

BETWEEN TOWNS

Religious Life and Leadership during a Time of Critical Change

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore and delineate leadership practices, which could facilitate the transition of Catholic religious institutes into the world of the third millennium, within groups facing the diminishment, and even death, of current forms of religious life.

Hermeneutical phenomenology, particularly as developed by Ricoeur, provided the philosophical base for an analysis of the multiple hermeneutical dimensions of culture, human sciences, spirituality and religion. Elements of postmodernism and feminism were also found to be useful starting points. Qualitative research provided the mechanisms out of which meaningful data was elicited and text and context explored.

An extensive literature review and individual interviews with thirty women and men in leadership positions in religious institutes formed the basis of the research. Initial findings were tested against the insights of a focus group of religious involved and interested in the future of religious life and its leadership. Additionally, the responses of the leaders of religious congregations in NSW at their annual conference provided a valuable sounding board for the research findings.

Core to the study, respondents believed, was a changing concept of God, described in the interviews as 'the larger God', and named as the foundation of contemporary religious commitment. A second fundamental call was pinpointed as that of radical commitment to 'the other'. 'Commitment to, and relationship with, the other' was seen as a critical focus for religious organisations in an increasingly divided and polarised world. For women and men currently in the midst of religious life transition, identity, mission and community were identified as specific orientations from which unfamiliar and emerging forms of 'the larger God' and 'relationship with the other' were examined.

Authenticating leadership was used to describe the form of leadership believed to be necessary during this time of transition to endorse and authenticate the tentative sparks of new life. This leadership was depicted as stimulated by a sense of spiritual dynamism and an outward focus, activating the motivation of the congregation towards 'the larger God' and 'the other'. Energising, empowering and challenging the group were described as intrinsic to these orientations. Demonstrating authenticity, embracing diversity, accepting suffering as the inevitable price of effective contemporary leadership, and 'holding leadership lightly', were also highlighted as essential elements for a leadership aimed at authenticating diverse expressions of new forms of religious life.

Two clear leadership practices were named as essential for effective transition during this period of decisive transformation. Consciously managing the disintegration and death of current expressions of religious life, while simultaneously mobilising the energies of small emergent groups to explore and attempt new and diverse forms, were seen as the most difficult, but probably the most critical, challenges for leadership at this time.

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One of my hesitations throughout the writing of this thesis has derived from my recognition that the outcome can never truly do justice to the wealth of the contributions that have been made. Without the generosity of those who have welcomed me into their lives and thinking, this thesis would not have been brought to conclusion. Finally, my appreciation goes to those family members, friends and colleagues whose encouragement, inspiration, trust and good humour helped to bring the writing to fruition. I am conscious of the personal experience of transformation as I have studied the complexities and the challenges of religious life lived and embedded in the women and men who embody its realities and possibilities in the new world of the twenty-first century.

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being currently submitted for any other degree.

I certify that help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged.

Signature: _____

Jan M Barnett

Date: _____

BETWEEN TOWNS

DAVID MALOUF

On the north-west highway stranded, in open country near Dunedoo:
a shadow by flashlight mends a wheel, the sky turns slowly
west over north. In frosty paddocks, lights, a fettler's camp
or boys at early milking. It might be Sydney or Babylon
we left just after noon, and how far is it to the next
town (I don't mean Coolah) that glows ahead, or the next star
we'll leap to over the ditch of dark? I share the time with hawk-moths
that dance in the headlamps' flare or into the nightjar's maw,
enormous

darkness between towns. At dawn the dormitory suburbs
of Verveteri rising ghostly through the weeds, dark horsemen
gather
charge, and the bronze helm cleaves before a harder metal plunging
deep into unknown empires; Knossos, Mycenae in the fields
below us founder with their weight of gold; at Chichen Itza
worn granite climbs, and a whole city steps off into jungle
silence, thickening light – a legend barely kept alive,
between towns, on the tongues of herdsmen in their cow-dance
preserving
the classic consonants, a broken shard turned in the hand.

The darkness between towns is not deserted. Farmlights signal,
or the sun
catches a roof or glances off a blade, something is held
in trust. In the eyes of goatherds hunkered down beside a lake
in the steady, iron rain of Etruria, a city beckons,
they rub their eyes and blink. The gold-tipped needle-towers
of Florence
(or is it New York?) blaze out, they reach towards them, rush-hour
traffic
halts at the fording-place, the cook-fires of lost armies wink
from suburb to suburb now, dawn pickets shout, their white
breath hanging
still where a milkhorse clops along the narrow lane towards them.

A hunter tracking mammoth in the dark looks up astonished
by the first rocket blasting into space where his spear-arm hurls it
far beyond brain or eye. Under the tongues of cattle, under
the tails of comets now the dead look up from sea-shell middens
and stick-plough paddy-fields to the shuttle service between moons.

A town is a meeting-place: hands at the trestle table passing
down through a family a cup to be drunk from and kept safe
a while out of children's reach; a group of neighbours setting forth
at dawn into unknown country, and where they stop to shoe a horse,
or gnaw hard tack, is where their names shall ring for centuries.
The journey is into time. Grassheads sigh, deer lift their antlers
alert, prepared to scatter, windows shine in stony paddocks
where strange humped cattle breathe. A town is what we are
making for.

Gaze round you. It might be here where two roads cross or
somewhere over
the ridge where empty fields await our coming. No signposts name it
yet or point directions. The next city we shall inhabit
is still in our saddlebags, in the dipper, flashing as we drink.
If not this star, another – there where they shift in millions over
the grass. Already named they wait for us, and we are on
our way, bearing the names their streets will bear. A moment only
in the darkness between towns, while shadows pause and change
a wheel.

PRELUDE

Over a period of seven years, this study has developed from a consideration of religious life 'at the crossroads' to an exploration of religious communities as sojourners 'between towns'. At the crossroads, there was a recognition that religious women and men were at a critical point of their history, at the end of one age and the beginning of another – culturally, societally and religiously. With conflicting signposts and the challenge of opposing routes, the decisions taken for future directions were seen to be critical. The question for this study thus became:

**What leadership practices can facilitate most effectively
the transition of Catholic religious congregations
into an uncertain future and possible new forms of religious life
during an era of critical change?**

As the study developed, however, with both the wisdom of contemporary religious thinkers and the interviews that have formed the basis of the study, it has become clear that it is more appropriate today to speak of religious life at this time, not so much as situated 'at the crossroads', but as being 'between towns'. The original question still retains its urgency and importance for congregations endeavouring to navigate this period of their history, but the context has shifted. Underpinning the writings and interviews is a fundamental acknowledgement that this is the 'waiting time'. At this juncture, the issues for religious congregations and their leadership are viewed from a different perspective. Facilitating the transition, even more than developing new mission statements, structures and strategic plans, has become the focus. And thus, dealing with issues of global change and uncertainty, religious identity and commitment, the readiness of religious membership to undertake change, and the leadership required for such transformation take on a new perspective.

The Next City – Still in our Saddle Bags

David Malouf's poem, *Between Towns*, describes the 'enormous darkness between towns', the unfamiliar, uncharted expanse between the traveller's point of departure and the destination, whether that destination is a new town, a new culture or indeed a new civilization. This darkness is a place of 'jungle silence, of thickening light', where 'the legend is kept barely alive'. The darkness is not deserted, however. There are signals, intermittent signs of life, and 'something held in trust'. There is the next star to 'leap to over the ditch of dark'. For 'a city beckons' towards a new horizon, 'far beyond brain or eye'. There is the realisation that, while 'the next city we shall inhabit is still in our saddlebags', it is indeed there. For the believing traveller, it is 'the shuttle service between moons'. And ultimately, Malouf reminds the reader, this time of transition is 'a moment only in the darkness between towns'. For the hope-filled traveller, there is the inherent belief: 'if not this star, another'. 'It might be Sydney or Babylon.'

Malouf's image is one that has been reiterated consistently by the participants in this study. While there are differences in the ways that individual religious leaders perceive the challenges facing their groups at this time, there is among all interviewees a strong sense that this is a time of transition. At the end of the twentieth century, religious life was at the crossroads. Now it is moving tentatively between towns, towards an unknown future, one that is clearly regarded as being 'held in trust'. Religious life is worth the effort. 'It will survive.' 'I believe in it – as a call, as a witness, as a mission to the world.' (E4). In the meantime, however, in the 'ditch of dark', the call is to fidelity and attentiveness to emerging signs of new life.

There is no doubt among respondents that the fundamental paradigm shift experienced by religious institutes calls for radical transformation. Hence, while there remains a clearly discerned passion among religious for what

they believe is at the essence of religious life, there are also significant differences about priorities and possible futures. Underpinning all discussion, however, there has emerged a clear sense that this is a time of transition, a waiting time, an interlude when religious men and women are charged above all with tending the embers, and of heeding and fanning the sparks of new flames that are beginning to appear.

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Chapter 1

DEFINING THE RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

In 1995 the Sisters of St Joseph, a community of women religious in the Roman Catholic Church, reached a decision at their 23rd General Chapter (an assembly of elected representatives held every six years) to review their leadership structures. The issue had been raised a number of times previously, but this was the first time that the group had formulated a deliberate time-frame for moving the agenda forward. The incoming leadership team was authorised to explore and develop leadership models appropriate to a world and church moving into the twenty-first century.

A number of realities faced the group. There was a recognition that the congregation was at the end of one age and at the beginning of another, culturally, societally, and religiously. The nature of the institute was changing significantly, with fewer women choosing this form of life and with the average age of the group close to sixty. The two previous General Chapters had established structures to move towards greater participation in leadership at local levels. By 1995, as a consequence of Chapter deliberations, it was decided to formalise processes across the congregation to continue the movement of participation beyond local levels to all spheres of governance. At the 2001 Chapter, leadership and governance were again part of the agenda.

It was out of these developments that the impetus for the current research arose. The processes that had been put in place to explore current leadership structures and practices within the congregation pointed to the

value of such a study, not only for the congregation in question, but for religious groups and organisations generally.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESEARCH

Purpose of the Study

This study explores changing approaches to leadership practices, and the implications of these understandings for Catholic religious congregations moving into a rapidly changing world. Specifically, it endeavours to delineate those features of leadership structures and practices, which can facilitate most effectively the transition of these groups during the fundamental paradigm shift of this time, where understandings of person, society, religion, the world itself, are undergoing changes almost unimaginable fifty years ago.

In exploring the processes currently under discussion by religious congregations planning for an unknown future, the research

- utilises current theories around change, psychosocial development, organisation and leadership;

- explores the impact of these theories on the nature, purpose, structure and leadership of religious organisations; and

- analyses emerging issues and trends, using an extensive literature review and a range of qualitative data.

From this exploration, it proposes new frameworks that might be developed to facilitate the movement of religious groups into a changing world, characterised by unfolding and increasingly urgent needs. Their identity and relationship in the fabric of a new church and a new world are central to the ongoing existence, identity and survival of religious congregations into the twenty-first century.

Extent of Study

The religious congregations that form the focus of this study are those groups found predominantly in western developed countries, and specifically, those

ministering in or from Australia. In Australia, the majority of religious were born and have lived only in this country. Most are tertiary-educated and have experienced ongoing opportunities for personal renewal. At this crucial time, a number of significant factors are compelling these groups to consider possible futures and the practices of leadership needed to facilitate their movement into possible new forms of religious life. The research question included these issues.

Key Research Questions

The key question addressed in this study is:

What leadership practices can facilitate most effectively the transition of Catholic religious congregations into an uncertain future and possible new forms of religious life, during an era of critical change?

A number of sub-questions underpin this key question:

What are the characteristics of the world and uncertain future into which religious congregations are moving?

What key elements of this transition are critical to the identity, survival and long-term development of religious organisations?

What particular characteristics of religious groups would facilitate or hinder transition and change?

What developmental readiness is required of members to enable them and their leadership to make the transition into new forms of religious life?

How do emerging understandings of leadership inform planning and decision-making for religious groups into the future?

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, Church refers to the Roman Catholic Church. Religious congregations are those groups within the Church, established at different times throughout its history, to promote its mission and values.

Traditionally, these congregations have been predominantly monastic or apostolic in their orientation.

Monastic groups have as their focus prayer and the vowed living of community. Most commonly, these groups take the vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience, although some also take additional vows, such as stability. Apostolic religious congregations, on the other hand, arose in response to specific needs in church and society. Their original ministries covered areas such as education, nursing, social work, and the care of those on the margins of society. These groups also, traditionally, take the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, although, both in their beginnings as well as in the post-Vatican II phase of their story, there have been variations in both the number and kind of vows taken by apostolic congregations. Both the monastic and apostolic institutes are characterised by what is known as charism – the particular gifts and unique spirit of a group for the carrying out of its mission and for the common good.

Vatican Council II refers to the Twenty-first Council in the history of the Catholic Church, held from 1962 until 1964. Religious life (and in fact the life of the whole of the Church) was reviewed and challenged in the light of the gospel, the signs of the times, and contemporary needs. Vatican II represents a turning point in the modern history of the Catholic Church

Following Vatican II, the secular institute, as a new form of religious life developed. These institutes, whose members are drawn together by common commitment to the gospel and a consequent articulated vision of life, do not desire the more formal structures of vowed religious life but seek a shared life and commitment aimed at transforming the world from within.

At regular intervals, the members of religious congregations meet to review their life and practices. These meetings of review are known as Chapters or Assemblies.

Review of Literature

An extensive review of literature is foundational to the study. In engaging with the sub-questions derived from the key research question, the literature review explores emerging understandings of change theory, and the resultant organisational, psychosocial, leadership and religious life theories seen as essential in framing emerging leadership practices in religious congregations. These theories thus provide an underpinning and critical framework for exploring the key question raised in the study and demonstrate that new understandings have significant implications for contemporary religious leadership, and for the effectiveness of religious institutes working to manage transition in the new millennium. The literature review utilises a dialectic between deductive and inductive reasoning, establishing a frame of reference for the ongoing exploration of the key research question. It demonstrates unequivocally that effective religious leadership practices during this time of transition will depend significantly on the theories adopted.

Methodological Framework for the Study

In addition to the detailed literature review, the methodology for the study, derived from the theoretical framework and the nature of the questions posed, is qualitative in approach. In order to reflect on the questions in depth and to complement the literature review and written material from the congregations, a number of interviews with key leaders were conducted. The research draws on a number of related studies such as the FORUS (The Future of Religious in the United States) Research Project carried out by David Nygren and Miriam Ukeritis in the early and mid-nineties. This study of religious congregations in the United States of America (Nygren & Ukeritis, 1993) incorporates a significant component covering the area of leadership.

In their study of leadership, Nygren and Ukeritis (1993) utilised competency assessment to identify the qualities critical to outstanding religious leadership. Drawing on compendia known from prior research, as well as on in-depth

interviews and panels of experts from within and beyond the organisations, they identified what they saw to be the principal competencies required for effective leadership of religious congregations in the USA. Their methodology has provided a valuable benchmark for this study.

The current study utilised a methodology that incorporated interviews and the use of focus groups. The interview procedures were informed by other relevant research, such as the Leadership Competency Study (Nygren, Ukeritis, & al, 1992) adapted to Australian conditions. Additionally, the focus group enabled perceptions to be tested against the experiences of religious leaders across Australia.

Data Selection and Collection

Eight religious congregations participated in the study. They represent the range of religious institutes ministering in the Australian Catholic Church – male, female, apostolic, clerical religious, brothers, sisters. The data collection methods comprised in-depth interviews with a number of individuals involved in leadership. Following the initial interviews, a number of recognised "experts" in the fields of leadership and religious life were invited to participate in focus group interviews. From these differing perspectives, a detailed analysis of the findings has been carried out and the conclusions of the study drawn.

BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCHER

I have been a member of a religious congregation for the past thirty-four years. During that time, my major ministry has been in education and educational leadership. Previous post-graduate research covered educational leadership, theology and religious leadership. My initial interest in this topic evolved through my participation in congregational Chapters and during my membership on the congregation's leadership team.

The perspectives I have inevitably brought to this study are balanced by the breadth of the literature review, by the variety and range of participants invited to participate in the research, and through ongoing reference to outside auditors, particularly focus group members. The feedback of supervisors (one a lay academic and one a member of a religious congregation) has also, in providing both insider and outsider views, helped to promote objectivity.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The thesis is structured around ten chapters. Chapter 1 incorporates the introduction to the study, the context, parameters and purpose of the research, the identification of the research questions and the methodology to be used. Chapter 2 introduces the context in which religious life currently finds itself. Chapters 3 and 4 establish the theoretical frameworks for the study, beginning with a detailed exploration of the key characteristics of a changing world and uncertain future into which religious congregations are moving. The particular elements of critical change and the characteristics of religious groups, which could facilitate or hinder this change are analysed. Psychosocial developmental theories are examined in an effort to indicate the developmental readiness required of religious women and men to enable them and their leadership to make the transition into new forms of religious life. Finally, the ways that emerging understandings of leadership theory and practice might inform planning and decision-making for religious groups into the future are drawn from the review.

The methodology, data collection methods and ethical issues are discussed in Chapter 5. This chapter also outlines the procedures used in the study to select participants, determine interviewing processes, and identify emerging themes. In Chapters 6, 7, and 8, the outcomes of the interviews are presented and analysed. Key themes are identified, and the correlation between the views of respondents and the findings of the literature review are explored.

Chapter 9 describes the resultant implications, questions and challenges for religious leadership practice at this time. A framework is developed and conclusions drawn. The final chapter (Chapter 10) draws together the differing strands and considers the implications of the research for the future of religious life, and its leadership between towns.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It is hoped that the contribution of this study lies in its suggested processes for a range of leadership structures and practices, which might enable religious congregations to navigate successfully the current bifurcation point between death and transformation. Key themes within the research include a clear focus on what interviewees call ‘the larger God’ and ‘the fundamental mission of religious institutes’. These themes take into account the discontinuities emerging from the fundamental paradigm shifts underpinning contemporary global and ecclesial realities. In facilitating and nurturing new forms of religious life within these primary commitments, the participants in this study believe that there are emerging indicators that can enable religious leadership to facilitate more effectively the transition of congregations into an uncertain future and possible new forms of religious life

CHAPTER 2

SETTING THE CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

Religious writers and scholars have examined the reality of the present time in history as a transitional moment for religious life, situated as it is at a critical point between disintegration and new life. This chapter identifies three overlapping contexts that impact on the leadership practices most likely to facilitate the transition of Catholic religious congregations into an uncertain future and possible new forms of religious life. These contexts lie at the heart of the research question and include the contemporary cultural context (characterised by discontinuous change as the most dominant characteristic of Western society), the religious context (profoundly influenced by social, political, economic, intellectual and spiritual developments within the contemporary context), and the psycho-sociocultural context (the particular environment in which any transition of religious groups will occur).

The challenges facing religious congregations as they endeavour to navigate new pathways into the future are enormous. As with the whole of our society, but in a differently focussed way, very few aspects of their lives have been left untouched, as they have struggled to understand, and witness to, the meaning of religious commitment at this point in history. The issues for them involve fundamental questions around who they are, how they are to live their lives, how they are to minister, and with whom and why.

As religious women and men have grappled with the issues outlined in the previous chapter, the debate around possible pathways for the future has been intense. The solutions are far from simple. Given the nature of religious life and the breadth of the issues being dealt with, however, a

number of theoretical frameworks provide helpful indicators of possible options for the future, suggesting as they do, some alternative directions for religious leadership. Contemporary writers such as Schneiders (1998) and Radcliffe (2000), emphasise that religious life cannot be studied in isolation from the broader contexts of church, society and world. Religious congregations are founded in response to perceived needs in the world and Church, arising out of specific cultures and specific situations. In order, then, to identify those features of leadership structures and practices, which can facilitate most effectively the transition of religious congregations during this period, it is necessary to explore the characteristics of contemporary society which are impinging on religious life and, within that context, to analyse current theories around understandings of person, organisation and leadership, particularly religious leadership, within the process of change itself.

An understanding of the contemporary cultural context is fundamental, both to any exploration of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, and to the resultant conclusions, which form the content of this study. The authors providing a perspective on the contextual framework have been selected because they examine the changing context of society, or religious life and its leadership, within the context of the contemporary world, and those changes which impinge so critically on religious organisations and groups. Providing the religious focus, Chittister (1996b), Gyger (1996), O'Murchu (1997), Markham (1999), Schneiders (2000), and Radcliffe (2000), among others, examine religious life against the broad span of the paradigm shifts of this time. These therefore provide responses to the sub-questions of this research as they analyse the characteristics of the world into which the religious congregations are moving.

THE CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL FRAMEWORK

As the human community begins the twenty-first century, there is an acute awareness that humanity is standing at the end of one age and on the threshold of another. From Toynbee (1946) and the broad span of Drucker's works (1957-1993), to Smith (1989), Handy (1989), Lukacs (1993) and O'Murchu (1997), contemporary thinkers have written of the disintegration of established institutions, patterns of life and of authority, as the twentieth century moved inexorably from one order of life to another. In their thinking, (examined in detail in chapter 3) the century witnessed whole societies caught at the crossroads between two worlds, living between towns, in an era of changing archetypes or paradigms, straddling, in western society, the industrial era being left behind, and the information, technological era being developed. They describe the demise of a way of life which has given shape to society for numerous generations and the struggle by contemporary thinkers to interpret the new signs of life which are emerging.

Across all academic endeavours (anthropological, historical, psycho-social, organisational and spiritual), these thinkers have discussed and debated the major shifts that have occurred across the globe in the past fifty years. From their writings, a number of trends can be identified, which are critical to possible new forms of religious life.

Emerging Paradigm Shift

As distinct from linear change, which is based on the development of what has already occurred, Sofield and Kuhn (1995) have developed the concept of the 'paradigm shift' to describe the profound change that accelerated in the mid twentieth century, when the structures that supported the specific interpretation of reality and collective action were changing radically. Accepted ways of doing things were being replaced or simply destroyed, as new understandings emerged and affected the very fundamental concepts, values and beliefs, which had once been taken for granted.

Particularly in the western world, Sofield (1995) claims, the way that people lived, worked, played, and even thought, had undergone fundamental transformation. Religious congregations, as part of this society, were being challenged to engage in the dynamics of meaning in transitional systems that continued to be developed. This new world was being described as postmodern, a recognition that it had emerged from the modern, but not yet achieved its own delineation. What had been the basis of religious commitment, the *raison d'être* for ministries in society, was fast disappearing.

Globalisation

The twentieth century saw significant changes in western political, economic and cultural hegemony (Europe and later North America), and the development of other centres of power, such as China, Japan and newly emerging Asian and Eastern countries (Gilkey, 1991; Metz, 1981). This situation has been accelerated in the last two decades with the increasing pace of internationalisation, especially, as Reich (2000) and Drucker (1993) point out, through the expansion of multinational corporations, which control a significant proportion of world trade.

Corporations now tend to monopolise power, reduce competition and dominate the market place (Theophanous: 1998). Accelerated exploitation of natural resources, mounting debts in developing countries, and the resultant concentration of wealth in the hands of corporations and powerful individuals, have led to the development of an international elite class of people who are determining economic and cultural milieus for millions of people across the globe. In this new world, religious congregations struggle to redefine their goals and mission, the ambivalence of their situation further complicated by their place in western society, and the scientific and technological advances in those countries.

Science and Technology in a Global Society

Combined with the globalisation of trade and economies, Drucker (1993) and Reich (2000) maintain that rapid developments in science and technology, the development of transport and communication, and the information technology revolution underpin the basic and driving forces of the twenty-first century. Improved standards of living for some (particularly in developed countries), greater wealth, higher educational standards, point to the positive results of scientific and technological developments.

The latent and fatal potentialities for destruction, however, of both the environment and of humanity, have shaken the foundations of the “myth of progress” (Schneiders, 1992, 510-516). Schneiders argues that the negative outcomes of current global structures (exploitation, oppression, racism and sexism) are central challenges to contemporary societies, but particularly to religious congregations, whose founding impetus derived from the poverty and oppression of the societies out of which they were founded. Religious congregations and their leadership struggle with these challenges. The impetus of Vatican Council II towards a revisioning of the place of religious life in the contemporary world, while enabling congregations and their leadership to undertake a radical review of their essence and structures, created new realities and emerging challenges for religious women and men in this new world.

VATICAN COUNCIL II AND THE NEW DIRECTIONS

Vatican II, with its restatement of the identity and mission of the Catholic Church in the mid-twentieth century, began an intense period of revitalization for religious institutes. The reforms of Vatican II called Catholics to a new image of Church and religious world-view in harmony with contemporary understanding of the place of humanity within the whole of creation. The long-held dualism between the secular and the sacred, between the Church

and the world began to disappear. The Council combined a respect for the tradition of the Church with clear insights into the fundamental call of the gospel within the context of the whole of creation.

Religious women and men throughout the world were invited to undertake a sweeping renewal of their lives in order to read more effectively the signs of the times, and live the gospel more authentically in the world of the twentieth century. The adaptation that followed was radical, and exceeded the expectations and indeed the anticipated outcomes of the Council. The frameworks of theological premises on which new understandings of religious life came to be understood were rich and diverse. They incorporated a scriptural base of radical discipleship, an emphasis on the charism of the founding group, a prophetic orientation, and a foundation of witness to the transcendence and immanence of the God to whom religious women and men committed themselves.

Religious began to see themselves, not as cut off from the world but as part of it. Every observable aspect of their lives underwent significant transformation. Religious dress, lifestyle, community living, daily horaria, ministry, the meaning of the vows, and the content and direction of religious constitutions were subjected to intense scrutiny, which led in time to widespread change. Congregations moved from rigid conformity in every aspect of their lives to a greater sense of freedom and independence that had not been experienced previously.

Inevitably, the changes were first experienced in developed countries. Although slower than their American counterparts, religious women and men in Australia also began the reforms that were to become the touchstone of late twentieth century religious life in this country.

SOCIAL CONTEXT IN AUSTRALIA

From the early years of the Australian colonies, the focus of religious congregations was on alleviating the needs of the poor, particularly poor Catholics, in education, health or social welfare. While some groups served the needs of the wealthier classes in the community, most religious, for little remuneration, worked with those on the underside of society. The majority of Catholics in these early years were among the least educated in the colonies.

During the twentieth century, however, as Leavey and O'Neill (1996) point out, there were significant demographic transitions, with improved educational and employment opportunities enabling the 'convict' (most Catholics had come to Australia as Convicts), and later immigrant Church to move into the mainstream of society and to take on middle class status.

Changing societal structures, the granting of government funding, and smaller numbers joining religious congregations had a profound impact on the vision and way of life of these groups from the mid-twentieth century onwards. Religious congregations, founded to provide Catholic education, health care and social welfare, began to see these needs being met by others (governments and community-sponsored institutions). The world that had spawned apostolic religious life was no longer the environment in which they now found themselves.

Some religious continued their involvement in traditional ministries. Many, however, moved outside the institutions of education, health and welfare to serve individually in parishes or local communities. Fundamental changes in ministry practice, combined with diminishing numbers, and developing theological, cultural and psychosocial issues, became significant factors in their ongoing consideration of possible new forms of religious life. Such foundational and paradigmatic shifts have inevitably raised questions about the leadership needed for this emerging reality.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS LIFE AND LEADERSHIP

The paradigm shift, which has become a fact of life for the global community moving into the twenty-first century, has been clearly characterised by fundamental discontinuity with the past (Kuhn, 1965; Mintzner, 1987). For religious women and men, renewed exploration of human and spiritual values has been wrought by reflection on the poverty, violence and social disintegration of today's world. Side by side with the implications of rapidly shifting cultural and societal values, significant challenges for religious congregations and their leadership have been identified. Rost (1991), Harmer (1995), Chittister (1996), and Gyger (1996) pinpoint what they see to be key elements critical to the identity, survival and long-term development of religious congregations. Discussed in detail in Chapter 4, these provide clear indications for many of the participants in this study of possible future directions for religious institutes at this pivotal time.

In contrast to the institutionalised areas of education, health and social welfare that dominated the lives of Australian religious in the middle of the twentieth century, Chittister (1996), among others, sees globalism, ecology, industrial slavery, peace, spiritual sterility and sexism as the issues of this age. In specifying these as the gauge point of every contemporary group, she raises serious challenges for religious institutes and their leadership. It is her belief that contemporary religious life has become immersed in the present to the point of potential obscurity, as incorporation into society blurs its presence. Enculturation, at the same time, has paradoxically sharpened the perceptions and diversified the expressions of religious commitment. For Chittister, as for the other writers mentioned above, the key element which is critical to the identity, survival and long-term development of religious organisations lies in the degree to which these groups recognise the missing values in today's world and raise them up for human reflection and response, "living new ideals and carrying the charism in radically new ways into God-awful new places" (Chittister, 1996a, p 159). The role of leadership in informing planning and

decision-making, derives from the call to nurture and galvanise groups in their struggles to be keepers of the values needed at this time.

For Radcliffe (2000) and Vecchi (1999), this is regarded as being possible only within the total context of human life. O'Murchu (1995) and Schneiders (2000) see it as making sense in the context of new scientific discoveries and the perspective of chaos theory. Tacey (2000) regards the emergent spiritual sense as core to the search for meaning of contemporary humankind. Such analyses of the economic, social and religious context of this time, which will be examined in detail in the following two chapters, provide insights into possible futures for religious congregations, as well as into the leadership that such futures demand.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The changes of the twentieth century ranged across all areas of life and left virtually nothing untouched across the globe. The degree of these changes has been so radical and fundamental that they have been accurately described as paradigmatic. Advances in science, technology, transport and communication have revolutionised the way humanity views itself and the world.

In developed countries, much has been written about the positive results of these developments. Leaders, and those who have benefited from them, have emphasised improved standards, greater wealth and the positive outcomes of scientific and medical research for people in all walks of life. As the negative outcomes of current global structures have become increasingly apparent, however, concerns have been expressed by many thinkers and social scientists about the exploitation of those who are already powerless, about industrial slavery, poverty and injustice, and about vast, forced people migrations across the globe.

At a different level, discoveries in science, technology and the theory of knowledge demonstrate the mutuality and inter-relatedness of the whole of creation. The coming together of ecological awareness, scientific exploration, human seeking, and a view of cosmology where everything is related to everything else, has resulted in a new consciousness of the meaning of life. From it has developed a repudiation of hierarchical dualism and a new emphasis on the plurality and ambiguity of human and spiritual consciousness, human solidarity, and the holistic inter-connectedness of the cosmos.

Within the boundaries of such a fundamental paradigm shift, religious congregations in Australia have moved from dualistic, institutionalised structures (which witnessed to religious values predominantly in the contexts of education, health and social welfare), to largely individual, community or parish ministries in the transformed society of the twenty-first century.

In this new world, where fewer people are joining religious institutes, where the average age for most groups ranges from the mid to late sixties, new understandings of life (in society and in the church) pose particular challenges to religious life and its leadership. These will inevitably inform the planning and decision-making of religious congregations as they endeavour to facilitate the transition into new life-giving forms of religious life.

Clearly, the changing contexts outlined in this chapter have significant implications for contemporary religious life. The chapters that follow identify the overlapping contexts that impact radically on the structures and practices of Catholic religious congregations. The review of literature, which forms the content of Chapters 3 and 4, describes in detail the theories developed from these changing contexts, demonstrating their clear influence on religious life. The subsequent analysis helps to highlight the leadership practices most likely to facilitate the transition of Catholic religious congregations into an uncertain future and possible new forms of religious life.

Chapter 3

LIVING DYNAMIC SYSTEMS

INTRODUCTION

The changes of the twentieth century ranged across all areas of life and left virtually nothing untouched across the globe. Paradigmatic shifts challenged religious groups to explore the meaning of their way of life in a new context. In turn, this resulted in a call for fundamental changes to the structures of religious organisations to enable them to meet new and differing needs. From these developments, new questions have arisen at this time regarding the type of leadership that such transformation demands.

Chapter 2 outlined the context of the world (including the religious world) in which we find ourselves at the start of the twenty-first century, a context characterised by discontinuous and fundamental change. Chapter 3 explores emerging understandings of change theory, and, in the light of that theory, a number of fundamental developments in organisational, psychosocial and leadership theories, which provide a framework for this research. These theories demonstrate that new understandings of both cosmology and change have significant implications for organisations, communities and leadership practices. An examination of changing world consciousness helps to clarify a number of underpinning issues for contemporary religious organisations and their leadership. The literature review is therefore deliberately extensive. It draws on an array of writings and multiple theories in order to frame the study within a credible context. It thus begins inductively, examining significant developments in organisational, psychosocial, leadership and religious life theories. From this analysis, the study then evolves into the deductive process of examining the theories against the responses of the participants in the research.

CHANGING WORLD CONSCIOUSNESS

The Classical Worldview

From the time of Aristotle until the twentieth century, the classical worldview dominated human thinking and behaviour across all sciences. Aristotle saw order as all pervasive in a hierarchical world (Lonergan, 1972). As a result, he ranked all life forms in order of importance, from inanimate objects to the divine. His attempts to impose order on the chaos of the world were adopted generally by later philosophers and scientists, and thus the classical worldview continued throughout Graeco-Roman times, through early Christianity, and up to the Age of the Enlightenment, reaching a peak with Newton and Descartes. Summaries of the classical model (Wheatley, 1992; O'Murchu, 1997; Schneiders 1998) describe three specific characteristics:

'cause and effect' (everything that occurs is a result of something that causes it to happen),

'determinism' (every aspect of life works in a predetermined, predictable fashion), and

'every whole comprised of a certain number of parts' (each part contributing to the efficiency of the whole)

Because this classical, and later strongly developed Newtonian view, was efficient, logical and comprehensible, it enabled humankind to create an ordered planned model of the universe. As Wheatley (1992) points out, this universe was a seductive place, prodding societies to greater assurances of the role of determinism and prediction even within each new discovery. Work, political realities, society, religion, and certainly religious life, were organized to accommodate this ordered universe. She describes the detail of this:

It is interesting to note just how Newtonian most organisations are. The machine imagery of the spheres was captured by organisations in an emphasis on structure and parts. Responsibilities have been organized into functions. People have been organized into roles. Page after page of organisational charts depict the workings of the machine: the number of pieces, what fits where, who the big pieces are. (Wheatley, 1992, p 27)

The Newtonian view, with its efficient, logical worldview, was idealised in the books of Rules and Practices of religious groups, as well as in the minutely detailed order of their daily horaria. The emphasis on order, structure, and the unchangeable place of each element, indicates the commitment of religious congregations to the classical, Newtonian view of life underpinning its structures and practices.

Limitations of the Newtonian View

Not all was well in this ordered universe however, and since the late nineteenth century a number of writers have highlighted some of its limitations. Schneiders (1992, pp 20-28) has summarised the thinking of many Newtonian critics. In analysing the negative impact of its worldview, she has isolated the three underlying characteristics of rationalism, dualism and the myth of progress. The underpinnings of thinking and structures in the western world, she believes, have both fragmented and limited the human (and religious) community's understanding of life.

It is her conviction that rationalism, by reducing reality to what can be scientifically investigated, has inaccurately presented itself as truly objective. In speaking of public reality as radically secular, such rationalism has also repudiated mystery (one of the reasons that modernism was rejected by the Catholic Church in the early twentieth century). By dividing all reality into ranks with predetermined rightful places, it has promoted domination and subordination as the primary mode of all relationships. In addition, the myth of progress (Schneiders, 1992; Wheatley, 1992), in which change is always

presented as improvement and whatever is new is held to be better, has resulted in ecological degradation, and in the myth that progress is inevitable and beyond moral evaluation:

The negative results of modernity are becoming ever more evident. Ecological disasters multiply, armed conflict is global, the abuse and exploitation of women and children is epidemic, our enormously inflated economy is out of control, we face reproductive chaos, the information glut causes growing confusion and paralysis, and cynical despair is pervasive. (Schneiders, 1992, p 20)

This growing critique of modernity, underpinned by a changing understanding of reality influenced thinking and discussion around organisational theory, and around theories related to persons, society and leadership. By the late twentieth century, as contradictions and questions emerged about a world that had hitherto been viewed as a giant machine (constructed from indivisible working blocks, systematically ordered into predictable constructs), scientists and other thinkers questioned strongly the long-held view of mechanical reductionism and a pre-ordained hierarchical order. For Catholic religious groups, whose underpinning structures derived from such order, the emerging questions had particular relevance, especially in the light of the challenges of the Vatican Council in the 1960s. The evolution of thinking around Quantum Theory (Hawking, 1988; O'Murchu, 1997; Wheatley, 1992), and newly emerging change theories began to impact strongly on religious groups and were closely aligned with developments in many of the social sciences, especially in the western world.

Development of Quantum Theory

From the late nineteenth century, the systematic ordering of the world and the established view of mechanical reductionism held within a preordained hierarchical order were seriously disputed. Darwin's Origin of Species and Einstein's Theory of Relativity raised the possibility of non-linear systems as systems not completely governed by logical cause and effect. Gleick (1987),

Davies (1987) and Hawking (1988) described the evolution of thinking around the nonlinearity of physical systems in which complexity is perceived not simply in terms of an inner unpredictable turbulence but as an apparent chaos, which moves towards an intricately ordered pattern. Even the simplest of systems demonstrates these characteristics of chaotic disorder and an ongoing continuous iterative cycle. In the midst of the scientific research being developed, there emerged what is now known as Quantum Theory, raising questions about the accepted views of the nature of reality and proposing new understandings. O'Murchu (1997) takes the implications of Quantum Theory to suggest new, richer complexities in the way that we view organisations:

It is at a perceptual level that the theory evokes a new way of viewing and understanding our world. In essence, it states that everything we perceive and experience is a great deal more than the initial, external impression we may obtain, that we experience life, not in isolated segments, but in wholes (quanta), that these bundles of energy which impinge upon us are not inert, lifeless pieces of matter, but living energies. (O'Murchu, 1997, p 27)

Quantum Theory (Jantsch, 1980) acknowledges that in this human scientific thinking, there is a place for the apparently inexplicable. In highlighting the human inability to know details about a specific reality at a given time, the Uncertainty Principle recognises the place of mystery in life. It describes equilibrium as occurring through the self-organizing process of 'autopoiesis: the characteristic of living systems to continuously renew themselves and to regulate this process in such a way that the integrity of their structure is maintained.

Quantum Theory has become widely accepted in scientific circles (Gleick, 1987; Hawking, 1988). As Harney (1997, p 46) points out, scientists have recognised the importance of clusters, networks and relationships, acknowledging that outcomes are dependent on the system's internal life forces interacting as they recreate themselves in response to external and

internal energies. Such a fundamental change in humankind's understanding of the universe is still to be realistically assessed in terms of its application to social systems. The transformation however has significant implications for religious organisations and their ongoing need to renew and change themselves while retaining the fundamental integrity of their structure.

Implications

The development of the theories outlined above has two specific implications for the present study. In the first place, researchers postulate that there is a correlation between natural systems and social systems (Jantsch, 1980). In the second place, as Wheatley (1992) points out, new understandings and new frames of references for interpreting the world often emerge in widely differing areas or across several disciplines at once. Changing understandings have led researchers and social scientists to the realisation that life is infinitely more complex, more ambivalent than had hitherto been believed, a reality that is critical to the identity, survival and long-term development of religious organisations. Many religious thinkers and leaders have indeed begun to use the emerging findings around Quantum Theory to inform planning and decision-making for their groups as they move into the future.

Critical to ongoing planning of religious institutes and the tentative development of strategies are:

- new theories of organisation and society (Wheatley, 1992; Sungaila, 1990; Jantsch, 1980);
- psycho-social theory (Sungaila, 1990, Murphy, 1995, Briskin, 1998, Schneiders, 2000);
- leadership theories (Greenleaf, 1977; Wheatley, 1992);

- theories exploring religious congregations and their leadership (Garvey, 1996; Gyger, 1996; Harmer, 1995b; Murphy, 1995; O'Murchu, 1995; Schneiders, 2000)

As religious groups have struggled to explore options and to understand the developments of their own groups during the past fifty years, many have utilised relevant theories from the Social Sciences. A detailed analysis of these theories forms an essential framework for this study.

APPLYING THE NEW THEORIES

Natural and Social Systems

Jantsch (1980) maintains that Quantum Theory can explain equally well the ecology of a pond and the organisation of a large company. The functioning of systems and the relationship of elements within that system appear to be valid for both. It is his contention that “the principles now recognised in natural and social systems alike, appear not simply to be formally similar principles, but are, it would seem, the same principles (Jantsch, 1980: 7). This underpins Sungaila's thinking (1990) that the identical basic principles underlie the dynamics of both nature and culture.

The principles foundational to these dynamics are identified in a range of theories across the Social Sciences. Wheatley (1992), one of the most prominent exponents of the importance of Quantum Theory, has explored the implications of new scientific discoveries for organisations and organisational leadership. She takes the basic principles of Chaos Theory and Quantum Physics to describe the complex structures of groups in a way that challenges many fundamental assumptions about organisations. This study examines the implications of Quantum theory for theories of organisation, and for psychosocial and leadership theories. Not only, it will be shown, have the structures of contemporary Catholic religious group been influenced by changing theories, but the very assumptions on which their lives are

based have been challenged and transformed. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 4, a number of aspects of Organisations Theory have specific relevance for religious institutes, and are crucial to their identity, survival and long-term development. Aspects that have implications for organisational theory are:

6. the rich potential for free engagement;
7. the breakdown and permeability of barriers;
8. the shift of consciousness in the worlds of work, education, society;
9. networking trends.

Under each of these headings the developing understandings in organisational theory can be illustrated.

The Rich Potential for Free Engagement

The rich potential for free engagement enables organisations, as systems, to reorganize themselves continuously, and to respond flexibly to needs as they arise. In place of the order and logic of the Newtonian organisations, Wheatley (1992, pp 25-43) proposes a living, dynamic system, open to the environment. As opposed to the hierarchical systems that have traditionally marked groups and society at large, she draws upon the participative nature of the universe, to describe the rich potential for organisations of free engagement and active participation (Wheatley, 1992, pp 59-73). She discusses the paradoxes of self-organizing systems, showing how the creative energy of the universe and the principles of chaos can enable an organisation 'to wander through the realms of chaos, make decisions about what actions will be consistent with our purpose, and emerge with a discernible pattern or shape to our lives' (Wheatley, 1992, p 136). The traditional definition of chaos saw systems as unpredictable. Chaos Theory demonstrates that this unpredictability operates within definite boundaries.

As Wheatley points out, chaos does have a shape or pattern that has become known as 'the strange attractor'. Through chaos, she demonstrates, any system, including a religious system, is able to reconfigure itself at a higher level of complexity.

The Breakdown and Permeability of Barriers

The second aspect of Organisational Theory with relevance for religious congregations is its focus on the breakdown and permeability of boundaries. The search by social scientists for deeper underlying patterns of new theories to enable them to understand physical, human and organisational behaviour in a world of increasing fragmentation and plurality has been explored by Briskin (1998). In integrating the fields of physics, psychology and management, he demonstrates the inadequacies of the traditional views of organisations which stressed structure, order and boundaries (between levels and ranks of people, between functions and areas of specialisation). He takes the principles of indeterminacy and relational uncertainty to explain how relationships and the permeability within organisations randomly shape their capacity to sustain change (Briskin, 1998, pp 247-254). He stresses the need for organisations to allow for chaos and complexity in order to create more flexible structures. Only with such flexibility will the organisation be equipped to manage the complexities and uncertainties existing at the core of organisational life. In exploring the new understandings of organisations in terms of a paradigm shift, Ashkenas *et al* (1995, p 4) describe the movement from the use of strong boundaries (vertical, horizontal, external and geographic) towards the development of more permeable boundaries:

In essence, we are suggesting that traditional theories are being replaced by a notion of boundaries as permeable, flexible, moveable membranes in a living, evolving organism. (Ashkenas & al, 1995, p 4)

For Wheatley (1992), Ashkenas (1995), Zohar and Marshall (1995), and Briskin (1998), there is a clear correlation between natural systems and

social systems (including religious systems). This correlation points to the need for social systems to establish flexibility and permeability within an intricately ordered pattern, and to build clusters, networks and relationships in the ongoing life of the organism.

The new frames of reference are explored further by Handy (1989) and Drucker (1993) in the specific context of the organisational world of the late twentieth century. These frames of reference provide underpinnings for the worlds of work, education and social structures. They highlight the necessity for religious groups facing transitional challenges to establish new structures and leadership practices, which reflect the shift of consciousness in this new world.

The Organic Worlds of Work, Education and Society

Handy's work on the parallels between work, education and society is a third area seen to be critical for religious groups in transition. The very title of Handy's book, *The Age of Unreason* (Handy, 1989), taps into some of the underpinnings of new theories of change. In identifying the discontinuity of change and the need for upside-down thinking, consistent with chaos theory, he describes the need for new structures of organisation deriving from fundamental demographic and economic changes of the past century. It is his belief that the dramatic developments of the last century call for new theories, structures and practices of organisations – from home, to work, to education, to the public sector, to society. The concept of the Triple I Organisation (encompassing intelligence, information and ideas) renders possible the ongoing growth of organisations within the context of discontinuous upside-down thinking through all facets of society (including religious organisations). For religious congregations whose lives, after Vatican 2, were catapulted from the ordered world of the nineteenth century Church to the chaotic discontinuity of the late twentieth century, *The Age of Unreason*, in fact, has specific relevance insofar as they have been involved

in fundamental shifts in organisational structures, which have required adopting concepts such as that of the Triple 1 Organisation.

Drucker (1993) also analyses the major transformations that have led to the creation of post-capitalist society and the development of a whole new way of life. The change, he claims, is of such a magnitude that people 'cannot even imagine the world...into which their own parents were born' (Drucker, 1993: 1). In this new world, decentralisation and diversity are essential if creativity, new life and innovation are not to be stifled.

Handy describes the present era as '*the Age of Unreason*'. Drucker sees it as the beginning of a transformed world. For Lipnack and Stamps (1994), who are concerned with the organizing principles for the new era of the twenty-first century, it is most accurately '*The Age of the Network*'. For the religious organisations in this study, it will be shown to include networking principles within the contexts of both Handy's and Drucker's worlds.

The Age of the Network

Networking trends thus comprise the fourth aspect of Organisations Theory with relevance to religious institutes in transition. Lipnack and Stamps (1994) describe networks as systems theory by another name, and networking trends as the window to the future. Needing to be understood as process as well as structure, networks work across boundaries, and capture insights, principles and laws that span both traditional sciences (such as Physics and Biology) and the newer sciences (such as Information Theory and Cognition). The conceptual framework includes small groups, hierarchies and bureaucracies within a broad framework. Lipnack and Stamps see the different structures as being interchangeable and utilised according to evolving needs. It is their belief that adaptability and flexibility within permeable boundaries not only allow the third millennium organisation to include all these types, but also enable a successful organisation to discard

ineffective hierarchical-bureaucratic structures. To ignore this trend towards such a fundamental orientation will prevent organisations (including religious organisations) from dealing with complexity without rival in human history. Lipnack and Stamps argue that fundamental changes in organisations have become too complex for hierarchy and bureaucracy. Networks, they contend, globalise and localise at the same time. They provide for both continuity and change. They cross but do not smash boundaries, and they nurture a strong sharing of leadership. New webs of connections and relationships encourage a diversity of leaders and styles, bringing greater resilience and creativity. In Lipnack's terms, 'networks are leaderful, not leaderless.' (Lipnack & Stamps, 1994, p 18). Like other aspects of Organisation Theory, networks have clear implications for religious institutes, particularly with respect to their leadership. With other key elements, these are crucial to the identity, survival and long-term development of religious organisations.

Significance of Organisations Theories for this Study

Contemporary religious congregations are challenged to make the transition into the new millennium, not only from strongly centralised and hierarchical structures towards greater decentralisation and diversity, but even more from established order and boundaries to permeability and flexibility. Their ability to effect this transition will depend significantly on the theories and practices of organisation which they adopt.

At its foundation, religious life is based on voluntary, equal membership, engaged in meeting a range of human needs. The commitment of religious women and men to particular ministries, often without wage or salary structures, suits their organisations to the processes and structures of free engagement, permeable boundaries and interchangeable networking structures. For women and men whose psychosocial social development enables them to adapt to newly emerging structures and processes, these theories provide a window of opportunity to predict and choose from a

number of possible futures. This study explores the propensity for such individuals and groups to provide leadership during transition. Personal and communal readiness is fundamental to this transition.

PSYCHOSOCIAL ISSUES

Individual and Organisational Development

Ability to deal with rapid change, discontinuity and chaos, as well as a capacity to act with flexibility and adaptability within permeable boundaries, are described by the theorists discussed above, as essential for contemporary organisations. These characteristics are particularly required of those individuals and groups who become transformative agents during transitional periods. Organisations can operate effectively during times of crucial change only if group members possess the personal capacities to live in a world of change and to operate out of the principles of shared leadership and consensual decision-making. Hall and Thompson (1980) utilise Maslow's (1968) hierarchy of needs and Rokeach's (1973) study of values to highlight the importance of the phases of consciousness and value evolution in transitional development. Their analysis of the four phases of consciousness (Hall & Thompson, 1980, p 84) indicates the interrelationship between the natural world, the individual world, the social world and the global world. The movement from self focus to global awareness is seen by Hall and Thompson as a necessary prerequisite to transition and new life for organisations (including religious organisations).

Phases of Consciousness

Hall and Thompson's (1980) Four Phases of Consciousness provide a framework which suggests that, in order to deal with discontinuity and rapid change, the individual needs to have moved to at least Phase Three or Phase Four Level of consciousness. In Chapter 4, those aspects seen to be particularly pertinent for religious institutes will be developed. When

organisations operated in stable environments, then hierarchical structures were appropriate, and individuals did not need to have moved beyond Phase Two level of consciousness to operate successfully within religious life. During periods of decisive change, however, the Phase Three and Phase Four qualities of participation, independence and global awareness are essential for effective involvement and contribution.

Elements	Phase One	Phase Two	Phase Three	Phase Four
How the WORLD is perceived by the individual.	The world is a MYSTERY over which I have no CONTROL	The world is a PROBLEM with which I can COPE.	The world is a PROJECT in which I must PARTICIPATE.	The world is a MYSTERY for which WE must CARE.
How the individual perceives its SELF to FUNCTION in the world.	The self EXISTS at the centre of a HOSTILE WORLD.	The self DOES things to succeed and to belong in a SOCIAL WORLD.	The self ACTS on the CREATED WORLD with conscience and independence.	Selves GIVE LIFE to the GLOBAL WORLD.
What HUMAN NEEDS the self seeks to satisfy.	The self seeks to satisfy the PHYSICAL NEED for food, pleasure, shelter	The self seeks to satisfy the SOCIAL NEED for acceptance, affirmation, approval, achievement.	The self seeks to satisfy the PERSONAL NEED for being one's self, directing one's life, owning one's ideas.	Selves seek to satisfy the COMMUNAL NEED for global harmony.

Hall and Thompson 1980, p 48

Table 1 – Four Phases of Consciousness

The paradigmatic transformation of the past century have resulted in newer, richer complexities in the way that individuals and groups view the natural world and the world of organisations. In this provisional milieu, the ability to deal with a global perspective, the discontinuities of life, and with upside-down thinking, are basic requirements for those who are called to create and live comfortably with new forms of life. Hall and Thompson suggest that it is Phase Four individuals who can facilitate transition most successfully for themselves and for their communities. In the movement from self-focus to a

focus beyond self, in the transcendence of needs for acceptance, approval and self-gratification, in commitment to communal and global concerns, these writers believe that organisations can grow and flourish. Senge (1990) describes five disciplines, which he pinpoints as intrinsic to this movement.

The Fifth Discipline

Senge (1990) deals with the development of the individual from a personal to a communal orientation, in a way that has particular relevance for religious institutes. In moving from the concept of personal mastery to shared vision, he reflects the thinking of a number of writers (Eveline & Hayden, 1999; Frank, 1996; Hambrick, Nadler, & Tushman, 1998; Moran, 1996; Tracy, 1994). He identifies five disciplines required of groups and leadership if transition is to be navigated and new futures generated. Personal mastery (the first discipline) is about the continuous development and deepening of personal vision, values and focus. The second, third and fourth disciplines progress from critical reflection and individual vision into shared vision and team learning. Systems thinking (the fifth discipline) integrates the others, so that individuals and teams see the interconnectedness of the parts and the patterns of interconnection.

These explorations provide valuable insights for transitional religious. An ability to live in the world of interconnection and inter-relationship (such as Phase Four of Hall and Thompson's thinking, and Senge's fifth discipline) enables individuals, not only to survive, but to flourish in a world of constant change. What is true of the individual is seen by a number of theorists to be true also of the community as a whole. Leaders need to both integrate these insights into their own persona and to support and challenge members to move into these higher levels.

From Personal Mastery to Communal Consciousness

Senge moves from the concept of personal mastery to shared vision. McRae- McMahon (2001, p 23) provides an additional dimension in her discussion of communal consciousness and growth. She speaks of the importance of the inner life of the individual and of 'the responsibility and inevitability of human initiative in the evolving of life', arguing that what makes communities change from generation to generation is the accumulated influence of individuals, their example, initiatives and decisions. Even further, she contends, not only do the individual's actions impact significantly on the community generally to bring about growth, but the human community as a whole experiences moments of breakthrough to new levels of development. In reflecting on Jung's concept of the collective consciousness, she quotes Scott in seeing this particular period in human history as one of those moments:

If you look at the history of humankind, it is possible to see a pattern for genuine human progress. By progress, Scott meant times in human history when life was enhanced for many people rather than a few, when there were true breakthroughs in human existence. In the repeated pattern, it seemed as though humankind has a plateau in its life story and then surges with what he called a 'collective lifting of energy', which takes us into a new day. (McRae-McMahon, 2001, p 23)

Perhaps this is one such moment for religious congregations. It is certainly a moment described by many writers as a pivotal one for leadership. Its implications for religious groups in both diminishment and new life provide an credible foundation for this research and the leadership practices it explores.

LEADERSHIP STUDIES

Leadership in the Context of Changing World Consciousness

New understandings of natural and social systems have significant implications for organisations and their leadership. Some of the foremost

thinkers and writers in this field (Handy, 1994; Wheatley, 1992) see leadership as key in ultimately determining the development of individuals and groups within these new contexts. The need to manage the context of discontinuous and fundamental change, and to maximise the value inherent in the principles of chaos, self-organizing systems and permeable barriers, have forced thinkers to go beyond traditional approaches to leadership. Developing theories postulate that leadership resides in the group as well as in the individual (DePree, 1989; McRae-McMahon, 2001), in relationships rather than in management (Hall & Thompson, 1980; Rost, 1991), and in a willingness to work through chaos and discontinuity in order to achieve goals (Blank, 1995; Wheatley, 1992). Finally, in a new world, which clearly includes the world of religious congregations, they stress the need for trust and integrity (Harmer, 1995b; Terry, 1993).

Development of Studies in Leadership

As theories of organisation began to critique the negative aspects of hierarchical and bureaucratic structures, researchers developed theories to accommodate leadership within flatter, more flexible structures. An examination of these theories demonstrates their clear relevance for religious congregations at this time. Initially, the developments stressed greater self-responsibility and personal encouragement, as evidenced in McGregor's (1960) Theory X and Theory Y, in Argyris' (1976) psychological contract and contingency view of management, and in Burns (1978) 'transactional' and 'transformational' leadership styles. Burns' analysis moved the discussion to new levels, with a call for leadership to go beyond individual interests to identify with the aims and greater good of the organisation and its members. As such thinking developed, and in the context of paradigmatic change, Handy (1989), Senge (1990), Wheatley (1992), Drucker (1993), and Lipnak (1994) began to highlight the importance of upside-down thinking, both in organisational structures, and in the leadership which they saw as critical in the development of those organisations.

The Age of Unreason –Giving Form to Organic Leadership

To deal with the fundamental shift of consciousness, Handy's (1989) model of organic leadership provides insights into new possibilities for religious leadership. In this model, individuals and small groups act with a great deal of autonomy, while the centre deals with overall direction, coordinates activities and exploits potential economies of scale. Handy (1994) describes it as 'a concept devised to make things big while keeping them small' (Handy, 1994, p 122). Leadership in Handy's model emphasises organic wholeness, strategic direction and a strong commitment to interdependence. It uses an 'inverted doughnut' concept, where the solid centre consists of work that is strictly defined by the group, while the surrounding hole is the place where the individual experiences both responsibility and the freedom to act. To be effective, Handy insists that leaders 'have to represent the whole to the parts and to the world outside' and that further, 'they may live in the centre, but they must not be the centre.' (1994, p 77)

Handy's model, supported by Drucker's (1993) analysis, has particular relevance for the most urgent tasks currently faced by a paradigmatically transformed global community and its leadership. His reasoning for a new social order, based on community rather than government, sees each person, through education, as being a critical leader in the development of the community, a leader able to live and operate in the global community of which he/she is a part. To neglect the perspective of community, gathered around a common value-based mission will hinder, he believes, the development of any group (including any religious group) endeavouring to navigate its way into an uncertain future.

Shaping the Organisation through Concepts and Values

A second and critical consideration for the study of religious leadership is the developing emphasis on values-based leadership. For Wheatley (1992), fluctuations, randomness and the unpredictability of the contemporary world

call for a leadership that focuses on the big picture, guided by governing principles, strong values and organisational beliefs. In giving priority to these, the leadership of a group (both those in authority and the members) can allow individuals their autonomous, random and at times chaotic meanderings. As Wheatley says, this is no simple task:

Any time we see systems in apparent chaos, our training urges us to interfere, to stabilise and shore things up. But if we can trust the workings of chaos, we will see that the dominant shape of our organisations can be maintained if we retain clarity about the purpose and direction of the organisation. If we succeed in maintaining focus, rather than hands-on control, we also create the flexibility and responsiveness that every organisation craves. What leaders are called upon to do in a chaotic world is to shape their organisations through concepts, not through elaborate rules or structures. (Wheatley, 1992, p 136)

As will be indicated in the current study, participants in this research are convinced that values and concepts, rather than the rules and structures of the past, are fundamental to new life for religious congregations in the twenty-first century.

Savage (1996) extends this concept further in his challenge to organisational members to rethink their values, attitudes and assumptions about leadership, work and time. To do so, he points out, the individual needs to be in touch with self and with others in new and creative ways, not preoccupied with one's own power, but with how each person empowers, energizes and enables the other. Such a stance speaks to the fundamental values of leadership that emerge in this study, values perceived by participants as motivated by the drive within and beyond the group to enable it to focus its creative energies for the sake of mission. It is 'other-focused' leadership dependent on integrity, trust and relationships for the successful navigation of transition.

Leadership as Relationship

Relational leadership is seen as a third area with implications for religious leadership at this time. Savage (1996), Handy (1994), Drucker (1993), and Wheatley (1992) all speak of leadership in terms of both core values, and flexibility, each bounded by the effectiveness of the relationships that are developed. Rost (1991), in his study of the nature of leadership in the postmodern era, develops a definition that stresses relationship as the foundation of leadership:

Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes. (Rost, 1991, p 67)

While his approach is linear, rather than circular or grounded in Quantum Theory, it does highlight the importance of this influence relationship in effecting real change, an importance that emerges in this study.

In Rost's definition, only when mutual purposes are being forged in a relationship, when common purposes are developed over time as members of a community interact in a non-coercive relationship about the changes they intend, can true leadership (including religious leadership) be said to be occurring.

Blank's (1995) definition of Quantum Leadership summarises the thinking of many contemporary thinkers around the significance of relational interdependence and the power of shared leadership:

Quantum leadership explains that leadership is best understood in terms of leaders and followers together. Through the lens of Quantum Leadership we recognize that leadership is a field, an interaction, and interdependence of leaders and followers. Quantum Leadership defines the power of leadership as the connection between leaders and followers who together play a role in generating leadership power. The Quantum Leadership paradigm expands the part everyone can play in guiding an organisation. (Blank, 1995, p 17)

For Blank, as for the participants in this study, in the field of leadership, interrelationships are core.

Interrelationships within Leadership Structures

A number of writers such as McRae-McMahon (2001), Limerick and Cunningham (1993), and DePree (1989) stress that effective leadership is exercised by all in the organisation. Hall and Thompson (1980) use their theory of consciousness and value development to demonstrate the close interrelationships among all members in an organisation. Individual members influence each other in determining the type of leadership that is exercised in a group. In this model, both those in leadership roles and other members play an important role in determining the leadership that occurs. Organisations are seen as being sustained by diametrically opposed behaviours in leaders and followers. In this research, Levels 5, 6 and 7 will be shown to be pivotal for religious groups facing an unknown future.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7
<p>AUTOCRATIC LEADERS as Dictators Godparents Bureaucrats</p> <p>who RETAIN POWER need</p> <p>↓</p> <p>-----</p> <p>↑</p> <p>CONFORMING FOLLOWERS</p> <p>Who RESPECT POWER</p>			<p>LAISSEZ-FAIRE LEADERS</p> <p>who DENY TO THEMSELVES POWER need</p> <p>↓</p> <p>-----</p> <p>↑</p> <p>REBEL FOLLOWERS</p> <p>who seek power for themselves</p>	<p>EMPOWERING LEADERS as Charismatic Collegial Servants</p> <p>who SHARE POWER need</p> <p>↓</p> <p>-----</p> <p>↑</p> <p>COOPERATING INITIATORS</p> <p>Who can accept SHARED POWER</p>		

Hall and Thompson, 1980, p 101

Table 2 – Leader-Follower Behaviours

In a reflection that holds particular relevance for religious institutes, Hall and Thompson suggest that there is a clear correlation between phases of consciousness, value development and effective leadership. They contend

as well, that there is a direct relationship between the style of leadership adopted by the person in authority and the style of followership taken on by those within the group. In their model, as in the current research, it is the collegial servant and peer visionary who can most effectively develop shared leadership within the organisation.

Servant Leadership

Greenleaf (1977) articulates a vision with particular relevance for religious institutes. In describing the leader who is both peer visionary and servant, his model speaks aptly to religious groups, whose underlying rationale of leadership is found in gospel stories (such as that of the washing of the feet) which emphasise service of one's fellow human beings. Coined by him in 1970, servant-leadership is defined by Greenleaf as underlined by service of others, a sense of community, and a shared decision-making power. Servant leadership is seen as a merging of servanthood into leadership and back into servanthood again, in a fluid and continuous pattern. It is characterised by mutuality, trust, and one of Greenleaf's fundamental ethics – the belief that the work exists for the person as much as the person exists for the work. Servant leadership emphasises the concept both of 'the leader as servant', and 'the institution as servant', a shift running counter to the hierarchical structures which provide power and status to people in positions of authority. For Greenleaf, the desire to serve comes before the desire to lead. And central to this, he believes, is an ethic of leadership grounded in the integrity and authenticity of the person.

Authentic Leadership

A final area seen to be significant for religious leadership during this time of decisive change is that of authenticity and integrity. It is this integrity which is explored in the writings of Rost (1991), Terry (1993), Duignan and Bhindi (1997). Since, for Rost, leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers, then this relationship is critical to the ethics of

leadership. He sees the process as defining both the nature of leadership and its ethical integrity.

Duignan and Bhindi (1997) describe leadership as fundamentally relational, and argue that, within this context, authenticity and trust are necessarily at the heart of leadership. They see the call to honour as intrinsic to what constitutes authenticity in leadership, and describe it as being at the core of the authentic self and the authentic organisation. This concept is also taken up by Terry (1993) to create his outline of authentic-action leadership. In presenting six ethical principles corresponding to his defined action wheel, he establishes the basis for six criteria, which can be used to recognise authentic leadership. For him, authentic-action leadership is an essential foundation for enabling leaders to frame issues, to understand legitimate and illegitimate uses of power, to assess competing visions, and to articulate a global ethic. In Chapters 6, 9 and 10, these are shown to be fundamental to transitional religious leadership.

LEARNINGS FOR A TIME OF TRANSITION

Summary and Conclusions

The argument proposed in this chapter is that postmodern life is characterized by discontinuous and fundamental change. Structures supporting the interpretation of reality and collective action have been reshaped as the fundamental paradigm shift of the past century has resulted in radical transformation of the way that human beings understand themselves and their world. New frames of reference for interpreting the world have emerged in new theories across the natural and social sciences. An analysis of organisational, psychosocial and leadership theories suggest strongly that the effectiveness of groups in managing the transition into the new millennium will very much depend on the theories and practices of organisations and leadership that they adopt.

Contemporary religious thinkers and writers have taken the challenges of this fundamental shift in consciousness to try to make sense of this new world for the women and men who have committed themselves to religious life. Discussing the impact of the paradigm shift of the past century, which has fundamentally shifted the way that humanity views itself, they have demonstrated the need for groups to transform their structures radically, in order to embody changing understandings of the world and changing attitudes to life. In examining the reality of religious organisations today (diminishing numbers, increasing median age of members, the life cycle of religious congregations, differing phases of consciousness and development), they describe some of the individual and collective characteristics of congregations which could facilitate or hinder transition at this time. The theories summarized in Chapter 3 provide a framework for the thinking of religious writers who explore the characteristics of contemporary religious life and leadership. They facilitate identification of the key elements of religious leadership seen as necessary in managing the transition of religious institutes during the pivotal changes of this time.

Chapter 4

RELIGIOUS LIFE IN TRANSITION

INTRODUCTION

Religious writers and thinkers have taken theories such as those examined in Chapter 3, utilizing and developing them extensively, as they have sought to explore and understand contemporary religious life. They are in an ideal position to do so. At the core of religious life is the commitment of persons, whose lives have their foundation in the freedom and equality of the gospel of Jesus, and whose vows commit them equally to a way of life based on prophetic engagement and service, transcendence, communitarian living, inclusivity, and a call to the margins of society. The consequent emphasis on value-based principles, response to urgent hardships and injustices in society, inter-relatedness, mutuality, trust and servanthood encompass some of the very principles named in Chapter 3 as intrinsic to effective transition and leadership in the third millennium.

In Chapter 4, the diverse ways that religious thinkers and writers have explored the implications of changed understandings of global realities, personhood, groups, and leadership for the future of religious life are examined. Contemporary writers argue, that for religious groups to embody new understandings of the world and respond appropriately to new and urgent needs within their foundational commitment, a radical transformation of religious life is essential. In describing some of the individual and collective characteristics of groups which could facilitate or hinder transition, they suggest a range of possible leadership practices within the underpinning motivations and dynamics of religious leadership.

From the significant body of literature that analyses contemporary religious life, the thinking of a number of pertinent writers is explored. The resultant theoretical framework suggests ways that emerging understandings of religious life and leadership might inform planning and decision-making into the future. The literature review responds to the sub-questions derived from the key question in this study:

Religious life in transition – viewed from both its human and ecclesial contexts and situated within the whole of life

Possibilities for reconfiguration – from chaos and disintegration to personal and communal shifts of consciousness and practice

Changing frameworks and models – with possibilities for self-renewing organic structures

Religious leadership during a period of pivotal shift – focussing on

The importance of organic frameworks, and a basis of trust, servanthood and authenticity

Characteristics of what is named as ‘outstanding leadership’

Factors inhibiting effective leadership.

RELIGIOUS LIFE AT A PIVOTAL TURNING POINT

Caught at the crossroads of the new millennium, and influenced by the global paradigm shift, which has called into question many of their structures, Catholic religious institutes face enormous challenges. The reality of diminishing numbers and the increasing average age within congregations have made the concept of change a fearful one for many women and men whose initial commitment was made in a very different time and environment. To embrace fundamental shifts of the magnitude called for in postmodern society is a far greater challenge for them than it would be for younger people, whose lives have been wholly situated in this new world. There is no doubt, as writers demonstrate, that their fundamental orientations suit religious life to the emerging theories outlined in Chapter 3. Nonetheless,

because of the above realities, transition remains a significant challenge, both for individuals and for many religious congregations.

Reframing Religious Life

Until the mid-twentieth century, as pointed out earlier, religious life was largely understood and lived according to Newtonian principles (Schneiders, 2000). Horaria, community, prayer, dress, ministries were clearly defined according to what were seen to be unchanging principles. The redefinition of the Church and of religious life at Vatican II (Flannery, 1992) challenged religious congregations to renew the structures of their lives in the light of shifting perceptions and new definitions. The systematic ordering of their daily lives gave way to more flexible structures, reflecting emerging understandings of their founding impetus, and their place in a changing church and world (Arbuckle, 1988).

Throughout the 70s and 80s, however, despite the enthusiasm of religious groups and their willingness to reform their way of life, significant numbers began to leave and fewer applicants were joining. At the same time, new understandings of natural and social systems were radically changing the way that humankind and religious congregations were viewing themselves. The focus shifted, as religious moved from a concentration on renewal from within religious life itself, to analyses of that life within the global world of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (Radcliffe, 2000; Schneiders, 2000).

In the provisional context in which it now found itself, religious life began to be examined, not so much from the perspective of the structures, procedures or new theological understandings emerging from Vatican II, but as a radically different form of life in the fundamentally changed arena of the new millennium (Arbuckle, 1988; Chittister, 1996b; Fiand, 2001; Harmer, 1995b; O'Murchu, 1995; Radcliffe, 2000; Schneiders, 2000, 2001; Wittburg, 1996).

It is in the context of human life today then, that prominent religious thinkers and writers now explore the meaning of religious life. According to Radcliffe (2000), any discussion of religious life needs to begin with a discussion of the meaning of human life. It is his belief that religious life has a particular and significant role at this time:

Religious Life is more important than ever before, because of how we are called to face the crisis of meaning of our contemporaries. (Radcliffe, 2000, p 211)

Schneiders (1998) also argues that the situation challenging the meaning of religious life today is identical to the one faced by contemporary humankind – the attempt to live life coherently within the context of chaos.

Religious Life during a Time of Transition

Two scholarly and detailed works on religious life published in the English-speaking world in recent years have been Schneiders' *Finding the Treasure* (2000) and *Selling All* (2001). In these first two volumes of a three-volume treatise on religious life in the world of today (the third due to be published in 2005), Schneiders uses the foundational concepts of Quantum and Chaos theories to develop new understandings of the underpinnings of religious life. As an organic system, religious life is seen to be chaotic and unpredictable in its openness to new evolutions within the arena of the global community. Faced with developing understandings of natural, social and theological systems, they have struggled to make sense of global realities. Schneiders describes the numerous events and shifts of understanding which have influenced religious organisations, demonstrating clearly the unpredictability that necessarily underpins any transition. It is this 'highly unpredictable', chaotic aspect of religious life, which challenges transitional leadership attempting to navigate new pathways in differing contexts.

Schneiders' work (2000; 2001; 2003) locates religious life in both its human and its ecclesial contexts. Her exploration of what religious life is and means

in the context of the new millennium demonstrates two things. Not only were the structures changed when religious organisations ceased to be closed systems in the years following Vatican II: pervasive interaction with a world undergoing a fundamental paradigm shift deeply influenced the very frameworks on which this life was based.

Arbuckle (1988), O'Murchu (1995), Chittister (1996b), Wittburg (1996), Fiand (2001), and Schneiders (2000) deliberately locate religious life within the changing anthropological, psychosocial and organisational world of the twenty-first century identified in Chapter 3. In adopting this perspective, they place their conceptualisations squarely in the contexts of the broad theoretical frameworks outlined earlier.

THE CONTEXTS

The Human Context of Groups in Transition

Chittister, (1996b), O'Murchu (1997) and Schneiders (2000) argue that, in the human arena, the capacity to view religious life from the perspective of the quantum universe is fundamental to the transition of religious organisations at this time. Religious life, as an organic life form, finds meaning through its interaction with the continually shifting patterns and chaos of the contemporary world. Schneiders (2000) uses the metaphor very deliberately to describe the intricate holistic system which a religious organisation must develop if the permeability of its own boundaries and its fundamental organic character are to be used to bring about meaningful renewal. In her thinking, the forum of the contemporary world, viewed from the perspective of the God quest, is key to the identity, survival and long-term renewal of religious organisations.

Chittister (1996b) and O'Murchu (1997) also see religious institutes as finding meaning in the values, structures and philosophical insights of a new worldview. For Fiand (2001), it is the transformation of human

consciousness that encourages confrontation with the issues and crises in which religious women and men find themselves. Wittburg (1996) emphasizes the intimate relationship between religious life and the environmental contexts of societal events and conditions. Writers also explore the importance and challenge of the ecclesial context in which religious institutes operate.

The Ecclesial Context

O'Murchu (1995) and Schneiders (2001) examine in detail the ecclesial arena of religious groups. Their analysis of this perspective points to the fundamental conflict between the image of religious organisations as chaotic, self-organising systems that are continually renewing themselves, and the concept of a hierarchical Church, which attempts to fix religious life into a pattern that remains permanently stable. The religious organisation is seen to have both a canonical and a prophetic relationship with the hierarchical Church. By its total involvement in the religious dimension of human life within the Christian tradition, the religious institute is committed to the life of the Church. Yet in its prophetic call, as these writers point out, religious life has been throughout its history, a kind of 'loyal opposition', in much the same way that the Hebrew prophetic movement was to Israel's leadership, and as Jesus was to the structures of Judaism.

It is to be expected then, that as religious life began to see itself as finding meaning through the continual recreation of itself in seemingly chaotic movements, with its basis in flexible and permeable boundaries, it would come into direct conflict with a Church that has remained intrinsically hierarchical, monolithic and totalitarian. In describing the enormous tension that even discussion of these issues generates, the above writers name this conflict as a fundamental challenge to any religious leadership endeavouring to facilitate the transition of Catholic religious congregations into an uncertain future. It is a conflict which is worked out in the Church and world of the

twenty-first century and within the chaotic fields of leadership within religious life itself.

CHAOS AND INTERACTION LEADING TO RENEWAL

It is within these chaotic fields that the above religious thinkers believe the wholeness of life is to be found. O'Murchu (1995) suggests that Quantum Theory encourages religious groups to view their life, not as hermetically sealed organisms, but as living entities, characterized by change, chaos and interaction with other systems. Reflecting the thinking of writers such as Senge (1990), Wheatley (1992), and McRae-McMahon (2001), he maintains that these interactions lead groups to reconfigure themselves at higher levels.

O'Murchu's analysis is paralleled by that of Fiand (2001). She discusses the implications of chaos theory and the relevance of the paradigm shift of the last century for the reconfiguring of religious life. Using Wheatley's (1992) analogy, she points out that, within the complexity and change of human life, religious organisations have experienced massive inputs of new information and random, ambiguous conjecturing. She suggests that the resultant levels of disturbance have caused chaos, loss of equilibrium and a breakdown of present forms. She emphasizes, however, that such disintegration is not necessarily a harbinger of the death of the group. In a conclusion relevant to this study, she argues that it is possible for religious institutes, out of the apparent chaotic meanderings, to reconfigure themselves.

Reconfiguration

A changed consciousness of truth and reality, a perception of organisations as relational, participative, and open to mystery, and a vision of religious life as capable of rising from the ashes of diminishment and disintegration are foundational to this research. New understandings of natural and social systems lead religious communities to new understandings of religious life

and leadership. Fiand (2001) draws on the wisdom of Wheatley (1992) to argue that reconfiguration is necessary for organisational growth and development in the religious institute of the new millennium. Her position reinforces the writings of both Harmer (1992; 1995b) and O'Murchu (1995) who explore new possibilities for reconfiguration in the movement from diminishment and breakdown to personal and communal shifts of consciousness. Wittburg (1996) cites fundamental purpose, membership, mission and use of resources as four areas that are pivotal in this movement.

A number of groups have been identified as having attempted reconfiguration in the terms outlined above. Institutes such as Gyger's (1996) underwent a fundamental theological reflection and review that enabled them to take the realities of the late twentieth century (poverty, violence, environmental degradation, war, and the new search for spirituality) and adopt new structures of organisation and leadership to achieve their fundamental purposes. In order to meet new and developing situations, this congregation changed its status from that of an apostolic religious community to one defined as a Secular Institute (cf Chapter 1). The group took this step to provide it with the freedom it felt was needed to face a significantly different world. Hierarchical directorships were disbanded in favour of a leadership of equals. Together, the community searched for new structures, new forms of communication, new ways of dealing with power.

The radical structural changes undertaken by this group reflect the development of emerging frameworks and models of leadership currently being explored as possible prototypes for the future of religious congregations.

CHANGING FRAMEWORKS AND MODELS OF LEADERSHIP

New understandings of religious life as an organic whole, where free flowing interaction allows the group to reconfigure itself into greater complexity and

greater depth, have given impetus to a transformation of thinking and writing around religious leadership. Previously, in a hierarchical structure, the leader of a religious congregation was seen as the ‘Major Superior’, or the ‘Superior General’ – titles that indicated clearly the role of the leader at the apex of the hierarchical pyramid, named explicitly as ‘the voice of God for those in the community’. Changed perceptions of the nature of Religious Life have led writers to explore new understandings, which see leadership as embedded in the group, authorised by the group, called forth from the group (Chittister, 1996b; Fiand, 2001; Harmer, 1995a; O'Murchu, 1995). In such models, it is the community that names those who will facilitate leadership within the group for a particular time.

In exploring changed perceptions, current reflections on leadership in religious life focus on two related but quite specific areas. Writers such as Harmer (1992; 1995a), O'Murchu (1995), and Schneiders (1998), explore possible new models of leadership in the light of changed understandings. Nygren and Ukeritis (1993), Markham (1999), and Fiand (2001) focus more specifically on the qualities required of those individuals who undertake formal leadership roles.

Self-renewal within Chaotic Disequilibrium

O'Murchu (1995) and Schneiders (1998) emphasise leadership as a process or dynamism, which promotes self-renewal within chaotic disequilibrium. If leadership in religious life is for a sociospiritual organism, if a healthy organism is one which is in a continuous state of disequilibrium, if living organisms are, of their nature, mobilized towards self renewal and regeneration (unlike machines which move towards disintegration), if, in Wheatley's terms (1992), they are focused on maintaining identity while changing form, then these writers argue, it is imperative for religious leadership, within the context of faith, to ensure that leadership processes promote an organic responsiveness to the environment, while retaining consistency with the core identity of the group. Such key elements are seen as crucial by Schneiders (1998), as well as by

Harmer (1992) and O'Murchu (1997). Schneiders (1998) identifies issues of governing principles within diversity, and 'whole-part interaction', while Harmer (1992) and O'Murchu (1997) focus on organic models of leadership. All three however argue that value-based leadership is foundational.

Leadership shaping the Organisation through Values

Schneiders' explorations reflect Wheatley's belief that the unpredictability of life calls for religious organisations to focus on the big picture, guided by governing principles, strong values and organisational beliefs. In this model, leadership creates the climate for a re-articulation of the basic framework of meaning for a particular religious congregation. This core identity and priority then allows individuals, in Handy's (1989) terms, their autonomous and at times chaotic meanderings. In facilitating this interaction between the whole and the parts, leadership is viewed as promoting a conception of the community as a self-renewing organic structure:

What we ask of leadership today is not that it supply us with the correct answers, or even that it pioneers the road to the future, but that it mediates the creative interchange between local and global levels, helping us to own the real questions and search honestly, together, for appropriate responses, and thus facilitate the life-giving interaction between the Religious Congregation and the real world in which we live and minister. (Schneiders, 1998, p 29)

In this sense, Schneiders locates the leadership of religious life in the dynamic of the relationship between named leaders and individual members, and between the congregation and the global community. Through the development of a shared identity within the diversity and ferment of the community an organic and life-giving form of Religious Life can emerge.

This concept of an organic model of leadership is explored in detail by both Harmer and O'Murchu.

Models of Organic Leadership

In two separate papers, Harmer (1992; 1995a) develops a model of organic leadership, which she believes is faithful to the gospel imperative and responds to developing theories of organisation and leadership. In contrasting the hierarchical and organic models of leadership, she points out that, while both models have legitimacy in differing contexts, the assumptional bases and principles which govern the hierarchical model do not fit the gospel basis of religious life or its reality in the contemporary world (Drucker, 1993; Handy, 1994).

The early Church used the organic model of leadership. For the community of the first century, authority came from the community, with the group identifying leaders and calling them forth to the service of the whole. With the growth of the Church and its approbation by Constantine, there was a gradual development of the hierarchical model used in the Roman world. This remained in force until the mid-twentieth century when a re-appraisal of leadership within the Church took place. Changing understandings of the nature of being, new theories of organisation and of leadership, developments in psychosocial theory, and rapid changes in religious life, particularly since Vatican II, have demonstrated, Harmer (1995a) believes, the appropriateness of the organic model in underpinning the structures of religious congregations.

Harmer sees the hierarchical structure (most commonly depicted as a pyramid) as exclusive, not only because it depicts power as being 'top-down', with authority concentrated in the upper levels, but also because the separation it establishes between the different levels fosters distance, competition, parallelism, and control of the flow of information from one level to another. Organic principles and structures, on the other hand, are depicted as operating in a cyclical structure, in which all members are seen as peers, operating within a circle of interconnectedness and co-operation, all possessing the knowledge and power shared within the circle. The origins of Religious Congregations, and their foundation in the early Christian community

of equals, reinforced by the contemporary studies outlined earlier, suggest strongly that an organic model of Religious Life is needed for religious groups at this time.

The hierarchical model is based on the assumptions that most people are not well educated (necessitating the importance of governance being entrusted to a small elite who are able to make informed decisions), that most people are dangerous to the leader (necessitating many layers of hierarchy to protect those at the top), and that there is a limited amount of power (making it imperative for the leadership to retain significant power as it sees itself as using its power for the good of all).

In contrast to this, the organic model assumes the members have sufficient knowledge to be entrusted with power over their own lives, that most people have good will, that power is limitless, and that the good of the whole is better served by involving as many as possible. This model is consonant with Hall and Thompson's Levels 6 and 7, and Senge's fifth discipline.

A table contrasting hierarchical and organic models of leadership, which has been developed from Harmer's comparisons, identifies the developing understandings as possible ways forward for religious groups and their leadership.

Hierarchical Model	Organic Model
<p>Authority</p> <p>Authority comes from the top. This is a top-down system in which the leader makes the decisions and the greatest authority resides in the highest leader.</p>	<p>Authority</p> <p>Authority and the power to create resides in the group, which chooses leaders to take on certain functions on its behalf (a model used by the early Church)</p>
<p>Responsibility</p> <p>Since decisions come from the leaders it is they who are responsible. The leaders may delegate certain responsibilities to the group.</p>	<p>Responsibility</p> <p>Authority is to be shared by all. Participation is a right and an obligation. Members delegate certain responsibilities to leaders.</p>
<p>Control of Power</p> <p>There are clear levels and clear delineations of control. “Middle Managers” are appointed from above to exercise delegated authority over a certain portion of the whole.</p>	<p>Diffusion of Power</p> <p>The power in the whole needs to be diffused appropriately. Diffusion recognises that different people hold certain powers and are held responsible for their exercise</p>
<p>Accountability</p> <p>Accountability to leaders is the responsibility of all members. It is rare in this model for leaders to be accountable to the members.</p>	<p>Accountability</p> <p>Each person and each entity is accountable for that share of the group power that is being exercised.</p>
<p>Subsidiarity</p> <p>As organisations become more complex some authority and responsibility are delegated to lower levels. This principle is that what can be accomplished at a lower level should not be reserved for the higher.</p>	<p>Interdependence</p> <p>Each is responsible for the effects that her/his decisions and actions have on the group. This principle allows for considerable diversity throughout the whole while protecting the integrity and inviolateness of the parts.</p>
<p>Freedom as Gift</p> <p>Freedoms are gifts from the leaders and can be taken away; they are not rights.</p>	<p>Freedom as Right</p> <p>While the individual is responsible and accountable to the whole and its parts, she/he possesses certain freedoms that cannot be taken away (although they may be given up willingly for the common good).</p>

Table 3 – Table 3: Principles derived from Harmer’s Analysis

This table has clear implications for transitional religious leadership. On the one hand, as Harmer points out, the hierarchical model is basically a familial one with some members adults and others children; some better educated and more able to take on governance; some superior and others inferior. In contrast to this, the organic model, since it is based on the assumption that all members are adult and equal, with gifts that are of value to the whole, is seen to be the more appropriate model for contemporary religious congregations, such as those involved in this research.

O'Murchu (1995) draws similar conclusions as Harmer. His Hierarchy-Bureaucracy and Team-Network differentiations roughly coincide with Harmer's hierarchical and Organic models, although he focuses more specifically on the contrast between imposed control and self control, between rigidity and flexibility, than does Harmer. This can be seen particularly in his comparison of institutional and networking structures. Like Harmer, O'Murchu makes it clear that neither model is intrinsically superior to the other. Given the situation of Religious Life in the contemporary world, however, his findings reinforce Harmer's – that the model appropriate to contemporary religious Life is an organic one.

Organic models operate most effectively in value-centred organisations where there is a strong sense of mission, an equality of membership, and a willingness to empower members of the group to act autonomously and at times chaotically within this foundation. It is the belief of these writers that organic leadership works only if there is a willingness to share power within a strong base of trust and authenticity. In this model, both leadership as a dynamic, and leadership as a function of personal character, development and skill, are seen as critical. It is this final area of personal character that concludes the literature review forming the content of this chapter.

TRANSFORMING LEADERSHIP QUALITIES

A number of religious writers (Fiand, 2001; Harmer, 1995b; Leddy, 1991; Markham, 1999; Nygren & Ukeritis, 1993; Schneiders, 1998; Sofield & Kuhn, 1995) focus on the qualities of leadership they believe are necessary for the women and men elected to formal roles of leadership within religious institutes. While acknowledging the importance of leadership as a field, understood in terms of the interdependence between leaders and community members (Schneiders, 1998), they examine more specifically the roles and desirable qualities of named leaders in generating leadership power for the group.

Three authors who focus specifically on leadership qualities as they pertain to the key question of this study are Nygren and Ukeritis (1993), Murphy (1995), and Markham (1999). They examine psychosocial readiness (Murphy, 1995), the necessary focus on spiritual and mission goals (Nygren & Ukeritis, 1993), and authenticity and trust as essential for spiritlinking leadership (Markham, 1999).

Psychosocial Readiness for Leadership

Murphy (1995) uses transpersonal psychology to argue that the breakdown of Religious Life derives from a refusal (through fear, lack of insight or inadequate emotional development) to make the transformation from the mythic stage of religion to that of rational-individuation and consequently to the higher stages of authentic religion. It is his contention that failure to nourish and support a sense of a global world that is interdependent and self-directed will hinder transition and change for religious groups. Fear, lack of insight or inadequate emotional development are seen to prevent religious organisations from moving at the most basic structural and relational levels beyond a classical, Newtonian view of life. This, he believes, will eventuate in the death of many religious groups.

Markham argues further that 'spiritlinking' leadership derives from the capacity of the leader to engage in interdependent, cooperative and dynamic action on

behalf of the good that is held in common. Walsh (1990) and McRae-McMahon (2001) examine the importance of the inner life and maturity of individual leaders in the evolution of life. They argue that the accumulated influence of the initiatives and decisions of individual leaders impact significantly on the community to influence growth and new levels of development.

Outstanding Leadership Qualities

Possibly the most extensive exploration of religious congregations completed in the nineties was carried out by Nygren and Ukeritis (1993). Their study, *The Future of Religious Orders in the United States*, provides a perspective on the lives of 121,000 religious women and men in the United States, through the responses of almost eight thousand religious who answered the survey. The study covered attitudes and practices of the members and leaders of religious institutes in all the major areas of their lives. Its purpose was to identify the changes which must occur if religious life is to continue as a vibrant, viable option for individuals who wish to commit themselves to the God-quest in this particular way. One of the strongest conclusions of the researchers is that, within the dynamic of leadership, the quality of the person in leadership remains one of the most critical factors in determining the future of any group striving to make the transition into an uncertain future. Their particular examination of leadership focuses on the leaders of congregations of more than 150 members. It endeavours to identify those qualities most needed to lead a group into a dynamic and viable future. In so doing the researchers differentiate between two groups, which they name broadly as 'outstanding' and 'typical' leaders.

Outstanding and Typical Leaders – Exploring the Differences

A major finding from the work of Nygren and Ukeritis (1992) is that outstanding leaders are characterised by what has been called the leadership-motive syndrome (McLelland & Boyatzis, 1982). Their model of leadership describes

the outcome of leadership as a shared vision to which all members of the group can commit themselves. In this scenario, outstanding leaders are depicted as focused on motivating the community to discern its shared vision and focus on group goals. They are less concerned with supervising, affirming and counselling individual members.

For religious congregations, this orientation manifests itself in two ways. In the first place, outstanding leaders find and communicate the spiritual significance of events and the meaning of the ongoing life of the group, seeing God as a source of direction and energy, beyond a pious interpretation of daily happenings. Secondly, outstanding leaders use their role to mobilise the energy and consensus of the group members, by whom they believe they are authorised to act. Typical leaders, on the other hand, are more often seen to be acting out of the authority that they believe is theirs by virtue of their position, and are more concerned with mentoring individuals.

Nygren and Ukeritis identify a number of characteristics that they believe derive from the two basic orientations of spiritual dynamism and mission:

Outstanding leaders exert more personal power to nurture a shared vision and, in so doing, mobilise members to commit themselves to the goals of the group;

Outstanding leaders demonstrate a capacity for empathy, which captures the understanding and commitment of members for collective action;

Outstanding leaders direct their energy more towards harnessing commitment to the vision than towards becoming involved in interpersonal concerns such as counselling or supervising individual members, and so are less involved in day-to-day personnel problems;

Outstanding leaders show signs of greater spiritual sensitivity; and that

Being more focused on the goals and vision of the group, outstanding leaders take initiatives that will deal with an anticipated future.

Typical leaders, on the other hand, focus more on maintenance and the day-to-day personnel problems and activities.

Summing up the results of their findings of the differences between outstanding and typical leaders, Nygren and Ukeritis profile outstanding leaders:

They are men and women grounded deeply in faith, who are able to acknowledge the centrality of God in their lives. They have a high need to achieve personally and have a clear sense of the impact that the congregation could have. Moreover, they are characterised by objectivity and compassion. With all these attributes, the outstanding leaders do not have a strong need to belong to the very groups they are attempting to lead, and yet they find meaning precisely in that context of faith, membership and impact. The outstanding leader has a clear vision of the future and successfully employs the means both to gain the support of the congregation for the direction, and implement the decisions of the group. (Nygren & Ukeritis, 1993, p 246)

As will be seen in Chapter 10, the conclusions drawn by participants in the current study mirror these findings.

Factors Inhibiting Effective Leadership

While highlighting the qualities of the outstanding religious leader, the researchers also delineate those factors which inhibit the exercise of effective leadership, and are thus likely to undermine the transition of religious groups into the new world of the twenty-first century. Sometimes, they believe, a breakdown occurs because of resistance or limitations within the group. At other times, it is a result of limitations within the person of the leader. This is a view substantiated by the work of Markham (1999). In describing Religious leaders as people who must be willing to keep hope and vision before people while modelling commitment themselves, she supports the findings of Nygren and Ukeritis. She speaks of the core requirements of a person in leadership as the possession of an overarching vision and an ability to mobilise the commitment of the group towards that vision, with truth, authenticity and

compassion. Such leadership, she points out, supporting the views of both Walsh (1990) and Murphy (1995), is predicated on both spiritual depth and psychological equilibrium.

Leaders who Undermine Effective Transition

Depth and psychosocial maturity are seen by the above writers as prerequisites for authenticity, interconnectedness and trust. Markham emphasises this requirement, not only describing Nygren and Ukeritis' "outstanding and typical leaders", but also exploring in some detail the impact on a group of dangerous or ineffective leadership. She speaks of the importance of psychosocial equilibrium for those in leadership roles (Hall & Thompson, 1980; Murphy, 1995), outlining some of the harm caused by particular leaders who, lacking spiritual depth and psychological balance, not only undermine any attempts of a group to move into the future, but who actually inflict harm.

Markham believes (1999, pp 231-237) that when leaders are lacking in a sense of inner authority (*'the empty suit'*), they derive their sense of leadership from a superficial enactment of a role, often that of the all-nurturing parent, who appeals to people's insecurities during a time of pivotal change. When they function from a fundamental base of denying feelings and emotions (*'the talking head'*), they lack interpersonal connection, and are unable to foster the circle of interconnectedness and co-operation required of an organic leadership. When self-importance and personal fame are more important than team-building and the vision of the group (*'the narcissist'*), then grandiosity can give rise to uninhibited, self-serving decision-making, disregard of organisational processes, and the inability to tolerate any real exchange of ideas. Markham believes that narcissists are the most dangerous of the dysfunctional leaders, both because their projection of power and drama, and their ability to establish quick, superficial relationships can magnetise others into following them, and because their powers of manipulation tend to polarise groups and destroy unity and vision. Where the size of the group limits the

knowledge that members have of each other, then the likelihood of dysfunctional members being elected to positions of leadership is increased.

It is Markham's conviction that weak leaders collude in fostering delusions of security and comfort, particularly dangerous at a time of rapid change, when the increasing age of the group makes commitment to change even more difficult. These leaders distract from the realities of a new world that challenge religious congregations to explore the meaning and significance of their way of life in a new context. They also undermine demands for the relinquishment of old ways that must precede any transition into an uncertain future. If, in addition, as Hall and Thompson point out (1980), organisations are sustained by diametrically opposed behaviours in leaders and followers, then religious groups will need to counter the limitations brought about by the reality that younger, more risk-taking members are increasingly in a minority in religious congregations. For groups such as those that form the focus of this study, psychosocial equilibrium, and a focus on mission and the risk-taking necessary to manage transition will be seen to be crucial factors for leadership.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

From the mid- twentieth century, religious congregations have been challenged to reinterpret and restructure their lives in the light of the discontinuous and fundamental paradigm shift that has occurred in both society and church. Research and writings during this period have identified fundamental changes in structures and practices, which could help to facilitate the transition of religious congregations into an uncertain future. It is these writings that have formed the basis of the literature review in this study. From the explorations of a wide range of writers, it is clear that leadership is crucial to transition.

Changing perceptions of the natural and social worlds have pointed to new models for religious groups. Flexibility, diversity and permeability, within the

intricately ordered pattern of core values and beliefs, call for groups that are relational, open-ended, participative and premised in mystery. Supportive structures promote an organic responsiveness to a rapidly changing environment while retaining consistency with the group. Within such a structure, a re-articulation of the basic framework of meaning for a particular religious congregation provides a core identity and priority that then allows individuals their autonomous, and at times chaotic meanderings.

The leadership model derived from this is essentially an organic one, where members are seen as peers, operating within a circle of interconnectedness and co-operation, possessing a shared knowledge and power based on authenticity, trust and servanthood. The leader is authorised by the group to carry out specific leadership functions on its behalf. Underpinning such a model is the assumption that the members possess the necessary psychosocial equilibrium to support such a model.

EMERGING CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The specific theories examined in Chapters 3 and 4 provide a relevant framework for the current research. As is shown in Figure 1, religious life can be depicted diagrammatically as clearly embedded in the society and world of the twenty-first century. The crisis of living contemporary religious life is seen to be a mirror image of the crisis of the modern self and modern society. Circumscribed by the fundamental paradigm shift of the last century, it has been influenced by the resultant radical changes in the understandings of person, society, organisations, and the leadership operating within them.



Figure 1 – Emerging Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 demonstrates that developing theories relevant to religious life and its leadership during a period of decisive transition can be summarized, at this stage, in the following way:

Fundamental Paradigm Shift

- New frames of reference in Science, Technology and the Theory of Knowledge demonstrate the mutuality and interrelatedness of the whole of creation.

Theories of Organisations

- Relationships, networks and the permeability within organisations randomly shape their capacity to sustain change within an intricately ordered pattern

Psychosocial Theories

- New frames of reference call for an ability to deal with discontinuities and to support a sense of an interdependent global world.

Leadership

- Effective leadership in this new world is fundamentally relational characterized by servanthood, mutuality, authenticity and trust – in which each person empowers and enables the other.

Religious Life

- Religious life and its leadership are called to straddle opposing worldviews to engender consensual, flexible, dynamic forms of religious life within the meaning of the whole of life.

Chapter 5

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS

INTRODUCTION

The impact of the fundamental changes of the twentieth century on the nature, purpose, structure and leadership practices within religious life was examined in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 outlines the methodological frameworks for the study. The choice of methodology was derived from the purposes of the research, and an identification of the data most appropriate to answer the research questions. The methodology takes into account both the depth and the complexity of the issues to be examined. It identifies the methods to be used and the methodology governing the choice and use of these methods.

At the outset, focussed interviews were identified as an effective method of realising the aims of the research. The choice of individual and group interviews was supported strongly by the recognisable congruence of epistemological and methodological considerations. The theoretical perspective underpinning the methodology, as well as the epistemology informing the theoretical perspective, justified this decision.

Chapter 5 has a number of purposes. Its first purpose is to provide the philosophical underpinning of the research methodology. The second is to present the methodology designed to achieve the research aims and to answer the questions in a comprehensive and focussed way. The third purpose is to describe the processes and techniques used to collect and analyse data, providing an outline of the procedures used in the study to select participants, to determine interviewing processes, and to identify emerging themes using the code and retrieve system of QSR NVivo. The final objective of the chapter is to address the issues of ethics.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study focuses specifically on the impact of the contemporary paradigm shift on the structures and practices of contemporary religious institutes, and the leadership needed to facilitate the transition of these groups into an uncertain future. The nominated questions detailed in Chapter 1 are restated here:

What leadership practices can facilitate most effectively the transition of Catholic religious congregations into an uncertain future and possible new forms of religious life, during an era of critical change?

A number of sub-questions are derived from this key question:

What are the characteristics of the world and uncertain future into which religious congregations are moving?

What key elements of this transition are critical to the identity, survival and long-term development of religious organisations?

What particular characteristics of religious groups would facilitate or hinder transition and change?

What developmental readiness is required of members to enable them and their leadership to make the transition into new forms of religious life?

How do emerging understandings of leadership inform planning and decision-making for religious groups into the future?

A qualitative approach was selected because the human and social basis of the study and the contextually rich and dynamic area of leadership provided an indication early in the research that it would be an appropriate and effective means of exploring the research questions (Cresswell, 1997). The multiple and complex facets of the reality of religious life, the value-laden aspect of the research, the need for an inductive methodology from which a theory of effective religious leadership practice might be developed, and personal experiences in educational and religious leadership, were basic underpinnings of the decision to utilise qualitative research for the study.

Social Science researchers (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Creswell, 1997, 2002; Crotty, 1998) have described the value of qualitative research for a study such as this. Qualitative enquiry takes into account the number of variables and the complexity of material involved. It provides a broad and comprehensive perspective from which meaningful findings about contemporary religious life and leadership could be extracted (Cresswell, 2002). It makes possible an analysis of contexts and meanings, and enables comparisons of similar and dissimilar processes, phenomena and beliefs in a variety of settings, across different religious congregations and different forms of religious life (Crotty, 1998). It facilitates the development of workable and shared understandings of change and new possibilities for religious institutes facing an unknown future (Cresswell, 1997). It allows for experimentation with the boundaries of interpretation, and an attempt to make sense of, and interpret, phenomena described by participants in terms of the meanings they might bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994).

UNDERPINNINGS FOR THE RESEARCH

Philosophical Foundations

An exploration of the philosophical underpinnings of the study provides the rationale for the choice of methodology. A number of considerations influenced the development of this framework:

the postmodernist theory that calls orthodoxies into question;

An underpinning feminist ideology; which has penetrated religious life and is defined by its strong critique of patriarchy, and its focus on the liberation of women and other oppressed groups, so that family, society and church may be reconstructed as communities of equals;

an awareness that in research such as this there is a clear need to examine firstly the phenomenon of contemporary religious leadership (with its

implications and complex meanings), and then to reflect on it as a process through which new insights might be developed; and

a realisation that in so doing there is a need to hold in creative tension the phenomenon being examined and the context in which it is being examined.

An examination of the origins and development of hermeneutical phenomenology helps to explain its appropriateness to the purposes of this research. Underpinned by a postmodernist and feminist orientation, it informs the subsequent structure and processes employed in the study.

Development of Methodological Underpinnings

The tenets of hermeneutical phenomenology have been developed from the conjunction of two continental traditions, developed in the hermeneutics of authors such as Schleiermacher and Dilthey and in the phenomenology of Husserl (Cresswell, 1997; Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Kearney, 1981a). It is the synthesis of the two traditions by Heidegger, Gadamer, and particularly Ricoeur (Kearney, 1996; Thompson, 1990), which have provided the starting point and justification for the methodology of this study. In his description of the origins and keystones of both hermeneutics and phenomenology, Crotty (1998) proposes relevant meanings and perspectives which these theorists bring to a qualitative research project such as this. Cresswell's (1997) examination of postmodernism and feminism provides a further understanding of the underpinning context out of which the research developed.

Three aspects of hermeneutic phenomenology are explored in some detail in this analysis. They demonstrate the value of this philosophical framework for informing the relationships between the reflections ('the text') provided by respondents in this study and the current situations ('the context') of religious life in which they find themselves.

- Dilthey's hermeneutic circle (Rickman, 1988) has clear relevance for examining the movement from the individual religious experience, to the context of contemporary religious life, and then to the relationship between the two.
- Husserl's phenomenology (Crotty, 1998), which focuses on the phenomenon to be examined, facilitates an analysis of the phenomenon of religious life.
- Hermeneutic Phenomenology, particularly as developed by Ricoeur (Kearney, 1996), indicates the value of the hermeneutical arc, in moving from initial understanding, to explanation, to existential understanding of religious life, and a subsequent way of interpreting what is real and possible. Ricoeur's belief that the symbols of myth, religion and ideology hold within them certain messages, which may be revealed by philosophical interpretation, points also to a process for uncovering implicit meanings within contemporary religious life.

The combination of these theories provides a philosophical framework which informed the methodology chosen for this research.

Hermeneutics

Crotty (1998) describes hermeneutics, the critical theory of interpretation, as coming into modern use in the seventeenth century as the science of biblical interpretation. Schleiermacher (Mackintosh & Stewart, 1963), regarded as the founder of modern hermeneutics, describes the twofold dimension of interpreting texts. In the first instance, speakers express their thought in words that listeners can understand because they employ the same language. In this sense, listeners recognise what the speakers are conveying. At the same time, Schleiermacher points out, there is a psychological aspect to the act of interpretation. Listeners are able to interpret, through careful analysis, both the speakers' intentions and the

speakers' assumptions. It is this twofold dimension of the grammatical and psychological that Schleiermacher posits for all hermeneutics.

Schleiermacher's twofold dimensions provided the point of departure for Dilthey (Rickman, 1988), who emphasised the speaker's/author's historical and social context as the prime source of understanding. For the latter, the lived experience of the author is incarnate in the language, literature, behaviour, art, religion, law - in fact every aspect of a person's cultural institutions and structures. Achieving hermeneutical understanding of these externalisations and expressions of life involves, he explains, a hermeneutic circle. The interpreter moves from the text, to the historical and social circumstances of the author's world (attempting to reconstruct the milieu in which the text came to be and to situate the text within it), and back again.

The hermeneutic cycle provided an effective starting point for the methodological possibilities for this study as it allowed for a clear focus on the phenomenon of religious life, within the ongoing movement between individual responses and the contexts in which religious congregations currently find themselves.

In focussing even more clearly on phenomena and the relationship between subject and object, phenomenology provides a second area with specific relevance for this research.

Development of Phenomenology

Phenomenology was developed by Husserl (Crotty, 1998; Kearney, 1981b) in the early years of the twentieth century. Described by Crotty (1998) as focussing on 'the things themselves', its concern is with the phenomena in the world and the requirement to make sense of them directly and immediately. The phenomenology of Husserl invites the reader to 'set aside all previous habits of thought, see through and break down the mental

barriers which these habits have set along the horizons of our thinking...to learn to see what stands before our eyes' (Husserl 1931, p 43).

As Polkinghorne (1994) and Moustakis (1994) point out, phenomenologists explore the structures of consciousness in human experiences, and through examining the lived experiences of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon, come to a new sense of them directly and immediately. Cresswell (1997) focuses on the psychological approach to phenomenology, placing individual rather than group experiences at the centre. He highlights also the subjective experience of the individual and the need to walk in the shoes of the subject in order to experience the phenomenon. Crotty on the other hand prefers to see 'what stands before our eyes', with the reader maintaining a distance from the phenomenon being explored, in order to focus more clearly in this first instance on 'the things themselves'.

In emphasising the call of the phenomenologist to put aside culturally derived meanings in order to look freshly at the phenomenon being studied, Crotty (1998) speaks of the need to call into question the current meaning that is attributed to it by some writers. He remains critical of the North American interpretation of what is termed 'the great phenomenological principle' of putting oneself in the place of another, seeing it as self-professedly subjectivist in approach and as expressly uncritical.

While this study takes into account both perspectives, it seemed at the outset that maintaining some distance from the subjective experiences of the individual religious women and men participating in the research would facilitate a more objective critique of the current realities of religious life, and a more accurate and creative response to future possibilities. Crotty's criticism highlights the importance for a study such as this of critiquing constantly the relationship between the particular phenomena being explored by participants and the context of religious life.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

The traditional juxtaposition of object and subject were intrinsic to the theories of both Dilthey and Husserl (Kearney, 1981a), whose thinking formed the base for the hermeneutical phenomenology of Heidegger (1977), Gadamer (1989) and Ricoeur (1981). This development encapsulates the third area of importance for the current study.

For Heidegger, before any object is chosen for a subject, both are bound together by a fundamental relationship of belonging to a world. Understanding in these terms is an ontological characteristic of being in the world, and of being part of history. He sees this experience as being in part a waiting time, a time which in its most profound sense is an experience of serving. This concept was to become important in the study and in the subsequent analysis of the research material, particularly as the principle of transition and waiting became a core theme in the responses of participants. In Gadamer's (1989) thinking, the belief that all understanding involves a projection of possibilities presupposes a connection between the preconceptions of understanding and the tradition. The phenomenon for which understanding is sought is not the psychological constitution of another subject, but a meaningful reality that is immersed in a tradition of its own. In his terms, the fusion of the two occurs in language and discourse.

It is this fusion that forms the basis on which the philosophical reflections of Ricoeur (1981) are developed. In his 'multiple hermeneutic detours' through sense, culture, politics, religion and the human sciences, Ricoeur explores the relationships between text and context, which in this study would comprise the text or response of the participant and the context of religious life as it is currently experienced.

The Hermeneutics of Ricoeur

Ricoeur (Kearney, 1996) emphasises the centrality and importance of language. He sees the analysis of the text as closely tied to broad philosophical and theoretical concerns. He describes the distinctiveness of discourse in terms of an internal dialectic between event and meaning. For him, language is the medium of objectification and, in this context, he assigns to hermeneutics the task of eliciting from the semantic structure of symbols and text (written and spoken) the dimensions being expressed in, and disclosed by, these. While in general however, language philosophers have tended to treat the field as the ultimate ground of inquiry, Ricoeur sees it as a medium through which interpretation proceeds, but which ultimately it must surpass. He explores language, not as an instrument that is limited to describing and dominating meaning, but instead (in terms of the focus throughout this research), as a way of interpreting what is real, possible and virtual.

In Ricoeur's thinking, the symbols of myth, religion, art and ideology hold within them certain messages, which may be revealed by philosophical interpretation. His hermeneutics is a process for uncovering the hidden or implicit meanings underneath apparent ones. He speaks of the 'hermeneutical arc' that moves from initial understanding to explanation, and from explanation to existential understanding. It was this 'hermeneutical arc', which provided an underpinning framework for the current study, as the responses of individual religious and the context of religious life developed in creative tension throughout the research, each defining and redefining the other.

Ricoeur 'process of appropriation' also helped to ground the methodological framework of this study. Using his terms, the research moved from the first naïveté (the immediate and initial perception of the views of respondents), to the second naïveté (involving a 'fusion of horizons'). Here new and richer

meanings were discovered as the identified theories, ideology and other relevant contextual issues began to fuse with the responses provided by participants. As a number of those involved in this study indicate, such a fusion of horizons is essential for the discovery of new possibilities for religious life.

Intrinsic to Ricoeur's philosophy is the belief that, in order to create something, the individual has first to imagine it. This imagining in turn derives from reflection on the text (the written text or the text of a person's life). The interpretation uncovers initial meaning, which can be subsequently decontextualised, and out of the reflection of the reader, then recontextualised.

As Ricoeur himself (1981) points out:

It is at the moment when a new meaning emerges out of the ruins of literal predication that imagination offers its specific mediation. It consists in the coming together that suddenly abolishes the logical distance between heretofore distinct semantic fields in order to produce the semantic shock, which, in its turn, sparks the meaning of the metaphor. Imagination is the apperception, the sudden glimpse, of a new predicative pertinence, namely, a way of constructing pertinence in impertinence. (Ricoeur, 1981, p 181)

In these terms, and for the purposes of this study, the contributions of respondents offer possible perspectives that make it possible to draw new meanings, not from some hidden faculty, but in demystifying the responses that have been made, and then reconstructing them by making use of the clues contained in the responses themselves.

Schneiders' Hermeneutics of Transformation

Ricoeur's consideration of text and context forms the basis of Schneiders' (1991) theoretical exposition of hermeneutics as transformation. She takes Ricoeur's possibilities for new meaning and shows how the process of hermeneutical reflection can become transformative for the participant.

Schneiders' defence of hermeneutics, in the tradition of Ricoeur, analyses the ways that text and reader interact in the experience of biblical study. The reader takes the text and, by means of interpretation, enters into and appropriates the world of meaning that the text projects. Within this process, transformation occurs.

In her analysis, the first reception of the material is taken at face value, deriving from the shared tradition of the researcher and the interviewee. This is the first naïveté. Clearly however, the researcher does not come to the exercise as a *tabula rasa*. Culture, history, previous experiences, the thinking of other theorists, all combine to distance her or him from the text and to lead to a 'suspicion' about the initial understanding, (distanciation). This process in fact leads to a new critical analysis, sifting the material for error and deceit and revealing new and more complex understandings, which enrich both internal and external interconnections. For this study, such a process was critical for analysing the interviews that formed the basis of the research. It facilitated both distanciation and the creation of new possibilities for the future of religious life.

In providing a distance from the data in this way, not only would its limitations be acknowledged, but the data itself would be safeguarded from loss of identity by uncritical assimilation into personal presuppositions. More importantly, however, the process would lead to the ultimate goal - the second and postcritical naïveté. Allowing the material to interact with the world of religious life and the world of the twenty-first century facilitated a new understanding – one that is at essence a transformative one. This attempt at transformative understanding of both text and context lies at the base of the current research. It offers both meaning and perspective for the methodology.

It was apparent however that there was a further dimension underpinning the philosophical reflections and epistemological considerations of this study.

Developments in postmodernist and feminist philosophical standpoints have influenced my own thinking around leadership and therefore inevitably impacted on the outcomes of the study. An analysis of these was seen as not only providing valuable insights into the ways they might impinge on the 'world of the text', but also further clarifying the context of the epistemological considerations.

Postmodernist and Feminist Considerations

It is evident, in both Ricoeur's (Kearney, 1981b) and Schneiders' (1991) writings that epistemological and ontological considerations are embedded in the contemporary context. Crotty (1998) also speaks of postmodernism as arising out of, and in reaction to, the context of modernity. He describes contemporary literary, philosophical and cultural movements, as defining themselves in opposition to earlier movements. Crotty (1998), Cresswell (2001) and Trigg (2001) describe a range of possible definitions of postmodernism, all pointing to the reality that, even within the current evolution, the fundamental stance of postmodernism against the rationalism, scientific method and dualism of high modernism continues to shape its development.

Schneiders herself (2001) writes from a religious postmodernist and feminist perspective. The abandonment of hierarchical dualism has demonstrated for her that feminism is not a first world aberration. Inclusiveness that honours both women and men is, in her terms, the basis of a truly human approach to all human interaction and organisation. Her interpretation sees hierarchy as at best terminally dysfunctional, and at worst a systemic sin.

As pointed out in this study, these developmental shifts pose real dilemmas for religious congregations who seek to straddle opposing life views and explore possible structures sufficiently flexible for a new world. These dilemmas are explored in detail by respondents in this study. Many reflect in detail on the challenges of opposing views and the difficulties of transition for

religious congregations. They question, as well, the ability of leadership groups within the Catholic Church to engender inclusive, consensual, flexible and dynamic forms of religious life within what still remains a strongly hierarchical and patriarchal Church.

The hermeneutical underpinnings described above informed the research methodology of this study. It was one that strove to be transparent and accountable throughout. Additionally, elements of postmodernist and feminist developments provided useful starting points. Framing the methodology within the paradigms outlined above assisted in establishing a sense of direction for the methods chosen. These paradigms interconnect with a number of related sociological principles, which also point to the value of qualitative research.

Sociological Considerations

Sociological considerations indicated early the advantages of qualitative research for this study (Cohen & Manion, 1985). It became clear that this methodology would facilitate the construction of social reality and cultural meaning in the study. In affording access to the meanings that religious attributed both to their experiences and to the social worlds of which they are a part, qualitative research provided a way of exploring, at depth and in detail, the viewpoints of individuals and groups, while attributing to them the culturally honoured status of reality (Neumann, 2000). It also had the potential to circumvent the barriers of time and space (McCall & Simmonds, 1969).

In Cohen and Manion's terms (1985), the use of interviews uncovered the values embodied in the organisational practices of religious groups, analysed the capacity of the group to effect the named goals, and suggested frameworks for the desired transformation of the values and practices. In this way, both the rapidly changing paradigms and the frames of references of

those religious involved in the leadership processes were accommodated. In providing for flexibility, both in clarifying issues and in exploring responses at the greater depth aimed for, this methodology facilitated the development of an interpretive framework and an open-ended approach, concerned with understanding religious groups, as well as individuals and events, from within.

It was clear, even in the early stages of the research, that the religious institutes in this study, as invented social realities, construed the reality of their worlds in a range of ways. In interpreting the subjective meanings that leaders and members placed upon their actions, it was possible to search for sets of meanings that religious groups use to make sense of their world and the practices within it. These took into account the perceptions of rapidly changing paradigms and frames of references of religious leaders, underpinned by their understandings of the processes of leadership, mission and community. The exploration of their individual and social realities raised issues of authenticity, understanding, readiness, process and decision-making. These helped to clarify the issues raised in the key question of this study and the constraints needing consideration.

CONSTRAINTS

The philosophical and sociological rationale outlined above informed the choice and usefulness of a qualitative methodology in generating data that could identify connective networks between understandings of new possibilities and resultant leadership practices within religious institutes. The choice took into account the limitations of personal bias and prejudice identified by writers such as Neuman (2000). The fact that the methodology would be situationally constrained and susceptible to subjectivity and speculation, was therefore an important consideration for the study.

Within the decision to use a qualitative methodology was a clear acknowledgement that there is no value-free or bias-free design or interpretation. By identifying personal biases and articulating the conceptual framework for the study, it became easier to clarify the foundations for the questions, and better ensure the trustworthiness of the data.

DETERMINATION OF RESEARCH METHODS

Two types of interviews were utilised for this study: individual and group interviews. From the outset, individual interviews and the use of two focus groups were regarded as the most effective means of realising the aims of the research. This initial preference was supported strongly, even in the early stages of the research, by the recognisable congruence of epistemological and methodological considerations. Within the conceptual framework, the structure and possibilities provided by interviews were confirmed as justifiable methods. Individual interviews facilitated in-depth exploration of the key question and sub-questions in the study. Follow-up interaction with two focus groups was organised to critique perspectives raised and enrich emerging findings. The use of focus groups was designed to promote greater objectivity and trustworthiness.

Sample selection

Individual Interviews

The individual interview has been identified as the most widely applied technique for conducting systematic social enquiry (Silverman, 1997, p 101). It is not only one of the most common, but one of the most powerful mechanisms out of which views and impressions of interviewees can be elicited, themes can emerge, horizons (in Gadamer's terms) can be fused, and text and context wrestled with in such a way that Ricoeur's second naïveté and Schneider's transformation can be attained.

The foundational principles of this study led to a preference for the use of semi-structured interviews. Their value was clarified early in the research:

- semi-structured interviews allowed for clarity of assumptions and premises;
- they enabled the voices of the interviewees to be heard with minimal interference;
- they facilitated the identification of the multiple perspectives of themes as they emerged;
- they promoted the examination of differences and problems as the research developed;
- they allowed for acknowledgement of the value-laden nature of the agenda; and
- they opened the research process to the breadth and depth of responses required to attain something of Ricoeur's second naïveté and Schneiders' transformative moment.

By alternating between semi-formal conversation and free-flowing exchange, interviewees were able to elaborate on those facets of the questions that made sense to them (Silverman, 1997).

Purposive sampling was used in the selection of interviewees for this study (Cresswell, 1998). As Strauss (2003), Flick (1998) and Cresswell (1998) point out, purposive sampling is valuable when a population is unique, and when it is the lived experience of a specific group which is being examined. Its power lies in the selection of information-rich cases for in-depth analysis. The use of maximum variation sampling for the religious institutes in this study aimed at identifying central themes that cut across participant variations such as age, gender, congregation, role. It was designed to

promote a range of approaches from different congregations, while allowing for the emergence of important common patterns. Following Cresswell's (1998) interpretation of purposive sampling as involving 20-30 interviews, it was decided to involve 30 participants, using maximum variation sampling.

The Use of Focus Groups

Two groups were invited to respond to the findings and emerging themes during the progress of the research: a reference group of religious women and men chosen from a range of congregations representative of those participating in individual interviews, and a focus group of approximately one hundred members of the Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes in NSW.

It was believed that these groups, through their responses to the ongoing findings and their analysis of the insights shared, would bring objectivity and trustworthiness, critiquing perspectives and enriching emerging findings (Flick, 1998). The small reference group was used for ongoing critique. The larger group at the CLRI Conference was involved in an interactive response to developing themes. These two groups were useful sounding boards, especially for validity checking and for triangulation (Flick, 1998; Morgan, 1998).

Data Selection Methods and Procedures

This section of the study will deal first with the selection of participants and the development of processes for individual interviews. It will then describe the procedures followed for focus group responses.

Selection of Participants and Invitation to Leaders

Prior to the study, the leadership teams of six religious congregations were contacted to ascertain their interest in the project and to discuss the process to be used. The leadership team is the central authority in the group, and the

members of the leadership teams, as the elected representatives of a particular religious institute, are authorised by the congregation to facilitate the realisation of its vision. Five members of each leadership team (or others in leadership in the groups) were invited to participate in the research. The congregations were selected to represent as wide a range of groups as possible in line with maximum variation sampling. Three female and three male religious institutes were invited to participate:

an order of clerical religious;

an order of nuns;

two congregations of religious sisters; and

two institutes of religious brothers.

A number of other variables were significant for maximum variation sampling.

The size of the congregations involved differed significantly, with their members in Australasia varying from fifty to twelve hundred.

Two groups ministered predominantly in Australia. Four were international institutes with leadership in Australia and overseas.

Four of the groups operated with a central governing body, supported by a number of provinces (one of these had its central leadership operating out of Australia, while the central leadership of the other three groups ministered from Rome or Ireland). The fifth group was an autonomous institute in its own right in Australia, although other orders under the same name existed in large numbers internationally. The final group interviewed comprised the leadership team of a Federation of autonomous congregations, which also formed part of a broader international group.

The range of participants was expanded when the international leaders for two of the groups agreed to participate in interviews during visits to Australia.

In addition to these congregations, four religious from four other religious institutes agreed to participate in pilot interviews.

The selection of the groups was thus broad and the reflections emanating from such a wide range of institutes and leaders was intended both to strengthen the discussion and to enrich the outcomes of the research.

The table below indicates the gender differences, the range of ages, the length of time in religious life, and leadership experiences of those interviewed.

Age	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71-80
Males - 15	0	1	1	7	5	1
Females - 15	0	0	0	5	7	3
Pilot-male - 2	0	0	0	1	1	0
Pilot-female-2	0	0	0	1	1	0
Years in religious life	0-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51+
Males -15	1	1	1	3	8	1
Females - 15	0	0	0	7	7	1
Pilot-male - 2	0	0	0	1	1	0
Pilot-female-2	0	0	0	1	1	0
Years in leadership of your group	0-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21+	
Males -15	2	5	5	0	3	
Females -15	10	3	0	2	0	
Pilot-male - 2	0	2	0	0	0	
Pilot-female -2	1	0	1	0	0	
Years in other leadership roles	0-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21+	
Males -15	4	2	2	2	5	
Females -15	0	3	5	3	4	
Pilot-male - 2	1	0	0	1	0	
Pilot-female -2	0	0	0	1	1	

Table 4 – Sample Characteristics

Procedures for Individual Interviews

The five members of each leadership team (or others in leadership in the groups) who were invited to participate in the research were sent a copy of the questions prior to the interviews. Informed by the previously described phenomenological approach, which sees practice as determined by the phenomenon of experience, the interviews sought to explore with respondents the characteristics of the changing world and uncertain future into which their religious congregations were perceived to be moving. The questions were designed to explore participants' perceptions and views about the future of religious life and leadership, both through direct questioning and through discussion of specific learning episodes in the particular context of religious life. Interviewees were invited to identify, describe and share their knowledge and understanding of the essential elements of religious life for the twenty-first century, the factors they saw to be facilitating and hindering change, and the characteristics they believed to be necessary for religious communities and their leaders seeking to live the vision of religious life in the twenty-first century.

The responses of interviewees to the nature of the study and to the format of the questions, both prior to and during the interviews themselves, were positive. Participants affirmed the apposite nature of the questions for this particular period of religious life, when so many institutes are grappling with these very issues. There was an openness to the process, which enabled valuable insights to be shared and explored.

Design of Questions

The interview questions were developed from the key research questions addressed in this study. They are outlined below.

1. *What changes do you believe are providing the three greatest challenges to Religious Life and its leaders? Include in your reflection what you consider to be:*
 - *the essential elements of Religious Life for the twenty-first century;*
 - *the factors facilitating change for Religious Institutes seeking to move into the world of the twenty-first century; and*
 - *the factors hindering transition and change at this time.*
2. *What do you think are some results of the increased collaboration that has characterised Religious Life since Vatican II?*
3. *Describe a leader who has embodied for you exceptional qualities of visionary, religious leadership.*
4. *Describe a time*
 1. *when you felt your leadership was life-giving;*
 2. *when you felt your leadership was ineffective.*
5. *Describe your own vision for the future of Religious Life. What do you believe is required of communities and their leaders seeking to live this vision in the twenty-first century?*

These questions were first administered to a pilot group of two religious sisters and two brothers. Following discussion with this group, the initial questions were retained in their original form, but an additional question was added. Frequent use of metaphors throughout the pilot interviews highlighted the possible value of a further question, asking respondents for a metaphor to describe religious life and leadership in the twenty-first century. Based on the realisation that metaphors used in the pilot interviews provided

new perspectives and richer understandings of the concepts being explored, an additional question was then framed:

6. *What metaphor/image would you use to describe religious life and leadership for the twenty-first century?*

Semi-structured interviews of one to two hours duration were conducted with participants. A tape recorder was used, but notes were also taken. There was an initial concern that respondents might find the process of note-taking inhibiting, but interviewees stated that this was not the case. Summary notes were helpful in initial coding, and where taped voices were not always clear. Transcripts of the taped interviews were made as soon after the interview as possible. Following each interview, a preliminary summary was developed to encapsulate emerging themes and insights. Two of these are provided as samples in Appendix 4. They proved a helpful starting point for the analysis and facilitated the development of tree nodes (see discussion on NVivo) for the analysis.

Limitations of the Interview Process

The limitations of the interview process were taken into consideration throughout the research. These included the allocated time for the interview, the limited and focussed area under discussion, and the closeness of the interviewer to the material. Miller and Glassner (Silverman, 1997, p 101) acknowledge that the language of interviewing can fracture the story being told, both in the limit of what is described, and in the coding, categorization and typologising. They also raise issues of practical, epistemological and theoretical concern. These were areas that were taken into account as the research took shape and was developed, and as the analysis of data was carried out.

Selection of Focus Groups

A reference group reflecting the composition of interviewees (in gender, membership of religious congregations, and leadership roles) was set up early in the research. Six religious women and men involved or interested in issues of religious leadership and the future of religious life were invited to validate the trustworthiness of the findings by responding to the emerging data and themes at significant intervals throughout the duration of the study. This group responded to the initial findings and interpretation of results, and helped to validate data and the conclusions that were being drawn. They were used at the exploratory stages of the study and during the development of themes to assess their trustiness and to generate further insights. As part of the evaluation process, members of the reference group were consulted on a number of occasions and invited to respond to the data in a variety of ways: as a group, as individuals, in discussion, and in writing.

Towards the conclusion of the study, following collaboration with the executive body of the Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes (CLRI) (representing all religious institutes in NSW), the findings were shared at the annual conference of religious leaders in Sydney in 2004. This gathering provided the opportunity for the inclusion of all leadership teams in NSW. The size of the group facilitated robust discussion and interaction. It made possible the generation of a concentrated set of interactions within one day. During the first session the emerging data and themes were shared. The follow-up session provided opportunities for questions and for verbal and written feedback. The responses at this conference supplemented the data furnished by the reference group, tested the degree of consensus on the given themes, and provided a valuable sounding board for the research findings (Morgan, 1998). A summary of written responses are provided in Appendix 5.

The transcription of interviews, the critique offered by the reference group, and the feedback provided at the CLRI Conference formed the content for the analysis of the data.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Analysis of the interview data was carried out using computer assisted qualitative data analysis software, QSR NVivo. In the past two decades, researchers have identified and explored a range of ways to report and represent the social and the cultural in contemporary life. This has led to a diversity of representational modes and devices (Richards and Richards, 1994; Fielding and Lee, 1995; Coffee and Atkinson, 1996; Bazeley and Richards, 2000). These new developments in information technology have been demonstrated to have the potential, not only of facilitating rapid text retrieval, but also of constructing a large and highly structured database with complex indexing into the text to be analysed.

Data Analysis Software – QSR NUD*IST Vivo

QSR NUD*IST Vivo (commonly referred to as NVivo), a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software, was chosen to assist with the analysis. It was seen to deal effectively with the two aspects considered to be critical in this study: the management of complexity and the creation of ideas and themes from the data (Richards, 2002). Social researchers (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Bazeley and Richards, 2000; Coffey et al, 1996; Fielding, 1993) speak of the very richly featured and highly advanced nature of this program for handling qualitative data analysis research projects. Identified as a useful tool for automating and speeding up the analytical process, the use of NVivo provided a way of examining the complex interrelationships in the data, and established a formal structure for the development of the analysis. Its value lay in the rigour and depth of its programming structure and the potential it possessed for facilitating conceptual development and

analysis of data. Barry (1997) describes its strengths in qualitative analysis as its structured organisation, its project management functions and its sophisticated searching.

Richards and Richards (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994) demonstrate the ways that NVivo combines and relates many of the features of other specialised designs. It is based on a code-and-retrieve system, which aims to transcend the simple text retrieval system utilised by earlier researchers. It contains two major components (a document system and an index system) for managing the documents and ideas necessary in any analysis of complex data in the hermeneutical phenomenological tradition. The document system holds textual-level data about documents. The index system, which retains codes and references, facilitates the creation and management of concepts and the storage and exploration of emerging ideas.

The value of NVivo has been widely recognised, and Barry sums up the strengths described by its proponents:

NVivo's strengths are its structured organisation, its project management functions and its sophisticated searching. It allows hierarchies to be built and developed. One of its organising principles is system closure, where any first stage of analysis (eg. memoing, annotations or coding) can become codable material in an iterative, potentially never ending cycle. It facilitates to-ing and fro-ing between on-screen and paper analysis, and it has many clever options for searching that allow sufficiently complex questions to be explored in the data. (Barry 1998)

Using this program, it was possible from the beginning to institute rapid coding procedures to identify individual responses to the initial questions. From this, each response was examined in relation to other responses in the same interview, and in relation to reflections by other interviewees. These were subsequently coded and analysed in more detail. The program thus facilitated a deeper understanding of the data and the development of new insights through corroboration or elaboration of conclusions drawn from an initial analysis (the first naïveté). It proved to be a valuable and integrating

tool in the management of data, in the generation of concepts and categories, in its flexibility and comprehensive organisation, and in its possibilities for conceptual mapping and development of theory.

Management of Data

From the transcripts of the taped interviews, text documents were created and imported into NVivo. These text documents were then coded, using nodes to store the categories as they were entered. These nodes were created to represent the ideas that emerged as the document was examined. Three types of nodes were used: free nodes for ideas not categorised as belonging anywhere; tree nodes cataloguing categories and sub-categories; and case nodes to store material about different groups participating in the research. These were reviewed, and then expanded or collapsed. as the ongoing entries were made and the coding and analysis of transcripts were modified. The code and retrieve system of NVivo, with its two major components of a document and index system, thus facilitated the creation and management of ideas and emerging themes.

EMERGING THEMES

The development of the branching conceptual tree structure (see Figures 2-6) included an acknowledgement of the spiritual basis of religious life, the global context, the impact of the changes of the twentieth century on contemporary religious institutes, and the call to apostolic religious life to be prophetic in its stance with people who are poor and pushed to the margins.

From the early stages of analysis, four overriding themes began to emerge. These are clarified in the following four figures, which identify one primary node or branch of the tree, and the associated sub-nodes that were identified in the coding process. The subsequent exploration of religious leadership emerged clearly from these themes.

The context of twentieth century religious life was the first theme identified as significant for change and transition. The realities of ageing and diminishment, increased prosperity and educational opportunities for religious, and the diverse responses to a paradigmatically different world were seen to be critical areas needing analysis.

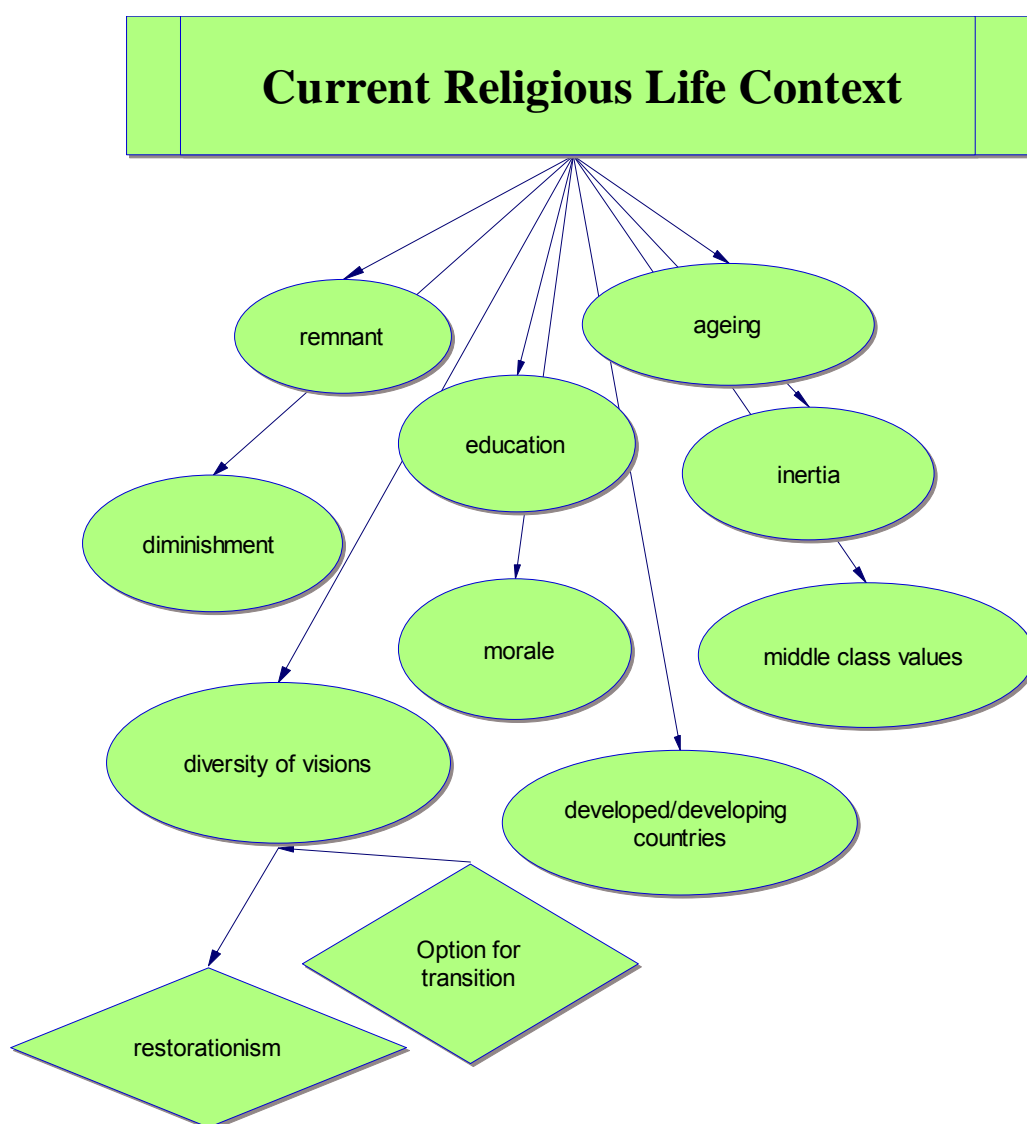


Figure 2 – Current Religious Life Context

The impact of paradigmatic change and the challenge of transition for contemporary religious women and men were seen as pivotal for religious life and leadership. This second category was closely tied to the context of contemporary religious life.

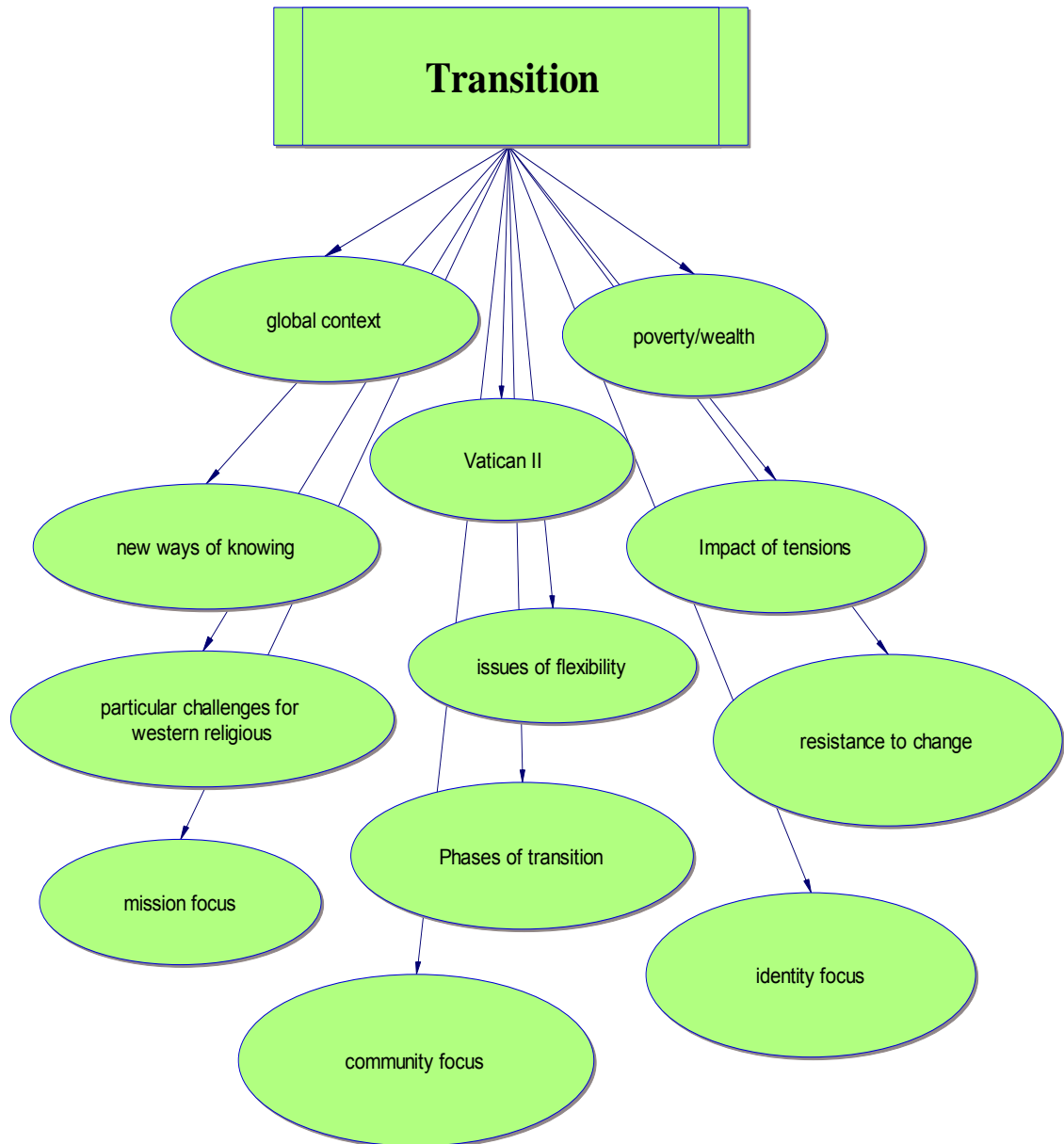


Figure 3 – Transition

The fundamental grounding of religious life in the God to whom religious commit themselves was a third major category. It emerged within the two contexts of the current spirituality revolution and the underpinning spiritual nature of religious life.

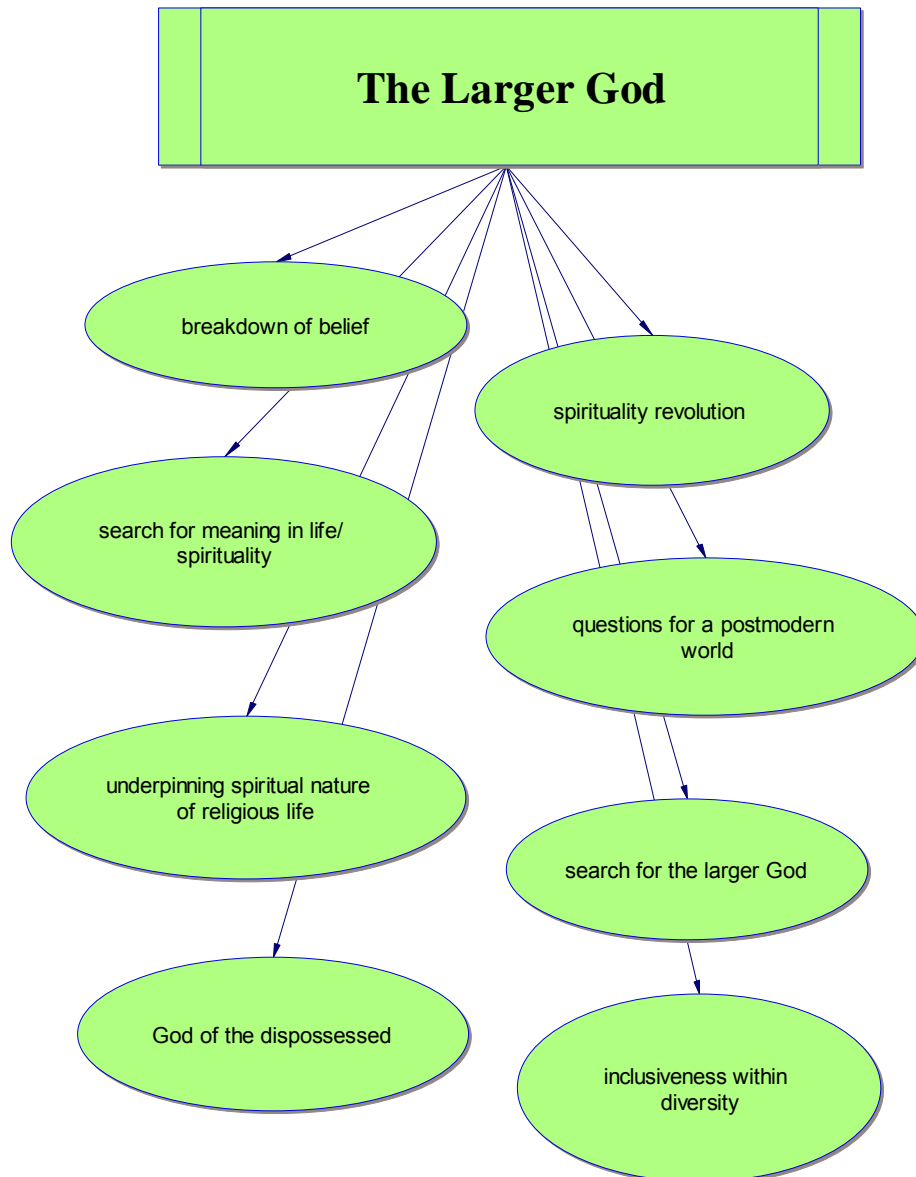


Figure 4 – The Larger God

A radical commitment to 'the other' as a core focus of religious life was a significant theme that emerged early in the coding. It incorporated categories

of 'religious as other', 'church as other', 'those pushed to the margins as other', and otherness and communion as particular challenges of this time.

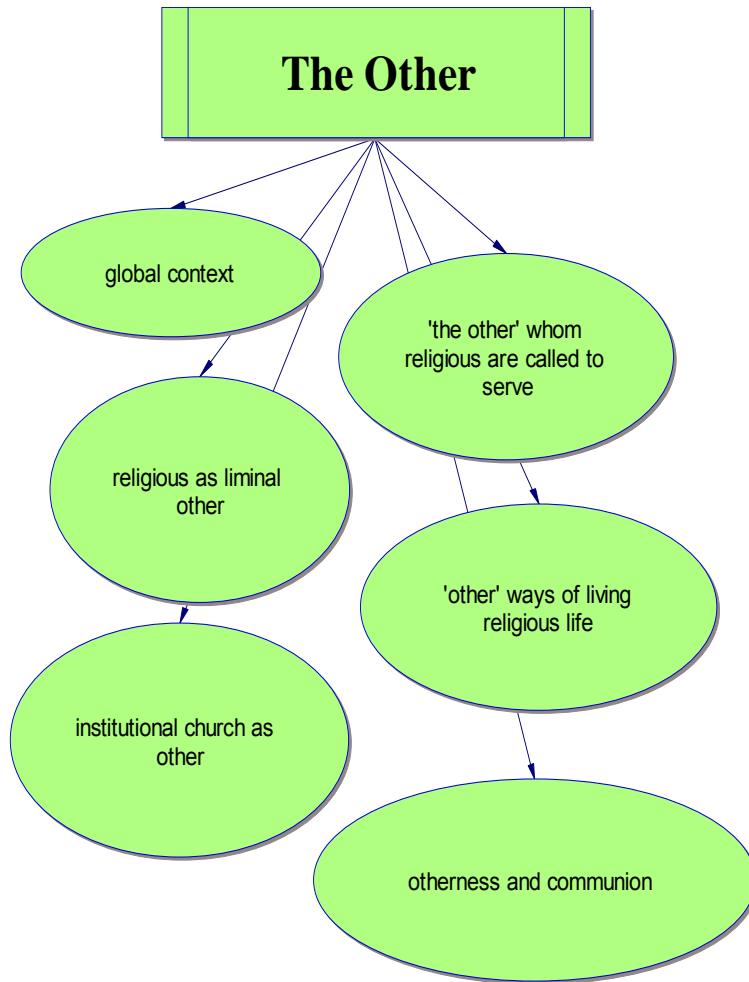


Figure 5 – The Other

Sub-categories emerging from the theme of leadership were derived from the other themes identified.

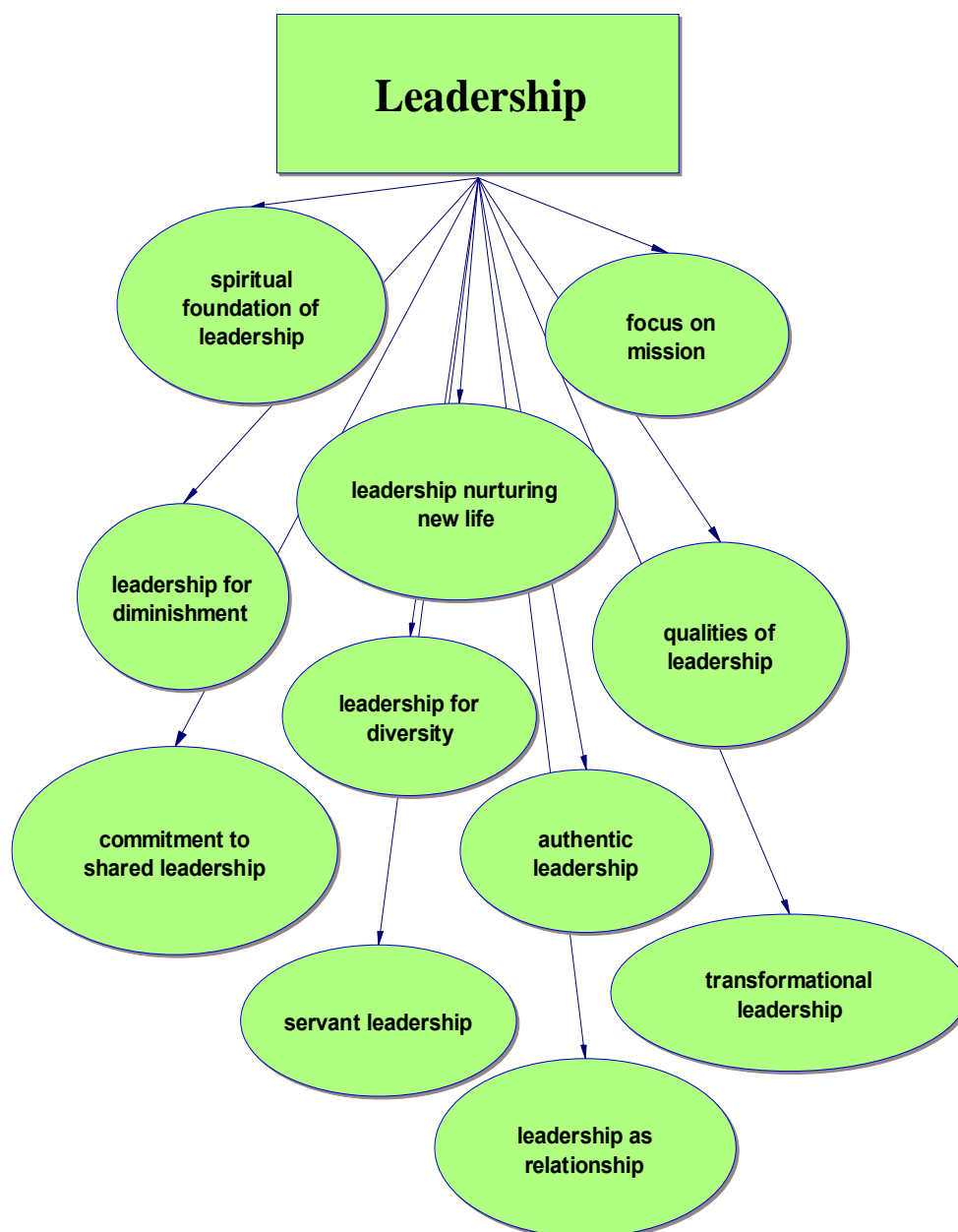


Figure 6 – Leadership

The five tree nodes summarised above were developed from the coding of interview transcripts. Creating tree nodes to catalogue categories and sub-categories, and expanding these as the research developed, reinforced these

areas as the major considerations for the study. The themes have been amalgamated in Figure 7 (given in Appendix).

ISSUES OF ETHICS

Prior to the commencement of the research, the project was reviewed by the Australian Catholic University's Human Research Ethics Committee. A broad description of the project, together with issues related to the selection and involvement of participants, the research design and procedures, and the potential benefits of the study, both to religious congregations and to the wider society, were discussed. Details regarding the gathering and disposal of data, the dissemination of results, and the ways in which confidentiality would be protected, were dealt with in detail.

The taping of interviews and the use of a focus group helped to promote the trustworthiness of the findings. These also served to protect the material against personal bias. The data were recorded initially on cassette, and then transferred to computerised records. Code names were inserted prior to the recording and analysis of data. The results were then reported as aggregated data only

Following submission of the relevant and supporting documentation, and the formal approval given by the Ethics Committee, the appropriate letters were drawn up and the interview questions constructed to carry the research forward.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter has considered three questions:

1. What methodology would best facilitate an effective exploration of the key questions of the study?

2. What methods would achieve a comprehensive and focussed response?
3. What philosophical underpinnings would serve to justify the methods and methodology used?

Within this framework, the sampling procedure, data collection methods and data analysis were described.

The initial decision to use a qualitative methodology that would incorporate individual and focus group interviews was confirmed by an exploration of possible theoretical and epistemological underpinnings for the study. At different levels, it became clear from the examinations of a number of philosophical positions that hermeneutical phenomenology (particularly as developed by Ricoeur) would provide a working rationale for the research.

Interaction with the transcribed interviews, through analysis, reflection and interpretation, provided the opportunities to enter into, and appropriate, the world of meaning that the text contained. In the interaction of the text and context of the interviews, and in the insights of the focus groups, attempts were continually made to exploit new understandings, through the appropriation of the world of meaning that the interviews encompassed.

The data analysis software program, NVivo, facilitated the management of the data, the complexity of the theoretical thinking, and the analysis of the material. Throughout the duration of the study, NVivo's structured organisation, its project management functions, the sophistication of its searching procedures, and its possibilities for conceptual mapping and the development of theory allowed for maximum interaction between text and context.

The five areas generated by the sophisticated searching techniques of NVivo form the foundation of the remaining chapters of this study. They provide

significant indicators of those leadership practices, which participants in this study believe can facilitate the transition of religious institutes into an uncertain future and possible new forms of religious life.

Chapter 6

BETWEEN TOWNS – RELIGIOUS LIFE IN TRANSITION

INTRODUCTION

Throughout this study, one of the most frequently recurring themes in the interviews is that of attentive waiting. It reflects an awareness that the old forms of religious life have collapsed and are dying, but that the new have yet to emerge. It permeates all issues named as significant by participants. New forms of religious life are discussed. Emerging challenges within present realities are raised. Different possibilities for meeting current responsibilities and responding to urgent needs are analysed. Underpinning the reflections however is an acknowledgement that, of all the issues facing religious congregations at this time, the one feature that is common is that of transition, of being 'between towns'. As is pointed out by one of the participants 'ours is above all the waiting and watching time' (E4)

It is this sense of transition that forms the content of Chapter 6, and indeed the underpinnings of all the findings that are analysed throughout the remainder of the study. The chapter includes an examination of

the context of the waiting time,

the stance of the significant number of women and men who have shown themselves unwilling or unable to enter transition, and

the identifying features of transition as revealed in the inner and outer realignment of religious who have begun to explore new forms of life.

The chapter concludes with an analysis of interviewees' reflections on possible futures for religious life – the forms that are beginning to be

discerned, the areas of focus seen to be important for transition, and the factors believed to be critical for the successful navigation of the time 'between towns'.

POST-VATICAN II RELIGIOUS LIFE

Renewal and Challenge

As noted in Chapter 2, Vatican II's restatement of the identity and mission of the Catholic Church in the mid-twentieth century began an intense period of revitalization for religious organisations. The differing responses of religious women and men to the rapid changes testify to Maddi's (2004) argument that because rapid change differs from incremental change, it produces a level of uncertainty that stresses one's capacity to adapt. It calls for a certain amount of "hardiness" or existential courage "to strike out in uncharted directions of thought and/or action" (Maddi, 2004, p. 284). In these terms, religious have responded to the chaos and confusion by taking decisions to choose the past or to choose the future. Respondents in the study reflect at length on the impact on their religious congregations of opposing choices. Clearly, both have ongoing consequences for religious life and leadership. .

From Crossroads to Transition

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, religious thinkers have continued to analyse the choices and directions, which have engaged religious institutions. The shift from 'crossroads' to 'between towns' has placed a growing emphasis and priority on ways to facilitate the transition. In the light of an altered orientation in identity and commitment, and challenged by issues of global uncertainty, interviewees note that the leadership required to navigate change has taken on a new perspective.

Fiand (2001) describes this period as 'a time for courageous waiting'. Wittburg (1994) sees it as an 'experience of Passover'. Schneiders (2000) refers to it as the 'Dark Night'; while for Radcliffe (2000), contemporary

religious are indeed travellers, called 'to sing in the dark' (Radcliffe, 2000, p 220). This sense of religious life as being in transition, caught in a waiting time that is simultaneously passive and active, is one of the strongest themes in the current study:

We are waiting and attentive to the signs of the rebirth, but not sure of what it is that's coming out of the desert. (HB1)

Transition, supported by attentive responsiveness to what is emerging, is a key characteristic of this time, both for religious life and for the wider society and world in which it is situated.

BETWEEN TOWNS – A TIME OF TRANSITION

Transition in an Era of Critical Change

The clearest consensus among the participants of this study is that religious life as it has been lived in the past three centuries has come to an end. Interviewees describe this collapse as part of a wider crisis across the world community. The breakdown of shared meanings across every aspect of people's lives, perceived disorder and violence, are clear manifestations of a broad and deep disintegration within society. Social scientists (McKay, 1999) speak of swirling contradictions. Structures are perceived to have broken down, political processes frayed and fragmented, the sense of historical responsibility (evidenced in Australia in the Reconciliation debate) all but disappeared, with social and psychological stability becoming seriously imperilled. The economic, political, cultural, psychological, religious and moral disjunctions that characterise interactions across society and the world reflect a radical and disruptive fragmentation and disintegration of society. In terms of the disruption to religious life, it is described by one of the respondents in terms of Yeats' *The Second Coming*:

You know, 'things fall apart, the centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world. The best lack all conviction; the worst are full of passionate intensity.' (E4)

Out of the soul-searching and reflection engaged in by participants in this study, there seems to have developed among many individuals and groups a strong sense that this moment is not the time for answers but for entering the emptiness and chaos, for engaging in reflective realignment and living with the mystery.

Interviewees describe this time, not as one for developing new mission and charism statements but for vigilance in the empty space and attentiveness to the embers of the dying flames, so that the new sparks that are ignited might be fanned. The sense is deep and interior. It does not mean that one does nothing. Indeed there is a new urgency about responding to the gospel poor in our world – as if having faced the possibility of dying, there is a greater sense of life and the need for living it to the full – Radcliffe's 'singing in the dark' (Radcliffe, 2000, p 220). Waiting watchfully, while searching and living dynamically and in risk-taking ways within the waiting, is seen by participants as essential to effective transition at this time. The two processes are named by respondents as complementary. They believe that the experience of transition will facilitate a new dynamism for understanding and creating uncharted forms of religious life in a changed world. They perceive it as a moment of break-through in the ongoing evolution of religious life. For P3 'it resembles compost – what is decaying and smelly is paradoxically bubbling with life and new possibilities.' S2 sees it as 'rising from the phoenix'. For T4 it is 'like waiting for a volcano to erupt:

The past, present and future are inextricably linked in the depths of the earth, just as religious life is rooted in tradition but has to burst into something new. It will be inevitably destructive for some, but it also forges new paths and creates new possibilities.
(T4)

In these terms, despite negative possibilities, waiting is seen to possess intrinsic value, and indeed is viewed as an essential precursor to change and new life.

Phases of Transition

Participants in this research see transition as involving three basic phases:

- the ending phase,
- the in-between phase, and
- the time of new beginnings.

The phases reflect the thinking of writers such as Bridges (1980). Individuals and groups move from situations of relative stability, to times of waiting, and finally to situations of new birth. It is influenced by both internal structures and sociocultural circumstances. For contemporary religious institutes, as for the world of the new millennium, transition, rather than stability is clearly the norm.

In this new world, it is the in-between phase (for both individuals and groups) respondents see as pivotal:

A culture in collision. (P3)

The chaos from which creation comes, and then more chaos and more creation. We're at a very transformative time. (E4)

It is a time when as Moran (1996) points out, 'we are provided with a view of life we get nowhere else' (Moran, 1996, p 20). The desire to grow contends with resistance to change. Long held assumptions begin to be questioned and there appears to be nothing with which to replace them. As the above reflections indicate, the disorientation, emptiness and chaos that characterise the in-between phase are valuable. This is not, they insist, unproductive time. If expended effectively, it enables the individual or group to wait in the empty space of loss and uncertainty, to clarify critical issues, to use the interim to differentiate between what is essential and what is incidental, to let go of the past, and to create time and space for the new to emerge:

In between time provides us with a view of life that we can get nowhere else. As we experience successive transitions, we find ourselves on the road leading to wisdom. (Moran, 1996, p 20)

Respondents in this study demonstrate an awareness of the imminence of something new for religious groups. As F4 points out:

‘It’s a new way; it’s a new world’. (F4)

The time of transition is viewed as a critical one of inner realignment for religious women and men exploring new forms of life. It is during the watch of this realignment that the value of the transition time will be realised. E5 reflects at some length on the importance of Bridges’ (2001) thesis, that transition involves moving, not from a known to a known, but from a known to an unknown. Such a leap, she argues requires considerable courage:

To make the transition, you have to let go and then walk into the unknown, and I think that the only factors that could inhibit that is the lack of courage and wanting certainty too quickly. (E5)

She echoes the beliefs of the majority of respondents that transition is difficult, it is disorientating, it is marked by instability, emptiness and chaos, but it is essential for growth, and its value cannot be minimised.

The Value of the Transition Time

Transition time is seen by respondents to be important as it facilitates discernment and decision-making. It provides time for the old to die so that the new can begin to emerge. It provides space for the reconciliation of polarised opinions and groups. As pointed out by interviewees such as E5 and P3, it promotes ‘a waiting that is holistic and nonlinear, rather than hierarchical and linear’ (P3). Its conceptual framework sees social systems as dynamic, evolving, open to the environment, and even chaotic in Wheatley’s (1992) terms. It anticipates an integration of forces within the new life beginning to emerge from the fanning of the embers:

We bury the coals and fan the flame of a world yet unseen but sure to come (P3).

It frees the wind chimes to catch the breeze:

The wind chimes can make a lot of noise at times, can also be silent, can swing one way and then be brought back to the centre and swing the other way, tied together at their apex and hanging there, waiting for something to happen, ready to risk letting go (S3).

The transition time is paradoxically empty but carries within it the promise of potential. It holds life in trust, even while being underpinned by pain.

The Pain of this Time

There is a recognition that for many religious, and particularly for those who are older, this can be a painful time. Emerging forms of religious life can both threaten and confuse those who made their commitment in another age and context. HB1 summarises succinctly both the idealism and pain of the experience for many:

I think they have wonderful generosity and idealism, and I believe that most religious are also yearning for something that many believe they have lost. One community member said to me, 'I have the feeling, you know, that I got on a train when I was young, but all of a sudden the train stopped. I've been on it ever since, but it's not going anywhere and it's not going to go anywhere.' I think it's almost as if somebody's pressed the pause button on a CD or something, you know, as if we're in mid-track (HB1)

For those who experience this sense of loss, as HB1 illustrates, change is seen as a disintegration of the dreams for which they have given their lives. Participants in this study acknowledge that the transition time of contemporary religious life is a source of deep suffering for many of their members.

This is made clear in the metaphors used by the interviewees. Contemporary religious life is described as 'the night' when religious have become disengaged from the concerns and activities of the day that has ended and 'wait in the shadowy life of dusk for tomorrow's new opportunities' (FA4). It is the 'shattered glass' in which 'the chaos of brokenness begins to settle while one waits in the unexpected beauty of that very brokenness for the new to be

created' (FA3). It is HB1's 'CD on hold'. It is 'the time of pruning' when 'the violence of the cutting back will lead to new growth and anticipated beauty' (P1). It is 'the dark seed beds of new beginnings that are anticipated' (N1).

The pain experienced in change and disintegration is not seen as a reason for failing to attend to new directions. Interviewees speak of the need to hold in balance an appreciation of past contributions, while attending to and acknowledging prophetic voices emerging within the community. Only through acknowledging current realities and through asking questions and taking risks to explore future possibilities, do respondents believe that religious groups will be able to navigate successfully this period of death and possible rebirth. HB1 summarises the need for honest confrontation and a resultant willingness to accept the truth of who religious institutes are, and where they find themselves in this new world. It involves facing the risk of uncertainty and the possibility of mistakes in new steps that are taken:

That phrase came to mind from the Gospel, 'Lord we do not know where you're going, so how can we know the way?' I think that's true of a lot of religious today, and when you think about it – if we're not sure of the framework of religious life or its direction or how it can currently be lived, or what its future might be or if it has a future, then that obviously throws into turmoil all that is important to all of us and especially the leadership. It might be a bit like after the First World War – 'Are you on horses or are you riding in a tank?' (HB1)

Transition is at the heart of current religious life experience. It is an opportune but dangerous time. It brings pain, loss, questions and the possibility of new life. It challenges and, in so doing, despite goodwill and expertise, almost inevitably gives rise to diametrically opposed viewpoints.

Differences are understandable. The way is uncertain, the signals are often mixed, communication frequently breaks down as individuals speak largely to like-minded people. Monologue rather than dialogue characterises the interchange that occurs. Because there are few clear signposts, anxiety rises, and resentment and self-protection can begin to dominate formal

communication and discernment. As a result, groups can become alienated and entrenched. What is difficult to discuss is then avoided, so that polarisation only increases.

In Bridges' (1980) terms, the current polarisation within religious institutes is taking place between those who are unable to disengage from the past or relinquish familiar assumptions, roles and routines, and those whose disenchantment with past values, structures and practices has brought them to a decision to choose the emptiness and chaos between towns. Transition for this latter group is seen as essential for the evolution of new forms of religious life. They regard the reactionary stance of those who are resistant to change as impeding transition and growth.

RESPONSES TO CHANGE

Failure to Deal with Transition

At one end of the transitional spectrum, a significant group named in this study (identified as settlers by E5) reflects the growing conservatism in the western world and among some religious groups. Current uncertainties and transitional demands are seen as negative and destructive. A reactionary lifestyle and stance reflect the desire to return to the practices of an earlier time when there was greater certainty and security: P3 sees it as a reaction to the global situation:

people who don't really want to come to grips with the outside world.
(P3)

For E6, it is tied to a desire for security:

the desire to play it too safe by putting the bulk of energy (as well as finance) into ensuring a level of security into a future not enjoyed by a majority of people. (E6)

This disengagement and the growing conservatism of a significant number are perceived by interviewees such as P3, FA3, P1 as hindering the

transition of religious during this pivotal period, both because it undermines the sense of common purpose necessary for effective transition, and because it sets up a pattern of resistance, even to the possibility of waiting. When individuals or groups fail to resolve even Phase 1 of Bridges' (1980) conceptual framework, then anxiety, anger and depression result in a reversion to past structures and past practices, which militate against successful transition and the exercise of effective leadership.

The settlers are described by respondents as having found the challenges of late twentieth century religious life unintelligible and overwhelming. The data analysis indicates that they have been unable to undertake the first transition task – that of acknowledging and accepting the end of religious life as they have known it, and unable to adapt to changing structures and practices, even those approved by the institutional Church. A significant number are named by interviewees as working within hierarchical church structures and in institutional ministries, as parish workers or pastoral associates. Many named in the study live in small communities or alone, but the pattern and practices of their lives have not been significantly altered, either by global paradigm shifts, or by sweeping theological developments. For this group, the longing for a past that has all but disappeared has been reinforced by the stance of those with whom they share their lives and among whom they minister. Generally, they move in limited circles, 'mixing with like-minded religious, parishioners, friends and family' (E3). Many serve in ministries involving largely middle-class clientele, and few actually work with those who are poor and on the edges of society, 'whatever official mission statements might say'. (N3)

Some interviewees, such as FA1, P3, N1, and S1, describe 'settlement' as a factor of the ageing composition of religious congregations (many with an average age over 65), and the reality that many of these religious no longer serve in full-time active ministries:

I think that the fact that we're older means it's harder to change, and many are quite content with being what they are, and doing what they're coping with – what they've been doing for all those years, (S1)

In one sense, it is seen to be related to a more comfortable lifestyle and the adoption of middle class values.

What's become very comfortable and doing your own thing. (FA1)

For SU2, it is also a function of diminishing numbers:

It's so much easier, as we get smaller, to retreat into comfortable, surer ministries – ones that will succeed, financially secure ones. (SU2)

Among some groups, the belief that religious life is dying has resulted in a perceived fatalism:

So let's just sit it out as best we can. (FA3).

A common stance among settlers derives from their belief that change has not resulted in the new life and energy promised to them by those who promoted renewal.

What is hindering them, I think, is the sense of the people who are scared, or who can't read it, or who feel betrayed because the actual structures are not working, or nobody wants to join, or people write terrible things about us in the papers – all that kind of stuff. (P3)

E4 summarises the complexity of the situation:

They couldn't see how we could get out of the bog. Now we're in another bog. They think they've done a lot, but they're not there; they're bogged down. It's worse now, because they don't realise (E4).

The complexity is reiterated frequently throughout the interviews. While the settler response is aligned with an inability to come to terms with global and theological paradigm shifts, it is not perceived primarily to be a result of age or disinterest, or even simple conservatism or middle class values (although

these are acknowledged as factors). The inability to acknowledge the disintegration of religious life as it has been lived in the past is seen by a number of interviewees (and verified through NVivo) as embedded in a type of psychical paralysis:

I think it's depression in the case of these people. (P3)

I think there is a loss of hope among some people. The fact that we are changing or the focus of our groups is changing doesn't have to bring hopelessness, but it does for some people, I think. (FA1)

The sense of depression that is referred to is summarised by S1:

There has been so much talk in the past about the death, and the dying of congregations – I think one of the results of that kind of malaise has been maybe a depression about the whole situation. I think there are still a number of individual religious (and maybe groups of religious) who haven't got out of that depressed state, and therefore they're kind of unable to grasp hold of any change. They can't be proactive because they're still depressed about the whole thing. Where in the hell are we going to? What's going to happen? Where are the new members going to come from? They're not there, and so on. So, they just sit and die. (S1)

Depression and psychical paralysis are recognised factors, which currently militate against the transition of religious institutes into an uncertain future and possible new forms of religious life. For settlers, such as those described above, fidelity lies in commitment to earlier values and structures, which they believe have been betrayed by the change agents within the institute to which they belong. They remain committed to what they see as the fundamental call of religious life, but they do not identify with the prophetic and transformational orientation held by those who choose new directions.

Their inability to deal with transition poses a serious challenge to leadership at this time. In a society and church marked by growing conservatism (McKay, 1999; Schneiders, 2003) resistance to change aggravates attempts at realignment and new beginnings. The settler stance is at sharp odds with

those who are seen to be situated in Bridges'(1980) neutral zone, and who believe that realignment and conversion between towns is critical to emerging future times for religious life.

Option for Transition

Within religious congregations in this study, a small but significant number of individuals and groups are identified by interviewees as transitional. Committed to the prophetic edge of religious life, they are described by interviewees such as E3, FA4 and E6, as seeking to use the time between towns to redefine religious life, its vision and its assumptions. Within the context of waiting and realignment, they strive to discern future directions and fan the embers they see at the heart of risk-taking action.

They have within them the seeds of change and the possibilities for transformation. (E3)

They are simultaneously aware of the twilight zone between past and present – the need for the in-between time of transition – and motivated at the same time by a sense of urgency regarding the fundamental transformation of religious life. Prophetic discernment, specifically within transition, is they believe, is critical to survival. The majority of respondents themselves appear to fall clearly into this category:

We need to stay in the struggle. I think we're on the edge of something. (FA5)

Transitional religious are described as attentive to the present, while motivated by future possibilities and the realisation of even tentative dreams. A transitional orientation demands fearlessness:

We can never achieve anything of value, nothing can be achieved by just hanging back. There's got to be a fearlessness. If it's for the good and the right and the true, then why hang back? The vision is what we're talking about. Religious life... we have to talk about it. In today's world, we have to be seen to be prophetic. I think it's definitely prophetic. And I've been thinking about that word. We probably don't claim enough the gift of prophecy.

It will take courage. I won't live to see it happen, but we have to ask, what are we going to do about it? (N3)

The contrast between resistance to change and desire for growth is stark. The challenge for religious leadership is to maximise the common commitments of such diverse groups within religious life and to utilise differences in such a way that new life can be nurtured.

Commonalities and Differences

Despite opposing ideologies, both groups described above are perceived by interviewees as unified by a common fundamental commitment and by a common experience of a particular congregation and a particular congregational identity. When describing fundamental beliefs about religious life, both settlers and transitional individuals have developed a capacity to share ideals and beliefs, especially in the areas of charism and mission.

They want what is of God to come alive in the world. (E5)

Discussion of significant differences, however (around ministries, the call of contemporary religious life, the place of the vows, the relationship between religious congregations and the institutional church), are largely avoided. Polarisation hampers efforts between towns to provide space for the old to die out. Until there is deliberate management by leadership of the signs of disintegration and death, new forms of religious life cannot easily begin to emerge, nor can essential transformation occur.

Towards New Life

Transition is seen by respondents as critical for transformation. Whatever the urgent issues of contemporary religious life, the spiritual passage of the neutral zone is for most interviewees a harbinger of the deep transformation of religious life itself. Some see transformation as occurring within the ongoing life of their own particular religious institute. Others sense that new life can only emerge out of the dying of the group.

We live in a world (religious and otherwise) that's in the process of deconstructing and reconstructing. Basically, it's surrendering to life, not trying to control it; letting the big institutions die. I think that religious have to be game enough to let what's there go, and what is alive to come to life and fan the flames of that. (E5)

For any transition to be navigated in a life-giving way, the neutral zone is viewed as an opportunity for leadership to call the group to courage, patience, and attentiveness to the signs of both death and new life. A number of participants speak of the need to allow what is irrelevant to die, and simultaneously 'to live rather than die' (N1) into the final moments of current forms. Out of the dying, new possibilities and new forms of religious life as yet unimagined may then emerge.

In this time of transition, apostolic congregations particularly, which have been challenged to find a new voice and a new locus since Vatican II, are seen in real terms as being 'in parenthesis' (P5) between the cloistered religious life of earlier centuries and the coming in this new century, of different and as yet unidentified forms. Whether this time leads to a further deepening of the life of their group or its demise, participants agree that religious life will continue in some form, either similar to present structures and lifestyle, or markedly different. They insist on the need to manage transition in a life-giving way in order to engage in processes that will open religious to new life.

Reflecting Boorstin's (1987) study of the differing perspectives of those who live on the frontier (identity, openness to the new, and community),

respondents identify three focus areas of identity, mission and community as specific orientations from which those in the midst of transition view unfamiliar and emerging forms of religious life

FOCUS AREAS BETWEEN TOWNS

A number of participants in this research point to a transitional emphasis on identity and self-awareness – the need for religious to identify ‘who they are, what they are thinking and what they are doing’ (E2) – if they are to navigate transition effectively. Other respondents focus more on the mission of the group, and those whom they see themselves as being called to serve. Most interviewees in this study appear to fit into this category. The final group of participants identifies a new consciousness of community, and the ways in which contemporary religious, faced by an unknown future, unite in fellowship to respond to the new world in which they find themselves.

The Focus on Identity

N4 reflects the thinking of a number of interviewees that the time of transition, with its characteristic emptiness, chaos, and even anomie and alienation, has led to a concentration on charism and identity:

Our identity and who we are. (N4)

This focus on the intrinsic nature of a particular religious congregation, the features that differentiate it from other groups and give it its particular character, is seen as enabling the institute to discern more easily its future possibilities and directions. In Schneider’s (2000) terms, it is just this reflection on the deep narrative developed throughout the history of the group, (recalling and retelling the story of the founding members, the struggles and achievements, the outstanding individuals and communities that have shaped the character of who the group is today, the need for realignment in the face of diminishment and disintegration), which will facilitate its transition into an uncertain future.

N4 believes that this reflection and realignment of identity is at the core of effective transition:

A wholehearted commitment to what is at the core of religious life – the essentials – who we are rather than what we do. (N4)

In N2's terms, it 'focuses on what is at the heart', while S4 believes that 'the future of religious life is basically about sharing who we are and what we have'.

For these participants, the crucial questions for a time of transition encompass reflection on who the group is at this time, how it has become who it is and what aspects of the group's identity call for realignment. This perspective, it is suggested, will call leaders and members into the new world of the twenty-first century. Those who focus on identity argue that understanding the distinctive nature of a particular charism enables individual members to identify more fundamentally with their own congregations and with religious life per se. The complex discernment of future directions for the group is thus facilitated. Ultimately, however, in the chaos and complexity of this time, as P3 asserts, reflection on who the group is requires opening oneself and one's institute to the future and to possible unknown forms of identity:

I think we're in the right direction but I don't know that we've made the great leap forward. I think we've reached a certain point where we've got to make a great leap into the Gospel or into the spirit. without rationalization, justification, of what we think we are, who we think we are. (P3)

Part of the self awareness is the realisation that it is always others who open our eyes and reveal to us who we are, and therefore there is a clear emphasis in the study on the critical nature of dialogue as a way of life:

There needs to be a lot of dialogue and discussion...of real listening to what the other person is saying – discernment, good listening and dialogue, giving things a go, risk-taking, letting go of what's so sure and perfect and guaranteed. (S3)

This ‘wholehearted commitment’ (N4) to identity will lead, these respondents believe, to a clearer sense of other aspects of religious life. Their starting point thus differs from those who begin with either mission or community.

The focus on Mission

A second group of interviewees focuses predominantly on mission and on those the congregation sees itself as called to serve. In the global encounter with a decisively different paradigm, religious life is perceived as offering new possibilities for meeting emerging needs in a fundamentally new world, and of living the gospel in that world with ‘a spirit of radical openness’ (FA1). Because the founding impetus of each apostolic religious institute is seen as emanating from the gospel call of Jesus to stand with those who are dispossessed, these respondents take their bearings from the mission orientation of the group. This engagement is described as central to the lives of contemporary religious, just as it was to the lives of the founders. It is from here, this group believes, that all other aspects of religious life will find meaning. E6 summarises the thinking of many in this group in her description of the challenge to religious institutes at this time:

It's the challenge about credibility in terms of mission and ministry and it's where we as religious see ourselves, and how we remain a force for change. To me the crucial factor is a new understanding of mission which has probably been around for a decade or so, but I don't think we've faced it...to go wherever there's a need, to encounter whoever's in need, to do whatever it takes to bring good news to the poor. It's not new, but it puts the primary focus back on mission and the mission of Christ...I think the crucial point in this understanding of mission is that it permeates our whole lives...The religious congregation of which we're members, doesn't have a mission, but is in the service of God's mission; in other words, the mission has a religious congregation. (E6)

The focus on mission is pinpointed by many participants in this study as the fundamental task for religious congregations in the twenty-first century. Respondents describe it as one that requires engagement in both compassionate service of the other and prophetic work towards the

transformation of systems (personal, social, political and ecclesial), which contribute to injustice.

Numerous comments reflect the mission orientation of respondents:

Asking constantly, 'what is our mission? with a real ability to share that with others (S2)

freeing people for mission (FA4)

working in solidarity with disparate ministries (E6)

putting gifts at the service of the dispossessed (SU2)

prepared to take a public stand (FA2)

asking constantly, when do we know we are truly following Jesus of Nazareth? and responding: when we are seeing things through the eyes of the poor (T2)

Numerous such comments throughout the interviews identify mission as an underpinning focus area for transitional religious. It is this area which is discussed in detail in Chapter 8.

Identity and mission are the two clearest focus areas for transitional religious. A third area pinpointed as critical however is that of community. In a global world, characterised by deep divisions, it is seen as intrinsic to any discussion of transition and essential to both present and future forms of religious life. Indeed, for a significant percentage of those who are choosing religious life in the western world today, community is named by a number of interviewees as a clear motivating factor for their choice.

The Focus on Community

In the space between towns, individuals become more conscious of who they are as a community. It is in the waiting time, and through others they meet and those who join them, that they come to identify more effectively what characterises them as a group:

To draw people into community, defining it and keeping it energised.
(FA1)

Community consciousness and the contemporary search for community is a third focus for transitional religious. While individuals who choose to join a religious institute during a time of transition do see themselves as aligned with its identity and mission, many give as their stated reason for seeking this form of life the search for community.

I entered for a sense of community. (FA4)

Respondents reflect the thinking of Wittburg (1996), Radcliffe (2000) and Tacey (2003) in viewing community as an aspiration of western women and men who experience postmodern life as isolating, atomised and sterile. Like Radcliffe, E4 believes that more people are drawn to religious life today by a search for community than for mission, identity or indeed any other reason. She describes the most recent arrivals to her congregation as older, with considerable life experience, searching, not for particular ministries, since these are open to them in the wider society, but for a community of like-minded individuals with whom they can live out their religious commitment:

...That sort of bond of mutuality that enables individuals to pursue their goals....It's always going to be done better in collaboration with, rather than alone. (E4)

For those whose focus is community, there is a belief that it is in community that deep, invisible bonds are shared and meanings communicated between people, especially in prayer and ritual. In community, individuals are nourished and nurtured by the spirit that is shared. Since these individuals nominate community as a prime motivation for their attraction to religious life, they search for new ways to share life and spiritual nourishment with a meaningful group that is committed to similar values. They exemplify in many ways Tacey's (2000; 2003) description of the postmodern spiritual searchers, yearning for fellowship and community. It is this innate human need for

community, he believes, that will build religion again, and these individuals who will nurture it.

The gift that the third group brings to this time of transition, E4 and FA4 believe, is a renewed spiritual and communitarian focus, together with the potential to build bridges and to span generations and viewpoints. They share a common commitment to religious life, and search (with those whose focus is identity and mission) for new ways to live apostolic religious life in the twenty-first century.

The people I am thinking of are very much needing to connect to the group...and related to that is some form of community or communion. (E4)

I didn't enter religious life to live on my own. I entered for a sense of community, but it challenged me to explore what community really means. We haven't got all the answers, and we move beyond our own religious communities to find other communities. How can we learn from each other and respect each other's stories and heritage? We're all in this together. (FA4)

There are two warnings about a community focus sounded by participants in this study:

the crisis between the longing for religious community as a way of making sense of life, and the difficulty of living community in contemporary western society,

the potential lack of capacity or readiness of many of those with a focus on community to become risk-takers in breaking open new forms of religious life.

Community – a Mirror Image of the Contemporary Crisis

In the first place, while it is community that draws many people to religious life, it is the difficulty of living community that causes many to leave, or to seek alternative commitment outside community. The uncertainty of the transition time is reinforced by the conflict between the desire for autonomy and the demands of community. In FA1's terms, these dichotomies raise questions for

religious congregations, who have traditionally professed that they cannot be Church, indeed they cannot be human, without commitment to community. For Radcliffe (2000), the point of convergence for this group of religious women and men is the challenge of living the mirror image of the crisis of the modern self – aspiring to autonomy, but increasingly aware of the impossibility of being human alone.

The inherent dilemma is summed up by FA1:

I think there's a huge challenge between the call to community and the individualism, both of our age and of our religious institutes as well. And it's very hard, in an affluent world, to draw people into community – real community, and not notional community...defining it, and keeping it energised with some vitality, and bringing people away from what's become very comfortable and often doing one's own thing. (FA1)

As many Australian religious have rejected and moved out of older forms of community, newer members aspire to some of these very forms. At one level, they are looking for experiences of communal living. At another, they seek communal bondedness and a relational spirituality, which connects the individual to the whole world and to the God who sustains it. As E6 points out, it both supports and disconcerts:

I need my sisters and other people to be a communal presence that disturbs. (E6)

In the context of increasing global interdependence, respondents speak of the struggles of humanity to live together in a global community, and in P3's terms, of the call to religious within this:

'to witness to reconciliation and peace within community' (P3).

Interviewees with a communal focus speak of the fundamental need to witness to the inextricable bonding of the whole of creation and all peoples in one interdependent earth community. In a new and particularly focussed way in a global world, the God who is being revealed is seen by these religious as a God of interdependence and global community. E2, who

describes at length the challenge of community to contemporary religious in a deeply divided world, sums up the responses of many participants in this study:

It emphasises that each of us is made in the image of God and as such, comes to live fullness of being person by growing in communion with other persons. It's based on the premise that difference and uniqueness can flourish through mutual relationships in communion. (E2)

Transition demands realignment with communal values. Holding onto intrinsic values of autonomy and freedom, while living the challenge of postmodern community so that new life and new dreams may emerge, is seen as both painful and difficult. It holds particular challenges for leadership during a time of critical change, both because it embodies the western crisis of the modern self, and because it raises for transitional religious women and men the demands of risk-taking.

Community and the Capacity to Break Open New Forms

The second warning around the focus on community sounded by respondents is of practical and experienced concern. Some leaders wonder about the capacity or readiness of many of those with a focus on community to become risk-takers in breaking open new forms of religious life. Desire for community and a focus on sharing lifestyle and prayer with groups of like-minded individuals carry inbuilt dangers of self-preoccupation. E4 sums this up:

Some of the newer people coming on would express all of this. They have a very deep relationship with God, but I don't really understand sometimes what really motivates them. In needing to connect with the groups, they've identified with a couple of other people, and there's a lot of mentoring going on, and that seems to be very essential for them. I think even to the extent that it might hold them from moving on to other things. (E4)

This is a clear challenge to those with a community focus. Religious life in its essence and its history, even in the midst of its limitations and failures, is always thus called to respond to the urgent needs of the time:

It has the right to be a face of a leadership...one that is prophetic.
This is an important role for religious congregations. (N2)

Paradoxically, it is in community that the face of the future is discerned, identified and witnessed. Individuals may stir the embers, but it is within a supportive group, even if small, that new forms will begin to emerge:

Now more than ever, first and foremost today, I believe that we need prophetic communities, not just prophetic individuals – prophetic communities. So the emphasis is on – how do you get a community to be prophetic? (T1)

ISSUES FOR TRANSITION

Assumptions about Future Forms

Participants in this study see the current period as being ‘in parenthesis’ (P5). They refrain from defining in clear terms the form of religious life for the twenty-first century. Too much is unknown for the women and men of this time to attempt definitive answers.

Two distinctive attitudes can be identified however. One group of respondents envisages religious life in the twenty-first century as a development of present forms; the other anticipates that it will be radically different. Those who assume that the visible face of religious life will be recognisably similar in the future as it is in the present (approximately 25%, identified through NVivo analysis) discuss the future of religious life in the context of known ministries, consecrated life, underpinned by three vows, and shared communal living. Ministries, they infer, will be dependent on societal or cultural needs similar to those in the present, and concerned with the needs of the gospel poor. They take for granted the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, which remain, in their view, intrinsic to religious life. Communal living is also assumed

to be a critical component. While associateships and other forms of membership are welcomed as valid ways of living the charism of the institute, vowed religious life, it is believed, will re-emerge as a development, rather than as a radical transformation, of its current forms:

The challenge I think, is the question of how do you begin a new thing without destroying what has been – how do we build on what has been, rather than sweep it away. . . I think the challenge for religious leaders is how do we encourage evolution rather than how do we start a new thing, and how does that evolution really grow up healthily, while at the same time allowing the past to be the past. (N2)

At the other end of the spectrum, the majority of respondents hesitate to define even the core elements of religious life:

Because it's a new way; it's a new world. (FA4)

For this group, the traditional vows are regarded as problematic, both from the perspectives of contemporary life and from the intrinsic value they are seen to hold. For male leaders particularly, the vow of celibacy is seen to be a critical sticking point for apostolic religious in both developed and developing countries. The very essence of religious life, the question of what is vowed, the witness of communal living, are all issues for which these participants believe there is no clear answer at this time.

I keep saying 'If a group of young people come along, we give them the keys of the house and say, 'go and live there and show us how religious life in this tradition can be lived today and we'll companion you from the outside.'" Well that just terrifies people out of their brains. But you can't ask people to come and live with 60 and 70 year olds, no matter how energetic they are. It's just a different world, so we've got to create something new and I think they need company to create something new. (FA4)

The God quest and the mission to the gospel poor is seen by both groups described above as intrinsic to religious life. Consequently, whatever the future, it is a foundational vision and the resultant transformational living, which

are identified by all respondents as critical to the transition of religious communities into an uncertain future. This is encapsulated by E5:

The group needs to embrace a vision. I suppose the leadership works to set appropriate strategy in place to sustain it. I think, again we haven't embraced fully the importance of the vision. It's often been seen as that unreal thing, and for sure it's not to do about work; it's at another level, but I think it's terribly important, because it's what will keep the group moving forward. And to deal creatively, not just with the facts, the way things are, but to put those 'what if' and 'why not' questions on the agenda. And then you stimulate the imagination and encourage an imaginative response in others – That's where the whole group comes into it. Why not? Why can't we do this? (E5)

Whatever the outcome, a transformational vision, even if only embraced by a few, is seen as central to the transitional moment in which religious currently find themselves. Most respondents agree that it is not unknown future forms that are critical at this moment, but fidelity to the management of disintegration, and commitment to the sparks of new life. These two areas, and the resolution of the tensions between them, is central they believe, to future development.

The Impact of Current Tensions within Religious Groups

David Malouf speaks of the 'enormous darkness between towns' as a time when the legend is 'barely kept alive'. Diminishing numbers, ageing groups, and the polarisation of attitudes and values outlined above call for dynamic and prophetic leadership.

The average religious institute in Australia now includes a significant group of older members. While some congregations include members in their forties and fifties, and perhaps even a small number under forty, it is clear that ongoing diminishment, the clear imbalance of numbers, and the tendencies of older people to avoid risk, are major challenges to religious leaders (who are themselves increasingly in older age ranges)

Side by side with the ageing nature of religious groups is the acknowledgement (often hesitant) that the new will be carried forward and expressed largely by the young. FA 4 emphasises the need to learn from the young. She argues that it will be in their living out of commitment that young people will manifest divergent and alternative expressions of religious life. They will also provide glimpses into the future shape of religious life and a window into the future of global society. By speaking of the need for courage to give them the keys of the house, literally and metaphorically, some respondents articulate the prophetic potential of youth to break open new expressions of the God quest, mission and community. For one of the younger respondents, the challenge is clear:

I stay because I believe there is another way, and I want to be part of creating that other way. (FA4)

Ways to nurture new signs of life, while refusing to deny the death of what is no longer a viable reality is a major challenge:

How do you keep the passion for something that appears to be dying? (E4)

This 'leap' and the possibilities it involves, as well as the 'certain point' religious have reached in this waiting time, are critical issues for leadership into an uncertain future. For western religious, there are specific challenges.

Particular Challenges for Western Religious Congregations

Three challenges, specific to western cultures, confront religious women and men in Australia. The first relates to the reality that Australian religious are part of the 20% of the world's population, which consumes 80% of the world's wealth. Many congregations in Australia have individuals and communities (both congregational members from those countries and Australians) working in developing countries, and for them the contrasts are stark. Religious returning from overseas ministries are often confronted, not only by the affluence and consumerism, which appear to permeate society, but also by the comfortable middle class living conditions of their own communities. The

situation is exacerbated when their community's standards of living, housing, economics, and travel exceed even those of individuals and groups with whom they minister within this country. FA1 refers to 'what's become very comfortable and often doing your own thing.' P3 sees religious life in Australia 'as being a culture in collision with outside, real outside forces.' The crisis of the global community is encapsulated in the crisis in the religious community:

Our aged care here is very high class, but we do have old brothers being cared for in other countries who have nothing. Now to me, to go global is to help everybody; we've got to share. We talk about the world redistributing wealth: we can't even do it in our own congregation. (P3)

As global inequities increase, religious life and leadership in Australia face significant questions about their own roles and responsibilities within and beyond this country.

The second challenge facing Australian religious institutes is the growing polarisation of ideologies, between east and west, between Christian and Muslim. In trying to break down the boundaries of nation states and to globalise world markets, humanity has struggled with 'internationality', and has not managed the differences between them with a great deal of success. Governments encourage polarisation as a way of dealing with violence across the world community, and divisions have only increased with the acceleration of globalisation and its impact on people who are poor. Political leaders rarely acknowledge the reality that violence is a disturbing manifestation of a broader and deeper disintegration. The challenge for the world community, as for religious, is summed up by T1:

one of the greatest challenges facing humanity itself is how to deal with the other. (T1)

The other, in his terms, is the individual who is perceived as different, in race, religion or culture. For religious in developed countries, issues of relating to 'the other' has particular relevance at this time, both because of the millions of marginalised and displaced peoples throughout the world with whom many of

their colleagues work, and because, as groups that are ageing and diminishing in number, the narrowing world of their communities and life limit the experience they have with ‘the other’. These are issues that are dealt with in detail in Chapter 8.

The third issue with which western religious are challenged derives from western liberal democracy. Liberal democratic values of freedom, individual worth, self-actualisation have had an eroding impact on the cultural underpinning of both western society and western religious life. As pointed out earlier, restorationists endeavour to deal with the chaos and confusion they experience in this world by reinstating traditional values and a greater sense of stability. At the other end of the spectrum, individuals and groups are identified by respondents as attempting to create new possibilities from the negative outcomes of individualism, breakdown of community, and loss of meaning and spiritual values (FA1, T1, SU3, P3, N3).

The realities confronting religious institutes in Australia raise very specific challenges for religious life and leadership as they are faced with choices for the future, and for this particular moment of transition.

The task for this Moment

Transition is not envisaged by participants in this study as being for the whole congregation, but for small groups prepared to take the risk to enter transition and walk new paths. It is unreal, respondents believe, to ask those at the end of the journey to do more than support those who are willing to pack their saddlebags and move off. Encouragement by older members is important for risk-takers at this time however, as it helps to legitimise transition and new expressions of religious life.

In Malouf’s (1987) terms, leaving the town is perceived as enabling the journeyers to take risks not possible in the old place. The absence of surety between towns makes it much easier to be creative, to try new ways of living the charism, to view change as transitory, and as exploratory, to regard

mistakes as new ways of learning rather than as negatives to be avoided. It is a time ripe for creative opportunity, and for fostering innovation. When the change is deep and far-reaching, the journey between towns can take a long time, and the innovations will be diverse and at times chaotic. Respondents emphasise that the camping ground between towns isn't a place of meaningless waiting and confusion. There are signals, lights, message sticks. At times, however, there is nothing to hold on to except faith.

The possibilities and the fear are well captured by FA5:

some of the factors that hinder transition and change include the good old figure of insecurity or fear of failure. I think fear is a fairly common element in lots of people's lives, and it's also a good safeguard or excuse, to cover up other things. Sometimes fear is preferable to taking risks, it can be a paralysing thing. Risk taking can be a cure for fear I think, I think I am preaching to myself mostly (FA5)

In Schneiders' (2000) terms, it is perhaps 'time for a more tentative and provisional, and therefore more humble and trusting walking in the present (Schneiders, 2000, p 208).' Perhaps only in walking in the present, in fidelity to the future, can transformation take place.

The Constant – Walking towards the Horizon

The conclusion drawn by many respondents in this research is that the critical issue is not the form that religious life might take, but the constancy and fidelity of religious individuals and communities in nurturing the flame and focussing on the horizon. The metaphor used by one interviewee captures this:

What came to my mind immediately when I read that question was something which I keep going back to such a lot. I don't know whether it's – it's not something new. It's a little cartoon by Leunig (and I'm a great fanatic), and it's about this little figure and it's walking along the path and it's got a swag on its shoulder, and there's a garden gate inside, and the garden gate is quite a long distance, but gradually gets closer. The gate is open, the little figure goes through the gate, and along the path, and all the time the thing that's constant is the horizon in the distance. At times the little figure sits down, takes a rest. The drawing portrays the sky, so sometimes it's got stars, sometimes the moon; sometimes it's cloudy; sometimes there's brilliant sunshine; and the terrain's different: sometimes it's very bare; sometimes there are flowers. It's absolutely rich. It's the journey of life, I suppose, that pilgrim journey. But the constant in it is that work of walking towards the horizon, and in all of that, you don't know what's over the horizon so it's the surprise element and – it's the unknown, I suppose, that thing that draws you on, to keep going on the journey. To me that inspires. It's a vision for now, it's the path of the pilgrim. The whole people of God can be there on the path with us even though it's a single solitary figure, so that might capture some new image – But it's like the God quest, it's as new as it's old; it's fundamental. (E6)

This quest and fidelity are seen as key, however unclear the future appears.

The challenge of holding so many strings at once, it's a bit like flying kites – you asked for a metaphor – holding onto all of those strings so that they all fly at once, and don't bang into each other and destroy each other. (N2)

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Chapter 6 has examined the identifying features of the transition that are manifesting themselves in the lives of religious women and men in the western world, particularly as they have moved from a sense of religious life as being at the crossroads to one that perceives it as being between towns. The chapter has included an analysis of transitional phases, possible responses, and focus areas that emerge during a time of transition. Western religious institutes face particular challenges, and these are summarised. The chapter concludes a reflection on possible futures for religious life, and the factors believed to be critical for successful navigation of the time

‘between towns’. An understanding of transition is undeniably critical for religious life and leadership during a time of crucial change. It will be shown to underpin the following areas covered in this research. The diagram below summarises the elements foundational to this.

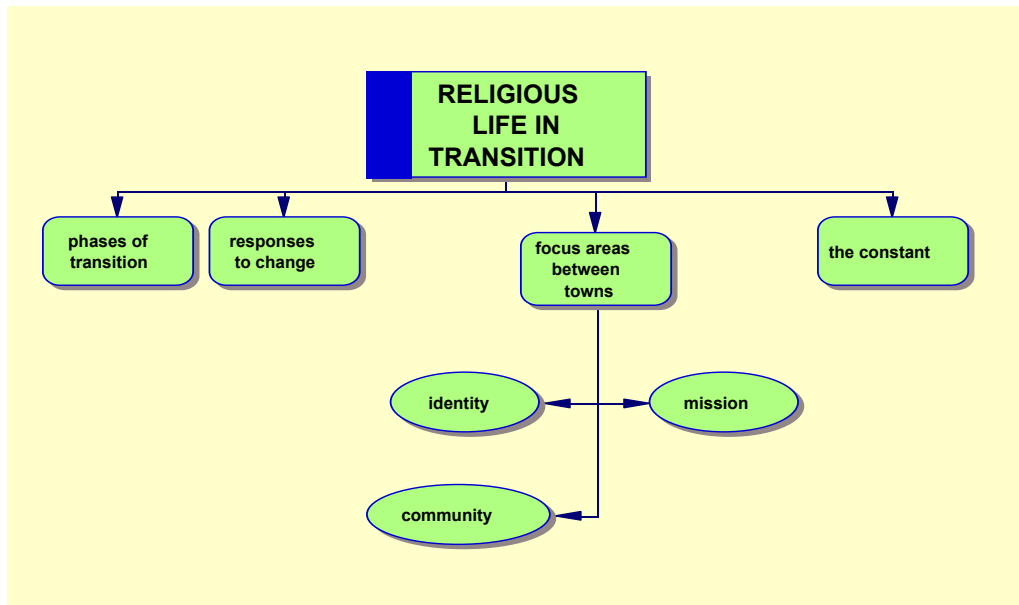


Figure 7 – Religious Life in Transition

Chapter 7 will explore respondents’ views on the ways that the God quest and the spiritual transcendence at the core of religious life have been radically changed by the transitional experiences of the past century.

Chapter 7

THE SEARCH FOR THE LARGER GOD

The Spirituality at the Heart of Religious Life

INTRODUCTION

Participants in this study believe unequivocally that spiritual values and spiritual commitment lie at the heart of religious life. Particularly during the paradigm shift of this time, the God to whom religious women and men have committed their lives is clearly identified as the source of meaning, impetus and direction of their life choices and fundamental life stance. Explicitly and implicitly, interviewees share their beliefs, articulate challenges, and raise questions, concerns and possibilities, in the context of this core spiritual dimension.

Chapter 6 identified the impact of change on the lives of members of religious institutes as presented by interviewees. Out of the sense of waiting and the resultant reflection that is taking place, the task of facilitating the transition, even more than creating possible new forms of religious life, has become the focus for congregations and their leadership. Chapter 7 explores interviewees' perceptions of the ways that the God quest and the spiritual transcendence at the core of religious life have been radically changed by the spirituality revolution of the twentieth century.

The chapter focuses on three areas identified in the data, all related to the spiritual orientation and commitment of religious congregations. Firstly, it explores the underpinning spiritual nature of religious life and the plurality of metanarratives that have become part of that life since Vatican II. Secondly, it examines respondents' experience of the spirituality revolution of the

twentieth century, heralded by the breakdown of structures and the resultant misalignment of the ideological frames of western society. Finally, the chapter describes the search for new images of God and a more inclusive theology, spirituality, and developing metanarrative or overarching myth, which point to new and to emerging possibilities and challenges for this time of transition.

THE UNDERPINNING SPIRITUAL NATURE OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

A spiritual orientation is unequivocally named by all respondents as being core to their commitment:

‘A life steeped in spirituality, prayerfulness, because that’s really, intrinsically what it’s all about.’ (S3)

While participants don’t use Wittburg’s term, ‘religious virtuosity’ (Wittburg, 1996, p 19), they do emphasise, as she does, the quest for the transcendent, spiritual dimension in human existence as the foundation stone of religious life. N2 summarises the responses of interviewees generally:

The God-quest is the core of it, but within our mission we express, if you like, in concentrated form, what the whole Church is on about, and so I think religious life has to be very conscious of what the world is and – of being part of the Church, which in turn is part of the world. Now all of that is very vague, but it’s the core. (N2)

‘The God-quest’ is identified as core to being ‘part of the world’, inextricably linked to it and significantly affected by it. As indicated in chapter 4, the spiritual dimension of religious life is perceived as making sense only within the spiritual dimension of the whole of life.

In Schneider’s (2000) terms, the consequences of differing responses can be seen in the diverse cultures, spiritualities and theologies, which have emerged. Spiritual values and spiritual commitment are at the heart of religious life. But

the rapidity of change and the various responses to it (Maddi, 2004) help to explain the widely differing concepts of God, spirituality and theology co-existing at this time (Schneiders, 2000).

Religious Congregations and the Search for Spirituality

The data in this study confirms the contemporary reality that all religious congregations in western society include among their members a range of spiritual and theological viewpoints (Harmer, 1995b; O'Murchu, 1995; Schneiders, 2000; Wittberg, 1994). It is a plurality derived from distinctive life stances and is indicative of the diversity operating within the current cultures of religious institutes. It is described by N4 as the result of disparate reactions to the mystery of God:

differences within the total orientation of our lives towards intimacy and union with the God' who calls us. (N4).

Responses in this study include a range of metanarratives that enable widely differing individuals to make sense of their life commitments. Interviewees describe three general categories of pre-modern, modern and postmodern concepts of God. For the purposes of this study, the postmodern is described as including both the Vatican II liberal and the emerging post-liberal stances.

End of Millennium Dilemmas

An analysis of the data, utilising NVivo, indicates that the plurality of metanarratives evident in religious life creates both diversity and tension. This is confirmed through analysis of the data, utilising NVivo. T1 summarises the three theological stances mentioned by a number of respondents:

I believe that in most of our communities we're faced with three theologies. You know, our Church came out of the pre-modern world about 1965 with the Vatican Council, and John XXIII speaks about bringing it into the modern world. Unfortunately, while he said it at that time, the world had moved into the postmodern. But in our communities, we have pre-modern, modern and post-modern, and ne'er the trio can meet. They're just not talking. There are the three ways and there's anger and upset. I notice that the anger really is not from the postmodern, nor from the modern, but from the pre-modern. And I believe that it's because they know it's dead and they don't want to accept the fact it's dead. They're living the past.
(T1)

Such tensions and the strong stance of those who have not moved beyond the pre-modern view of religious life are of major concern to most interviewees. It is clear from the data in the current study that within the discontinuities of religious life itself, the viewpoint of those identified as restorationist is regarded as a critical factor in inhibiting transition.

This whole movement of what I call restoration – that's a big hindrance. It's not taking us anywhere except back to the 1950's.
(S1)

Restorationism

According to participants generally, restorationist religious indicate a clear choice for a return to past beliefs and frameworks. A significant proportion of the religious congregations in this study include members who are named by interviewees as utilising structures and forms of theology and prayer, which gave certainty in a previous era and which continue to sustain conservative religious in uncertain and transitional times. In Maddi's (2004) terms they have chosen the past. Restorationists regard the spiritual developments of the twentieth century as flawed, fragmented and dismissive of the God of classical theism. This standpoint, together with a desire for roots, connections and security has led them to ignore, not only the radical spirituality revolution described by Tacey (2003) and Kohn (2003), but even the liberal view of God promoted by Vatican II. Restorationists retain a

traditional view of God as the infinite, omnipotent being, the supreme authority of life that gave meaning to their original commitment to the religious institute they joined. For most of the interviewees in this study, the inability to move beyond this particular God image is one of the most significant challenges to religious life today:

Still wanting to have the life that was generated by that – not life as in life-giving, but just simply the ‘life-style... a good religious – as somebody who said his prayers with everybody else. (S1)

The quick-fix God rather than the God of revelation. (T1)

With Leavey and O’Neill (1996), many respondents contend that such a view of God is no longer tenable. The sense of certitude and order that it promotes makes no sense in the face of the spirituality revolution and the radical loss of the familiar God image in contemporary society. The restorationist stance is of major concern to participants in this study because such a stance renders religious life meaningless in a world searching for new images of God. It blocks transition to possible new forms of religious life. Even more, it has engendered in those who promote it a perceived loss of spiritual energy and dynamism, which impacts negatively on religious life in general.

And I think as long as that kind of dead hand of authority is over religious life, defining it and putting it in a straight jacket, and not allowing deviations, and demanding that constitutions and things be vetted by some sort of approving and controlling central authority, which supposedly is the source of all wisdom, I don’t think you’ve got much of a chance of making a transition or a meaningful change. (HB1)

Increasingly also, as has been witnessed in the wider western society (politically, socially and religiously), a regressive restoration of the past has resulted in some cases in negative forms of fundamentalism and authoritarianism. A number of conservative religious maintain that the disintegration of spiritual values in the culture and the absence of a unifying

vision of God and religious life is causing breakdown and diminishment. Legislation, disciplinary action, and the restriction of power to those who hold formal authority are seen by them as intrinsic to authentic religious life.

Approximately 80% of respondents speak of their concerns, both about the orientation of this group's thinking, and the impact that such thinking is having on the focus and direction of religious institutes in general:

an inability by those who have been brought up completely in institutional life to allow the other life to evolve...wanting certainty too quickly...the certainty that everything you're doing is right and ordained by God. (E5)

Some perceive the stance as the dying illusion of an embattled group, who believe that the restoration of a former spiritual vision can be reconstructed through the coercive use of power. N1 summarises the concerns of many of the respondents:

(They are) speaking from a spirituality that is still punitive. (N1)

Unless or until this viewpoint dies out, interviewees do not believe that religious life can overcome the present disintegrating forces and move to new forms. The restorationist view of God is viewed as limited and limiting, especially when it divides communities, impedes vision and paralyses mission. Restorationism is seen to both inhibit change and de-energise individuals and communities.

Loss of Spiritual Energy and Dynamism

A particular characteristic of the restorationist group causing concern to the participants in this study is the loss of spiritual energy and dynamism among more traditional religious women and men. They regard it as partly related to the ageing nature of the group, but more significantly as a factor of the disintegration of meaning at the very foundation of the spiritual life and commitment of some religious. The depletion of traditional ministries,

alienation from the professed contemporary vision of the group (as identified in official documentation), and the breakdown of uniformity and outmoded structures, are seen by respondents as causing a lack of security and stability in a number of more conservative religious, a loss that not even their enclosed world and belief in an unchanging God can continue to sustain. Analysis of the NVivo tree nodes confirms the range of responses already examined in Chapter 6. FA1 refers to 'what's become very comfortable and often doing your own thing'; E4 sees it as 'a loss of soul, generativity and hospitality'; N4 speaks of a 'congregational malaise'. P3 explores its causes, naming as an underpinning reality, 'a deep psychological depression', rather than a more overt desire for stability, comfort or security:

I would say that if you want to look at it psychologically I'd say I think it's more depression. (P3)

There is no doubt that the group of religious who support a restorationist view of the church and religious life are viewed with both concern and compassion by respondents themselves. Interviewees understand the underlying causes of such a stance, yet they remain frustrated by it, and unable to support it. They do agree however that it is not appropriate to expect the majority of restorationist religious to navigate the transition of religious life into an uncertain future.

Those named by respondents as holding the seeds for the future are seen to perceive the concept of God and of spirituality from a different lens, one that has been significantly influenced by Vatican II and the western culture from which most respondents come. This was very clear from an analysis of the NVivo tree nodes. It is a broadly different God who underpins the vision and orientation of women and men influenced by the spirituality and theology of the Vatican Council II.

The God Image of Vatican II

The optimistic view of the world, articulated by Vatican II, became the focus for religious women and men of the mid-twentieth century working to create structures and orientations that were more reflective of, and more relevant to, the culture in which they lived.

In the aftermath of the aggiornamento of Vatican II... John's breath of fresh air became a gale. Religious divested themselves of the identifying habits... embraced a variety of non-foundational ministries... met needs and aspirations of the late twentieth century... and were released from the strict horaria of daily life. (N4)

Such descriptions create a telling image of frameworks that promoted greater freedom, increasing pluralism of expression, greater tolerance and a welcoming of diversity. In this new world, religion was not to be limited to particular times (Sundays and times of official prayer), to particular places (church, monastery or convent), or to particular people (priests or religious). God was named for all of humanity (religious included) as the mystery at the core of the whole of life, to be discovered and identified in the midst of life. As outlined earlier, many religious congregations throughout the western world embraced the new theology and moved in unheard of ways to live out the call of the Council.

Post-Vatican II Spirituality

For most participants in this study, it is the God of Vatican II who gives meaning, impetus and direction to any attempts to move into new forms of religious life. It is this God who is named as the mystery at the core of the whole of life, discovered in the midst of this life. The mission of religious congregations is clearly identified as being at the service of this God:

The church of which we're part as religious congregations doesn't have a mission, but is in the service of God's mission. You know, it's God's mission – to all the people of God – all the people on earth. (E6).

God and God's mission are referred to in diverse ways:

- 'the God quest' (N2),
- 'the will of God' (S2),
- 'the God commitment' (FA3),
- 'God as the basis of relationships' (S1),
- religious as 'a proclamation of God's word' (S3),
- 'seeing God in the poor and on the margins of society' (Su3),
- 'an understanding of the Christ whom we follow' (P2).
- 'being permeated with a commitment to Christ' (HB1),
- 'a passion for God' (E2),

The post Vatican II God is the God of a pilgrim people, the God who brings freedom, tolerance, pluralism and openness, the God who stands with those on the margins. For many interviewees, it is this God, rather than the restorationist God, who gives meaning to contemporary religious life. They explore religious life, its leadership and its possible futures from the perspective of such a God.

A small voice of critique has emerged in the research however. Approximately 20% of respondents question whether the Vatican II God is the God of western liberal democracy. The image of God, which has generated a diversity of ministries, communities and lifestyles, promoted personal growth, personalist spiritualities and tolerance, is being confronted by what T1 describes as 'the God we experience when we strike the margins.' A new critique is emerging from within religious life and its leadership. It is a critique which mirrors the crisis within the whole of life.

Transition – the Experience of being between Towns

Chapter 6 described the transition of religious congregations into the uncertain world of the twenty-first century, and the acceptance by participants in this study that religious life is caught in the chaotic experience of a fundamental paradigm shift. It is a movement, which is reflective of the profound shift in global consciousness being experienced across the entire world community. In the midst of its own struggle to find meaning and give voice to its particular spiritual foundations and understanding of the transcendent in a new world, religious life has found itself reflecting and articulating the foundational struggles of the global community. The spirituality revolution of this time is emerging as core for any understanding of religious life now and into the future.

THE SPIRITUALITY REVOLUTION

Breakdown of Belief

A number of respondents reflect on the contemporary spirituality revolution and its impact on religious life. Interviewees are particularly cognisant of the ways in which the breakdown of belief is reshaping the underpinning foundation of their own beliefs and commitment. They tie this unequivocally to the spirituality revolution being experienced broadly across the world community and the undeniable spiritual energies underpinning the contemporary search for meaning. For E3, it is Yeats 'second coming'; for T1, it is 'a new way of living, a new way of relating, seeing God differently'; for P3, 'when God doesn't work, you've just got to have a bigger God'. He names it in cultural terms:

I always think of the church or any religion really as a kind of evolved or constructed organisation for what, I suppose, is the real thing: the spiritual kind of energies underneath, at any time in history. So I tend these days to see it as being a culture in collision with outside, real outside forces. (P3)

In the western world particularly, respondents believe that the breakdown of belief is evidenced in the collapse of the familiar God image and the accompanying loss of underpinning metanarratives and the spiritual foundations of life. They describe the impact of scientific rationalism and the emergence of the postmodern, post-Christian society, in which traditional concepts of God no longer underpin the way that individuals and societies order their lives. Interviewees generally concur with Wittburg's (1996) premise that the ideological frames of western society have become seriously misaligned and in many cases apparently defunct. Empty churches and the abandonment of traditional forms of faith are, for interviewees, indicators of the breakdown of traditional religion, and the extent to which radical dislocation is being experienced by both individuals and communities:

We've gone from one extreme – and it was an extreme – to the other extreme, and what we're currently living in is an extreme also.
(HB1)

Out of the breakdown, however, (the perceived end of the myth of progress, the limits of reason, the isolation of the individual and environmental threats, as described in Chapter 3), there has been a new search for meaning and a subsequent quest for new theologies and spiritualities. A number of the respondents in this study have defined the quest as 'the search for the larger God'. While descriptions differ, the data confirms a common thread. Respondents' consistent observations confirm Tacey's (2003) belief that there is a new search for a universal language of the spirit. He describes it as a language respectful of diverse traditions, but able to communicate within the expanding, globalised, planetary culture. The revolution has significant implications for religious congregations and their leadership during this time. As pointed out, the upheaval within religious life is in fact a reflection of the spirituality revolution occurring in the wider society and across the global community.

Search for a New Spirituality in Society

Humanity's need to find a meaning for life, and to make sense of it in the face of the seminal shift in global consciousness, has led to a new hermeneutic on the nature of spirituality and of God. In phenomenological terms (cf. Chapter 5), there has been an exploration of the structures of consciousness in human experiences. In examining the lived experiences of individuals and communities, philosophers and religious thinkers have attempted to develop new understandings. P3 articulates what many are struggling with:

We just have to get out of that cultural ownership. It's beyond personality, it's beyond culture. It's the only answer to postmodernism. It speaks many languages, many cultures, many religions. But that's the big against the little. (P3)

His observations reflect those of Tacey, who explores the search for a universal spirituality that makes sense in a new global reality:

The spirituality revolution thrusts us into a new social situation. We have not only outgrown the values and assumptions of mechanistic science and humanism, but we can no longer situate ourselves comfortably in the containment of the traditional religions.

In the present global culture, with the need for common values and visions in a multicultural and plural world, the time is propitious for the discovery of a universal spirituality. (Tacey, 2003)

This universal spirituality and the search for a new image of God is seen as critical by a number of participants in this study. They believe it is core, both in examining the shifts in global culture and in drawing out its implications for the future direction of religious institutes facing an uncertain future and possible new forms of religious life:

I think we're at a very transformative time and I think it demands a perspicacity to be able to name what's true, what's bogus, what we can challenge and why. (E4)

And so, how does the leader make the cultural analysis and the skill to kind of sift, to sift the new prophetic from the old faithful? (P3)

Respondents note the discernible search for new stories to replace the myths that no longer hold meaning and the conceptions of God that no longer work. They speak of the conscious exploration of indigenous and Eastern religions and the underpinnings of meaning in these spiritualities.

I also believe that there is revelation in all religions...everything that is happening is at bottom 'revelation'. Do you have eyes to see? That's what it's about. You're going to come into this whole question of the larger God. (T1)

T1's reflections on and critique of economic and scientific rationalism, and his exploration of an increasing openness to mystery and the larger God, reinforce, if in a different context, discussions of the new images of God that have begun to emerge across a broad range of literature (Johnson, 1994; Leavey & O'Neill, 1996; Schneiders, 2003; Tacey, 2003). These writers argue that the growing focus on spirituality is a clear sign of a new phase in the spiritual development of the Western world. The same stance is taken up explicitly by a number of respondents in the current research (T1, P3, E4, FA4, N4, SU3).

Participants explore the phenomenon of the spirituality revolution in relation to religious life itself, as well as in relation to the role of religious congregations inevitably caught up in the transformation of human consciousness and in the spirituality revolution of this age. They refer to the profound spiritual hunger in our society and the potential role for religious named by Wittburg:

Religious communities must develop and articulate ways to meet this hunger, to address however hesitantly and imperfectly, the deepest needs and discontinuities in our society. (Wittburg, 1996, p 58)

Participants see the tasks of reinterpreting the meaning of life and the place of the transcendent and the spiritual within human existence as key

components in facilitating the transition of religious congregations into possible new forms of religious life during this era of pivotal transformation.

The question for today is what God are you talking about?... I believe that it's a strong one and it's something religious life is grappling with.

I've got a new way – of how we live and how we relate. Today we are seeing God in a new way. (T1)

At the most profound levels, a fundamental change in the experience of God and what is broadly described as the spiritual life, is being encountered both in religious life and in the wider society.

Questions for a post modern world

Approximately 20% of interviewees take up this question of 'what God are you talking about?' (E4). For these respondents, the God image is more uncertain, more challenging, more concerned with the underside of society, and more inclusive of all spiritualities than that professed by post-Vatican II spirituality. They describe the concept of 'God as God' as probably the most critical challenge for religious life and its leadership at this time. These respondents critique, not only the restorationist view of the God image, but also some aspects of the liberal post Vatican II God. They regard assumptions around the nature of spirituality and the nature of God, as well as the search for a new metanarrative, as core challenges for religious life, especially religious life in western, democratic societies. The context of the spirituality revolution, embedded in the postmodern, post-Christian world, is for this group a fundamental issue for religious congregations searching for key elements critical to the identity, survival and long-term development of religious life.

Transitional interviewees explore from a religious life perspective the postmodernist suspicion of all metanarratives, religious or otherwise. It is their belief that the essential challenge is to take the chaos in which humanity

currently finds itself, and in the context of Catholic religious life, to develop a metanarrative that is inclusive and overarching – one that encompasses what a number of the respondents refer to as ‘the larger God’. In this way will religious congregations, albeit in a tentative and incomplete manner, tap into the hunger of contemporary women and men for what is at the heart of all life.

Like the whole of society, religious women and men find themselves ‘between towns’ in the way that they understand and interpret the concept of God. A number of participants see the challenge for religious life as that of facing this reality. In Heidegger’s terms, ‘the gods of the past have fled’, and only by suffering through the meaninglessness and darkness of this present time, can radical conversion occur.

The data in this study indicates that respondents in this group critique the developing concepts of God from four different perspectives:

They examine the image of the unknown God, the God of transition, who is emerging in the chaos and darkness between towns.

They discuss ‘the larger God’, in all and beyond all.

They examine the God of ‘the underside of society’, seeing this God as most truly revealed in those who have been dispossessed and alienated by current structures.

They explore the place of community in this search for the God between towns.

Their reflections highlight a number of core issues emerging for religious institutes and their leaders -- issues that are pointing to key elements critical to their identity and effective transition into possible new forms of religious life.

NEW IMAGES OF GOD

The God of Transition

The clearest characteristic of the God of transition is described by Johnson (1994), Schneiders (2001) and Fiand (2001) as that of darkness and unknowing. The sense of darkness and loss that they attribute to contemporary religious is succinctly explained by HB1 and supported by other respondents:

Practically everything that we stood for, everything we believed, and everything we did, and everything that we gave up has now a gigantic question mark over it. We thought we knew what being spiritual meant, and I think we've come to understand that in all probability we didn't. (HB1)

For many religious, individual anomie is exacerbated by the loss of a common vision. As Schneiders (2000) points out, the fragmentation and relativism of postmodernism and post Christianity is no longer external to the lives and communities of religious women and men. They constitute, in fact a 'zeitgeist' in which they, like others caught in the spirituality revolution of this time, are forced to confront their deepest beliefs and doubts. E4 names what is experienced by many transitional respondents:

There's no longer homogeneity in the way we pray, or the way we worship, or even in the way we describe God or believe in God...or do we believe in God? (E4)

E4 sees this lack of homogeneity and the resultant dissidence as both 'essential and dangerous'. It is for many interviewees a confrontation between doubt and hope, between death and resurrection:

How do you keep the passion for something, which appears to be dying? (E4)

Transitional respondents name, not only the diminishment of numbers, age and energy, but particularly the diminishment of meaning, as a major challenge for contemporary religious congregations. In the face of

Schneider's' tentative and provisional explanation of religious life of this time as an experience of 'walking in the dark', they see themselves as confronting the apparent meaninglessness of the age and of religious life by becoming engaged with the challenge of re-imagining God in a new and transitional world:

I think the challenge is to live in the grey, to live in the confusion rather than to be trying to give answers and define what's happening; to let yourself be disturbed and identify what it is that's disturbing you. (P1)

As part of the developing hermeneutic on the nature of God and the quest for a metanarrative that speaks to a world in search of meaning, they describe the endeavour to discern what God is saying in the darkness and uncertainty. They demonstrate, even in the face of diminishment and the breakdown of religious structures, a preparedness to wait between towns and to 'fan the embers' for those who will 'begin a new way'. It is this expectant mindfulness that sustains belief and hope even in the face of the darkness between towns:

I believe there is another way, and I want to be part of creating that other way. (FA4)

As identified earlier, 'singing in the dark', 'open to the signals between towns', 'searching for the larger God over the ditch of dark', are named as crucial for religious life at this time. Such metaphors describe individuals and small groups who, out of a transitional stance, are witnessing to emerging ways of living religious life. They identify a new sense of the spiritual that is being experienced between towns. They examine the contemporary search for a new metanarrative, the quest for the larger God, the mystery from whom life for them springs, the one who is the source of religious commitment. Their exploration reflects the recognition among thinkers in the wider society that western civilization, if not the whole global community, is itself in transition (O'Murchu, 1997; Tacey, 2003; Tilley & (ed), 1995) and searching for a new

spiritual direction. It is a world characterised by P2's and P3's 'postmodern, post-Christian reality', a threat to some, but holding potential for those searching for a new way to re-imagine God:

To me it's the challenge. It's not a danger to me; it's got possibilities. (P3)

The potential within such a world is echoed by other transitional respondents:

The reawakening of spirituality is a moment pregnant with possibility. (N4)

N4's reference to Ranson's (2002) exploration of the spirituality revolution and the spiritual hunger in contemporary society echoes the reflections of a growing number of writers. Tacey (2003) claims that postmodernity has been friendly to the idea of God. Kohn (2003) identifies developing trends discernible in the quest for the spiritual essence of life, which are reflected in the thinking of participants in this study. With the abandonment of old images that no longer work (Armstrong, 1988), respondents regard the search for a new concept of God as key to transitional development. They see it as the first tentative steps towards a new metanarrative in the re-imagining of the God image.

I have enough time to help you listen to your God and you have enough time to help me listen to my God. And then we sum it all up by saying, well, this is where the whole four of us are, from what we hear each other saying....You see, to me that's very genuine. (P3)

As scientific rationalism is increasingly questioned, the new sciences demonstrate a tentative openness to mystery and new images of God are beginning to emerge.

I think the Christian narrative has to be retold according to the movement within any particular era and so I think our current era needs to be very open to the very big movements which are occurring around us, such as the feminist movement, the ecological, the spirituality movement, the global movement – wherever we need to be.

And that will facilitate change if in religious congregations we are open to the positive aspects of very significant movements occurring in our culture and our society at this time – just an openness to that, I think, facilitating change for us, if we want to avail of it. (T2)

The retelling of the narrative calls for a surrender of metanarratives that no longer work, and an openness to new and larger stories that are beginning to emerge.

The Larger God

T1 speaks over and over of the larger God, not the designer of the clockwork universe, but the source of dynamism and mystery, both immanent and transcendent, at the heart of all life:

a God for all religions. All things are in this God and this God is in all things – a mystery and presence in the ordinary world. (T1)

The world itself is seen as revelatory of God's presence, and its rituals are regarded as core in articulating this compelling sense of the sacred. Time contains the eternal and all reality is described as being part of sacred reality, symbolic and sacred in itself. The role of religious women and men in this model is described as connecting the lives of those with whom they stand to a deeper, more profound presence:

When I say the God of revelation, I'm speaking about more than just the God in Christian scriptures. I call it a search for a larger God. Not that the God is larger but that our perception of God widens. All you need to know is to see God differently...see God differently. Like the Hubble telescope. ...Boy! There you are, a whole new world opened up for humanity.

It was exciting to see all this happening. And the beauty about it was that when they started writing all this, people kept on reminding them: "Remember, this is the way it has always been. This is the evolving universe; it's not new. The way we are seeing it has changed". At the heart of it all is 'How do you see things?' Today we are seeing God, and are challenged to see God in a new way. And that's what I call 'the larger God'. (T1)

It is this concept of the larger God, which underpins the hermeneutic reshaping religion and spirituality, and which provides a signpost for religious congregations seeking to re-imagine God within the underpinnings of their lives.

As part of such a hermeneutic, interviewees speak of the thirst to renew and remake sacred images in a way that speaks to twenty-first century women and men searching for a spiritual basis for their lives. As E4 explains, the images that have come to grief in our time were never meant by theologians to be synonymous with God, but were conceptions of God, ways of imagining the unimaginable, or articulating the unknown. For her, as for other participants, the unknown God has become too known and the mystery too cut and dried, so that religious life, and indeed religion, appears to have reached its use-by date. For transitional respondents, re-imagining God calls religious beyond the walls of religious life, and beyond the walls of church, and beyond the walls of outdated theology.

Waiting for the rebirth, but not sure of what it is that's coming out of the desert. I think it's to do with - the old order has gone. The things which gave us identity, purpose, stability, a sense of being on mission - if they haven't really gone they've certainly changed so much that we haven't yet been able to recognise and name them, and that's all ok; that's fine in the scheme of things. I think you've got to have this spiral thing. You've got the chaos from which creation comes and then there's more chaos and more creation, and I think we're at a very transformative time. (E4)

It is in the imaging of a larger God that new life is seen to be possible. And within the data of this study, images of inclusion and dispossession are regarded as core.

The Inclusive God

The hope of culture and religion has always been that exclusion and sectarian versions of otherness can be transcended and replaced by inclusive, deeper and more profound understandings of the spiritual life. As

the dualism of spirit and world witnessed in the twentieth century collapsed, thinkers began to speak of new possibilities. Part of their thinking incorporated the belief that the mystery of the spirit is revealed at the heart of the one, inclusive world (Tacey, 2003).

Because of the uncertainties of this time of transition, however, there are few clear signposts, and in the face of chaos, individuals and groups in this study report that many can experience alienation and polarisation. Transitional respondents believe that in the face of exclusion and experiences of otherness, the concept of God as inclusive is critical in facilitating transition and opening up new paths for transformation.

Transitional respondents reject a spiritual world and religion that excludes and polarises. They claim, at the heart of the spiritual worldview and the unknown depth dimension of the world we already have, a God image that includes the whole of life:

When you take a holistic view of life then you're looking at a larger God...There is the larger God, when we get to the heart of it, and if we as religious do not tap into that, we've missed the whole bit of revelation.. I believe that at this moment in history – this is God's great revelation. (T1)

It is a revelation that includes both inclusiveness and diversity.

Inclusiveness within Cultural Diversity

The combination of inclusivity and diversity is identified clearly through the NVivo data. P4 refers to 'the shift from divergence to convergence in which diversity is not erased but intensified'. P3 reflects on the need to welcome such diversity. He speaks of the 'danger of dominating with the western model', and the reactionary trends towards uniformity, but is convinced also of the 'great potential of having 'people sit down and listen to each other through different cultural ways'.

It makes you slow down, just to see that the culture of someone else has a different God and a different way of communicating, and it gets you more deeply down to the common Holy Spirit, I think...We just have to get out of that cultural ownership. It's beyond personality, beyond culture. It's the only answer to postmodernism...that speaks many languages, many cultures, many religions. But that's the Big against the Little. (P3)

The larger God, the inclusive God, is the God within whom both diversity and oneness are possible. Such a God is seen by transitional respondents to be incarnated in the world of the twenty-first century, but particularly they believe, this God is encountered at the edges of society, in the oppressed and the dispossessed of this time.

The God of the Dispossessed

T1 speaks about the God who breaks into our lives as

'the God we experience when we strike the margins'. (T1)

The stripping away of all securities, even the security of being at a crossroads and being able to choose the road less travelled, has forced religious to confront their complete vulnerability, and to wait in the dark for the God who they believe, in a world of almost universal doubt, will save. The struggle for religious in the twenty-first century is a struggle for meaning, not only in mission and ministry, but more significantly, at the very core of their lives. The God to whom they have given their lives, touches them, they believe, at the most profound levels of their vulnerability, through those they are called to serve:

Where are the people who are touched by injustice touching you?
(T1)

At this level, transitional respondents speak of the involvement by religious in the lives of the dispossessed and suffering people whom their congregations serve, not as peripheral to their religious commitment, but as its very core. The God who calls religious to spend their lives in the service of the

vulnerable is also the God of the whole of a vulnerable humanity, a humanity of whom religious are truly a part. It appears to be the underpinning motivation for the new religious life that is emerging in small groups across the globe.

They're sticking with people. They're putting faith in the God of the poor. They're following the insights of the liberationists. They're becoming powerless. (P3)

Vatican II called religious to abandon those structures that had previously enabled them to buttress themselves against intrusion from outside forces. Participants in this study believe that religious are once again called to a new stance – one that invites them to abandon all security and to take up this new journey with all the insecurities that it involves. They examine the ways that congregations are invited, from 'the crossroads' of Vatican II, to the transition 'between towns' (with all the darkness and insecurity involved in such a pilgrimage). Being dispossessed themselves, individuals and groups are challenged to stand authentically with the God of the poor and dispossessed. They are charged to search for the larger God within the profound global shift of the twenty-first century:

among those searching for a new spirituality, among the refugees and the homeless, among the unattractive and the outcast, in a world ravaged by pollution and global warming, torn by conflict, unable to deal with the other (T1).

In facing their own darkness, in their preparedness to wait between towns, in their willingness to do little more than keep the embers burning, transitional religious are described as refusing to 'go gently into that dark night' (E4). In 'raging' (E4) against the darkness of injustice, but paradoxically willing to wait in the darkness of the unknown, they appear to have found new meaning and purpose.

It will take courage. Somehow we've got to challenge ourselves. Does it matter? Does it really matter? Well, I think it does. (N3)

The God who breaks into the broad context of a world community is described as 'postmodern and post-Christian' (P2), 'the larger God' (T5), revealed in a milieu in which 'the centre has fallen apart' (E4), and in which God is experienced in the margins (N3):

the God who breaks into our lives. (T1)

The God who is described by transitional respondents is the larger God, the inclusive God, the God of the dispossessed, and finally and inevitably, the relational God.

Beyond Individualism – Towards Relationality

The larger God described by many participants in this study presupposes a God that is operative in the individual and in the whole world. Such spirituality is inevitably relational in that it connects the individual to the whole world and to the God who sustains it. Respondents speak of the increasing global interdependence of this time and the struggles of humanity and of religious to live together in a global community, 'to witness to reconciliation and peace'. The face of God is as it has always been, but in a new and particularly focussed way in a global world, and is seen by them to be a God of interdependence and global community:

This is the power revealed by a trinitarian God of mutual relations whose very being is communion. (E2)

It is this God who underpins the belief that the whole of creation and all peoples are inextricably bound together in one interdependent earth community.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

For religious women and men, a God commitment and a sense of the transcendent lies at the heart of their searching and the meaning they give to their existence. During this period, participants in this study believe that

religious have come to identify this God in three clearly defined ways. These were explored in this study through an extensive analysis utilising NVivo. In this analysis, a number of religious women and men are categorised by interviewees as pre-modern or restorationist. This group retains a view described broadly as classical theism. The second group described by respondents profess a belief in the Vatican II, liberal God, within all and beyond all, encompassing the whole of life. This is the God of 'original blessings' rather than the God of 'original sin' (O'Murchu, 1997). Both of these standpoints are viewed by the third group of respondents to be inadequate, particularly in the face of the profound shift in global consciousness, which has generated the spirituality revolution of recent years. Transitional respondents argue that a new concept of God and the transcendent is essential for any religious congregation moving into the future. Chapter 7 has demonstrated that an ongoing theological exploration of the transcendent orientation of religious life, and the phenomenon religious refer to as God is fundamental to any understanding of religious life moving into an uncertain future. The diagram below summarises this analysis.

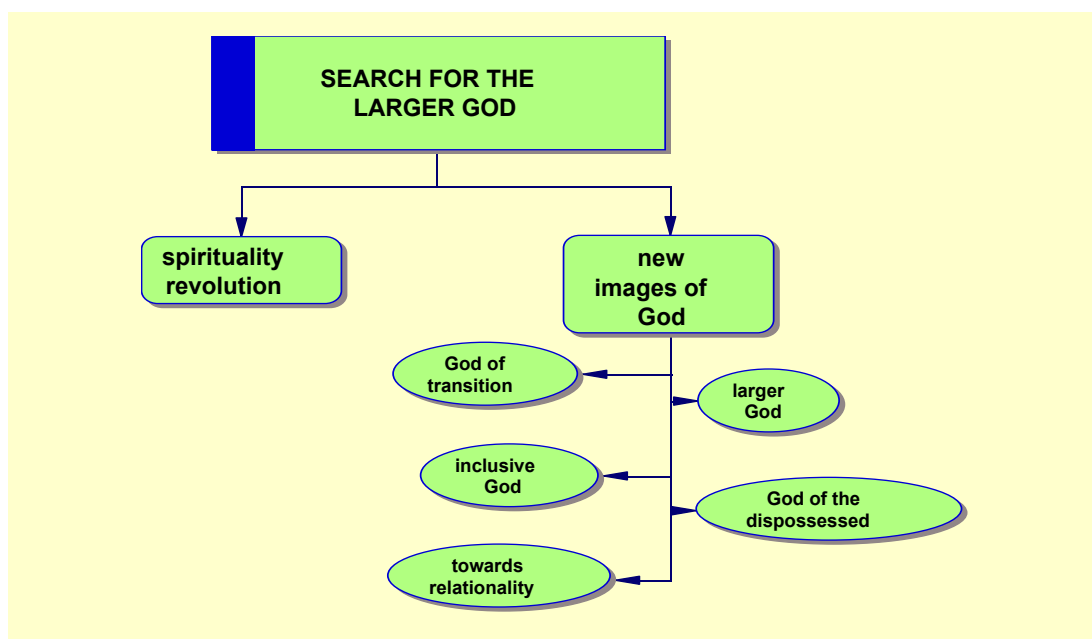


Figure 8 – The Larger God

The chapter has described the spirituality revolution and the emerging search for what is described in this study as ‘the larger God’. It is examined from the perspectives of transition, inclusivity, dispossession and relationality. Chapter 8 will explore the areas that the participants believe comprise the fundamental non-negotiables for the women and men who commit their lives to such a God.

Chapter 8

CORE CHALLENGE – WELCOMING THE STRANGER

INTRODUCTION

This period is a critical one for religious congregations in the developed world. Fifteen years ago, leading thinkers on religious life saw this time as a moment of choice between refoundation and death (Arbuckle, 1988). In the intervening years, however, the significant changes outlined earlier have led to a new and changed perspective. In these opening years of the new millennium, as religious women and men have reflected on the situation in which they now find themselves, respondents in this study speak more of this time as one of transition, a period of waiting in the unknown darkness of the age. They see themselves as called to serve in a spirit of attentiveness, alert to and tending the embers 'between towns', living both faithfully and dynamically in the darkness. The call to leadership is thus one that demands an astute watchfulness, so that the sparks of new life may not be extinguished, but may be inflamed in new and relevant ways.

Religious life has always seen itself as responding to the deep longings and anguish of a particular time in history. Chapter 7 described a fundamental longing of the present period as a search for new meanings in life. This chapter names a second anguish. Probably the most striking characteristic of the present moment is the inability of individuals and groups to live in harmony. Communities and societies are torn apart by differences and conflicts. In an age of transition and enormous change, a sense of insecurity leads people and societies to fear what is different. 'The other' is the enemy,

The ways that this awareness informs and challenges religious congregations in addressing the emerging tasks of their groups in the world of the twenty-first century is explored in this chapter. Participants identify the core search as one that focuses on a radical commitment to ‘the other’, embedded in commitment to the larger God. This is named as possibly their most challenging but most authentic response to the invitation of Christ to ‘come follow me’. In this sense, respondents see such a call as one of fidelity to the tradition of their founders in standing and working with the dispossessed and those on the margins. All other aspects of their lives are viewed as secondary to this.

Underpinning the reflections of the respondents in this study then, are two clear emphases – ‘*the God*’ (named in this study as ‘the larger God’) who is the source of religious commitment; and ‘*the other*’. In the Christian gospel, ‘the other’ is described by Jesus as ‘neighbour’, the alienated stranger who is to be welcomed as friend. This ‘other’ is the one who has been oppressed by societal structures, the marginalised person, who has been the motivating imperative for the founding of apostolic religious congregations throughout Christian history.

CONVERGENCE WITH FOUNDING IMPETUS

Apostolic religious congregations were founded in response to specific needs at particular times in history. Founding women and men saw themselves as being called to stand with individuals and groups pushed in some way to the fringes of society. In their passion to alleviate the suffering and injustice being suffered, they set up communities, and later established structures, to bring about change for the people they served.

Seven of the nine religious congregations in this study were founded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to meet the needs of those identified as poor and alienated at that time, the dispossessed of ‘the God of the

dispossessed' (T1). Founders saw themselves as called to assist individuals and communities to move out of situations of poverty and need. Fundamentally, founders were at the cutting edge of change, 'ahead of their society, or at least among the movers and the shakers in a number of key ways' (Poole, 2001). In their work in education, health and social welfare, they endeavoured to open the way to new opportunities for those who were poor. By taking a stance with the poor and marginalised, the founding religious women and men became marginalised themselves, liminal symbols of their time. By their willingness to stand at the edges, they witnessed to the deeper values to which their society aspired, called out by the communities to which they belonged. Such liminality (described in Chapter 4) is seen as deeply embedded in all religious traditions, and is found in every religion and culture in every age:

There have always been individuals who wanted to give themselves over for the coming of God's reign, or the work of God, or however it was expressed, and I know it always took a form that was somehow related to the society of the time. (E4)

Many participants in this study see the present period as offering this same challenge. It is those caught at the margins of today (named by respondents as 'gospel strangers' and 'the other'), with whom contemporary religious are called by their God to stand. This is a clear response from participants in the study.

There is a distinction, however, between the orientation of the founding religious in their congregations, and the call to religious women and men today. The founders worked 'hands in there, in the muck and the mud with the poor' (T1). Religious founders focussed clearly on creating opportunities for those alienated by society to change their life situations and create new possibilities for themselves. Religious today see their role somewhat differently.

CHANGING ORIENTATION

While the call to stand with the outsiders of society is identified by the participants in this study as the fundamental task for religious congregations in the twenty-first century, the context has changed. From their beginnings, religious congregations did critique the systems that contributed to injustice, but their greater focus was on compassionate service of those in need, a service designed to enable individuals to change their own life situations. Many respondents in this study describe the contemporary call as one that includes both engaging in compassionate service of the other, and in prophetic work towards the transformation of those systems (personal, social, political and ecclesial), which contribute to injustice:

The two feet of justice – the hands-on or on-the-ground ministry, and the need for advocacy to change unjust systems. (E6)

The transformation of unjust systems is seen as a global challenge. The need to reshape the ways that contemporary global society interprets and structures community calls all of humanity (and religious as part of that humanity) to engage in the establishment of new paradigms, which answer contemporary needs, and create systems that promote greater justice, especially for those who have been dispossessed of their basic human rights.

FUNDAMENTAL ROLE OF RELIGIOUS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

All respondents spoke of the need for systemic transformation, but from differing perspectives and with differing emphases. Understandably, the study identifies a range of responses to the key challenges for religious congregations in today's world. Participants for whom challenges within their own group are a major focus (approximately 10% identified through the NVivo analysis) reflect on the situation in their own congregations, of which

they are the elected leaders. In examining factors hindering the realisation of the institute's mission in today's world, they speak of

- the reality of ageing and diminishing numbers,
- the difficulties experienced in sustaining ministries to which the group is committed,
- the comfortable, middle class lifestyle of many communities,
- the restorationist attitudes of those members who desire a nostalgic return to an imagined and idealised past,
- the challenge of creative fidelity in the face of all these realities.

All of these, however, are discussed out of a concern for the attainment of the mission of the group. Even in the midst of these urgent, internal challenges, the respondents in this group name, as do other participants more emphatically, those pushed to the margins of society as the core focus of their congregation's mission. The responses indicate unequivocally that it is this engagement that is seen as central to the lives of contemporary religious, just as it was to the lives of their founders.

THE OTHER IN THIS TIME

In the first interview conducted in this study, T1 identifies 'relating to the other' as a key challenge facing both the world of the twenty-first century, and religious congregations as part of that world. For this leader, it derives primarily from the challenge of internationality. From another perspective, for both P3 and E2, the stranger both within and beyond the self, the one who is different, is the other with whom the religious woman and man is called to relate as neighbour. Participants believe that for contemporary religious congregations, the witness to relational living, and to 'sisterhood and brotherhood' in an increasingly divided society, church and world, is a

fundamental call. A detailed analysis of the interviews revealed this as a core theme running through the documents. A search using NVivo confirmed this thread within the diversity of the reflections that occurred.

Six clearly defined areas were identified:

- The other as the stranger religious are called to serve – in the global context of colour, culture, religion, economics;
- The other as the institutional Church with whom congregations are called to relate both canonically and prophetically;
- The religious congregation itself as other called to live prophetically and liminally in Church and world;
- The other newly affiliated fresh hope embedded in present realities;
- Community with the other witnessing to brotherhood and sisterhood in new ways;
- Otherness and communion as the theological underpinnings of religious life.

The global nature of contemporary life, particularly for religious who serve in different cultures and diverse communities, impinges on the mission of religious groups in new and challenging ways. Participants are aware that contemporary life exposes individuals and societies to 'the other' in ways not possible in the past, creating new and critical questions for the world community and all those who belong to it:

The fact that the world is shrinking because of the huge technological advances, the fact that communication is so much quicker – all this means that we are coming face-to-face with the other' in a way we never have before. (T1)

Coming face to face with the other, thus has created significant challenges, and it is this phenomenon that respondents in this study believe that contemporary religious are called to address.

The Other in the Global Context

Technological advances have increased material wealth and speeded up communication across the so called global village, but as many respondents point out, globalisation has resulted, not in the advancement of humanity and a greater sharing of the world's resources, but in the concentration of wealth in fewer and fewer hands, and in a widening of the gap between rich and poor in both developed and developing countries:

Because of globalisation in the world today, the group that seems to be most at risk would be the poor, whether in the First World or in the Third World. (T3)

Australia is seen as critically involved in this shift:

I feel our situation of conflict in the world and the distribution of the world's resources – these are the things that compound very much in a society like Australia. (SU3)

Respondents speak of the resultant tendency as one that divides individuals and communities in destructive ways. In discussing the negative effects of globalization and the growing divisions in both society and church, many participants (eg SU3, P3, T2 and E3) name these structural realities as major challenges to the contemporary world.

T1 sums up the general views of the respondents:

I believe that one of the greatest challenges facing humanity itself is how to deal with 'the other'. Whatever happens, it's how do you deal with the other? In many parts of the world it's not happening very well, and I found the two great barriers to it would be colour and religion. So, when I look at religious life (and I can never separate religious life from what is happening in our world, because we are meant to be immersed in our world), I see this as the challenge for our world. It is also the challenge that is faced by religious life. (T1)

N5 describes a trend of 'enemy-creating', 'getting into attitudes of over-against' as a dangerous trend in contemporary life. It enables one to excuse oneself from any responsibility to the other. In contrast, she sees the recognition that all of life is connected as fundamental to contemporary religious life:

The call to religious to live in relationship with God, the other and the planet earth, is intrinsic to living out the demands of the gospel and of religious life today. (N5)

She believes that this is the gift religious are offered and subsequently, the gift they themselves are called to offer to the contemporary world, even in the midst of their own fragility and brokenness.

Other respondents also reflect on the propitious conjuncture inherent in the core of religious commitment. The fundamental challenge to religious life, they believe, is to offer an alternative to the polarisation of goods and people that has developed across the globe. Participants speak on the one hand, of the negative trends of polarisation, of scapegoating, of increased litigation, and of the growing violence, which individuals and communities have come to accept as appropriate ways of dealing with 'the other'. On the other hand, the potential within religious life, gives hope, they contend, for new and different possibilities, both for religious themselves, and for those with whom they minister – for living the gospel imperative to love the stranger, and for what P5 describes as the 'Levinas possibility for communion:

which occurs when we gaze into the face of the other within and beyond' (P5).

In such a context, the other is not the enemy, the scapegoat on whom society can place the burden and blame for its ills and excesses, but the stranger who is also the neighbour, the one who, in the richness of diverse cultures, colours and religions, is 'the other' whom religious are called to serve.

Religious life then is clearly viewed by respondents as one based on a radical commitment to 'the other', embedded in commitment to the larger God. It is a commitment, they acknowledge, which takes place, and is realised, in the context of the institutional Church. It is in the name of the Catholic Church that religious congregations carry out their mission and in this name that they develop the theologies and structures that underpin their commitment.

Within this core interdependence, however, the relationship is not always a harmonious one. For the majority of religious in this study, relations with the Church create very specific challenges, arising both from the intrinsic nature of religious life itself, and from the current orientation of the institutional Church. With Fiand (2001) and Schneiders (2000), many respondents believe this interrelationship raises major, highly polarising questions about the identity and mission of religious.

The Institutional Church as Other

There was no reference to the institutional church in the interview questions, and the question on collaboration was initially designed to explore the impact of collaborative structures on the effectiveness of corporate decision-making within religious groups themselves. The consistent responses referring to the relationship between the religious congregation and the institutional church were, therefore, in the first instance, unexpected, but added a further dimension to the concept of 'other' as it had been introduced into the

research. The concept of the institutional Church as 'other' eventually emerged as an important consideration through analysis of the responses.

In the canonical sense, of course, religious life is not other from Church, but is an official body within the institution. Throughout history, however, the relationship has at best been ambivalent, and derives from the creative tension that has characterised the relationship between the two. In Schneiders' (2000) terms, this has arisen from the apparent contradiction between the canonical and prophetic roles that have traditionally been regarded as the hallmarks of religious institutes within the Church. In the present climate of restorationism that characterises the orientation of the official Church (Schneiders, 2000), many participants in this study have reflected on highly polarising questions about their role within this organisation. That the Church at this time in Australia is perceived as 'other' is clear from comments made during the interviews. Respondents identify two discernible aspects of this issue. In the first place, the church is seen as other because it is 'that other', which influences, and ultimately determines, the form and direction of religious congregations. It is also other because its current stance is perceived as differing theologically from the general orientation of religious congregations in this study.

Firstly, the institutional church is for its members, as participants point out, 'that other', which, within a hierarchical structure, is the ultimate authority for all religious congregations. Interviewees speak of the endeavours of religious to recognise the relationship between canonical religious life and the church:

As religious, we are who we are in the context of Church. We live in an ecclesial reality and we exist as religious because of the Church. (N2)

Within this reality, religious have endeavoured to create a clearly dialogical and harmonious climate with the institutional hierarchy of the Church:

We've talked about keeping the dialogue open – recognising tension, but keeping it open; between new ways of thinking and living, but embedded in the tradition. (FA1)

By collaboration, the congregations have given a lead to the hierarchy...and we have encouraged that collaboration across the Church. (N2)

By and large, however, respondents see the institutional church as restorationist in character, and they identify clear tensions between the two:

I don't see much evidence either of collaboration between religious Orders and the hierarchy. If there is I don't know about it. (HB1)

I think the prophetic call of religious today against the institutional Church is very, very stark. (P3)

I know the Bishops Conference has expressed in the past a fear that ACLRI (which is an expression of collaboration among congregations), a fear that it would set itself up as a parallel Church, and so in that way it may appear as a threat. Certainly it can give an alternative leadership, and in this way it can be seen to be parallel, instead of within the Church. And so that is a challenge to religious congregations – that their leadership isn't set apart. But at the same time, it has the right to be a face of leadership within the Church that is prophetic, and this is an important role for religious congregations. And I think in collaboration they have found this role to be more effective than other roles. (N2)

There is no doubt that the theological and hierarchical restorationism within the institutional Church is identified by many respondents as a source of dissonance for religious congregations. Despite this, however, in only one instance is there mention of the canonical status of religious institutes – the approbation by the Church of each congregation as a canonically approved institute – and even in this instance, there is no mention of the possibility or option of operating without this approbation. Canonical approbation is named by Schneiders (Schneiders, 2000), however as a critical issue for those religious groups today who believe that their identity and mission are being undermined by church regulations. Throughout its history, the official

church has often refused canonical recognition to new groups (e.g. the founding Franciscans, Jesuits and Ursulines), and even withdrawn it from established groups (e.g. the IHM Sisters following their adaptations after Vatican II). To consider such a step, therefore, with both its advantages and limitations, is as Schneiders points out, a serious one, but it is nonetheless a clear option for congregations seeking to be prophetic in a restorationist Church (Schneiders, 2000). The decision, taken by Gyger's group to change its canonical status from religious to secular (Gyger, 1996), in an effort to exercise the freedom it believed necessary for change in a new world, was described in Chapter 4. Participants in this study do not raise such a possibility, but there is little doubt that religious congregations in this country, while making collaboration with the official Church a priority for their groups, are conscious of the limitations of what they describe as the 'in-built conservatism' of the Church:

Because religious life is at the heart of the Church, we suffer from the in-built conservatism of the Church itself. Even though we're supposed to be prophetic we seldom are prophetic really, and even Orders that were prophetic in the early days very soon learnt to keep their heads down and avoid the courts. And I think that as long as that kind of dead hand of authority is over religious life, defining it, and putting it in a straitjacket, and not allowing deviations, and demanding that constitutions and things be vetted by some sort of approving and controlling central authority which supposedly is the source of all wisdom, even though they've never lived religious life, the people who are doing it, I don't think you've got much of a chance of making a transition or a meaningful change. (HB1)

Thus while participants do not discuss the possibility of change to their canonical status, they do speak of the clear tensions between the issue of canonical status and what is seen as the prophetic call of religious in the Church. In this context, not only is the Church described as other; the religious congregation if it is true to its roots, must also be other, although in a different sense. Its imperative is to be the group on the edge, the liminal community, called to be other in Church and society.

The Religious Congregation – Called to be the Liminal Other

Religious have always viewed their call as a prophetic one (Schneiders, 2003). Respondents describe unequivocally this role and the resultant challenge for contemporary religious within the structures of the hierarchical Church:

And that's the role of the religious, to be on the edge, to be missionary, to be prophetic. (E5)

Religious life in its essence and its history, even in the midst of its limitations and failures, is always thus called:

It has the right to be a face of a leadership...that is prophetic, and this is an important role for religious congregations. (N2)

It is a role also that is seen to be communitarian, and not just one for individual members of religious institutes:

Now more than ever, first and foremost today, I believe that we need prophetic communities, not prophetic individuals – prophetic communities. So the emphasis is on how do you get a community to be prophetic? (T1)

Many respondents speak of the particular difficulties that such a stance poses for contemporary communities, especially in the context of current religious membership. The realities discussed earlier include ageing and diminishing numbers, difficulties in sustaining ministries to which the group is committed, the comfortable, middle class lifestyle of many communities, the restorationist attitudes of those members who desire a nostalgic return to an imagined and idealised past, and the challenge of creative fidelity. Analysis of the tree nodes indicates that these have been further complicated by the loss of corporate commitment, the growth of individual ministries, the perceived assimilation of many religious into the individualism of mainstream culture, and their apparent absorption into the life of the institutional Church through their involvement in parish ministries. Even in the face of these

realities however, there is little doubt for transitional respondents that contemporary religious are called to new possibilities:

I think my generation has been called to another vocation, which is probably going to form the new religious life. I think that. The challenge to leadership in all this, I think (and this may be another question in there somewhere), is: how do you deal with this sense? Even if you have a sense that a kind of polarisation is taking place. There are people who are responding to the view and people who are in denial about it. What does a leader do? I suppose the first criterion for a leader is that the whole thing holds together; and my instinct is that oftentimes you come up against a brick wall and you think 'it's damn well got to split'. How do you get a new model that allows you to grow and be formed into support groups, and all this stuff, which we call community? (P3)

It is the opinion of participants generally that the support that comes from community, prophetic community, is essential for new life – for the group, for the laity with whom they see themselves to be in partnership, and for the Church itself. Schneiders (2000) speaks of the challenge to claim and live genuine solidarity with the laity in the prophetic struggle for a just and egalitarian Church. SU3 describes 'the leadership of lay people' in the church as *the* issue within the contemporary Church, and the role of religious as facilitating this through its fundamental task as 'faithful nation'. It is a task demanding both collaboration and prophecy. This clearly requires of religious the willingness to consider some deeply difficult questions about its relationship with, and its role within, the institutional Church, 'the other' with whom it engages in both a canonical and prophetic sense.

Religious life is called to interact with the Church in a clearly prophetic role. Its prophetic role however extends far beyond Church and is, respondents believe, intended to be a prophetic witness within society and across the global community. In the face of the realities outlined above, this also poses critical challenges, and the temptation to 'duck for cover':

I think there's a huge challenge between the call to community and the individualism both of our age and of our religious institutes as well. And it's very hard, in an affluent world, to draw people into community – real community, and not notional community. (FA1).

Religious life is never there for its own interests. So when we see a Congregation that is protecting itself and protecting its name, protecting its interests, then we say there is a group, not of the marginalised, but of the right wing, of the rich, because riches are my name, my reputation, whatever I have. (T1)

Sometimes, perhaps even often, our autonomy has degenerated into individualism. I think it's also led to loss of identity. I believe most religious congregations gave away far too many of their practices and far too many of their symbolic actions. I think we ignored the realities of human psychology in a lot of that. I think it's led to a loss of corporate thrust and it's led to a diminished public place for us in the Church. We've almost disappeared. (HB1)

For these respondents, as for Leddy (1991), Wittburg (1996), and Schneiders (2000), the failure to be 'other' in the face of the dominant culture, the temptation to acceptability within the mainstream Church and culture, the loss of corporate thrust and identity, are contributing to the failure of groups to remain 'other', as they believe they are called to be. Wittburg is particularly clear. She believes that religious institutes have not done a great deal to foster, or indeed to function as, prophetic groups:

In other words, religious communities have not addressed the basic strains and discontinuities of their society in a corporate or collective way. And, unless they do, they will not survive. (Wittburg, 1996)

Approximately half of the respondents in this study reinforce this need for a corporate thrust within a strongly visible prophetic community, although not in such unequivocal terms as those used by Wittburg. For interviewees and many contemporary writers, nonetheless, the identification is made unequivocally in terms of commitment to the gospel poor – 'the other' for whom the congregation exists to serve – and 'the other' (the institutional

Church and their lay brothers and sisters) with whom respondents believe they are called to minister.

Affiliates as ‘Other’

Respondents acknowledge that the present form of religious life is coming to an end, that the way it has been lived for the past two hundred years is without doubt in its dying stages:

I can't see any signs that the kind of religious life that we lived is about to regenerate. (HB1)

At the same time, while new forms have yet to emerge (and people believe history gives religious groups reason to hope that there will be new forms), there is a discernible consensus of possible future directions.

In the first place, respondents generally believe that the core group of religious in lifelong commitment will be smaller. The essence of commitment is envisaged as being the giving over of oneself in the service of the larger God, who calls both the individual and the community in mission to ‘the other’, identified as the one alienated and dispossessed by the global structures of an increasingly unequal world order. While present patterns suggest that decreasing numbers will be attracted to lifelong commitment in this form of life, there are signs that many others are drawn by the mission and witness of religious groups and are motivated to join them in diverse ways.

All of the congregations participating in this study include among their members affiliates who are associated with them in prayer, and in varying forms of involvement and support. In most cases, these women and men outnumber the vowed members, and like the religious members themselves, they tend to be older, so that even in this way young people are not being attracted. These affiliates are most closely involved in the group through their participation in its spirituality.

While this form of affiliation is named as the most common, other groups also serve in differing capacities in some congregations. Developing partnerships with those who work with them is an identifiable thread throughout more than half the interviews:

So it's a huge movement from us and them... Together, we're much more articulate about our own identity and our own charism and how it can be shared with other people. (SU2)

These associates who are involved in the ministry of the group, who are strongly committed to its spirit, and who bring their own living of the charism to what is beginning to emerge, are seen as 'sparks of hope' for the future life of the group's particular interpretation of the gospel call for this time.

A third clearly defined group in some congregations is the group of temporary volunteers, who tend to come from a younger age group. These volunteers have made a full-time or part-time commitment for a set period of time to the mission of the group, particularly in its ministry to the dispossessed in society. Six of the nine groups interviewed are involved in this particular form of endeavour. Some of the volunteers work overseas, with impoverished communities in developing countries or in refugee camps throughout the world. Others serve in Australia – with youth, with asylum seekers and refugees, with people in boarding houses, indigenous communities, and with others who have been alienated in this society. The enthusiasm and commitment of this group are seen by interviewees to enliven, challenge and enrich the mission of the total group.

'The other', the individual who does not belong to the community in traditional ways but is undeniably committed, although in new directions, to the mission of a group, is found today within the structures of most religious congregations – as an associate involved in spirituality and prayer, as a partner in mission, or as a volunteer serving at the edges of society and world, rekindling the spirit of the founders in untried and challenging ways.

This 'other' is a sign of new life and new hope for religious women and men in these times. Whether or not the congregation continues as a recognisable form into the future is not the critical issue for most respondents. What is important is that the mission of Jesus, a mission that nurtured new forms of liminality in the past, will continue to call in the present and the future. It is rekindled in this time, and is facilitated by a leadership that recognises and fires the sparks emerging between towns. But as participants point out, such nurturing requires a keen discernment and clear courage.

I keep saying... if a group of young people come along, we give them the keys of the house and say: go and live there and show us how our form of life can be lived today and we'll companion you from the outside. (FA4)

There are of course implications of such action, and while a number of respondents speak of the need to risk and try new ways, this is the only response that refers so explicitly to the leap in the dark that this might involve, for both new members and old:

You've got to do it, and you've got to take the risk, so what facilitates the change is being prepared to take the risk and do it. But are we free enough to do it? I don't think we are. Because people think we've got to show them the way. You can't show them the way. Because it's a new way, it's a new world. (FA4)

Allowing 'the other' to create new and radically different forms in an established and settled world undeniably involves risk. But this study suggests, in the light of present realities (within the darkness between towns, where sparks are just beginning to emerge from the embers), that it is precisely such danger that needs to be embraced, just as the founders of these groups courageously took such steps in their time. Welcoming 'the other' requires hospitality towards the new, and well as a nurturing of those who join in more traditional ways. Community is central to both.

Community with the Other

The core orientation of a number of newly vowed members of religious institutes was described by many respondents as being that of community. These women and men are often older, with considerable life experience, searching for communities of like-minded people with whom they can live out their religious commitment. Their interest is not so much in particular ministries, since these are open to them in the wider society but in community as a way of living commitment. Often, these religious give as a prime motivation for their attraction to religious life the opportunity to share life with a group of like-minded individuals, committed to living the gospel and sharing their spiritual yearnings within community.

Welcoming this new other, and engaging in a fresh witness to brotherhood and sisterhood in a highly individualistic society, is a challenge, both for recent arrivals to religious life and for those they join. As one respondent points out:

There's always this motif of being a stranger... and welcoming the other, not as a friend – and this is the irony, isn't it – not as a friend, but as a stranger who becomes a friend. (E4)

Community, and how it can be expressed, is a critical issue for many respondents:

To me, religious life is this transitional community support thing... I think our leadership and our community is really stuff we've got to experiment with. I say brotherhood hasn't really been expressed yet, but let's get going... a true brotherhood and a true sisterhood. (P3)

Making sense of these realities and challenges has called religious women and men to reflect again on the core meaning of their lives. In turn, this has resulted in developing new theological approaches, by which they have endeavoured to make sense of their place, in both a Church that is other and a world that is other. In her own studies, E2 has developed new thinking

around the theology of otherness and communion. It is a theology that has valuable implications for contemporary religious. Participants in this study reflect on this theological development of otherness and communion from a range of perspectives.

OTHERNESS AND COMMUNION – CORE OF RELIGIOUS CHALLENGE

Analysis of the interviews has indicated that at least two of the leadership teams participating in this study have explored together the theology of otherness and communion as a core orientation for contemporary religious life. Individuals from other groups, however, also refer to the theological relevance of ‘otherness within communion’ in religious life today. The feedback provided at the Congregational Leaders Conference (where these findings were presented) affirmed this as a key image for congregations seeking to move into the twenty-first century.

As pointed out earlier in a reference by P5, Levinas contends that humans are ‘inextricably linked to each other by bonds that are both visible and invisible’ (P5). Girard (1986) and Bailie (1997) begin from a more negative stance. They speak of the observable ways that society builds social solidarity and moral righteousness by selecting and uniting against the scapegoat, ‘the other’ who is regarded as the enemy responsible for the ills suffered by the group. They describe this phenomenon as a spiritual crisis of this time. P3 speaks of the way that this hinders life, undermining trust and debilitating community. P5 discusses a clear alternative. She believes that Levinas holds a critical key to resolving this crisis:

When we open ourselves to discovering the true face of the other, we also encounter our own identity. Our identity is, in some mysterious, inexplicable way, bound up with our fellow human companions. (P5)

This is further explored by E2, who describes two basic aspects of personhood:

A person comes to be in relation, moving out from oneself to form communion. But a person is also a unique irrepeatable entity. And both are inter-related. (E2)

E2 refers to the Girard thesis (1986) that fear of the other is inherent in each human being and that difference itself is seen as a threat. But she also maintains with N5 that the mystery of person is broader than this:

It lies in the fact that otherness and communion are not in contradiction, but coincide. (E2)

It is her belief that to be a person is to be in relationship. And for the religious woman and man, the larger God described in Chapter 7 is the origin and core of all relationships.

It is in lived communion that uniqueness and difference...come to full potential and creativity. It emphasises that each of us is made in the image of God and as such comes to live the fullness of being a person by growing in communion with other persons...A spirituality of communion means to know how to make room for our brothers and sisters. (E2)

This theological underpinning is seen by many respondents in this study as the basis for an authentic religious life for the twenty-first century. All other aspects are seen to be derived from this core orientation. As T1 comments:

Now that's what I think are the essential elements. You can put all that – vows and everything else in there. (T1)

Clearly, it is the search for the larger God, within a communion that celebrates diversity and difference, which respondents see as the critical role for religious congregations in a world where the other is feared and the God of many institutional churches is seen as irrelevant. Other aspects of traditional religious life – the vows and community – are seen as secondary to this, and are reflected on in the light of this basic conviction.

NEW REFLECTIONS ON TRADITIONAL STRUCTURES

‘The larger God’ and ‘the other’ are seen by many participants in this study as the sparks of new life, the essential fundamentals, which need to be fanned by religious women and men who are seeking, as old forms die, to nurture new contours of religious life. Named in different ways, the responses nonetheless return time and time again, to these two core elements. T2 describes it in terms of

a clear focus on seeking God in our lives’, and a call ‘to be very clearly in solidarity with marginalised and poor people...moving towards more radical lifestyle and more radical witness and more radical ministry within the Church. (T2)

This view is confirmed by other respondents (S1, FA1, SU4, HB2 and P2). It is their conviction that relationships with the transcendent core of life and with the other, is central to all commitment. In FA1’s terms, ‘our life is really about relationships’ (FA1). For others (E4, N2, T1, HB1 and T2), religious life is ‘an archetypal life within the Church, which will continue because there’s a call there’ (T2). It is underpinned, N3 believes, by passion:

The passion for God, the passion for our life, the passion for humanity.’ (N3)

It is clearly these fundamentals, more than any consideration of vows or traditional structures of religious life, which for the respondents in this study, are intrinsic to religious life for the twenty-first century. The vows and community are discussed, but the discussion takes place within the context of this core rather than as specific, unchangeable aspects of religious life.

In the light of these findings, the questioning of traditional aspects of religious life are viewed by respondents in the study as opening new options and new possibilities for contemporary religious women and men.

VOWED LIFE IN COMMUNITY

For most of the respondents, the vows are not the most critical aspect of religious life. The God-quest is central, as is one's relationship with 'the other', and community is viewed in the context of the theological underpinnings of otherness and communion. The vows, as such, are not seen by participants as the characteristic elements of religious life they were once believed to be. E2 reflects on what she sees as part of the reason for this:

...the shifting culture of society and the general irrelevance of things like the vows to a society where things like chastity or celibacy have no sign value. People in a pluralistic society are quite willing for us to live how we like, but that's our business; it's not their business, so the vows don't say anything to them, don't offer any challenge to them. It's a way of being that they wouldn't choose for themselves. They will let us live the way we like but don't want us to intrude in their life. Let people do their own thing and we'll all get on together. So what do we do with that situation is a big challenge to leaders. How do we impact? How does our sign speak in the Church, let alone in society? (E2)

Three people (SU1, FA1 and N4) speak of the traditional vows of poverty, obedience and chastity as part of the ongoing life of religious, and the vowed life appears to be an underlying assumption in six of the other interviews, although they are not explicitly mentioned. Even for these respondents, however, the context of the vows is seen differently:

So it goes back to the three features: poverty, chastity and obedience, and how do we re-understand those, maturely live those in 21st century terms. (S2)

Poverty is raised as an issue by participants, but mainly in terms of the challenge of a comfortable, middle-class lifestyle and the challenge of reaching out to 'the other', the dispossessed of God from this position of emptiness. Obedience is seen as a response to the act of 'listening over against God, the other and the earth.' (N5)

The one vow that does give rise to some specific discussion in the interviews is that of celibacy. The responses in this area reflect the findings of Nygren and Ukeritis (Nygren & Ukeritis, 1993), that for women the most meaningful vow is celibacy and the most difficult is obedience, while for men the most meaningful is obedience and the most difficult celibacy (reinforced in a personal interview with Ukeritis in May 2002).

E4 describes chastity or celibacy as fundamental to the way that religious see themselves, both before God, and with ‘the other’:

I think if we understood chastity in the way I think it should be understood, then we probably don’t need any other vow, because it’s all embodied in who I am before God and with God, according to the values that I profess, and one of those is celibacy. So I think chastity could be quite exciting, if we gave it a chance. (E4)

For her, as for Schneiders (2000), it is core:

I do see religious life as an end in itself and it has some defining characteristics and one of those, I think, is chastity and celibacy, and related to that is some form of community or communion. (E4)

For men such as S2 and HB2, however, celibacy is instrumental and not core. For S2 particularly, this is a significant issue for men contemplating religious life today:

[For men it has been] an instrumental celibacy – not Sandra Schneiders’ consecrated celibacy, where you have this archetypal virgin thing that she talks about. In men’s congregations that’s fairly rare, and the men choose celibacy (this is just from talking with the friars) – apart from a few, apart from a few, not a very big number – the men choose celibacy as an instrumental celibacy, in other words, a celibacy for the sake of the kingdom, or for the work, or for the good they can be or the good they can do or bring to others, and celibacy is part of that kind of package. (S2)

In his reflections, he differentiates between the meaning of celibacy for women and men, as well as that for clerical and non-clerical religious:

In celibacy especially, I think there's a big difficulty here and a big question here of Why? Why should they take up celibacy when they don't particularly feel called to it? And the generation of religious that came in way back – many of them didn't feel called to it either but they accepted it. And that acceptance of something like that is no longer there. It's different from the priesthood where it is mandated celibacy. That's a different issue altogether, so I'll keep that one out of it, but for us it was accepted. And nobody's got any good names for it. We talk about it as consecrated celibacy and stuff like that, but in actual fact it was accepted celibacy in order to do what it is that we thought we needed to do. (S2)

This discussion reflects the thinking of respondents such as FA4 and HB2 who speak of those individuals who do not feel called to lifetime commitment to a celibate religious life as it has been known in the past, but who nonetheless are committed to a particular living out of the mission of Jesus as expressed by a particular group. This has been confirmed by research initiated by religious leaders in Ireland (quoted by S2), referring to the need to differentiate between what is core and what is instrumental for the future of religious congregations. S2 sees celibacy as a critical part of that. Other participants do not discuss celibacy in the same detail, but like S2, they do speak of the need to focus on the essential features of religious life if we wish to identify possibilities for its future:

In general, participants make little reference to the vows. Rather, they acknowledge that the traditional form of religious life is fast disappearing, and is being replaced by a form of life that is diverse and, at the same time, more focussed on the core values that underpinned the founding of religious congregations:

You can put all that, vows and everything else in there. (T1)

You know, we won't take vows and things like that. Some are exploring – I don't know. I'm talking about the vowed life with the understanding of concentration. To me the vowed life is a concentration of baptism or an expression of baptism, in the vitamin pill image. Because to me the vows are a way of relating to God the same as faith, hope and love are. They're a concentrated form of faith, hope and love, which is the way we relate to God. (N2)

It is generally agreed by participants that religious life will have a future but that it will be markedly different from the way it is lived today. Subsequently, they observe, within the embers of the life that is dying, some indicators of that marked difference are even now beginning to appear.

SPARKS OF NEW LIFE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

So, what are the sparks of new life that are being identified? From the reflections of the participants in this study, as analysed using QSR NVivo, it would appear that they cluster around E2's theological foundation of otherness and communion, encapsulated in a group's particular vision of the gospel that gives it life and energy.

Respondents believe that the religious congregation of the future will resemble more closely the characteristics of the founding group, in its focus on the mission of Jesus, and the particular identity of the group in its living out of this mission. As in its beginnings, a particular congregation is envisaged as being varied, flexible and developed according to need. The future will draw individuals who are attracted by the core of the group's mission, and by the desire to serve on behalf of the Christian community, according to the identified spirit of a particular congregation.

Throughout their history, many religious congregations were joined at times by affiliates – individuals drawn to the group by prayer and ministry, but not regarded as equal in their commitment. Participants in this study suggest that future congregations will recognise an equality of commitment, and will

welcome many forms of membership where individuals will live out the call in a multiplicity of ways. Commitment, they believe, will be expressed through diverse forms of membership, which can include women and men, single and married, vowed in a range of ways – all with varied time involvements, but with the same commitment to the group's living out of the mission of Jesus. The challenge to current members is to move the mission forward through increasing collaboration with others who share their spirit. In this way new forms will emerge.

In living out their commitment, members seek community with others. As pointed out by many respondents, this will not be identified as necessarily living together, but more essentially as a communion, coming together for prayer and for the support of those engaged in the same prophetic enterprise. It is described by respondents such as N2 as a community without borders or walls, since living the global dimension of life together means both to be open to the other and to belong to one community, the community of disciples. For religious, the need to witness to relational living, and to sisterhood and brotherhood in an increasingly divided society, church and world, is seen to be a fundamental call to all religious groups, now and into the future.

Communion is essential. The witness to brotherhood and sisterhood is regarded as an imperative. But this does not mean that every member of the congregation is called to participate actively in nurturing the sparks of new life. Given the realities discussed by interviewees, this is an impossibility, and is not even seen as desirable. As respondents acknowledge, new life will be rooted in the phenomenon of small groups engaging in new and prophetic ways of living out the passionate endeavours that consumed the founding group.

Clearly, this new form of religious life is being defined as the search for the larger God, within a communion that celebrates diversity and difference, and

which, within a particular spirit and identity, reaches out to the other, the one who is dispossessed, in an increasingly divided and polarised world. It is this mission that respondents see as critical for religious congregations, in a world where the other is feared and the God of many institutional churches is seen as irrelevant.

Achieving this new orientation will require creative and visionary leadership. The following chapter will explore the type of leadership that interviewees believe will facilitate the development of new and prophetic forms of religious life defined by participants in this study as essential for the living of religious life in the twenty-first century.

Chapter 9

PROBING THE LEADERSHIP QUESTION

INTRODUCTION

Radical commitment to ‘the other’ was identified in Chapter 8 as a core focus of religious life. Chapter 9 explores the kind of leadership that could honour this commitment to ‘the other’, embedded in commitment to the God who lies at the heart of the meaning of religious life. It examines those aspects of leadership, which respondents believe will facilitate the transition of Catholic religious institutes striving to live a commitment to ‘the other’ into the twenty-first century. They speak of a leadership occurring within groups facing the diminishment, and even death, of current forms of religious life, and specifically the deaths of their own congregations as they have known them. It is also a leadership called to identify and facilitate new ways of living the essence of religious life into the future. The leadership question then involves two clearly identifiable strands, the first dealing with disintegration and the second with sparks of new life.

Participants note that contemporary religious leadership requires the development of processes that will enable contemporary religious women and men to come to terms, and be reconciled, with the disintegration and death of religious life as they have known it. In this acknowledgement, they can live fully and hope-filled, even as the old forms of religious life, to which they had originally committed themselves, continue to die.

Leadership at this time, however, demands even more than this. Between two towns, within the embers of old forms and structures, it is called to

discern and identify the sparks of new life. It is challenged to galvanise the energies of women and men in order to create new possibilities for a radical giving to the essential call of religious life, within the social and spiritual questions and needs of this age. Respondents believe strongly that out of such creative responses to the tiny signs that are being discerned between towns new forms of religious life will emerge.

Chapter 9 then examines the leadership practices identified by respondents in the study as essential to religious life during this time of critical change:

- the motivational forces of effective religious leadership – spiritual dynamism and a focus on mission;
- the consequent capacity to energise, challenge and empower leadership in and beyond the group;
- the specific qualities of leadership, both within the dynamic of leadership and in the persons who assume it
- a capacity to embrace diversity,
- authenticity and trust,
- a willingness to pay the price required of transitional leadership,
- an ability to hold leadership lightly,
- a concentration on mission rather than maintenance within the group itself;
- a focus on the need for leadership to manage deliberately the disintegration of current forms of religious life, and to galvanise small group embarkings into new forms. Emerging pathways are seen to include the three perspectives of identity, mission and community.

The chapter concludes with a description of the framework designed to incorporate the conclusions of the study.

Authenticating leadership is the term that has emerged from this research to describe the leadership seen as necessary for religious institutes at this time. The environment of discontinuous change and disintegration in which religious leadership finds itself, the core focus areas of religious life, the view of leadership as a dynamic within the group as well as a power within individuals, has resulted in this definition. It is supported by the description and framework provided as a conclusion for the chapter.

Correlation between this Research and Other Studies

It was only late in the present research that an unambiguous parallel emerged between the characteristics of ‘exceptional leadership’ named by the majority of respondents in this study and the outstanding leadership qualities identified in the study of the future of religious orders in the United States (Nygren & Ukeritis, 1993). The close correlation between them indicates that this research has implications for the future of religious leadership, not only in Australia, but more broadly across the Western world.

The two clearly identified core challenges emerging from respondents in this study – ‘the larger God’ and ‘the other’ – are precisely those emphases named in the US study (Nygren & Ukeritis, 1993) as decisive in what that research identifies as ‘outstanding leadership’. The coincidence was totally unexpected but, on reflection, should have been anticipated, if one were to assume common critical elements in contemporary religious life internationally.

Evident in the present research, and described in Chapters 7 and 8, are the two constitutive principles of ‘the spiritual dimension of religious life’ and its related focus on ‘the other’. Correspondingly, the individuals identified as outstanding leaders in the Nygren-Ukeritis (1993, pp 37-98) research retain a

fundamental focus on the spiritual significance of their everyday lives, supported by a frequently identified awareness of the presence of God active in all they do, and thus the source of support and energy for the mission and outward focus of the life of the group

The parallels between the two studies are clear. In the current research, these two identified focus areas emerge initially from respondents' discussion of the major challenges facing religious life and its leadership today. They are then developed more fully by interviewees in descriptions of leaders they name as outstanding, as well as in the nominated experiences of success in their own leadership. The final reflections on the leadership practices required for the world of the twenty-first century reinforce the conclusions reached. They correspond closely with the two emphases in the Nygren-Ukeritis Study on the spiritual orientation of leaders' lives, and on the mobilisation by outstanding leaders of the energies of the group towards mission. Outstanding or authenticating leadership – in the past and present, both within the dynamic of leadership and in the persons who embody it – provides the key to future possibilities.

AUTHENTICATING LEADERSHIP DESCRIBED

When asked to describe someone who has embodied for them exceptional qualities of visionary religious leadership, every respondent in the current study, understandably, nominates a religious leader. The leaders described range from well-known international leaders, such as Mahatma Gandhi, to leaders of small, little known local groups.

Interestingly, in one of the religious institutes interviewed, all of the respondents describe the same person. The strength and unanimity of the responses in this particular leadership group provides a template for what the majority of respondents in this study regard as characteristic of exceptional religious leadership. The picture that emerges from the descriptions of this

man is one of a leader who encapsulates clearly the essential practices and qualities of leadership described by participants generally in this research. He embodies also the Nygren and Ukeritis (1993) qualities of exceptional leadership.

In the first place, his leadership is named as deeply embedded in an awareness of the presence of God operating in his life and in the life of the group:

(A man) of deep spirituality and charismatic vision (SU 4),

operating out of a vision of fundamental Christian faithful nation (SU 3)

It is this spirituality that is seen as the source of the dynamism underlying his focus on mission and his outward focus on people pushed to the margins. This mission focus is the second emphasis named as intrinsic to his leadership:

putting his gifts and those of the group at the service of the dispossessed (SU2).

This deep spiritual life...also committed (him) to social justice and the spreading of the gospel. He was very much a man of the gospel.

Interviewees in this group recognise this leader's focus on the spreading of the gospel and the mission of the group. His capacity to engage the energies of the institute towards the big picture is unanimously affirmed:

His vision, his authenticity and his willingness to speak and take public stands for what he believed were inescapable gospel values' (SU2),

These qualities are perceived as the underpinning motivations that enabled this leader to energise, challenge and empower leadership within the group, working assertively to influence commitment to group goals and group action.

In the third place, this orientation is seen as enabling him to inspire individuals within and beyond the group. Out of his belief that the mission of the group possessed intrinsic value, and that the work, spirit and charism needed to be nurtured and fostered broadly, he is described as endeavouring to build experiences and structures that brought together the needs of 'the other', and the commitment of people in all walks of life called to serve those needs. He is perceived as recognising and appreciating the diversity and cultural shifts both within and beyond the group. Respondents do not see his focus on the group's identity as deriving from a perceived necessity for self-perpetuation for the institute. They describe it as emanating from the leader's fundamental conviction of the need to create new possibilities and options, so that the mission of the group might be more effectively realised within the diversity of a new world:

open to the signs of the times and an agent of change among and beyond the group (SU 1)

with an ability to speak to his constituency and to the publics of his constituency (SU 3)

It's been a move from OUR charism, OUR spirituality, moving out to this is a gift to the whole Church, to anyone who wants to embrace it.

A fourth characteristic identified is this leader's focus on the mission of the group, rather than on specific responses to individual needs, harmonious relationships or the day-to-day occupations of members. While he is described as demonstrating a real understanding of the feelings and needs of individuals in the group, his leadership is seen as operating at a level beyond involvement in the personal lives of congregational members.

beyond issues of the pastoral care of individuals (SU 2).

It perhaps explains the comment of one respondent that this leader was not as successful on the middle levels of hierarchical leadership 'a sort of an unsuccessful provincial on one level' (SU 3), but an outstanding leader at

congregational level (a conclusion reflected in comments about named leaders from other participants in the study).

Fifthly, authenticity and trust are named as characteristic of the leadership of this man:

his vision, his authenticity ...inescapable gospel values. (SU2)

One respondent speaks of 'the consistent line that emerges through his writings' (SU3), and of his emphasis on trust and loyalty as prerequisites for vision and active engagement:

...of trust, trust in people, trusting the spirit of the times, openness to various elements in the group. And loyalty too...he was ready to defend his people. (SU3)

Finally, respondents in this group concede that the leader's passion for mission and his focus on strategic action did not gain for him universal acceptance by the members of the institute. He is seen as having evoked 'strong feelings' (SU2), and the subsequent differences of opinion in which he was held by members of the order are depicted by these respondents as leading to significant suffering. His leadership is seen in fact as being achieved at great personal cost:

He could see the need for change, and was courageous in bringing it about, but he suffered greatly. (SU1)

There were costs in his leadership. He lost a lot of supporters. So he didn't have universal appeal. But the fact that he could stand up and speak on issues and generate initiatives that made him hated by some sectors, says something to me. (SU2)

It's been a great vision, but it's also been at great cost. (SU2)

Regardless of the cost, he is perceived as motivated by the drive to exert his influence within and beyond the group to enable it to focus its creative energies for the sake of mission. Overwhelmingly, these interviewees speak of the qualities of vision, a passion for mission, an abiding concern for those

for whom Jesus spent his life, an authenticity and trust in his relationships, and a focus on strategic action that facilitated the mission of the group. Interviewees regard this man as 'a charismatic leader' (SU1). He is perceived, in both his vision and his suffering, as 'an exceptional, visionary leader' (SU 2), 'regarded as our classic hero' (SU3), 'a gospel man' (SU 4), 'a saint' (SU 1).

This was the only leadership team in the current study where all interviewees focussed on the same person. In contrast to this group, other respondents in the study describe a wide range of leaders, both within and beyond Catholic religious life. It is interesting to note that every one of the male interviewees names and describes a male leader; while the women identify both female and male leaders. The themes running through all descriptions are remarkably similar, however, and cover in varying but analogous terms, the characteristics outlined above. Exceptional leaders are named as possessing undoubted spiritual dynamism, supported by an impelling commitment to those individuals and groups the congregation sees itself as called to serve. These leaders are perceived as working with their communities to realise the two aspects of this fundamental commitment. Their leadership is characterised by the specific qualities named in the template established in the preceding description, and impelled by the spiritual motivation at the core of their commitment.

Spiritual Leadership

As spiritual leaders, different individuals named in the study are delineated in a variety of terms. Most explicitly, respondents describe them as motivated by the clearly identifiable sense of spiritual dynamism and support, and a potent and intense awareness of the presence of God:

through and through a spiritual individual, with a sense of the inner world and inner life conveying itself to people he met (HB1),

a priestly leader, able to share his spiritual life with others (S2),

a leader of deep faith, deep spirituality (P3).

She is steeped in spirituality and prayerfulness, and models that for the group (S3).

He pushes all the time for the larger God, not confined by others' words or thinking, and simultaneously giving people freedom to be what God wants them to be (T2),

seeing God as the creative force that brings into existence things that didn't exist (E5),

working for what is of God to come alive in the world, and thus able to hold the world in her heart (E5).

Outstanding leadership is perceived as mobilising commitment from the members of the group for the mission of the group:

in enabling what is of God to come alive in the world. (E5).

S5 summarises it as the experience of God through three interdependent encounters:

the experience of God in the leader's own person (as communion),

the experience of God within mission (in a preferential option for the poor),

and the experience of God in the community (as brotherhood). (S5)

These reflect the recognition by respondents generally that contemporary religious leadership for both death and new birth demands a three-pronged focus of clear identity with the spiritual and prophetic basis of religious life, explicit mission orientation towards those the group is called to serve, and a communal commitment to both.

Leadership in this context is perceived very explicitly as:

not afraid to take the God question and articulate it, and to put it there at the forefront of mission. (E1).

In all responses, spiritual leadership is linked with mission and that mission is tied to a commitment to ‘the estranged other’. (E4)

Leadership Focussed on Mission

Out of an orientation of ‘working for what is of God to come alive in the world’ (E5) authenticating leaders are described by interviewees in a wide variety of ways, all of which highlight the urgency and centrality of mission:

fired by an urgency to carry out the vision (E6),

broadening lives and crossing boundaries (E5),

freeing people for mission (FA4),

inspiring and challenging (S4),

immersed with the poorest of the poor, giving leadership a name and a dignity the few people in our world today have (T1),

asking constantly: ‘when do we know we are truly following Jesus of Nazareth’? and responding: ‘when we are seeing things through the eyes of the poor (T2),

focussing on the marginalised and recognising that’s where Jesus was (T3),

prepared to take a public stand (FA2),

putting gifts at the service of the dispossessed (SU2),

challenging the group to look to the future (FA1).

Throughout the study, participants speak of the fundamental need for religious women and men to be unambiguous in their witness to a life lived from the side of the gospel, in their commitment to the marginalised, and in their solidarity with those who are truly poor. And new ways of living the gospel demand, they believe, not only for individuals to be prophetic within their own groups, but for the group, as a group, to be a prophetic witness and compelling voice, with and for, those who have no voice in the world of today. For interviewees then, the issue of leadership has become one of calling

forth the sense of mission within and beyond the group. Emphases among participants however vary.

Differing Emphases of Leadership

As was pointed out in Chapter 9, while all interviewees name the above elements as basic to religious life, not all participants allocate to them the same emphases. Two very clear directions have emerged in this study. Approximately 20% of respondents concentrate predominantly on the group of which they are leaders. Their focus is on the care of individuals and communities within the group, and on internal challenges, such as diminishment and ageing within the religious congregation itself. There is also however a second orientation verified through NVivo analysis. A significant group (between 60% and 70%) emerge with a clear concentration, both on the spiritual core of religious life, and on its mission to 'the other', whom the religious congregation sees itself as called to serve. Other viewpoints fall somewhere between these two primary orientations, although the majority (approximately 80%) incline more towards an outward than an inward focus. It is this orientation that appears to embody the motivating impetus to energise, challenge and empower the group.

Motivating Leadership

The clear and abiding awareness of the presence of God, and the strong sense of spiritual dynamism and mission, characteristic of the authenticating leadership identified above, are seen as key in motivating the group towards its goals and vision, in locating emerging needs, and responding to them effectively. Such leadership is characterised as engendering commitment from the membership to the shared collective and enabling vision believed to be at the heart of the congregation's mission. The motivation of leaders, their focus on those the group exists to serve, and their creativity in exploring alternatives, are named as critical aspects of leadership:

asking, what is our mission? And possessing a real ability to share that with others (S2),

envisaging a future with the women in the group and beyond (E5),

A focus on mission, both within and beyond the religious institute, is named as important. Interviewees believe that the mission of religious life possesses intrinsic value, and that the work, spirit and charism need to be nurtured and fostered broadly. Experiences and structures that bring together the needs of 'the other', and the commitment of people from all walks of life called to serve those needs, are identified as significant motivators in energising, challenging and empowering those within and beyond the group. As with the leader named earlier, such leadership is seen as energising members to create new possibilities and options so that what is of God might come alive in the world.

Clearly, the focus of authenticating leadership is on the mission of the group, rather than on maintenance issues, individual needs, or the day-to-day occupations of members. Leadership in this context personally and collectively focuses its creative energies for the sake of mission. Qualities of vision, a passion for mission, an abiding concern for those for whom Jesus spent his life, and a focus on strategic action that can facilitate the mission of the group, are named as powerful indicators of a compelling leadership that is able to galvanise the energies and passion of a group.

Among participants in this study, a number of practices and specific qualities are identified as animating such energies. They reflect the indicators named earlier as characteristic of authenticating leadership.

BROADENING THE CHARACTERISTICS OF AUTHENTICATING LEADERSHIP

There are four specific observations made by interviewees in this study, with implications for the future of religious life and leadership. They further

illuminate the Nygren-Ukeritis findings on outstanding religious leadership, while at the same time, reinforcing the conclusions of writers such as Wittburg (1996), Chittister (1996b), Markham (1999), and Fiand (2001).

In the first place, as has already been noted, interviewees reflect on the ability of authenticating leaders to embrace diversity as intrinsic to unity, and to nurture new and different forms of religious life as key for a time of transition. Secondly, they describe personal cost and suffering as an inevitable component of authenticating leadership. In the third place, they point out that authenticating leaders do not need formal leadership for personal fulfilment. Such leaders accept it as a commitment for a certain period of time, with all the consequences it carries (including a lack of universal acceptance), but willingly surrender it when their elected time is concluded. And finally, authenticating leadership consistently emphasises mission over maintenance.

Unity in Diversity

Union or communion in diversity has become a critical issue for leaders of religious congregations in recent years. *‘Embracing Difference within the Unity that is God’* was the theme of the General Assembly of the Australian Conference of Religious Institutes in June, 2004, and it reflected the issues that had been raised at the NSW State Conference earlier that year. Throughout the current study, this dimension of leadership is clearly at the forefront of many respondents’ thinking. For E6, authenticating leadership incorporates ‘working in solidarity within disparate ministries’. For S2 and his brothers, it encapsulates a fundamental question for this time:

How can we best learn to recognise and appreciate the diversity and cultural shifts across our congregation and strengthen unity and the sense of brotherhood, both within and beyond our congregation? And how do we witness to the reality of brotherhood and sisterhood in a deeply divided world? (S2)

These questions are reflected in the thinking of other participants. The leader described by T3 is seen as ‘modelling commitment to a vision of community that is respectful of freedom, giving people the freedom to be what God wants them to be.’ For T2, this involves ‘not being confined by our own words or our own thinking’. The leadership called for, these interviewees believe, incorporates acceptance of wide differences and diverse pluralism, side by side with a single-minded focus on the core mission of the group within the specific faith tradition of Catholic religious life. In the conclusions of E2, it has a very specific emphasis:

Otherness and communion are not in contradiction, but coincide.
(E2)

There is however a rider to this. Openness and acceptance of diversity, underpinned by a specific call to the margins of society are deeply challenging in a world where, as E2 points out, ‘fear of the other is inherent in each human being, and difference itself is seen as a threat’. That authenticating leadership will meet this challenge is taken as a given by respondents. It comes however at a cost. A leadership, which stands firmly in its own integrity and authenticity, which welcomes pluralism, challenges a group to live prophetically, and works to build communion in a world fractured by differences and conflict, will experience inevitably the suffering that such challenge provokes.

Suffering in Leadership

Interviewees in this study describe the personal cost involved in standing at the edges and in emphasising union in diversity. In respondents’ descriptions of authenticating leaders, many echo SU2’s reflection quoted earlier about its exaction:

See, we think of him as visionary. But there were certain costs in his leadership. He lost a lot of supporters. It wasn't everyone who jumped up and down and said, 'Isn't this guy a wonderfully charismatic hero?' I've known men who've said things to me like, 'that man destroyed the group'...so he certainly evoked strong feelings...but the fact that he could stand up and speak on issues and generate initiatives that made him hated by some sectors, says something to me. (SU2)

The courage to stand at the edges and to call the group to what one leadership team calls 'creative fidelity to the founding vision' is seen as inevitably controversial, and during a time of decisive changes causes significant antagonism. P3 speaks of 'paying the price'. N1 describes a leader threatened in recent years with excommunication or expulsion from the institutional Church. E5 reflects on the liberation theologians of South America, and the many ways they have been alienated from the Church. P3 emphasises nonetheless that this is a fundamental call to religious leadership today:

I don't think we've got much option except to speak out, defy injustice and be authentic. Plenty are doing that. They're sticking with the people. They're putting faith in the God of the poor. They're following the insights of the liberationists. They're becoming powerless. They're becoming heroic...paying the price for that.

Prophetic leadership is thus seen by respondents as evoking contradictory responses, which lead to significant personal cost. That such leaders are able to hold their leadership lightly in the face of this is a tribute to their leadership and key to a further quality identified by respondents.

Holding Leadership Lightly

It is clear, both from the responses in this research, and from the Nygren-Ukeritis study, that authenticating leaders do not need formal leadership for personal fulfilment. Their strong beliefs about leadership as shared power, and their convictions about authenticity, interconnectedness and trust, as the basis out of which effective leadership functions (the psychosocial equilibrium

described in Chapter 4), means that they use leadership for the good of the group rather than for personal satisfaction or for meeting personal needs. They accept formal leadership as a commitment for a certain period of time, with all the consequences it carries (including a lack of universal acceptance), but they surrender it willingly when their elected time is concluded.

Interviewees describe authenticating leaders as able to hold formal leadership lightly. These leaders are seen as neither seeking formal power nor attempting to hold on to it. The leader described by P3 is a clear example:

He didn't want to make a career out of it but he gave all he had to it.

For P3, as for other interviewees, there seems to be a clear correlation between outstanding or authenticating leadership, and an ability by such leaders to move easily from formal leadership roles to other expressions of the gospel call.

And when he finished office, what did he do? He went to X. It would have to be our most remote community in the entire world: dangerous, core – Christians struggling for survival, supporting a little group of indigenous brothers who had absolutely no resources.

This view is reinforced by respondents such as S1, T2, N3 and E4. E4 contrasts it with the power that is sought and needed for personal fulfilment. She compares two models of leadership

...one that is facilitating, co-ordinating, and being prophetic in the context of our reality – (people who don't own the congregation) – with a leadership that makes them almost covetous of the position: 'I deserve this role sort of thing'. They need it for something; it is part of an extension of themselves, and having ended it they can't quite let go.

It is her belief that leaders who have not ‘actively sought leadership’ ‘have done a much better job’. This is confirmed by the work of Nygren and Ukeritis (1993), who maintain that ‘outstanding leaders do not have a strong need to belong to the very groups they are attempting to lead, and yet they find meaning precisely in that context of faith, membership and impact.’ (Nygren & Ukeritis, 1993, p 246). It is the urgency and centrality of mission that is the driving force of their leadership.

The Priority of Mission over Maintenance

While all religious leaders referred to by participants in this study engage in both care of members and in a commitment to those the congregation sees itself as called to serve, authenticating leadership is described as explicitly focussed on the mission and outward focus of the group. As already pointed out, this leadership is more concerned with exerting influence on members in order to attain its mission, than it is in focussing on the pastoral care of members within the group itself (cf. Nygren & Ukeritis, 1993). As in other organisations (Handy, 1994; Zbar, 1994), the strong motivation of authenticating leadership uses initiative and the identified gifts of the group to engage the enthusiasm of the members in attending to its mission.

At a time of change, this involves both conscious management of the disintegration of the group and intentional stimulus of the signs of new life. Exercising leadership for the sake of mission, rather than for personal fulfilment, being prepared to bear the cost of prophetic leadership, and nurturing different models within the core mission of a group, are named in this research as ways of consciously preparing a group for dying, and at the same time of stirring the embers of new life that are being discerned. Leadership in this difficult time between towns is called to attend to two clearly identified strands. It must consciously direct the process of disintegration of the current forms of religious life, creating opportunities for dynamic living into, and reconciliation with, the reality of dying. It must also,

respondents believe, open possibilities for the future, nurturing signs of new life and freeing members for new paths and new eventualities.

LEADERSHIP INTO DIMINISHMENT

Providing leadership in ageing and diminishing religious congregations is described by all respondents as a significant challenge for religious leadership at this time. Interviewees name a number of areas of concern:

Care of the frail aged,

The strong influence of the restorationist stance (described in Chapters 6 and 8), which indicates a clear choice by many older religious women and men (some younger as well) for a return to past beliefs and frameworks,

The challenges of diminishment and ageing,

the fragmentation, increasing dispersal and isolation of diverse ministries,

the conflict between bureaucratic and community models of religious life (cf. Wittburg, 1996, p 48)

How to deal with these, as leadership faces the related call to manage consciously the disintegration and death of current forms of religious life, is a major challenge at this time.

Leadership Challenges of Diminishment

The average age of most groups in this study ranges from the late sixties to the early seventies. This reality has of necessity resulted in the significant allocation of resources (material and human) to the care of older members, and in major reductions in ministry commitments within congregations. The physical and therapeutic needs of older members have increased. For many leaders, the time taken to visit sick members, to consult with doctors, to attend funerals, and to organise aged care services, with all the legal and

health requirements that these involve, are considerable. T2 speaks of 'more and more focus on the care of aged members and pastoral care for the aged.' Leaders acknowledge the reality of this ministry. They recognise also, in a society that is often seen to devalue old age, the need to affirm the commitment and wisdom that older members bring to the congregation. At the same time, the physical and emotional demands of such care are seen as significant challenges for leaders. A number of respondents speak of the need to provide specific and perhaps alternative leadership for the care of older members.

I think our leadership and our community is really stuff we've got to experiment with. (P3)

We're living in a much more hard-headed time now, and I think we've got to make some sort of rationalisation. So if my time is spent dealing with aged care, then I need to do it in a way that is really prophetic. (E4)

I was thinking about this the other day. A great part of my time is spent dealing with issues related one way or another to ageing and diminishment. So... that's the reality. That's all we really have. I mean, the spirit is present in the signs of the times. The potential for being radical is only in the reality. So if my time is spent dealing with aged care, then I need to ask, how can we be prophetic about that? Because that's where it is! (E4)

Both in the focus groups and at the CLRI conference in 2004, responses suggested diverse ways of sharing leadership to meet these needs. One particular group is already sharing leadership in this way. Different areas of responsibility have been identified by the total group and different sub-groups within the congregation volunteer or are co-opted to assume leadership within a specified area. A co-ordinating group works to facilitate the leadership of all sub-groups. One leadership group in this congregation deals specifically with the care of aged and frail members.

The care of aged and frail members is a clear responsibility of leadership at this time. Just as challenging is the restorationist stance identified by a

number of participants in this research. Male respondents in particular name it as a specific issue.

The Leadership Challenge of Restorationism

A significant group of older religious with whom leaders relate are those who operate out of a restorationist stance. Many of these live in community with people of similar ages, interests and religious orientation. Without the stimulus of differing ideologies and lifestyle, it is difficult for these members to engage with differing viewpoints and theologies. While many older religious are at the forefront of ministries related to contemporary gospel and justice issues, there is no doubt in the minds of many respondents that a significant proportion of religious in their late sixties and beyond can be described as restorationist. Some interviewees describe it as a factor of the ageing composition of religious congregations, and the reality that many religious are no longer in full-time active ministries or mixing with diverse groups. It is also seen to be a result of the more comfortable lifestyle and middle class values in western society. S1 reflects on the clear implications for community and lifestyle:

There are follow-on effects from that, and I think the greatest is that a number of them are still wanting to have the life that was generated by that life – not life as in life-giving, but simply the lifestyle that was generated by those large numbers – regular timetable, the whole horarium led by school or hospital. (S1)

And even more importantly, as FA1 points out:

Where you have an ageing, comfortable group, it's hard to move people into new thinking. (FA1)

A corollary of this stance is the desire of restorationist religious for strong and unambiguous leadership, which they perceive as demonstrated in the willingness of leaders to 'take charge' and to provide direction so that a sense of order and control might be restored:

When (they) elect people, (they) want somebody who's going to keep (them) safe, who's going to be pastoral – that's a word that's used a lot, who's going to be sensible with the money, who will respect (them) – each wants to be respected and understood – and who's not going to make really, really radical demands. (E4)

The temptation of those to whom they turn is to provide advice on day-to-day directions and activities, and to influence the individual decisions and actions of members within the group. In such cases, however, as P3 points out, leadership is simply reinforcing the insecurity of this group and impeding growth and readiness for the challenge of new life:

How do you deal with this sense – even if you have a sense that a kind of polarisation is taking place, and there are people who are in denial about it? (P3)

The issues are seen as increasingly tangled and respondents don't provide ready answers for what are becoming progressively complex questions. In their descriptions of leadership and the needs of a rapidly changing world, however, they do provide a number of indicators, which they describe as possibilities for authenticating leadership at this time of disintegration (E1, SU1, N3, E2, T2, P3, FA1):

The encouragement of theological formation and reflection as an indispensable element of formation into new understandings of religious life and commitment (E1);

A prophetic stance and response to the gospel needs of this time, even within the diminishment being experienced (T2);

A challenging of the dominance of comfortable groups within congregations, when ironically, the call is for change and discomfort (FA1);

The testing of different models of leadership (including shared models) as possible ways of managing the time and energy required of leadership in ageing and increasingly frail groups (P3);

Ongoing review of the dilemmas created when larger percentages of active members work in formal positions of leadership, in internal ministries, and in administrative sectors of congregations, even while the overall number of members to be served is considerably smaller (N3).

Both time and energy are needed for leadership in an increasingly older group. The call to dynamic life within the reality of dying is seen to be strong. A number of congregations in the current research have not received new members for fifteen or more years. They do not appear to anticipate that new members will apply to join the group, although most do not preclude this absolutely. Yet, their named goal is to live as fully as possible into disintegration and death, and having made their contribution, to let go when the time comes so that they may die with dignity. The demise of two-thirds of Catholic religious institutes over the past two thousand years (Wittberg, 1991) confirms for all groups that death is a real possibility for any organic entity.

For a number of religious leaders and writers (Chittister, 1996b; Fiand, 2001; Leddy, 1991; Schneiders, 2000; Wittburg, 1996) the clear and present danger is not that congregations will decide one way or the other, but that they will in fact drift into diminishment and death:

...that they will not decide at all and will passively submit to having the choice simply happen by allowing constitutive dimensions of their life form to be abandoned, rendered meaningless, or made inoperative until they simply 'wake up dead.' (Schneiders, 2000, p 67)

The strategies outlined by leaders in the above summary are perceived as ways of avoiding this drift. For respondents, these practices will assist in managing transition into diminishment, particularly when the way is uncertain, the needs of an ageing group increasingly time-consuming, the denial of death a subconscious urge, and the signs of new life fragile and limited.

Participants see this approach however, as only one aspect of the leadership question. P1 describes the task of leadership as not simply taking initiatives ‘to help the congregation or even allow it to die. For her, it is just as critical to identify the sparks of fresh possibilities and ‘to try to effect change within that.’ Leadership involves both death and resurrection. It is called to meet the challenge of what Leddy (1991) calls creative disintegration, and it is invited also to identify and nurture the embers and signs of new life – to facilitate the journey of those moving towards an unknown future – the towns, ‘still in their saddlebags.’

keeping the passion for something, which does appear to be dying, and doing it in a way that is really prophetic.(E4)

LEADERSHIP INTO NEW LIFE

All respondents in the present study struggle with issues of transition, change and new life. As has been confirmed in Chapter 6, a dominant theme that has emerged in the interviews is the question of how to live in the dark time between towns in a way that opens new possibilities for the future. Developing insights into the urgent gospel call of this age have provided indicators for meeting the anguish of contemporary humankind (as founding women and men did for their times). Responses suggest that individuals and small groups, rather than whole congregations, are called to begin the journey, with the transparent blessing and encouragement of congregational leadership. That they will make mistakes is regarded as a given. But the allocation of resources (material and human) will indicate, respondents believe, the degree of the commitment by leadership to the fledgling initiatives of the venturing groups.

Opening New Possibilities

Small, specifically identified groups of religious and their associates are envisaged as embarking in this journey. Interviewees see authenticating

leadership as challenged to nurture the seeds of new life, and to mobilise the energies of those who indicate a desire and a propensity to deconstruct and reconstruct religious life. Not all members of a religious institute can participate in this, and not all should. E5 states unequivocally that 'it is for some, not for all.' P1 speaks of the possibility of a small group 'defecting in place... remaining in the group, but able to disassociate from it in order to effect change.'

Deciding which individuals or groups should embark on the journey requires, interviewees believe, communal discernment, honesty and trust. P3 speaks of the need for new models:

...one that allows you to split, and through new shoots, 'to grow and be formed into support groups... I think it's going to be prophetic. I think it's going to be small. I think it's going to be high in authenticity...It's going to be brotherhood. Brother means non-vertical. It means being with, and I think that is our spirituality and I think that is our God. It's really stuff we've got to experiment with. We really have to.

Breaking out in these terms demands a conscious authorisation from leadership to enable marginal groups to move into new paths. As Leddy (1991) indicates, simply assenting to new ventures while trying to keep them in an ongoing relationship with the congregation as a whole, is not sufficient. Her own experience points to the limitations of endeavouring to begin new ventures within current ideologies and structures and without clear authorisation and encouragement:

We kept on trying to hold the group together in whatever way we could... In the process, of course, the radical potential of any new venture was minimalized. The commitments to new ventures were tolerated only as long as they did not threaten the sense of belonging of the other members. (Leddy, 1991, p 148)

Small groups then, rather than the whole congregation, combined with strong authorization by leadership, and a willingness to sustain chaos and disorder, will create new possibilities. As was pointed out in Chapter 6, respondents

identify three focus areas of identity, mission and community as specific orientations from which those in the midst of transition view unfamiliar and emerging forms of religious life. All three require the authorisation of leadership. The particular focus is not the critical issue. Beginning the journey in a prophetic way with the blessing of the group is.

Beginning the Journey

In speaking of the future of religious life and its leadership, interviewees refer repeatedly of the call to be prophetic. This necessitates, they maintain, 'moving out to the cutting edge' (SU2), 'supporting new sparks' (S2), 'letting go of institutions' (P1), 'biting the bullet' (P2), 'breaking boundaries' (E3), 'being game enough to be part of an evolving process' (E5), 'beginning to even imagine a future' (N4). They are not concerned that the future is vague and largely unknown. For them the critical thing is to begin. There appears a strong call to leave the security and comfort of known ministries and to go beyond self-interest for the sake of something greater. And as Fiand (2001) points out, acceptance of diversity, letting go of too much control, remaining open-ended, can in fact allow for creativity, and may stand religious women and men in good stead, 'restoring much needed energy and life.' P3 likens it to a Leunig journey:

a group of those little fellows, with a horizon, and the light's on the horizon, and it's just this side of light, on the dark side, trying to get courage to go over the hill.' (P3)

The journey requires the willingness to risk, for 'on the dark side', the path is unknown, and the possibilities for error can be daunting.

Risking the Unknown is to face the Possibility of Error

To undertake the first steps of an unknown journey is to anticipate many mistakes and false starts. 'Setting forth at dawn into unknown country' (Malouf 1980), encouraging new ventures, creating and recreating new options, means starting anew many times. A number of interviewees speak

of the possibilities for error, and the pain, and polarization that divergent journeys can bring. There will be many mistakes and many new beginnings. Unless both those beginning the new journey and the wider group accept this unconditionally, interviewees believe that there will be unresolved pain, and attempts to organize and structure even the chaos and disorder. Participants reflect the thinking of Leddy (1991) and Wittburg (1996) who indicate that many groups discuss carefully pre-delineated communal plans and move cautiously into new ventures, thus minimising disorder, chaos and error. Ultimately however to fail to risk unknown beginnings would be the most overwhelming error of all.

Any religious who truly attempt to found or refound their community will make many, often serious, mistakes. Some of these mistakes will be so severe that they may easily destroy the entire project. This is a frightening prospect. Nonetheless, only those who never start out on the refounding journey – remaining content merely to talk, year after year, about someday doing so – will avoid mistakes. And that would be the greatest mistake of all. (Wittburg, 1996, p 182)

Starting out, taking risks, stepping over the precipice and off the well-travelled track, is seen by a number of respondents as a critical step for religious moving towards a new town.

I think my generation has been called to another vocation, which is probably going to form the new religious life...to sift the new prophetic from the old faithful...to avoid paralysis. So how do you get people out and motivated and on top again? (P3)

In HB1's terms, religious are called to be the 'canary in the mine.' For T3, the image is more violent. He likens the journey to a volcano.

Within the volcano, moving in the depths of the earth, past present and future are inextricably linked. It is rooted in tradition, but has to burst into something new. This is inevitably destructive for some but also forges something new and creates a new world. (T3)

A critical role for leadership in the face of such risk-taking is seen to be that of encouragement and challenge. By freeing members for possible new

futures, and providing resources (human and material) to demonstrate their support, leadership is able to support and nurture ‘new possibilities and new worlds’ (P3).

Allocation of Resources

All participants in this research speak of the need for religious congregations to move dynamically and prophetically into the future. A major concern for them is the need for religious women and men to stand and work prophetically with those caught at the margins of today. Only three however, speak of the implications and the consequences of this orientation for deliberate future action and strategy by the institute.

N5 speaks generally of the need for religious to ‘walk their talk’ and for the call to the congregation to allocate resources to this. T1 describes more specifically a decision of his congregational Chapter to focus on those who are poor and pushed to the margins of society. For this institute, the consequences have been the deliberate and planned commitment of personnel and material resources.

The poor must get the best. We must give the best to the poor, otherwise we’re useless. (T1)

To achieve this outcome, a number of congregational members have moved from leadership roles in prestigious institutions, to working with people who are poor or oppressed. Their involvement has included both service and advocacy. A conscious allocation of material resources has accompanied this commitment.

It is clear from this research that a number of the institutes participating in the study have committed personnel and resources to congregationally identified ministries concerned with radical commitment to ‘the other’. In general however, respondents believe these ministries have developed more from the passion and responsibility of individuals than from deliberate

congregational policy. Very few institutes appear to have embarked on the journey described by T1. Commitment by all leadership groups is clear, but deliberate congregational management of human and financial resources appears to be governed as much as by needs of maintenance as by mission.

Furthermore, working with groups in recent years has led to certain informal observations, which appear to support the findings outlined above. In Congregational Assemblies and Chapters, groups working on visions and goals become enthused by the vision of the founding members, and by the reinterpretation of that vision for contemporary religious life. It is when this vision begins to be translated into concrete terms that the impetus of the group often seems to falter. It is as if they have been inspired by far horizons and new possibilities, begun the journey, come to the edge of the precipice, and, realizing the extent of the risk, drawn back. Perhaps it is the expectation that all need to agree with the direction and the strategies, which causes the group to falter. Perhaps it is the realization that the cost is great. Perhaps the demands when one is older and has less energy become overwhelming. Perhaps the anticipation of conflict within the group, when so much energy has been expended to build unity, is just too much to bear. Whatever the reasons, many groups appear to falter when radical change is identified as a necessary outcome of far-reaching congregational visions.

Whatever the outcomes of the above speculations, respondents in this study agree nonetheless on a number of principles. Many identify a prophetic stance as indispensable, small group initiatives as intrinsic, new beginnings as imperative, risking the unknown and the possibility of error unavoidable, and the deliberate allocation of resources essential. FA4 summarises the challenge in no uncertain terms:

We've got to create something new. We've got to take the risk.
(FA4)

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Contemporary religious leadership calls for a clear commitment to what is referred to in this study as ‘the larger God’. The spiritual dynamism, which gives impetus to their focus on the mission of the group, enables leadership to create new possibilities for the future, both for those facing the diminishment and even disintegration of their congregations, and for those striving to interpret and experience the signs of new life, which have been identified within religious congregations at this time.

Embracing diversity as intrinsic to unity, accepting suffering as an inevitable part of contemporary leadership, holding leadership lightly, and focussing single-mindedly on mission over maintenance, are intrinsic elements, which participants in this research believe will facilitate leadership during the current transformational period. This new form of leadership operates within the co-existing experiences of diminishment, death and new life. It calls for authenticity, courage and trust, as religious endeavour to create new futures, which confirm their belief in the intrinsic value of the life they have chosen. In Radcliffe’s (2000) terms, because of the ways religious are called ‘to face the crisis of meaning of our contemporaries’ (Radcliffe, 2000, p 211), then for respondents in this study, ‘religious life is more important than ever before’ (T2). As they reflect on the challenges and possibilities for religious life, interviewees conclude that, although it remains chaotic and unpredictable, it will nonetheless evolve prophetically into a new organic wholeness, informing its direction into an uncertain future.

AUTHENTICATING LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

This study has examined the leadership practices identified as essential in facilitating the transition of Catholic religious congregations into an uncertain future and possible new forms of religious life, during a time of decisive change. Out of the analysis, a framework has been developed to explain

both the challenges facing religious life and the leadership perceived as essential for nurturing and facilitating transition. This framework is outlined in the following diagram.

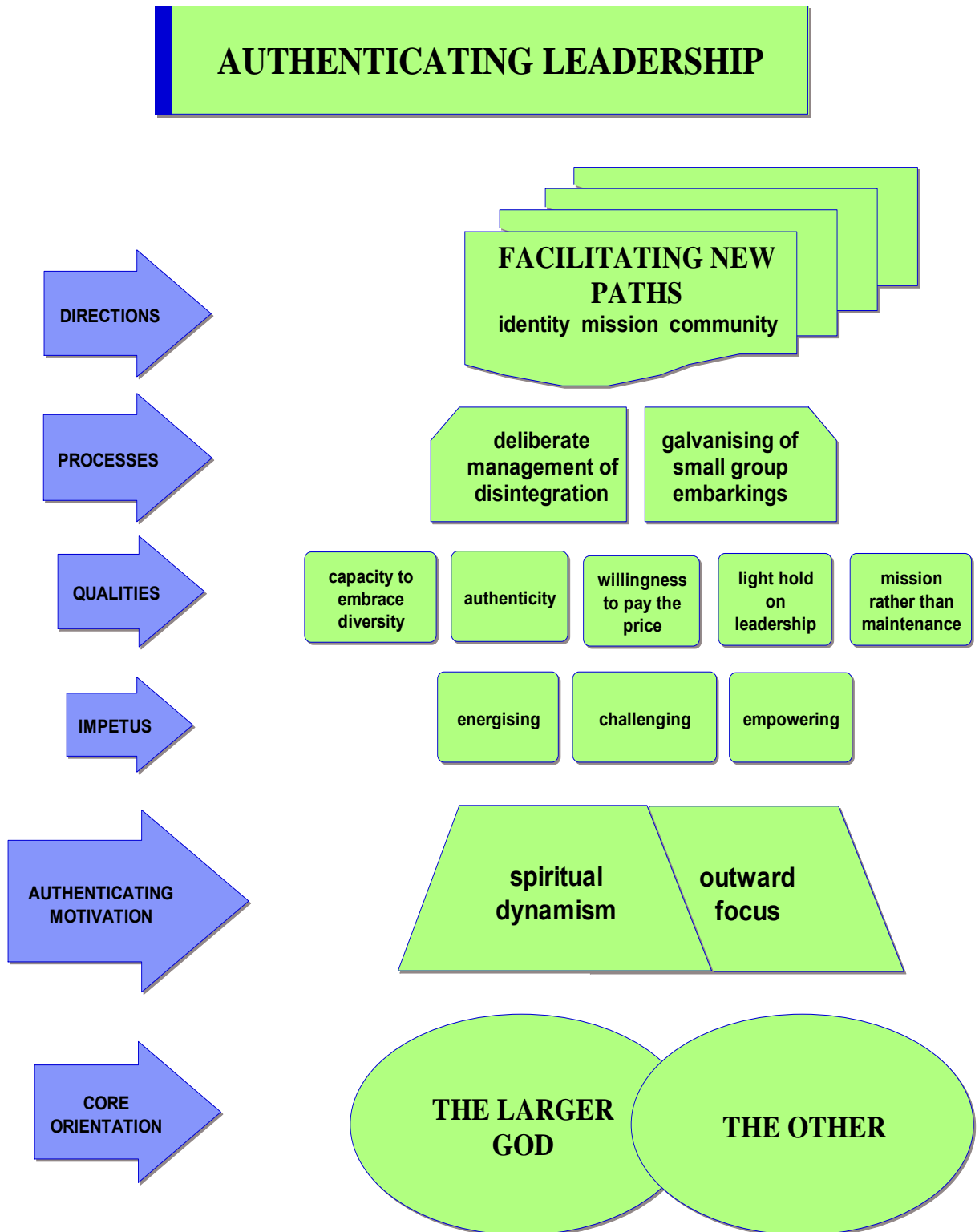


Figure 9 – Authenticating Leadership

Figure 9 provides a framework for understanding the practices of leadership described as desirable for a time of transition. It can be summarized, at this stage, in the following way:

Core Orientation

- The God-quest is at the core of religious commitment. Authenticating leaders are seen as deeply embedded in an awareness of the presence of God operating their lives and in the whole of creation.
- Radical commitment to 'the other', as derived from the founding imperative of apostolic religious congregations, underpins authenticating leadership.

Authenticating Motivation

- The motivational impetus for authenticating leadership is characterised by a spiritual dynamism and the mobilisation of the energies of the group towards mission.

Motivating Action

- The spiritual potency and outward focus of authentic leadership energises and challenges the group. Such leadership demonstrates servanthood, mutuality; authenticity and trust – in which each empowers and enables the other

Desirable Qualities

- Authentic leadership is fundamentally relational. It is marked by a willingness to accept the cost involved in standing at the edges. It is able to hold leadership lightly. The subsequent absence of personal agenda facilitates a focus on the mission of the group, and an ability to galvanise members towards this mission, rather than focusing on maintenance issues.

Essential Processes

- In facilitating new paths, which focus alternately on identity, mission and community, religious life and its leadership are called to straddle opposing worldviews. The critical tasks for authenticating leadership in this changed context are identified as the nurturing of sparks of new life and the encouragement of small group embarkings, side by side with the deliberate management of the diminishment and disintegration that is occurring in contemporary religious congregations.

Chapter 10

THE WAY FORWARD

Summary of Research findings and Conclusions

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the research documented in this thesis is to identify and investigate the question:

What leadership practices can facilitate most effectively the transition of Catholic religious congregations into an uncertain future and possible new forms of religious life, during an era of critical change?

The study analyses current challenges and possible futures for religious life and its leadership in Australia, particularly as analysed by thirty women and men in leadership positions in religious congregations. It examines these within the realities of diminishment and transition, which are characteristic of contemporary religious institutes in Australia. It identifies the two essential elements of religious life today as ‘the search for the larger God’, and ‘relating to the other’. In the light of these findings, the leadership practices most able to facilitate the transition of religious congregations into an uncertain future are seen to involve an intentional focus on these core elements, both in the deliberate management of the diminishment and death of current forms of religious life, and in the nurturing of new forms as they are beginning to emerge.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions were developed from a number of areas identified as core to the future of religious life. These were clarified and refined through

the literature review, through ongoing discussions with the focus reference group described in Chapter 5, and in meetings with Ukeritis (Nygren & Ukeritis, 1993). Four fields were identified for consideration:

the relationship between religious life and the paradigmatically changing world and uncertain future into which religious institutes are moving,

the deep-rooted challenges of transition, and the developmental readiness required of religious women and men endeavouring to effect a fundamental shift into new forms of religious life,

key elements critical to the current identity and the possible future development of religious life,

leadership practices necessary for planning and decision-making for religious groups now and into the future.

These components formed the basis of the questionnaire administered to interviewees. As the research developed and emphases shifted, less attention was paid to the developmental readiness of the members of religious institutes, although this area clearly remained an issue. At the same time, the critical role played by small prophetic groups and the importance of the conscious management of leadership into diminishment and death became increasingly important.

CHOICE OF METHODOLOGY

The decision to use a qualitative methodology that would incorporate individual and focus group interviews was confirmed by an exploration of possible theoretical and epistemological underpinnings for the research. It became clear early in the study that hermeneutical phenomenology, particularly as developed by Ricoeur (Kearney, 1996; Ricoeur, 1981), would inform the rationale and methodology for the study.

For the analysis of the data, the software program, QSR NUD*IST Vivo (referred to in the research as NVivo) was used. NVivo's structured organisation, its project management functions, the sophistication of its searching procedures, and its possibilities for conceptual mapping and the development of theory, allowed for maximum interaction between text and context in a way that facilitated the investigation.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Both in the interviews and throughout the analysis of the material, the trustworthiness of the four core areas has been established, although, as indicated, emphases have shifted, both in importance and direction. Interviewees describe a clear relationship between current world needs and the contemporary call to religious women and men. At the heart of the discussion, the capacity of religious leadership to manage transition, to identify sparks of new life, and to nurture emerging forms, is clearly seen as key. There is a conviction among interviewees that the development of new expressions of religious life will be in proportion to the ability and willingness of leadership to focus its vision, structures and practices in managing the death of the old, and in nourishing risk-taking initiatives for possible unknown futures. The challenge is complex. Leadership is described as being called to respond to issues of global change and uncertainty, and to galvanise religious identity and commitment, even as it waits 'in the darkness between towns', directed towards an unknown future being 'held in trust'.

The implications of these challenges are themselves complex, but require careful attention if a significant re-imagining of religious life is to occur.

IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

Religious leadership in the twenty-first century calls for a commitment to the two specific areas referred to in this study as 'the larger God' and 'the other'.

The contemporary search for meaning and the transcendent, which is explored by Tacey (2003), is foundational to the God commitment, lying at the heart of the searching and the meaning religious women and men give to their existence. The concomitant great challenge and question facing contemporary humankind – how to deal with the other – is also a critical issue for religious seeking to build communion, and to witness to ‘sisterhood and brotherhood’ in a society, church and world fractured by differences, inequality and conflict.

Implication 1

Search for the Larger God

The core focus of religious life places congregations in an ideal position to contribute to the contemporary spirituality revolution, embedded in the post-modern, post-Christian world:

- to tap into the named hunger of twenty-first century women and men for the meaning and spirituality they identify as being at the heart of life;

- to contribute to the development of an inclusive, overarching metanarrative, which responds authentically to this revolution;

- to confront the apparent meaninglessness of the age by becoming engaged with the challenge of imagining a ‘larger God’ in a new and transitional world – discerning what this God is saying in the darkness and uncertainty; and

- to utilise the spiritual and prophetic foundation of religious life in engaging with these calls.

Education and formation in philosophy, sociology and theology would help to promote such engagement. The nurturing of individuals and small groups to become involved in emerging initiatives, and a specific allocation of resources (material and human) would facilitate this contribution.

The growth of religious fundamentalism in Australia, with its offer of simplistic solutions to the meaning of life in the transitional and often confusing world of today, holds different, but serious implications for religious congregations. It would be understandable for some fundamentalist Catholics to be attracted to Catholic religious life, particularly if it appears to offer security from the confusion experienced during this time of paradigmatic change. The challenge for religious leadership is to harness the growing interest in spirituality and religion, while engaging with the mystery and ambiguity of life and refusing to encourage or accept simplistic reductionism, even if it means discouraging potential applicants.

Implication 2

Relating with ‘the Other’

The fundamental call to religious life is named by respondents in this study as one that challenges individuals and congregations to reach out to ‘the other’ – the one who is dispossessed or pushed to the margins, in an increasingly divided and polarised world. ‘Relating with the other’ also includes the religious congregation itself as ‘other’, and the institutional church as ‘other’

The Person Dispossessed and Disempowered as ‘the Other’ whom Religious are called to Serve.

In this area, the challenges for leadership are considerable. Religious congregations in Australia operate at this time with limited resources. Smaller numbers and an older membership have resulted in diminishing involvement in congregational ministries. At the same time, lower energy levels make it harder for groups to sustain the dynamic enthusiasm needed for mission. The increasing needs of older members have often resulted in decreased leadership involvement in mission and vision. The more

comfortable lifestyle has further challenged congregations seeking to minister at the edges of society.

A significant implication of these realities relates to the need to prioritise needs and resources. If the focus of the group is to remain clearly on those it sees itself as called to serve, then resources (material and physical) need to be consciously allocated to these. Using key personnel for internal rather than external ministries, and allocating funds to support more comfortable living conditions, can be seen to contradict the professed aims of the group. Minimising the number of active religious engaged in internal ministries, and allocating fewer financial resources to the care of members themselves are significant decisions that require lengthy discernment and consensus.

The Institutional Church as ‘Other’

Many respondents in this study see themselves as part of, and yet apart from, the institutional Church. When the current stance of the majority of participants is theologically opposed to what they regard as the theological and hierarchical restorationism of many Church authorities, polarising questions about identity and mission inevitably occur. There are two immediate implications of this.

Demonstrating observable loyalty to a patriarchal, hierarchical church, and acting with integrity when fundamental stances differ, has proved difficult for religious congregations and their leadership. While some progress has been achieved, this is an area where religious institutes continue to be called to search for new and creative ways of entering into life-giving and prophetic dialogue.

Even more fundamentally, the possibility of changing their canonical status is a significant but viable option for religious institutes who believe that their identity and mission are compromised by church regulations. The clear tension between the issue of canonical status, and what is seen as the

prophetic call of religious in the church needs some resolution for groups whose desires to be liminal cannot be realised at this time.

‘The Other’ – Beyond Vowed Members

The growth of committed individuals and groups beyond vowed members has been a growing phenomenon in religious groups since Vatican II. The broad fostering of these affiliates is desirable if congregations are to bring together the needs of ‘the other’ and the commitment of people in all walks of life (including religious life) called to serve those needs. It is an initiative not so much concerned with the self perpetuation of a particular congregation, but with the need to create new possibilities and options, so that the mission of the group might be more effectively realised, both within and beyond it.

Implication 3

Authenticating Leadership

Leadership throughout this study has highlighted both the dynamic of leadership and the person of the leader. Authenticating leadership includes both.

The Dynamic of Leadership

Authenticating leadership frames a paradigmatic model, in which each person empowers, energises and enables the other by:

ensuring that members have access to the formation and theology underpinning new understandings of religious life;

building the leadership capacity of all;

creating an environment where individuals are encouraged to exercise initiative and new ways of living the charism of the institute;

acting most often through persuasion, rather than direction, to influence congregational members, (out of the recognition that power lies in the members as well as in the office of leadership);

focusing on the mission of the group, more than on individual needs, harmonious relationships or day-to-day tasks; and

giving priority to long-term strategies over maintenance

The Person of the Leader

While most respondents in this study speak more of the dynamic of leadership than of the qualities of the named leader, they do identify specific features that they believe are required of formal leaders at this time. For those who are responsible at congregational Chapters for the election of leaders of congregations, as well as for those who are eligible for election, these are important considerations.

From the findings of this study, certain qualities of leadership are seen as necessary for authenticating transitional leadership. For groups desiring prophetic leadership at this time, four specific qualities appear to be called for:

1. the ability to promote communion within diversity – in and beyond contemporary religious life;
2. the willingness to embrace the inevitable suffering that results from a prophetic stance;
3. a sense of self that does not need leadership for personal fulfilment, and is able therefore to hold leadership lightly; and
4. a clear focus on mission rather than maintenance.

Implication 4

Leadership into Diminishment

One of the clearest outcomes of this research is the call for religious leadership to manage deliberately the diminishment and disintegration of current forms of religious life. Leadership must deliberately direct and

manage the process of disintegration, creating opportunities for dynamic living into, and reconciliation with, the realities of diminishment and dying.

Diminishment and ageing, fragmentation and dispersal, with a subsequent strong restorationist culture, are identified in this study as significant challenges. The conscious management of disintegration and death demands a high degree of honesty and trust, and significant levels of risk-taking. These issues have formed the content of many congregational meetings and assemblies. In most instances however, there appears little evidence of meaningful discussion or specific planning for these realities. The vision in many groups appears to be generic rather than particular.

The implications in this area are clear. As was pointed out in Chapter 9, the danger appears to be, not that congregations will decide one way or the other, but that they will in fact drift into diminishment, until one day, as Schneiders (2000, 67) points out, they will simply 'wake up dead.'

For institutes involved in leadership planning for diminishment, two areas appear important for consideration, both for the empowerment of present members and for the ongoing mission of the congregation:

- the assiduous management of resources (human and material), so that the core mission (not just ministries) of the group might be appropriately continued, even if there are no vowed members available; and

- consideration of the possible establishment of two specific leadership structures – one to deal with the vision and mission of the institute into the future, and the other to carry forward current issues related to diminishment and disintegration.

The increasing involvement of formal leadership in issues of pastoral care of ageing members is certain to increase in the future. This reality will minimise opportunities for either planning for disintegration, or for working with issues of new life, unless structures are established to facilitate leadership in both areas.

Implication 5

Leadership into New Life

In this 'dark time between towns', leadership is called to attend to two clearly identified strands. It must, as was pointed out above, deliberately plan for diminishment and disintegration. It must also create opportunities for the future, nourishing signs of emerging realities, and freeing members for new paths and new possibilities – facilitating the journey of congregations moving towards an unknown future, the next town 'still in their saddlebags.'

Small, specifically identified groups of religious and their associates are envisaged as embarking on this journey. Most Interviewees see leadership as challenged to nurture the seeds of new life, and to mobilise the energies of those who indicate a desire and a propensity to deconstruct and then reconstruct religious life. Not all members of a religious institute can participate in this, and not all should. It is seen to involve the facilitation of risk-taking ventures, even those initiated by individuals and groups regarded as fringe-dwellers within the congregation.

If the prerequisites for fanning new sparks are to be realised, there are a number of specific implications for religious leadership:

- the mobilisation of individuals and small groups (rather than the whole congregation);

- conscious and clear authorisation by leadership; and

- a demonstrated willingness to sustain chaos and disorder.

The personal qualities outlined earlier are essential for such leadership. Often new sparks will emerge from the fringes of a group, from those often regarded with suspicion precisely because they are fringe dwellers. These individuals and groups offer diverse and sometimes risky perspectives. They are not always regarded as being good team members. They will make mistakes, which will inevitably reflect on official leadership. For igniting and

fanning new sparks then, personal integration, honesty, trust and risk-taking are essential prerequisites for persons holding positions of formal leadership.

FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The findings reported in this research raise a number of issues requiring further study. The tentative nature of religious life 'between towns' will of itself necessitate ongoing reflection and planning. Studies in both western and developing countries could provide valuable insights into new paradigms and developing models. Utilising the areas developed as the basis of a larger survey would test their applicability more broadly.

A further dimension for research could include examination of the vowed life. Contemporary understanding of the vows traditionally taken by religious are raised as issues by respondents in this study. By no means is there unanimous agreement that the vows presently taken are intrinsic to religious commitment. As religious life is redefined in the light of its relationship to the whole of life, further research on the vows would offer valuable insights into this area.

Community is also an arena for ongoing research. The concept of community has been transformed in the past half century from an understanding which views it as a group of vowed individuals residing in the same house, to a sense of it as communion. Ongoing research as to what this term means for religious of different generations and what structure of lifestyle they see it needs would offer valuable insights. Witnessing to relational living, and to sisterhood and brotherhood in an increasingly divided society, church and world, are regarded as core to continuing research.

A further critical territory for research is one which analyses the difficulties experienced by current leadership, both in managing the disintegration of current frameworks and in facilitating radically new expressions of religious

life. These could point to appropriate strategies necessary for ongoing reform.

Interviewees speak of the transitional dangers of striving for security in the midst of unknowing, and of being too selective, too narrow in the interpretation of the meaning of contemporary religious life, and so limiting the ability of congregations to dialogue with a contemporary world on issues of change, religion, culture, ministry, justice, violence, peace, women, ecology, life itself. A number of questions are raised:

- about the dominant collective consciousness within congregations;

- about the victims that this collective consciousness dominates or neglects because of fear, inertia or comfortable middle class lifestyle;

- about members in the group who struggle to free themselves;

- about the ways that religious might come to terms with current realities and thus open the possibility of new directions and new ways of fidelity to the gospel that respond to the transitional world.

Respondents thus raise new possibilities for further research into the horizon of hope and prophetic challenge calling forth religious women and men for the new world of the twenty-first century.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The clear recognition by participants and focus groups in this study – of religious life as situated ‘between towns’ – is seen as both gift and challenge. Walking the fine line between seeing this period as an interlude in which religious are summoned to wait in ‘the ditch of dark’, while at the same time welcoming it as a moment for initiating possibilities into the future, is proving a significant challenge for religious congregations. There is little doubt among the respondents in this study however that this time signals a new manifestation of religious life.

All groups in this study highlight the importance of seeing religious life as intrinsic to the whole of life. Humanity's need to find a meaning for life, and to make sense of it in the face of seminal shifts in global consciousness, have led to a new hermeneutic on the nature of spirituality and of God. If religious women and men are to find meaning and give voice to the foundational struggles of the global community and to an emerging understanding of the transcendent in a new world, a strong philosophical and theological formation is essential. A well-developed theological foundation has emerged in this research as core to any understanding of religious life and its leadership now and into the future.

Concomitantly, it is the search for 'the larger God', within a communion that celebrates diversity and difference, which respondents in this study see as the critical role for religious congregations in a world where the other is feared and the God of many institutional churches is seen as irrelevant. Service of 'the other', leadership for 'the other', a commitment of resources to the needs of 'the other', are named as essential aspects of contemporary religious life. In such a context, planning will focus significantly on the allocation of material and human resources (within or beyond the congregation) both to direct service and to working for structural change. A number of respondents in this study perceive that at times, the care of members, more than the mission of the group, has become the focus of contemporary religious leadership. While care of members (particularly those who are older) is essential, the mission of the congregation, especially as witnessed in prophetic word and action, is named as an underpinning framework to possible new forms of religious life.

The overwhelming consensus of respondents in this study is that the future of religious life is 'still 'in our saddlebags'. Nonetheless, the importance of 'leaping over the ditch of dark', and of planning for what seems to be 'rising ghostly through the weeds' are identified as core. Respondents see this era as one of break-through, when institutes are faced with the most basic

questions of group and individual identity and mission. Congregations implicitly accepting of the inevitability of death are faced with the challenge of planning deliberately for this eventuality. Groups planning to initiate new possibilities for the future are called to create opportunities for radical, risk-taking options.

Authenticating leadership is the term that has emerged from this research to describe the leadership seen as necessary for religious institutes at this time. Authenticating leadership, both within the dynamic of leadership and in the persons who embody it, provides the key to future possibilities. In facilitating new paths, which focus alternately on identity, mission and community, religious life and its leadership are called to straddle opposing worldviews. The critical tasks for authenticating leadership in this changed context are identified as the nurturing of sparks of new life and the encouragement of small group embarkings, side by side with the deliberate management of the diminishment and disintegration that is occurring in contemporary religious congregations.

FINAL REMARKS

The past decade has revealed a discernible trend in the writings of leadership scholars in the western world towards a single-minded and apparently simpler focus on core values. Singer (2002) describes the increasing interconnectedness of life on this planet and the consequent demands on humanity and its leadership to develop a global ethical viewpoint and an appropriate global government to facilitate such an orientation. Wheatley (2002) speaks of faith in people, of a personal spirituality, and of love, as the bases of effective leadership. Burns (2003) describes the moral and passionate dimensions of leadership as core to its effectiveness. It is his belief that a passionate and compassionate leadership, working in partnership with the dispossessed people of the world, 'could become the greatest act of united leadership the world has ever known' (Burns, 2003, 3).

This is a significant shift. From complex theories of leadership, theorists have developed a new perspective that, while acknowledging the enormous ambiguities and diversity of the global society in which we find ourselves, is one, which at base encapsulates the fundamental human values underpinning human life and human relationships. The shift has enormous implications for Catholic religious life now and into the future.

This study has revealed that, at the heart of its attempts to address the deepest needs and discontinuities in our society, religious life is sustained by its commitment to God and other. To the extent that it develops and articulates new ways to foster this dual core commitment, religious leadership will most effectively facilitate the transition of Catholic religious congregations into an uncertain future and possible new forms of religious life.

A town is what we are making for.

Gaze round you. It might be here where two roads cross or
somewhere over
the ridge where empty fields await our coming. No signposts name it
yet or point directions. The next city we shall inhabit
is still in our saddlebags, in the dipper, flashing as we drink.
If not this star, another – there where they shift in millions over
the grass. Already named they wait for us, and we are on
our way, bearing the names their streets will bear. A moment only
in the darkness between towns, while shadows pause and change
a wheel.

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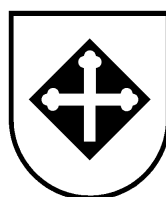
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

LETTER TO LEADERS OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES



Dear (Leader, Members of the Leadership Team - *named*),

I am currently undertaking study towards a Ph. D. in leadership at the Australian Catholic University. The area of my research is ***Redesigning Religious Leadership at a Time of Critical Change***. The study will explore changing understandings of leadership theory and practice, and the implications of these understandings for the leadership of Religious Congregations, during what is for all of us in Religious Life, a time of fundamental shift. Specifically, the research will endeavour to delineate the features of leadership structures and practices that can facilitate most effectively the transition of religious groups into the world of the third millennium where understandings of person, society, religion and Religious Life, and of the world itself are undergoing seminal change. The data for the research will be gathered through a series of individual and group interviews.

Apart from the inconvenience of time, it is not envisaged that the project will be an onerous one for participants. The prior distribution of the interview

questions and the freedom of individuals to accept or refuse the invitation should ensure that only those who wish to take part would do so.

This letter is to request the participation of the individual members of your Leadership Team in this research project. Such participation would involve an interview with individual members of the Team. Alternatively, it could involve other members of your community, with an interest and involvement in leadership, as well as a strong belief in, and commitment to, the future of Religious Life. I would hope to interview a total of five members of your Congregation. With your permission, the interviews will be taped. It is anticipated that each interview will take approximately forty minutes, and that all interviews will be completed by the end of March.

Six Congregations from a range of groups (female, male, small, large, clerical Religious, Sisters, Brothers) have been invited to participate in the research, in order to cover as wide a range of experiences as possible.

It is my belief that we hold among us a great wisdom, which can be of enormous value to all Religious communities and their leaders, during this time of critical change. Religious Leaders have experienced a long history of giving and receiving valuable support from each other in the ministry of leadership as Congregations have experienced a number of metamorphoses into new forms of life. Research such as this could strengthen and validate such experiences. The study could be of value also to the wider community, where business and civic leaders are searching for meaningful directions into an uncertain future. The research data collected for the study may be used therefore in publications or talks, but will be done in a way that does not identify you in any way.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary. While I believe that your contribution to the research is valuable and would be greatly appreciated, I hope that you feel free to refuse consent without having to justify that

decision, or to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in the study at any time without giving a reason.

As indicated above, the information provided in the interviews will be treated with confidentiality, and will only be available publicly in the form of consolidated reports.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or issues you wish to discuss:

Jan Barnett rsj
School of Educational leadership
Australian Catholic University
28a Barker Rd Strathfield NSW 2135
Email: janbarnett rsj@hotmail.com

Following completion of the research, I will feed back to you the results of the study and share the findings with you.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University. In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or have any query that I have not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee:

Chair, HREC
C/o Research Services, Australian Catholic University
Locked Bag 2002 STRATHFIELD NSW 2135

If you are willing to participate in this research, you are asked to complete the enclosed Consent Form and return it to me before February 10. Following any acceptances, I will be in touch to discuss availability, and to arrange a time when I can meet with participants.

Many thanks for taking time to consider this request. Your contribution is very much appreciated.

Yours gratefully,

Jan Barnett rsj

Appendix 2

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Religious life has undergone significant changes since Vatican II. Many people argue that we are again at a critical crossroads of Christian history, a crossroads similar to that of early Christianity, or of the beginnings of Monasticism, or the emergence of apostolic Religious Life. We see ourselves as called to make sense of the new conditions in which we find ourselves and to apply gospel values and the charism of our founders to the radically different world of the twenty-first century.

7. What changes do you believe are providing the three greatest challenges to Religious Life and its leaders? Include in your reflection what you consider to be:
 - the essential elements of Religious Life for the twenty-first century.
 - the factors facilitating change for Religious Institutes seeking to move into the world of the twenty-first century
 - the factors hindering transition and change at this time.
8. What do you think are some results of the increased collaboration that has characterised Religious Life since Vatican II?
9. Describe a leader who has embodied for you exceptional qualities of visionary, religious leadership.
10. Describe a time
 3. when you felt your leadership was life-giving
 4. when you felt your leadership was ineffective.
11. Describe your own vision for the future of Religious Life. What do you believe is required of communities and their leaders seeking to live this vision in the twenty-first century?

Appendix 3



Australian Catholic University

CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF PROJECT:

***REDESIGNING RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP
AT A TIME OF CRITICAL CHANGE***

NAMES OF SUPERVISORS:

PROFESSOR P. DUIGNAN,

ADJUNCT PROF. P MALONE

NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: JAN BARNETT RSJ

I (the participant) have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, realising that I can withdraw at any time. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:

SIGNATUREDATE.....

Appendix 4

TWO SAMPLES OF INTERVIEW SUMMARIES

Interview 1

Code Name: Tagore 1

Female ☐

Male ☒

Sister ☐

Brother ☒

Clerical Religious ☐

Key Issues Raised by Interviewee

- Search for the larger God – seeing God differently
- New understandings of world/life – all is relational
- Internationality - How do I deal with the other?
- The Church – called to be a church for the poor
- Prophetic nature of Religious life

Overall Impressions (mood, stance, worldview of interviewee)

1. Positive
2. Energised by mission/vision
3. Conscious of the way that the world happenings and Religious Life cannot be separated (related at all times to gospel)

Emerging themes

- Energised by presence of God – the God beyond - the God of the poor, Religious are called to interpreting the vision and mission in current metaphors
- Key to the living out of Religious Life is acting compellingly to achieve the vision
- In focussing on those the group exists to serve – mission oriented – we are being true to the call of the gospel and the vision of our founders
- Mysticism of service is a way of moving forward in today's world

- There is a clear danger of being domesticated by the world or the structures of group

Hunches

- Sense of larger God/of larger world leads to larger view/vision of Religious Life
- Passion for Religious Life – sense of spiritual dynamism and support in group lead to a greater sense of life and mission and of life-giving practices (even if difficult)

Desirable Leadership Qualities

- Grounded in ‘the larger God’ and ‘the other’
- Visionary, challenging and inclusive
- Tapping into heart of group’s aspirations and naming these
- Non-violent (willingness to pay price of standing with the other)
- Moving beyond and empowering group to move beyond

Metaphor/image:

1. Can a brick in a former building be used as a mirror in a new structure?
The whole question of transition is enveloped in this image. The leader who often propped up the structures in a previous vision of religious now has another function: to look at the world outside and to allow the outside in. It shows us another way of being in the world. It catches the whole image of “seeing” that is so central to a new way of being.

Overall impressions of this interview:

1. Dealt with the ‘large’ issues
2. Religious life was firmly situated in whole of life
3. There was an integrity of vision
4. Profile fit with Ukeritis’ description of outstanding leadership

Interview 2

Code Name: FA 5

Female ☒

Male ☐

Sister ☒

Brother ☐

Clerical Religious ☐

Key Issues Raised

- Impact of huge paradigm shifts
- 1. Globalisation – world on our door step
- 2. Individualism – being barred off from others
- 3. Breakdown of family

- Signs of hope

increasing numbers of people searching of meaning in life:

new focus in education on relational areas of life

strength of spirituality across cultures

- The negative impact of groups within religious life who have settled into their own comfortable corners

The pruning of groups has led to congregations being preoccupied with filling gaps rather than daring to dream

There is an increasing number of older religious with many needs demanding care

The key call to us is to move back from maintenance to mission

Contemplative spirituality and a passion for mission are fundamental to contemporary religious life

Overall Impressions (mood, stance, worldview of interviewee)

Optimism about essentials of Religious Life

Recurring theme during interview – seeing as urgent the need to focus on mission from the foundation of contemplation

Her experience of illness has highlighted for this woman “the value of today, and the gift of today”

Emerging themes

- Need for creative tension
- Strength of spirituality energises vision
- Subversive action – often characteristic of women and especially Religious women
- New models of Religious Life encompass volunteer movement, temporary commitment as well as permanent commitment
- Authenticity essential for new forms – as we search for new models
- Religious Life today – an activity of the two feet → Scripture and newspaper – contemplation and action – the call to be a contemplative and prophetic presence in the world

The challenge to be risk takers – hovering near edges – a presence that disturbs

Religious life is about “seeding” rather than “harvesting”

In the absence of collaboration in hierarchical Church, Religious are modelling something different

Future is unknown – on edge of excitement and fear, there is a need for invitational conversation: “what holds us together and leads us on?”

Hunches

- It is difficult to welcome new forms of life in the face of the reality of the settlers who settle into their own comfortable corners. Often, what is proclaimed as new is simply an alternative version of navel gazing (which attracts those seeking security) rather than calling forth those attracted by the prophetic risk of giving all for the reign of God, where that reign is needed most today

Current structure (older, fewer, middle class educated) mean that Religious are finding it difficult to risk, to live on the margins

There is a real dissonance between role of Religious and lack of collaboration in hierarchical Church

There is a deep-seated sense of the need to be contemplative and prophetic, even if this is not the current experience

- Contemporary Religious Life is seen as called to be
 - Anchored in the gospel
 - Lived in simplicity, justice and equality
 - Empowering of others
 - Willing to move on when the job is done
- Collaboration/leadership depends of the support of all

Desirable Leadership Qualities

- Energised by spirituality
- Healing, bringing life, working for common good
- Prophetic, speaking out against injustice
- Using gifts for others
- Voice for those with no voice

Courageous, resilient, committed

Able to find the humour in life

Willing to hover near the margins, to step outside the square – make hard choices, to follow through and pay the price of this

Encouraging, facilitating, empowering

Risk taking – both in being prophetic and in asking for feedback

Image/metaphor

- Dusk – period of shadowy life – can be ending or beginning – things look different – can be scary. Time for regathering, renewing, reflecting, reforming- for new day, new opportunities
- Shattered glass – beautiful in its brokenness, and holding the potential for new and completely different creation

Appendix 5

PRESENTATION

CONFERENCE OF LEADERS OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

1. Areas of affirmation from the reflection?

- All images resonated with our experience
- Embodied in the contemplative
- Making things better for those we serve
- Brotherhood/sisterhood
- Open to and through the other
- Being in communion
- Resonate with image of re-igniting the embers – more sparks than flames visible at times!
- Reference to depression in Religious needs further work
- Sharing material on leadership qualities was helpful
- Challenge to be “out focused” –
- Liked emphasis on God who is Large, God who is Other
- Called to ‘other’
- I felt very at home with your talk – where I’ve been moving to
- I like the image of “Between Towns”: says so much more to me about where (and the feelings about where) we are at present!
- Stress on the Other and Communion
- Great that it is Australian research
- Well researched
- ‘Between Towns’ – appropriate image
- ‘Between Towns’ image is real for the present
- Images of God insightful
- Australian context valuable
- All very true
- Your insights are consistent with my experience!
- “Our lives will be opened up to and through the other”. I believe this is where God is leading us, if we are listening
- Between Towns and The Larger God – your comments have put words around my Congregation’s experience

- Shift in consciousness around Spirituality you have named well – explains why the “Settlers” are so disconcerted by the language, movement around Cosmological Theologies, etc
- Appreciated your comments about “affirming and challenging” the other – also brother/sister. The relationship dimension was beautifully brought out by Rubilev’s Icon of the 3 angels

2. Areas of Challenge?

- I think we have a long way to go in our congregation and in this type of thinking – in relation to membership. I believe this is where we should be in 21st century
- Theology of Vatican II – in some ways there’s still much to be implemented, too early to say it’s finished
- Transition? Transition times are finite times of waiting – labour, dying, adolescence! When do we recognise that we need to live this time of evolution in religious life
- Community is for mission – dynamic and living!
- Maybe there are religious who ‘reflect’ all three stages of “settlers” etc, at different times in their life?
- other rather than Other?

3. Gaps?

- Gaps/Questions? Are there findings from studies of liminality that might inform/shed further light on your findings? *Comment:* I love the Australian landscape/skyscape that you’ve linked through your presentation
- Would like to hear more about the “Fringe Dwellers” Between Towns

- Role of associates/colleagues in supporting the mission/charism of a congregation
- The 'gap' between the Larger God – the Ultimate Mystery, “the Divine”, that post-modern people are attracted to, the God of an infinitely complex, mysterious universe – and the God of Jesus, God the Father, the God of the poor; and the implications of all that for the place of religious life in the world of today and of the future and the challenge to religious leaders in that. How can we religious communicate effectively with today's world?
- Relationships to Creation (non-human) – Larger God
- The Larger God – I see this not so much in terms of breakdown of belief but coming from a whole new understanding of the universe, and its evolution
- The challenge of the other: we need to include not only our own species, the whole natural world and animal world (Have you read Sean Sammon's book “Religious Life in C21 in America”?, It's great)
- How do the “younger” members who might be classed as “settlers” be encouraged to move on?

4. Concerns?

- Individual Sister's needs/problems and maintenance has a strong and loud call for many leaders!
- Your data from responses was challenging and I'm wondering if this would be the case if mainly from 'conservatives'
- Religious life is not in transition it is EVOLVING!!
- You spoke about “different gods” – wondered if in this day of cultural diversity seeking unity in God, that it would be better to use the “different images of God” perhaps?
- 'Community' – carries the burden of the 60's and 70's – we preferred communion which you used, but drop “the community” term

- From the CLRI Justice Committee: we want you to bring to the forefront the needs of women who make up the greatest proportion of the dispossessed here and throughout the world. We seek gender equity in terms of attitude/economics – and this even includes the middle class given that the media influence so strongly our thoughts/attitudes. We commission the CLRI to increase the media watch and speak out on our behalf. Also identify other groups speaking our language

5. Challenges from the discussion?

- Makes me appreciate that the future of Religious Life is bigger than just my own congregation
- Abandon all security – it's the only way
- Collaboration between congregations is still superficial. How can it be made more real, practical?
- If you're in leadership and your daily life is never "touched by the poor" (except our sisters), how can we be open to the gift of their formation, their needs and their God?
- To influence further and challenge further my own leadership group and congregation in relation to: What do we stand for? Who knows it? and then focus on 'other' – not only on congregation – in word and action
- The challenge that the Larger God makes in terms of where we find God and how we thereby are called to live
- We would have had loads of responses if we'd had more time for interaction and debate – you gave us so much positive stuff but we didn't have enough time to absorb OR process. More than two sessions were needed.
- "What do we stand for and who knows it?"
- To live the vision – challenged to be an "outstanding" leader

- For Congregational Leaders to give priority to the bigger issues of meaning etc rather than be consumed by day-to-day issues

1. Metaphors to describe religious life leadership for the twenty-first century?

- 1 Fanning the embers
- 2 A juggler
- 3 Live while you die
- 4 Straining forward
- 5 Like Sydney Rail – sometimes it runs well and sometimes it meets obstacles and stoppages e.g. the institutional church
- 6 Evolution of
- 7 Trying pathways out of the cul de sac
- 8 Trying to stand still in space
- 9 Women weave the web together rather than being queen bee in a hive
- 10 Waiting in the dark – and reaching out to hold hands with your friends/colleagues/Congregational members
- 11 A Grace-Cossington Smith painting of an ordinary room with a few jugs – ordinary – ready to be filled and “poured out”, feminine
- 12 The image of the pilgrimage between the towns

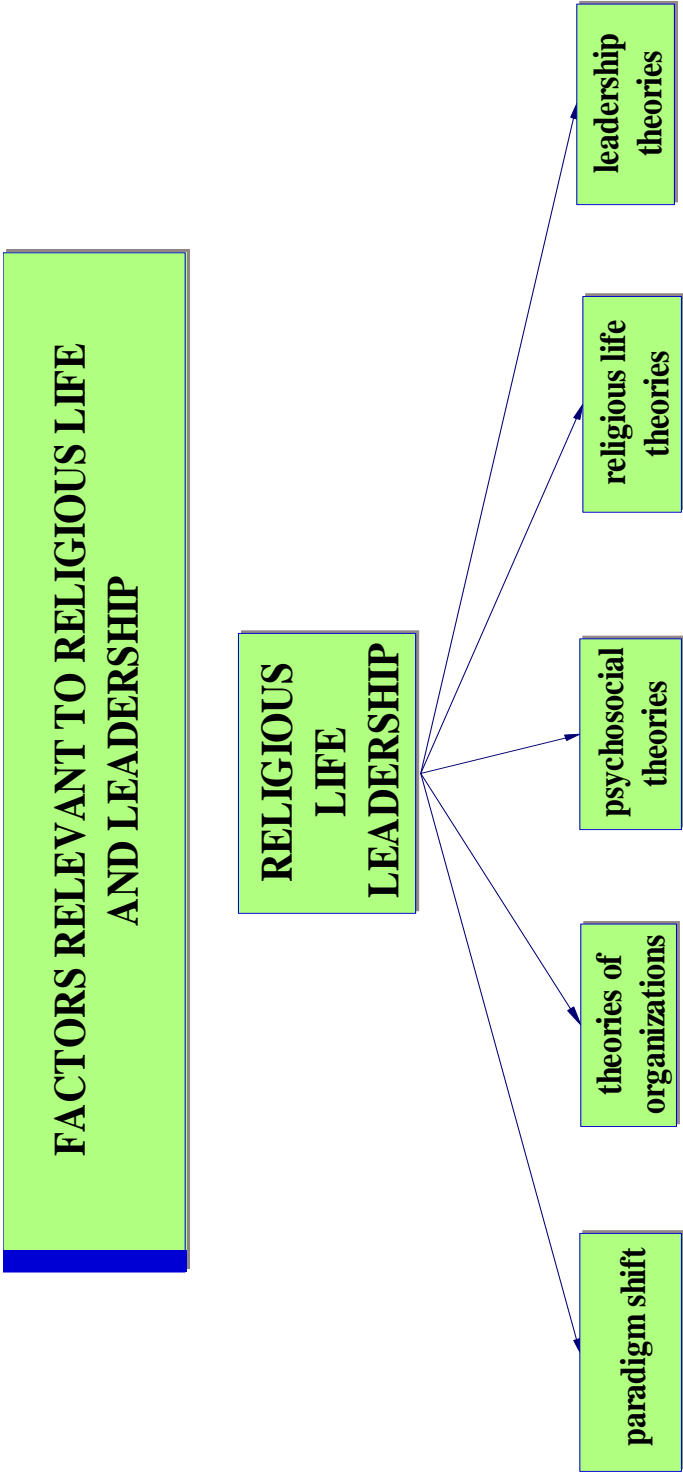


Figure 10 – Base Data

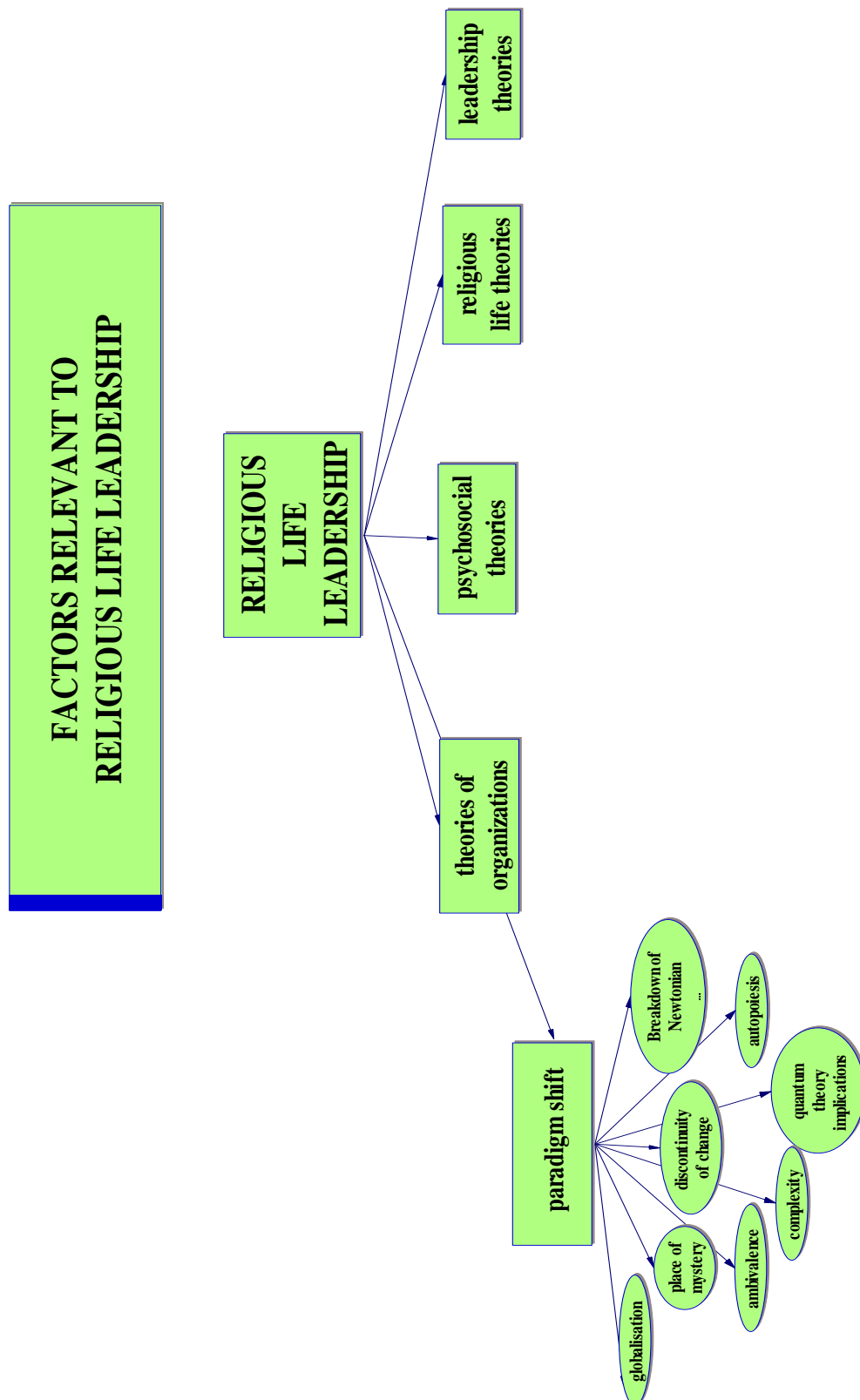


Figure 11 – Paradigm Shift

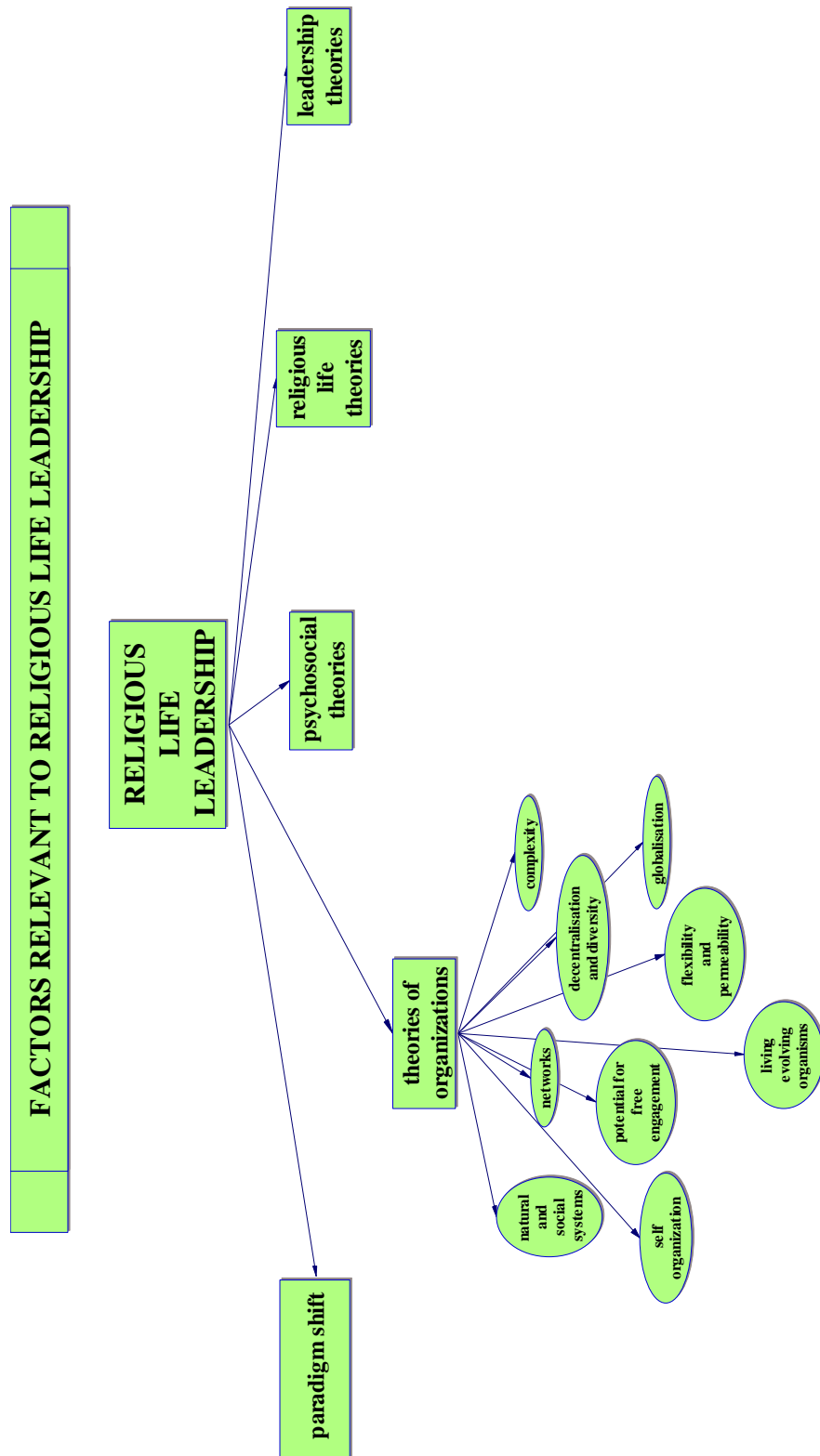


Figure 12 – Theories of Organisations

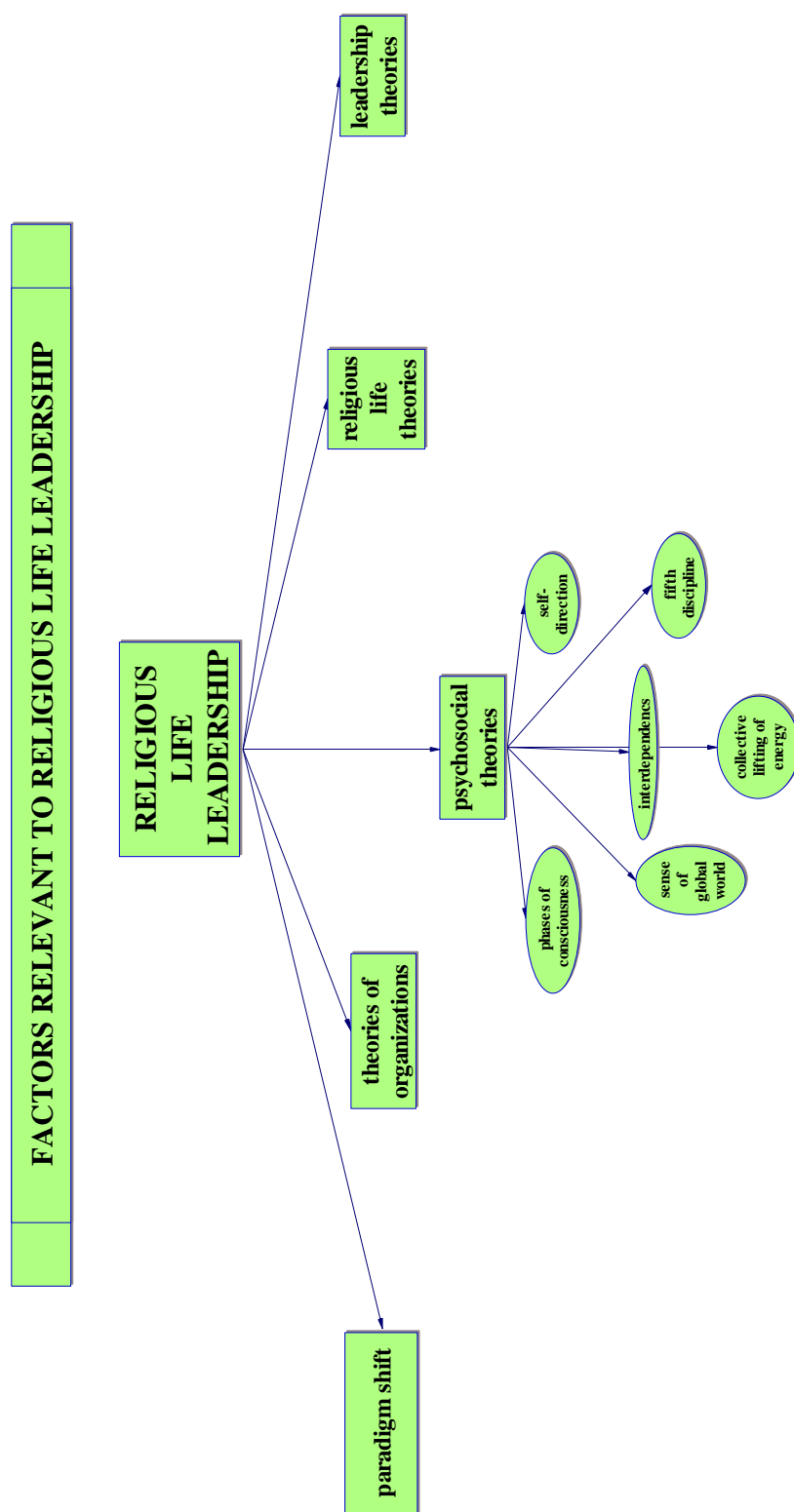


Figure 13 – Psychological Theories

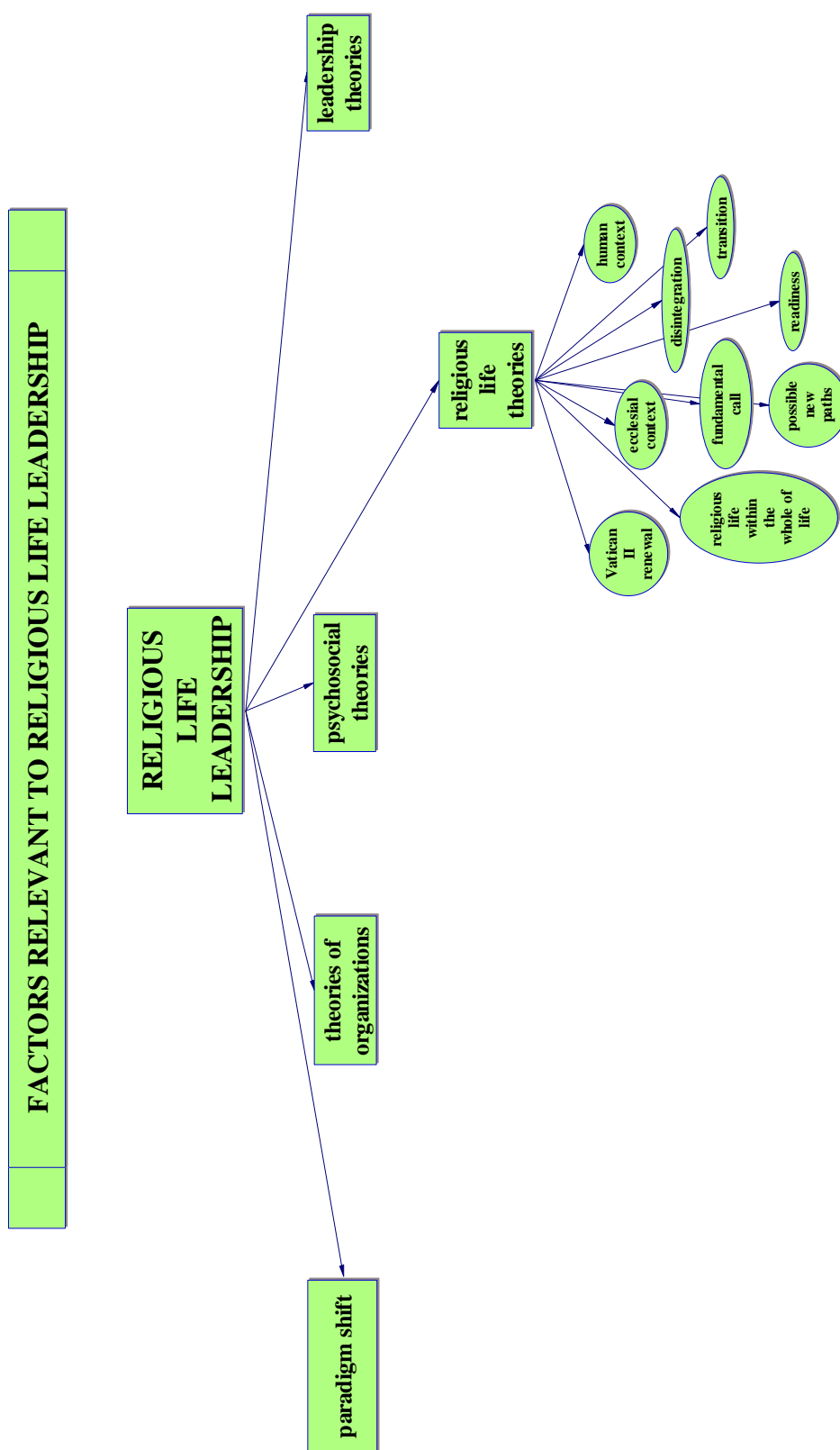


Figure 14 – Religious Life Theories

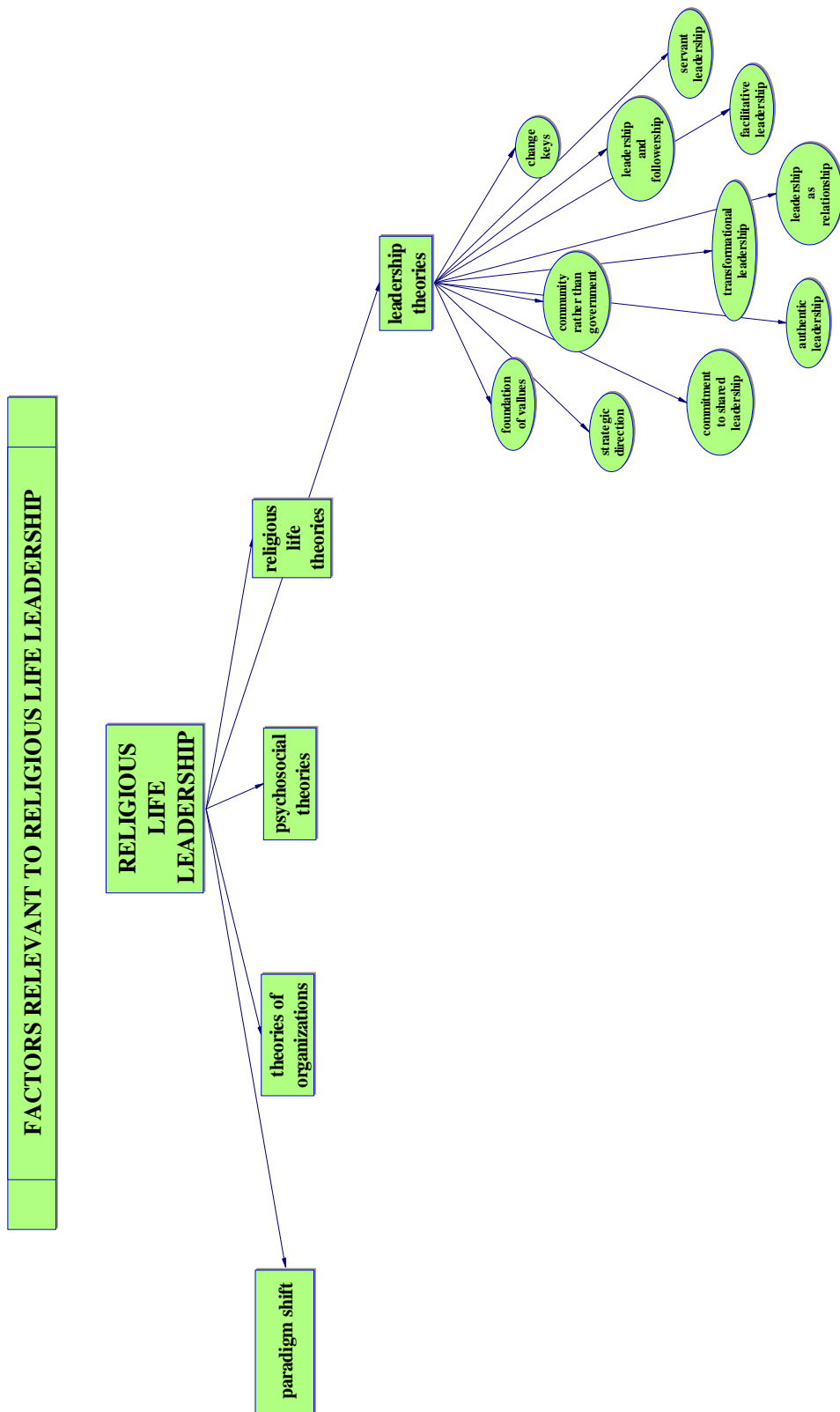


Figure 15 – Leadership Theories

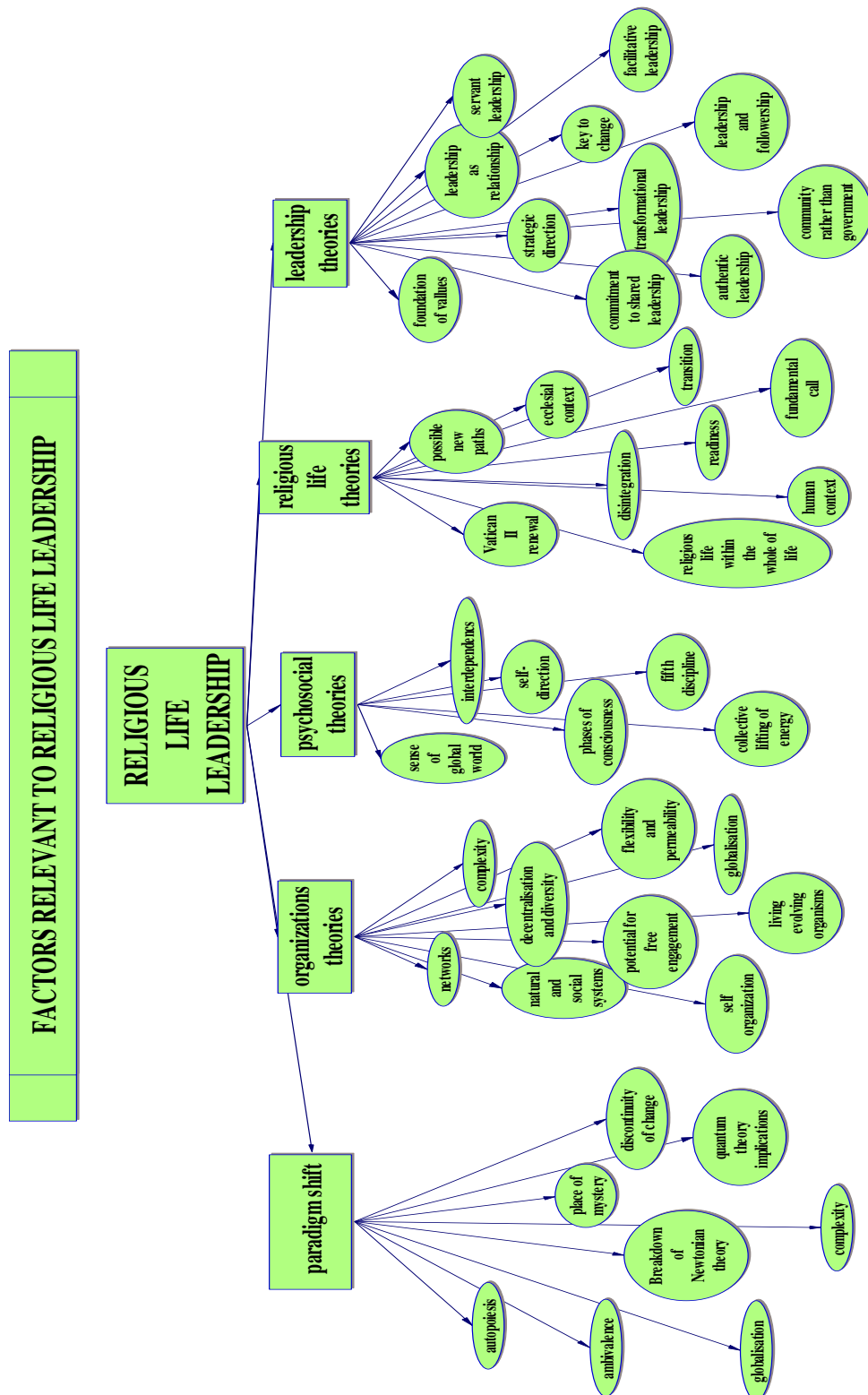


Figure 16 – Factors Relevant to Religious Life Leadership

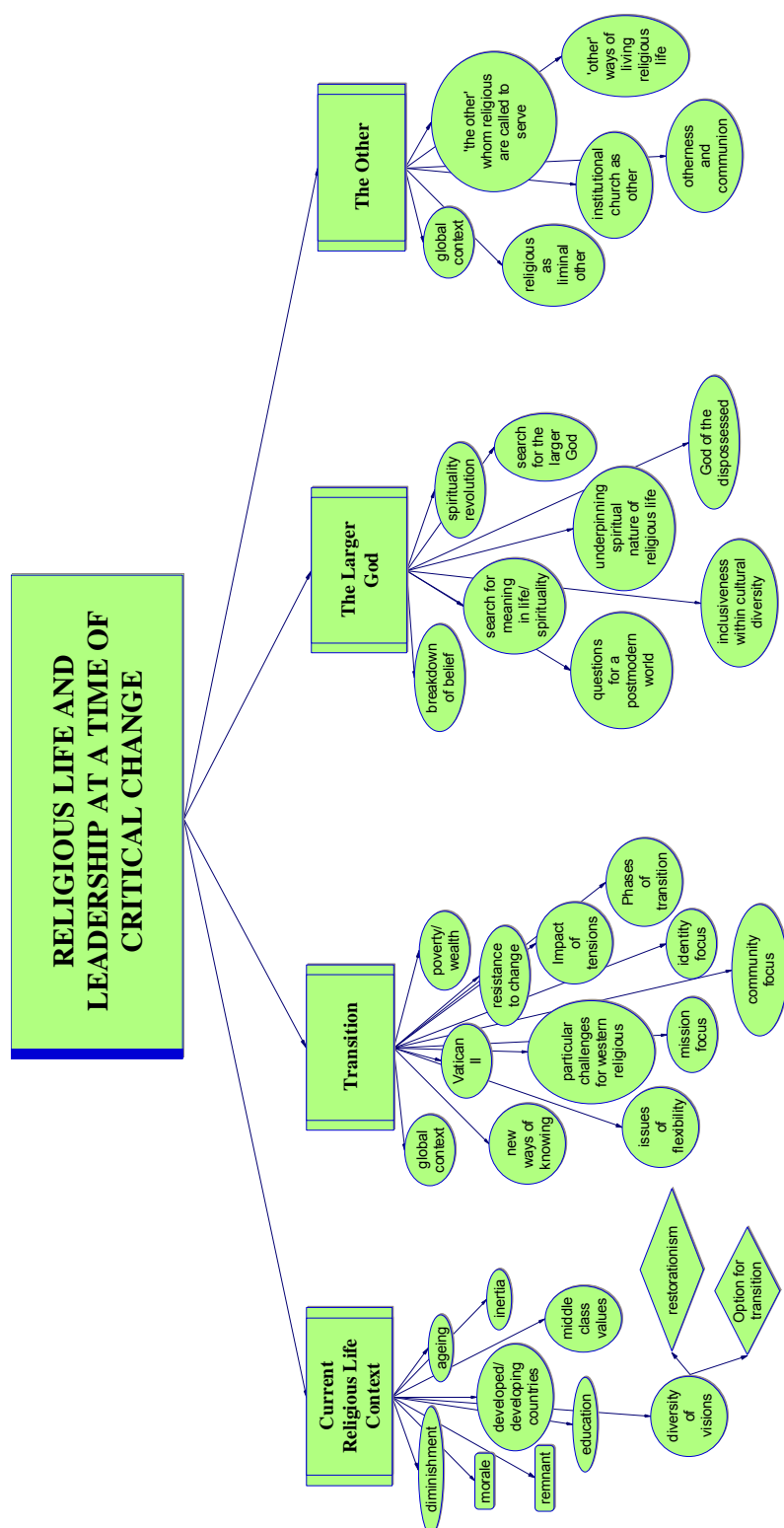


Figure 17 – Emerging Themes Identified Through NVivo