoundation' in nonfoundational theology must not be understood to be the exact equivalent to the 'nonfoundation' in postmodern philosophy.

The allegiance to the biblical narrative and faith in God, as Thiel (1994) notes, indicates some manner of foundation. While this Christian foundation is more akin to intense justifying beliefs, Christian theology remains, to a degree, grounded in this foundation (Thiel, 1994). While nonfoundationlist theologians claim that faith cannot achieve foundational certitude by way of metaphysical reflection, as Ambrose (2012) highlights, there is no need for such theologians to abandon or refute the Augustinian credo of 'faith seeking understanding'. One returns to a recognition of the significance of dialogue as a shared quest for truth, a quest that must, at one and the same time, remain attentive both to particularity and universality, and foster an openness to a God-beyond-being. From this discussion, the ground has been laid for a meaningful exploration of Marion's postmodern theology.

4.4.2. A God-Without-Being

The work of Jean-Luc Marion (2018; 2013; 1991) is central to any consideration of the phenomenological tradition which attempts to integrate Heideggerian insights into Christian theology. To truly appreciate the theological contribution of Marion (2018; 2013; 1991) it must be recognised that his theological reflection is primarily a response

to two fundamental challenges issued by Derrida (1976, 1981, 1998): [1] that there is nothing beyond the text, i.e. there is no true set of references to which text's point and offer access, and [2] that the entire concept of *gift* is impossible both in theory and practice (Bracken, 1998; McCabe, 1999; McCabe, 1994; Mudd, 2008).

Of particular importance to Marion's theological project are: [1] his distinction between icon and idols – which is, perhaps, best engaged and apprehended in the context of a critique of metaphysics, and [2] his transposition of the Heideggerian concepts of *Ereigns* and *es gibt* in his theological treatment of the withdrawal of the Christian God. Although heavily influenced by Heideggerian insights, Marion is critical of Heidegger. This is most evident in Marion's treatment of the withdrawal of the Christian God, for the withdrawal and the giving of Heidegger's Being-present are distinct from Marion's (Ward, 1995; Ambrose, 2012; Marion, 1996).

The greater part of Marion's theological project is concerned with a critique of traditional Western metaphysics, or what Gerald Loughlin (1996) refers to as the *refusal* of metaphysics. Marion (1991) attempts to liberate theology from what he designates as 'the second idolatry' which, as David Moss (1993) notes, "is the idolatry of inscribing God according to Being" (p. 99), i.e. the domestication of the reality of God [Truth] by means of reason and being. This emancipation of theology can only be achieved, according to Marion (1991), by rejecting any strategy of appropriation that is solipsistic and moves towards determining the meaning of every 'other', including God [the Wholly, Supreme Other], by offering an account of its relation to oneself (Mitchell, 2000).

In considering the 'self' as the focal point of reality, as the centre of the universe, such a solipsistic appropriation turns all language into speech about the self and, therefore, abolishes or erases 'otherness' (Marion, 1991; Mitchell, 2000). Such appropriation, for Marion (1991) is idolatrous – a notion which he develops in relation to the distinction icons and idols – must be resisted. As Moss (1993) outlines, for Marion:

> […] the idolatry of the revolving or dazzling return to the Self. Thinking always remains idolatrous so long as it moves within an odyssean economy of appropriation; that is a homecoming to Self of the thought that has defused the otherness of the world, and, in the last instance, the otherness of God. (p. 393)

Western metaphysics is no longer a reflection about Being within which Being is apprehended as an otherness, i.e. of the world, of other persons, or of God (Marion, 1991; Ambrose, 2012). The focus of western metaphysics, as Marion (1991) notes, has shifted to the Self. Metaphysical thinking, according to Marion (1991), has relinquished its purchase on being and has clandestinely become egocentric. Mitchell (2000) affirms this point, stating that the centre of metaphysics is "circle, and the circle is the self" (p. 108).

This S/self is an idol, i.e. a god made after our own image and likeness (Mitchell, 2000). Marion (1991) upholds his commitment to the phenomenological method by making his distinction between idol and icon within the context of 'seeing'. For Marion (1991; 2017), one's gaze makes something an icon or an idol as the idol is totally subject to, or an object of, a self-interested human gaze. The idol is the manifestation or visible term of the *human gaze* which, as Marion (1991) notes, reflects the anthropocentric source of its gaze like a type of one-way mirror.

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In the context of this point an important aspect of Marion's thinking emerges concerning his insistence on intentionality, or the attitude behind the human gaze, in relation to the constitution of an idol. The idol is a human product, according to Marion (1991), not just because it is shaped by human hands, but as a result of the manner in which it is perceived. Manifested idols are capable of dazzling the person and, therefore, one can become transfixed by their superficial appearance (Marion, 1991). The idol can become, in the worst case, a focal point of one's attempts to validate or legitimise, or even sacralise, their cultural prejudices and biases as well as that for which they yearn. In the best case, however, an idol may in fact demonstrate something of the divine but, being an idol, will ultimately defile the divine its apprehension of the divine in human terms (Ambrose, 2012).

In taking account of this insight, it is evident that Marion's greater theological project moved towards delivering the circle, i.e. the self, from this preeminent place. The wider theological agenda of Marion, therefore, was guided by the following question: how can one worship a God who *is* not and in fact cannot *be*? This question raises another more challenging question in terms of the correct relation between the God of Abraham and the god of the Philosopher: is there any relationship between the god of Athens and the God of Jerusalem? Similar to Martin Heidegger (1962), Marion (1991) insists that the god of the philosopher is *not* the God of theology – or 'the God before whom David danced'. Any worship of a God who *is*, according to Marion (1991), ultimately leads to a type of conceptual idolatry. Marion highlights the names of a variety of false gods, for example, the ultimate foundation of Leibniz (1996), the *causa sui* of Descartes (1996) and Spinoza (2001), and the god of morality of Kant (2011), Nietzsche (1978), and Fichte (1987).

A theology of a God-without-Being, i.e. the affirmation that God does not *exist*, assists in reducing the risk of falling for an idol (Marion, 1991). The critique of western metaphysics offered by Heidegger (1962), as understood by Marion (1991), is a wakeup call for all thinkers who utilise such philosophical concepts when attempting to explicate the essence of God. For Marion, theologies that are grounded in metaphysics and thereby take up its correlating terminology in relation to God are, therefore, idolatrous. In this way, Marion insists that "the Promethean Self must be subverted" (Mitchell, 2000, p. 108). The idol does not have to be a material object, i.e. the Golden Calf in Exodus 32, it can also be conceptual.

For Marion (1991), it is the latter, i.e. the conceptual idol, that is of central significance to his understanding of a God-without-Being, i.e. his attempt to move beyond an order of exchange. It is the conceptual idol, according to Marion, that fails to acknowledge the otherness of God and the differentiation between God and creature. The effort to subvert the Promethean Self is characterised by Marion as an emphatic confrontation between idol and icon. The idol, according to Moss (1993), is "a pagan sun in the human firmament," whereas the icon, "marks the advance of God […] the creedal affirmation of a kingdom without end" (p. 395). For example, Marion (1991) states:

> The idol always moves […] towards its twilight, since already in its dawn the idol gathers only a foreign brilliance. The icon, which unbalances human sight in order to engulf it in infinite depth, marks such an advance of God that even in the times of the worst distress, indifference cannot ruin it (p. 47).

For Marion (1991), the icon "does not result from a vision but provokes one" (p. 17). Contrary to the idol which draws one's vision only to the visible, the icon elicits a vision of the invisible for in it there appears to be a semblance of the divine.

Whilst one's interest is initially fixed on the visible, the icon *calls* one to see something more – one encounters the invisible for it is not stagnated in the visible. There is a transparency *given* to the icon in that the invisible shines forth through the visible both dynamically and continuously. If this transparency is clouded in any way, however, the visible seizes for itself an element of the invisible. The human gaze, as Ambrose (2012) highlights, does not "aim past the surface and is not open to the gift [icon] and the giving Giver [the invisible]" (p. 24). Marion emphasises that St. Paul refers to Christ as "the icon of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15). Every icon, according to Marion, can only be understood within the context of the relationship between Christ and God. In this way, for Marion, Christ is the pre-eminent icon.

There is a parallel to be drawn between Marion's critique of idols and Heidegger's critique of the understanding of beings as present. For Marion, the idol is a sign or religious figure made present, i.e. it manifests when there is a failure to let-be and see the Other in its 'ownmost' being (Ambrose, 2012). In a manner akin to the poet who, as accounted for by Heidegger (2001), listens to or allows the river to speak, and is responsive to the call of Being, the religious person allows the icon to speak, and heeds God's self-revelation. Unlike a self-interested gaze directed to an object, the religious gaze *is directed by* the visible icon to the invisible. Hence, for Marion, there are two different types of 'seeing' as opposed to two different objects – idol and icon. The first gaze is an 'idolic gaze' which goes beyond the surface and observes only the object.

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With an idolic gaze the object can be only for its 'master' as it fixates on the visible, the '*it*' of the sign itself, rather than the invisible, the '*given*' which is mediated by the sign. An idolic gaze, therefore, is one that is self-interested or egocentric. The second gaze is the 'iconic gaze'. Unlike the idolic gaze, the iconic gaze is *open to* and *opened by* the invisible, the *given* and infinite depth of a sign, event or figure (Ambrose, 2012).

The two ways of seeing outlined above are also representative of different attitudes (Ambrose, 2012). The iconic gaze, for example, is governed by an attitude of letting-be and is, therefore, open and able to receive the gift shown in and by the icon. The status of being an idol [the 'given'] or icon [gift], however, is contingent on the attitude and intention of its observer. Every icon, therefore, has the potential to become an idol, yet simultaneously, an idolic gaze – similar to a metaphysics of presence – can be shattered by the appearance of the invisible. When attempting to understanding this rich insight in Marion's theology it is useful to consider the analogy of a light and a one-way mirror, for example, when a bright light is placed behind a one-way mirror it causes the mirror to become transparent.

Despite the risk of it being transformed into an idol, such a view implies that the authentic function of the icon is primarily concerned with overcoming idolatry (Marion, 1991). The theologian who must think about matters of faith is potentially the most vulnerable to the danger of idolatry. The history of the Judeo-Christian experience of God, as Ambrose (2012) outlines, "represents a series of iconic figures, signs, and events that counter the human idolic gaze" (p. 25). For Marion (1991), therefore, Christian writers must embrace a phenomenological approach if they are to be truthful to the experience of the divine as non-metaphysical.

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In taking these insights into account, Marion argues that if the conceptual idolatry of metaphysical theology is to be avoided theologians must begin to think of God *without being*. To think God-without-being, for Marion (1991), "is to replace idol with […] icon" (p. 47). This point is illustrated by Marion in script by writing 'Gxd'. Such *erasure* is evident in many postmodern writings, however, its usage in the work of Marion carries an additional but important theological dimension, i.e. the 'o' in God has the sign of St Andrew's cross imposed over it (p. 46). This additional theological component of Marion's erasure further accentuates the centrality of the Cross in his negative theology. For Marion, the most powerful revelation for countering the idolic gaze of humankind is the Crucified God, Jesus Christ. If theologians are to avoid the dangers of idolatry, according to Marion, they must sustain a state of *openness* to God's self-revelation [the cross] and consistently foster an iconic gaze. For Marion, to think of God-without-being "is to replace idol with […] icon" (p. 47). He understands the Cross as the symbol of suffering, shame, degradation as well as the icon of limitless love. The Cross displaces the circle which has classically being an image of eternity and divine being (Mitchell, 2000). On this point, therefore, it is important to consider the way in which Marion (1991; 2018) addresses what he refers to as the withdrawal and giving of God in the light of the image of the crucified Jesus Christ on the Cross.

4.4.3. The Withdrawal and Giving of the Christian God

For Marion, the Crucified One is the ultimate icon where at the one and the same time, the gift of God's love as well as the assentation of the distinction between God and creature are given witness (Ambrose, 2012). Classical metaphysics is subverted by the Cross and God appears in human speech *under erasure as not God* (Mitchell, 2000).

As outlined by Moss (1993), for Marion "it is only the Cross that can signify pure Gift whose name is Love […] Only Love gives without any expectation of return" (p. 395). For Marion, the Cross is witness to the divine agape, it reveals that God's 'love', loves without restriction because it loves for no other reason and no ulterior stimulus. On this point, Marion implicitly argues against Derrida (1992) and his insistence on the impossibility of the gift (Mitchell, 2000; Champetier, 2001).

It is precisely in the context of this insight that the matter of contention between Heidegger and Marion emerges concerning the *es gibt* [it gives]. In particular, the issue in question arises as Marion (1991) attempts to move beyond both metaphysics as well as Heidegger's reprise. The self-giving of *agape*, for Marion, is something totally distinct from Heidegger's *es gibt*. On this point, Marion is working as a Christian theologian and, therefore, contemplates *es gibt* in the context of grace and creation. Unlike Heidegger (1962), for Marion (1991) there is a separation between giving and gift. This point presents a problem for Marion as he moved to see beyond Heidegger's ontological difference, a further difference (Ambrose, 2012). This difference is developed by Marion (1991) theologically, as Graham Ward (1995) notes, through a Trinitarian theology which emphasises the distance of the Father and philosophically utilises Derrida's concept of *différance*. Marion (1991) develops an "irreducible difference which cannot be abridged by separating the Giver [Donator] and the visible gift [Being/beings]" (Ambrose, 2012, p. 25). In constituting this irreducible difference, Marion (1991) enables an understanding of the Heideggerian concept *Ereignis* to emerge in line with creation [Being and beings] as well as God's act of creation. On this point, it is evident that Marion's theological reflection situates God-*beyond-Being*.

In his later works namely, *Prolégomènes à la charité* (1986) and *La Croisée du visible* (1996), Marion further develops his treatise on the divine agape as gift-exchange represented in the mode of the crucified Christ. In these writings, Marion attempts to place his 'theology of gift' within Christology and the sacraments – here, the Cross of Christ is consistently understood as 'gift' (Ward, 1995). For Marion, as Ambrose (2012) outlines, the death of Christ emphasises the erasure of the visible that aids in safeguarding the iconic function of Christ and assures the necessary distance between creation and God. In utilising the language of gift, Marion (1991) enters one of those "orders [economies] of exchange – like money, sex, influence, power or any of a dozen other forms of human commerce" (Mitchell, 2000, p. 109). Each of these orders are central to Marion's thinking about a theology that is capable of refuting metaphysics and, therefore, releasing itself from solipsism.

On this point, Marion's insistence on Love is central, for it is only Love that possesses the power to go *beyond*. It is only the divine agape, for Marion, that can break the infernal circle of an order or economy of exchange founded on obligation – "a commerce based on calculated debts and settling accounts" (Mitchell, 2000, p. 109). In this way, as Mitchell (2000) states, "*God without Being* is Marion's manifesto, his diatribe against the tyrannizing law contained in the very word 'economy'" (p. 109). All economies are an idolatrous order of exchange as, for Marion, each economy is a "perfect circle of getting, giving, spending, using, incurring debt, negotiating, obliging and repaying" (Mitchell, 2000, p. 109) which never reaches its completion as it infinitely recycles itself. How then does one move *beyond* this impasse? The answer, according to Marion (1991), is found in his conception of *gift* and *gift-exchange* which

he explicated by way of an exegesis of Luke's account of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-32).

Marion's reading of the parable points the reader in the direction of the younger son's request for his 'inheritance' [*ousia* in Greek] (Mitchell, 2000). In spite of the son having full use of his inheritance and sharing in it already, his request is indicative of a desire to possess. Marion (1991) claims, therefore, that what the son truly desires is to be free of having to constantly recognise and receive *ousia* as gift. For Marion, the paternal gift and its reception constitute the filial relation and, thereby, establish the dignity and identity of the children. The younger son's yearning to possess the gift, accompanied by the eldest son's objection to the father's forgiveness and renewed elongation of the gift, demonstrates that both have succumbed to an *idolic gaze* (Ambrose, 2012). Both of the sons perceive *ousia* as their inheritance, a thing that they can come to possess, control and master. The real value of *ousia* is found in its *symbolic value* as opposed to its market value (Ambrose, 2012). For the Father, *ousia* signifies the *gift* and the *giving* by which each of us becomes who we *truly* are: brothers and sisters to one another before the one God.

The parable of the Prodigal Son, according to Marion (1991), shows the manner in which a God-*without-Being*, i.e. a God who is freed from the traps of metaphysics, would behave (Mitchell, 2000). For Marion (1991), God is the Prodigal whose gift delivers *ousia* [Being/being] – that is "being as 'for + givenness,' being as self-bestowal and self-emptying, being as lavish pardon and unabashed excess" (Mitchell, 2000, p. 110). God's gift, therefore, is not *something* [i.e. money] but *ousia* [Being/being] and it is only God that can subvert those orders of exchange which diminishes human

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existence to "a treadmill of desire, accumulation, consumption and obligation" (Mitchell, 2000, p. 110). The modern theological task can be rearticulated as follows: theology must attempt to "subdue the [inevitable] economics of thinking by way of banishing money from the discourse of faith" (Moss, 1993, p. 397).

The clarification offered by Marion (1991) is central to addressing this task outlined above. The prodigal God's *gift* as *icon*, for example, discloses that *telos* of being as self-emptying, pardon, abandonment, and donation. Whereas, the *gift* as *idol* is distorted and, therefore, its real *telos* is diverted. Self and other have come to be equated, and therefore, what was once received as *pure gift* has been transformed into a *possession*, our *property*. As a result of this process, the *gift* has been *commodified*, "the totalitarian subsumption of all human life under a single rubric – the means of production and exchange" (Mitchell, 2000, p. 111). This implies that, maybe unintentionally but regardless inexorably, money and metaphysics have come to be one and the same thing, they share an identity and, therefore, are inseparable. Metaphysics has become mere counterfeit money (Mitchell, 2000).

The modern theological task to develop a theology without money. There is a need for a new order that will enable theologians to speak of both *gift* and *exchange* without lapsing into the tyranny of economics (Mitchell, 2000). The theologian must take on the disposition of the poet who is capable of listening to as well as responding to Being and, therefore, capable of avoiding a lapse into *everydayness* (Heidegger, 1962). In this way, the task of the theologian requires an acknowledgement and consideration of "the ineffable exteriority [that is, 'otherness,' not made by us] of God's love which has become for-us in Christ, i.e. learning the dauntingly difficult discipline of rendering

unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's, and doing it all in the one language, one life" (Moss, 1993, pp. 397-398).

In taking account of these insights, it is evident that Marion (1991) longs to arrive at a pure pre-ontological discourse for God, a language that has yet to be contaminated by the counterfeit metaphysics of money (Mitchell, 2000). Contemporary theology, therefore, is charged then with the task of thinking in such a way that refuses to count the cost. Mitchell turns to the Eucharist to further explicate this novel theological task – "it must expose the utter poverty of the riches we believe to possess and control […] these riches include [indeed, they are ritually embodied and enacted by] the gifts we bring to Eucharist" (p. 112). Moss (1993) also turns to the Eucharist suggesting that, while preparing the gifts at Sunday Eucharist, "the presence of money, in this symbolically charged transition [from Word to Sacrament]" would appear to threaten the Eucharistic exchange proper by claiming to be "*another place* [a rival place, a competitor] in this [sacramental] world where sign and referent coincide in the Word which is God" (p. 399). One still insists, however, that one's collection of *gifts* and money are therefore totally different, utterly distinct, from that *other* exchange in which the creaturely elements of bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ *given for us* (Mitchell, 2000).

These contemporary issues rest, therefore, on the matter that one thinks that "our collection of money and goods remains filthy lucre [albeit filthy lucre for a good purpose]" (Mitchell, 2000, p. 112). This view, however, demonstrates a failure to understand the way in which the prodigal God, as icon, subverts all our orders of exchange. It is imperative that one recognises that God generously and freely

transforms our *ousia* [that is, the material goods brought to the poor] in a much more lavish play of divine donation [remember the Cross and the displacement of the circle] (Mitchell, 2000). And, in doing so, transforms our creaturely money into the currency of a totally novel exchange – one that is totally distinct from the everyday money-based commerce that operates amongst humankind (Mitchell, 2000). Since Marion's larger theological program has been outlined, i.e. the need for an understanding of God-*beyond-being*, and his understanding of the *icon* and *idol*, i.e. his understanding of *gift*, it is therefore possible to engage with his discernment of four hermeneutic moments in *givenness* which inevitably leads Marion (2012) to assert that there is a need for a properly phenomenological hermeneutics in the context of any consideration of the phenomenology of *givenness*.

4.4.4. Phenomenology and Hermeneutics: Four Moments in Givenness

No given, as Marion (2013) notes, instantly gives itself. Neither, is the given mediated as an object already established as the given does not give or show itself merely because it gives itself up. This central principle has "nothing sufficient about it" (p. 53). While the phenomenon manifests itself only if it transpires as a given, this is not sufficient for the phenomenon to manifest as *showing itself* in total phenomenality. If the entirety of that which is disclosing itself must initially give itself, as Marion states, "it sometimes happens that what gives itself does not succeed at showing itself" (p. 53). It is exclusively in its reflection that the given discloses itself, "in its reflective return […] in the response of the *adonné* [the gifted], who sees it, but only as it receives itself from this given" (p. 53). It is possible to see the finitude of phenomenality in the context of givenness specifically as a result of the fact that the condition of 'what gives itself, shows itself' remains uncorrupted. As Marion explains, "for what gives itself shows

itself only as much as it is received by the 'gifted [*adonné*]', whose proper function is to give back to the given, the possibility of showing itself" (p. 53). If the given gives itself as an intuition or a call, if it manifests itself solely in the response of the gifted, and if the gifted is necessarily finite, then what is disclosed forever endures in comparison to that which gives itself.

The finitude of the disclosure, i.e. of the self-monstration of phenomenon, presents itself, therefore, against the infinity of the hidden givenness of that which remains obscure. The gap between that which gives itself and what is disclosed about it definitively characterises the phenomenality of the givenness precisely as a result of the fact that it is a direct outcome of the finitude of the gifted. The necessary context and role of hermeneutics is, according to Marion (2013), the management of "the gap between what gives itself and what shows itself by interpreting the call (or intuition) by the response (concept or meaning)" (p. 55). The call or intuition, which is given and received, remains blind – it discloses nothing – as long as the gifted fails to identify in it the concept/meaning or concepts/meanings that ultimately enable phenomenon to disclose justly itself. The hermeneutic authority of the gifted, therefore, principally evaluates the possibility or potentiality for what gives itself to show itself – it ultimately "calibrates the scale of phenomenalisation of the givenness" (p. 55). Marion further explains this point:

> Not only does the unconditional universality of givenness not invalidate the recourse to hermeneutics, but, on the contrary, a phenomenology of the givenness reveals phenomena as given only as far as there is in it the use of a hermeneutics of the given *as* shown and showing itself, *as* visible and seen by the *adonnés* [the gifted] (p. 55).

In fact, the efforts made toward a phenomenology of givenness have continued to utilise the support of hermeneutics. In this context, it is possible to identity at least four hermeneutic moments in givenness:

[1] the intuition or call is determined by its sensible or semantic obscurity. Such anonymity arises not merely as a result of the silence of the call or intuition – not everyone hears voices, at least not always as a result of a lack of its physical sound – but principally as a result of the fact that the call or intuition includes "the intention and assignment of a signal (sonorous or other, silent or visible)" (Marion, 2013, p. 57). These sounds or non-sounds must initially be interpreted as calls or intuitions – and not merely as background noises, etc.

Following from this initial interpretation, the calls must then be interpreted as a call addressed to such and such *adonnés* [the gifted]. Lastly, it is necessary to discern the identity of the partly who is called, i.e. to consider the call or intuition as mine, as sent towards one's self, which will ultimately make a response possible (Marion, 2013). Interpretations again assert that the call is only heard in the response. This answer or response, as Marion (2013) outlines, does not merely define "the content of the call, but also its reality (or its illusory character)" (p. 57). This point holds true concerning the phenomenon of the gift, i.e. as opposed to exchange or trade: "no being or object offers itself as a gift; it can be only about the unrefined state of thing, a something ventured or available, of something which is available or ventured, without any intention which would destine it to anyone" (p. 57). While it is precisely this that is determined by interpretation, i.e. that it is something that is destined to be received by someone as *gift*, one must still interpret what recipient must benefit from it (Marion,

2013). Any decision regarding whether or not there is a given is made possible solely by way of interpreting if *that* discloses itself.

[2] Whilst there is a noted intrinsic value in phenomenon, if the intuitive height associated with a saturated phenomenon is to be appreciated, which is of higher value, it is necessary to take up a hermeneutical approach that will thereby assign various meanings and concepts to said phenomenon (Marion, 2013). The gap must be lived between saturated phenomenon and the inadequacy of concepts or meanings for it cannot be bridged any, if not all, of the potential interpretations of intuition (Marion, 2013). The insufficiency of *noesis* to its *noema*, i.e. understood as intended by Levinas (1969; 2009), is generally assumed and thereby becomes the necessary condition of saturated phenomenality. It can be assumed that the saturated phenomenon of the icon requires an infinite hermeneutics (Marion, 2013).

[3] How ought one make the distinction between degrees of intuition or givenness – "between poor phenomenon, phenomena of common law, and saturated phenomenon?" (Marion, 2013, p. 59). Is it necessary to make the distinction between these three cases, i.e. as established, definitively different and forever irreducible? Or, should movement betwixt and between these categories be considered with the view to safeguard saturation from being restricted to rare and minimal cases, that potentially are inadequate in terms of qualifying or legitimising outside norms? One must concede, therefore, the banality of saturation precisely because the same given may disclose itself, i.e. "to appear, to phenomenalize itself, as more or less saturated depending on the hermeneutics that looks at it" (p. 61). The gifted is far from passive in this context. In its hermeneutic response to the call or intuition the gifted, as Marion outlines, permits

it and exclusively it, "to what gives itself to becoming, only partially but really, what shows itself" (p. 61). It is evident, therefore, that the movement betwixt and between the categories outlined above, i.e. poor, common law to saturated phenomenon, continues to be a matter of hermeneutics. This point is further explicated by Marion (2013) by way of analogy:

> […] the three horizontal stripes of a flag and a painting by Rothko, sound as signal (information, communication, concept, meaning) and sound as music (meaningless concert), wine in its taste and its chemical formula, odour and perfume (p. 61).

From this standpoint, therefore, the saturated phenomenon also necessities a hermeneutics, one in which the existential *as* permits itself to the exposure of itself to "the counter-experience, and to thus enter into battle with the inevitable objectifying experience expressed by the apophantic '*as*'" (p. 61) – both of which circle in a conversely measured manner.

And, finally, [4] the foundation of the final differentiation of every phenomenon into the category of object or event finds its genesis in the hermeneutic function, which, "by radicalising banality (already hermeneutic) of the saturation, trans*forms* the object into event and return" (p. 61). On this point, Marion (2013) takes his lead from the infamous examination of the difference between the phenomenality of *vorhanden* [the present-at-hand] and of *zuhanden* [the ready-to-hand] constituted by Heidegger (1962), principally by way of his hammer analogy (p. 157). Marion (2013) is "generalising it [the hammer] to the inversion of objecthood into its hidden '*événementialité*'" (p. 63). Yet, as Heidegger (1962) makes clear, it is primarily about the hammer as that which is available and beneficial as opposed to some inert subsisting object. Rather, it is about allowing the hammer to play the existential '*as*', that Dasein's '*as*', that is susceptible

or open to the world, which sees the hammer as it is used, in a radical hermeneutics (Marion, 2013).

Although the distinction between these two types of phenomenality, generally speaking, may provide other aspects, the fundamental remains: the differentiation between types of phenomenality, i.e. between object and event, can be rooted in hermeneutic variations, that possess and exert their power over the phenomenality of *being*. The phenomenology of givenness therefore, according to Marion (2013), resides in the governance of the gap that exists between what gives itself and what shows itself. Its challenge establishes the *self* of the phenomenon exclusively by way of a properly phenomenological hermeneutics (Marion, 2013).

In no sense is it being argued in this research that Marion's theological project provides *the* definitive answer to the way in which one relates to truth, i.e. truth understood beyond the confines of being, nor is it suggesting that such an emphatic acceptance of a de-ontological approach is conclusively advantageous in this regard. Rather, in the context of this research, the significance of Marion's position rests in the fact that his theological project takes seriously the insights of postmodernity, and attempts to meaningfully integrate them in his theology which ultimately points to the *possibility* of God/Truth beyond the confines of being, and that God/Truth conceived as such, requires that one must approach God/Truth from a radically hermeneutical perspective.

Marion's post-modern theology is not without criticism. In particular, Marion's (1991, 2013) distinction between saturated phenomenon and phenomenon, particularly in terms of the transparency of the world to its own givenness – i.e. the total captivation

of the gift in its own gifthood – and his discernment of degrees of givenness is subject to particular criticism (O'Leary, 2005). For example, Joseph O'Leary (2005) argues that, if a pure givenness is already accomplished in everyday phenomenon, is it not reasonable, therefore, to assume that any phenomenon perceived to be of a higher order, i.e. saturated phenomenon, would introduce some novel aspect that is unable to be embraced under the rubric of givenness? If such a novel aspect is accounted for as givenness elevated to a higher authority, does this not carry the risk of an inevitable collapse of the unitary, analogical conception of givenness into equivocity, i.e. "a mere homonymous relationship between the different usages of the word 'given'" (O'Leary, 2005, p. 139). O'Leary does concede, however, that he is unable to definitively discern the degree to which Marion's thought does justice to perspectives of a "historicising, pluralistic, and relativizing hermeneutics" (p. 142), or the degree to which he effectively counters such perspectives.

O'Leary concludes that Marion's phenomenology is still, at least to some extent, tangible in terms of the empirical realities of giving and receiving human relational behaviours that adhere to rules that are more integrate those of the economy. Furthermore, as O'Leary (2005) outlines, in expressing "the claims of phenomenology in their most consequent and far reaching form" (p. 166), Marion (1991) honed and illuminated the essential question confronting the phenomenological movement since its genesis – "the question of its status and scope" (O'Leary, 2005, p. 166). In engaging with the manner in which phenomenologists address the gift, it is evident not only that the gift persistently slips out of the phenomenologist's line of vision, but that phenomenology is inclined to "overreach itself in its efforts to retrieve the territories subtracted from its sway" (p. 166).

As mentioned earlier in this discussion, the act of giving is understood as a particular *event* by Marion. *Events* captivate Marion, as Shane Mackinlay (2005) notes, precisely because contrary to an object which persists in presence events *happen*. O'Leary (2005) claims, however, that this event of giving does not appear to possess "the universal reach that Marion ascribes to it" (p. 151). For instance, Marion utilises the *happening* of events to bolster his emphasis that phenomenology must ascribe the initiative in appearing to phenomena as opposed to a *cause* that may in fact explicate "them metaphysically, or any consciousness for which they appear" (Mackinlay, 2005, p. 169). Marion inverts the common apprehension of "both causality and intentionality in the appearing events" (p. 169). Marion (1991), therefore, sees events as phenomenological facts that possess priority over any cause, i.e. events are uncaused, for he presents them as being autonomous of any cause. Similarly, Marion argues that as events are the 'objects' of a subject's intentional exercise of consciousness, events therefore impose themselves on a perceiver, and hence show the 'self' of a phenomenon. In this way, Marion ultimately determines the *adonné* or the *gifted* in terms of receptivity.

On this point, thinkers such as Mackinlay (2005) are critical of Marion for his swift ascription of 'selfhood' to events. In particular, Mackinlay claims that contrary to Marion's (2013) assertion that the gifted "has nothing passive in it" (p. 61), in constituting the above inversions the role of the gifted or *adonné* is essentially passive. Furthermore, he argues that in being constituted as such, this passive receptivity is also mirrored in the confinement of hermeneutics by Marion (1991; 2013) to "acts of interpretation *after* an event has actually happened" (MacKinlay, 2005, p. 170). It can

be argued that Marion's theology overlooks a fundamental hermeneutical dimension – the need to situate the happening of events in the sphere of their happening *to* a human subject while at one and the same time recognising that events happen of their own initiative (Mackinlay, 2005).

4.5. Conclusion

This chapter has argued that both modernity and secular culture have led to a narrowing of reason which ultimately brings the secular claim of self-sufficiency into question. In this context, it was highlighted that the call for dialogue issued by Habermas ought to be welcomed if the horizon of secular reason is to be expanded. It was argued that the model of mutual understanding that is advocated for in the documents of Vatican II and subsequent post conciliar theologies have much to offer in terms of conducting such dialogue, particularly with regard to the relationship that exists between faith and reason and the possibility of encountering truth in non-Christian religions. The conduction of such dialogue must take account of and be informed by the eschatological character of truth.

The account of truth offered by contemporary theological discourse insists that religious truth cannot be reduced to mere informative details, or basic explanations of the world in which one dwells, nor to a simple theory about existence. Religious truth, therefore, must not be understood to be the same as the truth of empiricism, science or of 'pure' propositions or geometric statements. Religious truth is not available for scientific examination or inspection as it can only be encountered by way of the experience of personal participation. Religious truth, therefore, is best understood as relational, dynamic, and above all else, participatory. Truth is always encountered in an

embodied state, within a living faith tradition as well as in the praxis of faith and teachings of a particular religious tradition.

It has been shown that contemporary theological reflection on the question of truth has significant insights to offer religious education, particularly in terms of the accommodation of 'religious knowing'. It has been shown that if religious education is to be successful in its facilitation of 'religious knowing' it must be conscious of the hermeneutic that operates at its centre. This hermeneutic must be capable of not only taking account of the particular and local embodied reality of religious traditions as well as the local's capacity to assume universal significance, but also recognise the complexities, subtleties and delicate nature of religious truth as encountered in an embodied state in living religious traditions. It was necessary to define the importance of the relationship between tradition and religious truth in a post-modern epoch.

In this context, Boeve's novel approach to the question of truth by way of a recontextualised understanding of the Christian tradition as an open narrative was explored. Here, it was again demonstrated that a neutral approach to the question of truth is impossible, particularly when one meaningfully addresses the process of detraditionalisation, individualisation and pluralisation which ultimately leads to a recognition of the need for one to enter into dialogue with diversity and difference. The recognition of this point is essential if one wishes to avoid lapsing into relativistic inclinations or tendencies of indifference concerning the truth claims of religious traditions or fundamental life options. Any relation to truth [that is, any that is to be considered viable at least] must foster an openness to the other, his/her/its otherness and difference. Such a position is not merely philosophically justified, but also

theological necessary. The theological necessity of such a position is evident when one observes that the Christian tradition is to best understood as a *living* tradition, a tradition that is capable of bearing authentic witness to the Truth, i.e. the God in whom Christians profess to have carried out the historical interruption *par excellence* in the incarnation of Christ.

At the heart of this recontextualised understanding of the Christian tradition as an open narrative one encounters a definitive appreciation of the inexhaustibly of Truth – that *our* narrative cannot claim to be *the* narrative as the totality of Truth is ultimately incomprehensible to the person and, therefore, unable to be definitively articulated in the accounts offered by a single tradition. As outlined earlier in this chapter, such a view does not imply that there is no such thing as truth or that one should foster a relativistic position. Rather, is was shown that such relativistic tendencies are negated by way of an authentic recognition of the particularity of the Christian narrative. It has been argued that the recognition of such specificity is a necessary condition for the existence of the other for it is by way of such acknowledgement that one's capacity to identify the other, and it is and it is through encounters with the otherness of the other that the limits of a specific narrative present themselves as the boundary of the other.

In taking account of these points, it is evident that the question of truth, particularly religious truth, cannot be reduced to the mere falsification and verification various propositions and statements of faith (Wright, 2007; C. Go, 2019). This chapter has argued that the question of truth cannot be adequately addressed by way of a hermeneutical approached that is exclusively concerned with textual interpretation (Bowie and Cole, 2018). It has staked the claim that the question of truth ceases to be

primarily concerned with the 'truth-*content*' of a narrative, but rather with the matter of *living the truth*, of entering into relationship with the truth which no particular narrative can exhaust.

In arguing for an open Christian narrative, this chapter was forced to consider the insights offered by theologies informed by the western critique of onto-theology. This chapter focused primarily on the work of Jean-Luc Marion and argued that his post-Heideggerian theology meaningfully attempts to take seriously those insights of post-modernity that move towards assisting one in grappling with God/Truth in a post-metaphysical or de-ontological context. In no sense did this chapter make the case that Marion's theological project offers *the* definitive answer to the way in which one ought to relate Truth, i.e. truth understood beyond the confines of being, nor did it propose that such an emphatic acceptance of a de-ontological approach is conclusively advantageous in this context. Rather, this chapter has demonstrated that the significance of Marion's position rests in the fact that his theological project takes seriously the insights of postmodernity, and in his attempt to meaningfully integrate said insights into his theological thinking, his theology opens up the *possibility* of God/Truth beyond the confines of being and, that God/Truth conceived as such, ultimately requires that one approach God/Truth from a radically hermeneutical perspective.

Of particular importance in the analysis of Marion's theological discourse was his understanding of the act of giving as a particular *event.* As demonstrated in this chapter, *events* captivate Marion precisely because events *happen* as opposed to objects which merely persist in presence. This insight has much to offer religious education, particularly in terms of attempting to grasp the *happening* character of education. In

considering truth, tradition and the possibility of a God-*beyond-being*, the ground is set for one to attempt to discern and articulate the hermeneutical task of religious education in the Republic of Ireland. In Chapter Six, the rich theological insights raised in this chapter will be brought into conversation with the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer with the view to offer an attempted articulation of the hermeneutical task of religious education in the Republic of Ireland as a curricular area in which the *happening* character of education manifests by way of the hermeneutical orientation towards meaningful encounters with truth, i.e. truth-events.

Chapter Five

Philosophical Hermeneutics and Encounters with Truth

5.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter the insights of Catholic theology in terms of the question of truth, tradition and the possibility of a God-beyond-being were addressed. In doing so, the theological foundation for a novel treatment of the hermeneutical orientation of religious education in the Republic of Ireland has been set. This chapter will establish the philosophical foundation for this task. It will consider the question: given the emergent hermeneutical context in the Republic of Ireland, what does philosophical hermeneutics contribute to understandings of the encounter with truth? In attending to this question, Gadamer's reconstruction of the question of hermeneutics and his response to the charge of relativism will be addressed.

To assist with this treatment of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, section one of this chapter offers an account of: [1] hermeneutical circles, and [2] a 'philosophical' hermeneutics. By addressing these hermeneutical aspects, the ground is set for a meaningful consideration of the question of truth and its treatment by Gadamer. Section two of this chapter initially considers Gadamer's reconstruction of the question of hermeneutics. This analysis is structured by way of the following: [1] seeing, projecting and fusing, and [2] artistic mimesis. Secondly, Gadamer's response to the charge of relativism is considered under the following two themes: [1] art, play, and truth, [2] prejudice and tradition. In section three of this chapter, the hermeneutic event of disclosure and the centrality of the imaging of truth to Gadamer's account of the happening of truth is explored. In particular, it will be shown that Platonic overtones are evident in Gadamer's account of the happening of truth, and that in appreciating

this aspect of Gadamer's philosophical project, this research breaks with readings of his philosophical hermeneutic that read the happening of truth with an exclusively Heideggerian accent. In considering Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics in this way, this chapter provides the philosophical foundation that will shape discussions in Chapter Six in terms offering an account of the hermeneutical task of religious education in the Republic of Ireland.

5.2. Hermeneutical Circles and Philosophical Hermeneutics

This section sets the ground for an analysis of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. To this end, it offers an account of: [1] hermeneutical circles, and [2] a 'philosophical' hermeneutics.

5.2.1. Hermeneutical Circles

As outlined in Chapter Three, Schleiermacher offers the first comprehensive establishment of a 'hermeneutical circle' (Dilthey, 2010a). In his attempted development of a universal theory of the 'art' of interpretation within which there is a movement between the 'parts' and the 'whole', Schleiermacher (1997) provides a model of textual interpretation. Thus, a central tenet of Schleiermacher's work is the move towards understanding a text on its own terms, "seeking to account for its meaning only with reference to the intentions and life history of its author or the linguistic tools he would have had available to him" (Aldridge, 2017, p. 1).

In this way, one amends their provisional understanding of that which is disclosed in their ongoing analysis as one moves towards an occurrence of empathy with the author – striving to comprehend the text "at first as well as and then even better than its author"

(Schleiermacher, 1997, p. 112). This formula has contributed significantly to the theory of textual interpretation. Gadamer, however, ascribes to his teacher Martin Heidegger[1] the more significant step or "decisive turning point" (Gadamer, 2013, p. 293) in the move towards providing a philosophical description of what he refers to as the '*event*' of understanding (p. 208).

Gadamer (2013) claims that Heidegger's circle "breaks right through the circle drawn by romantic hermeneutics" (p. 296). While Schleiermacher's circle "runs backward and forward along the text" (Gadamer, 2013, p. 293), Heidegger's contribution is to stress the inescapable and enabling role "the interpreter's 'fore-conception' plays in the event of understanding" (Aldridge, 2017, p. 2). In this way, the Heideggerian circle includes both the reader and the text, as opposed to the parts of the text and the whole. Rather than emerging from the disintegration of one's own prior prejudices in favour of the author's intention in writing the work, for Heidegger, understanding emerges from "the play or tension between the text and the reader and its familiarity" (Aldridge, 2017, p. 2). For example, Gadamer (2013) outlines that "the true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between" (p. 295), and therefore, understanding necessarily encompasses "sharing in a common meaning" (p. 292).

From this perspective, it becomes clear that for Gadamer the primary concern is not that one acquires an 'objective' interpretation of a text. Rather, the 'in-between' essence of the event of understanding implies that it resists being characterised as either a subjective or an objective process. Hence, there no method or process that can be

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[1] See David Kennedy (2015, pp. 112-133) for a detailed exploration of Martin Heidegger's critique of western metaphysics.

offered for correct understanding for the interpreter "cannot separate in advance the productive prejudices that enable understanding from the prejudices that hinder it and lead to misunderstandings" (Gadamer, 2013, p. 296). Instead, Gadamer states that "this separation must take place in the process of understanding itself" (p. 296). In this way, even the 'method' itself that one utilises can be found wanting through an encounter with the text. For Gadamer, understanding is a historically affected event.

It is imperative that one does not interpret Gadamer's hermeneutics as a post-modern 'reader-response' theory, as Gadamer (2013) makes clear that meaning is not ascertained subjectively as the goal of an attempt to arrive at understanding is "agreement with the subject matter" (p. 292). While he discerns understanding as a process of 'coming to an understanding' with the text, this does not imply that one uncritically accepts the other's view. Gadamer states that "if prejudice becomes questionable in view of what another person or a text says to us, this does not mean that it is simply set aside and the text or the other person is accepted as valid in its place" (p. 298). Rather, one's own "prejudice is properly brought into play by being put at risk" (p. 299). For Gadamer, texts can be understood truthfully, but not exhaustively or definitively. In other words, instead of coming to empathize with the author's intention, or achieving said empathy and knowing something else as well (Aldridge, 2017), Gadamer (2013) argues that "we understand in a different way, if we understand at all" (p. 296). From this standpoint, it is evident that the hermeneutic circle is perpetually open, it is never closed, and hence, there is the possibility for new or further understanding.

On this point, Gadamer is for the most part developing Heidegger's consideration of hermeneutics in his hallmark text *Being and Time* (1962). However, as Aldridge (2017) notes, in his later work Heidegger "develops a related example of 'circular' reasoning that deals with the structure of a philosophical work or argument" (p. 3). Heidegger recognises that his attempt to question *The Origin of the Work of Art* will ultimately be cyclical (Aldridge, 2017). He states that "what art is can be gathered from a comparative examination of actual artworks. But how are we to be certain that we are indeed basing such an examination on artworks if we do not know beforehand what art is" (Heidegger, 2011, p. 90). While such a circle runs contrary to 'ordinary understanding' as it 'violates logic', Heidegger claims that "this is neither a makeshift nor a defect" (p. 90). Rather, "to enter upon this path is the strength of thought, to continue on it is the feast of thought" (p. 90). Hence, it is perhaps no surprise that Heidegger leads the reader down a rather circuitous path in the essay.

Heidegger (2011) initially attends to the work of art by questioning the work in its 'thingly' nature. From this standpoint, it is evident that the traditional concern of Western aesthetics with a work as a being among beings is merely a 'detour'(Aldridge, 2017). Yet, as Heidegger (2011) outlines it does bring one "directly to a road that may lead to a determination of the thingly feature in the work" (p. 104). Following from this position works of art are considered as instantiations of a broader category of the *happening* of truth, that in this way can reveal something of the nature of truth and the Being of beings to the person (Aldridge, 2017).

From these insights, one can discern that an argument necessarily implies or assumes a conversation. Aldridge (2017) notes that, in this way, "a text can be understood to

'present' an argument, then, to the extent that it participates in a conversational structure: the voice of the text addresses an imagined reader, solicits her to read further, and urges her assent to particular propositions" (p. 4). Hence, Gadamer (2013) emphasises on the need for one to allow themselves "to be conducted by the subject matter" in any significant conversation (p. 360). Gadamer (1991) outlines in a much earlier work on Plato's dialectic just how simple it is to ascertain a particular manner of frivolous agreement with one's conversationalist if one does not have any significant concern for the subject matter that is at stake between them.

On this point, Aldridge (2017) explains that "even if we are to reach a serious *disagreement* on substantive issues, there needs to be a certain convergence between us on the way the subject matter is being interrogated, what is exactly at stake is what we are arguing about" (p. 5). This insight is central to Gadamer's 'fusion of horizons' which will be discussed later in this chapter. In other words, if one does not exhibit an openness towards the necessary transformation of one's initial view of the subject matter in the 'event' of understanding, one will ascertain nothing from participating in dialogue despite the fact that one may seem to agree or disagree with their conversationalist initially.

Arguably a hermeneutically informed argument enables its subject matter to 'emerge'. These insights are of particular importance to any argumentative text, but particularly to this discussion as one attempts to grapple with the richness of Gadamer's insights and what they have to offer to the discourse of religious education in the context of the Republic of Ireland. Having considered the Heideggerian hermeneutical circle, one can then move towards a deeper understanding of what one means by a 'philosophical'

hermeneutics. Cultivating such an understanding is integral if one is to grasp that Gadamer does not present a methodology for dialogue, but rather a 'philosophy' of dialogue that presents explicit implications for a dialogical method (Tracy, 2010).

5.2.2. A 'Philosophical' Hermeneutics?

Drawing on Aldridge's (2017) reading of Heidegger, there are three senses in which the term 'hermeneutic' can be attributed to Heidegger's philosophical project:

[1] Heidegger (1962) makes explicit that there is an intrinsic relationship between the phenomenological account as a method itself and interpretation. Although Heidegger recognises that he has been gripped by Husserl's concept of 'categorical' – later 'essential' – intuition, contrary to Husserl, he argues that one can never merely perceives or intuits something (Taylor, 2006, pp. 102-105). Heidegger (1962) speaks of a 'grasping' of the phenomenon and, in this sense, there is a particular directness to one's understanding of the phenomenon. It must be recognised that, at one and the same time, one does not simply perceive it or see it – rather, one takes it *as* something (Aldridge, 2017). Hence, Husserl's desire to free one from prejudice cannot be one's phenomenological aim, nor can a phenomenon be treated as self-evident. This point is further explicated by Aldridge (2017) stating that "it is precisely because we already operate within an understanding of being that we are able to thematise being in any way at all, and when we point (as the phenomenologist must) to the 'things in themselves' we do not step outside of this original understanding" (p. 69).

A significant concomitant observation is that one must refrain from making the mistake of confusing the phenomena with representations that are at once obvious to

consciousness (Aldridge, 2017). Phenomena are not commonly obvious immediately. Rather, more often than not phenomena must be made or allowed to disclose themselves. On this point, Hubert Dreyfus (1991) offers a simple but rather apt analogy, he states that "we dwell in our understanding like a fish in water" (p. 35). In this way, it can be argued that it is specifically as a result of the fact that our 'average understanding' of being is forever presupposed, as it is innately intimate to us, that it is challenging for one to articulate explicitly.

Aldridge (2017) outlines that it is possible for phenomenon to be concealed by the history of humankind's attempts to thematise them, so that when one believes that they are grasping 'the things themselves' one is actually covering and "distorting the very phenomenon which, if we could only attend to them, would strike us ultimately clear and powerful" (p. 69). Heidegger (1962) indicates that further challenges emerge when one acknowledges that the conventional apprehension of a phenomenon will forever be an intrinsic aspect of one's primary or governing understanding, particularly when one tries to bring said apprehension into focus more explicitly. In this way, it is clear that one's apprehension "may be so infiltrated with traditional theories and opinions about Being that these remain sources for the way in which it is prevalently understood" (p. 25). While one's primary understanding ultimately guides interpretation, "traditional way of understanding may be found wanting *in the event of disclosing the phenomenon*" (Aldridge, 2017, p. 69). Heidegger promotes the view that one ought to be open to the possibility of radical transformation: "in finding what we were looking for, we come to have a new understanding of what it was that we were looking for in the first place" (p. 69).

[2] The term 'hermeneutic' can be applied to Heidegger's phenomenological ontology in a manner that presents hermeneutics as being not merely one's means of access to phenomenon but also reveals itself to be a phenomenon. As one's effort to interpret being-in-the-world, 'hermeneutics' divulges the apprehension of the world already present in all behaviour, "this hermeneutic also becomes a 'hermeneutic'" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 62). On this point, Aldridge (2017) notes that there is a circularity inferred "in that our access to the essence of interpretation itself comes through interpretation" (p. 70). This presents a fundamental theme in Heidegger's philosophical project, the distinction between truth 'as the unhiddenness of beings' and truth as 'the correctness of propositions' (Heidegger, 2013). From this standpoint, then it can be argued that the circularity that is inferred above, i.e. our access to the essence of interpretation itself comes through interpretation, "is not a vicious circle, and Heidegger intends a substantial positive claim" (Aldridge, 2017, p. 70). For Heidegger (1962), the question of hermeneutics in the human sciences is "'hermeneutic' only in a derivative sense" (p. 62). He establishes the area of enquiry of an explicitly *philosophical* hermeneutics – the effort to thematise specifically a phenomenon of understanding which is "rooted in the existential constitution of *Dasein*" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 195), and "which is in the background of all local or prescriptive accounts of interpretation" (Aldridge, 2017, p. 70). In Heidegger's phenomenology 'hermeneutics' reveals itself as a person's way of firstly going about things which itself additionally presents itself as a phenomenon that requires a description or account.

And, finally, [3] the term 'hermeneutic' is used in Heidegger's work in relation to his project of fundamental ontology in which he outlines that the ontological significance of hermeneutics emerges from the fact that the condition of being-in-the-world is a

hermeneutic condition, i.e. *Dasein* is "the understanding which interprets" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 62). The 'understanding' that is essential to *Dasein* is the ontological condition for the more primordial kinds of activity upon which explicit interpretations are founded. This understanding is not to be considered cognitively, propositionally or representatively. As Aldridge (2017) notes, however, Heidegger's insight that all of one's 'concernful dealings', whether one is clicking their fingers to the beat of a song on their phone as they walk to work, or focusing their attention on parking between the lines in carpark, "presuppose that we have taken a stand on the possibilities held out to us by the world in which we dwell" (p. 71). He states that such choices are not "at the level of conscious belief but on the ontological level of orientation towards things" (p. 71). In this way, the character of this stand is determined by the 'work-world' that is nearest to one's current activity.

On this point, Heidegger (2011) notes that it is specifically because of the fact that morality heretofore has a claim on us, while 'concealed' and not yet 'mastered', that offers the potential of there being an important moral choice (p. 116). This does not imply that one is determined in their business with the world. Rather, Heidegger (1962) outlines that understanding is in fact the projection of possibilities for action – "*Dasein* 'sees' possibilities, in terms of which it is" (p. 188). This insight implies that as one's understanding changes so too do the possibilities – therefore, so too does one's understanding of themselves and the world. Aldridge (2017) highlights that "this is not a possibility that is 'grasped thematically', but which is constitutive of my being – so that as understanding develops, *Dasein* is transformed" (pp. 71-72). Hence, it is evident that Heidegger's hermeneutical circle is connected to the 'temporality' of *Dasein*. This link to temporality is perhaps unsurprising. Ambrose (2012) playfully suggests that

temporality plays such a central role in Heidegger's thought that perhaps the title of his book should have been "Time and Being" as opposed to 'Being and Time' (p. 12). Heidegger (1962) claims that "our theoretical mode of experiencing time, in a 'present', is tied to the derivative realm of the present-at-hand, where entities become 'occurrent'" (Aldridge, 2017, p. 72).

Heidegger (1962) states that "an entity for which, as Being-in-the-world, its Being is itself an issue, has, ontologically, a circular structure" (p. 195). Aldridge (2017) explains that "*Dasein*'s being is a state of 'becoming': *Dasein* is 'thrown' into a situation where possibilities are already given and understanding always precedes purposive action; yet these possibilities are 'projected' on to what is to be understood, and always run ahead of *Dasein*" (p. 72). It is important to note that, as Heidegger (1962) does, interpretation is never an end point or the procurement of knowledge that stands outside of understanding – "it is rather the working-out of possibilities projected in understanding" (p. 189). It is from this perspective that Heidegger (1962) argues that "in interpretation, understanding does not become something different. It becomes itself" (p. 188).

Following from this discussion, one is in a good position to engage with Gadamer and how he believes that 'philosophical hermeneutics' – the attempt to give an account of the event of understanding- constitutes the universal philosophical problem (Gadamer, 2013, p. xxvii). Heidegger's hermeneutics, which Gadamer (2013) takes over from Heidegger (1962), is not concerned with prescription. Gadamer does not move towards specifying a method for avoiding misunderstanding – which was a significant absorption of preceding efforts at hermeneutic science – but to further develop

Heidegger's expansion of the hermeneutic situation to all human experience (Aldridge, 2017).

Gadamer (2013) moves towards explaining what one means when they say that they have understood, and to meaningfully address the transformational ramifications of acknowledging understanding as an *event* of human becoming. A central tenet of this position is that philosophical hermeneutics must not be viewed as an epistemological instrument, method or technique. Rather, it proffers "an account on the level of ontological transformation, of how we are always 'thrown' into an interpretive situation and how in understanding we are taken up into Being" (Aldridge, 2017, p. 72). Hence, at this point, it is important to consider Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics in greater detail with the view towards demonstrating the unique contribution that his philosophical hermeneutics has to make in terms of the question of truth and religious education.

5.3. The Question of Truth and Philosophical Hermeneutics

The question of truth in philosophical hermeneutics is most certainly more enigmatic than the question of finitude. Gadamer (2013) does not pose the question of truth in an explicitly thematic manner in *Truth and Method* rather it is raised in various essays. Gadamer is most explicit concerning the question of truth in his analysis of art. Within this consideration of truth in *Truth and Method*, Risser (1997) notes that more often than not, the point is "lost because the analysis of hermeneutic experience has not yet been given" (p. 139). It is precisely this point, however, that provides a clear orientation for one to consider the question of truth in philosophical hermeneutics. If one is to grasp the insights raised by Gadamer in his consideration of the question of truth, and

therefore, his philosophical hermeneutics, one must first appreciate his reconstruction of the question of hermeneutics.

5.3.1. Gadamer and the Reconstruction of the Question of Hermeneutics

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle (1993) outlines that the state of character focused on wise deliberation [*bouleuesthai*] and making appropriate choices [*prohaireseis*] is a narrow mean between two expansive, explicitly marked paths of vice, each of which is well travelled. In this way, Aristotle makes clear that living a good life is difficult as "to miss the mark is easy; to hit it difficult" (bk. II.6, 1106b). Similarly, Heidegger (1962) gives an account of inauthentic existence as one that "tends to make things easy for itself," is "tranquillised" into thinking that "everything is within its reach" (p. 223). Alternatively, Heidegger (1962) proffers a hermeneutics of facticity that seeks to re-establish factical existence to its initial difficulty. A hermeneutics of facticity, as Carr (1996) explains, attempts to discern the constraints placed on human understanding by living within the parameters of time; to express the abyss, the play, the uncanny aspects of human rationality; to advocate for, in John Caputo's slogan, an "owning up to the fix we are in" (Caputo, 1987, p. 6).

In the hermeneutical inquiry of the "fix we are in", the outlines of which will be traced in this section, one observes the phenomenon of the consciousness of human facticity come to the fore in terms of philosophical interest. For instance, Carr (1996) states that "hermeneutics seizes upon the insight that the appropriation of human meaning and truth is not directed by an objectively perceiving, transcendent ego articulating itself in timeless statements" (p. 30). Rather, hermeneutics promotes the view that it is "by a consciousness that grows in the awareness of its situatedness in time and place" (p. 30).

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Furthermore, as a result of the *a priori* character of such temporal-regionality, "it is bound to project itself into the interpretative process, to condition its results, and to limit its claim to universality" (Carr, 1996, p. 30). Yet, as Gadamer (2013) strives to demonstrate, in spite of placing serious restrictions on what can or cannot be taken to be universally true, human situatedness is the primary stimulus of the interpretative process. One's understanding of truth is made possible by the condition of human finitude.

Such a position, as Carr (1996) outlines, brings a critical question to the fore: "for if the temporal-regional world that limits human cognition projects itself into every interpretation as both its confining medium *and* the condition of its possibility, how is interpretative understanding ever to bring to maturity results that pass the test of time?" (p. 30). Or, to phrase this question in a slightly differ and simpler manner: in taking the above view into account, in what way can interpretations that are inseparable from the here and now stake the claim to speak for all times and places? Within the context of a more methodological or scientific model, knowledge moves in a linear manner from one logical step to another without any allusion to the knowers situatedness. For instance, as Carr notes, "the axioms of geometry, the laws of physics and the properties of chemical compounds are all considered to be permanently fixed truths, irrevocable, and uninfluenced by the people who formulated them" (pp. 30-31).

Gadamer (2013) is at pains, however, to demonstrate that hermeneutical reasoning is operative in all forms of human understanding, including the natural sciences. And, as outlined above, hermeneutical reasoning operates in a more circuitous manner, moving back and forth as a mode of conversation between interpreter and interpretand, each

participant in dialogue probing deeper into the subject matter, each fusing into each in what Gadamer coins the 'fusion of horizons' (Carr, 1996). From this standpoint, one must ask and address the following: in what way can one apply the concept 'knowledge' to the yield of hermeneutical reasoning if its specification is so non-objective, so meta-logical? And, in this way then, in what manner can Gadamer speak of truth if it is not truth in the universal sense i.e. all times and places? To adequately address these questions, it is necessary for one to rehearse several central ideas in hermeneutical philosophy.

5.3.1.1. Seeing, Projecting and Fusing

The central thrust of Gadamer's work in *Truth and Method* is to deconstruct the Enlightenment's model of objectivity. Fundamental to Gadamer's (1976c) perspective as a whole is the view that truth can only be arrived at via "the totality of human experience" (p. 179) Immediately such a view out rules any hope that truth, once discovered through the use and application of scientific method, can be appreciated in an undistorted, unbiased state. Rather, Gadamer (2013) critiques the modernist assumption that scientific methodologies grant direct access to objective 'facts'. In the hermeneutical model of rationality, as Carr (1996) highlights, "there are no *facta bruta*, no things-in-themselves beyond temporal and spatial ordering, no naked essences, no bare quiddities that are not 'always already' [*immer schon*] coloured, construed and sometimes contorted by the subjects who perceive them" (p. 31). As demonstrated thus far, it is a fundamental principle in philosophical hermeneutics that perception is always already interpretation, seeing is always "seeing as" (Gadamer, 2013).

Unlike some of his French colleagues, Gadamer is not calling for the end of philosophy and metaphysics. Rather, the finitude that confines human reason is the very essence of what it means to be human, but it does not imply the ability 'to see what is there'. In fact, as Gadamer (2013) makes clear, without human finitude there would be no seeing to begin with. Here, there is a negative deduction – 'seeing' is never 'pure seeing'. Rather, he emphasises that 'seeing' is always already 'prejudiced' by that which makes it possible. This view, however, does not translate into a view that the world is meaningless.

Gadamer (2013) argues that this prejudicial fore-structuring of perception is full of creative potential. He states that "even perception conceived as an adequate response to a stimulus would never be a mere mirroring of what is there" as such perception is always "an understanding of something as something" (p. 83). Hence, it is evident that "all understanding-*as* is an articulation of what is there, in that it looks away from, looks at, sees together as, and […] so too expectations lead it to 'read in' what is not there at all" (p. 83). Therefore, for Gadamer, "pure seeing and pure hearing are dogmatic abstractions which artificially reduce phenomena" (p. 84). Briefly stated, "perception always includes meaning" (p. 84).

Working from this perspective, Gadamer (2013) is critical of any type of methodology that is founded on an Enlightenment model of detached, unprejudiced objectivity. Carr (1996) states that "such objectivity is a myth, and a destructive one at that" for the call of 'detached objectivity' "is all too easily exploited, too readily a mask worn by people hiding their wills to power" (p. 32). As will be discussed below with greater focus, Gadamer is of the view that scientific methods, including science-based methods of

interpretation, often disregard some of the more fundamental acts of human perception and understanding, "acts that are so deeply part of us they slip through the grasp of methodical representation" (Carr, 1996, pp. 32-33).

For Gadamer, then, modern methods of explication regardless of the particular field fail to take account of the pre-given historicality of human existence, the situatedness in time and place that is an intrinsic dimension of being human. Methodological consciousness moves toward abstracting the "more specifiable moments of human experience from their proper context of world-engagement in order to submit them to preconceived rules of analysis" (Carr, 1996, p. 33). It operates in this fashion as a direct result of the fact that it assumes that the mode of being particular to person possesses the possibility to distance itself from Being. In other words, the human mode of being has the potential to "transcend the flux of time and reduce all materiality to a thematic essence" (p. 33).

Hence, Gadamer (2013) is explicit that this Cartesian presupposition is erroneous. Instead, he concurs with his teacher Heidegger (1962) regarding his determination that human beings exist always in a fundamental state of 'belongingness' to Being. As noted thus far, Heidegger (1962) purports that human existence is 'thrown' into the world at birth and is "ever on the way toward death" (pp. 172-224). Carr (1996) outlines that between these two existential events there is the more ontological occurrence of a deep connectedness to life that is unsurpassable; "to the world that is both a product of our interpretative projections, and the very substance that makes those projections possible" (p. 33). Hence, as outlined in great detail above, for Heidegger the human being is a

'being-in-the-world', a *Dasein* [being-there] conditioned by history, by time, by Being itself.

Working from the above definition, Gadamer (2013) claims that in epistemological terms the intimate relationship between the person and Being indicates "a coordination of all known activity with what is known" (p. 232) such that "the knower is not standing over against a situation that he merely observes but […] is directly affected by what he sees" (p. 280). Gadamer highlights that what one sees or turns their interpretative focus toward is inseparable from the same world in which one is situated. As Carr (1996) states, " it is a product of the same temporal-regionality that has shaped our own being-in-the-world" (pp. 33-34). Ultimately, all understanding is self-understanding to a certain extent.

For Gadamer self-understanding is rooted in an apprehension of the manner in which humans exist in the world in general terms. Here, one is referring to the appropriate orientation of *Dasein* in its basic 'openness' to reality. In this sense, what one already knows is a type of, to use the words of Heidegger (1962), "ready-to-hand" knowledge (p. 69). This type of knowledge, as Carr (1996) notes, is speaking of "a form of knowledge that opens up the realm of practical knowing, a knowing through experience, a knowing that is not learned as one learns a geometrical theorem, but is gained as a 'skill' simply by living and reflecting on one's life" (p. 34). In a similar vein to Cardinal John Henry Newman, Gadamer (2013) takes his lead here from Aristotle's doctrine of *phronesis*. The term *phronesis* denotes a circumstantial form of knowing that is cognisant of the developmental nature of life's encounters, a form of knowing that operates with a dynamism and flexibility that is enabled by the basic

temporal-regional relationship that exists between subject and object (Gadamer, 2013, p. 41). The potential result of said fundamental 'openness' of human being to its world is a 'fusion of horizons' (p. 269), this is to say, a metaphorical translation of what one would call 'consciousness-raising'.

The metaphorical term 'horizon' has a long tradition in German literature and it effectively mediates the finitude and ostensibly infinite potential of human understanding. For example, it enables one to articulate a 'narrowness of horizon' or an 'expansion of horizon', both of which are advantageous in terms of epistemology. Gadamer (2013) also utilises the term to speak of a person with "no horizon" who "does not see far enough and hence overvalues what is nearest" (p. 269). Horizons are not static or fixed. Rather, they are "products of our primordial openness to Being" (Carr, 1996, p. 35). In this way, horizons are perpetually changing for time and experience carry new perceptions of reality. 'Fusion', therefore, presents itself as the dynamism of said transformation.

It is important to adequately grasp what the term 'horizon' [*Horizont*] is referring to. A 'horizon' is a subjective sphere of consciousness that verges on two separate but related fronts – the historical and the linguistic. Here, both one's 'thrownness' into history as one's temporal-regional habitat, and therefore into a wide range of traditions (i.e. religious, political, social, etc.) that influence one's values and behaviour, *and* one's 'thrownness' into language (or in some cases languages) that frames one's pattern of thought, and in this way restricts one to particular constructs of meaning that are already given, jointly establish the framework of consciousness by way of which one arrives at an understanding of themselves and the world around them. In a Gadamerian

sensibility, then, the above historical-linguistic infrastructure operates as one's interpretative 'horizon' – that is, as a "forestructured network of self-understanding that frames all subsequent understanding of what is outside ourselves" (Carr, 1996, p. 35).

For Gadamer (2013), an utterly novel encounter is a 'fusion' of the subject's current horizon with that of the object(s) of encounter in such a manner that a greater, more discerning horizon emerges. Here, it follows that this 'fusion of horizons' broadens one's appreciation of the world. In this way, it can be said that, such a 'fusion of horizons' is brimming with potential in that it raises the possibilities for new encounters, and therefore further broadens one's understanding. For Gadamer (2013), this development of understanding that is operative in the 'fusion of horizons' is perpetual, and, therefore, perpetually brings one to even more penetrations into self- and world-knowledge.

By way of the fusion, one comes to possess novel descriptive vocabularies with which s/he can ask more insightful questions of 'the other'. In this way, one is able to engage more meaningfully "in an ever more deeply understood conversation" (Carr, 1996, p. 35). Therefore, it can be said that the transformation of Being and time always bear new encounters that change, maybe even nullify, the understandings that emerged from previous encounters. On this point, it is important to give attention to the arena in which the fusion of horizons is best outlined according to Gadamer – the arena of art.

5.3.1.2. Artistic Mimesis

For Gadamer (2013), the fusion of horizons is most explicated articulated in the arena of art. In part 1 of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer initially presents the concept of art in a

historical perspective. By way of this presentation, Gadamer demonstrates "how the concept of art gradually came to be understood in terms of aesthetic differentiation by aesthetic consciousness" (Risser, 1997, pp. 139-140). From the standpoint of aesthetic consciousness, as Risser notes, "art has its being in the subjectivity of the subject, where the experience of art is the experience of aesthetic enjoyment unencumbered by any association with the world in which the art work is rooted" (p. 140). For Gadamer (2013), such an apprehension of art is a distortion of the real experience of the work of art. Rather, he claims that art is a manner of comprehending oneself, that is, understanding one's historical existence. Risser (1997) highlights that this perspective is not too dissimilar to "Hegel's view of art as a form of spirit in which the real is presented in its not yet fully mediated absolute shape" (p. 140). As will be demonstrated in greater detail later in this discussion when addressing Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and the question of relativism, Gadamer (2013) takes a concept that has exerted significant impact in aesthetics as his starting-point for his effort at overcoming the subjectification of aesthetics in the attitude of aesthetic consciousness – the concept of play [*Spiel*].

Following from these insights, Gadamer (2013) posits a fundamental question: "is there to be no knowledge in art? Does not the experience of art contain a claim to truth which is certainly different from that of science, but just as certainly is not inferior to it? And is not the task of aesthetics precisely to ground the fact that the experience of art is a mode of knowledge of a unique kind" (p. 97). In this context, Gadamer blends his hermeneutical ontology with epistemological themes taken mostly from Western traditions of philosophical aesthetics. Contrary to Immanuel Kant (1987), Gadamer (2013) refrains from subordinating "the mimetic, representational form of aesthetic

interpretation to conceptual thought" (Carr, 1996, p. 36). By the term 'art', in contrast to Georg Wilhelm Fredrich Hegel (1975), Gadamer (2013) is referring to all the arts, i.e. fine, literary and performance, and does not assesses the arts on a sliding scale according to the lesser or greater degree they make use of spatial and material dimensions (Bungay, 1984, p. 97). Rather, for Gadamer (2013), as it stands art forever already conceptual.

Gadamer (2013) argues that art represents the world in that it brings the nature of worldly things into form [*ins Gebilde*] and arranges, even enhances their being. Of greater significance here is the fact that Gadamer emphasises that art is *for* the world (pp. 99). In saying that art is *for* the world, Gadamer is directing one's attention to the fact that art not only gives voice to reality, but also speaks out on reality's behalf. For instance, Gadamer states that "reality is defined as what is untransformed, and art as the raising up of this reality into its truth" (p. 102). In the aesthetic experience of art, it is the truth of art that communicates with us, even when a person is interpreting art it is interpreting us. Contrary to Hegel (1975), Gadamer (2013) does not establish a criteria or sliding scale in his consideration of art. Yet, does this imply that all that passes for art is to be considered as 'raising up reality into its truth'? Surely not all art raises the nature of things and brings it into some manner of cognizable arrangement. On this line of enquiry Gadamer's project falls short (Hirsch, 1967), but as noted above, Gadamer (2013) does not set out to produce criteria for the evaluation of art. Rather, Gadamer moves towards retrieving art from its radical dismissal by Kant (1998) as non-cognitive, and to clarify its position as epistemic.

Kant restricts his vision of the province of knowledge to the natural sciences, hence, from this Kantian perspective, art is to be equated with the unreal and, therefore, positioned outside the realm of knowledge. For instance, Gadamer (2013) states when summarising the Kantian position that "where art rules the laws of beauty are in force and the boundaries of reality are transcended" (p. 74). For instance, Gadamer (2013) argues against the position proposed by Friedrich Schiller (1965) who moved that his readers ought to educate themselves aesthetically with the view to becoming citizens of an 'ideal realm' in which aesthetic perfection governs as opposed to the real world that carries such ambiguity. In making his case against the view proposed by Schiller (1965), Gadamer (2013) takes his led from Aristotle, Gestalt psychology and phenomenology to demonstrate that aesthetic perception is not as 'pure' as Schiller (1965) had considered. Rather, he shows that aesthetic perception is an 'understanding' which includes at all stages personal, interpretative reasonings.

Gadamer (2013) integrates his findings with a reappropriation of the classical aesthetic concept of mimesis (Warnke, 1987). According to Gadamer (2013), mimesis is not merely imitation. Gadamer does not take his led from the Platonic notion of mimesis, but from the Aristotelian tradition which "assumes the more cognitively oriented meaning of 'representation' which in turn evokes the response of 'recognition'" (Carr, 1996, p. 37). One should caution, however, in terms of a Platonic blind spot when considering Gadamer's hermeneutics and its account of truth. For example, while the above Aristotelian line is of the utmost importance to Gadamer's account of truth, the Platonic connection between the recollection of truth and the experience of the beautiful must be maintained in an account of truth in Gadamer's hermeneutics as well.

This Aristotelian line in Gadamer's hermeneutics can be observed in three ways when applied to art. Firstly, "art is representative of ideas, not just empirical forms and shapes" (Carr, 1996, p. 37). For instance, Cubism or Expressionism which are highly creative even in artistic circles still contain real ideational content, propose ways of looking at reality, offer "'horizons' with which one may grapple, even fuse" (Carr, 1996). Gadamer (1986b) emphasises that art is a form of language and is therefore only appropriately 'encountered' and apprehended when one takes the time to meaningfully engage and listen to what it has to say.

Secondly, art aims to show that which is hidden concerning the things that it represents; "'concrete' aspects that in coming out of concealment sometimes 'shock' us, but always leave us better informed as to the totality of Being they help constitute" (Carr, 1996, p. 39). The mimetic disclosure of Being calls one to change their conventional mode of thinking, to widen one's all-too-familiar horizon of understanding. For Gadamer (1986b), art always moves towards adding an "additional something" (p. 34) to ones finite perspective – a person is always improved in some capacity for having considering its merits.

And, lastly, the third manner in which this Aristotelian line can be observed is in the fact that "in our responses to the art-work we not only learn new things about the object represented, we learn more about ourselves as well" (Carr, 1996, p. 38). Similar to Plato's doctrine of *anamnesis*, there emerges from the apparently infinite store of *memoranda* a 'recognition' of something that relates to self-understanding. In the artistic portrayal of reality, one recognises something authentic and real about themselves, something of the "truth that we are" (Gadamer, 1976c, p. 16). For Gadamer

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(2013), the anamnestic movement of 'recognition' that art effects is not identical to that of Plato, i.e. "a call from our higher selves to remember our true mode of transcendence", but rather "a call that wells up from within and calls us toward the existential structures of our finitude" (Carr, 1996, p. 38). While the anamnestic movement of 'recognition' that Gadamer speaks of is not exactly as it is for Plato, it is in no way accidental that Gadamer closes *Truth and Method* by bringing his analysis of the work of art back to the fore but now furnishes it with the addition of a discussion of Plato's notion of the beautiful.

Risser (1997) highlights that many commentators, in recognising the general insight that "truth in philosophical hermeneutics pertains to a disclosure, have simply assumed that the experience of truth in philosophical hermeneutics can be accounted for in terms of Heidegger's analysis of truth as *aletheia*" (p. 143). This does not imply that Gadamer's conception does not have affinities with Heidegger's account of truth as *aletheia* or disclosure, i.e. "it marks an uncovering of some aspect of the world and/or our self-understanding otherwise occluded by the familiar or 'forgetfulness" (Carr, 1996, p. 39; Heidegger, 1975). Nevertheless, if one takes a purely Heideggerian line concerning Gadamer's conception of truth they will undermine the Platonic dimension of his account of truth, particularly in terms of the Being of the beautiful as it relates to the explicit thematic of recollective recognition that rests at the heart of Gadamer's understanding of truth as evidenced in his philosophical hermeneutics (Risser, 1997).

Therefore, by 'truth in art' Gadamer (2013) is speaking of the fact that in the artistic act of representation, and in the interpretative act of recognition, "some disregarded aspect of human experience, some long-forgotten piece of self-understanding, has been re-

discovered, separated out from others, illuminated, enshrouded with past memories and future expectations, and finally, brought into artistic expression by being given form, shape, colour and texture in the work of art" (Carr, 1996, p. 39). On this point, the affinities with Heidegger's notion of truth as *aletheia* or disclosure are most explicit in that, as mentioned above, it signifies an uncovering of a certain aspect of the world and/or our self-understandings otherwise prevented by 'forgetfulness'. As Carr highlights, "in the artistic rendering of reality, nothing depicted is left uninterpreted; nothing is presented as 'brute fact'" (pp. 39-40). When speaking of the art of writing, for example, Gadamer (2013) states that "what is fixed in writing has detached itself from the contingency of its origin and made itself free for new relationships […] Normative concepts such as the author's meaning or the original reader's understanding represent in fact only an empty space that is filled from time to time in understanding" (p. 357). The various aspects of the thing are discerned out of the infinite ties of historical relationships that condition it, and are revealed, "in the heightened truth of [their] being" (p. 102).

From this standpoint, it can be said that, artistic representation is an ideational representation of truth in the way that it frees its subject matter or contents from a contingent mode of being. Here, it becomes clear that it is impossible for the truth that art presents to be strictly empirical, however, its lack of verifiability does not imply that it is a lesser truth to that of the empirical sciences. Rather, the truth that art presents is merely truth presented from another point of view, that of representation and interpretation. In this way, then, it is evident that art "does not present its 'truth' in the same way a straightforward proposition does" (Carr, 1996). In the experience of art, as Gadamer (2013) states, "there is present a fullness of meaning which belongs not only

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to this particular […] object, but rather stands for the meaningful whole of life" (p. 63). In other words, both can be said to be 'meaningful', but just not in the same manner. This emerges from the representative nature of art, as "it is inherent to the nature of representation to be indirect in its portrayal of reality, one 'read' art hermeneutically" (Carr, 1996, p. 40). If art is to free the truth it possesses, it needs to be 'recognised' by one who is interested in understanding its message. This is to say that, if the truth which art possess is to be released, art must be interpreted and its message applied in a manner appropriate to the horizon of understanding of the interpreter (Gadamer, 2013).

For Gadamer (2013) the pedagogical role of truth in art is as follows: art presents its objects in such a manner that one learns something about what it represents but, as mentioned above, one also learns something above themselves in this interpretative process. In one's encounter with a work of art, one experiences a widening of their horizon as one engages with the horizon of the work of art; this interaction moves one towards "new and increasingly relevant insights into the object portrayed, and into ourselves in relation to that object" (Carr, 1996, p. 41). It is clear that this hermeneutical dynamic described, which is stimulated by aesthetic representation and recognition, is imbued in Gadamer's 'fusion of horizons' metaphor as applied to art.

This 'fusion' produces a genuine enrichment of understanding not merely of that which is portrayed, but also of oneself and their world as observed in and through the experience of art. The experience of art gives rise to a type of knowledge. The epistemic product of such knowledge is a direct outcome of the internal dynamics of the hermeneutical experience of 'fusion'. This happens at any point in which one encounters art and opens themselves to what the work of art has to say. Such encounters

with truth do not present themselves as relativistic. As demonstrated thus far, Gadamer argues that "the work of art is an *event* which discloses truth" (Nieuwenhove, 2014, p. 111). Hence, art ought not to be principally understood "in terms of feelings or personal experience but rather in terms of what the art work as an *event* is able to disclose" (p. 111). At this point, then, it is important to consider the manner in which Gadamer addresses the charge of relativism and the important role of 'play' in understanding as an 'event of being'.

5.3.2. Gadamer and The Question of Relativism

According to Rik Van Nieuwenhove (2014), the discussion of art as an event of truth assists in protecting the integrity of the humanities in an intellectual context that has to a large extent surrendered to a positivistic methodology, "by making the point clear that we can meaningfully speak of 'truth' in the liberal and fine arts" (p. 112). However, the limitations of one's ability to make claims to knowledge and truth have been highlighted by postmodernist thinkers, Richard Rorty (1991) and Jacques Derrida (1976), who follow on from Nietzsche's (1968) maxim "there are no facts, but only interpretations" (p. 267), argue that the will-to-interpret permeates all human attempts to render objective statements. For Carr (1996), it is for precisely this reason that hermeneutics has taken two trajectories. One trajectory emerges through the work of thinkers such as Emilio Betti (1990) and Eric Donald Hirsch (1967) where hermeneutics has come to take a reactionary bent by becoming increasingly scientifically focused, and taken its goal to be an arrival at the 'true meaning of the text', i.e. the autonomous, original meaning as intended by the author. A second trajectory reveals itself through Rorty (1991) and Derrida (1976) where hermeneutics has discarded science to give its attention to what Gary Madison (1991) articulates as

"the free play of the text, the endless play of signifiers devoid of decidable meaning" (p. 123) that diminishes interpretation to a "free-ranging 'parody' of objective truth" (Carr, 1996, p. 43).

In taking account of these two trajectories, it is clear that Gadamer's hermeneutical project moves towards finding a middle ground between these two positions. When speaking of truth, for example, Joel Weinsheimer (1985) states that "from Plato to Hegel, truth consists in the complete revelation of the thing, its full presence to an infinite mind […] for Gadamer, by contrast, dialectic takes place not in the wordless realm of the Logos but instead in spoken language, not in the opposition of statement and counterstatement but in the exchanges of conversation and dialogue, in question and answer rather than assertion" (p. 250). From this perspective, it is evident that Gadamer has aligned himself with the scepticism of the deconstructionists in that he condemns foundationalism, scientific objectivity as well as another other metaphysics of presence. Gadamer does so, however, without discarding metaphysics, epistemology and objectivity altogether. Rather, Gadamer moves towards establishing an integrative arrangement through which one can move beyond traditional metaphysics without having to occupy a stance of relativism.

In this way, as Richard Bernstein (1986) notes, for Gadamer there can be "no hermeneutics without the claim to knowledge and truth" (p. 61). On this point, the divergent path upon which Gadamer's work moves becomes clear in that he strives to demonstrate that it is not imperative for one to discard the concepts of knowledge and truth. Rather, he argues that it is indeed possible for one to extract the truth whilst, at

one and the same time, maintaining a robust metaphysical scepticism. On this point, it is important for one to consider how successful Gadamer is in this endeavour.

5.3.2.1. Art, Play and Truth

Gadamer (2013) posits a fundamental question: "is there to be no knowledge in art? Does not the experience of art contain a claim to truth which is certainly different from that of science, but just as certainly is not inferior to it? And is not the task of aesthetics precisely to ground the fact that the experience of art is a mode of knowledge of a unique kind" (p. 97). As his starting point in terms of addressing this question and positing the above conception of understanding, Gadamer (2013) moves toward transcending the subjectification of aesthetics in the attitude of aesthetic consciousness by way of a notion that has occupied a central position in aesthetics: the notion of play (*Speil*) (p. 101). For Gadamer, as Risser (1997) notes, "the concept of play is freed of its subjective meaning [as found in Kant and Schiller] in order to capture the event character of understanding in the experience of art" (p. 140).

In *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, the analogy with play is established for two reasons: [1] as noted above, it demonstrates Gadamer's insight that understanding, i.e. of views voiced in a conversation, a work of art, a text etc., "is not something purely subjective but, rather, in understanding we participate in an *event of disclosure,*" and [2] in this situation understanding assists one in making sense of modern art as well, in that "the art-work tries to break down the barrier between the audience and that work of art of art" [i.e. modern theatre productions in which the audience becomes active participants] (Nieuwenhove, 2014, pp. 112-113). The latter, however, is not of primary concern to this discussion here, but it will be elaborated further in this research. The former is of fundamental significance at this point, and therefore, requires further attention.

Gadamer (2013) discerns a variety of traits of play: [1] play is "dynamic, full of inner movement and tension", and [2] play "is characterised by a non-purposive rationality: when playing, we engage in an activity for its own sake, which has its own set of rules and logic" (Nieuwenhove, 2014, p. 112). The first point here is concerned with the to-and-fro movement that is perpetually unfolds in play. Here, Gadamer (2013) makes the analogy with a child bouncing a ball. This is a rather pointed analogy not only in terms of a piece of art but also with regard to the nature of interpretation as, for Gadamer (2013), interpretation is always dialogical in nature – it is a process in which truth arises in the to-and-fro of question and response (Nieuwenhove, 2014). The second point here, is concerned with the notion that the game ultimately masters the players. Here, Gadamer is implying that "the real subject of the game is not the player but the play itself" (Nieuwenhove, 2014, p. 112). Spectators are called to participate by play, to play along as one is captured by "what is intended in the game, even if it is not something conceptual, useful or purposive" (p. 112). As Carr (1996) outlines "in game playing, we are transported out of ordinary existence and into another reality" (p. 45).

In considering the notion of play in its regular usage, Gadamer (2013) argues that play necessarily involves a "decentering of the player in play for the sake of play's self-presentation" [such that] the player loses him or herself in the play; the player in the game of sport, for example, gives him or herself over to the game, participates in the playing of the game" (Risser, 1997, p. 140). In this way, it can be said that "play contains its own sacred seriousness […] it only fulfils its purpose if the player loses himself in play" (Nieuwenhove, 2014, p. 113). It is imperative that one does not interpret this 'losing' in a literal sense, but in a manner that is attentive to the way in

which "self-understanding always occurs through understanding something other than the self" (Gadamer, 2013, p. 97). One remains present in the loss of self, but that presence is of a difference character – "the character of being outside oneself" (Risser, 1997, p. 140). Gadamer (2013) explains:

> Being outside oneself is the positive possibility of being wholly with something else. This kind of being present [*Dabeisein*] is a self-forgetfulness, and to be a spectator [at the festival] consists in giving oneself in self-forgetfulness to what one is watching. Here, self-forgetfulness is anything but a primitive condition, for it arises from devoting one's full attention to the matter at hand, and this is the spectator's own positive accomplishment (p. 126).

Here, the submission to authority is unavoidable – "in the case of the game to its 'rules', and in art to the rules and limits of its particular form of mimesis" (Carr, 1996, p. 45). In considering both the act of game-playing and art-viewing it becomes clear that both are reliant upon "a recognition of the 'bindingness' of this authority, and a willingness to abide by it" (p. 45). In this way, then, it can be said that a game cannot be played nor art properly understood without such an act of willing submission (Gadamer, 2013). It is evident, however, that there is a tension that exists at the centre of the act of willing submission. The rules of a game, for example, are unable to exercise any kind of intrinsic power that evokes submission. Rather, if the rules of a game are to exist they need players that are willing to adhere to them, and alter them if the need arises. Hence, it can be said that, "in playing a game, players bring that game into existence in the sense that their actions and responses represent its rules", yet, at one and the same time, "games that are represented in the actions and concerns of players are thus subject to change" (Carr, 1996, pp. 45-46).

From this standpoint, it is evident that self-forgetfulness is central to play in that play requires "the undivided attention and commitment for the very reason that we merely participate in an event of play which has primacy over the consciousness of the players" (Nieuwenhove, 2014, p. 113). For example, Gadamer (2013) outlines: "the structure of play absorbs the player into itself, and thus frees him from the burden of taking the initiative […] the real subject of the game […] is not the player but instead the game itself. What holds the player in its spell and draws him into play, and keeps him there is the game itself" (pp. 105-106). The player encounters "the game as a reality that surpasses him" (Nieuwenhove, 2014, p. 113). Therefore, as Risser (1997) explains, it is "the players participation in play that brings play into presentation, yet, it is not the player's subjectivity that is presented, but the game, the play itself" (p. 141). In other words, "the players are not the subjects of play but play itself reaches presentation (*Darstellung*) through the players" (Nieuwenhove, 2014, p. 113). In this context, Risser (1997) outlines that play is best understood as "a circle of play, a back-and-forth self-renewing movement, like the *κίνησις* [kinesis] of a living being" (p. 141).

This model of play is set up to a certain extent in the experience of art as the 'play' of art. For instance, as Risser (1997) states, "undergoing an experience with art means being able to recognise its claim to say something to me, which is accomplished not by being a distanced onlooker, but in a kind of participatory involvement in the manner of play" (p. 141). From this standpoint, it can be said that, the 'spectator' to some extent performs "the meaning of the work as the player performs the play/game" (p. 141). This point is explained with particularly clarity by Risser: "just as play has its being in being-played, so too the work of art has its being, not as an object framed by aesthetic categories, but in the event of re-presentation, as is most evident in the case of theatrical

performance" (p. 141). Here, it becomes clear then that the tension outlined above, also manifests itself in the context of art – particularly in the performance arts (Carr, 1996).

In this sense, the relationship between actors, the play and its script and the relationship between the player, the game and its rules are but two sides of the same coin. However, such tension does not present an impasse. Rather, it is a stimulus in that "no game is played nor drama performed in the same way twice, there is *development*" (Carr, 1996, p. 46). The rules of the game, the structure of dramatic scripts, as Carr states, "are interpreted by the players, by the performers, in light of their own self-understandings; these self-understandings are themselves, of course, always in flux" (p. 46). With each performance new dimensions of the original emerge. It is important to note that the same can be said of the spectator or critic in terms of the rule of interpretation.

Hence, as Carr (1996) explains art, similar to the manner in which a game is played, moves "beyond the limits of original intent […] new dimensions of meaning are added at every turn, new challenges are presented to view oneself and the world differently" (p. 46). On this point, then, the work of art is actually in its being played, and the spectator, if one follows the Greek comprehension of this, "is no mere spectator but is a participant in the performance" (Risser, 1997, pp. 141-142). In this way, it can be argued that, the spectator is in some manner 'educated', that is, "the spectator becomes who one is in the interpretative participation with the work of art" (p.142). Here, as Risser states, "the point is that art *is* in the encounter with it, in the place where it is there (*da*)" (p. 142). When art is most successfully 'there' it communicates in a manner that implies that something more has been said, that more has come to be known. It is

precisely in this understanding of what has been communicated that one participates in an *event of truth*.

As all encounters with art differ the question of truth in this context is open to being interpreted as "the attempt to justify the claim that art gives us a historicised, relativized truth" (Risser, 1997, p. 142). Gadamer is not ignorant of the fact that this comparison between art and game-playing brings with it the charge of relativism. For instance, if all new performances carried with them new meaning, "if every new viewing of an artwork renders free a new aspect of the object portrayed, then all we are left with is a never-ending production of 'meanings', and not *the* meaning of a thing" (Carr, 1996, p. 46). Gadamer strives to prevent one from taking such a position. For instance, Gadamer is primarily concerned with demonstrating that art represents *truth* and elicits a *truth-response* as opposed to an artist's creative genius or a person's subjective interpretation.

When considering the fact that all encounters differ and, therefore, the question of truth in art is open to the charge that art gives one an historicized, relativized truth, at one and same time, it is evident that "it is the same work that presents itself to interpretation" (Risser, 1997, p. 142). Hence, one could argue that the question of truth in art may perhaps be interpreted as an effort to substantiate the claim that art provides one with numerous appearances of the same truth, but merely displayed in a variety of ways. As Risser states "the connection between play and art is in fact meant to take neither position here" (p. 142). This point becomes clear when one comprehends what Gadamer is implying when he speaks of play in the experience of art as achieving "an ideality in its transformation into figurative structure [*Gebilde*]" (p. 142). In this context

then, as its being is not rooted in the consciousness of the player, the 'play' of art is plainly 'pure appearance [*reinen Erscheinung*]' (what is being played).

The concept of 'appearance' can be read in either a Heideggerian or a Hegelian context. For instance, in the epilogue of *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger (2001) states that: "when truth sets itself into the work it appears. Appearance [*Erscheinen*] is, as this being of truth in the work and as work, beauty" (p. 81). Whereas, in the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel (1977) states that: "appearance is the arising and passing away that does not itself arise and pass away, but is 'in itself' [i.e. subsists intrinsically], and constitutes the actuality and the movement of the life of truth" (p. 27). Hence, as Risser (1997) notes, "in this autonomy the 'play' of art is a transformation, that is, something is suddenly and as a whole something else" (p. 142). On this point, Gadamer (2013) is making a clear distinction between transformation and alteration (p. 111). In the case of the latter that which is altered remains the same, whereas, in the context of the former, that which is transformed is utterly changed and different from its original state.

A rather useful yet simple analogy can be drawn here with the child playing dress up. For instance, in the playing of dress up it would be erroneous to consider the disguise as the transformation, rather it is what is presented that ought to be taken as the transformation. Yet, of even greater significance for Gadamer (2013) is that in this autonomy the 'play' of art is a transformation *into structure* (p. 110). In other words, "the play as *κίνησις* [*kinesis*/movement] is ἐνέργεια [*energeia*/actuality] as the actuality of movement, but in its ideality it has the character of an ἔργον [*ergon*/a completed action] as completed work and not only of ἐνέργεια [*energeia*/actuality]" (Risser, 1997,

p. 142). Whilst the actuality of art has become 'figured,' this is to say that, it has taken an organised or a structured shape, one must still refrain from designating said structured shape as a 'thing' (Heidegger, 2011, pp. 15-88).

Risser (1997) is rather discerning of the particularity of the actuality of art in this context, he states that "what takes place in being structured is a leaving behind of the origin, and yet, by virtue of being structured, the work of art is capable of repetition" (p.142). In this way, then, Gadamer (2013) demonstrates that the transformation into structure "means that what now exists, what presents [*darstellt*] itself in the play of art, is that which remains true [*bleibende Wahre*]" (p. 111). The transformation into figurative structure in art is a transformation into the true. For example, Gadamer (2013) states:

> Certainly the play takes place in another, closed world. But inasmuch as it is a structure, it is, so to speak, its own measure and measures itself by nothing outside it. Thus the action of a drama … exists as something that rests absolutely within itself. It no longer permits of any comparison with reality as the secret measure of all verisimilitude [*abbildlichen Ähnlichkeit*]. It is raised above all such comparisons – and hence also above the question whether it is real – because a superior truth speaks from it. (p. 112)

In taking account of this, it is clear that "the world that is 'mirrored' in the play of art is a world pure and simple, not a copy of some intended other reality" (Risser, 1997, p. 143). For instance, Gadamer (2013) explains that in the presentation of play, reality is captured in an image: "what we experience in a work of art and what invites our attention is how true it is, that is, to what extent one knows and recognises something and oneself" (p. 114). On this point, the question of truth in philosophical hermeneutics presents itself with particular clarity. The question of truth in philosophical

hermeneutics is related to the disclosure of the real in the image – "to disclosure through a kind of μίμησις [mimesis] in which there is recognition, but not a recognition as a recollection of an origin" (Risser, 1997, p. 143). Hence, it can be said that the *question* of truth in philosophical hermeneutics is "one of understanding precisely what this means and how it can be maintained for hermeneutic experience as a whole" (p. 143). As noted earlier in this discussion, however, many commentators in recognising this insight, i.e. that truth in philosophical hermeneutics pertains to disclosure, have assumed that the experience of truth in philosophical hermeneutics can be explained exclusively by way of Heidegger's consideration of truth as *aletheia* (see section *5.3.1.2*).

In attempting to move beyond the charge of relativism, i.e. that art gives a historicised, relativized truth, Gadamer outlines his theory of mimesis which has already being presented in section *5.3.1.2*. With his reinterpreted mimesis theory, Gadamer (2013) demonstrates that art is an authentic or real learning experience; "that follows the form of Hegelian dialectic, and backed by a metaphysics of 'play', we can be confident that the new insights we achieve into what art portrays are rightly labelled as 'truth'" (Carr, 1996, p. 47). With the view to further orientating the remainder of this discussion as well as establishing the ground for a discussion of Gadamer's analysis of 'prejudice' and 'tradition', it is useful here to provide a brief account of Gadamer's reinterpreted mimesis theory. In so doing, however, there is a risk of presenting a limited reading of Gadamer's mimesis theory, one that neglects the fullness of his presentation. Nevertheless, it serves the purpose of this discussion to proceed with the following summary of Gadamer's position:

    a)   Similar to game-playing, art exercises a 'normative authority' over the spectator

b) and in this way, art makes a 'binding' claim on the spectator.

c) This claim is a 'truth-claim' from which a new perspective of the world and oneself can be garnered.

d) Hence, hermeneutical aesthetics is, first and foremost, about understanding the truth-claims of art,

e) And is potentially life-changing.

f) Yet, this only follows when there is a willing submission to those truth-claims, after which one arrives at an understanding of what said truth-claims mean for oneself, integrating this understanding in a manner that is personally appropriate.

This summary raises significantly more questions than it does answers. For instance, if the meaning of art is dictated by, as Gadamer suggests, the understanding of the viewer, is it even possible for one to arrive at any definitive meaning? Furthermore, if taking that the knowledge in art necessitates both a recognition of as well as a willing submission to art's 'normative authority', how does one prevent merely imitating that which the artist says? More pointedly, how can one be certain that what the artist is saying is correct? Or, is it appropriate to take up the positon that all artistic mimesis is equally truthful, and, therefore relative? If this is not the case, how is one to discern whether it is true mimesis or false mimesis? Gadamer addresses the questions outlined above by way of a three-fold response that provides a more explicit definition of what he implies by 'truth in art' which is of the utmost importance to the task at hand.

Firstly, Gadamer indicates that understanding art is principally "a matter of recognising that it is making a claim to *know* something about the nature of human life and the

world in which we live" (Carr, 1996, pp. 47-48). In this context, any form of art gives voice to this claim to knowledge. This remains true too with the context of extreme forms of abstract art. When speaking of such abstract art forms, such as the Cubism of the early twentieth century, Gadamer (1986b) argues that while such art forms have led to the "total elimination of any reference to an external object" (p. 8), this does not imply that one's ability to learn something about reality from such abstract art forms is negated. Rather, abstract art forms such as Cubism necessitate that "we must make an active contribution of our own … to make an effort to synthesize" (p. 8). Hence, all art forms express this claim to knowledge. Until one willingly submits oneself to this fact, i.e. the fact of its *claim* to be epistemic, it remains impossible for one to be open to encountering that claim, and therefore, also impossible for one to understand the 'truth' the artwork moves towards mediating.

Secondly, it is impossible for one to understand art if it is not relevant to their life. For instance, Gadamer (1986b) notes that up to the eighteenth century art represented the assimilation of the human community, political society and the Church. With the onset of historicism, however, this assimilation broke down. Gadamer explains that previously artists were associated with one dimension of the aforementioned threefold community. Hence, representation legitimatised itself by way of serving as a unifying force. In our contemporary context, however, especially as a consequence of pluralism and the disintegration of more cohesive modes of community, the artist is responsible for establishing a community for themselves "as is appropriate to [their] pluralistic situation" (Gadamer, 1986b, p. 7). It is solely within this personalised context that art becomes pertinent as a community-creating mechanism.

Therefore, it follows, that just as one is unable to comprehend a text that has been scribed in a language they do not know, neither can one comprehend art unless it communicates via one's own language. Art's truth-claim "must always be understood from the horizon of my own personal concerns, experiences, convictions, etc." (Carr, 1996). Hence, the meaning of art is particular to each individual. The variances in the production of play, however, are not expendable in terms of its meaning. The significance of such variances in the production of play are reliant upon each spectator's, reader's, director's or composer's understanding of the play's 'truth'. Hence, Gadamer (2013) deduces:

> Interpretation is probably in a certain sense a re-creation. This re-creation, however, does not follow a preceding creative act; it rather follows the figure of the created work that each person has to bring to representation in accordance with the meaning he finds in it. (p. 107)

Thirdly, one can conclude from the two points raised above that the truth-claims posited by art are *not* universal. For Gadamer, the concept of a claim "contains the idea that it is not itself a fixed demand" (p. 112). The content that the work of art imposes upon a spectator or audience can only be understood within the particular circumstance that the work is encountered. Or, to use the language of Hirsch (1967), the work of art has no 'determinate meaning'.

A claim, as Gadamer suggests, merely designates the terrain that allows art to fulfil its pedagogical function. Carr (1996) explains this point with particular clarity: "a truth-claim issued by an art-work merely provides the occasion for my understanding it, and is not directly responsible for its content" (p. 49). In this way then, it can be said that, the truth-*content* of art is dictated by one "participating understandingly in the art-

work's horizon; by what 'happens at the level of the 'fusion of horizons'" (Carr, 1996, p. 49). Therefore, truth-content is reliant upon the rate of openness that one brings to the work, one's degree of perceptiveness, the volume of previous experiences that permits one to share in its language, and the rest. Briefly stated, "fusion occurs in the mediation of an object's meaning with the horizon of one's own experiences" (p. 49).

From this standpoint, it is evident that understanding is achieved by way of this fusion. The mode of knowledge accessible via art, therefore, and by extension in all the humanities, is forever encountered by way of this fusion. As outlined by Carr (1996), "aesthetic truth, the truth found in art, is always mediated, always subjectively apprehended and interpreted, always defined and appropriated relative to human finitude" (p. 49). Clearly, this still positions one within the confines of relativism, and within boundaries of the subjectivity that Gadamer was so critical of in Kant (1998). On this point one must ask if Gadamer merely identifies the truth in an aesthetic object with what the spectator happens to find in it? Is it appropriate for one to view their personal interpretation as being utterly frivolous? If this is not the case, what then are the most appropriate criteria of judgement?

Such questions have been considered by modern hermeneuticians. Theorists such as Arthur Danto (1968) and Harold Bloom (1973) exhibit a significantly greater degree of pessimism than Gadamer when addressing them. Danto (1968) claims that any mode of interpretative understanding necessarily involves "an inexpungable subjective factor" as well as an "element of sheer arbitrariness" (p. 142). Bloom (1973) exhibits an even greater pessimism arguing that all interpretation is *misrepresentation* and therefore "utterly subjective" (p. 95). In taking account of this discussion it could be

argued that Gadamer's recourse to a re-worked theory of mimesis is insufficient. It could be claimed that upon more stringent analysis one discovers that Gadamer's re-worked theory of mimesis purports a significant contradiction. For instance, if one is to consider mimesis as an *education* into what art communicates in the form of truth-claims, in what way then can it also be a *participation*, as one observed in the above comparison with game-playing, for the spectating subject? Or as Carr (1996) articulates, "how can one both submit to art's 'normative authority', and at the same time have the freedom, as have the players of a game with respect to its rules, to interpret in a *personal* way what art presents?" (p. 50) In terms of one's interpretative stance, is it not proper to assume a particular critical distance, a specific detachment from authoritative norms?

According to Carr (1996), "Gadamer has left us in the uncomfortable predicament of choosing between a passive authoritarianism on the one hand, or a completely subjective relativism on the other" (p. 50). Moreover, if one were to bring the two together, i.e. if the truth that art gives is simply a truth-for-us to which one yet submits as authoritative, what is to prevent art from being misused for selfish and dangerous purposes? The answer to this question is that one must acknowledge that such degeneration is possible, and Carr even suggests that "if one were to draw this conclusion from Gadamer's theory of mimesis, it would not be unrepresentative" (p. 50). This mode of interpretation, however, is most certainly out of kilter with the manner of interpretation that Gadamer himself imagined. For example, in his autobiographical *Philosophical Investigations*, Gadamer (1985) emphasises that his theory is working with purely academic purpose, and he conveys a hope that some of his critics would apprehend his theory in this manner. In spite of this, the central

question is unwavering: does a hermeneutical aesthetics possess the power to discern between historical situatedness and *distortion*?

This central question becomes even more entangled in dispute the further one ventures through Gadamer's key themes. Yet, at this point of the discussion it is clear that thus far one can deduce that truth generally speaking, for Gadamer, and particularly aesthetic truth, "is situational, projectional, interpretative and [so it follows] subject-dependent; that it exists always in complex form as a 'fusion' of very varied horizons" (Carr, 1996, p. 51). Furthermore, as a result of it being subject-dependant, and therefore, inseparably connected to contextual frames of time and place, it is changeable. On this point, the key question arises: in taking account the above summation, is it possible for one to ever arrive at reliable indicators for clearing the ground in terms of that which is true for the individual and that which is true *for all* – or at the minimum *most*? In response to this question, Gadamer argues that the *quaestio juris* is best addressed by way of a rehabilitation of the concepts of 'prejudice' and 'tradition' (Hinman, 1980). This position is the source of much anti-Gadamerian criticism (Larmore, 1986).

5.3.2.2. Prejudice and Tradition

The term 'prejudice' has been apprehended, in the majority of contexts since the Enlightenment, in a pejorative sense. As a result of the success of the Cartesian model of radical doubt since the Enlightenment, prejudice has come to be understood as a type of "distorting bias that tends toward easy, unverified judgments, and must be extricated in order to make room for certain knowledge" (Carr, 1996, p. 51). Gadamer (2013) argues that such a view is unfounded and he refers to this scepticism surrounding 'prejudice' as the "prejudice against prejudice" (p. 240).

For instance, if one considers the etymology of the Latin term, *praejudicium*, which is sustained in both in German and English, it becomes clear that *praejudicium* is to the larger extent value-neutral; "that it embodies cognitive-reflective processes that may or may not be skewed to disadvantage" (Carr, 1996, p. 51). In fact, Gadamer (2013) explains that the term 'prejudice' "means a judgement that is given before all the elements that determine a situation have been finally examined" (p. 225). For example, the judgement associated with prejudice, as Gadamer notes, is the same as any other in that no judgement genuinely rests on the *totality* of proof and a *finality* of analysis. On this point, a useful reflection presents itself by way of the ancient Roman courts. In the ancient Roman courts, prior to the instigating the litigational process, the judge rendered a *praejudicata opinio* which provided a starting-point in the dialogue for the proceedings which would ultimately lead to either a conviction or acquittal. The *praejudicum* was always open to being overturned. The *onus probandi*, however, lay with the opposing party. Following this reflective trajectory, the term prejudice "is a trial judgement or hypothesis, made perhaps without much deliberation, but still essential fodder for all future deliberations" (Carr, 1996, p. 52). Gadamer (2013) is at pains to establish that, be it either positively or negatively, all one's knowing activity is tarnished by prejudice.

Gadamer (2013) contends that there is a significant ontological relationship between human existence and its encircling world, i.e. the 'temporal-regionality of *Dasein*' (Heidegger, 1962). It follows that such situatedness encompasses one's self-understanding in a manner that is particular to the individual. In this way, self-understanding is established by [1] one's specific time and place in history, and [2] the language one speaks and thinks in. Established in this manner, self-understanding is

forever growing by way of continuous assimilation of one's experiences of 'other' types of self-understanding in and through one's everyday participation in the world that surrounds them. It is precisely this self-understanding so conceived that Gadamer claims to be the substance of one's prejudices. It is impossible to rid oneself of their prejudices. In this way, then, consciousness is not a blank slate that one can merely wipe clean at will. Rather, consciousness is forever filled already with active sources of meaning that "project themselves *qua* 'pre-judgments' onto our perceptions of the thing" (Carr, 1996, p. 52) when one attempts to comprehend something. Hence, Gadamer emphasises that one is unable to move beyond this situation for it is an intrinsic reality of being human.

Here, it is important for one to observe the manner in which Gadamer connects his examination of 'prejudice' to his case for the epistemic value of 'tradition' [*Überlieferung*]. Gadamer (2013) argues that one is not only surrounded by traditions, but is also sub-consciously entrenched in them, and it is by way of these traditions that prejudices invade one's self understanding. In the form of one's pre-judgments, "traditions influence our thinking and interpretations whether or not we will them to" (Carr, 1996, p. 53). On this point, it is useful to consider the manner in which one approaches literary works, for example, that of Shakespeare. For instance, it is impossible for one to approach Shakespeare in a tradition-less vacuum as one's apprehension of his work is always already contingent on the way in which he has been apprehended over the previous four centuries. If one wanted to deconstruct the Shakespearean cannon, therefore, such deconstruction would only be possible within the interpretative framework already established by tradition as normative for Shakespearean studies.

While one may desire to transcend their own traditions with the view towards giving Shakespeare a Hindu spin or a pan-African gloss, "these non-Western horizons would then only be merging with the rule of orthodox interpretations we have long since learned" (Carr, 1996, p. 53). For Gadamer (2013), one cannot extinguish, but merely extend, the "effect" wielded by one's own tradition upon them (p. 268). He speaks of such effects of tradition as the principle of "effective-history" [*Wirjungsgeschichte*], or the real work of history on the process of understanding itself (p. 268). For Gadamer, it is precisely this point that historical objectivism overlooks, i.e. the inescapable impact of effective-history for the interpreter, however, as he states "the power of effective-history does not depend on its being recognised" (p. 268). It must be acknowledged that heretofore one is not yet any closer to reaching a solution to the problem of Gadamer and relativism. For instance, is it not possible for the same tradition to be interpreted by numerous people in varying ways? If this is the case, how does one make a judgement between them? Whilst not giving explicit consideration to these questions, Gadamer indirectly moves towards widening his explanatory hypothesis by way of three practical principles – anticipation, application and conversation.

5.3.2.2.1. Anticipation

Anticipation [*Vorgriff*] is a remnant "from Gadamer's appropriation of Gestalt psychology as he brings it to bear on the exegetical dynamic of the so-called 'hermeneutical circle'" (Carr, 1996, p. 543). The principal of anticipation moves that prejudices can be adjudicated with regard to their propriety only *in* the process of interpretation itself, as opposed to *before* they are utilised in the act of interpretation which would implythe erroneous view that such prejudices can be totally discarded. This argument follows on from Gadamer's use of the Aristotelian doctrine of *phronesis*,

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"that understanding is best when it takes place in the practical, experiential working out of questions and their solutions" (p. 54). In the context of this hermeneutical consideration, Gadamer relates it to the part-whole method of exegesis that is most commonly attributed to the hermeneutical theories of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1977) and Wilhelm Dilthey (2010a), i.e. the hermeneutical circle.

In utilising the hermeneutical circle, the interpreter starts by way of making the assumption that the text has something meaningful to communicate. If one refrains from making this initial assumption, one will be without what Michael Polanyi (1958) refers to as the essential "obligation toward the truth", the readiness to "submit to reality" that directs interpretation toward new encounters (p. 63). Following from this, as Gadamer (2013) notes, by projecting understanding onto the text, one 'anticipates' the meaning of the text "as a whole" *before* arriving at the whole subject (pp. 262-264). Yet, this anticipation is not held a static fashion, rather, it is subject to perpetual revision as more parts of the whole present themselves. Hence, the *telos*, of course, is to uncover some manner of coherence in terms of the integration of the various parts. When this integration is accomplished, the circle is closed and it can be claimed that the whole is to be understood in terms of itself, i.e. "without remainder, *and* without antecedent prejudices" (Carr, 1996, p. 54). By way of this method, therefore, one may not *start* in an unprejudiced state but at the very least ought to *end* there.

From this discussion, it is clear that the understanding of the hermeneutical circle is founded upon both the idea that one must 'anticipate' or 'project' meaning in order to comprehend a thing, and upon the assertion that said initial projection can be amended as one's understanding deepens. Gadamer (2013) insists that the thing to be

comprehended forms a unity, an internally coherent whole, and by way of this regulative model of unity, this 'prejudice toward completion' [*Vorurteil der Volkommenheit*], one can evaluate the sufficiency of their interpretations of its various parts. On this point, Paul de Man (1971) notes that the methodological commitment to a text's unity has been subject to criticism by deconstructionist thinkers that direct one's attention to tensions and contradictions which all texts seem to possess, i.e. the gap between intention and meaning, content and rhetoric, and the like. Nevertheless, as Carr (1996) outlines, it is this prejudice toward internal consistency that proffers the measure for maintaining, amending or discarding interpretative pre-judgments about the thing. From this standpoint, hermeneutic as well as aesthetic efforts are therefore to be directed towards discovering interpretations that not only "make sense out of the individual parts", but "integrate them into a coherent whole" (p. 55). It must be acknowledged, however, that this scheme does carry problems.

Take for example if one starts with an anticipation of the whole, and perceives the comprehension of its parts from the perspective of said anticipation, it is unclear as to how such parts, so apprehended, could ever lead one to revise their understanding of the whole. Or for instance, vice versa, if one anticipates a meaning of the whole on the grounds of an interpretation of the manner in which isolated parts cohere, how can the comprehension of the whole, so anticipated, move one to alter their understanding of the parts? On this point, it becomes clear that the hermeneutical circle presents itself as being merely that – a self-enclosed circle – and not therefore as an avenue by way of which one can achieve critical distance. Gadamer (2013) was all too aware of said *lapsus*: "here the question arises… how is one supposed to find this way out of the boundaries of his own fore-meanings?" (pp. 84-85). This question moves Gadamer to

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seek out and articulate a more practical way to determine the validity of prejudice and tradition – the principle of 'application'.

For Gadamer (2013), the starting point of the principle of application [*Anwendung*] (pp. 29, 274, 281, 294-303) takes the form of a question: how is hermeneutics to be safeguarded from being merely an apology for tradition? In response to this question, Gadamer unsurprisingly turns yet again to Aristotle. In his general consideration of ethics, Aristotle (1993) understands ethical knowledge as the capacity to employ theoretical principles to real-life circumstances. In this sense, then, Gadamer seeks to discover a contemporary instance of such *phronetic* reasoning, and he does by way of legal hermeneutics.

Gadamer (2013) claims that not only does the interpretation of laws constitute a notable issue in hermeneutics, but that such interpretation operates from the same manner of circumstance-based reasoning as Aristotle had advocated for in terms of concrete decision-making. Further, he argues that it also proffers an authentic paradigm for the way in which "ideas from past (legal) traditions can be applied judiciously to present situations" (Carr, 1996, p. 56). In this way, then, it can be said that legal counsellors are, in many respects, hermeneuts in that to appropriately carry out their profession, a legal counsellor must immerse themselves into the significance of historical laws and legal texts, when the view towards developing effective arguments for present cases. As Carr notes, "it is the intent of their investigative-interpretative work to find legitimate, fitting forms of legal precedent, i.e. to apply past judgements to present questions" (p. 56).

In addition, Gadamer (2013) suggests that such applicative understanding produces a *development* of the legal tradition as it requires one to see the legal tradition "at every moment, in every particular situation, in a new and different way" (p. 275; pp. 290-305). For instance, consider a legal decision made in 1918. This may have carried little weight when it was promulgated, but now it takes on new significance as a result of new particulars culminating around an identical or similar problem: "its significance as a judgement *then* becomes more when it is applied *now*" (Carr, 1996, p. 56). From this standpoint, it is evident that 'application' is an integral aspect in development, and, therefore, in the widening of the range of present horizons of understanding. 'Application' represents the more active dimension in the 'fusions of horizons'. It is only by way of their application that interpretations come to be judged as being appropriate or inappropriate relative to the particular circumstance at hand.

For Gadamer, this principle holds true for aesthetic understanding. The truth contained in and mediated by a work of art must be such that it is able to be applied to one's concrete circumstance, that is, if it is to be comprehended at all. This is to say that, if aesthetic truth is to 'happen', it ought to be a truth that is coherent for and to the understanding subject. As Carr (1996) states, aesthetic truth "must be concretised for it to have any reality; just as for legal interpretation it is the concrete situation that determines the normative interpretation of general legislative principles" (pp. 56-57). On this point, the epistemological flip-side of Gadamer's argument presents itself.

The epistemological flip-side takes its lead from a tradition laid down by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, and given systematic expression by Heidegger (1962): namely, "that the fullness of self-understanding is never achieved *a piori* through conceptual abstraction,

but is something that is only realised through engagement with concrete life-experiences and the interpretative struggle to understand them" (Carr, 1996, p. 57). This point is articulated by Gadamer (1976a): "the self that we are does not possess itself, one could say that it 'happens'" (p. 55). In this way, then, similar to the manner in which self-understanding acquires its reality through concretion, the truth of art similarly acquires its truth by way of concrete application.

Application does not occur in empty spaces. Rather, if it is to move forward in any real sense there must be a level of self-interest enmeshed. Therefore, Gadamer's analysis of self-understanding demonstrates that it "always already has in place a variety of pre-understandings of what is to be applied, certain 'first principles' that govern the orientational mode of every application" (Carr, 1996, p. 57). These principles are transmitted by tradition, and one approaches the thing to be apprehended with said principles in mind in spite of them being recognised or not. From this standpoint, it is evident that tradition, operating through self-understanding, acts as a 'guiding image' directing all modes of interpretative understanding. For instance, Gadamer (1976a) states "in the last analysis, *all* understanding is self-understanding" (p. 55).

Still, one must acknowledge that tradition is not a dictatorial voice enforcing its heuristic frameworks from some non-temporal, omnipotent origin. Rather, for Gadamer, "tradition is a human effect, conditioned by history, and as such is always open toward the future" (Carr, 1996, p. 57). Whilst it is impossible for one to alter past traditions and their power as starting points in the perpetual dialogue of human comprehension, as understanding *is* such a dialogue, one is forever reflecting back into the tradition their present interpretation and therefore, modifying it, often times beyond

recognition. In this way, then, while proffering an essential interpretative framework for any attempt at understanding, "tradition is itself transformed in accordance with the concrete circumstances of the interpretation-event itself" (p. 58). Georgia Warnke (1987) provides a rather clear and concise explanation of this point:

> The text handed down to us is a fusion of previous opinions about it, a harmony of voices, as Gadamer often puts it, to which we add our own. But this means that the object of hermeneutic understanding is already a fusion of the interpretations of a tradition and our encounter with it is an encounter with the tradition… [in such a way that] the views of a tradition are not simply adopted but modified in accordance with changed historical circumstances (pp. 90-92).

This leaves one, however, in a rather peculiar state of uncertainty in Gadamer's treatment of tradition. For instance, in one way, one is indebted to tradition for all one's interpretations, regardless of how non-traditional that they may be; and in another way, current situations possess the power to change the traditional structures of interpretation with the view to meeting changing measures of evaluation (Carr, 1996). For instance, one might ask if Gadamer has in fact left one pendulous between a conservative traditionalism and the potential for an indiscriminate opportunism? However, such a view is hardly adequate in terms of an appropriate understanding of Gadamer's treatment of tradition. This point finds much support when one considers the fact that Gadamer is not only conscious of the above criticism, but actually attempts to move towards resolving this tension by way of his third hermeneutical principle – "conversation" (Gadamer, 2013, pp. 163, 165, 330, 344, 487).

5.3.2.2.2. Conversation

'Conversation'[*Gespräch*], according to Gadamer, "is of the essence of all authentic human understanding" (Carr, 1996, p. 58). Any conversation, however, that strives to be both authentic and genuine is only possible if each participant or conversant refrains from failing to listen to that which 'the other' has to convey by way of arrogantly explicating, in great detail, one's own views. Therefore, authentic conversation or true conversation finds its starting point in a confession of loyalty to the Socratic *docta ignorantia*: "we are to acknowledge our finitude; to admit that we do not know everything; that other, more expansive horizons have much to teach us" (p. 59). When one operates from this perspective, one nurtures an 'openness' to seeking the truth in what 'the other' is conveying.

It is important to note that 'the other' does not have to be a person. The hermeneutical event of truth occurs any time one wants to apprehend something. For Gadamer (2013), this understanding is forever already *conversational*. For example, if one reads a text, views a painting or listens to music; if one looks poignantly into the sunrise, or into their partner's eyes; if one laughs or sings or sheds tears in the face of death, one is in each circumstance participating in a 'conversation' with 'the other'. And, as a good conversant, one assumes that 'the other' has something meaningful to convey; that if one 'listens' carefully, they will hear 'the other' speak to them of things they can designate as 'true'. In this context, then, it can be said that "conversation is a hermeneutical act of self-improvement" (Carr, 1996, p. 59). For instance, when one is entangled or 'caught up' in a conversation, similarly to the way one gets 'caught up' in game playing, one emerges at the end being *more*. In this way, it is evident that

conversation is an act of wanting to move beyond one's limited horizons with the view to enfolding them around wider horizons.

For Gadamer (2013), arriving at some manner of 'agreement' [*Übereinstimmung*] with that which is communicated by the 'other' is the ultimate goal of any conversation. If one manages to accomplish this goal, according to Gadamer, then one will have moved beyond their own limited horizon and ascertained a 'new view' of the subject. In this way, then, it can be said that, even if one is unable to find anything upon which they can agree with the other and the 'conversation' has deteriorated into a debate, it still holds true that one will have achieved something by way of their conversation with the other: for one will have re-formulated the parameters of their own horizons by defining them *over against* 'the other', and thereby will have widened the scope of one's self-interpretative vocabularies. The model for this principle of conversation is a Socratic-Hegelian dialectic; and, as has been outlined above, the 'fusion of horizons' is the metaphor that is utilised in giving an account of the way in which it works. Further, as Carr (1996) outlines, "the 'integration' that results from such a fusion determines that the content of the subject-matter, regardless of whether an agreement is reached between the two 'conversation partners', is always some way taken up by the one trying to understand it, always makes its way into consciousness and transforms it" (pp. 59-60).

The question still remains, however, as to whether it is possible for one to choose between any of these competing views, and whether it is possible for one to make a value judgement regarding the validity of one perspective over another? In spite of this, the above metaphor is useful in terms of comprehending Gadamer's main point: that a

reasoned description of any particular dimension of a tradition necessitates a certain amount of appropriation and integration into an individual's own understanding of the subject matter in question. It is impossible for one to understand that which they do not converse with, and it is also impossible to enter into authentic conversation if one refrains from taking seriously the possibility that 'the other' might merely be speaking the truth. In this way, then, it can be argued that it is only by way of such a disposition that one is able to identify strands of agreement and disagreement, and then utilise them to entwine into their own horizons of understanding more universal perspectives.

In sum, the point being made by Gadamer is to a certain extent Hegelian in that apprehending 'the other' necessitates that one takes seriously that which the other is communicating, that one contemplates it in the context of their own comprehension, with a view toward both its valid, appropriate insights and its erroneous positions in relation to the subject matter in question. Hence, for Gadamer, in the resulting fusion, "the truth of one's own position and that of the object are both preserved in a new stage of the tradition; and at the same time, they are cancelled as independently-existing opinions that may or may not have been valid in their own right" (Carr, 1996, p. 60). This methodology is referenced by Gadamer (2013) with what he refers to as the 'priority of the question'. He outlines that a question situates given subject-matter within a specific context, perspective or horizon. And, that it is precisely by way of the critical and dialogical movement of the to-and-fro process of question and answer that new insights arise. Hence, it can be said that, it from within the whole dialectical process of interrogation that truths 'emerge' (p. 331).

Yet, it must be highlighted that questions still arise concerning Gadamer's treatment of tradition. For instance, is what he is proposing not merely a softer version of the traditionalism that he is at pains to evade? Do the majority of conversations not commonly result in one person's perspective taking over? Take for example the Platonic dialogues: Socrates normally emerged victorious did he not? Therefore, if one is to avert this apparently unavoidable predicament, and taking that a fusion of horizons is the accomplishment of some manner of consensus of views, would one not merely be unwillingly compelled in each instance into an *acquiescence* as opposed to an authentic or real *synthesis* of opinions?

While such questions clearly direct one's gaze to real abysses in Gadamer's hermeneutical project, it would be erroneous to take up the view that his work, *as a whole*, permits such questions to be raised without qualification. It is clear that Gadamer strives to proffer a hermeneutical philosophy that safeguards the movement of particular traditional concepts into modern schemes of understanding – that the Greco-Roman classics are greater than modern writings, i.e. that in terms of moral education the human sciences are of greater significance than the natural sciences, it is also evident in his writings that one must be critically selective.

Gadamer (2013) states that "every encounter with tradition … involves the experience of the tension between the text and the present" (p. 273). Yet, as Carr (1996) outlines, "the latter pole of this tension seems often to miss mention" (p. 61). For instance, as Warnke (1987) notes, Gadamer considers tradition in similar terms to that of his treatment of good art. The authority that one assumes to be normative in terms of tradition or good art is enchanting. It 'enchants' one before any manner of attempt can

be issued to evaluate its claim (Warnke, 1987, pp. 105-106). On this point, it is important to reiterate that Gadamer's hermeneutical investigation concerning the conditions of understanding, in a general sense, *do not* support such a powerful traditionalism. For instance, while one is forever in agreement with the tradition in terms of the fact that one is inextricably a part of it, and hence, to a lesser or greater extent directed by the tradition, it is a necessary requirement of each hermeneutical encounter that there be a reversal of orientation, i.e. that by way of one's engagement with the tradition they also alter it as one moves towards an agreement, *conversationally,* upon the truth of the subject matter with which both are concerned.

One does not only evaluate, then, particular traditional values against other values that one has received from the same traditions, but occasionally wholly changes those values with acumens acquired from one's own, "post-traditional–and changed–historico-linguistic circumstances" (Carr, 1996, p. 62). From this standpoint, it is evident that, Gadamer (2013) is consistent in his appeal that it is not necessary for one to agree with their inherited traditions substantively all of the time, but rather in a way that one recognises that opinions of said traditions are inseparable from our own whether one agrees with them or not.

In addressing the charge of relativism a central question arises: is there a relativism required in terms of anti-objectivism or interpretive pluralism that is incapable of determining correct from incorrect or fitting from unfitting interpretations? In this context, one would be forgiven if they considered everything to be up for grabs if the object of understanding is perceived to be unstable, and therefore, unable to "serve as a standard for validity in interpretation" (Weberman, 2000, p. 62). Following from this

line of inquiry numerous commentators, such as Charles Larmore (1986), E. D. Hirsch (1967) and Jürgen Habermas (1981) argue that Gadamer, whether he concedes this point or not, finds himself firmly in a relativist position. Larmore (1986) speaks of the "historical relativism that Gadamer in fact embraces" (p. 148), and argues that, "for Gadamer the only alternative to objectivism, or the pursuit of objectivity is relativism" (p. 154). They are incorrect, however, as Gadamer (2013) demonstrates a clear desire to make a distinction between legitimate from illegitimate prejudgements and interpretations, i.e. fitting from unfitting, from incorrect and correct, and therefore, avoiding relativism as well as "an untenable hermeneutic nihilism" (pp. 95, 267, 295, 298, 353). He makes such a view explicitly clear: "but what takes the place [of objectivity] is not a vapid relativism. It is not at all random or arbitrary what we ourselves are and what we are able to hear form the past" (Gadamer, 1976a, p. 42).

Is it possible for Gadamer to make such determinations or does interpretative pluralism necessarily preclude the obtainability of conditions for validity in interpretation? It is significant to highlight that a possible way forward is offered by David Weberman (2000) in his defence of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Anti-relativist critics, such as those noted thus far, assume that pluralism necessitates relativism (Weberman, 2000). However, such assumptions are erroneous and as Weberman states "their reasoning on this point is fallacious" (p. 62). Some of Gadamer's defenders argue that there is a viable middle ground between objectivism and relativism, but fall short in terms of making clear the character of the conditions for validity obtainable to such a middle ground. In this regard, it will be demonstrated below that the viability of such a middle ground is established by the limitations proffered by "the fixed intrinsic and shifting, though not arbitrary, relational properties of the object at issue" (Weberman,

2000, p. 62). Before considering this issue in greater detail, it is necessary to address what Weberman refers to as 'fallacious' reasoning.

In issuing the charge of fallacious reasoning against the argument that pluralism requires relativism, the following passage from E. D. Hirsch (1967) serves as an exemplar of the argument in question:

> If a meaning can change its identity and in fact does, then we have no norm for judging whether we are encountering the real meaning in a changed form or some spurious meaning that is pretending to be the one we seek. Once it is admitted that a meaning can change its characteristics, then there is no way of finding the true Cinderella among all the contenders. There is no dependable glass slipper we can use as a test, since the old slipper will no longer fit the new Cinderella. (p. 46)

Hirsch (1967) is correct in making the case for the fact that when one recognises that something changes its traits, then it is not possible to discover *the* Cinderella, i.e. "the one true and unchanging Cinderella". Why ought one assume, however, that there is an *unchanging* Cinderella in the first place? Maybe Cinderella is subject to change, but this hardly implies, as Hirsch argues, that one no longer possesses a way by which to judge whether they have in fact found Cinderella. The point being made here is that the conclusion itself is dubious. For instance, Weberman (2000) highlights that the error of this argument is evident when one observes the following inference:

> Premise: X (or the meaning of X) changes, i.e. is not the same at different times, places and when presented from different perspectives.

> Conclusion: There can be no standard or norm for deciding whether a given representation or interpretation of X is correct or not. (p. 63)

If the conclusion suggests that a standard for judging the correctness of the interpretation of X is not possible without designating "the time, place, and circumstances under which X is presented, then the conclusion follows" (Weberman, 2000, p. 63). Yet, when it is possible to designate the time, place and/or conditions in which X presents itself, there does exist a standard for judging the correctness of an interpretation, i.e. "whether the interpretation of X conforms to X presented under the conditions specified" (p. 63). Therefore, the sound and volume of a guitar, for example, varies according to the conditions under which it is being heard. This does not infer, however, that there is no standard or norm for judging its sound or volume at the point at which the conditions are specified.

This harmony in relationship that exists between change and standards for correctness brings one to "the pluralist middle position between objectivism and relativism" (Weberman, 2000, p. 63). For instance, David Couzens Hoy (1982) accounts for this Gadamerian position as contextualist. In contrast to relativism within which the validity of the interpretation made by the happen-stance of an interpreter's preferences, contextualism is the position that:

> Interpretation is dependent upon, or 'relative to' the circumstances in which it occurs – that is, to its context (particular frameworks or sets of interpretive concepts including methods). For contextualism, rational reflection and dispute do not stop with the interpreter's personal preferences. On the contrary, although the choice of the context […] is underdetermined by the evidence, justifying reasons for the appropriateness of that context rather than alternative ones can and should be given. […] Gadamer's version of contextualism thus holds that the interpretative understanding is conditioned by preunderstandings (*Vorverständnisse*) arising out of the situation of the interpreter. (pp. 69)

The conclusion that Hoy (1982) moves towards, whilst correct, fails to offer a sufficient account of what specifically keeps contextualism from being merely a disguise for subjectivistic relativism. For instance, is it merely the case that interpreters simply appeal to the prior existence of a background framework, method or set of preunderstandings? Is there any difference in terms of choice between personal preference and these or those frameworks, methods or sets of preunderstandings? Is it the fact that one has the potential to offer 'justifying reasons' for them? If this were so, would it not be the case that one could simply offer justifying reasons for their own preferences? In either case, it is safe to assume that there must be something to the reasons utilised to justify one's framework or set of preunderstandings – but what, therefore, is the character of such reasons? Without being subject to further scrutiny and argumentation, such circumstances and preunderstandings could present themselves as being somewhat subjective or conventional as an interpreter's casual preferences (Fish, 1980; Weberman, 2000).

It is precisely as a consequence of this point that the idea of relational (and intrinsic) properties is necessary. As Weberman (2000) notes, "the existence of intrinsic properties ensures that those interpretations that get these properties wrong will be incorrect interpretations" (p. 64). While one might not be able to reconstruct said properties in a way that is unadulterated by one's own historicity, it is at least possible for one to move towards approximating such a reconstruction. This insight is outlined explicitly by Weberman, "the fixed intrinsic properties constitute one central source for rational constraints on validity in interpretation" (p. 63). This point explicates, i.e. the fixity of intrinsic properties, the manner in which Gadamer (1997) can hold that "it is equally possible that an interpreter misses the point entirely" (p. 221). Furthermore, it

also explains how Gadamer (2013) can maintain that there is something self-same that underlies multiple interpretations: "to understand a text always means to apply it to ourselves and to know that, even if it must always be understood in different ways, it is still the same text presenting itself to us in these different ways" (p. 398).

The object of understanding, however, is greater than the sum-total of its unchanging intrinsic properties. This point becomes clear when one recognises that akin to secondary properties, relational properties also belong to the object of understanding as well. And, as Weberman (2000) outlines, whilst such secondary properties rely upon the particular conditions under which an object is presented, "they are not at the whim of the interpreter, but inter-subjectively verifiable" (p. 63). For example, the fact that the reckless lending carried out by of Irish banks eventually led to the collapse of the Irish economy is a relational property that is there for all to witness, it is not merely a matter of subjective preference or whim. This holds true too for other relational properties.

Whether such properties, as Weberman (2000) notes, obtain (or are known to obtain) is relative to the interpreter's position, but not simply *up* to the interpreter" (p. 63). Following this line of reasoning, it is evident that, contrary to the position of Hirsch (1967) and other objectivists historicism need not be anarchic. While relational properties make for multiple interpretations, both intrinsic and relational properties limit the possible range of such multiplicity and offer an account for the essentiality of the ideals of a particular impartiality and allegiance to the act of interpretation, hermeneutically apprehended (Weberman, 2000).

Gadamer's anti-objectivistic interpretive pluralism offers a reputable account of the historicity of understanding in so far as one apprehends said account to rest on a thesis that is concerned with the determinedness of the object of understanding. In this novel defence of Gadamer's hermeneutics, offered particularly by Weberman (2000), one finds the category of relation properties of the object of understanding to be essential to explicating the non-fixed character of the object and its various interpretations and assists one in underwriting the conditions that govern the validity and nonarbitrariness of said interpretations.

In taking account of both sections *5.3.2.1* and *5.3.2.2*, it is evident that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is not participating in a metaphysical quest of seeing truth itself as opposed to an image, but rather, in its own *sui generis* and paradoxical manner, it moves towards the inverse of such a notion – it moves towards getting one entangled in the image that entangles one in truth. The mimic field, as reworked by Gadamer, whilst infinite considering its practical performance, "is not a house of mirrors without referent, where endless play deflects and diffuses the brightness of the illuminated" (Risser, 1997, p. 151) or to use the phrase utilised in the previous section, "a never-ending production of meanings, and not *the* meaning of a thing" (Carr, 1996, p. 46). On the contrary, rather to be captured within the mimetic field is for one to be "caught in a play of truth" (Risser, 1997, p. 151). Such a hermeneutical position, it is claimed in this research, presents a viable and indispensable philosophical perspective to any notion of religious education that attempts to adequately engage with the question of the truth in the context of a modern pluralistic democratic society.

In taking account of this discussion, and conceding that Gadamer (2013) does not offer *the* 'perfect' or *'definitive'* treatment of truth, it is argued in this section that his philosophical treatment of the question of truth is rather convincing and expansive in terms of it understanding of the limitations of human reason and the specificity of one's engagement with truth without either slipping into the relativism of post-modernity nor the metaphysics of presence subscribed by those following modernist applications of reason. It is clear that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics offers a viable philosophical basis upon which religious education can begin to consider its hermeneutical task.

5.4. The Hermeneutic Event of Disclosure: The Imaging of Truth

In this section, the original question posed at the beginning of section *5.3.2.1* in terms of knowledge and art is reconsidered with the view to offering a more precise account of the character of truth in the image-play. It is necessary to return to this question, for in this question the ultimate difference not only between Gadamer (2013) and Derrida (1976; 1981; 1998), but also between Gadamer (2013) and Heidegger (1962) presents itself in terms of the question of truth. Although recognising that truth in philosophical hermeneutics pertains to disclosure, thinkers such as Aldridge (2017) assume that the experience of truth in philosophical hermeneutics can be therefore explained merely in terms of Heidegger's consideration of truth as *aletheia*. It will be demonstrated in this section that if one takes up an exclusively Heideggerian line concerning Gadamer's conception of truth, the Platonic dimension of his account of truth is undermined – particularly in terms of the Being of the beautiful as it relates to the explicit thematic of recollective recognition that rests at the heart of Gadamer's understanding of truth. To demonstrate this point, further attention will be given to the hermeneutical event of

disclosure, particularly the imaging of truth. In taking up this novel reading of Gadamer's understanding of truth, this research makes an important contribution to hermeneutical discourse in religious education by breaking away from existent readings of Gadamer's account of the experience of truth in religious education (Aldridge, 2017). At this point, therefore, it important to begin this discussion by given attention to the Platonic dimension of Gadamer's understanding of the experience of truth.

5.4.1. The Happening of Truth

Without beginnings [ἀρχαὶ/*archai*] or ends [τέλος/*telos*] moving beyond the mimetic field, the image-play as a play of truth proposes that "what transpires in language, art, and all the other dimensions of hermeneutic experience is a constant entanglement of *thick* images in which the intelligible is itself entangled" (Risser, 1997, p. 151). In this way, Risser states that "such entanglement is prescribed not only by the character of the image, but also by the character of hermeneutic experience" (p. 151) which always finds its starting point in 'a supporting mutual understanding' (*ein tragendes Einversätndis*). Gadamer (1976a) addresses this point explicitly:

> There is always a world already interpreted, already organised into its basic relations into which experience steps as something new, upsetting what has led our expectations and undergoing reorganisation itself in the upheaval. Misunderstanding and strangeness are not the first factors, so that avoiding misunderstanding can be regarded as the specific task of hermeneutics. Just the reverse is the case. Only the support of the familiar and common understanding makes possible the venture into the alien, and lifting up of something out of the alien, and thus the broadening and enrichment of our own experience of the world. (p. 15)

From this stand point, it is clear that one is, as a result of our common origin, already in the truth. Consequently, one attests to their entanglement with truth when one discovers oneself engrossed in the effort of uncovering the shared ground whereby what is communicated by the word or offered up by the performance speaks in a novel voice. In such attempts at apprehension, it is more so a concern of performance enactment as opposed to the disentanglement of the image play, i.e. to retreat from the image and entanglement. As indicated earlier in this chapter, this manner of performance unfolds within the context of the already understood, and as such, it is characterised by recollection as it consolidates anew the already interpreted.

The instance of recognition, however, in such recollection whilst it is, at one at one and same time, a recognition of the true, it is not merely the fact that something makes sense, i.e. the state of being carried out of the unfamiliar – as the matter of truth amounts to nothing concerning such a claim, and, it fails to sufficiently take account of the critical analysis that is integral to the movement between the unfamiliar and familiar. Furthermore, one must heed caution in terms of reinscribing an even more complex idea of *adequatio* into the movement between the familiar and unfamiliar. For instance, a correspondence requires an alignment to a point of reference, "a correlation from which the measure of the thing is taken" (Risser, 1997, p. 152). This description of truth here too falls short in terms of its ability to sufficiently account for the dynamic of the image which is forever encircled to the play of figuration within hermeneutic encounter.

Although operating with particular circumscription, it is possible for one to go further in terms of discerning the character of the imaging of truth by turning to a metaphor that is fitting to thick images, specifically, depth. The 'circumscription' or 'reservation'

in this context pertains to the manner in which the metaphor of depth is open to construal in terms of a reintroduction of origin and the notion of a rehabilitation from oblivion or nothingness. For example, Caputo (1987) argues that the hermeneutics of Gadamer (2013) is merely a hermeneutics of recovery of a *deep* truth (Caputo, 1987, p. 111). This metaphor of *depth,* i.e. that "a thick image is one with great depth: but in its depth it can be dense in the sense of abundant or muddy or obtuse" (Risser, 1997, p. 152), opens up a path by which one can proffer two descriptions of the happening of truth in hermeneutic experience.

Firstly, in the event of truth "there is something *fitting*" (Risser, 1997, p. 152). This concept of *fitting* describes with particular authenticity the character of disclosure that one encounters in practical life. For instance, practical reasoning, is set against *episteme* and is typified by that as a knowing that is 'indeterminate' in the way that the rule-governed activity continues to be dictated by the circumstance. This, amongst other reasons, prompted Aristotle (1993) to suggests that in terms of determining moral virtue it is not difficult to miss the mark, but difficult to hit it. This point is further developed by Gadamer (1986a): "practical philosophy by itself can give us no assurance that we know how to 'hit' what is right. Such knowledge remains the end of practice itself and the virtue of practical reasonableness, which is precisely not mere inventiveness" (p. 166).

From this standpoint, hitting the mark can be understood as discovering the appropriate measure, or in other words, to find the measure that best *fits* the circumstance. Risser (1997) notes that "in the fit is the interpretation, and it is this notion that is carried over into hermeneutic experience" (p. 153). For instance, one can speak of a fitting response,

in the play of language which is structured by logical movement of question and answer. One not only offers statements, but tosses out statements as part of the process of dialogical conversation with the view to discovering the most fitting response as some statements lead nowhere. Therefore, it can be said that, fitting is concerned with a particular disentanglement, "a separating out in which something comes together – a moment of coherence not of wholeness, where the interpretation is now one with the λόγος (*logos*/reason), but a moment that forms a whole in coming together as it does" (p. 153). In such thickness of words, that carried with it an infinity of meaning, the right word emerges, the word heard by the inner ear, is fitting and can be designated as 'true'. Hence, fitting refers to the action of a text, or a dialogical partner, upon the hearer.

5.4.2. The Idea of Error

Here, the potential arises for one to consider a concept of falsifiability in hermeneutic experience. For example, any instant where the *Sache* pierces a conversation to present itself as other to its initial self-presentation results in an interpretation becoming false. The term *Sache* is challenging to translate, but it refers, generally speaking, to a work's subject matter, to what the work addresses or to the issue that is being contested. The *Sache* must not be apprehended as "that which is self-same within the multiplicity of interpretation" (Risser, 1997, p. 153). This point is explained by Risser with particular clarity: "philosophical hermeneutics is not subscribing to a metaphysics of a plurality of essence, that is, the self-same showing itself in many ways as one could read in cursory fashion, for example, Gadamer's notion of tradition" (p. 153). In sum, the *Sache* is the singular piece of information: this text, this work, this spoken word. Thus, in the context of the mimetic field of the image play, it is significant for one to understand that here 'recognition' is the recognition of that which is given in its presentation.

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This does not infer, however, that recognition is simply a case of observing something which one has observed previously. On the contrary, in recognition one cognizes "something *as* something that we have already seen in our entangled condition" (Risser, 1997, p. 153). Gadamer (1986b) argues that the enigma of knowing rests exclusively in this '*as'* that, in the process of recognition, enables one to see things "in terms of what is permanent and essential in them" (p. 99). Such seeing is "unencumbered by the contingent circumstances in which they were seen before and are seen again" (p. 99). Gadamer refrains from elaborating on the relationship between recognition and the '*as'* in this context. It can be assumed, however, that if Gadamer were to further develop this aspect in this context, he would perhaps reiterate the as-structure presented by Heidegger (1962), whilst simultaneously breaking down the distinctions made by Heidegger in *Being and Time*. This position finds much support when one considers that, for Gadamer, the main thrust appears to be that recognition, which is the knowing best fitting to the universality of interpretation, operates in a manner akin to the as-structure in that it establishes the interpretation whereby something is clearly apprehended.

And, yet, at one and the same time, this points to the second description of the moment of truth in that the thick image proposes that truth is played out within the range of empty and full. This idea of the continuum of empty and full can be equated to Gadamer's concept of empty and fulfilled time. For example, in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, Gadamer (1986b) addresses these two elementary modes of experiencing time with the view towards giving an account of the type of recurrence that belongs to the festival and the work of art. In this sense, empty time is time which is at one's disposal i.e. I have time for 'x'. Time that is empty must be spent, it needs

to be filled. Thus, in 'bustle and boredom' one fills their time. In contrast to empty time, time can also be experienced as fulfilled or autonomous, such is the case of the festival as it fulfils every aspect of its duration. For instance, Gadamer (1986b) states that "this fulfilment does not come about because some has empty time to fill. On the contrary, the time only becomes festive with the arrival of the festival" (p. 42).

From this standpoint, one can recall that the mimetic field is such that in the image play something is given in opulent affluence. The work of art does not merely signify something as that which it signifies is actually there, its fruitful nature can therefore be described as an 'increase in being'. This determination of truth in the work of art seems to be directed as this overflow. As Risser (1997) notes, "it has to do with the possibility of saying more as the landscape in a picture becomes more by being picturesque" (p. 154). Likewise, in relation to the marrow of living speech, one is 'full up' but always has the ability to say more. For instance, when one says that which they intend, one is at once holding together that which is said "with the affinity of what is not said in one unified meaning" (Gadamer, 2013, p. 154). This insight correlates with Ratzinger's (1984) pointed question with regard to religious truth that was discussed in section *4.2.5.* "must not the answers concerning the ultimate questions by their very nature leave room for the unexpressed and the inexpressible?" (p. 354).

If one is to observe more precisely that which is being inferred above, it is helpful to recall the concept of falsifiability that is operating in one's interpretative efforts, i.e. error corresponds with the empty, this is to say, when the interpretation leads to nothing. For instance, Gadamer (2013) states, "indeed, what characterises the arbitrariness of inappropriate fore-meanings if not that they come to nothing in being worked out?" (p.

267). In the context of the work of art, "the empty is the imitation in its common signification, i.e. imitative art seizes to live. Such art is of the worst kind, it is artificial and pretentious. In 'Philosophy and Poetry', Gadamer utilises this concept of the empty to give an account of an aspect that is common to both poetical and philosophical forms of speech. For Gadamer, both cannot be false. Here, Gadamer is implying that "the measure-taking for the truth of each of these discourses cannot be obtained by an appeal to an external standard that would verify or falsify the discourses" (Risser, 1997, p. 154). Such discourses are far from capricious. Rather, they represent a *sui generis* manner of risk as they can fail to live up to themselves, which occurs when their words present themselves as being empty. Gadamer (1986b) explains this point clearly:

> In the case of poetry this occurs when, instead of sounding right, it merely sounds like other poetry or like the rhetoric of everyday life. In the case of philosophy, this occurs when philosophical language gets caught up in purely formal argumentation or degenerates into empty sophistry. In both cases these inferior forms of language – the poem that is not a poem because it does not have its 'own' tone, and the empty formulae of a thinking that does to touch on the matter of thought – the word breaks. (p. 139)

Still, that which constitutes being full – the happening or instant of truth – is not determined by a quantitative mark. Rather, it happens in any moment that the *Sache* communicates again in a new voice.

It is evident that both the happening of truth and the idea of error are connected to the question of whether or not something occurred, "to the performance that occurs when one is drawn into the experience with the work or when one responds to the voice of the other in dialogical encounter" (Risser, 1997, p. 155). On this point, it is important to note the link that Gadamer makes between hermeneutic truth and the tradition of

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rhetoric. This link is also established by Gianni Vattimo (1988). He supports this position by citing Gadamer (1976b) in his treatment of the Frankfurt School of criticism of hermeneutics (pp. 18-43). The section from which Vattimo (1988) cites offers basically the same insight that is made in the consideration of rhetoric in *Truth and Method*, namely, that the tradition of rhetoric is a proponent for a claim for truth that defends the probable.

There are significant difficulties, however, with the interpretation of this manner of truth offered by Vattimo (1988). For instance, he typifies the shared language that serves as the content of rhetorical cajolery as a 'collective consciousness' and proposes that the instant of recognition is the acceptance of said collective consciousness (Risser, 1997). From this standpoint, it can be said, that Vattimo (1988) in his reading appears to overlook Gadamer's own statements that he issued in response to this Habermasian critique. Hence, as Risser (1997) outlines, an interpretation such as that suggested by Vattimo (1988) opens up hermeneutics to the charge of being a defence for that which already exists.

From this standpoint, it could be argued that in terms of hermeneutic experience one returns to a deeper conception of truth as *veritas*, i.e. the idea of truth as real, and *verificare*, i.e. the idea of affirming and attesting. In *Radical Hermeneutics*, Caputo (1987) argues that "Gadamer is interested in *verum*, *aletheia*, what is true here and now and ready for consumption (application), not *a-letheia*, the event of concealment and unconcealment" (p. 115). Here, Caputo has erred twice in that for one, there is no truth prior to the application, and two, the verum is not that which is to be verified i.e. consumed (Risser, 1997). Take for example, in the presentation of art, Gadamer

proposes that "the presentation intends to be so true that what we do not advert to the fact that it is not real […] art is true whenever it shows itself to be 'real', a 'veritable' image" (Risser, 1997, p. 155). In participating in an encounter with art, it can be said that, one 'verifies' it, but this is not an issue of merely confirmation. Rather, it is to testify to the 'real', "of bearing witness to what is by being drawn into the image-play of making the matter itself real through the practical performance of play" (p. 155).

In response to the question of the significance of truth in poetic language, Gadamer (1986b) speaks of this conception of truth, he states that poetic saying "says so completely what it is that we do not need to add anything beyond what is said in order to accept it in its reality as language" (p. 110). In this way, it can be said that reality as such is at one and the same time a 'recitation of the truth'. Risser (1997) explains this point clearly, he states that "the word of the poet is autonomous in the sense that it is self-fulfilling, bearing witness to itself, and thus does not admit […] of anything that could verify it in the ordinary sense (a kind of confirmation by external authority)" (p. 155). The poem is not assessed against the world that exist outside it, rather within the poem itself a world is constructed. In this way, Gadamer (1986b) suggests that while this is true for poetic language it also holds true for all speaking, but poetic language "stands out as the highest fulfilment of the revealing which is the achievement of all speech" (p. 112).

Gadamer (2013) highlights that in the case of the living language of the early Greeks, there is a double sense to truth. For instance, in relation to speech, *aletheia* (truth) "is openness where being open means to say what one means" (Risser, 1997, p. 155). When one is *telling* the truth one states what one means. However, this point is enhanced by

a further sense of truth in which "'*something says*' what it 'means': whatever shows itself to what it is, is true" (Gadamer, 1986b, p. 108). When one speaks of 'real gold', therefore, one implies that it is gold, that it is true gold as the Greeks say *aletheia*/truth (Gadamer, 2013). It is interesting to highlight that both Gadamer (2013) and Heidegger (2013) utilise the same example i.e. gold. Unlike Gadamer, Heidegger (2013) uses this example as a point of departure in his consideration of the question of truth: "what is true about genuine gold […] cannot be demonstrated merely by its actuality" (p. 119).

In such an account of truth, *aletheia* is comparable to its Latin translation; the true is *veritas*, not in its medieval definition as a type of *adequatio*, but frankly as the actual nature of the thing (Risser, 1997). It is precisely on this point that the key difference between Gadamer and Heidegger becomes most evident. For Gadamer (2013), it is inaccurate for one to consider this to be merely an issue of thinking the withdrawal that delimits the area of the open, or to presume that it is enough to suggest that, for hermeneutics experience, truth is openness for it happens when words issue forth and demonstrate things as they are. Rather, it is an issue of the "thematic of speaking itself that holds the question of truth within it in an unthematized manner" (Risser, 1997, p. 156). This point was appreciated by the early Greeks. For instance, without taking any regard for the structuring of the true, for what concerns *aletheia* per se, one encounters Nestor in the *Iliad* having heard the thunder of running horses asking, whether he is incorrect "or speaking the true" (Homer, 1960, X, 534).

Here, Nestor is asking if he is in fact speaks a true thing, if the issue is true or real. The Gadamerian hermeneut duplicates this action, as Risser (1997) notes, "one stands in the truth, verifies it, only when one finds the right word, only when one says what one

means […] one stands in the truth, bears witness to it, only when the thing, the art work, says what it means" (p. 156). In this context, one also bears witness to their own being for the image play entangles one in its entanglement. Decisively, for Gadamer (1986b) the truth of poetry, and one should note that this too concerns all speech that 'verifies' through its power of realisation, resides in establishing a 'hold upon nearness' (p. 115).

The imaging of truth for Gadamer is not concerned with the manner in which things come to reveal themselves as they do, nor is it about "the conditions for the rupturing in the folds of being" (Risser, 1997, p. 156) as Heidegger takes up in his philosophical project. Rather, for Gadamer, the imaging of truth is concerned with the art of saying, it pertains to that which Cicero believed to be the task of the orator: *consule veritatem*, consider the etymology. *Veritatem* in this context is a translation of *etymon* i.e. real (Lewis, 1907). Hence, the duty of the orator is to address the 'real' being, and, that, for philosophical hermeneutics, is all that is possible for anyone to do.

Following from this discussion, it can be said that recollective recognition is the best understood as the event of perpetual reacquisition. Plato affirms such a view in his doctrine of recollection. Gadamer (2013) outlines that "in his theory of *anamnesis* Plato combined the mythical idea of remembrance [*Wiedererinnerung*] with his dialectic, which sought the truth of being in the *logoi*, that is, in the ideality of language. In fact, this kind of idealism of being is already suggested in the phenomenon of recognition" (p. 114). In this way, Platonic recollection is best understood as a gathering-together – "for a human being must understand a general conception formed by collecting into a unity by means of reason the many perceptions of the senses" (Plato, 1977, 239b-c) which refurbishes the vision of true being (Risser, 1997). In this way, for Plato, such a

process of reacquisition is the path by which mortals participate in immortality. This necessary human endeavour of keeping in memory is a concept that will forever be in close proximity to the work of philosophical hermeneutics.

The recollection of truth with regard to poetic saying is considered "the highest fulfilment of the revealing which is achievement of all speech" (Risser, 1997, p. 156) and this, for Gadamer, is 'living in poetry': the "rediscovery of the abundance which *memoria* is able to grant to human life" (Nicholson, 1992, p. 91). Hence, one must recognise that in *memoria* ought to be understood as the preserving [*Bewahren*] of all that one is, but in this instance preserving does not imply clinging on to what already is. Rather, preservation is the genuine way in which the true can be for humans, "this means nothing less than the taking care for, paying heed to that which is in being said" (Risser, 1997, p. 157).

5.5. Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics emphasises that hermeneutical reasoning is operative in all forms of human understanding, including the natural sciences. Hermeneutical reasoning operates in a circuitous manner moving back and forth as a mode of conversation between interpreter and interpretand with each participant in the dialogue probing deeper into the into the subject matter. In this hermeneutical processes, persons experience a 'fusion' of their current horizon with that of the object(s) of encounter in such a manner that a greater, more discerning horizon emerges.

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It has been shown that tradition is inseparable from all human understanding as it is characterised by prejudice or presuppositions. A person is not only surrounded by traditions, but is also sub-consciously entrenched in them, and it is by way of these traditions that prejudices invade one's self understanding. Such prejudice cannot be eradicated by any method, nor is any authentic encounter with truth tied to a particular method. Rather, hermeneutical reasoning which is operative in all modes of human understanding suggests that in the circuitous process of back and forth between interpreter and interpretand truth *happens*. This chapter has argued that, while a person is forever in agreement with the tradition in terms of the fact that they are inextricably a part of it, and hence, to a lesser or greater extent directed by the tradition, it is a necessary requirement of each hermeneutical encounter that there be a reversal of orientation, i.e. that by way of a person's engagement with the tradition they also alter it as one moves towards an agreement, *conversationally,* upon the truth of the subject matter with which both are concerned. It is in this fusion of horizons that a person's understanding is broadened and perpetually brings persons to deeper penetrations into self- and world-knowledge.

By way of the fusion, a person acquires novel descriptive vocabularies with which s/he can ask more insightful questions of 'the other' and engage more meaningfully in an ever more deeply understood conversation. This chapter argued, therefore, that the radical particularity or situatedness of human understanding implies that one's narrative cannot claim supremacy, i.e. become *the* narrative. In giving significant attention to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, this chapter has argued that a possible middle way between the absolutising of one's own truth claims and the snare of relativism can be discerned.

When attending to the question of truth in a plural context a person need not necessarily take up a relativistic position in terms of truth. This chapter has argued that truth is characterised by its particularity and that it is always experienced in a radically dialogical and contingent manner by way of encounters with the other. Relativism is counteracted by way of an acceptance of this particularity. Particularly, therefore, serves as the antidote to relativistic understandings of truth as it ultimately constitutes the emergence of the other or otherness and difference.

In attending to his philosophical project, this chapter offers a novel interpretation of Gadamer's account of the experience of truth which is characterised by a recognition and acceptance of the Platonic overtones evident in Gadamer's account of the imaging of truth. In embracing this Platonic dimension, this chapter does not follow Aldridge (2017), who interprets Gadamer's account of the happening of truth in an exclusively Heideggerian accent, i.e. truth as *aletheia*. In Chapter Six, the philosophical insights raised in this discussion will be brought into conversation with the rich theological insights raised in Chapter Four with the view to arriving at an account of the hermeneutical task of religious education that is both theologically *and* philosophically viable in the context of the Republic of Ireland.

Chapter Six

The Hermeneutical Task of RE: Conclusions and Key Principles

6.1. Introduction

This thesis has set out to respond to the research question: is truth at the centre of religious education and, if so, how is it to be encountered in religious education in the Republic of Ireland today? In Chapter Six, the manner in which this thesis has responded to this research question is summarised and brought to a conclusion. Following from a synopsis of the research journey, the key contributions of this research are presented: [1] bringing the theological and philosophical insights of Chapters Four and Five into conversation with one another, i.e. Gadamer with Catholic theology, and [2] the offer of an account of the hermeneutical task of religious education in the Republic of Ireland that is grounded in the theological and philosophical insights of Chapters Four and Five. From here key principles are identified which may assist in the future developments of religious education in the Republic of Ireland. Having identified these key principles, suggestions for further research are presented in the light of this research, and, finally, an overall conclusion to the thesis is offered.

6.2. A Brief Synopsis of the Response to the Research Question

As outlined in Chapter One, the central concern of this thesis was to consider the capacity of religious education as conceived of in the Republic of Ireland to meaningfully address questions of truth and ultimate meaning in an era best described as being both post-Christian and post-Secular. This thesis asked:

> Is truth at the centre of religious education and, if so, how is it encountered in
> religious education in the Republic of Ireland today?

In responding to this research question, Chapter Two considered the question: in what way does the question of truth present itself in the context of religious education in the Republic of Ireland today? It was demonstrated that religious education in the Republic of Ireland has struggled in relation to the question of truth. Chapter Two argued that there has been an erosion of objective truth, a complex concept, in religious education and that religious education has been forced into polemical positions in its relation to truth, i.e. those who accept the existence of objective truth and those who deny its existence. In taking account of this insight, Chapter Two claimed that there is an urgent need to attempt to identify the hermeneutical task of religious education in a way that speaks to both religious and non-religious educational environments in the Republic of Ireland. Ultimately, Chapter Two argued that religious education is best understood as being a hermeneutic activity.

In taking account of this insight, Chapter Three addressed the notion of religious education as a hermeneutic activity in greater detail and asked: what hermeneutics are at play and how do we deal with the restrictive hermeneutics that are often present in religious education today? It argued that hermeneutics presents a constitutive turn in religious education. In recognising hermeneutics as such a turn the ground was laid for a critique of the hermeneutics of modern religious education. It was argued that religious education today often fails to adequately address the question of truth as a consequence of the restrictive hermeneutic that is evident at its centre.

Whilst recognising that a variety of approaches to religious education have been offered in response to this restrictive hermeneutic, the proposals of a critical realist approach to

religious education were considered. In particular, it was argued that this approach also falls short, particularly in terms of its caricature of religions as mere true or false propositions. It was posited that contemporary Catholic theology – particularly in terms of its treatment of truth, tradition, and the possibility of a God-beyond-being – has something to offer in terms of grappling with the question of truth in religious education.

Given the context of religious education in the Republic of Ireland, Chapter Four asked what Catholic theology contributes to discourse surrounding encounters with truth, tradition and a God-beyond-being? Chapter Four demonstrated that contemporary Catholic theology presents a meaningful treatment of truth. From this analysis, it was shown that truth, particularly in relation to religion, is only ever encountered in particular historical events and specific cultural forms and interpretations of experience. Following from this point, the centrality of tradition was discussed from the perspective of contemporary Catholic theology. By addressing tradition in this way, it was illustrated that truth is always tradition specific, and that tradition should be considered as living as opposed to something that is unchanging or static. Tradition, it was argued, is subject to change as a result of contemporary encounters with revealed truth. Chapter Four posited that the Christian narrative it is best understood as an open, as opposed to closed, narrative – one that not only fosters an openness to encountering truth or the Other, but to the change that ensues as a result of such encounters.

From this standpoint, Chapter Four argued that one must refrain from a domestication of God – where God is reduced to the limited existence of finite being as well as to the limitations of the linguistic and cognitive capacities of the person. It was then argued

that there is much to be garnered from an exploration of post-Heideggerian de-ontological theology which has much to offer in terms of its treatment of God and truth. In particular, Jean-Luc Marion's reclamation of an apophatic approach, albeit from a postmodern phenomenological perspective, challenges one to transcend the limitations of modern or enlightenment rationality and to embrace a God without being. Chapter Four showed that the fragile hermeneutical encounter between the person and the wholly Other is best understood as an event in which the givenness of God or truth moves towards the person. In addressing these insights, Chapter Four offered the theological foundation upon which an account of the hermeneutical task of religious education can be offered.

Given the emergent hermeneutical context in the Republic of Ireland, Chapter Five asked: what does philosophical hermeneutics contribute to understandings of the encounter with truth? Here Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics were explored, especially his account of the emergence of truth in the experience of art. In particular, Gadamer's reconstruction of the question of hermeneutics and his response to the charge of relativism was addressed. In order to equip the reader for a meaningful engagement with Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, Chapter Five began by firstly offering an account of: [1] hermeneutical circles, and [2] a 'philosophical' hermeneutics. By addressing these two themes the ground was set for a consideration of the question of truth and philosophical hermeneutics. Chapter Five firstly addressed Gadamer's reconstruction of the question of hermeneutics and then considered his response to the charge of relativism. In taking account of these aspects of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, Chapter Five offered the philosophical foundation upon which an account of the hermeneutical task of religious education can be offered.

6.3. Key Contributions of this Research

In this section the key contributions of this research are presented: [1] bringing the theological and philosophical insights of Chapters Four and Five into conversation with one another, i.e. Gadamer with Catholic theology, and [2] the offer of an account of the hermeneutical task of religious education in the Republic of Ireland that is grounded in the theological and philosophical insights of Chapters Four and Five.

6.3.1. Catholic Theology and Gadamer in Conversation: Some Correlating Insights

In this section, the Catholic theological insights raised in Chapter Four are brought into conversation with the philosophical insights of Chapter Five so as to identify key correlating insights.

6.3.1.1. Truth is neither subjective or objective

In Chapter Four the themes of truth, tradition and the possibility of a God-*Beyond-Being* were explored. In this analysis, it was demonstrated that both modernity and secular culture have introduced a narrowing of reason which brings the secular claim of self-sufficiency into dispute. In this context, the need for dialogue between religious and secular reason was noted as being particularly urgent. Chapter Five argued that Gadamer has successfully articulated that enlightenment rationality or secular reason is insufficient in and of itself, i.e. as the exclusive means by which one acquires valid knowledge and truth. Rather, by way of his treatment of the emergence of truth in the experience of art, Gadamer demonstrates that knowledge and truth can be acquired in contexts outside of those of modern rationality or secular reason, and suggests that the encounter with truth offered in the context of art is beyond the capacity of secular rationality. Such knowledge and truth ought to be considered as equally valid as that

offered by secular reason. Truth, in this context, is no longer understood as being either objective or subjective, but instead something that finds itself navigating between these two poles. It is precisely on this point that the importance of dialogue as a shared quest for truth presents itself.

6.3.1.2. Truth is always encountered in an embodied state

In Chapter Four, it was argued that the model of mutual understanding that is advocated for in the documents of Vatican II and subsequent post conciliar theologies have much to offer in terms of conducting such dialogue, particularly with regard to the relationship that exists between faith and reason and the possibility of encountering truth in non-Christian religions. In this context, it was demonstrated that the conduct of such dialogue, i.e. between secular reason and religious reason, must take account of and be informed by the eschatological character of truth. Similar to the Gadamerian conception of truth, the account of truth offered by contemporary theological discourse insists that religious truth cannot be reduced to merely informative details, or basic explanations of the world in which one dwells, nor to a simple theory about existence.

Religious truth must not be understood to be the same as the truth of empiricism, science, or of 'pure' propositions or geometric statements. Rather, religious truth is not available for scientific examination or inspection as it is only encountered by way of the experience of personal participation. Religious truth, therefore, is best understood as relational, dynamic, and above all else, participatory. It is always encountered in an embodied state, within a living faith tradition as well as in the praxis of faith and teachings of a particular religious tradition. On this point, Gadamer's understanding of the person as 'entangled' in truth is significant, particularly in terms of the manner of

participatory knowing that is operative therein and the consequent inescapabilty of prejudice.

6.3.1.3. All human reasoning involves prejudices

Chapter Five demonstrated that, for Gadamer there is no method or process that can be offered for correct understanding: the interpreter "cannot separate in advance the productive prejudices that enable understanding from the prejudices that hinder it and lead to misunderstandings" (Gadamer, 2013, p. 296). Instead, Gadamer states that "this separation must take place in the process of understanding itself" (p. 296). In this way, even the 'method' itself that one utilises can be found wanting through an encounter with the text. It follows, therefore, that such situatedness encompasses one's self-understanding in a manner that is particular to the individual. In this way, self-understanding is established by [1] one's specific time and place in history, and [2] the language one speaks and thinks in. Established in this manner, self-understanding is forever growing by way of continuous assimilation of one's experiences of 'other' types of self-understanding in and through one's everyday participation in the world that surrounds them.

It is precisely this self-understanding so conceived that Gadamer claims to be the substance of one's prejudices. It is impossible to rid oneself of one's prejudices. In this way, then, consciousness is not a blank slate that one can merely wipe clean at will. Rather, consciousness is forever filled already with active sources of meaning that "project themselves *qua* 'pre-judgments' onto our perceptions of the thing" (Carr, 1996, p. 52) when one attempts to understand something. Hence, Gadamer emphasises that one is unable to move beyond this situation for it is an intrinsic reality of being human.

It becomes clear that one is forever in dialogue with he/she/its otherness from the position of one's own particularity in the search for truth. Such contemporary philosophical and theological reflection on the question of truth carries significant implications for the accommodation of religious knowing in religious education.

6.3.1.4. Reason is inseparable from tradition

These philosophical and theological insights suggest that if religious education is to be successful in its facilitation of 'religious knowing', it must be conscious that the hermeneutic which operates at its centre must be one that is capable of not only acknowledging the particular and local embodied reality of religious traditions as well as the local's capacity to assume universal significance, but also recognise the complexities, subtleties and delicate nature of religious truth as encountered in an embodied state in living religious traditions. It is precisely on this point that the importance of tradition comes to the fore.

Gadamer argues that one is not only surrounded by traditions, but is also sub-consciously entrenched in them, and it is by way of these traditions that prejudices invade one's self understanding. In the form of one's pre-judgments, traditions affect a person's thinking and interpretations whether they will them to or not. For Gadamer, one cannot extinguish, but merely extend, the 'effect' wielded by one's own tradition upon them. Gadamer speaks of such effects of tradition as the principle of 'effective-history' [*Wirjungsgeschichte*], or the real work of history on the process of understanding itself.

For Gadamer, it is precisely this point that historical objectivism overlooks, i.e. the inescapable impact of effective-history for the interpreter, however, as he states "the power of effective-history does not depend on its being recognised" (Gadamer, 2013, p. 268).

The problem of Gadamer and the charge of relativism still needed to be resolved. For instance, is it not possible for the same tradition to be interpreted by numerous people in varying ways? If this is the case, how does one make a judgement between them? Whilst not giving explicit consideration to these questions, it was demonstrated in Chapter Five that Gadamer indirectly moves towards widening his explanatory hypothesis by way of three practical principles – anticipation, application and conversation. Critics of Gadamer suggest that he is proposing a relativistic hermeneutic. It has been demonstrated in Chapter Five, however, that a Gadamerian inspired hermeneutics does not lead to a relativist position. This position is further supported by those theological insights raised in Chapter Four in relation to tradition.

6.3.1.5. *A pluralist context does not require a relativistic stance towards truth*
In Chapter Four, Boeve's approach to the question of truth by way of a recontextualised understanding of the Christian tradition as an open narrative is important. Here, it was argued that a neutral approach to the question of truth is impossible, particularly when one meaningfully engages with the processes of detraditionalisation, individualisation and pluralisation which ultimately leads to a recognition of the need for one to enter into dialogue with diversity and difference. Such dialogue is essential if one wishes to avoid lapsing into relativistic inclinations or tendencies of indifference concerning the truth claims of religious traditions or fundamental life options. Any relation to truth

[that is, any that is to be considered viable at least], therefore, must foster an openness to the other, his/her/its otherness and difference.

Such a position is not merely philosophically justified by Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics but is also theologically necessary. The theological necessity of such a position is evident when one observes that the Christian tradition is best understood as a *living* tradition, a tradition that is capable of bearing authentic witness to the Truth, i.e. the God in whom Christians profess to have carried out the historical interruption *par excellence* in the incarnation of Christ. This notion of *interruption* presents itself as especially interesting when one considers the understanding of truth as *event* or *happening* that is advocated by Gadamer – i.e. truth-events *happen* and, in doing so, *interrupt* and *transform* the individual.

In bringing this position into conversation with Gadamer's hermeneutics, it is evident that at the heart of this recontextualised understanding of the Christian tradition as an open narrative, one encounters a definitive appreciation of the inexhaustibly of Truth, i.e. that *our* narrative cannot claim to be *the* narrative as the totality of truth is ultimately incomprehensible to the person and, therefore, unable to be definitively articulated in the accounts offered by a single tradition. This insight is recognised not only by Boeve, but also by Gadamer. As outlined in Chapters Four and Five, this view does not imply that there is no such thing as truth or that one should foster a relativistic position in relation to truth. Rather, such relativistic tendencies can be negated by way of an authentic recognition of the particularity of a narrative or tradition, e.g. the Christian narrative. The recognition of such specificity is a necessary condition for the existence of the other for it is by way of such acknowledgement that one has the capacity to

identify the other, and it is and it is through encounters with the otherness of the other that the limits of a specific narrative present themselves as the boundary of the other.

6.3.1.6. *No single narrative can exhaust the question of truth*

In taking account of these points, it is evident that the question of truth, particularly religious truth, cannot be reduced to the mere falsification and verification various propositions and statements of faith (Wright, 2007; C. Go, 2019). Neither can the question of truth be adequately addressed by way of a hermeneutical approach that is exclusively concerned with textual interpretation (Bowie and Cole, 2018). Rather, this research has argued thus far that the question of truth ceases to be primarily concerned with the 'truth-*content*' of a narrative, but rather with the matter of *living the truth*, of entering into relationship with the truth which no particular narrative can exhaust. In fostering an openness to truth, a person accepts that they can indeed know something of truth, but also embrace at the same time a recognition that *their own* narrative is incapable of offering a comprehensive account of the *entirety* of truth, and therefore, cannot be elevated to the position of *the* narrative.

Of central importance to this point is Gadamer's account of self-understanding and his critique of the hermeneutical circle proposed by Schleiermacher which has exerted significant influence on textual interpretation. In the Schleiermacher inspired hermeneutical circle, which has influenced the approach of contemporary religious educationalists such as Bowie and Cole (2018), one amends their provisional understanding of that which is disclosed in their ongoing analysis as one moves towards an occurrence of empathy with the author – striving to comprehend the text "at first as well as and then even better than its author" (Schleiermacher, 1997, p. 112). This

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formula has contributed significantly to the theory of textual interpretation. Gadamer, however, ascribes to Heidegger (1962) the more significant step or "decisive turning point" (Gadamer, 2013, p. 293) in the move towards providing a philosophical description of what he refers to as the '*event*' of understanding (Gadamer, 2013, p. 208).

In this way, the Heideggerian circle includes both the reader and the text, as opposed to the parts of the text and the whole. Rather than emerging from the disintegration of one's own prior prejudices in favour of the author's intention in writing the work, understanding emerges from "the play or tension between the text and the reader's prior conceptions, or between the text's strangeness to the reader and its familiarity" (Aldridge, 2017, p. 2). Gadamer (2013) outlines that "the true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between" (p. 295), and therefore, understanding necessarily encompasses "sharing in a common meaning" (p. 292). One not only returns to an understanding of truth that cannot be characterised as either a subjective or objective process, but rather as something that is relational, dynamic, and above all else, participatory. Furthermore, this Gadamerian line of enquiry points explicitly to an understanding of dialogue as a shared quest for truth.

Take for example if one starts with an anticipation of the whole, and perceives the comprehension of its parts from the perspective of said anticipation, it is unclear as to how such parts, so apprehended, could ever lead one to revise their understanding of the whole. Or for instance, vice versa, if one anticipates a meaning of the whole on the grounds of an interpretation of the manner in which isolated parts cohere, how can the comprehension of the whole, so anticipated, move one to alter their understanding of the parts? On this point, it becomes clear that the hermeneutical circle presents itself as

being merely that – a self-enclosed circle – and not therefore as an avenue by way of which one can achieve critical distance. Gadamer (2013), however, was all too aware of said *lapsus*: "here the question arises… how is one supposed to find this way out of the boundaries of his own fore-meanings?" (pp. 84-85). This question moves him to seek out and articulate a more practical way to determine the validity of prejudice and tradition. This is the principle of 'application' which represents the more active dimension of the 'fusions of horizons'. It is only by way of their application that interpretations come to be judged as being appropriate or inappropriate relative to the particular circumstance at hand.

6.3.1.7. Truth is encountered by way of truth-events

For Gadamer, this principle holds true for aesthetic understanding. The truth contained in and mediated by a work of art must be such that it is able to be applied to one's concrete circumstance. In other words, if truth is to be comprehended at all, if aesthetic truth is to 'happen', it ought to be a truth that is coherent for and to the understanding subject. Gadamer's analysis of self-understanding demonstrates that it has a range of pre-understandings of what is to be applied always already in place. It has particular 'first principles' that direct the orientational mode of every application. These principles are transmitted by tradition: one approaches the thing to be apprehended with said principles in mind in spite of them being recognised or not. Tradition, operating through self-understanding, acts as a 'guiding image' directing all modes of interpretative understanding. For instance, Gadamer (1976a) states "in the last analysis, *all* understanding is self-understanding" (p. 55), one must acknowledge that tradition is not a dictatorial voice enforcing its heuristic frameworks from some non-temporal, omnipotent origin.

Gadamer (2013) claims that "every encounter with tradition … involves the experience of the tension between the text and the present" (p. 273). Yet, as Carr (1996) outlines, "the latter pole of this tension seems often to miss mention" (p. 61). For instance, as Warnke (1987) notes, Gadamer considers tradition in similar terms to that of his treatment of good art. The authority that one assumes to be normative in terms of tradition or good art is enchanting, it 'enchants' one before any manner of attempt can be issued to evaluate its claim. On this point, it is important to reiterate that Gadamer's hermeneutical investigation concerning the conditions of understanding, in a general sense, *does not* support such a powerful traditionalism. For instance, while one is forever in agreement with the tradition in terms of the fact that one is inextricably a part of it, and hence, to a lesser or greater extent directed by the tradition, it is a necessary requirement of each hermeneutical encounter that there be a reversal of orientation, i.e. that by way of one's engagement with the tradition they also alter it as one moves towards an agreement, *conversationally,* upon the truth of the subject matter with which both are concerned.

In other words, one does not only evaluate particular traditional values against other values that one has received from the same traditions, but occasionally wholly changes those values with understandings acquired from one's own, "post-traditional–and changed–historico-linguistic circumstances" (Carr, 1996, p. 62). It is evident that Gadamer is consistent in his appeal that it is not necessary for one to agree with their inherited traditions substantively all of the time, but rather in a way that one recognises that opinions of said traditions are inseparable from our own regardless of whether one agrees with them or not. It is precisely in this context that the importance of an open

narrative in terms of being orientated towards truth and the transformation that unfolds as a consequence of the *happening* of truth as *event* can be recognised.

In arguing for the centrality of tradition and the need for open narrative, this research considered the insights offered by theologies informed by the western critique of onto-theology. In particular, this research focused primarily on those insights raised in the work of Jean-Luc Marion. It was argued that his post-Heideggerian theology meaningfully attempts to take seriously those insights of post-modernity that move towards assisting one in grappling with God/truth in a post-metaphysical or de-ontological context. In no sense did Chapter Four make the case that Marion's theological project offers *the* definitive answer to the way in which one ought to relate to truth, i.e. truth understood beyond the confines of being. Nor did it propose that such an emphatic acceptance of a de-ontological approach is conclusively advantageous in this context. Rather, it was demonstrated that the significance of Marion's position rests in the fact that his theological project takes seriously the insights of postmodernity, and in his attempt to meaningfully integrate said insights into his theological thinking, his theology opens up the *possibility* of God/truth beyond the confines of being and, that God/truth conceived as such, ultimately requires that one approach God/truth from a radically hermeneutical perspective.

Of particular importance in the analysis of Marion's theological discourse was his understanding of the act of giving as a particular *event.* As demonstrated in Chapter Four, *events* captivate Marion precisely because events *happen* as opposed to objects which merely persist in presence. Truth is something that *happens*, something that the person does not make or create – it is something that one cannot separate themselves

from for the perpetually participates in. In bringing this insight as found in Marion into conversation with Gadamer's understanding of truth as event, it is clear that one can only ever give expression to truth in radically contingent and partial ways, and therefore, is cannot confine truth or God to the confines of finite being. This insight has much to offer religious education, particularly in terms of attempting to grasp the *happening* character of education. In bringing truth, tradition and the possibility of a God-*beyond-being* into conversation with Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, the ground is set for one to attempt to discern and articulate the hermeneutical task of religious education in the Republic of Ireland.

6.3.2. The Hermeneutical Task of RE as the Accommodation of Truth-Events?

In moving the argument towards its conclusion, the richness of the theological and philosophical insights gathered are brought to bear on the contemporary context in which religious education is carried out in the Republic of Ireland. In doing so, this section offers an account of the hermeneutical task of religious education as one that is orientated towards meaningful encounters with truth, i.e. *truth-events*, which ultimately presents religious education as a curricular area in which the *happening* and, therefore *transformative,* character of education is radically manifest.

In taking account of the theological and philosophical insights highlighted in the previous section, it is clear that they have much to offer in terms of discerning a way forward for religious education in the Republic of Ireland, particularly one that is informed by the need to embrace the hermeneutic turn. In being carried out in a post-Christian and post-Secular context in which the processes of detraditionalisation, individualisation and pluralisation of religion are emphatically manifest, religious

education needs to be better equipped to address the question of truth. This point is particularly pertinent if religious education is to be carried out in the public space and, therefore, adequately meet the needs of a modern pluralist democratic society. It has been demonstrated that religious education in the Republic of Ireland has struggled in this regard. In particular, it has been shown that religious education has, as a consequence of the aforementioned processes and the impact of enlightenment or secular rationality, been undermined in terms of its validity as a justified path to human knowledge and truth. The question of truth in religious education in the Republic of Ireland has come to be addressed by two broad approaches that can be accounted for as follows: [a] approaches that operate from the presumption that objective truth exists, and [b] approaches that are sceptical of any claim to objective truth.

In taking account of these theological and philosophical insights, it is clear that such designations are far from adequate. Such perspectives have led to the emergence of a perspective that designates a faith-based approach which operates from within a particular faith-tradition as being value-laden and a non-faith-based approach as a neutral value-less position. It has been demonstrated conclusively in this research that there is no such thing as a neutral position in education nor in terms of the manner in which one to relates to reality or truth. As a result of the human condition, people find themselves entangled in their own particularity, in their own specific circumstance or narrative, which ultimately influences the way in which they relate to the world as well as their account or explanation of the world in which they dwell. A non-faith-based approach therefore presents itself as being equally value-laden as it too operates from within a particular tradition.

Similarly, the case has been made that religious education, generally speaking, has followed the categorisation of insider and outsider approaches. This categorisation is fundamentally challenged by the varying degrees of adherence to a religion evident within society. There is a spectrum of beliefs and commitments evident not only in society, but also within traditions. This diversity is a fundamental component of religiosity and the fragile hermeneutical condition of the person. It appears to be somewhat presumptuous to employ the categories of insider and outsider for both religion and religiosity are not realities that can be adequately captured by way of a monochrome characterisation or depiction. From this standpoint, the trajectory of religious education in the Republic of Ireland, i.e. [a] approaches that operate from the presumption that objective truth exists, and [b] approaches that are sceptical of any claim to objective truth, as a means of addressing questions of truth and ultimate meaning are challenged by an ever evolving context in which the radical plurality of religions and fundamental life options radically confront the person on an everyday basis. From this standpoint, the hermeneutics of modern religious education which operated from a narrow and restrictive hermeneutic in which religious truth is not fully appreciated nor the limitation of human reason entirely recognised have been found wanting.

This research argues that the question of truth, particularly in terms of its limited understanding of religious truth, has been tranquilised and robbed of its ability, in the context we are considering, to confront and *interrupt* the lives of pupils by way of the *happening of truth* that is so central to education, and thereby of its ability to *transform* them and their lives. This research proposes that religious education in the Republic of Ireland ought to embrace the insights of contemporary Catholic theology and

Gadamerian hermeneutics, and in so doing, evoke a constitutive hermeneutical turn in religious education. This position emerges by way of a detailed consideration of contemporary theological discourse on the importance of truth, tradition and a God-beyond-being as well as Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. In so doing, this research argues that the hermeneutical task of religious education is to accommodate the *happening* of truth. Its role is to nurture an openness amongst participants in the learning process to the *interruptive* nature of *truth* which ultimately manifests in *truth-events* that are always historically 'given'. The specificity of tradition in which the *givenness* of the *gift* takes place as *event* is always significant and needs to be taken into account. Truth-events, conceived as such, should be understood as *happenings of truth* in which understanding and, therefore, self-understanding, are *interrupted* and *transformed* by concrete encounters with the Other from an explicit tradition specific position – a particularity that possesses its own correlating language – that is open to her/his/its otherness.

The hermeneutical approach being advocated for in this research, therefore, attempts to move beyond an exclusively textual hermeneutic with its enclosed hermeneutical circle (i.e. Schleiermacher's hermeneutic circle) which is evident in the hermeneutical approach of Bowie and Cole (2018), and towards a hermeneutical disposition similar to that of Aldridge (2017) in which there is an attempt to embrace the *happening* character of education. It must be noted, however, that this research differs from the hermeneutics of religious education offered by Aldridge in two important and distinct ways: [1] this research is inclusive of the insights offered by contemporary Catholic theology to religious education, and [2] this research does not interpret Gadamer's understanding of the experience of truth as disclosure exclusively using the

Heideggerian consideration of truth as *aletheia,* but rather is attentive to the Platonic influence on Gadamer's hermeneutics in this regard.

6.4. Key Principles

In taking this hermeneutical orientation of religious education seriously – i.e. religious education as an accommodator of *truth-events*, *transformative* events, that are rooted in a materiality that is inclusive of a *particular* curriculum with a historically *given* justification but will happen in spite of it, and in the *interruption* of the *happening of truth* confront said justification as well as the participant in the learning process – it is possible to identify some key principles that may assist future development in religious education in the Republic of Ireland. The following principles may also speak to educational contexts outside of the Republic of Ireland:

[1] the question of truth, particularly religious truth, is central to religious education in a pluralistic context

[2] truth, especially religious truth, is neither objective or subjective – it is relational, dynamic and above all participatory,

[3] reason is inseparable from tradition as such relativist positions are to be avoided at all costs in religious education as they undermine the particularity of religious truth and, therefore, the capacity of religious education to meaningfully engage in a truthful treatment of religion, religiosity or any other fundamental life option,

[4] dialogue is best understood as a shared quest for truth, but openness to the otherness of the other necessitates an acceptance that religion has something meaningful to offer and communicate to pupils in the pluralist context of contemporary secular society,

And, finally, [5] there is no process or method that can be offered for correct understanding as the interpreter is unable to separate in advance the generative prejudices that enable understanding from the prejudices that hinder it and lead to misunderstanding.

In taking account of these principles, the validity and indispensability of religious education to the education of young people in the Republic of Ireland is most evident.

6.5. Suggestions for Further Research

In considering the insights raised in this thesis, it is evident that further research needs to be conducted. As outlined in Chapter One regarding the limitations of this research, in no way does this thesis offer an exhaustive treatment of truth nor a definitive account of truth. The questions of truth, therefore, is in need of further consideration by theologians, philosophers and educationalists if the needs of students are to be met today in pluralised and detraditionalised classroom environments. For reasons specified in Chapter One, this research does not offer a thorough analysis of the various approaches or programmes that are currently used in RE in the Republic of Ireland. Following from this, such an analysis would be welcome in the light of the findings of this research. In taking account of the key principles offered in this thesis, it is evident that research is needed in terms of the implications carried by these principles for

educational policy and curricula in the area of religious education in the Republic of Ireland.

6.6. Conclusion

This research is not purposing that the pursuit of religious knowledge and truth through religious or spiritual enquiry is *all* that there is to religious education. Rather, the point being made here is that it cannot be a matter of indifference for religious education which religion(s), if any, young people are introduced to or *how* they are introduced to it; not, that is, if reason and enquiry are to make the same sort of sense in religious education as they undoubtedly should in other areas of education – as reliable routes to meaning, knowledge and truth. In taking seriously the realistic truth claims affirmed by religious traditions, a critical openness is sustained within religious education. This openness is facilitated by shifting the orientation of religious education away from the array of moral challenges encountered by open democratic societies in addressing the existence of a plurality of religious and secular traditions and towards the pursuit of ultimate truth.

This research attempts to embrace a broader horizon for religious education, one that is receptive to the fragile hermeneutical condition of the person. This thesis claims that encounters with truth and ultimate meaning are events that take place in a radically hermeneutical fashion not only in the context of textual engagement, but also in the variety of contexts that are unique to the life of a person. This research offers a novel understanding of religious education as being concerned with questions of truth and ultimate meaning but in a radically hermeneutical manner. It contributes to religious education discourse in the Republic of Ireland by offering an account of the

hermeneutical task of religious education that speaks not only to denominational educational contexts, but to both secular and religious or multi-religious educational environments in the Republic of Ireland.

This research has attempted to offer an understanding of the hermeneutical task of religious education that is both philosophically *and* theologically tenable in the context of the Republic of Ireland. It has argued that religious education in the Republic of Ireland should orientate itself towards the accommodation of *truth-events*, *transformative* events that are rooted in a materiality that is inclusive of a *particular* curriculum with a historically *given* justification but will happen in spite of it, and in the *interruption* of the *happening of truth* confront said justification as well as the participant in the learning process. This novel account of the hermeneutical orientation of religious education has ultimately lead to the introduction of the concept of *truth-events* to contemporary discourse in religious education in the Republic of Ireland.

It was argued that, although Gadamerian accents are evident in discourse about religious education in the Republic of Ireland, particularly in the work of Lane (2013) Hession (2015), and Cullen (2017), there is a need for more meaningful engagement with Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. This research has argued that in giving significant attention to Gadamer's philosophical project a potential middle way between the absolutising of one's own truth claims and the snare of relativism can be discerned. In attending to his philosophical project, this research contributes to discourse in religious education in the Republic of Ireland. It contributes to this discourse not simply by entering into a deeper engagement with Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, but in its novel interpretation of Gadamer's account of the

experience of truth. This research makes a significant contribution to discourse in religious education by taking up a novel interpretation of Gadamer's account of the experience of truth. It is receptive to the Platonic overtones evident in his philosophical hermeneutics as opposed to following other thinkers who interpret this aspect of Gadamer's work in the exclusively Heideggerian consideration of truth as *aletheia*.

In no way is the case being made by this research that account offered of truth is *the* account, or the definitive answer to the question of truth, in religious education. This research in no way exhausts the question of truth, nor truth itself, in the context of religious education or elsewhere. Rather, it attempts to posit a potential way forward for religious education, one that speaks to both religious and secular educational environments, which takes the question of truth seriously in a post-Christian and post-Secular epoch. In sum, this research stakes the claim that any attempt in the area of religious education which moves towards meaningfully engaging with the question of truth in a manner fitting to the contemporary needs of the pluralistic and detraditionalised classroom environment necessitates that one take up a radically hermeneutical orientation and move towards the accommodation of *truth-events* in which the interruption of the happening of truth confronts participants in the learning process.

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