AN EXPLORATION OF A CONTEMPORARY YOUTH SPIRITUALITY AMONG SENIOR STUDENTS IN THREE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Submitted by

Michael Maroney

B Theo, M.A. (Theo), Grad Dip Ed. (R.E), Grad Cert (R.E), M R.Ed.

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AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY
OFFICE OF RESEARCH
LOCKED BAG 4115
FITZROY, VICTORIA 3065
AUSTRALIA

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STATEMENT OF SOURCES

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For my family

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ABSTRACT

The theory and practice of Catholic schooling, particularly with respect to religious education, have the purpose of promoting the spiritual and moral development of young people. This includes a special emphasis on acquainting them with the religious traditions and spirituality of the Catholic Church. Because Catholic schooling has always endeavoured to meet the religious and personal needs of students, there has been an ongoing interest in monitoring the spirituality of youth to inform the development and planning of a relevant and effective religious education. Hence, there has long been an interest within the Catholic education sector in research on youth spirituality.

A significant volume of research has been conducted on the spirituality of contemporary youth within the last decade. This has included a number of major studies in Australia (Crawford and Rossiter, 2006; Flynn and Mok, 2002; Hughes, 2007; Mason et. al. 2005, 2007) and in North America, Smith & Denton (2004). This project reports on an empirical investigation of the views of senior school students in three metropolitan Catholic schools in Australia.

The first part of the study, a literature review, provided an opportunity to review research on the spirituality of young people to give a broad perspective on developments and issues, particularly for young people in westernised cultures. The first section of the review considered the way in which structural development theories have been used to interpret young people's spirituality. The second section explored research related to the components and development of youth spirituality. The third section examined a number of cultural influences on young people's spiritual and moral development.

The second part of the project canvassed the views of all 207 Year 12 students in three metropolitan Catholic high schools about their understanding of spirituality and about the links between their spirituality and the experience of Catholic schooling. Each school has its own gender, charism, and multicultural dynamic. A systematic questionnaire provided quantitative

data, a summary of which was then discussed in focus groups of students in each of the three schools. In this way, students were invited to interpret the empirical data and to attempt to explain *why* young people thought and felt as they did – yielding qualitative data. The focus groups also responded to an innovative use of cartoon caricatures of God which prompted participants to talk about the ways in which they and other teenagers imagined God and God's role in the world and in their own lives.

The study contributed to the current body of research information on youth spirituality, especially in a sample group of senior school students in Catholic schools. The key findings were:

- Evidence that youth spirituality is both eclectic and diverse

- Evidence of some non-religious elements to spirituality; it is not linked exclusively with religion,

- Young people are conscious of their roles in 'choosing' and 'constructing' a spirituality, rather than just accepting a 'traditional' pattern of spirituality.

- Acknowledged a strong parental influence; also the importance of friends.

- While a number of students identified their spirituality as 'religious', the trend was a spirituality that was not as strongly rooted in religious traditions as was the case for previous generations.

- The most prominent image of God for this sample of young people was a God of unconditional love and forgiveness. There was less emphasis on a 'checking' and 'punishing' God that seemed more prominent for earlier generations of Catholics.

In discussing the meaning and significance of the empirical data, a comparison was made between the results of this study and those of five recent major studies of youth spirituality examined in the literature review.

In conclusion, the project explored a number of issues and implications for educators interested in the spiritual and moral education of young people, especially in the Catholic education sector. These included:

- In the light of a significant and continuing increase in both 'individualism' and 'moral self-reliance' in children and adolescents, there is a need for refinement in the ways developmental theories (such as those of Kohlberg and Fowler in particular) are used for interpreting the spiritual and moral development of young people.

- There is a need for further understanding of how cultural factors like 'postmodernity', 'individualism' and 'relativism' affect young people's spirituality, particularly as regards linkage with religious traditions.

- Young people's images of God and their ideas about how God might 'work' within the world are key transcendent elements to youth spirituality.

- Planning for a 'relevant' religious education – which helps young people negotiate contemporary spiritual/moral issues, as well as provide access to spiritual heritage – needs to take into account the findings of research on youth spirituality.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Spirituality has been considered a uniquely human attribute since the time of the Greek philosophers. The idea of 'spirit' gained a religious connotation when the ancient Hebrews wrote of the 'ruach' or 'spirit' of God infused into the human being at birth's first breath. Twenty first century spirituality has morphed into a different concept and is no longer exclusively linked to institutional religion (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006).

In Christianity, there has been a long association between the concepts 'religion' and 'spirituality'. Spirituality was the expression, and the living out of one's religious faith, usually involving a range of religious practices like prayer, reflection and spiritual reading, together with communal worship and liturgy. For many people, their spirituality remained, and still remains today, 'religious' in a traditional sense. But social and cultural changes, particularly in the twenty first century, affected the way spirituality was understood and practiced. Spirituality has morphed into a multiplicity of different forms; it is no longer linked with institutional religion in a relatively exclusive way (Horell, 2004; Crawford & Rossiter, 2006).

Promoting the spiritual and moral development of students has long been a key purpose of Australian schooling, both in government and independent schools. In 1957, the New South Wales (NSW) Wyndham Report proposed the development of "spiritual values" as one of the eight aims for public education (NSW Government, 1957, p. 40). National statements of goals for Australian schooling, the Hobart Declaration (1989) and the Adelaide Declaration (1999), as well as the National Values Education Study (Curriculum Corporation, 2003, 2005), affirmed the importance of personal development aims. But the specific term 'spirituality' has not been used in statements of purposes for Australian public education, probably because there remains a perceived strong link

between spirituality and religion; and promoting students' spiritual development in a 'general' way within public education would not want to imply that this required formal 'religious' education. Somewhat inevitably, there remains a gap between theory and practice as regards the spiritual aims for Australian public education (Crawford & Rossiter, 1993, 2006). In the United Kingdom, this problem has been negotiated successfully with 'spirituality' having a prominent place in educational theory and practice (Rossiter, 1996; Grimmitt, 2000).

In religious schools in Australia, where there has been a longstanding and important link between religion and spirituality, there is a specific interest in promoting young people's spirituality within the context of the religious tradition sponsoring the school (Cleverley, 1978; Rossiter, 1981). This is particularly the case in Catholic schools which continue to give special attention to the purpose of developing young people's spirituality in a Catholic context (Flynn, 1979 Dwyer, 1970; Holohan, 1999). This is notable in the formal religion program, a part of the core curriculum in Catholic schools across all year levels, as well as in the practices of prayer, liturgy and retreats, and in the purpose of having Catholic values and ethos influencing the social and organisational life of the school.

With increasing evidence of a great diversity to spirituality, including a divergence between the concepts spirituality and religion (Bouma, 2006; Zohar & Marshall, 2000), as well as extensive secularization (Mackay, 2000), it has become important for church schools, and in particular, Catholic schools to review their approach to spirituality. To what extent should their efforts remain focused mainly on teaching and practicing a traditional religious spirituality?

The Catholic Bishops Conference of NSW and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) (2007) expressed concerns about the religious effectiveness of Catholic schools because of the continual decline in the numbers of young people participating in parish life and worship. This view tends to presume a causal link between Catholic schooling and Church involvement. On the contrary, some educators argue that Catholic schools may well have excellent and effective programs for educating young people in spirituality, but this cannot by itself persuade youth to become active members of the Church (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Hughes, 2007). This latter view presumes a

great complexity in the factors determining young people's choices regarding church participation.

But whatever view is taken of the links between Catholic schooling and church involvement, a fundamental question remains about the link between the Catholic religion (as experienced in Catholic schools) and young people's spirituality. While there have been a number of recent major research studies on youth spirituality (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Hughes, 2006; Smith & Denton, 2005) they have been more general in focus and have not given special attention to the perceptions of the senior students in Catholic schools, or to their views on the relationships between their religion and their spirituality.

For educators in Catholic schools, ranging from classroom teachers, through the school executive, to system leaders, as well as for parents, and the clergy, there is an ongoing need to appraise research on young people's spirituality and to consider implications for the theory and practice of Catholic schooling and religious education.

The following section identifies a number of the issues related to youth spirituality and Catholic schooling. And these issues point towards the need for more research investigating the contemporary spirituality of senior students in Catholic schools.

1.1   ISSUES RELATED TO SPIRITUALITY AND CATHOLIC SCHOOLING

1.1.1   A NEED FOR REINTERPRETING THE APPLICATION OF DEVELOPMENTAL THEORIES TO THE SPIRITUAL AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Educators, when preparing professionally for involvement in Catholic schooling, have studied the spiritual and moral development of children and adolescents. Since the 1970s, such study has usually drawn on the work of the developmental theorists Piaget (cognitive development and moral reasoning, e.g., Piaget, 1955), Erikson (personal development, e.g., Erikson, 1958, 1965,

1968) and Kohlberg (moral reasoning, e.g., Kohlberg 1984), as well as drawing on the work of Fowler (faith development, e.g., Fowler, 1981, 1987), and to a lesser extent Kegan (development of the 'self', e.g., Kegan, 1982), and to a limited extent Oser (belief development, e.g., Oser 1991).

These theories have been used as lenses for analysing and interpreting how young people find their path through personal development. The pathways envisioned in these theories tend to presume particular, traditional views of what constitutes the ideal of maturity, and in turn this includes a constructive relationship with traditional community beliefs and values. However, the understandings of young people's spirituality emerging from recent research suggest that their construction of a personal spirituality is often far from what might be regarded as 'traditional'. Hence, there is a need to review aspects of some of the developmental theories to take the new situation into account.

The following note about the development of moral reasoning illustrates the problem.

An important component of a Catholic school's endeavour to educate young people in spirituality involves the development of moral reasoning. Catholic schools set out to promote a strong sense of Catholic morality that is founded on the doctrines of the Church (Pope John Paul II, 1997a; Pope John Paul II, 1997b). Catholic education is guided by the aim to develop in young people a worldview based on the ethical and moral standards of the Catholic Church (Bishops of NSW & ACT, 2007).

In addition, the religious program at school intends to teach the traditional Catholic view of the spiritual/eternal consequences of breaking the laws and dictates of God and the Church. However, some students feel that this is an education in a set of ethical standards that are outdated, irrelevant, and that do not evidently relate to their lives (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Hughes, 2007). The moral laws of the Church may be perceived as 'counter-cultural' to young people, and at odds with their own conscience (McLaughlin, 2005).

Increasingly, students are developing their own sense of right and wrong apparently based on the acceptance of personal and moral relativism, with traditional religious values not accorded the respect they were given formerly. This growing contemporary attitude toward moral decision making may require some adjustment to the way that progress through Kohlberg's stages of moral reasoning is interpreted (Kohlberg, 1984).

This growing sense of 'moral individualism' among young people may also have an impact on how other developmental theories are applied when analysing youth spirituality – for example the faith-development theory of James Fowler (1981).

The need for a review of this application of developmental theories in the light of increasing moral individualism is also reinforced by other socio-cultural trends such as secularisation, and the effects of cultural postmodernity. Young people may not be thinking and developing in the same ways as their counterparts did last century when these theories were first devised.

1.1.2 SOCIO-CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL'S ROLE IN EDUCATING SPIRITUALITY: INCREASED SECULARISATION, A DECLINING CHURCH, AND THE CONTINUING POPULARITY OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

A significant proportion of parents and students bring a different attitude to the Catholic school's religious program than was the case in the past. Their views may well differ from those officially proclaimed by Catholic school authorities. If there is not a congruence in belief and practice between home and school, then the students' overall perception and understanding of the role religious education plays may be diffuse (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Jackson, 2004; Rymarz, 2003).

In addition, studies of the beliefs and practices of the parents of Catholic school students point to an increasing secularisation and disengagement from the Church (Rymarz, 2001; McLaughlin, 2005). Contemporary society is experiencing an increased modernisation that has impacted heavily upon the more traditional attitudes and practices of the past (Dixon, 2005).

Secularisation has contributed to a significant decline in religious adherence throughout western, industrialised societies (Brown, 2006; Crawford & Rossiter, 2006).   The Catholic Church in Australia has experienced a steady decline in Church attendance and parish involvement for each of the past four census surveys (Dixon, 2005). However, parents, in increasing numbers, are sending their children to Catholic schools. Thus, there is 'a booming Church school system' in a 'declining Church' – and this may be the real difficulty that Church authorities are trying to comprehend; they hope that the Catholic school system can be effective in revitalising the Church. But many of the enthusiastic patrons of Catholic schools are reluctant to commit themselves to active Church membership.

The Catholic school system in Australia has experienced continued growth with new Catholic secondary schools being established almost yearly (Tinsey, 1998). The reasons why parents choose to send their children to a Catholic school appear to be based mainly on an overall perception of a higher quality education, rather than on the religious component of the curriculum (McLaughlin, 2005). The largest recent increase in enrolments has been of students who are not Catholic (Bishops of NSW & the ACT, 2007).

If a significant number of parents are sending their children to Catholic schools, primarily for the quality of education, then the religious education program may not be supported and reinforced in the home. If Catholic schools have as their principal goal; 'the formation of Christian disciples, with appropriate world view, character and behavior (Bishops of NSW & the ACT, 2007, p. 16)' then this intention to develop young adults with more traditional Catholic beliefs and practice may fall well short of the situation and needs of most of the students in Catholic schools.

It is not that the handing on of the traditional religious heritage is unimportant. But a religious program with this as its exclusive purpose may set Catholic schools up for a judgment of failure to achieve this goal because no matter what the school may do, it will be unable to change the relatively secular spirituality of students and their parents. It may be both unrealistic and unfair to judge the spiritual effectiveness of the Catholic school because it cannot reverse cultural trends in secularisation and lack of engagement with religion.

There is a natural difficulty for a school representing a religious tradition, with a strong traditional religious spirituality, in working out what is the best way of offering an education in spirituality to young people that will do justice to its connections with the religious tradition while at the same time taking into account the increased complexity of social and cultural life.

Study of the personal spirituality of school students and of its links with the religious tradition will be important for reconceptualising the Catholic school's role in education in spirituality.

1.2 THE IMPACT OF INDIVIDUALISM AND CULTURAL POSTMODERNITY ON YOUTH SPIRITUALITY

The term 'cultural postmodernity' has been used to describe the socio-cultural situation in Western industrialised countries where there is widespread questioning of the value of metanarratives (like religion) and a strong individualism in the way people construct their own meaning (Drane, 2000; Mckay, 2000). In turn, this cultural mood affects spirituality; it tends to shift people's attention away from the traditional religious emphases on beliefs and acceptance of a religious worldview, towards a more individualistic, personal emphasis on the importance of spiritual experiences, and of making sense of life 'here and now' rather than in terms of its 'preparation for an afterlife' (Horell, 2004; Hughes, 2007; Crawford & Rossiter, 2006.)

Other aspects of cultural postmodernity – complexity, existentialism, pluralism, multiculturalism and relativism, as well as uncertainty about the reliability of knowledge and moral standards – also have a shaping influence on sense of self, search for meaning, connectedness with community, and moral/personal development.

1.3 THE FORMATION OF A GOD CONCEPT

A central aspect of spirituality is the sense of the transcendent. Research on youth spirituality has given attention to levels of religious belief, including belief in God. Recent major studies report that most young people believe in God (Hughes, 2007; Mason, Singleton & Webber, 2007; Smith

& Denton, 2005; Flynn & Mok, 2002). However, there has been little research that has looked in detail at young people's images of God. Of these studies, most examined the images of God in middle-adolescents and primary school students only (Duffy, 2004).

More data are needed on how senior school students think about God and about how this belief functions within their personal spirituality. Such research could also investigate the extent to which traditional Christian theology affects young people's images of God. This could help show how the worldview of senior students is constructed, and what impact the Catholic school experience might have on their spirituality.

1.4 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This two part research study of the spirituality of young people will address the issues noted above as well as some related research questions. The first part of the project will be a documentary/analytical study of the literature related to youth spirituality. The second part will be a qualitative empirical study of the views of a sample of senior school students in metropolitan Catholic schools.

Three main themes will underpin the whole project as it explores the area of contemporary youth spirituality.

- Perspective on young people's spirituality from developmental theories
- Components and characteristics of young people's spirituality
- The influences of culture, especially a 'youth culture' on young people's spirituality

1.4.1 PART 1. DOCUMENTARY, ANALYTICAL STUDY

1.4.2 MORAL AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

The first part of the review of literature examines the construction of youth spirituality from a developmental perspective, and it considers the impact of the contemporary cultural/societal situation on some theories of linear maturation.

1.4.3 COMPONENTS OF CONTEMPORARY SPIRITUALITY

The review then investigates contemporary spirituality, and the relationship between Religion and spirituality. It explores what has been written about the efficacy of Catholic/religious education and the passing on of the faith tradition, in the light of the less than traditional spirituality that is becoming more common among young people as well as adults.

1.4.4 THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE AND YOUTH CULTURE

Because young people's point of contact with a spiritual/moral dimension to life is often conditioned by their existential interest in lifestyle (Hughes, 2007), a study of youth spirituality needs to consider trends in contemporary culture such as consumerism, multiculturalism, and the influence of television in terms of their impact on youth spirituality.

1.5 PART 2 - QUALITATIVE, EMPIRICAL PART OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Part two of the research will include a survey questionnaire and focus group questions used in the qualitative, empirical part of the study. The following questions informed both parts of the research project and served as foundation for the research instruments.

1.5.1   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does the construction of a contemporary youth spirituality relate to the stages of religious and moral development proposed in various developmental theories?
2. How do senior school students understand the concept of spirituality in their lives?
3. From what aspects of life do senior school students in Catholic schools derive personal meaning and purpose?
4. How have some aspects of contemporary culture influenced the spirituality of senior school students?
5. What factors are contributing to the relationship between senior school students and the Catholic Church?

It is important to note that the purpose of this study is *not* to highlight the aspects of traditional Catholic beliefs that senior students are accepting or rejecting. The focus is on the articulation of the characteristics of life that help forge a meaningful spirituality. This includes an investigation on the extent to which young people refer to their own religious tradition in their construction of spirituality. Another important feature of this project is an exploration of senior students' images of God. This will involve identifying ideas and concepts of the divine that are personally relevant, and whether or not these endorse traditional/doctrinal notions of God.

If the teaching of Religion, and the overall thrust of the Catholic school are to be relevant to the needs of young people then Catholic education must take into account their contemporary spirituality. Identifying aspects of Catholic belief and practice that students are identifying with, as well as influences in lifestyle, cultural factors, the search for meaning, and identity development will all be important in developing a picture of youth spirituality.

The study will attempt to explore youth spirituality from a holistic perspective that encompasses the 'what', 'how', 'when' and 'why' surrounding its many facets. Any critical exploration of spirituality, aspects of culture, and the beliefs and practices of young people needs to respect and

acknowledge the many dimensions which are a part of, and which impact on, the consciousness, beliefs and attitudes of senior school students in Catholic schools.

This study is important for Catholic education, and it may lead to useful implications for theory and practice, because it will try to explore the essence of what young people find meaningful in their lives. It will look at the worldviews of students while trying to see if their Catholic education is regarded as a significant contributing influence on their spirituality. Increasing the knowledge base in this regard will assist educators to better focus their teaching, pastoral care, and mentoring energies.

1.6 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

The introductory chapter briefly establishes the location of the research and how this project responds to particular issues that emerged from the literature in relation to a contemporary youth spirituality. **Chapter 2** reviews the literature pertinent to the purpose of the study. The review of literature is organised under three main sections in line with the three key themes of this study noted above. Section one examines spirituality from a developmental perspective. Section two explores a number of interpretive and empirical studies on contemporary spirituality, and the various forms in which it is defined and expressed. While section three looks at how some aspects of culture may be impacting on young people's life experience, their worldview and spirituality.

Chapter 3 explains the design and methodology of the empirical part of the study. Details of the research methods are described. Within the interpretive philosophy, an epistemological position of constructionism was adopted because it takes into account the focus on young people's interpretation of their own spirituality as well as the potential impact of involvement in the research on the participant's construction of meaning. The perspective of symbolic interactionism helps acknowledge the influence of context on the participants' spirituality.

Chapter 4 presents the data collected from the questionnaire and the focus group interviews. This chapter also includes the responses of students to a number of caricatures portraying images of God.

Chapter 5 discusses the meaning and significance of the results presented in chapter four.

Finally, **chapter 6** presents the conclusions from the study. It includes a synthesis of this research project's findings in comparison with those of a number of major studies in young people's spirituality conducted over the past decade. The final chapter also highlights some key conclusions gained from this study, and discusses the implications for the teaching profession, Catholic education, religious education, and further research on youth spirituality.

CHAPTER 2

Part 1 DOCUMENTARY ANALYTICAL STUDY OF YOUTH SPIRITUALITY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to present a critical synthesis of the scholarly literature relative to this study.   An investigation of literature in three main areas of the research project is included, and consists of;

- Perspective on young people's spirituality from developmental theories
- Components and characteristics of young people's spirituality
- The influences of culture, especially a 'youth culture' on young people's spirituality

Each section contains a number of sub themes that relate to the major areas of the study.   A brief summary of insights is included at the end of each topic.   These conclusions were used to inform the research questions and the data gathering, as well to serve as reference points for interpreting the empirical findings.

This study adopted the theoretical framework of a systematic literature review in an interpretive context.   This method of construction synthesises ideas from the literature related to youth spirituality in an attempt to analyse contemporary youth consciousness.

Taken together, the three underlying themes of this research project provide a conceptual framework for the literature review.   This framework is illustrated in Figure 2.1.   It helps give direction and cohesion to the review by 'painting the big picture' of youth spirituality.   Relationships between the themes are highlighted.

Fig. 2.1 Conceptual framework for analysis of literature related to youth spirituality

Theme 1

Perspective from developmental theories

1 Perspective on Spirituality from developmental theories
2 Faith development (Fowler)
3 Moral reasoning (Kohlberg)

Theme 2

Components & characteristics of spirituality

1 Morphing of spirituality
2 Catholic spirituality
3 Contemporary theological developments
4 Catholic belief and practice
   Alternative spiritualities
6 Pentecostalism

Theme 3

Cultural influences & Youth Culture

1 Search for meaning
2 Secularisation
3 Consumerism
4 Influence of television
   Multiculturalism
6 Multi-Faith Society

An interpretation of Youth Spirituality in the context of its formative influences

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2.2 SPIRITUALITY AND DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY

2.2.1 THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF SPIRITUALITY

While there is an extensive literature on spirituality, much of which is beyond the limited scope of this study, the following summary of recent trends was drawn from a sample of publications.

The word 'spirituality' has traditionally held a Christian connotation of personal religious practices and worship (Rossiter, 2005). Gradually, the notion of spirituality broke free from the confines of the Christian tradition and came to be applied more readily to other faith traditions as well (O'Murchu, 1997). Contemporary research suggests that spirituality is moving away from an identification with institutional religion, and is increasingly concerned with an individual's sense of connectedness with self, others, the world or universe, and with the transcendent (Hill, 2004; Crawford & Rossiter, 2006). As Drane noted:

> As a result a dazzling and bewildering array of different spiritualities compete for attention, each of them claiming to offer something that will help us find our souls again and chart a safe course into the new culture of the future (Drane, 2000, p. 10).

Contemporary spirituality is also understood to be holistic and not limited to a one-dimensional definition. It is a dynamic wholeness of self in which the self is at one with itself and with the whole of creation (Zohar & Marshall, 2000, p. 124). Spirituality requires people to regard others, each with his or her own sense of interconnectedness (Tacey, 2003). Recent literature has also described spirituality as an intrinsic and primal quality of what it means to be human (Tacey, 2000; Hill, 2004; Zohar & Marshall, 2000).

Some scholars regard spirituality as 'ontological' because it belongs to every human's being (Zohar & Marshall 2000; McDonald, 2005).   From this perspective, it is preferable to refer to people as 'spiritual beings who have a human life', than 'human beings who have a spiritual life' (Groome 1998; Tacey, 2003).

A number of scholars regard 'transcendence' as a key dimension to spirituality.   As well as being embedded in the individual, it 'reaches to the beyond'.   Different types of spirituality diverge on the question of transcendence – about whether it involves a 'beyond', and if there is a 'beyond', what is that like.   The stance taken on this question leads to a divergence between religious and non-religious spiritualities (Fuller, 2001; Hill, 2004; Hughes, 2007).

Several studies have considered that spirituality is a characteristic that has evolved in harmony with other inherent human structures and has biological foundations (Newberg & d'Aquili, 2001; Parsons, 2005; Fontana, 2003).   Spirituality is "rooted in life itself, and thus has biological and evolutionary origins" (Zohar & Marshall, 2000, p.   88).   Spirituality is regarded as a component part of the human being that allows the person to connect with the world and is the 'glue' that binds the interconnectedness of personal relationships (Tacey, 2003; Hill, 2004).

SUMMARY: THE NATURE OF SPIRITUALITY

Key ideas and themes:

- Increasingly, there is a divergence and a distinction between Religion and spirituality.
- An emergence in non-religious, or 'secular' spiritualities
- Less dependence on formality and religious doctrines (evidence of cultural postmodernity acknowledging a degree of uncertainty about personal and spiritual knowledge)
- Less trust in the 'truth' of religious meanings
- Spirituality is concerned with the interconnectedness and relational aspects of life
- Spirituality has a transcendent dimension

> **YOUTH SPIRITUALITY** (In addition to the above)
>
> - Where there is a relatively non-religious spirituality, lifestyle experiences and interpersonal relationships are highly valued

Moral reasoning and decision-making may be more influenced by sources such as family and friends, than by religious moral prescriptions and institutional doctrines

2.2.2 YOUTH SPIRITUALITY AND THE DEVELOPMENTAL THEORIES

The idea of spirituality as a developmental process, similar to the developmental processes described by the developmental theorists, has recent origins (Erikson, 1994; Parsons, 2005). Traditional theology tended to regard spirituality as either a non-developmental fixed aspect of the human experience, or a process of development (Hill, 2004). This 'spirituality development' was traditionally described in terms of three stages; the purgative, a movement away from sin; the illuminative, progression of virtue; and the unitive, where one is united with God (Helminiak, 1996; Parsons, 2005).

Recent writings about the development of spirituality emphasise connections between culture, the search for meaning, and spirituality (Erikson, 1994; Rossiter, 2005). Spirituality was defined as a search for significance (meaning) through relating to something (cultural) that is considered to be sacred (Rossiter, 2005; Parsons, 2005). The experience of spirituality was considered to be the enhanced connection of self with something that is defining, resulting in the feeling of wholeness or joy (Erikson, 1994).

Self-transcendence has been considered to be a prime criterion in spiritual development and as the central principle needed to explain spiritual development in a non-theological context (Helminiak, 1987; Rossiter, 2004; Tacey, 2003; Hill, 2004). This sense of being connected to something larger than the self was regarded as a common denominator

underpinning spiritual experience as adolescents strove to find where they 'fitted in'(Berk, 2001; Erikson, 1994; Parsons, 2005).   As far as identification with formal religion was concerned, there appeared to be a relationship between adolescent faith maturity and parental, congregational, and peer influences (Hughes, 2007; Smith & Denton, 2005). While communal influence on personal/spiritual development was found to be minimal, the influence of parents was more marked (Smith & Denton, 2005).

Even though young people may often appear to be non-conformist, it would seem that, in their quest to be different, they possess an overriding sub-conscious need to conform (Berk 2001; Erikson, 1994; Fischer & Lazerson, 1984).   Young people seek out groups in which they might find and express who they are (Rymarz, 2003).   This is an indication of the community aspect of spirituality which is important to many (Rossiter, 2005).   They need to feel a part of a culture and society in which they can connect and feel intimate with, and loved by, the people they value and consider role models (Berk 2001; Fischer, & Lazerson, 1984).

The non conformity may be interpreted as a coping mechanism based on a perception that cultural inconsistencies exist which they cannot resolve or identify (Berk, 2001; Rossiter, 2005; Alexander, 2000).   Inculturation has been considered to be an integral part of formative development in many Church youth (Smith & Denton, 2005; Berk, 2001).

Immersion in popular culture can be problematic for the spiritual development of young people because the world of their experiences is in a constant state of flux.   This contemporary situation of diversity and eclecticism means that there has been a decline in their readiness to listen and to absorb traditions and spiritualities of the past (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Tacey, 2003).   Compounding the difficulties inherent in a world with moving value foundations is the make up of the 21st century family unit.   The family dynamic is taking on different dimensions that inhibit meaningful, intimate family relationships where the handing on of identity and tradition can take place (Dixon, 2003; Tacey, 2003; Berk, 2001; Kaldor, Hughes, Castle & Bellamy, 2004).

Current theories of spiritual development roughly correspond to, and appear logically consistent with, models of ego, cognitive, moral, and psychosocial development (Zohar & Marshall, 2000; Crawford & Rossiter, 2006).   The theories of Piaget, Kohlberg, Erikson, Kegan, Fowler and Oser all have own their distinctive viewpoints on personal development (Piaget, 1955; Erikson, 1994, & Kegan, 1982; Oser, 1991).   Within the limited scope of this study, attention will be given to the theories relating to 'faith development' (Fowler) and 'moral reasoning' (Kohlberg).

2.2.3 FAITH DEVELOPMENT AND SPIRITUALITY

Faith development is the process of developing physically, cognitively, and emotionally in the understanding of a faith tradition (Fowler, 1981).   Building on the work of Piaget in cognitive development and Kohlberg in moral reasoning, Fowler devised a stage theory of faith development based on a study of 359 adults (Fowler, 1981).   Yet he displays concern with regard to,

> Their restrictive understanding of the role of imagination in knowing, their neglect of symbolic processes generally and the related lack of attention to unconscious structuring processes other than those constituting reasoning (p. 103).

Despite some limitations of Fowler's study (an Anglo- Judeo-Christian bias Fowler, 1981); it contributes to an understanding of faith development by articulating how people construct knowledge and meaning in life through their experience as they mature (Colby, & Damon, 1993).

Fowler's model includes the factors of biological maturation, emotional and cognitive development, and the influence of the cultural context (Fowler, 1991; 1995).   It is established on four assumptions

- Firstly, that human beings are created to strive towards an ever deepening and evolving understanding and communion with the Divine.

- Secondly, that people live with freedom of choice; exercise of this freedom may promote communion with God, or it may be used to distance the individual from God.   Competing influences of society/culture and secularisation impact on the growth of spirituality (Wilber, 2000; Parsons, 2005).
- Thirdly, the formative processes of faith and identity development interact within the context of the community and its symbols, languages, rituals and liturgies (Parsons, 2005).
- Fourthly, faith evolves and emerges gradually through difficult sequences of developmental construction (Fowler, 1981).

Whether or not spiritual development unfolds in a series of linear stages is a matter of some debate (Wilber, 2000; Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Moran, 1983, 1987).   Also pertinent here is the operative definition of spirituality (Zohar & Marshall, 2000). Cultures as well as individuals develop spiritually (Wilber, 2000).   Spiritual development may unfold in overlapping and interweaving levels "resulting in a meshwork or dynamic spiral of consciousness unfolding (p.   7)." Each level includes and expands on the development of earlier stages and moves to greater integration.

Fowler's theory has been very influential on the thinking of Catholic religious educators since the late 1970s.   His theory has provided a notion of maturity in faith that increases at higher stages of development.   Fowler also promoted the idea of a 'searching faith' that takes into account the complexity of faith development during the stage of adolescence. The spirituality of young people during this phase in their lives can be individualistic; reconciling the traditions taught through parents and educators with the search for a personal, meaningful faith (Fowler, 1981).

The spiritual and faith development of young people is a primary goal of the Catholic school (Pope John Paul II, 1997).   While the importance of the overall notion of faith development is evident in the widespread prominence of the term (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006), religious educators appear not to have given a lot of attention to the development of 'faith competencies' as Fowler defines them.

In the Catholic school environment students are educated and nurtured in the traditions of the Church. Students are able to access teachers and priests who are the 'face' of the Catholic faith. In addition, students receive thirteen years of Religious Education that provides them with an understanding of the history, beliefs, and practices of the Church. Therefore, a large amount of time and resources are invested in fostering a sense of connection with history and faith. Educating young people 'in faith' has usually been regarded as having two components:

- educating them 'in *the* faith', referring to the connection with the tradition.
- educating to promote their own personal faith development.

A number of the key research studies (referred to later) regard parents as the primary source of faith development for young people (Hughes, 2007; Mason, Webber & Singleton, 2006; Smith & Denton, 2005). These studies confirm that young people, in the main, are taking on board the faith of their parents. This is significant because it raises questions about how 'individualistic' young people's moral development is while at the same time being influenced by parents.

Young people's faith development is parentally guided and nurtured, particularly as regards core values and fundamental attitudes to religion. But there has also been significant divergence between the spirituality of young people and their parents, especially where youth spirituality is not as traditional as that of their parents. It is within this complex interplay of influences that questions about the impact of the Catholic educational experience need to be considered. Hughes (2007) and Mason et al. (2006) suggest that it may not be having a significant influence. This study will set out to collect some data on how young people see their school's religious educational experience affecting their spirituality.

The next aspect of the personal growth for young people in Catholic schools to be considered here `is the ongoing development of morality (Rossiter, 2004; Kohlberg, 1984).

2.2.4 THE DEVELOPMENT OF MORAL REASONING AND SPIRITUALITY

The key conceptual premise from the perspective of theories about the development of moral reasoning is that incremental stages underpin the development of youth spirituality (Newberg, d'Aquili, & Rause, 2001; Tisdell, Tolliver, & Villa, 2001; Wright, 1997). On the basis of his comprehensive research, Kohlberg identified six stages of moral reasoning grouped into three major levels (Kohlberg, 1984). Each level represented a fundamental shift in the social-moral perspective of the individual. At the first level he proposed the pre-conventional level, whereby a concrete, individual perspective characterizes a person's moral judgments (Kohlberg, 1984).

The Stage 2 orientation focuses on the instrumental, pragmatic value of an action. Reciprocity is of the form, 'you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours' (Kohlberg, 1984). The Golden Rule becomes, 'If someone hits you, you hit them back.' Individuals at Stage 3 are aware of shared feelings, agreements, and expectations, which take primacy over individual interests (Malinowski & Smith, 1985). Stage 4 marks the shift from defining what is right in terms of local norms and role expectations to defining right in terms of the laws and norms established by the larger social system (Malinowski & Smith, 1985). Significantly, only stage 5, has received substantial observed support (Malinowski & Smith, 1985). Stage 6 remains as a theoretical endpoint, which rationally follows from the preceding 5 stages. In essence this last level of moral judgment entails consistent applications of self-chosen ethical principles (Kohlberg, 1984).

Critiques of Kohlberg's approach find flaws inherent in this model (Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989). Malinowski and Smith set out to test Kohlberg's claims concerning cognition and action, the link between moral judgment and moral behaviour. An experiment based on people's inclination to cheat was proposed to test a number of Kohlberg's premises. The results supported the hypothesis that higher moral reasoning resulted in a lower frequency of cheating (Malinowski & Smith, 1985). Carol Gilligan

(1982), a student of Kohlberg's, also critiqued these stages, stating that Kohlberg had only studied privileged, white men and boys. In addition, the predominantly male view of individual rights and rules (a notion of justice) was taken as the overarching value perspective for the theory. This tended to neglect the alternative perspective often taken by women which put a higher store on 'caring' human relationships (Malinowski & Smith, 1985).

More recently, longitudinal studies conducted by the Kohlberg research group began to reveal anomalies in the stage sequence (Turiel, 2002). Researchers using Kohlberg's matrix endeavoured to work through these variances through modifying the stage descriptors (Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989). Further research found no plausible ways of reconciling the original framework with the new statistical data; this has prompted moves to review the theory itself (Turiel, 2002). Subsequently, 'domain theory' was proposed as an alternative to Kohlberg's original theory of moral reasoning. Within domain theory, a division is applied between the child's developing concepts of morality, and other factors such as social and cultural influences (Turiel, 2002). Kohlberg's research was concerned with a person's capacity to reason about moral issues. The principal focus is not moral content, but the structure of reasoning.

Most significant for this research study is the idea that young people have a natural sense of justice, but their characteristic moral thinking may be different from that of adults (Parsons, 2005). Kohlberg's theory implies that, if they are not stimulated to advance from lower stages, they may not progress towards decisions based on internalised principles (Turiel, 2002). This study will endeavour to investigate linkage between moral reasoning and spirituality.

2.2.5 SUMMARY OF SECTION ON MORAL AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS:

- Moral and faith development, as aspects of personal/spiritual development, are interpreted by structural developmental theories as progressing through a series of linear, sequential stages.
- Parents, as the primary educators and nurturers, are foundational in their influence on the faith development of children.   The role-modeling pattern of their influence may change for young people during adolescence.
- A more individualistic 'personal' style amongst the young may affect the processes of faith development – with consequent implications for the roles of home and school.
- The notion of maturity implied in the developmental theories, particularly as regards moral reasoning and faith development, tends to presume that individuals start with a very self-centred focus, and then proceed through stages which are more *community* and *law* conscious.
- Progress in spiritual/moral development involves movement towards a more internalised value system where adherence to laws and principles includes an internal affirmation of those values
- Questions can be asked about how a heightened sense of individualism among the young may affect their progress through developmental stages. These questions will have educational implications.

The conclusions noted above will inform the data collection phase of the study.   In particular, it will canvass the views of students about their own spiritual development in a way that will address some of the links between the developmental theories and young people's spirituality.

2.3 COMPONENTS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S SPIRITUALITY

2.3.1 MORPHING OF SPIRITUALITY

While there is a steady decline in the number of students labelling themselves 'religious' (Flynn & Mok, 2001; Hill, 2004; Hanvey, 2005), this does not necessarily mean that they lack a 'spirituality'.   However, the word 'spirituality' itself is not a word that many young people would readily use to describe the spiritual/moral dimensions of their lives;

but the word 'spiritual' is apparently more acceptable, indicating an awareness of this dimension (Rossiter, 2005); it also encountered in film and television and appears more relevant to their lives (Bridger, 2001).   Many children find it difficult to express their spirituality or feel embarrassed because they felt it is not socially acceptable to do so (Hay & Nye, 1998).

Some young people regard their spirituality as inherently religious, while others identify (more or less strongly) with the Christian tradition without drawing significantly from its traditions of theology and scripture (Rossiter, 2005; Hill, 2004; Tacey, 2003; Hanvey, 2005).   Belief in God and the afterlife is a common feature of youth spirituality in Australia (Engebretson, 2003; Mason, Webber & Singleton, 2006; Hughes 2007).   This transcendent worldview based on the traditional religious 'bigger picture' can nurture and provide meaning in life (Smith & Mason, 2005; Bridger, 2001; MacDonald, 2005). Conversely, the secular attitude to the metaphysical is acquired from a range of societal values (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Jackson, 2004; MacDonald, 2005).   A nationalistic consciousness, as well as identification with a cultural group assists in the building of a personal spiritual perception (Austin, 2002).

These developments in perceptions of the spiritual and the religious have had major implications on the institutional churches in Australia.   The Catholic Church has experienced a decline in numbers attending Sunday Eucharist (Dixon, 2003; McLaughlin, 2005).   Young people make up only 6% of Sunday's congregations (Bellamy & Castle, 2004; McLaughlin, 2005).   Furthermore, the impact of the Second Vatican Council, and its reforms, has also been a major force of change in attitude and practice amongst believers (Bridger, 2001; Rossiter, 2004; Rymarz, 1999).   The departure of young people from formal Church worship can be linked to the belief and resonation with spirituality and the search for meaning in experience and not so much within traditional sources (Mason, Webber & Singleton, 2006; Hughes, 2007; Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, Alexander, 2000; Hanvey, 2005).

Students are not attending Sunday Eucharist in large numbers but personal prayer is somewhat important to young people and is used sporadically (Hughes, 2007; Mason et

al., 2006; Smith & Denton, 2005).   It is done privately and involves an informal
conversation and is often petitional.   It involves dialogue and reflecting and thinking
about life and its transcendent dimension.   In contrast, young people are not feeling drawn
to corporate worship and ritual prayer (Hughes, 2007).   If a spiritual means of expression
is relevant, sustaining, and enjoyable, then students will try it out, or participate in it.   The
only constant is that it must be personally pragmatic.   This recent attitude to spirituality
means that the Catholic communitarian consciousness of the past, with all its inherent
layers of tradition and dogmatic practice is no longer as relevant to young people as it was
formerly (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006).

2.3.2 CHANGES IN CATHOLIC SPIRITUALITY SINCE THE 1950s

To understand the sort of 'spiritual environment' in Catholic schools in which its
contemporary pupils are educated, and to be able to locate and identify aspects of youth
spirituality with respect to Catholic spirituality generally, there is a need to examine the
way Catholic spiritualty has changed since the 1950s.   The changes have resulted in a
very different spirituality prominent within Catholic schools by contrast with what was the
case in the 1950s.   Because it is beyond the scope of this study to document details of
changes in Catholic spirituality, this section will attempt to summarise only and to identify
key characteristics and trends.

Despite the danger of oversimplification, this summary helps provide a 'background' to
the interpretation of youth spiritualty as far as it develops within the context of a
mainstream Catholic spirituality as practiced in Catholic schools.   This does not imply
that students will automatically subsume the prevailing spirituality within their school; but
it does identify an important spiritual, environmental factor.   In one sense, it defines the
community spiritual 'baseline' of the Catholic school.   How young people perceive and
respond to this 'resource' of Catholic spirituality is a key research question.

Prior to 1960, the term spiritual usually meant an association with a mystical approach to religion and worship practice (Driedger, 1999). For Catholics, the 'spiritual life' was a term that applied to all, but it had special pertinence to those who were in the priesthood or who were members of religious orders. Catholic lay spirituality prior to the 1960s was a mix of popular piety and religious order spirituality (Rossiter, 2005). It was community based and steeped in imitation of the actions and psychological/theological deliberations of the saints and intellectuals of the past (Hill, 2004; Alexander, 2000).

After the Second Vatican Council, and influenced by many cultural factors, there was a significant change in the focus and style of Catholic spirituality, both in Australia and elsewhere (Crawford & Rossiter, 1988, 2006). Distinctly Catholic institutions such as the Catholic Institute of Counselling, seminaries, conferences, retreats adult education programs and study groups contributed to the spiritual education of Catholics since the 1960s and this helped catalyse the development and consolidation of the 'new' spirituality, even though there Catholics who maintained a more traditional '1950s' spirituality (Rossiter, 2005; Eckersley, 1997). This change was illustrated in the significant literature of Catholic spirituality from the late 1960s.

The new Catholic spirituality that began in 1960s and 70s, and which has become 'mainstream' for Catholics, emphasised personal freedom, individuality and a sense of spiritual liberation (Rossiter, 2005). Within the last decade, the Catholic Episcopal perspective, and consequently the wider ecclesiastical perspective have become more conservative. But this has not affected popular Catholic spirituality significantly, even though it is felt by those with a more conservative spirituality to be a vindication of their position. However, some consider that this development has suppressed to some extent the newfound consciousness among religious congregations and the laity (Driedger, 1999).

The new Catholic lay spirituality since the 1970s emphasised the following:

- ❖ It was strongly based in theology and Scripture
- ❖ It was personal, reflective and psychological, and it stressed quality in personal relationships; its intention was to be 'relevant' to everyday life.
- ❖ It was prayerful and liturgical

Following the modelling from within religious orders, a number of Catholics sought 'nourishment' and 'guidance' for their spirituality through various activities like reading, attending personal development seminars, and in some instances in seeking spiritual 'direction'. In Catholic schools, while numbers of religious personnel declined significantly, there were efforts to retain a sense of the religious order tradition and spirituality in those schools which were formerly operated by particular religious orders; often this was described as maintaining the *charism* of the religious order (Dixon, 2003).

This spirituality that was prominent from the 1970s did not represent all of the styles of spirituality that existed across the whole Catholic community (Rossiter, 2005; Dixon, 2003). It was more common among those who consciously sought out the new style and this included many involved in Catholic education. Those who were opposed to this more 'easy going' spirituality considered that it was at odds with their view of 'conventional' Catholicism and they branded it pejoratively as 'liberal' (Tracy, 1979).

An individualism in spiritual thinking occurred during this period in Australian Catholic history. Practicing Catholics had a choice of paths that could nourish their spiritual needs (Rossiter, 2005; Hill 2004, Tracy, 1979; Driedger, 1999). For this spirituality, spiritual practice was now less authoritarian and had the added features of the Vatican II reforms to make the associated liturgies more meaningful (Ray, 1999).

In line with cultural and educational differences amongst Australian Catholics, various themes can be identified that indicate particular interests or 'flavours' that were distinctive in the spirituality of various individuals.   Rossiter categorized a number of these themes in the following table (2.1):

Table 2.1 *Catholic spiritualities*

Spirituality	*Key Themes*
Creation Spirituality	Giving special attention to the theme of ongoing creation and ongoing revelation
Feminist theology/spirituality	Acknowledging the patriarchal hegemony of Christian and especially Catholic spirituality, and the need for addressing the agenda coming from the perspective of women.
Ecological spirituality	Stressing the need for: responsible environmental stewardship, ecologically sustainable commerce, respect for the physical and biological environment, and a global perspective on ecological relationships.
Charismatic spirituality	Catholic charismatic renewal is a Catholic version of Pentecostal spirituality that emphasizes emotional prayer, healing and is largely experiential in nature.
Ecumenical and multi-faith perspective	Acknowledging the need for a positive perspective on ecumenical relationships with other Christians as well as respectful dialogue with people from other religions. Indigenous/Aboriginal spirituality is included in this theme.
Social justice and social analysis	Adding a critical evaluative perspective to spirituality that judges culture and prompts committed social action.

(Taken from Rossiter, 2005, P.7).

Catholic spirituality was thus diverse.   It ranged from the 'conservative' to the 'liberal'. In Catholic schools, the norm in practice would generally lie towards the 'liberal' end of the spectrum, and this meant some accommodation to religious authorities.   Given the prominence of the themes of 'freedom' and 'individualism' in the wider culture to which young people were exposed, it could be expected that most youth in Catholic schools would be more accepting of the new 'personal' Catholic spirituality rather than what could be described as the '1950s'.   However, the predominant style of spirituality in their

homes might also be significant.   Some scholars and writers see the new Catholic spirituality as described above as being more in tune with modern needs and sensibilities. Some others consider that even a new liberal Catholic spirituality is not always perceived as relevant by Catholic youth – and adults.   There is a natural tension between being 'relevant' to contemporary life and being 'faithful' to traditional theology and Catholic worldview.   All of this influences a growing divergence between the 'spiritual' and the 'religious' (Crawford and Rossiter, 2006).

The more traditional worldview that was defined by the Catholic Church, in which the Divine provided all the answers to the past, present, and future is no longer regarded by many as a viable 'spiritual commodity' today where Westernised countries have a veritable 'spiritual marketplace' of options that can be considered (Jackson, 2004; MacDonald, 2005).   People tend to think more critically about their belief system in the light of new scholarship and a new attitude to life (Rossiter, 2005; Crossan, 1994).

There is a more individualistic frame of reference and a more conscious, personal construction of meaning, rather than just acceptance of what is offered in the way of spirituality by religious authorities (Bridger, 2001; Crawford & Rossiter, 2006).   The Australian situation also shows the influence of privatisation of religious beliefs and spiritual practice, mainly because more people are acknowledging a 'relativism' as regards religious beliefs and because of factors like sense of freedom/individualism, and preoccupation with lifestyle and consumerism – perhaps even a laconic attitude that many Australians have to personal beliefs and attitudes (Rossiter, 2005; Eckersley, 1997).

 'Live and let live' has been suggested as an Australian mantra and 'whatever gets you up in the morning' is ok with the majority as long as you are not hurting anyone else (Rossiter, 2005).   As a result, the notion of 'religious' tends to be associated with external observance and formality.   On the other hand, 'spirituality' tends to be regarded as more personal and private.   Some research points to a certain stigma attached to being overtly religious (Hughes, 2007).

The tendency towards a more individualistic approach to spirituality is compounded by its commodification. Spirituality can be bought and sold like any other consumer product (Jackson, 2004). This development is in line with post-modern thinking and relates to a reinterpretation of religious dogma (Jackson, 2004; Horell, 2004; Hill, 2004). Contemporary spirituality within the Catholic tradition has morphed into a number of spiritual systems focusing on diverse theologies, whilst retaining a Catholic resonance (Hill, 2004). Also, theological studies have allowed a 'new' Christology to emerge that pulls up the anchor of faith that was once so sturdy and gave all the unquestioned answers on who God is, and where we all came from (Rossiter, 2005; Borg, 1994, Crossan, 1994).

The following conclusions relating to Components and characteristics of young people's spirituality have emerged from this review.

SUMMARY
- Young people identify with the word 'spiritual' more than 'spirituality.'   - Recognition of God and the afterlife is a common feature of a youth spirituality, but it is not a conventional, doctrinal belief.   - Spirituality helps provides identity, meaning and purpose.   - A significant number of Catholic young people are not participating in Sunday Eucharist.   - Catholic spirituality is diverse and has many dimensions.   - Prayer is an important expression of spirituality in youth.   - Spirituality has been commodified and privatized.   - There is an emphasis on a pragmatism and individualism in youth spirituality.

2.3.3 RECENT MAJOR STUDIES OF YOUTH SPIRITUALITY

This section of the review of literature refers to five major studies on youth spirituality that have been completed within the last six years, four of which were Australian. The following table (2.3) outlines the 5 major studies and their sample size and method.

Table 2.3 *Recent major studies in youth spirituality*

Research studies on Youth Spirituality	Putting Life Together	Reasons for Living	Spirit Of Gen Y	Catholic Schools 2000	Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers	Research Project	Notes
Sample Group & Research Method	Empirical study 350 interviews, 1200 telephone interviews and 3,500 questionnaire responses	An interpretation of youth spirituality and identity with implications for education; takes into account the research literature	Empirical study Interviewees 13-59	A Longitudinal empirical Study of Year 12 Students in Catholic Schools 1972-1982-1990-1998	Empirical study Telephone survey of teenagers (aged 13-17) and their parents in 3,000 U.S. households. The survey is complemented by 267 face-to-face interviews	Empirical study 207 questionnaire responses and 27 focus group interviewees	The comparison contains 4 Australian studies and 1 American research project. Each study was concerned with the Spirituality, attitudes and values of senior school students, except PLT/GY which had a demographic range of 13-29

Soul Searching (Smith & Denton, 2005) is a major American study that looked at the values and attitudes of teenage adolescents in 45 states.   *The Spirit of Generation Y: Young People's Spirituality in a Changing Australia (*Mason, Webber & Singleton, 2007) surveyed the views of a sample of Australian young people, including a relatively small number of school age adolescents.   This book followed up their earlier research report; *The spirit of generation Y: Summary of the final report of a three year study* (2006).

 Putting Life Together (Hughes, 2007), reports Hughes' own professional interpretation of the data from the *Spirit of generation Y* report, complemented with reference to his own data on senior school students gathered from research conducted by him under the auspices of the Christian Research Association.   *Catholic Schools 2000* (Flynn & Mok, 2002) surveyed the views of significant numbers of senior secondary students in Australian Catholic schools on a number of questions, including some that related to spirituality.   Contrasting with these empirical studies, Crawford and Rossiter (2006) published a handbook *Reasons for Living* that interpreted research on youth spirituality, with a focus on three constructs 'meaning, identity and spirituality'.

Although each of these studies had a different focus, comparisons showed that there were identifiable trends running through them all. The studies will be briefly described here, while the key trends will be considered in a thematic fashion, referring to these studies where pertinent.

The Gen Y Report (2003-2006), studied the spirituality of young Australians in their teens and twenties. The research was undertaken by the Australian Catholic University, Monash University and the Christian Research Association. The research methods used included a survey of a broad sample of Generation Y (born 1976-1990), and a follow-up face-to-face interview as well as telephone interviews. The project explored Generation Y's spirituality and participation in traditional religions. The study also explored the relationship between spirituality and the influences of society (Mason et al. 2005).

Reasons for Living is an interpretive study that explores the development and psychological function of meaning, identity and spirituality in the lives of young people. The books main focus is on why an education in meaning, identity and spirituality is so important for adolescents. The book makes some important links between education and young people's spiritual and moral development (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006).

Putting Life Together is a publication based upon the research data produced by the Spirit of Gen Y project, together with other data collected from school students. The purpose of the study was to explore and identify the spiritualities, worldview, sense of meaning in life, and values system of Australian teenagers and young adults. All Australian states were surveyed except the ACT. The research method included online surveys and telephone interviews (Hughes, 2007).

Catholic Schools 2000 is based on the responses of 8,310 Year 12 students and 1,657 teachers at 70 schools in NSW and the ACT. The study's focus was primarily on the religious beliefs and practices of the sample. An important purpose for this research was the intention to monitor the perceived effectiveness of the Catholic school in developing the catholicity and religiosity of its students (Flynn & Mok, 2002).

Soul Searching is an empirical research study conducted over 5 years that looked at the spiritual lives of American teenagers aged 13-17.   The book reported the findings of *The National Study of Youth and Religion*, the largest and most detailed such study ever undertaken in the United States.   The research method included 3,370 phone interviews with parents and their teenagers, and then extensive interviews with 267 of the teenagers (Smith & Denton, 2005).

2.3.4   OTHER PUBLISHED ARTICLES ON SPIRITUALITY

In addition to the studies on spirituality considered in the main body of this review of literature, a search was conducted on the three main religious education journals in Australia to identify articles concerned with spirituality and education (and religious education).   While numerous articles touched briefly on spirituality in one form or another, the search was limited to finding articles which had the terms 'spirituality' or 'spiritual development' or the like in their title.   The results of this search give a picture of the emerging interest in spirituality in academic circles in Australia.   While articles and books on spirituality published overseas have been accessed in this literature review, no similar attempt was made to list the articles on spirituality and education in overseas English journals of religious education such as *Religious Education* (North America), *British Journal of Religious Education*, *Journal of Moral Education*, and *Journal of Beliefs and Values* (United Kingdom).   It is significant to note that a relatively new British journal is specifically committed to spirituality and education – *The International Journal of Children's Spirituality*.

The table below (2.4) contains a general tally of articles found in three major Australian journals of religious education; the *Journal of Religious Education* (formerly known as *Word in life*) articles since 1983 , published through the Australian Catholic University, the *Religious Education Journal of Australia* articles since 1985, published by the Australian association of Religious Education, and the *Journal of Christian Education* articles since 1975, published by the Australian Christian Forum on Education.   Articles listed in the table below will not be duplicated in the list of references at the conclusion of the thesis unless they have been accessed elsewhere in the thesis.

Author	Journal	Reference	Title
Chittenden, A.	REJA	2003, 19(2), 9-20	Perceptions of spirituality through an ethic of care
Chung, M.	JRE	2006, 54(1), 58-66	A study of the spirituality of Chinese young people in a multicultural society
Chung, M.	JRE	2003, 51(4), 71-82	A study on the spirituality and identity of Chinese young people
Cohen, J	JRE	2004, 52(2) NPG	Strange spiritualities: Nix and Harland
Crawford, M & Rossiter	JRE	2004, 53(1), 1-2	Editorial: Spirituality and religious education
Crawford, M. & Rossiter, G.	JRE	2004, 52(3)	Spirituality and reality television: more than meets the eye
Crawford, M. & Rossiter, G.	JRE	2003, 51(4), 2-12	Reasons for living: school education and young people's search for meaning, spirituality and identity
Crawford, M. & Rossiter, G.	REJA	1994, 9(2) 1-8	Spirituality of today's young people: Implication for RE and Church schools
De Souza, M.	JRE	2006, 54(4) 46-54	Spirituality in religious education: Implications of changing contemporary contexts
De Souza, M.	JRE	2001, 49(3) 31-41	Addressing the spiritual dimension in education: teaching affectively to promote cognition
De Souza, M.	JRE	2003, 51(1) 72-80	Catholic schools as nurturing frameworks for young people's spirituality
Engebretson, K.	JRE	2006, 54(1), 42-58	Catholic schools as nurturing frameworks for young people's spirituality
English, G.	JRE	1997, 45(1) 3-4	All you need is love: An approach to spirituality
Fallding, H.	JCE	1999, 42(3) 21-37	Towards a definition of the term "spiritual"
Fisher, J.	JCE	2000, 43(3) 37-53	Being human, becoming whole: Understanding spiritual health and well-being
Green, P	JRE	1998, 46(3) NPG	The nature of spirituality of leadership in Catholic schools as a ministry in an evolving Australian church.
Habel, N.	REJA	2002, 18(1) 22-29	Host nations, host spirituality, healing sites
Healy, H.	JRE	2005, 53(1) 29-35	Nurturing the spirituality of religious educators in Catholic schools within a professional development framework
Hide, K.	JCE	August 1991, 19	Towards an Australian Spirituality for Children
Hill, B.	REJA	1996, 13(2) 32-38	Spirituality and religious education
Hill, B.	JCE	Papers 98 September 1990, 5-23	A time to search: 1: Spiritual development in the classroom
Hogan, A.	JRE	1980, 28(4) 120-127	Reflections about moral-spiritual development
Hyde, B.	JRE	2003, 51(1) 13-20	Spiritual intelligence: A critique
Hyde, K.	JRE	1981, 39(3) 19-21	Towards an Australian spirituality for children
Hyde, B.	JRE	2006, 54(2), 19-30	Mapping the terrain: describing different perspectives

Author	Journal	Reference	Title
Kelly, T.	REJA	1988, 4(2) 4-10	Embarrassing silences-reflecting on Australian spirituality
Liddy, S & Dean, A.	JRE	2006, 54(2), 33-42	Staff spirituality: exploring key values
Liddy, S.	JRE	2002, 50(1) 13-19	Children's spirituality
Liddy, S.	JRE	1999, 47(2), 32-36	Teacher spirituality and its relationship to knowledge for teaching religious education: three case studies
Lovat, T.	REJA	1998, 14(1) 18-22	Movements between mainstream and alternative spiritualities: Implications for religious education-Part 1
Lovat, T.	REJA	2001, 14(1) 8-12	Movements between mainstream and alternative spiritualities: Implications for religious education-Part 2
Malone, P.	JRE	2005, 53(1), 36-42	The web and ongoing spiritual development
Maroney, M.	JRE	2007, 55(4), 22-31	An exploration of contemporary youth spirituality among senior students in three Catholic schools
Matthews, S.	JRE	1992, 40(2), 5-6	Towards defining Aboriginal Spirituality in the RE classroom
McDonald, R.	REJA	1987, 3(2), 3	Australian Identity and Spirituality-the 1988 conference theme
McPhiliips, K. & Mudge, P.	JRE	2005, 53(1) 2-13	Visual art and connected knowing—imagination, meaning and spirituality in the art works of young people
Moylan, J.	JRE	2001, 49(1) 28-34	The Eucharist, personal spirituality, and assessing the effectiveness of Catholic schools
Nongkas, C.	REJA	1999, 15(2) 24-34	A way to be: Melanesian spirituality in a time of change
O'Reilly, P.	JRE	1997, 45(2), 29-31	Spiritual journaling and youth retreats—an entry point for growth in the spiritual journey
Rossiter, G.	JRE	1995, 43(3) 3-21	Developments in education for spirituality in the UK
Rossiter, G.	JRE	August 1996, 3	The 'Alternative' Religious Education! The Formative Influence of Film and Television on Young People's Spirituality
Rossiter, G.	JRE	2000, 48(3) 2-16	The shaping influence of film and television on the spirituality and identity of young people: An educational response—part3
Rossiter, G.	JRE	2005, 53(1), 3-22	From St Ignatius to Obi-Wan Kenobi: An evaluative perspective on spirituality for school education
Rossiter, G.	JCE	1995, 37(1) 37-50	RE and the development of young people: A reply to Gideon Goosen
Shiplpey, K.	REJA	1998, 14(1) 34	Spiritual trends in popular lyrics
Smith, D.	JCE	1999, 42(2) 27-35	Cross-curricular spiritual & moral development: Reflections on the charis project
Trainor, M	JRE	February 1991, 15	Meaning, Identity and Spirituality: Australian Faith Education in the Nineteenth Century
Walsh, P.	JCE	1997, 70(2) 48-50	A spirituality of the curriculum: Contemplation and care

Table 2.5 summarises the number of articles published by the journals, pre-1997 and post-1997, and outlines the percentage of articles containing the words 'spirituality/spiritual' in the article title. The table suggests the number of Australian journal articles on spirituality has increased significantly in the past ten years.

Table 2.5 *Percentages of published articles on spirituality*

Journal	All articles pre-1997	All articles post-1997	Spirituality articles pre-1997	Spirituality articles post-1997	Percentage Pre-1997	Percentage Post-1997
Religious Education Journal of Australia 1985-1997	107	102	3	8	2.8%	7.8%
Journal of Religious Education 1983-1997	278	220	5	23	1.8%	10.5%
Journal of Christian Education 1975-1997	306	98	3	3	0.9%	3.06%

2.3.5 THE SPIRIT OF GEN Y PROJECT

Because the Spirit of Gen Y was an extensive national study of Australian young people's spirituality, it will be described here and some of its key findings noted because these serve as a type of recent 'benchmark' of contemporary Australian youth spirituality. However, this format will not be repeated for the other four studies whose findings will be referred to in this review where pertinent under more generic headings.

The Spirit of Generation Y project (2003-2006) was a national study undertaken by the Australian Catholic University and Monash University and the Christian Research Association. A number of publications and reports have been released by the project's authors (Hughes, 2007; Mason et al., 2006). The purpose of the study was to explore and

identify the spiritualities, worldview, sense of meaning in life, and values system of Australian teenagers and young adults. All Australian states were surveyed except the Australian Capital Territory (ACT).

The research method included online surveys and telephone interviews. The survey sample included a number of students from Catholic secondary schools. One criticism that can be made of the project is the generic language used in the questionnaire and the telephone interviewing for a broad range of age groups. The interviews took between 30 minutes and an hour to conduct. As could have been expected, the younger participants were less articulate, and hence less helpful to the project in their responses (Hughes, 2007; Mason et al., 2006).

While reporting extensive data on the cohort, the Gen Y research did not focus specifically on young people of school age, and age specific language for this group was not used. This study of a sample of year 12 students provides an opportunity to compare results from this age group with those from the much wider age group in the Gen Y study. The comparison may be able to detect different emphases in the spirituality of 17-18 year olds.

The Spirit of Generation Y research project chose to demarcate the 'believer groups' covered in this study into three separate categories of 'spirituality'; Christian, Eclectic, and Humanist. The following results were gained form the Gen Y longitudinal study. Christian: (43% of Gen Y) Eclectic: (17%) Humanist: (31%). Only 19% of Gen Y Catholics are actively involved in a church. However, a considerable number of Catholics surveyed believed in God and Jesus, and prayed regularly. School students participating in this survey viewed Religion as a private matter, and there was a strong tendency among Gen Y Christians to move away from previous involvement or identification with a church, and religious belief (Hughes, 2007; Mason et al., 2006).

As an illustration of eclecticism in spirituality, the study showed that a number of participants incorporated two or more beliefs from eastern religious practices (such as

reincarnation or astrology) into their traditional Christian beliefs. Females were more inclined to be eclectic than males due to a wider range of interests and pursuits (Hughes, 2007; Mason et al., 2006). Most of the eclectic believers did not attend regular church services, although some integrated worship services into their spiritual practice. The Humanist believers were largely atheistic in belief and accounted for 42% of people surveyed. Humanists also tended to reject alternative spiritualities. They did not see formal religion as 'truth' and less than half thought there existed a life after death.

The Gen Y study tends to confirm social learning theory that indicates that religion and spirituality are largely learned from significant people such as parents, teachers, and role models. It also confirmed the prominence of individualism which appeared to permeate young people's worldview and spirituality. The project also found that belief in Jesus was strong but respondents were somewhat sceptical when it came to accepting his Divine nature. Responses affirmed Jesus' acceptance of outcasts and his teachings on love for neighbour, and social justice.

A summary of the key findings in the Generation Y project are outlined below:

SUMMARY
- Spirituality and Religion are learnt, primarily from parents   - There is a growing individualism of beliefs and values   - The social justice emphasis in the life and work of Jesus was more believable than the doctrine of his divinity   - Peers played an important role in the development of values   - There is an eclecticism of different spiritualities   - A high proportion of the Catholics surveyed believed in God and Jesus, and prayed regularly

2.3.6 THE IMPACT OF CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS ON SPIRITUALITY: THE EXAMPLE IN CHRISTOLOGY

Christology is an extensive area of literature in which this project does not have the scope to review. There are some diverse and disconcerting views that raise questions, not only for theologians, but for people at large. New interpretations of the Jesus of history inevitably impacts upon young people's understanding of who he is for their own spiritual lives. The inclusion of this topic is intended to draw attention to an area of controversy increasingly for young people themselves, and not just the theologians. A number of references are included to provide a sample of views from which this debate is contended (Funk, 1993; Schuessler-Fiorenza, 2001; Kasper, 1996; Crossan, 1994; Lane, 1975). It is acknowledged that this area of scholarship is substantially more comprehensive than the brief mention of it in the context of this study. While it is beyond the scope of this study to investigate in detail the relationships between theology and spirituality, it is important to identify this area because it becomes particularly significant with respect to the planning and teaching of religious education.   If religious education is intended to inform the development of young people's spirituality, then the prevailing notion of spirituality and the words used to describe its scope need to be clearly articulated.   An immediate problem then is the perspective on spirituality coming from developments in theology.

Often, new theological interpretations outstrip traditional doctrinal formulations.   A key question then arises about the extent to which teaches of religion should keep more or less strictly to traditional theological formulations, or whether they need scope to include reference to new theological insights that might be considered as moving away from orthodoxy; and whether there is a range of views/interpretations presented to young people.

This section sets out to identify some of the issues in one area of theology – Christology. This area relates to young people's images and interpretations of Jesus – of who he is and what might be his role in their spiritual life.

Mention has already been made about the declining influence of formal religion and theology on young people's spirituality. Compounding this problem that young people have in reconciling a meaningful spirituality with religious tradition is the emerging *Christologies* of the 20th and 21st centuries (O'Shea, 2004; Kelty, 1999; Meier, 1991; Schillebeeckx, 1979). These developments have challenged the relevance of the more traditional images of Jesus for today's young people (Eckersley, 1997; McLaughlin, 2005). For example, contemporary theological movements, such as Feminist Liberationist Christologies, have established a pathway to engage with the memory and traditions of their particular interpretation of Jesus of Nazareth (O'Shea, 2004; Schuessler-Fiorenza, 1997).

This new hermeneutic sheds the layers of doctrine and traditional theology to 're announce' Jesus' message in a new way (Kelty, 1999). Both liberal and mainline religious academics have lectured, written articles in specialist journals, attended conferences and debated among themselves with regard to theological developments (Funk, 1993; Schweitzer, 2000; Crossan, 1994, O'Shea, 2004). They have taught generations of conservative, moderate, and liberal theology students. But their conclusions have rarely filtered down to the classrooms of Catholic schools.

> The public is poorly informed of the assured results of critical scholarship, although those results are commonly taught in colleges, universities and seminaries. In this vacuum, drugstore books and slick magazines play on the fears and ignorance of the uniformed (Funk, 1993, p. 5).

Their conclusions differ greatly from what Christian denominations have historically taught (Crossan, 1994; Funk, 1993; O'Shea, 2004). They are also in conflict with the current beliefs of most present-day conservative Christians (Beaudoin, 1998; McLaughlin, 2002). Contrary to traditional Church doctrine, these interpretations do not hold that God divinely inspired the authors (and redactors) (O'Shea, 2004; Funk, 1993). In contrast, they take on a view of the Bible as a human document, composed by writers who actively promoted their own theological and doctrinal intentions (Kelty, 2004; O'Shea, 2004; Meier, 1991).

In terms of engaging the gender disparity, feminist scholars have actively sought to transform traditional images of Christ for contemporary society (Schuessler-Fiorenza, 2001). By approaching Jesus from a new and open-minded viewpoint, an image of Jesus is offered that may encourage interpretation that reflects the distinctive views of both genders and provide a balanced interpretation of who Jesus can be for 21st century Christian followers (Schuessler-Fiorenza, 2001; Crossan, 1994; McLaughlin, 2005; O'Shea, 2004).

Attempts at reconstructing the historical Jesus produce a figure who identifies with poor tenant farmers and the dispossessed poor (Crossan, 1993; Borg, 1994). The good news of the kingdom is that Jesus is proclaiming a program of radical inclusiveness, focused on mutual solidarity (Borg, 1994). It is focused on community, not on private salvation (Evans, & Stanley, 1995; O'Shea, 2004). It does not look to future divine intervention but identifies God's action as occurring in the present as people live out the values of justice and equality (Borg, 1994; Schweitzer, 2000).

For young people this image of Jesus is the one that research indicates is likely to be perceived as most relevant to the young (McLaughlin, 2005; McGillion, 2003). Social justice is an area of interest in which significant numbers participate or are interested. The Kingdom theology of the New Testament itinerant Galilean teacher is what is of interest; not the 'Trinitarian', 'Incarnate Word', 'Final Judge' of more traditional Catholic Church doctrines and Catholic school curriculum (McLaughlin, 2005; Dixon, 2003).

Jesus is still viewed with some confusion by young people in terms of his humanity and divinity as shown in most research studies. For example, a number of beliefs about Jesus exist and students are divided about who he is and what he represents (Hughes, 2007; Mason, Webber & Singleton, 2006).

The Gospel values that the school espouses are recognisable for students. They understand the idea of loving one another and forgiving unconditionally. However, there appears to be a dichotomy between the message and the messenger (Crawford &

Rossiter, 2006). Young people are sifting through the believable and palatable, and separating that from the 'fantastical' and the irrelevant. If there is identification with the 'acts' of Jesus, apart from his personhood, then one could argue that this amounts to some success in school religious education (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006).

However, the research suggests that, in a general way, young people display an individualistic notion of God. Their idea of God may or may not include elements of Trinitarian dogma. Contemporary images of God for today's Catholic school students are different from those of the generations of students who preceded them (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006).

What remains to be determined is the extent to which new interpretations of the 'historical Jesus' and the 'Christ of faith' feature in senior school religious education in Catholic schools. This would be a test example of the impact of theological developments on school religious education at the classroom level.

2.3.7 YOUNG PEOPLE'S IMAGES OF GOD

Research studies have indicated that measures of young people's attitudes to belief in God changed markedly during early adolescence (Rossiter, 2004). In the United Kingdom, while 44% of a sample of 11 year olds agreed that "God is very real to me," the level dropped to 18% for the 15 year olds. Repeated surveys between 1974 and 1986 showed a continual decline. Correspondingly, the percentage of 11-15 year olds agreeing with the statement "I find it hard to believe in God" increased from 36% to 50%. There is no reason to believe that the situation in Australia is very different (Francis, cited in Rossiter, 2004).

However, a significant number of Australian students believe that God exists (Hughes, 2007; Mason et al., 2006). They view the world from the perspective of creation being the handy work of a divine being (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006). Students feel that the way the 'judicial' and 'atonement seeking' God of Catholic theology has been presented to

them in school is not believable.   An interesting contrast is evident in the Australian and American research studies.   Each of the Australian studies points to some level of departure from the more traditional views accepting ecclesial responsibilities and moral dictates, and belief in God.

Young people acknowledged the existence of God, but did not see any obligation in having to practice a certain prescribed piety or set of worship practices (Flynn & Mok 2002; Hughes, 2007; Mason et al., 2006).   Young people in the Gen Y project had the lowest scores for belief in God in the various studies.   The report commented that unless young people experienced something, then it was difficult for them to believe in it (Mason et al., 2006).   They appeared to need 'experiential referents' for their spiritual beliefs.   How 'believable' a belief seemed to be depended to some extent on its perceived 'relevance' to their lives.

One Australian study that focused primarily on young people's images of God showed that middle adolescents tended to positively endorse images of God that portrayed God as loving, caring, as Trinity, and as Atoning (Duffy, 2004).   This result may have been affected by the research methodology.   Participants were required to score their 'recognition' of a range of theological views of God; but they were not asked to indicate how they perceived these images – that is whether or not they perceived them as 'relevant' to their lives.   This result suggests that Catholic students may well be aware of a wide range of images of God portrayed by Catholic theology.   However, discerning whether young people take these images of God as vital parts of their own belief system and spirituality may need another research approach.

In contrast, the American study used the phrase 'Moralistic Therapeutic Deism' to explain a God concept that is a mix derived from all the mainstream Christian denominational traditions (Smith & Denton, 2005).   American teenagers believe in a God who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth (Smith & Denton, 2005).   As regards the origin of the word 'deism', it views God as the 'Divine

clockmaker' who created the world and set it on its path of evolution and functioning according to the laws of nature in a 'clockwork' like fashion.   Technically, this view of God places God 'outside' the universe; God is 'transcendent' but not 'immanent' or 'within' the universe, even though in other notions of God transcendence and immanence are not exclusive (Birch, 2007).   Smith and Denton seem to have used the word 'Deism' to identify the notion of a creator as 'initiator' who 'cares' for the universe and responds to people's requests and needs; but this usage is ambivalent because they appear not to have adverted to the original meaning of 'deism', apparently using it as a synonym of 'theism'.

Duffy (2004) considered that her sample of Australian adolescents tended to view God as more 'transcendent' than 'immanent' – this suggests the notion of god who is more 'distant and separate' than 'within and engaged'.   More discriminating research would be needed to clarify this issue because the studies referred to here were not precise enough with their use of terms like 'transcendent', 'imminent' 'deism', 'theism' etc.

By contrast with their Australian counterparts, American teenagers also appear to differ somewhat in their idea of a final judgment.   The US study indicated that American teenagers believed that Heaven is not for everyone and that God will sort the bad from the good (Smith & Denton, 2005).   However, these differences may well depend on the sample.   The American study may have included a larger proportion of young people with a Pentecostal background where this view of the 'end times' is more prominent.

A noteworthy aspect of research findings in this area is the gender differences in attitudes to God and spirituality.   Girls in the age group 16-25 are more likely to be positive about God than are boys at every age level and across ethnic and social groups (Mason et al., 2006).   A reason proposed to explain this difference is the 'feminine characteristics' of religious practice (Kay & Francis, 1996).   The virtues of Christianity and belief in God can be regarded as 'feminine' in nature and as such would appeal more to females or those who would 'resonate' with feminine qualities (Mason et al., 2006).

For example, religions use terms such as reconciliation, compassion, healing and so forth which tend to be associated with the feminine (Kay & Francis 1996). In addition, this viewpoint has been used to help explain the more pronounced drift from the churches by male adolescents; they are more likely to feel estranged from the church if they sense that there is no language that 'speaks' to them and provides a sense of meaning and identification (Engebretson, 2004, Kay & Francis, 2001).

The following are key insights from the sections on theological developments and Images of God:

SUMMARY
- There is an increasing variety and a note of 'relativism' in Christians' view of Jesus as the Christ.   - Young people tend to identify with the 'acts' of Jesus more than with the person of Jesus.   - The majority of young people believe in God.   - Young females are more likely to identify with God and spirituality than young males.   - Most young people do not see an obligation or commitment to God as needing Church attendance and regular prescribed piety.   - Parents (US & Australia) are the prime influence on young people's belief in God.   - God for young people is more transcendent than immanent.   - US teenagers are more likely to believe in a God who rewards and punishes.   - A sense of relativism and individualism seems to be becoming more prominent in young people's view of God.

The next section of the review of literature examines spirituality from the perspective of Catholic belief and practice, taking into account the mission, purpose, and contemporary situation of Catholic education.

2.3.8   THE PURPOSES OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS RELATED TO ENHANCING CATHOLIC BELIEF AND PRACTICE

How the purposes of Catholic schooling are interpreted with respect to the enhancement of Catholic belief and practice is important because this will affect the underlying notion of spirituality that the school is trying to foster.   This section of the literature review identifies a significant change in purposes at the practical level, even if this is not always evident in official documentation.

While always important, theology is not the only mainstay of Catholic education (Kelty, 2004).   The mission of the Catholic school has been represented as a synthesis of faith and culture (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977).   This mix of faith and culture is to be projected in the light of Gospel values and the traditions of the Catholic Church (Pope John Paul II, 1997a).   The large Catholic education system that exists in Australia today is a network of schools with a common commitment to servicing the human and spiritual needs of the Catholic community in Australia, while also contributing to the general education of young Australian citizens, not all of whom will necessarily be Catholic (McGillion, 2003; Engebretson, Fleming & Rymarz, 2002).

Vatican documents have regularly acknowledged the purpose of a Catholic school as educating Catholic children for a faithful life within the Church and a productive life within society (Pope John Paul II, 1997a; Pope John Paul II, 1997b; Pope John Paul II, 2001).   Having passed through a period where sectarianism affected the nature, resourcing and functioning of Catholic schools, the Catholic education system now enjoys healthy numbers, government funding, and a good reputation in Australian society (Dixon, 2003).   Traditionally, the projected identity of the Catholic school gave the impression that it was structured for and by fully 'practicing' (regular church going) Catholics.   However, with increased secularisation and a notable decline in church attendance by Catholics, this view was superseded.   There was a new emphasis on evangelisation as the primary mission of the Catholic school (Pope Paul VI, 1976).   Complexity to the notion of evangelisation allowed for both the 'confirmation and deepening' of the faith in believers, as well as for

the 'challenge to believe' that might be more relevant to individuals who were not identified with the Church (Pope John Paul II, 1997a).

Over time, concern about the increased secularisation of parents and students in Catholic schools became even more prominent (Neist, 2002; Pope John Paul II, 2001). The Vatican document, *The Catholic Church on the Threshold of the third millennium* (1997b) noted that in some instances Catholic schools were not perceived to be strongly integrated within the local Church community.

> Unfortunately, there are instances where the Catholic school is not perceived as an integral part of organic pastoral work of the Christian community. At times it is considered alien, or very nearly so, to the community (par.10).

More recently, the document, *Ecclesia in Oceania*, applying specifically to the Catholic Church in Australia, was explicit in encouraging the employing Catholic school authorities to "take into account the faith life of those they are hiring (Pope John Paul 11, 2001, p. 117)." At the same time, the percentage of non-Catholic students enrolling in Catholic schools increased markedly (Dixon, 2003; McLaughlin, 2005). Some research, supporting what was recognised anecdotally, suggested that many parents were sending their children to Catholic schools, primarily for the quality of education and pastoral care and not necessarily for explicit religious purposes (Tinsey, 1998).

The Catholic school is officially regarded as an 'ecclesial arm' of the Church, implementing its evangelistic mission. Nevertheless, there is a considerable range in the way this responsibility is interpreted. How it is interpreted informs the view of what is to count as 'success' and 'effectiveness' in Catholic schooling. For a long time, success was interpreted in terms of 'reproducing traditional Catholic piety and religious practice'. This meant that the criterion was young people's regular mass attendance. That is a measurement of success and effectiveness that was inevitably bound to judge Catholic schools as failing in their mission, because statistics showed a steady but marked decline in Catholic religious practice since the 1960s. Evidence of this thinking is present in the

recent document on Catholic schools issued by the Catholic bishops of NSW and the ACT in 2006 (NSW Catholic Bishops Conference, 2006).

Some would argue that measuring the Catholic school's success in terms of Sunday Mass attendance is to view spiritual development from a religious rationalist perspective, manifested as spiritual consumerism (Campion, 1982) which is in fact the antithesis of a Catholic view of humanity (Pope John Paul II, 1982, par.18).

If the change/decline in the religiosity of young people (as well as for adults) was interpreted as more cultural and to do with the image and functioning of the Church itself, then it could be interpreted as a decline in the practice of Catholicism which had no simple causal link with what was happening in Catholic schools.   In other words Catholic schools might be both successful and effective in what they can contribute to young people's spirituality and links with the Catholic Church, but despite this contribution, pervasive cultural change has resulted in continual decline in Catholics' active engagement in local faith communities or parishes.

Hence, the interpretation of the sort of spirituality that Catholic schools are trying to encourage in young people becomes a pivotal question.   The following questions are relevant; they also remain controversial for parents, educators and authorities in Catholic school systems and for clergy (priests and bishops):

- Measurement of spirituality more or less exclusively in terms of Mass attendance implies a narrow view of spirituality (Dixon, 2003).
- The average, contemporary Catholic spirituality will not have the same mass attendance rates as was the case for earlier generations of Catholics.
- While the encouragement of the young to become regular church goers may be an important part of a Catholic school's education in spirituality, the effectiveness of this component may be superseded by powerful cultural factors beyond the school.

- Catholic schools may well educate young people well in their faith tradition, but this in itself is not enough to persuade them to become regular church goers.

- Catholic school religious education needs to give pupils substantial access to Catholic religious traditions, spirituality and religious practices; in addition, it needs to help them learn to identify and evaluate contemporary spiritual/moral issues in ways that will help their spirituality be relevant to everyday life.

2.3.9 SECULARISATION AND THE DECLINE IN RELIGIOUS PRACTICE: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SPIRITUALITY BEING PROPOSED FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Following on from the issues considered in the previous section, this section examines briefly the situation within Catholic schools where the type of spirituality that is officially promoted within religious education and the school's religious life may be in conflict with the style of spirituality that is developing in young people and their parents.   Firstly, it will note the social and religious situation of the families whose children attend Catholic schools. One of the key responsibilities accepted by Catholic schools is a commitment to 'hand on' the religious tradition to the next generation.   But this purpose may problematic to achieve because the average spirituality and religious practice of the families choosing Catholic schools are not congruent with what the school is officially promoting.

> The current generation of primary-school-aged children will be the first where the majority will have no memory of a Church involvement at some stage in their upbringing (Kaldor et al., 2004).

Catholicism is the largest single denomination in Australia; more than 27% of the population (Hughes, 2007).   Catholic education is the highest non-government school provider; in terms of students with more than 20% of the school population attending Catholic schools (McLaughlin, 2005).   With those statistics in mind, it appears there is a pluralism in Catholic education whereby the students are acquiring views inconsistent with official Catholic doctrine and dogma (Dixon, 2003; McLaughlin, 2005).   Significantly, 46% of priests viewed secondary schools as burdens on parish resources.   More than half

the priests surveyed found the school and the parish had little in common and worked independently of each other (Tinsey, 1998).   Much of this negativity between parish and school may lay in the motivation of parents in sending their children to Catholic schools (Tinsey, 1998).

It is a generic given that parents want the best education for their children.   However, slightly less than 50% of Catholic children attend Catholic schools (Dixon, 2003; Hill, 2004).   The population of non-Catholic children attending Catholic schools is continually increasing (Dixon, 2003; Neist, 2002; Hill, 2004).   The stand out statistic in all the contemporary research data is that most Catholic parents who send their children to Catholic schools do not regularly practice Catholicism (Dixon, 2003; McLaughlin, 2005).

This group of parents, while they may be happy enough for their children to receive a basic religious education, probably do not regard the religious aspects of the Catholic school's life and curriculum as important or as seriously as do Catholic school authorities, and many Catholic school staff – especially those involved in religious education.   The question that emerges here is why do parents send their children to Catholic schools? The answer appears to lie in a complex mixture of factors, the most important of which are the quality of overall education, the pastoral care, and the values element implicit in the teaching and learning process (McLaughlin, 2005). The Religious Education curriculum that Catholic schools present is not a major factor in parents sending their children to a Catholic school (McLaughlin, 2005).

The influence that Religious Education has on the faith/spiritual development of young people is also very complex and not easily ascribed to a few prominent factors; research suggests that its influence is less significant than modelling of values and beliefs in the home.   Rymarz (2001) claimed that the attitude to religious education of most Catholic students is 'weak positive.' While students might show some interest in the subject, they sense that it does not help them answer the difficult questions they face as young Catholics.

It appears that the influence of Jesus on the lives of young people is another significant factor in the mix of influences (McGillion, 2003; Rymarz, 1999). But the doctrine of the incarnation is no longer as strongly supported as in the past, and a 'critical', inquiring teaching model which is normative in the school curriculum may even contribute to this trend (McLaughlin, 2004; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Holloway, 2001). This trend in consciousness has been prominent for 30 years as Pope Paul VI noted, "The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time (*Dei Verbum*, Flannery, 1996, par. 20)."

Teachers are the third stakeholders involved in the debate about the religious influence of Catholic schools. The extent of the spiritual/moral influence of teachers on young people is very difficult to determine. Some research suggests that this may be minimal. For example, Hughes (2007) and Mason et al (2006) found that young people considered teachers had relatively little influence on their spiritual/religious development. Their perceptions of an inability of teachers to relate to their personal situation, and of a lack of relevance to their lives generally, suggest that this may be yet another factor that has some influence on young people's hesitancy to take institutional religious traditions seriously. But, this does not rule out the possibility of their having an influence on particular individuals. Hence it is pertinent to consider what are prominent features in the spirituality of teachers in Catholic schools, particularly those who teach religion.

Some research indicates that a number of the educators in Catholic schools have misgivings about the Catholic Church as a whole and are not regular church goers (McLaughlin, 2005). And as for young people, there is the same tendency amongst these adults to consider whether particular beliefs and religious teachings are relevant to their lives (McGillion, 2003). Authoritative religious doctrines and dogmas tend to mean little to them personally, and they are more ready to dissent from religious authorities (McLaughlin, 2005, Dixon, 2003). A number of teachers fall within the demographic identified as Generation X (those born between 1960 and 1975), which is said to have particular lifestyle interests and which also could have distinctive characteristics in their

spirituality (Rymarz, 1999).   Given those teachers of students in Catholic schools impact on the beliefs and practices of senor school students, it is integral to include some research data pertaining to their particular values and attitudes.

Generation X has been described as the *options generation* and having the characteristic of being *moral boundary riders* (Mackay 1997).   Having options brings with it freedom from commitment and little interest in ideology. Generation X places far more emphasis on the importance of human experience and is generally suspicious of institutional authority (Rymarz, 1999; Beaudoin 1998).   This point is critical when identifying the familial background structure behind the development of the worldview and spirituality of senior school students, because these same characteristics are common amongst young people.

The mix of post-conciliar reform and post-modern thought has affected the spirituality of adult Catholics.   For earlier generations, the Council had far more impact (Rossiter, 2005; Moloney, 2002). The Baby Boomer (born between 1945 and 1960) Catholics who generationally preceded the Gen Xs experienced the contrast between the world before and after the Council (Campion, 1982).

Pre-conciliar Catholics would generally fast from Saturday night until after they had received the Blessed Host on Sunday mornings.   Clerical and religious dress has also disappeared to an extent, defusing the perceived authority, status and aura of religious Catholics (Becker 1992).   An example of this is the priest facing the Altar and speaking in Latin.   Also, the changes in theology regarding imagery, symbolism and spiritual presence deeply affected what constituted the sacrificial mystery (Campion, 1982).

There was a loss of Catholic solidarity and widespread dissention in everything from moral attitudes to married clergy, resentment around *Humanae Vitae* (1968), and relationships outside the married union.   Thus such concepts as infallibility, the

Magisterium, and Canon Law are largely meaningless (Becker, 1992). The aforementioned attitude to guilt and sin and the burdens associated with it is reflected in the decline of senior school students attending the sacrament of reconciliation. Flynn and Mok (2002) have noted this decline in their longitudinal study of senior secondary students.

Over the past 30 years the curriculum has evolved into outcomes - based faith formation. No longer is the religious education teacher a religious. The typical religious education teacher may be non-Catholic, atheist, non-accredited, and unenthusiastic towards the subject (McLaughlin, 2002). This has major implications for today's senior school students and the development of their spirituality. There is a range of experiences from life, and influences from parents and role models impacting on their faith formation and meaning making (Rossiter, 2004; Jackson, 2004; Hill, 2004).

The following key insights emerged from a review of literature on Catholic belief and practice, and Catholic education:

SUMMARY

- The traditional view of the Catholic school was that it existed to serve the Catholic community and to help induct children and adolescents into the Catholic Church.
- Official Church documents propose that the Catholic school participates fully in the salvific mission of the church, and therefore that it is engaged in the Church's evangelistic enterprise.
- A high percentage of parents sending students to Catholic schools do not attend Sunday services or participate in Parish life.
- The percentage of non-Catholic students enrolling in Catholic schools is increasing.
- There is a pluralism in Catholic education and an ever increasing secularisation of those who attend the schools.
- Generation X (teachers and parents) tend to place far more emphasis on the importance of human experience and is generally suspicious of institutional authority.
- Some research suggests that teachers have little impact on student's faith development.

The following section examines the literature on alternative spiritualities and Pentecostalism.

2.3.10 YOUNG PEOPLE'S ACCESS TO ALTERNATIVE AUSTRALIAN SPIRITUALITIES

Mason et al (2006) reported that their sample of Generation Y showed an eclecticism in their spirituality, drawing from a variety of sources including Eastern religions. However, this trend was more noticeable for young people in their 20s than for those who were still at school.   This section reports on some of the alternative spiritualities that adults have accessed; a number of these can be regarded as 'non-religious' spiritualities (Fuller 2001).   It remains to be determined to what extent young people at school are aware of such alternatives and to what extent they have actively incorporated elements from these sources. The new approach to acquiring and manifesting one's own spirituality has opened up a range of possible sources of thinking and practice.

Spiritual place: Some people have a strong affiliation with nature (James, 2002; Hanegraaff, 2005). In Australia, the land and the biodiversity of life have taken on a spiritual dimension for some people, providing a 'place' for them to reorient themselves throughout life.

New Age spirituality: New Age spirituality includes a range of eclectic beliefs, taken from philosophy, psychology and eastern philosophies, including Buddhism (Hanegraaff, 2005). This current trend towards eclectic spirituality lends itself to a belief in a universal God or entity not bound to any particular religion.   This 'New Age' spirituality has also been labelled as theosophy (Kohn, 2003; Hanegraaff, 2005).   It is basically a search for truth but it is not bound up in the idea of an omnipotent God intervening in history. Within this spiritual paradigm an individualistic approach prevails (Tacey, 2003; Hanegraaff, 2005).

Natural therapies and healing practices also contain a spiritual element (Kaldor et al., 2004). Acupuncture, Reiki, Chakra, and Reichian therapy have gained a foothold in contemporary culture (McDonald, 2005; Hanegraaff, 2005). Other expressions include

tarot cards, horoscopes and other psychic phenomena as meaningful activities falling under the umbrella of contemporary Australian spiritual practice (Rossiter, 2004; Kaldor, Hughes, Castle & Bellamy, 2004). People with a spiritual orientation are said to experience higher levels of personal growth than those with a secular 'here and now' attitude (Kaldor, Hughes, Castle & Bellamy, 2004; McDonald, 2005).

Spirituality and well-being: Some social research proposes that, with an increasing level of affluence in society, spirituality as a means of enhancing well-being may be an important to a healthy functioning society (Hamilton, 2004; Zohar & Marshall, 2000). Finding one's self and reconciling with the 'energy' of the universe is proposed as an ultimate goal. A personal journey without rules, rhyme and reason (Kohn, 2003; McDonald, 2005; Hanegraaff, 2005). Australian societal data suggests that this notion of spirituality is becoming more popular as a spiritual worldview and that it can attract young people with its openness (Dixon, 2003; Hughes, 2007). However, at this stage in history the more institutional Christian traditions appear to be still retaining their core membership, albeit at low levels.   The fastest growing movement spiritual movement amongst young people is in the Pentecostal churches (Kaldor, Hughes, Castle & Bellamy, 2004).

 ## 2.3.11 PENTECOSTALISM

Most Australian young people become aware of the increasing prominence of Pentecostal churches.   There is some data on the numbers of youth who leave the mainline churches to become members of Pentecostal churches; but this does not give an accurate picture of what is happening to children of school age.   This section briefly investigates the Pentecostal style of spirituality which may be an important element in its potential attractiveness to youth.   Contrasting with the non-religious spiritualities noted above, Pentecostalism has a particularly strong and overt religious dimension.   The phenomena of spirituality in Australia include religious movements that are rapidly increasing in numbers, the opposite of the trend of declining membership in the mainline churches. Between 1996 and 2001 the number of Pentecostals worshipping on a Sunday

outnumbered Anglican worshippers (Kaldor et al., 2004). Significantly, the demographics of the Pentecostal churches over the period 1996-2000 indicate that the Pentecostal churches experienced a rise in weekly church attendance of 20%.   In contrast, the Catholic Church experienced a drop of -13%.

The average age of church attendees is 52 for Catholics and 34 for Pentecostals (Bellamy & Castle, 2004). Statistics vary because of the autonomy of Pentecostal churches; however, a figure of 15% is the average number given for the percentage of young Catholic people migrating to the Pentecostal denomination (Chant, 2004). An interesting question arises as to what attracts young Catholics to the Pentecostal churches?

The most distinctive and influential branch of the Pentecostal movement in Australia is the Assemblies of God. The Assemblies of God in Australia formed in 1937 (Dempster, 1999). It was recognised by the leaders of the Pentecostal movement of Australia and the Assemblies of God, Queensland.   At the time it was agreed that a more harmonious, cooperative and unified relationship was needed. Groups in every state were granted autonomy in their own affairs, as was each registered assembly (Dempster, 1999). Pastor Andrew Evans who was superintendent from 1977-1997 and Brian Houston since 1997 appear to have been instrumental in the development and the growth of these churches into a major force on Australia's spiritual landscape (Dempster, 1999).

Specifically, Pentecostals believe that the Bible is the Word of God and is normative for Christian belief and behaviour (Sargent, 2000; Dempster, 1999; Cox, 1995; Anderson, 2005). The belief system is evangelical and a literal interpretation of scripture is adhered to. Worship services include multi-piece bands that play popular music interspersed with Bible reading, teaching and preaching from ministers, tithe giving, requests for people to come forward and give themselves to Jesus, prayer, and healing (Sargent, 2000; Cox, 1995; Anderson, 2001). Each service is loosely structured and led by the 'Spirit' (Dempster, 1999). Members of the Pentecostal churches express their faith in a number of ways. Regular Bible study groups and 'Cells' meet and exchange experiences on their respective spiritual journeys (Sargent, 2000; Cox, 1995; Anderson, 2005). Members are

encouraged and prayed for by others in an extensive support network. Pentecostals are not just 'Sunday Christians.'

A recent example of Pentecostal success is the Hillsong Church located in Sydney's North-West and inner city. Then Prime Minister John Howard and Federal Treasurer Peter Costello both accepted invitations to speak at worship services and seminars. Hillsong church is renowned for its particular style of music and several national CD releases have topped the music charts in Australia (Hillsong, 2007). Hillsong has over 15,000 members attend church over 3 services on a Sunday. Hillsong runs missions in Africa and has its own Bible College, school, and Child care centre on site. It also runs a medical centre with a resident psychologist and a team of counsellors (Hillsong, 2007).

Based upon financial success, converts to the faith, and attendance on Sundays, it would appear that the Pentecostal movement is at the forefront of *Christian* spiritual 'success' in Australia, at this time. It comes across to people as an attractive, enthusiastic, and motivated organisation. Young people, including some students from Catholic schools, are switching denominations and embracing Pentecostalism in its various expressions (Chant, 2004). It is a comfortable, religious, fun, and culturally acceptable community of believers within which to express their spirituality (Hillsong, 2007). However, research questions the longevity of 'denominational switchers' .The average membership of a 16-25 year old member of a Pentecostal Church is 18 months (Kaldor et al., 2004; Chant, 2004).

The following summarises key points noted in this review:

SUMMARY
- Key aspects of the attractiveness of alternative spiritualities are their openness and diversity, usually without the sorts of commitment that is usually associated with mainline church membership.   - Alternative spiritual practice is not strongly evident amongst school age young people.   - Alternative Spiritualities provide a sense of wellbeing.   - Alternative Spiritualities are self-focused and self-affirming.   - Alternative Spiritualities can have an affiliation with nature.   - Pentecostalism attracts a significant number of young Catholics.

- Pentecostalism is the fastest growing Christian denomination in Australia.
- Pentecostalism's attraction lies in its style of worship, contemporary music and experiential focus.
- Pentecostal Church participation can include youth groups, Bible studies, social networks, and demographic related cells.
- Pentecostalism does not appear to attract long term membership from youth.

2.3.12 SUMMARY OF THE SECTION ON THE COMPONENTS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S SPIRITUALITY

An exploration of the literature investigating a number of aspects relating to contemporary spirituality and senior school students in Catholic schools has been undertaken (Dixon, 2003; Hill, 2004; Rossiter, 2004; Kaldor et al., 2004; Hughes, 2007; Mason et al., 2006). A number of key insights have been identified at the end of each section. These points contribute to an understanding of youth spirituality and provide a foundation for the research instruments. The research questions emerging from this section of the literature review are:

1. How do senior school students understand the concept of spirituality in their lives?

2. What factors are contributing to the relationship between senior school students and the Catholic Church?

2.4 INFLUENCES OF CULTURE AND YOUTH CULTURE

Spirituality for young people is no longer reliant upon institutional religion for its foundations. Competing cultural trends and mindsets are encroaching on the psyche of youth in 21st century society (Jackson, 2004). The interpretation of youth spirituality in this study needs to take into account the cultural factors that have an influence on young people's spiritual and moral development. Within the limited scope of the study, the following sections will develop some perspective on cultural influences.

Youth culture: Youth culture is a term used to refer generally to the ways young people (adolescents and teenagers) express themselves that differ from the generally accepted

culture of their community (Hill, 2004). Research points to youth culture being a fairly recent phenomenon (Honner, 2000, Roff, 1999, Crawford & Rossiter, 1981). It is thought that it came to prominence as its own entity after World War II, in response to the economic, political, and educational climate (Hill, 2004, Mackay, 1997; Hanvey, 2005). Youth culture is also fostered as a niche market for consumer goods (Warren, 1992). The psychological prominence of the idea of youth culture for young people themselves appears to be congruent with the new search for identity in the face of an ideological and cultural upheaval (Rossiter, 2004). Also, conformity to the lifestyle as imagined within youth culture can be a satisfactory psychological and sociological "home" for young people (Roff, 1999).

The concept of 'coolness' is pertinent in terms of what is 'in' and what is 'out.' The only hard and fast rule is that whenever a trend goes 'mainstream' or 'commercial' (in teenage terms) it is no longer in vogue and discarded for the next 'big thing' (Jackson, 2004). Thus, individualism is somewhat compromised within this framework (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006). However, 'must have' ipods, mobile phones, and designer clothes transcend and are exceptions to the rule (Bridger, 2001).

The postmodern world of the 21st century is likely to experience what has been termed "an almost unimaginable shift of focus from the 'self' to the 'other' (Honner 2000 p. 14)." Young people tend not resonate with discussions on morality but with what is personally meaningful (Rossiter, 2005; Hanvey, 2005). They are in touch with the real, the meaningful and the verifiable. Significantly, research points to a state of existence whereby their lives are finely balanced between finding meaning and falling into self-destruction (Honner, 2000). It is within this context that young people strive and struggle to form an identity that is meaningful and empowering (Roff, 1999; Hill, 2004; Engebretson, 2003; Crawford & Rossiter, 2006).

Research is indicating that a strong sense of social justice is apparent within this demographic, an interest in 'issues and causes beyond self (Honner, 2000, p. 47; McLaughlin, 2005).' However, there appears to be an ambiguity of definition and

experience.   The postmodern condition is congruent with this montage of beliefs and attitudes.   The common denominator is borne out of relating and synthesising experience (Roff, 1999).

This culture in which young people find themselves enables and empowers the experiences in which they spend their time (Honner, 2000; Rossiter, 2005; Hall & McMinn, 2007; Hanvey, 2005).   The postmodern condition is, in many ways, a vehicle of personal growth and formative in its nature (Jackson, 2004).   Within this paradigm the search for meaning is undertaken.   For some young people it is not a quest or even a topic of daily consciousness and pursuit; they may be so preoccupied with lifestyle questions that they give little time to trying to develop an ultimate meaning and purpose for their lives. However, searching for meaning remains an intrinsic aspect of spirituality for youth living in a world of eclectic lifestyles (Jackson, 2004).

The following summarises the key insights noted in this section of the literature review.

SUMMARY
- Youth culture is an identifiable sub-culture in Westernised countries which is no longer very reliant on institutions and traditions for its foundation (cultural postmodernity).   - Youth culture is personalised, experiential, and meaningful.   - Youth culture is eclectic and has a range of expressions that include the secular and the spiritual.

The following section explores literature on the search for meaning for young people and how it is navigated via contemporary youth culture.

2.4.1 YOUTH SPIRITUALITY AND THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

The search for and discovery of meaning may directly form an aspect of developing spirituality.   However, it may be that these more cognitive signs of spiritual activity are in many cases the secondary products of

> spiritual stirrings found in awareness-, mystery- and value-sensing.   It
> will be important to understand the foundational experiences.   Through which
> issues of meaning may become salient to the child (Hay & Nye, 1998, p.   151).

Cultural postmodernity has provided a generational-conscious framework in which discussion and debate regarding 'meaning' can take place (Larson & Mortimer, 2002). In the light of this condition, the search for meaning may be regarded as an aspect of 'spiritual intelligence.' This theory builds upon the work of Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1985; Zohar & Marshall, 2000). For all other animals, there is no evidence of this level of self-awareness (Hughes et al., 2003).

 Only humans can ask questions about the meaning and purpose of their lives (Aerts, Apostel, De Moor, Hellemans, Maex, Van Belle, & Van Der Veken, 1994; Crawford & Rossiter, 2006). This fact of human existence rings true for all generations. For many in Australia, this revolves around constructing meaning from belief in God and in an afterlife, and the practice of religion; for others, and an increasing number of young people, meaning is constructed in spiritual, but not necessarily religious terms (Rossiter, 2004; Hill, 2004; Tacey, 2003).

In contrast, some decide, there is no meaning (Rossiter, 2005; Hanvey, 2005).   Moreover, the journey to construct a meaningful worldview is now a road that is taken alone (Aerts et al., 1994).   It may contain a tableau of eastern and western philosophies, worship practices, values, and deities (Hughes et al., 2003).   In contrast, it may include a worldview based around social interaction and technology (Bridger, 2001).   It is autonomous, psychological and sociological (Jackson, 2004; Wright, 1997). Consequently, the traditional mainstays of Religion and Philosophy are experiencing a reduction in influence on contemporary meaning (Zohar & Marshall, 2000).

Zohar and Marshall (2000) consider that thinking derived from the fields of psychology, neurology, anthropology and cognitive science are now more influential than religion and

philosophy, However, other theorists retain a key role for religion as a communicative tool in the quest for meaning (Hughes, Bond, Bellamy, & Black, 2003). The means of religious communication, in a contemporary sense, is a commodity for young people to consume like any other product (Bridger, 2001). This can take the form of participation in worship services, or taking on board the teachings, values, and dictates of senior clerics (Rossiter, 2005; Hanvey, 2005).

In the past, the religious institutions, via the theologians and philosophers have largely controlled and dispensed most of the core cultural resources in meaning for most people. These resources for meaning were written and discussed with a mainly religious vocabulary and they came to constitute several, largely Christian, worldviews (Tacey, 2003; Hanvey, 2005). In terms of belief in the non-verifiable elements of religious faith, it would appear that acceptance of dogmatic principles within a religious institution is on the wane (Rossiter, 2004).

Research contends that the link with community and the development of meaning is an important one (Roff, 1999, Jackson, 2004; Alexander, 2000). Young people in Catholic schools seem to have a 'foot in both camps' by being a part of two different environments as regards cultural meanings.   Firstly, they spend time in the Catholic school which actively proposes a Catholic world view as a basis for spirituality – although for some who are indifferent to this spirituality the religious culture of the school may appear to be 'surreal'.   Secondly, in their ordinary life, they participate in a social life that is virtually devoid of spiritual consciousness and religious practice (Wallace, 2000).

Most studies of adolescent concerns suggest that young people need to find meaning in life. Along with the urge for expression by 'doing,' youth are seeking some sure foundation for purposeful 'being' (Larson, & Mortimer, 2002). Some express this desire more freely than others, but it seems to be a deep-seated concern of all young people. Indeed, the search for meaning is another aspect of the eclectic makeup of youth spirituality (Hill, 2004, Rossiter, 2005; Crawford & Rossiter, 2006).   It is another feature

of secular compartmentalisation, a discerning skill that is necessary in a post-modern culture (Bridger, 2001). The culture and the increased secularisation of the society in which young people find themselves impacts directly on their construction of a personally meaningful spirituality.

The following key insights were identified in a review of literature on the search for meaning.

SUMMARY
• Self-awareness and derivation of personal meaning are distinctively human characteristics. • Meaning is drawn from religion and other spiritual cultural sources, often in an eclectic way. • The search for meaning may be an integral part of spirituality. • Attachment to family has significant meaning for a number of young people. • Membership and participation in community are important. • Young people seem to take themselves in and out of communities depending on their perceived relevance Interpretation and critical evaluation of experience is an important source of meaning.

The following section explores literature on secularisation and its impact on youth spirituality.

2.4.2 SECULARISATION

Western secularised countries no longer have the same influence in determining values and communicating meaning as they once did (Dobbelaere, 1981; Mackay, 1997; Hanvey, 2005). Significant parallels exist between the values and attitudes of young people from similar nations. In all developed western countries research points to a drift of adolescents from organized religion. In all developed western countries research points to a drift of adolescents from organized religion (Engebretson et al., 2003). In addition, from an Australian perspective, there was an anti-religious attitude in this country from the beginning of European settlement, with the convicts despising the British establishment with which the Church institutions were associated (Mackay, 1997).

Mackay (1997) considered that a typical Australian trait that permeates across all demographics is the personal element of religion and spirituality, even though as a whole the country is secularised. However, there is a marked difference between being religious and believing in God. A 1999 survey found that 74% of Australian adults professed belief in God (without a definition or distinction), 53% believed in heaven, and 32% in hell. Forty-three percent believed in the resurrection of Christ, 42% in his divinity, and 33% believed in the devil. However, fewer than 20% of Australians attend church at least monthly (McKay 2000, p. 221).

The fall in church attendance seemed to stabilise during the 1990s, although it was estimated that there was a 10% decline in attendance at Catholic churches between the years 1991–1996 (Mckay, 2000; Dixon, 2003). This research showed a strong connection between significant personal religious experience and maintenance of a connection with the Church. Interestingly, the research implications included the assessment that the colonisation of Australia as a penal settlement had a direct influence on the consciousness and attitude towards organized religion by people of Anglo-Celtic origins (Mackay, 1997, Crawford & Rossiter, 1991). It would seem that moral convictions hold more sway than belief in a peripheral, external God (Mckay, 2000).

Thus, contemporary Australian youth culture has inherited a secularised approach to the world. One of the noteworthy aspects of youth culture in Australia is that secularisation and spirituality seem to be able to coexist. The terms 'secular' and 'spiritual' are not mutually exclusive. Young people absorb pop culture but also infuse spiritual elements into their identity and meaning-making.

In addition, young people are living in a world where the concept of family is changing. Any number of domestic situations may exist from a two parent-multi sibling, to single parent of either gender providing the care giving (Crawford & Rossiter, 2004).

The following key insights were identified in a review of literature on secularisation that relate to the research project.

SUMMARY
- Australia is becoming increasingly secularised.   - Western, industrialised nations are adopting similar, secular worldviews.   - Religious belief and religious worldview are on the wane.   - The socialisation process is steering young people towards the secular and not the metaphysical.   - There is a marked difference between being religious and believing in God.   - The secular and the spiritual are coexisting in a youth spirituality.   - Young people infuse secular and spiritual elements into their personal spirituality interchangeably.

The next section of the review of literature explores the influence of families on the beliefs of young people.

2.4.3 THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILIES ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S BELIEFS

The research literature demonstrates that the influence of the mother is paramount in the development of spirituality in young people. Moreover, church attendance by the mother is the most powerful predictor of the church attendance on sons and daughters in the 11-16 year old range (Kay & Francis, 1996). In addition, the church attendance of the father has a pronounced affect on the attendance of the sons more than on the daughters (Haug & Warner, 2000). While this particular statistic is significant, it means little in the inner attitudes towards faith and spirituality. Some students report on regular church attendance while maintaining a negative attitude towards the church (Haug & Warner, 2000). Kay and Francis (1996) noted that divorce has a negative affect on children's attitudes towards Christianity. The research showed that when students came from a completely non-religious home and attended religious schools their attitude to religion became more positive.

The following key insights were identified in a review of literature on the influence of families on belief for young people;

SUMMARY
• Parents are the primary influence on the development of belief and faith in young people. • Church attendance by the mother is the most powerful predictor for future church adherence by young people. • Divorce is reported as a negative affect on young people's attitude toward Christianity. • Prayer is important and can be taught at home.

The following section reviews the literature on consumerism and how it impacts upon a contemporary youth spirituality.

2.4.4 CONSUMERISM

21st century culture is underpinned by products and services that make life comfortable and modern (Bridger, 2001).   However, the ease of life enjoyed today is generated by a way of thinking that is congruent with the western system of buying and selling.   What started as a means of availability and commerce morphed into a movement all on its own (Jackson, 2004).   In the 1950s consumerism developed strongly as an entity and a driving force in people's lives. Post-war reconstruction ensured that economic growth and television became perfect means for promoting consumerism. This drive of consumerism into people's lives permeated most facets of their existence. Religion and spirituality did not escape its influence. The 21st century has become characterised by spiritual consumerism where religion and spirituality have been commodified – there is a market for them and people seek them according to their own needs and interests (Bridger, 2001, Jackson, 2004).

Bridger (2001) considered that religious imagery has been progressively trivialised into 'brand names'. Religions have become commodified and tend to be presented in convenient 'bits and pieces'. Relativism is the 'prime mover' of an eclectic approach to spirituality in the 21st century (Bridger 2001). Moreover, the extensive rejection of institutional religion and the accommodation of spiritual philosophies and practices make

it culturally acceptable to commodify one's own spiritual worldview (Bridger 2001, Engebretson, 2003). This spiritual makeup is relativistic in style, nature, and moral obligation. The spiritual component to life is no longer ruled by a grand narrative interpreted and re-interpreted by an authority elite dictating to the masses when, where, and how they can be human (Bridger 2001, Jackson, 2004, Horell, 2004).

Mackay (2000) considered that an entire industry of Christian products, services, and merchandisers has emerged with televangelism, marketing Jesus as a product that works and God as a service that delivers. Christian insignia such as the fish and the *chi rho* have gone from being symbols of Christianity to brand names with their own marketing power (Jackson, 2004).

In terms of religious adherence, research suggests that there is a shift from one denomination to another quite readily amongst the 16-25 demographic (Kaldor et al., 2004). Within the Pentecostal movement, a plethora of variants exist from which young people can choose (Tacey, 2003). Kaldor considered that it is not uncommon for a person to change churches every few of years for reasons of spiritual or social dissatisfaction (Kaldor et al., 2004). In contrast, young people identifying themselves as Catholic tend to remain in the one parish. Denominational switching from Catholic to Pentecostal is not uncommon (Hughes et al., 2003; Chant, 2004). One interpretation suggests that the compelling reason for changing denominations is the level and sophistication of marketing and merchandising strategies undertaken by some Pentecostal churches (Kaldor et al., 2004).

SUMMARY
• The 21st century is dominated by a consumerism of products and services.
• Some churches use marketing and merchandising strategies to attract young people.
• Religion and spirituality have become commodified.
• The prominence of the 'grand narrative' in religions is reduced; it tends to be superseded by the ideas of experience, products, and value for money.
• Consumerism has encouraged an individualistic approach to spirituality.
• The experiential nature of consumerism has permeated young people's attitude to spirituality and religious practice.
• Relativism is the prime mover for an eclectic approach to spirituality.

In terms of brands and logos, one of the major vehicles for advertising secular or spiritual 'products' is via the medium of television. The following section briefly reviews the literature on the spiritual/moral influence of television.

2.4.5 THE POTENTIAL INFLUENCE OF TELEVISION ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S SPIRITUALITY

Consumerism and marketing have been very successful over the past 30 years. The media has facilitated the acculturation of the Australian public to a general. 'popular' culture where people's imaginations of what life should be like are orchestrated by the consumer-advertising-entertainment complex (Goosen, 1997). Television has been one of several media that have carried products, logos, brand names and jingles into the homes and the minds of consumers – and consequently into their lifestyle expectations (Bridger, 2001; Crawford & Rossiter, 2006). Significantly, young people spend equal amounts of time at school as they do watching television (Australian Bureau Statistics, 2005).

Advertisements, as well as the myriad of programs available for viewing, have a significant effect on the beliefs and values of senior school students (Rossiter, 2005; Crawford & Rossiter, 2006)). Television can be an influential means of education. Exposure to different cultures and social situations through objective documentary style programs enhance students' awareness of their place in the greater world (Greenfield, 1993). However, a full and frank expose on any given issue is rarely given due to time constraints imposed by production and agenda schedules (Bridger, 2001; Anderson, 2001).

The young person who spends an exorbitant amount of time in front of the television is in danger of developing a values system based upon the interests and persuasion of the market economy (Anderson, 2001). Images of celebrities, and attractive people endorsing particular products, and subliminally acting out behaviour and values, pressure young people into a conformity that is consistent with a brand name, and with language and

conduct that are prevalent amongst their age group at that particular time in cultural history (Jackson, 2004; Anderson, 2001).

As an educational tool, television enables young people to achieve an awareness of the nature of society and the human condition (Anderson, 2001). Current affairs and news programmes show the way reputations and actions can be called into account, positively and negatively. The motivation of production staff and television executives (on commercial networks) are squarely fixed on the ratings figure calculated at the end of each ratings period. Significantly, advertising revenue is based on these figures and content of programs is driven by time slot, demographic considerations, and entertainment value (Anderson, 2001).

Research suggests that young people can sit in the comfort of their own living rooms and deliberate on the character and reputation of political leaders, sporting icons and celebrities, absorb advertising promotions, enjoy gratuitous violence and sex, and learn about the greater world through educational programmes like documentaries (Anderson, 2001, Greenfield, 1993). The implications in terms of this research study are that all of the above have a subtle, difficult to identify, but likely significant influence on the values, tastes, and attitudes of young people, implicitly crafting their personal spirituality.

The most watched television shows for the demographic 16-25 in Australian in 2005 were: *Big Brother*, *The OC* (Orange County), *24*, and *Lost* (Australian Media Ratings, 2005). While a detailed analysis of these programs is beyond the scope of this study, it is of interest to note that apart from *Big Brother*, the others are of a similar genre. The *OC* is a drama-based series involving a group of 18-20 year olds focusing on their experiences with contemporary issues such as drugs, alcohol, sex, and interpersonal relationships.

The fashion and language of the *OC* is evident in the lives of young people in Australia (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 24/6/04). Whether Australians are taking on the values and

attitudes of the characters in the program (Alcohol abuse, wanton violence, drug use, bisexuality etc.) is yet to be determined. *Lost* and *24* are fantasy style action dramas with very specific heroes and villains indicating that escapism may be a key attraction. *Big Brother* has been a worldwide phenomenon for the past 5 years and is shown between May and August each year since its inception in 2000.

A group of 14 people aged from 19 and 30 live in a house and are filmed 24 hours a day. (Network Ten, 2005). Each Sunday the general public votes off a housemate until a winner is announced at the end of the 3 months. Ratings consistently topped the primetime slot (AMR, 2005). 62.7% of 16–39 year-olds watched Big Brother's Sunday night eviction programme in 2005 (AMR, 2005). During the Big Brother season much debate arose over the behaviour of the housemates; much of it coming from Church leaders and practicing Christians (*The Age*, 22/6/05). In the 2005 season, debate raged over the explicit nature of some scenes involving housemates performing certain acts, which were considered sexual in nature. Some male chauvinism and bigotry emerged that caused concern from the 'moral right' (*The Age*, 22/6/05). The bottom line is that statistics indicated that young people accepted this form of entertainment and resonated with the characters and their values and attitudes.

Australian television has little in the way of Christian based programmes. The Australian Broadcasting Commission has two particular religious programs. *Compass* on Sunday nights, which is intended for a more mature, discerning audience, and *Sunday Spectrum*, which an eclectic look at all ranges of religions, philosophies, theology and spiritualities (ABC, 2005). Ratings figures were low suggesting that these programs catered to on older demographic and were of little interest to young people (ABS, 2005).

From the mid-1970s, until a series of scandals struck three prominent programs ten years later, televangelism was a force on television and in the world of religion. However, by the mid-1990s virtually no Australian national or network-based religious program continued. Currently, the most watched televangelist in the world is Benny Hinn (Kohn,

2003). Hinn is affiliated to the Assemblies of God and has a daytime program on the major networks of the United States and Australia. He also travels regularly staging 'crusades' for people who need healing (Kohn, 2003).

The only Australian Churches regularly on Australian television, with the exception of Pay television's Christian channel, is Brian Houston's Hillsong Church and the East Coast City Church's Pastor Phil Pringle (Sydney Morning Herald, 13/8/05). Given the statistics from the census and the Church Life Survey it would appear that television is helpful in evangelizing young people toward the Pentecostal churches. However, they appear to be the only denomination spending significant amount of money in this area of evangelization.

The following key insights were identified in a review of literature on the influence of television;

SUMMARY
- Television (TV) is used for advertising religious and spiritual products and services.   - Most young people spend a significant time watching TV.   - A number of religious TV programs are available, most are American and evangelical Christian.   - Pentecostal Church-based shows are popular and successful in attracting members.   - Reality TV and situational programs are popular with young people; content includes, drug use, violence, bisexuality or homosexuality, pre-marital sex and so forth.   - Young people see some value in educational programming.

In addition to the aspects reviewed here in regards to youth culture and spirituality it is pertinent to include some mention of the impact of Australia's diverse multicultural landscape. According to the 2001 Census, 23% of Australians were born overseas. An additional 20% had at least one parent born overseas. About 200 languages are spoken and a wide variety of religions are practiced. These statistics indicate that a multicultural/pluralistic society significantly influences the spirituality of young people in

Catholic schools (Dixon, 2003). The following section briefly summarises some key aspects of multiculturalism that are pertinent to youth spirituality.

2.4.6 YOUTH SPIRITUALITY AND THE MULTICULTURAL / MULTIFAITH NATURE OF AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY

The number of students in Australian Catholic schools born overseas is around 25% of students. This has introduced a melting pot of beliefs, attitudes, values, and religious practice to the Catholic school community (Dixon, 2003). Indeed, multiculturalism is consistent with the Church universal (Pope John Paul II, 2001). However, the reality is that the Australian Church has not yet arrived at a situation where people of all cultures feel comfortable as full members of the Australian Catholic Church. Those lacking fluency in English often feel lost in the dominant religious climate and its customs (Arbuckle, 1990). New arrivals often fail to find opportunities to celebrate popular religious celebrations of their own nations or places and communities where they can worship easily in their own language (Dixon, 2003).

Furthermore, the steep decline in Australian seminarians, and the sharp rise in the average age of priests have seen a recruitment drive overseas to fill positions in Catholic parishes (Cahill, Bouma, Dellal, & Leahy, 2004). It is now commonplace to visit a traditionally European populated suburb and encounter a Colombian or Indian priest with very limited English (Dixon, 2003). Significantly, this trend has impacted more on the older faithful more so than the young (who only make up 7% of Sunday's population) given their affinity with the global village (Cahill et al., 2004).

A closely related phenomenon to multiculturalism and the advent of the global village is the experience of religious pluralism in Australia. The current multicultural environment in Australia has experienced an influx of diverse spiritual beliefs and major religions that have made their way into Australia's religious landscape (Hill, 2004).

> Most spiritual people in Australia today are simply not prepared to believe that
> people are evil or condemned because they were born…Hindu…or Buddhist,

> black or Muslim.   They believe that if there really is a God such as religious
> people talk of, then God must be tolerant, loving and accepting, not narrow,
> biased and arrogant (Milley, 2002, p.   54).

Recent immigration patterns have caused cultural change with the arrival of more members of the larger world religious traditions of Judaism, Islam and Buddhism amongst others (Kaldor et al., 2004; Wright, 2003).   The increased presence of these religions emphasises the diversity of religious options available in Australian culture.   As Wright (2003) noted with reference to the situation in the United Kingdom, Australians now live in a 'religious bazaar' spiritual environment, where Christianity is just one among many voices 'vying for the minds and hearts of adherents'

There appears to have been a lack of interest on the part of Australians in learning about other religious groups, especially the non-Christian religions.   Hence interreligious dialogue has been minimal.   A mutual lack of knowledge with a fear tends to prevail, which sometimes leads to racism and prejudice (Kenworthy, 1997; Wright, 2003).   However, the ideals of tolerance, egalitarianism, and mutual respect remain core Australian values (Goosen, 1997).   The pluralism of Australia's spiritual landscape (secular pluralism is another consideration not dealt with in this study) includes a variety of ethnic derived spiritualities.   Only recently have the implicit beliefs, values, and practices of the first Australians been broadly recognised and taught in schools (Engebretson, 2003)

A Catholic affirmation of respect for the Aboriginal culture of Aboriginal Catholics was evident in the address by Pope John Paul II in Alice Springs in 1987,

> You do not have to be people divided into two parts, as though an Aboriginal had
> to borrow the faith and life of Christianity, like a hat or a pair of shoes ...   Jesus
> calls you to accept his words and his values into your own culture.   To develop in
> this way will make you more than ever truly Aboriginal (Pope John Paul II, 1986,
> p.   16).

A respect for Aboriginal culture and spirituality has become evident in community practice.   Many schools acknowledge the owners of the land at official functions and assemblies.   Other educational institutions fly the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

flags alongside the Australian standard. Aboriginal spirituality is taught as a topic in the religion curriculum in Catholic schools at Year 10, 11 and 12 levels alongside the other major faith traditions of the world (Catholic Education Office, Sydney Archdiocese, Indigenous Education Policy, 2004).

The spirituality of the *Dreaming* has been used as a means of expressing the story of Jesus and the Gospel message. Many indigenous artworks are displayed around the churches and art galleries of Australia, characterised by Aboriginal metaphors and motifs (Jesuit Social Justice Centre, 2005). Education in Aboriginal spirituality in Catholic schools, acknowledgement of the wrongs of the past and meaningful dialogue have assisted young Australians to discard the misconceptions and stereotypes of the past (Engebretson, 2003).

The religions and spiritualities of indigenous Australians, and those making Australia their new home have significantly contributed to the religious and spiritual landscape of the nation (Dixon, 2003). These elements, along with secular consumerism and various non-religious spiritualities are additional elements in the spiritual mix with young people's own religious tradition that can serve as resources for their construction of a spirituality.

The following key insights were identified in a review of literature on the influence of multiculturalism;

SUMMARY
- Australia is a multicultural society.   25% of Catholic school students were born overseas.   - Multiculturalism has enjoyed mixed success in Australian society.   - A significant number of new arrival Catholics find it difficult to worship in their own language or setting.   - A number of diocesan priests now in Catholic parishes come from Asian or Latin-American cultures.

The following key insights were identified in a review of literature on the influence of Australia's multi-faith society on youth spirituality.

SUMMARY
• Immigration has introduced significant numbers of new Australians from different Christian denominations and from non-Christian religions. Australian society contains a number of faith traditions. • The majority of Australians are tolerant of other faith traditions. • 67% of Indigenous Australians are Christian with a number infusing traditional beliefs with mainstream Christianity.

A review of the literature has indicated that the religions and spiritualities of indigenous Australians, and those making Australia their new home have significantly contributed to the religious and spiritual landscape of the nation (Dixon, 2003). Therefore, a synthesising of secular consumerism and religious adherence provide substantial elements toward the interconnected eclectic makeup of youth spirituality.

The research questions emerging from this section of the review of literature are:

3. How have some aspects of contemporary culture influenced the spirituality of senior school students?

4. From what aspects of life do senior school students in Catholic schools derive meaning?

2.5 GENERAL CONCLUSION

This chapter has reviewed the literature in relation to youth spirituality and some societal characteristics affecting its articulation and formation. It has focused on the three following areas and significant sub-areas:

- Perspective from developmental theories
- Components and characteristics of young people's spirituality
- Cultural influences and youth culture

The next chapter, Chapter 4, *Design of the Project and Research Methodology* will explain the second empirical part of the research.   It will justify the choice of epistemology, design, the selection of the participants, as well as the choice of research methods

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF THE PROJECT AND
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to explain and justify the research design for the second, empirical part of the study that explored the contemporary spirituality of Year 12 students in 3 Catholic schools. Five questions were developed from the major themes considered in the research literature that provided the focus for the empirical research design:

1. How does the construction of a contemporary youth spirituality relate to the stages of religious and moral development?
2. How do senior school students understand the concept of spirituality in their lives?
3. From what aspects of life do senior school students in Catholic schools derive meaning and purpose?
4. How have some aspects of contemporary culture influenced the spirituality of senior school students?
5. What factors are contributing to the relationship between senior school students and the Catholic Church?

3.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework, which underpins a research design, ensures consistency between the research problem and the questions, and between the methods adopted to address the research problem (Crotty, 1998). The theoretical research framework includes overt assumptions, concepts, and forms of explanations concerning the research problem and its intended exploration (Neuman, 2003). In this study, contemporary youth spirituality is a personal construct containing a number of concepts and perceptions; it also includes feelings, attitudes and values. Consequently,

the adoption of an appropriate theoretical framework assists the articulation and clarity of the research process. Since research is re-searching, theories of knowledge or epistemology need to be declared. Table 3.1 provides an outline of the theoretical framework adopted to provide clarity of understanding.

Table 3.1 *Theoretical Framework*

Epistemology	Constructionism
Theoretical Perspective	• *Interpretivism:* **Symbolic interactionism**
Methodology	• **Case Study**
Methods	• **Focus Group** • **Participant Interview** • **Questionnaire**

3.2.1 EPISTEMOLOGY: CONSTRUCTIONISM

Epistemology is defined as a branch of philosophy that investigates the origin, methods and limits of human knowledge (Cresswell, 2002a; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Every research perspective is relative to particular personal, social, cultural conditions. These interactions, when applied to the known with the knower, depend on the interaction of the subject and object (Crotty, 1998). In this particular research project, the subject is *students*, and the interactive construct is a *youth spirituality*. One of the features underpinning a research design is to declare the position taken about how knowledge is specifically re-searched and constructed (Crotty, 1998).

Constructionism was adopted as the research epistemology underpinning the conduct of this study (Crotty, 1998; Raskin, 2002). Two fundamental principles apply to this epistemology. Firstly, knowledge is not just passively received through the senses nor by way of communication, but is actively construed by the knower (Cresswell, 2002b;

Bogdan, & Biklen, 1998). Secondly, the function of knowing is adaptive and serves the subject's organization of the experiential world through social interaction. (Cherryholmes, 1993).

Constructionism is a suitable epistemological framework for this study because the focus of the research design is to share how Year 12 youth construe something within their experiential world, namely their spirituality. This means that the process of constructing meaning is subjective and active. Participants draw on their personal background and knowledge to make sense of their world (Schwandt, 2000). Spirituality is a personal construct; it is an accumulation of experiences and cognitive developments that are synthesized and it evolves, expressing key aspects of the individual's personal identity. Crotty's commentary on constructionism harmonises with this view of the construct youth spirituality;

> There is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it. Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world. There is no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed. In this understanding of knowledge, it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon (Crotty, 1998, pp. 8-9).

3.2.2 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE: INTERPRETIVISM

Constructionism is a broad epistemology. Within it is theoretical perspective of interpretivism which has been used in the research design (Crotty 1998). An interpretivist approach "looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life world (Crotty, 1998, p. 67)." Moreover, interpretive research is the study of the social action in which people attach subjective meaning (Crotty, 1998). The aim of interpretivism is to explore the values, attitudes and beliefs, which influence people to act in a particular way. Interpretive researchers understand that patterns are created out of evolving meaning systems, or social conventions that people generate as they interact (Crotty, 1998).

Interpretivism as a theoretical perspective allows the researcher and the researched to gain access to the 'meaning' behind people's actions (Crotty, 1998). The search for

meaning is catalytic to the construction of a personal spirituality amongst senior school students in Catholic schools. This search is an active, conscious reflection and participation within the students' world.

The interpretivist paradigm considers that reality is the 'mind' dependent and influenced by the process of observation (Crotty, 1998). Such a theoretical perspective is consistent with reflecting on experiences and interactions that contribute to personal spirituality. Interpretivism seeks to produce descriptive analyses that emphasise deep, interpretive understandings of social phenomena (Crotty, 1998). Similarly, symbolic interactionism is embedded in interpretive assumptions that view the world as socially constructed and subject to multiple interpretations.

3.2.3 SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

Symbolic interactionism focuses on the subjective aspects of social life, rather than on objective aspects of social systems (Cresswell, 2002; Neuman, 2003). Interactionism focuses the theoretical perspective on the image of humans, rather than on the image of society. Within an interactionist paradigm, humans are pragmatic actors who continually must adjust their behaviour to the actions of other actors (Cresswell, 2002; Neuman, 2003).

In addition, a symbolic interactionist approach presents life as "an unfolding process in which individuals interpret their environment and act upon it on the basis of that interpretation" (Morrison, 2002, p. 18). In a symbolic interactionist perspective, individual meanings are construed through an interpretive process by the use of objects called symbols (Charon, 2001). As a result, the research questions for this study surfaced from an understanding of the common sets of symbols and ideas that emerged from a study of the research literature. These symbols highlighted interactions within the world of the students to which they attached meaning. Consequently, insights were gained with regard to the symbols which the students attributed to 'spirituality' as they reflectively explored their meanings. Symbolic interactionism enabled the researcher

to focus on how the participants constructed their realities within the culture in which they reside, their relationships with one another, and their experiences of Catholic education.

For each individual participant, perceptions were constructed through the lens of socially created symbols, which were transformed to create the students' reality (Charon, 2001). In terms of data collection, the suitability of symbolic interactionism is apparent in the two core areas of inquiry. Firstly, documentary analysis is conducted through a literature review. Secondly, responses, by way of focus group interview and questionnaire (Appendix F & G) by the participants are examined for common themes and insights. Figure 3.2 outlines the specific theoretical perspective nestled within the overall research project.

Figure. 3.2 *Theoretical Perspective*
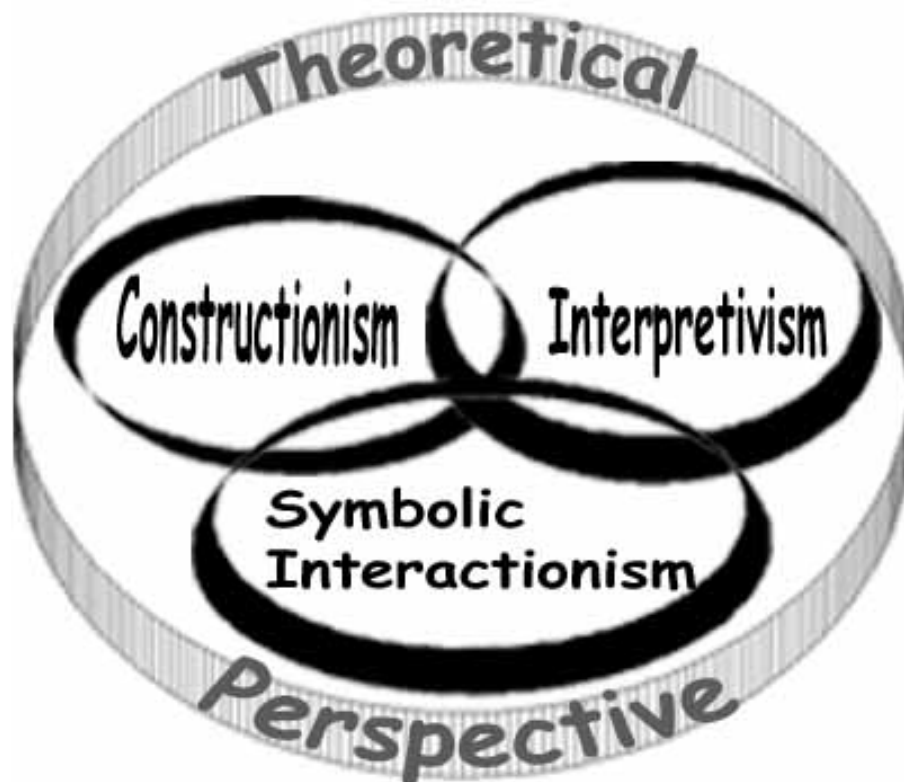
3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The first stage of the research design took into account the first part of this study, the review of the research literature that had a bearing on youth spirituality. The theoretical perspective adopted above was also pertinent to Part 1 by providing conceptual clarity for the analysis of the various themes that emerged in the literature study. Three key themes from the analysis of the literature underpinned and informed the qualitative research:

- Perspective on young people's spirituality from developmental theories
- Components and characteristics of young people's spirituality
- The influences of culture, especially a 'youth culture' on young people's spirituality

The commonality in the three areas centres on the construction of youth spirituality. This study adopts the theoretical framework of a systematic literature review in an interpretive context. This method of construction synthesises the literature in an attempt to analyse contemporary youth consciousness pertinent to these areas of inquiry.

The research offered all senior students from the three schools the opportunity to articulate their beliefs, values, and attitudes. The literature reviewed is contemporary and within the range of 1998 to 2007. The sources analysed included material in books and journals, and other material accessed via the Internet. The empirical research involved a participant cohort of senior students from three Catholic secondary colleges which made up the study.

The use of case study as a methodology for this research project was not used in the conventional way, whereby each school is analysed, and conclusions drawn about each case. The descriptive analyses were based on the overall results of the triangulation of data from the whole cohort of participants.

3.3.1 CASE STUDY

Case study examines contemporary experiences and phenomena within a real life context by seeking to convey in- depth understanding of the interpretations and meanings being explored (Crotty, 1998). Case study research raises questions about the boundaries and defining characteristics of a case. Such questions help in the generation of articulating new thinking and theory (Cresswell, 2002; Neuman, 2003). Therefore, the methodology for this research is consistent with both the epistemology of constructionism and theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism. Additionally, case study is congruent with this research because it is exploring a phenomenon that is not confined by boundaries. Moreover, the subject matter examined is highly subjective and contextual (Yin, 1994). Case studies describe events in a framework within an environment (Bassey, 1999). The use of case studies also assist researchers connect the micro level, or the actions of individual people, to the macro level, or large-scale social structures and processes (Lovey, 2000; Creswell, 2002; Neuman, 2003). In addition, a researcher may investigate one or several cases focusing on several factors (Lovey, 2000).

Case study is relevant for gathering responses from senior school students in regard to what constitutes a contemporary spirituality. The principal difference between case studies and other research studies is that the focus of attention is the individual case and not the whole population of cases (Lovey, 2000). In the case study, the focus may not be on generalisation but on understanding the particulars of that case in its complexity (Bassey, 1999; Lovey, 2000). It is important to note that the use of case study in this research project does not involve a detailed ethnographic case study of the school, but a study of participants' views and understandings. The use of case study provided a legitimate empirical base from which to explore responses from a sample of young people to questions about youth 'spirituality' (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Furthermore, the adoption of case study as a methodology is useful for participants from several locations (Bassey, 1999).

3.4 PARTICIPANTS

This study focuses on three Catholic secondary schools from a metropolitan Archdiocese. The schools selected for the research were chosen to include different types of school population, with different student profiles as regards background, range of ethnic origins, socio-economic status. All three schools contain different characteristics in terms of student background and culture. Despite the differences, there were commonalities that ensured there was likely to be a coherence and integrity to the data collection while also allowing for variation, and provide diversity of results for data analysis. In terms of the integrity of obtaining a broad response, the selection of three schools with modest commonalities was essential (Bassey, 1999).

School A is co-educational with students from a predominately Anglo Celtic background. School B is a boys' school with a reputation for academic and sporting excellence. In contrast with School A, School B's students were from multicultural backgrounds, which also reflected the demographic of the several suburbs where they resided.

School C is a Year 7-12 girls' school with a distinctive majority of Lebanese students, with a high percentage drawn from a Catholic Maronite tradition. The school enjoyed a reputation for academic excellence and was acknowledged for its celebration of a multi-cultural identity. In outlining the cultural descriptors for each school it is not the intention of this research project to explore the cultural or ethnic differences that might be correlated with the profile of students at a particular school. It is acknowledged that the Eastern Catholic traditions may be more overtly religious than young people belonging to a more anglo-celtic background. This difference in religious practice was not investigated within the scope of this research project.

The three schools were different in terms of geography, gender balance and cultural backgrounds. In addition, two schools maintained distinctive links with their particular founding religious order traditions; hence there were differences as regards their claims to 'traditional religious charisms'. Teachers at each school, religious

education coordinators, and religious education teachers, agreed to assist in supervising student participation in the completion of a questionnaire and in arrangements to allow a number of students to be available for interviews in focus groups.

Once an agreed date and time were confirmed the researcher attended each school. Before the students commenced the questionnaire it was explained that their answers to the questions were completely confidential and their participation was strictly voluntary. Schools B and C completed the survey in class groups, while School A filled out the questionnaire as a Year group in the School Hall. Teachers assisted the researcher in handing out the surveys, supervising the questionnaire session, and collecting the forms. The researcher collated the questionnaires that were used later for data analysis.

Figure 3.3 outlines the data gathering strategies utilized. The instruments designed for the purposes of data gathering needed to be consistent with the interpretivist paradigm underpinning the research project.

Figure 3.3 Data Gathering Strategies
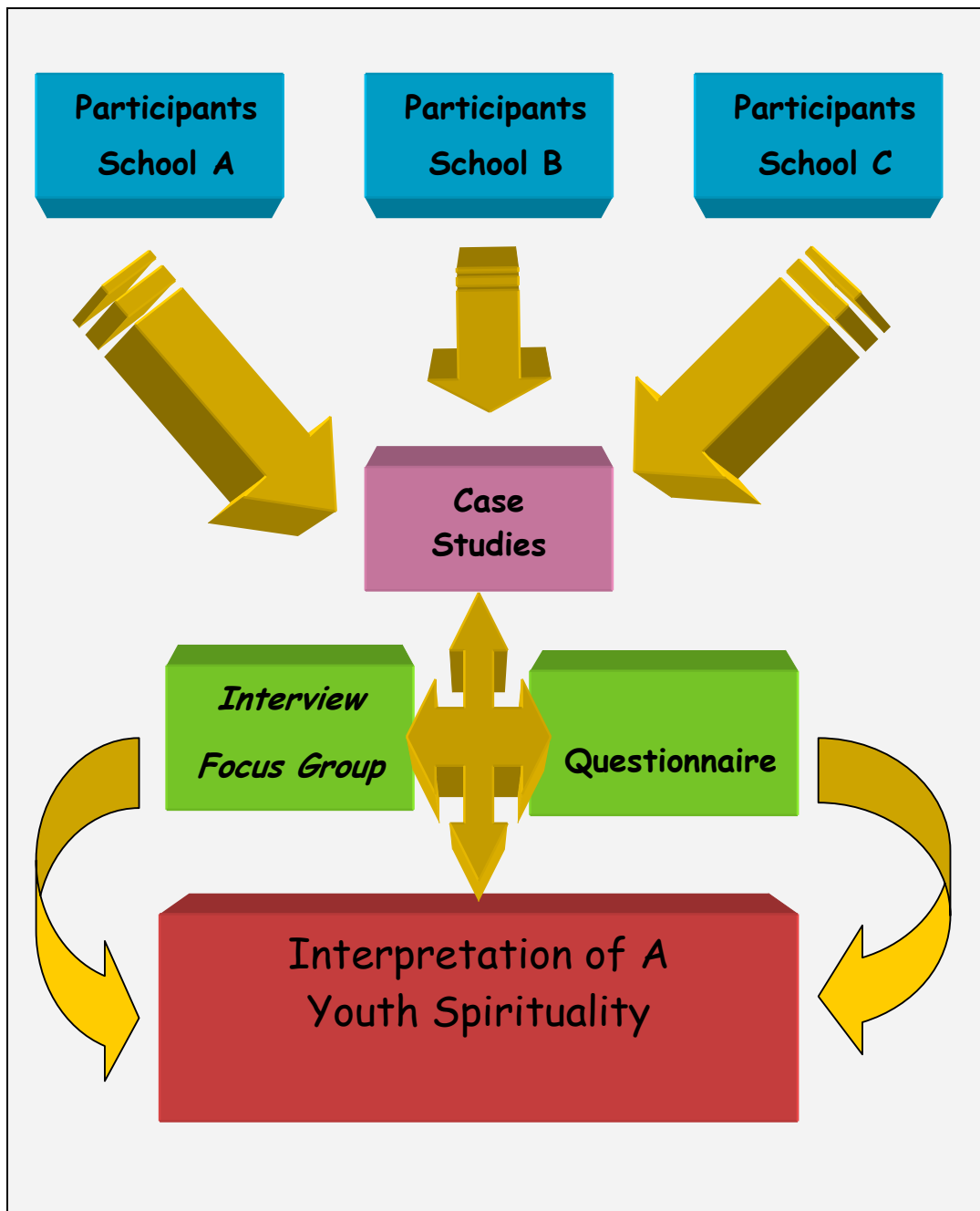
3.5 DATA GATHERING STRATEGIES

In interpretive research, the researcher is highly involved in collecting and analysing the data (Cresswell, 2002; Lovey, 2000). Interpretive studies are generally concerned with issues of interaction and meaning. Interpretive analysis requires the creative

involvement of the researcher. Because of this requirement, "nearly as many analysis strategies exist as… researchers" (Crabtree & Miller, 1992, p. 17).' This feature of interpretive analysis was the basis for a two-stage approach to the interpretation of the research (Blumer, 1969). Firstly, cohorts of students at each of the three case study schools completed the questionnaire. Secondly, focus group interviews at each school were used to extend and 'depth' the data in particular areas – an example of data funneling (Cresswell, 2002). Secondly, the use of focus group interviews was employed with the intention of funneling the responses. This process yielded more expressive data beyond that given by the questionnaire; and this helped achieve a consistency between the direction of the research, the data collection and the data analysis as regards the overall interpretivist paradigm for the study (Blumer, 1969).

3.5.1 QUESTIONNAIRE

In the context of interpretive research, a questionnaire is a method of collecting data in which the interviewer directs the interaction with the participant and introduces the ideas into the research process (Denzin & Lincoln 1994; Neuman, 2003). The purpose of the questionnaire was to give all Year 12 students within each of the three schools, the opportunity to express their points of view regarding spirituality and some aspects of culture. For convenience, and to maximise response rate, the survey questionnaire was group administered (Cresswell, 2002) to all Year 12 students who were prepared to participate in the study.

The main types of interpretive questionnaires are the face-to-face, electronic, and telephone (Maxwell, 1996; Neuman, 2003). The face-to-face method was chosen because this method of administration has, traditionally, the highest level of response rate (Cresswell, 2002). Participants completed the survey by hand. The questionnaire gave the participants the freedom and opportunity to respond to open-ended items that allowed them to articulate what aspects of their life contributed to a personal spirituality. The questionnaire was semi-structured to allow students to express opinions on the impact of Catholic education and aspects of contemporary culture (Neuman, 2003).

After feedback from a preliminary testing of the questionnaire by five academics, four religion teachers, and twenty-four students, it was modified to enhance its design, style, clarity of expression, and appropriateness of questions (Templeton, 1994). The trial tested the questionnaire's effectiveness and helped identify potential problems with its length, language and administration.

A sensitivity to the language and idiomatic usage of senior school students was crucial for the relevance of the questions – that is, their capacity to speak to the students in a meaningful, respectful way. Oral literacy of the students was also taken into account (Neuman, 2003). Using phraseology that was attuned to their way of thinking was considered to be helpful in enabling more meaningful and consistent responses (Smith, 2002).

The students selected in this first trial, and the results of their surveys, did not ultimately participate in the research project. Following a meeting with the trial groups of teachers and students separately, a second draft of the questionnaire was developed, the second draft was then trialed with fourteen students and four staff. The modifications of the questionnaire in the light of feedback from the two trials involved improvement in the clarity of questions and more concise expression. The format of the questionnaire itself was also rearranged for the final draft. The second method of data gathering was the use of the focus group. A self-selection process was undertaken with students freely expressing their wish to participate. A cohort of 15 students per school was selected randomly from these volunteers to participate in the focus group interview. The final selection was made by their class teachers. The approximate numbers who volunteered for the focus groups for School A, B, and C were ten, eight, and nine respectively.

3.5.2 FOCUS GROUP

Once the participants were selected the focus group interviews took place (Appendix G). Focus groups are a form of group interview that capitalises on communication between research participants in order to generate data. Although group interviews are

often used simply as a quick and convenient way to collect data from several people simultaneously, focus groups explicitly use group interaction as part of the method (Lovey, 2000).

This means that instead of the researcher asking each person to respond to a question in turn, people are encouraged to talk to one another: asking questions, exchanging anecdotes and commenting on one another's experiences and points of view (Cresswell, 2002). The method is particularly useful for exploring knowledge and experiences and can be used to examine not only what students think but also how they think and why they think that way (Lovey, 2000). This method is consistent with the interpretative design for the study.

Some potential sampling advantages with focus groups are that it does not discriminate against people who cannot read or write (Lovey, 2000). Furthermore, focus groups can encourage participation from those who are reluctant to be interviewed on their own (Cresswell, 2002). This is crucial to enable a broad range of responses to questions on the esoteric and metaphysical. The interview strategy was structured in a way that would allow a free and flowing interaction amongst students and facilitator. It was important that an atmosphere of trust and openness with all participants was established (Gillham, 2005). Students were assured of response confidentiality. The focus groups provided data that gave voice to ideas, concepts and trends. This in turn assisted in facilitating the direction of the interview (Cresswell, 2003; Neuman, 2003). It could be argued that a certain self-consciousness in a school group that is committed to a particular tradition may put some psychological pressure on individuals to communicate ideas that comply with the community worldview. An example of this may be a reluctance by participants to admit to a lack of belief in God. On the other hand, the interaction with friends in the focus group may provide a stimulus for more open responses to occur than might be the case in a private, one on one interview situation.

A unique strategy that was employed during the focus group interviews was the use of caricatures as stimulus material for discussion. Students were shown a number of

caricatures containing images of God (C/F Figures. 4.4 to 4.11). The images were displayed via a multimedia projector at two schools, and as a series of laminated A3 size cards at the other school. The value in this method of focus group discussion is that students discussed the validity of each of the images of God without the use of leading questions by the interviewer, or the restriction of only discussing images of God contained within the parameters of traditional God concepts.

3.5.3 FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

Face-to-face interviews focus group interviews have the highest response rates and permit the longest questionnaires (Gillham, 2005; Neuman, 2003). Thus, the interview is an integral function of the research in obtaining meaningful data. Within this context, an interview is a conversation, the purpose being;

> to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena (Gillham, 2005, p. 117; Chase, 2005; Templeton, 1994).

The focus group interview designed for the purpose of this study was open-ended and the process allowed the interviewer the opportunity;

> to build a conversation within a particular subject area, to assist in facilitating the flow of the interview, to word questions spontaneously and within context, and to establish a conversational style (Patton, p. 283).

The students responded by building upon the comments of others and enhancing the articulation of the points and concepts provided by the cohort. However, it is acknowledged that sometimes in the focus group situation participants can be shy or awkward in talking in front of others (Chase, 2005).

After obtaining permission, an MP3 voice recorder was used to record each focus group interview. The purpose of the recording was to increase the accuracy of the data collection and to enhance the interactive nature of the interview by focussing on the

student and the conversation, thereby removing the disruptive nature of looking down and taking notes (Gillham, 2005). The recorder was small and inconspicuous and was placed to the side of the interview table. Full transcriptions were made of the conversations of the focus group interviews.

The aim of the student interviews, embedded in a constructionist paradigm, was to explore how they acquired a personal spirituality, and how Catholic spirituality and aspects of culture contributed or impinged on that personal construct. However, it was recognised that interviews do have limitations as participants can only describe their own perceptions and interpretations (Gillham, 2005). Furthermore, their views can be subject to personal bias (Chase, 2005; Patton, 1990; Neuman, 2003). Additionally, the researchers may carry their own bias into their interpretation of results (Cherryholmes, 1993). As far as possible, this latter problem was addressed. Checking interpretations with research supervisors who checked for bias was one way of doing this. In addition, the results were presented in a paper entitled, "An exploration of a contemporary youth spirituality of senior students in three Catholic schools" at an International Symposium to allow for more feedback and critique in regard to potential bias.

3.6 ANALYSIS OF DATA

3.6.1 QUESTIONNAIRE ANALYSIS

The questionnaires were analysed as three separate schools; labelled School A, School B and School C. Questionnaires were read and analysed and sorted into segments that were pertinent to the specific sections of the research project (Flick, 1998; Neuman, 2003). Each survey response was collated, and grouped. The questionnaires were coded so that the quantitative data could be read and analysed by the SPSS statistical package (SPSS, 2002). The use of coding imposed some order on the raw quantitative data and allowed movement into synthesising, generalisations, and theory, so that similar responses could be grouped together, and counted (Neuman, 2003; Hollway & Jefferson, 2002). The coding was guided by the research questions

for each section of the questionnaire (Hollway & Jefferson, 2002). In addition, a *T-test* was applied to the responses according to gender to measure whether or not two independent populations had different mean values on each of the measures. Those results are included in the following chapter.

Percentage and mean responses to clusters of related items were then analysed and organised into tables. The data were merged indicating the responses as a School grouping. Each of the answers was placed under the general headings of each question. Answers were sorted to identify themes, patterns, and relationships. Generalized conclusions could then be drawn from the collated data.

In order to reduce the chances of putting too much emphasis on attractive survey responses that are not widely shared; the use of colour coding was employed to identify commonalities. This helped categorise the various aspects of the research project and to gather the information together into concept clusters and consistent results (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Neuman, 2003). This led to a flow chart that highlighted the key themes and personal constructs emerging from the data. The *SPSS* statistical package was used to analyse the quantitative data. This method produced frequency tables, percentages, and cross-tabulations of the numerical data taken from the questionnaire surveys that prepared the results for detailed analyses.

3.6.2 FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

The focus group interview tapes and notes produced more expressive qualitative data and were transcribed, analysed, and reviewed into a list of varied responses. A sorting and sifting framework allowed for distinctions in language, relationships, phrases, patterns, and themes that were identified on an individual and collective level (Hollway & Jefferson, 2002; Glesne, 2006). Moreover, the process of memoing was utilized to develop a set of generalisations that cover the uniformities contained within the findings. Reflective notes were written in order to cover the common themes and identify the major and minor ideas permeating the data (Kamberelis, & Dimitriadis, 2005; Neuman, 2003; Hollway & Jefferson, 2002). The memos provided a set of results that were used to articulate the ideas, concepts, and understanding amongst the participants in this study. In particular, the participants talked about their personal

views on culture, spirituality and the impact and influence of Catholic education. The results from the focus group interviews supported the quantitative data obtained through the tabulated statistics of the questionnaire survey. The results collated from the questionnaire survey and the focus group interviews developed into the basis for the discussion of the results that are included in chapters five and six.

3.7 LEGITIMATION

Verification of research findings is often discussed in relation to concepts of reliability, validity and generalisation (Yin, 1998; Neuman, 2003). Ensuring there is a high degree of internal validity helps develop a satisfactory level of reliability (Neuman, 2003). In terms of trustworthiness, interpretive research attempts to build dependability in order to make a reasonable claim on methodological consistency. Trustworthiness refers to the believability of the findings of the research project (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

Building upon this is the requirement of a degree of confidence that what emerges from the study is revealing a truth, in a philosophical sense. However, this 'truth' is relative to the position and contribution of the participants, not a pursuit for an absolute (Cresswell & Miller, 2000; Neuman, 2003). As described earlier, two sources of information were used in each of the three schools; (questionnaires and focus group interviews), serving as triangulation that helped show the consistency and reliability of the data, as well as help endorse the validity of the interpretive constructs used to analyse the data. An additional innovation that added to the validity of the data was the use of questionnaire responses during the focus group interviews. Students were asked to elucidate their responses to the survey which enabled a clearer understanding of the concepts that students were attempting to convey. Participant checks were also undertaken in order to enhance the validity of the data (Hollway & Jefferson, 2002; Neuman, 2003, Cresswell, 2002). Informants checked and counted the number of questionnaires from each school, read the transcripts of each interview, and verified the results.

3.7.1 RELIABILITY

A research task needs to hold up to a degree of scrutiny in terms of its findings and the bias of the researcher (Cresswell & Miller, 2000; Glesne, 2006). The researcher attempts to ensure that both the recording of observations and the interpretation of their meaning are as free as possible from contamination by the researcher. There needs to be a level of 'confirmability' in the data (Cresswell & Miller, 2000). This means that the sources are clearly demarcated and the chain of assembly in interpretation is self evident to the reader. Moreover, the theoretical framework is detailed and adhered to in its design protocol.   A case study is the study of a singularity, chosen because of its interest to the researcher. The research design includes data generated by multiple cases specifically employed to increase the legitimacy of the study. Trustworthiness in case study research is focused on singularity, and, in this case, a multiple of singularities (Bassey, 1999; Cresswell & Miller, 2000).

This research is consistent with this premise because of the selection of sites with diverse populations in culture, gender, ethnicity, and location. Multiple cases provide more compelling support for generalisations that may be drawn from the study than do single-case studies (Yin, 1989).   The perspectives, attitudes and behaviours that exist within each discrete case are compared with those that exist across multiple cases to test emerging conceptualisations (Bassey, 1999; Cresswell & Miller, 2000). Since the purpose of the study is not to portray any single case but to synthesise the generalisations drawn from all cases, the presentation of data is organized around key themes and concepts (Lincoln & Guba, 2003). Reliability was enhanced by 'triangulation of data' (Cresswell & Miller, 2000). The use of Lickert scale items in the questionnaire, as well as open-ended questions in the focus group interviews added to the confirmabity of the data.   Participants had opportunities in the focus groups to check that their interpretations were being validated, and their views were comprehended. Their comments were valid interpretations of their spirituality. They also had an opportunity to raise questions about any problems with the data.   No one complained that the questionnaire could not be understood. Checking and testing the questionnaire with teachers and trial students helped reliability by removing any ambiguities.

3.8 LIMITATIONS

The objective of this research is to gain meaningful descriptions of the experience under review, being as faithful as possible to the sense attributed to the experience by the participants (Tellis, 1997; Neuman 2003). The role of the principal researcher is to assist the participants explore their experience and, without imposing her/his own biases and interpretations on the data, seek to identify core themes and trends (Tellis, 1997). This requires a sufficient degree of self-awareness on the part of the researcher to be able to filter out biases and preconceptions brought to the research. Therefore, there must be a focus on the research issues and avoiding undue influence by the researcher. Researcher bias can lead to compromises in the researcher's ability to disclose information, and can raise power issues (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Therefore, multiple strategies of reliability create reader confidence in the findings. As a consequence, the interview and questionnaire sessions were completed by the teachers who are members of that year group, under the leadership and direction of the principal researcher and the year coordinator. Thus, there was an element of 'collaboration' within the research study, and in the data gathering process (Cresswell, 2002).

The students had prior knowledge of the research project and the involvement of the principal researcher (Creswell & Miller 2000). All due care was taken to ensure that the research fieldwork was completed with similar consistency at all three schools, and within the interpretivist matrix that underpins the study. Data collection, within the interpretivist paradigm is varied and allows for a holistic approach to information gathering (Tellis, 1997). Moreover, the method that used in this research to ensure reliability is multiple data sources (Morse, Barrett, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). The purpose of sourcing data from a number of specific contexts is to obtain confirmation of findings through a divergence of different perspectives. The strategies to collect the data include a systematic literature review, questionnaires, and interview. Obtaining data from multiple sources involves time, space, and persons, and consists of the use of multiple, rather than single observers (Morse et al., 2002). In addition, use of multiple sources encouraged collecting data from multiple participants on the same topic to draw conclusions about what constitutes a personal 'truth' (Chase, 2005).

Indeed, "real life is composed of different perspectives that do not always coalesce, discussing contrary information adds to the credibility of an account for a reader (Creswell 2003, p. 196)." Personal interpretation and the derivation of meaning within the themes studied in this project varied from participant to participant. The nature of this study provides a snapshot of participants' spiritual constructs at a specific point in time. The research relies on the willingness of participants to answer the questions put to them and be open with their responses. Using semi-structured interviews provides some limitations to the study due to the non statistical nature of most data (Gillham, 2005; Chase, 2005; Templeton, 1994). However, this research is intended to increase the understanding of the contemporary spirituality of senior school students in three Catholic senior colleges. Interpretation and discussion of the results based on the data will be produced within the limitations of this study. Figure 3.4 outlines the linear stages for data collection and analysis.

Table 3.4 *Stages for Data Collection and Analysis*

	Step	Description
Exploratory Phase	Step 1:	Initial inquiry and conceptual development
	Step 2	Literature mapping and contextual framework
Documentary analysis Phase	Step 3:	Documentary analysis: Review of literature related to youth spirituality
Qualitative data collection: **Questionnaire**	Step 4:	Questionnaire and focus group structures finalised Cohort completed the questionnaire;
Focus Groups interviews	Step 5:	Focus group interviews conducted at the three colleges
Analysis and reporting of data	Step 6:	Collation & analysis of data collected in steps 4 and 5 The SPSS program used for data analysis and reporting of questionnaire results. Data coding, memoing, synthesis of qualitative data
Discussion of findings	Step 7	Discussion of the meaning and significance of the data
Conclusions and recommendations	Step 8	Interpretation of the perspective on youth spirituality derived from the study

	Step	Description
Exploratory Phase	Step 1a:	Initial Inquiry and conceptual development
	Step 1b:	Literature Map and Contextual Framework
	Step 2:	Documentary Analysis: Literature Review
Individual **In-depth Interviews** **Focus Groups**	Step 3:	Questionnaire completed by cohort
	Step 4:	Focus groups at colleges: Interview
	Step 5:	Initial collation & analysis of data collected in step 3 and 4
Data **Analysis**	Step 6:	Document analysis & coding
	Step 7	Final analysis

3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study adhered to all of the ethical protocols required by the University that govern data gathering strategies. Approval was gained from the Australian Catholic University Research Project Ethics Committee (Appendix A). Written approval for the study was obtained from the relevant Catholic Education Office authorities and Principals (Appendix B). All students and teachers received a letter outlining the nature and purpose of the research project (Appendices C & D). They were made aware of the ethical protocols that applied and that participation was voluntary. The participants were guaranteed privacy and confidentiality; the letter to participants also sought parental permission for participation (Appendix E). This protected the anonymity and the sensitivity of participants (Guba, 1989; Doucet & Mauther, 2002; Berg, 2004; Glesne, 2006).

Given the sensitive and personal nature of the area being investigated, it was possible that the participants might feel some personal gain from the opportunity to reflect on, and work out their own responses to, the various questions posed in the study. This possibility was consistent with the theoretical framework that allowed for some insight and personal growth for participants as a result of their involvement (Doucet & Mauther, 2002; Berg, 2004; Glesne, 2006). 'Reciprocity' is consistent with the epistemological framework underpinning the study (Cresswell & Miller, 2000).

To maintain anonymity, student codes will be used for labelling quoted contributions and for indicating school sites (Doucet & Mauther, 2002; Berg, 2004; Glesne, 2006). Raw data and the subsequent analysis of results have been safely archived at the University. This included written and audio taped material.

3.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter has explained the research design and the underpinning epistemology and theoretical framework. It has also addressed a number of issues that relate to the use of questionnaire and focus group methods, as well as to questions about ensuring

validity and reliability in the collected data.   Finally, attention was given to limitations of the study and to ethical questions in the research process.

Data will be presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

This chapter presents an analysis of the empirical data from the second part of the study, reporting on questionnaire and focus group responses from Year 12 students from three Catholic high schools. Some illustrative comments from students on their image of who God might be are also included.

4.1 RESEARCH FINDINGS

The data analysis presented below is a synthesis of results from the survey questionnaire and the focus group interviews.

4.2 SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

The sample was limited by definition to students enrolled at three Catholic schools. Two hundred and seven questionnaires were received with the corresponding ethical clearance forms. This represented a return rate of 79% of the overall student cohort. Analysis of the questionnaires at the three schools considered gender and some aspects of their personal and demographic background, and their views of spirituality.

The items on *cultural background* asked students to assess the level of influence they feel that their cultural background has on them. Therefore, on this item the results *medium* and *strong* do not add up to 100%.

The following table outlines the numbers participating and the percentage of male and female participants. Out of the 207 respondents 58% were female and 42% were male.

Table 4.1 *Questionnaire and Focus Group participant numbers*

School	Focus Group Number		Questionnaire Number	
A	10		95	
B	8		52	
C	6	3	34	26
Total	27		207	
Male/Female	14	13	86	121

The following tables outline the parent's birthplace, domestic situation, birth order, and religious affiliation of students in this study.

Table 4.2 *Parents' Birthplace*

Q no PD03	Question: Parents Birthplace	School A Females	School B Males	School C Overall	Total average
	Born in Australia	11.7%	56.9%	69.5%	39.7%
	One Parent Overseas	21.3%	21.6%	25.4%	22.5%
	Both Parent's Overseas	67%	21.6%	5.1%	37.7%

With about 60% of the students having at least one parent born overseas, the sample probably reflects the level of multi-ethnicity that is common in schools in the large Australian cities.

Table 4.3 *Domestic Situation*

Q no	Question:	School A	School B	School C	Total average
PD02	Domestic situation	Females	Males	Overall	
	Mum and Dad	79.6%	88%	76.3%	83.8%
	Mum Only	11.6%	10%	18.6%	12.3%
	Dad Only	3.7%	2%	5.1%	3.9%

16 % of the students in the sample came from one a one parent family.

Table 4.4 *Birth Order*

Q no	Question:	School A	School B	School C	Total average
		Females	Males	Overall	
	1	42%	24%	23%	43.8%
	2	33%	15%	21%	34%
	3	10%	9%	10%	14.3%
	4	7%	1%	3%	5.4%
	5	0%	1%	2%	1.5%
	6	1%	0%	1%	1%

Table 4.4 shows the birth order of students in the sample. 44% were the first born. This data does not show the numbers of students who were only children.

Table 4.5 *Religious Affiliation*

My Religion	School A	School B	School C	Total Males	Total females	Total average
	Females	Males	Males & Females			
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Catholic	82.1%	60.5%	66.1%	58.4%	81.7%	72.6%
Anglican	3.2%	0%	1.7%	1.3%	2.5%	2%
Uniting	4.2%	9.3%	10.2%	11.7%	4.2%	7.1%
Orthodox	5.3%	4.7%	6.8%	6.5%	5%	5.6%
Pentecostal	0%	18.6%	6.8%	14.3%	.8%	6.1%
Other Christian	0%	4.7%	5.1%	5.2%	.8%	2.5%
Non-Christian	5.3%	2.3%	3.4%	2.6%	5%	4.1%

The highest proportion of Catholic students in the three school sample was 82% and the lowest 60%, with the overall average 72%. These figures reflect the general pattern for numbers of Catholic students in Catholic schools in NSW (Catholic Education Commission, NSW, 2006).

Table 4.6 *Students' perceptions of the relative strength of their ethnic cultural Influence on their spirituality*

Cultural Influence	School	Low	Medium	High
PD05 Australian	A	9.6%	52.1%	38.4%
	B	4.8%	16.7%	78.6%
	C	5.1%	3.4%	91.5%
PD06 Other English Speaking	A	16.7%	23.3%	60%
	B	23.5%	11.8%	64.7%
	C	16.7%	16.7%	66.7%
PD07 European	A	34.1%	31.7%	34.1%
	B	28%	44%	28%
	C	44.4%	47.2%	8.3%
PD08 Asian	A	40%	7.5%	52.5%
	B	68.8%	0%	31.3%
	C	88.9%	11.1%	0%
PD09 Pacific Islander	A	81%	4.8%	14.3%
	B	84.6%	7.7%	7.7%
	C	96.3%	3.7%	0%
Latin American	A	60%	20%	20%
	B	85.7%	0%	14.3%
	C	96.3%	3.7%	0%
Middle Eastern	A	45.5%	21.2%	33.3%
	B	71.4%	7.1%	21.4%
	C	67.6%	12.2%	20.3%

Students in this sample identify themselves, primarily, as culturally Australian. Significant numbers of students also acknowledge their parents and grandparent's cultural heritage as important to their identity.

4.3 SPIRITUAL AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

In the first section of the survey, students were asked to identify what aspects of life contributed to their moral and faith development using a Likert scale score. Scores of 1 represented-*little importance* through to 5-*very important*. The first question in this section was; "How influential are each of the following on your sense of what is right and wrong?" Table 4.7 summarises the results for the moral development section into the

three school groups.

Table 4.7 *Influences on Moral Development*

Q no	Question Influences on Moral development	School A Females		School B Males		School C Males & Females		Total Females		Total Males		Total average	
		% impt	Av	% impt	Av	% impt	Av	% impt	Av	% impt	Av	% impt	Av
MFD01	Teachers	56.2%	3.53	39%	3.10	3.16	47.5%		3.14	38.4%	3.49	56.3%	3.34
MFD02	Parents	95.8%	4.73	79.2%	4.12	4.09	93.3%	96.7%	4.21	82.7%	4.71	90.8%	4.50
MFD03	Friends	75.6%	4.07	44.2%	3.37	3.23	70%	78.2%	4.09	49.4%	3.52	67.1%	3.85
MFD04	Boy or Girlfriend	43.3%	3.35	49%	3.28	2.98	59.6%		3.35	49.4%	3.28	48.3%	3.32
MFD05	Belonging to a school community	37.4%	3.36	29.4%	2.78	2.81	38.3%	47.9%	3.41	27.9%	2.83	39.5%	3.17
MFD06	Helping Younger students	37%	3.05	25%	2.48	2.19	21.9%	34.5%	2.99	22.9%	2.63	29.6%	2.84
MFD07	Community/ Sporting Affiliation	26.9%	2.68	44.2%	3.13	3.86	49.2%	31.3%	2.85	46.5%	3.21	37.8%	3.00
MFD08	Conscience	90.4%	4.51	75%	4.04	4.12	83.4%	90.6%	4.55	77.2%	4.06	84.4%	4.34
MFD09	Pop star	20.4%	2.32	22.3%	2.31	1.98	16.6%	21.6%	2.32	17.2%	2.26	20%	2.30
MFD10	Sports star	15%	2.12	23.4%	2.46	2.23	20%	16.1%	2.12	20.7%	2.53	18%	2.29
MFD11	Social Justice Involvement	37.7%	3.05	23%	2.35	2.12	35%	42.4%	3.10	20.6%	2.46	33.2%	2.83
MFD12	Role model for others	71%	3.82	36.3%	2.75	1.86	46.7%	68.8%	3.73	37.9%	2.84	55.1%	3.35
MFD13	Belief in God	87.2%	4.47	40.4%	3.02	2.29	47.5%	79.6%	4.26	41.8%	3.05	63.7%	3.75
MFD14	Behaviour of celebrities	9.7%	1.98	9.6%	1.87	1.87	8.4%	10.1%	1.92	8.2%	1.81	9.3%	1.87

MFD01 to MFD14 were values given to measure the developmental influences on young people's moral development. The table also shows the combined percentages of students who indicated that the value was *important*, or *very important*. School A is a female only school, school B is a male only school and school C is coeducational.

The largest response was for parents (90.8%), friends (60.7%), and conscience (84.4%) which were felt to be a significant influence on students moral development. In addition,

56.3% of female students indicated that teachers had an impact, compared with 38.3% for male respondents.

A notable difference was observed in school A and the response to being a role model for younger students (68% female/37.9% male). Role modelling and nurturing younger students appeared to be more important to females than for males. Females also tended to view belief in God as more a more important formative factor in their moral development than did males. 79.6% of females surveyed indicated that belief in God directly affected their moral development. Male responses were not as strong at 40.1%.

Summary: Overall, female responses were higher for each value than the male responses. The only difference in which the response was reversed was in the case of sport where 20.7% of males indicated that a sportsperson who is respected as a role model can influence their moral and values development. Interestingly, both genders (<10%), rejected celebrities as major influences on their moral development.

4.3.1 MORAL ATTITUDES

The next section looked at particular scenarios and statements that students could identify as personally applicable. The goal was to explore the moral attitudes of students to moral scenarios and societal norms. Students were asked to indicate their most appropriate response to a particular statement, coded MAT01 to MAT08. The scale employed was; 1-*certainly false* to 5-*certainly true*. The rationale for this question is that students develop a personal moral structure through experience and decision-making.

Table 4.8 *Statements on Morals and Attitudes*

Q no	Question Statements on Morals and Attitudes	School A		School B		School C		Total Males		Total females		Total average	
		Females		Males		Males & Females							
		% impt	Av	% impt	Av	% impt	Av	% impt	Av	% impt	Av	% impt	Av
MAT01	If it feels good and no-one gets hurt	56.8%	3.63	60%	3.74	67.8%	3.81	62.3%	3.78	59.3%	3.66	60.6%	3.71
MAT02	Ok if everyone else is doing it	4.2%	1.73	20%	2.36	40%	2.23	14.3%	2.41	5%	1.76	8.8%	2.03
MAT03	I stick to the Law no matter what	56.8%	3.63	60.2%	3.16	30%	2.80	37.2%	2.91	54.1%	3.53	47.1%	3.27
MAT04	I burn music & copy off the Internet	76.9%	3.94	88%	4.46	80%	4.13	88%	4.27	77.5%	4.02	79.9%	4.12
MAT05	As far as I can I stick to Christian values	66.3%	3.77	37.3%	2.90	33.9%	2.81	34.2%	2.86	60.9%	3.58	49.7%	3.28
MAT06	Being good is more important than believing in God	25.3%	2.61	45.2%	3.35	65%	3.90	48.8%	3.48	37.3%	2.95	42.6%	3.17
MAT07	I befriend the Lonely & Rejected'	86.3%	4.14	62.8%	3.59	83.4%	4.03	78.6%	3.69	87.5%	4.18	79.6%	3.97
MAT08	Conforming develops maturity	2.6%	1.62	5%	1.70	0%	1.63	4%	1.72	1%	1.58	2.3%	1.64

To the statement, "If something feels good, and no one gets hurt, it is ok to do it," the response was similar between sites and genders. A score of 60.6% of students indicated that this was *important* or very *important*, and that it applied to them as a life rule. The second statement was "It is alright to do something if everyone else is doing it." The result was different for each school and gender. School A, an all girls' school, disagreed with only 4.2% responding in the affirmative. School B (all males) had 20% indicating positively as did 40% of students at school C. However, only 8.8% of all students thought that this was a personally definitive statement. The MAT03 was "I stick to the law no matter what." The boys and girls schools responded in a similar fashion (56.8%/60.3%) that was fairly high. Only 30% of school C respondents indicated that they abided by the law in all circumstances. Overall, females (54.1%) reported that they were more inclined to adhere to their civic duties than were the males (47.1%).

The fourth assertion touched on the area of copyright and intellectual property law. The

statement, "I burn music and copy stuff off the Internet," was given the highest response in the affirmative. 79.9% of students claimed to have burnt music or copied other people's work. The majority of students reported having used someone else's written work, or copied music illegally.

The next statement for comment was, "As far as I can, I base my life on Christian values." In response to this question, approximately 60 % considered that statement to be generally true. This result indicated that a significant number of respondents, male and female, acknowledged Christian values as a whole, or in part, as a basis for morality.

"Being a good person is more important than believing in God" was affirmed by 25.8% for females and 45.2% for males. This suggested that most students, females in particular, viewed a belief in God as more important than being a good person. Students seemed to be able to understand the significance of a faith life in contrast with moral behaviour. The penultimate statement for comment in this section was, "I try to be helpful and friendly to people who are lonely or rejected." A significant proportion (79.6%) of students accepted this statement as applying to them and their attitude to kindness and charity. Female results were higher than those of the males (86.3%/63.8%).

Respondents were then asked to comment on a final statement regarding the acquisition of maturity, "Conforming to the expectations of parents and teachers is the best way to develop maturity.' Less than 6% of students indicated that conforming to the expectations of parents and teachers was the best way to develop maturity. At first sight, this appeared to be significantly different from results where both teachers and parents were placed very high on the list in terms of influencing their moral development. This data suggested that more information was needed about the actual *role* of parents and teachers as perceived spiritual/moral influences. It could be that young people perceived their role as more in an advisory than in a prescriptive or role-modelling capacity.

MAT01 to MAT08 dealt with statements concerning moral situations. The highest % agreement was recorded for practical charity. Females indicated that they were genuinely concerned with reaching out to people less fortunate. Males also indicated that this was important to them. But both genders admitted to burning music illegally and copying information from the Internet. A low result for both genders was also evident for the issue of behavior. If "everyone/someone else is doing it" does not necessarily make the behaviour or situation morally acceptable.

Summary: The genders generally recorded similar scores for the section on moral situations and attitudes. Significant results were evident in the responses to the development of maturity and social justice. Students did not place too much weight on the expectations of parents and teachers. Females indicated that they were also more inclined to take on board Christian values as a part of their personal moral fabric than males. Conversely, males viewed a belief in God as more important than being a good person. Females were less inclined to agree.

The survey then moved to the issue of problems in life and what particular person would be the one who could be consulted with a degree of trust and wisdom (MA09-MA16). The intention was to draw out the attitude that students display towards their own decision-making processes and the connection with their wider social world. The statement provided was, "If a problem in your life happens, or you have to make a decision, what would you normally do?" Again, the scale was 1-5, 1 being of *little importance* and 5, *very important*.

Table 4.9 *Consultation for decisions in life*

Q no	Question: Who would you consult for a decision or problem in life	School A Females		School B Males		School C Males & Females		Total Males		Total females		Total average	
		% impt	Av	% impt	Av	% impt	Av	% impt	Av	% impt	Av	% impt	Av
MA09	Talk with friends	70.7%	3.90	47%	3.29	66.7%	3.32	53.5%	3.48	71.9%	3.90	63.1%	3.72
MA10	Talk with best friend only	69.8%	4.18	62.8%	3.67	76.6%	3.76	60.6%	3.69	84.8%	4.25	75%	4.01
MA11	Talk with parents	57.4%	3.71	52%	3.28	55%	3.56	56%	3.31	58%	3.73	55.4%	3.55
MA12	Think by yourself	80%	4.34	86%	4.36	83.3%	4.32	84.7%	4.38	82.2%	4.33	82.4%	4.35
MA13	Talk with a teacher	8.6%	1.91	8%	1.84	6.7%	1.89	8.3%	1.95	7.6%	1.90	7.9%	1.92
MA14	Talk with a priest	5.3%	1.80	8%	1.88	3.4%	1.86	7.1%	2.33	4.2%	3.48	5.4%	1.73
MA15	Pray	70.3%	3.74	30%	2.42	26.7%	1.91	25.9%	2.64	54.6%	2.84	47.2%	3.00
MA16	Talk with an adult friend	38.3%	2.93	16%	2.32	30%	2.19	24.7%	2.64	34.4%	2.83	30.4%	2.75

The results in Table 4.9 were noteworthy given that the highest response, (84.7%/82.4%), was "Thinking by yourself." "Talking with best friend only" was the next highest (60.6%/84.8%), followed by 'Talking with friends" (53.5%/71.9%). The least helpful people in this situation were "Teachers" (8.3%/7.6%) and "Priests" (7.1%/4.2%).

The highest response for males was to "think by yourself" when sorting through a problem. Females agreed this was the best option but were also more inclined to confide in a best friend. Both genders rejected the notion that talking with an adult, other than their parents was a likely proposition. In addition, females were more inclined to turn to prayer in a difficult life situation.

The concluding statement in the survey section on moral development stated "I behave in a socially acceptable way because…" Students were asked to circle one or more responses (MA17-MA21). This allowed for a percentage score giving an overall picture of the views of the cohort.

Table 4.10 *Motivation to behave in an acceptable way*

Q no	Question: Motivation to behave in a socially acceptable way	School A Females	School B Males	School C Males & Females	Total Males	Total females	Total average
		% Yes	% Yes	% Yes	% Yes	% Yes	% Yes
MA17	It is the right thing to do	81%	62%	71%	64%	83%	75%
MA18	I do not want trouble	37%	33%	32%	29%	35%	32%
MA19	Peer pressure	6%	4%	4%	8%	7%	2%
MA20	Conscience	42%	23%	32%	45%	48%	38%
MA21	It's what the Church says	15%	6%	7%	7%	3%	10%

The two highest scoring responses were, "It's the right thing to do," and "I don't want to get into trouble." 75% of students chose the first option, while 32% of students chose the second statement. Conscience was also significant in terms of responses but not as high as the first two. These results point to students being aware of their responsibilities; they appeared to want to avoid trouble and punishment. At the other end of the scale, "peer pressure" and the "Church's teachings" played a less significant role in the way students behave and interact socially.

This result appeared significant given the great store that theorists place on peer group pressure on young people's development of values and attitudes. This data shows that the group did not rate peer pressure as a significant influence on their values. Perhaps

this sort of result is affected by not wanting to 'own up' to being susceptible to peer group influence. Few young people would want to state that they were 'influenced by peer group pressure'. Even if influenced by peer group pressure, they would not like it. More sophisticated questions in an interview would seem to be needed to explore this issue in detail. As noted later in tables 4.14 and 4.15, friendship groups were acknowledged as very important locations for the construction of personal meanings.

4.3.2 FAITH DEVELOPMENT

The final question in the section on moral and faith development dealt with the perceived influence on faith in God (MA22-MA27).

Table 4.11 *Influence on Faith Development*

Q no	Question: Influence on Faith Development	School A Females		School B Males		School C Males & Females		Total Males		Total females		Total average	
		% impt	Av	% impt	Av	% impt	Av	% impt	Av	% impt	Av	% impt	Av
MA22	Teachers	35.8%	2.86	22.4%	2.27	32.2%	2.34	26.2%	2.23	34.1%	2.92	31.3%	2.63
MA23	Parents	76.4%	4.20	44.9%	2.94	37.2%	3.12	46.4%	3.93	74.8%	2.83	57.6%	3.48
MA24	Friends	30.8%	2.83	16.7%	2.21	10.4%	2.45	17.2%	1.99	32.1%	2.68	22.5%	2.40
MA25	Church teaching	68.9%	4.08	38.7%	2.98	38.9%	2.12	37.6%	2.82	67.3%	3.89	42.7%	3.45
MA26	Religious Education	70.1%	3.93	34.7%	2.69	37.2%	2.94	33.3%	2.53	71%	3.85	52%	3.31
MA27	Priests	54.8%	3.57	28.5%	2.61	28.8%	1.98	26.1%	2.45	56.4%	3.36	40.8%	2.99

The assertion was "my faith in God is influenced by the following." The results were spread more evenly over the responses which perhaps indicated a diversity in individual religious journeys. However, the strongest results were for Parents (57.6%), Church teaching (42.7%) and Religious Education (52%).

According to the results, teachers and friends were the least influential in terms of articulating and nurturing a faith in God (31.3%/22.5%). The result for the influence of priests was significant at 40.8%, indicating students may see the priest as a significant figure in their faith development. The data here suggest that a principal location for developing young people's faith is with the parents at home. Teachers may be educating young people in the faith but students may be looking more towards what their parents are doing and saying, with regard to a faith in God and the Church.

4.3.3 FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

MORAL REASONING

Each of the three schools provided a group of volunteers who answered a series of questions relating to the three themes underpinning this study. Their responses are outlined in a theme by theme sequence. In addition, the responses were tagged to the particular respondents, with each identified by a school and student code number – the first number for the school, and the second for the student. The interview began with a preamble; 'Feel free to exchange responses amongst each other. We are encouraging a free flowing interaction on the major aspects of youth spirituality as you see it,' and was flexible enough to allow student's to build on the responses of others.

With respect to the question, 'What has been the biggest influence on your life so far?' Student 1.1 commented.

> Family, school, being in Year 12, friends at school, the whole environment, the Year 12 experience…it dominates your life…God is the biggest influence in my life... family, school, being in Year 12, friends at school, sport and mates.

Student 2.1 added to the diversity of answers by saying,

> My family makes me who I am for sure…This HSC thing is a massive influence….also our friends are from school so that makes school like the centre of the universe.

One student (3.1) saw sport as a big part of his identity as well as a vehicle for acceptance. He said, "Sport is big for me in many ways….it gives me a place to feel comfortable and my friends think I am cool because I swim alright."

The next question asked interviewees, "What aspects of life, including school and home, give you a sense of right   and wrong?" Comments included,

> A bit of everything…I trust my family the most…A friend that you trust the most…You don't stick to exactly what the Church says or what your parents say…you get everyone's advice and stuff and make up your own mind…it's more down to your own conscience…

Student 2.2 saw the image and values of his father as a guiding light in issues of right and wrong. He declared,

> You just know sometimes….what is right and wrong…listen to your heart…I think of my Dad and what he would think when I have to decide between right and wrong…It doesn't mean I always do the right thing but he looks out for me and I trust him so he is normally right about stuff…the Church guides me when I have to try and understand why something is wrong, like sex…the Church's teachings are a good guide but it can be out of touch…A bit of everything…yeah, your conscience is the thing….

Student 2.3 reinforced this contemporary eclectic approach to moral development. He said the formation comprises,

> A bit of everything…I trust my family the most…A friend that you trust the most…You don't stick to exactly what the Church says or what your parents say…you get everyone's advice and stuff and make up your own mind…it's more down to your own conscience…

Students were asked whether they felt they had "high moral values." Respondents commented that they felt, as Catholics, they had more moral direction than other young people. Student 3.2 said,

> kind of…I have the same morals as other people who aren't Catholic…we have a better sense of direction…other religions have morals too but they are just different…it doesn't mean Catholics are better people…it's not higher morals but stronger beliefs in values…I have friends outside of school who are Catholic and you don't notice the difference in the way we act in social situations…

Participants also felt that Catholics had a different approach to moral reasoning than non-Catholics. Student 2.2 felt that the example of Jesus was the difference. He explains,

> Catholics have better morals than normal people…belief in God helps you to be better…not because you will go to Hell but because it is acting the way Jesus did…at parties you can tell…lots of kids take drugs and stuff…people from our school are generally good like that…

Some interviewees were more general in their responses. Acting like a Christian person was more "moral" than telling people your religious affiliation. Student 3.2 said,

> You don't go around telling people you are a Catholic…it's just the way you act and live…

The next question looked at the way young people respond to social situations and what motivates acceptable behavior. Conscience and "what's in the heart" was significant. Student 2.3 said,

> Family, Religion and parents…It comes down to knowing what you feel in your heart to be right, whether or not that is socially acceptable or not…sometimes you've go to do or be what you really want regardless of what is right and wrong according to the authority figures in my life…what society says is acceptable, like fitting in.

The last question asked in the section on moral development dealt with the issue of shame and guilt. The rationale was to explore whether students feel and sense of guilt about their mistakes and the way they behave in contravention of Church teaching. Students 1.1 and 1.4 declared,

> God only gives you things you can handle…you are only going to learn from your mistakes, even if that means feeling bad about it…I attend a Pentecostal Church and we are taught to ask Jesus' forgiveness and claim our sins on the Cross, guilt doesn't come into it once there is repentance…when you know you are truly sorry it is no big deal anymore…sometimes you feel guilt when you do the same sin over and over again…I feel sorry but I don't feel any guilt, what's the point?...actually I do feel bad when I do the wrong thing and it stays with me, I feel I have let my Lord down…I know God forgives me but I have trouble forgiving myself, and forgetting…

FAITH DEVELOPMENT

The second part of theme one explored the factors that contribute to faith development in senior school students. The first question looked at Catholic education and the positive or negative effect it had on students' faith development. Respondents were asked, "How has your Catholic education helped you understand yourself and your place in the world?"

Student 2.1 was somewhat disappointed in the way some of the primary and secondary curriculum seemed to contradict the ancient biblical stories, she said,

> It has made everything more confusing…like when you're in Primary school you learn more specifically about the Bible and then in High school you learn about other religions and that Adam and Eve didn't exist…it gets complicated…a lot of the teachers don't have the answers to all our questions and you are left a bit lost…that whole meaning of life thing goes without any real answers by our education…also religion doesn't have the clear answers to some of the big things we want answered…teachers never corrected us when we were in Primary school about our questions about Noah's Ark and stuff, then you realise they were kind of lying to us…

The discussion from one of the schools focused on some of the positives associated with a more mature image of who God might be. However, they noted some perceived inconsistencies. Students 3.2 and 3.7 commented,

> God isn't so scary anymore….we are taught that he loves and forgives….confession doesn't do any good…you just say sorry in a prayer….I think he is part female and part male…we can all identify with God...God in primary school was a bit silly…he was taught a bit like Santa…gave you stuff when you were good and punished you if you were bad…the naughty and nice Christmas thingie…

The theme of bewilderment was inherent in one interview. There was a link in this discussion with a particular resentment towards the Church because of the perceived hypocrisy of the different primary and secondary messages about the 'truth.' Student 1.6 declared,

> I have never really understood what the point of teaching us all this stuff when it isn't even sure what and who God is anyway!! Some teachers have lost the plot when it comes to God….I know they don't go to Church all the time so why tell us to go…that's a bit hypocritical…Religion doesn't help me when I feel all this pressure to do well at school…telling me not to worry and that God loves me won't get my assessment tasks in on time…How did Noah get two of every creature onto a boat? Now we know it was all B.S. it's a bit like finding out Santa isn't true…Then you felt betrayed a bit and resentful…I had a teacher in Year 9 was amazing you could tell she loved God and it was a real part of her life…I wanted to feel that too but don't know how to get there…

The next discussion looked at Religion and whether that was a barrier in developing a believable and sustaining belief in God. The question asked, "Has Religion contributed to, or put you off, a faith in God?"

Some students felt that Religion was more of a set of guidelines that can be arbitrarily selected to suit one's situation. The priest was seen to be distant and hard to identify with. Respondents also felt that liturgies are sometimes too busy for quiet time and reflection with God. Students 1.2 and 1.3 said,

> Religion is guidelines that we use to help us…You don't have to believe everything the Church tells you to be a Catholic…It has to make sense to me before I will believe it or use it in my life…I go to Mass but it doesn't make me feel spiritual, I often go during the week when no-one is around, I just sit there on my own in the quiet, I feel God more in those moments than when I am at Mass…Also the Priest can put you off (everyone nodding)… Our guy is old and cranky and seems distracted…

The discussion at one school was heated and focused more on the negative. There was also a comment that school liturgies seem to be more elaborate and entertaining than Sunday services. Student 2.6 commented,

> Definitely put me off…Mass is dead boring…I can's stand the Holy days of obligation…what is with that?...we have to go because Mary went up into Heaven body and soul…where is that in the Bible??...I am more into helping people, and seeing God in others...I think religion is ok sometimes…some of the Masses we have at school are entertaining and heaps better than the Sunday ones…I don't get the Holy Spirit…how do we pray to him/her?...religion doesn't explain the Trinity thing real well….I think religion helps me to understand who God is and how to worship him…although I can't cop all the rules.

Some students agreed that Mass can be personal fulfilling. They also agreed that the age gaps of priests and ministers are a 'put off.' Student 1.1 said,

> Religion was forced upon me when I was young but I freely choose to go to Mass now and I sincerely love it…religion is personal not communal as you get older….gaps in ages are a put off.

The final question on faith development asked students to look toward the future and speculate whether they might continue their journey in searching for a clearer understanding of faith and God. The question asked, "Are you still undecided about God and faith? Will you keep an open mind as a young adult?"

Students from one school were open-minded and felt that worshipping God in any form was valid. They also saw Catholicism as a culture as well as a faith tradition. Student 1.3 and 1.5 said,

being a Catholic is like a culture…God is ok in any form of expression…see God in other religions and respect them…it's a different way of expressing God…maybe God's bigger than we are and we are all just trying to understand him in our own way…every single religion comes from the one source…

Another school related some of their attitudes to their family and the way they view religious belief and practice. Students 3.3 and 3.6 said,

we all have doubt….at times when things are going bad…its human to feel doubt in God…my grandfather said to me, "why should I believe in God".? He has been a Catholic all his life and he still questions it…If you don't doubt you can't really believe…I think when Jesus died he went to Hell then back up again so we all have to go through bad times to get to the good…

Some students understood that faith is not an absolute and may come and go during life. Student 2.2 said,

I think God is there but I don't think about him all day every day…faith comes and goes…I think about God when things are going bad…not so much when I am happy and stuff…I would like to go to Mass when I am out of school but weekends are so busy with sport and that…I don't think anyone 100% believes that God is true…everyone has doubt…I think I will believe in God but the Church puts me off with all its obligations and rules. I want to live life my way….I think God would be ok with that…

4.4 COMPONENTS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S SPIRITUALITY

The second theme of the research is contemporary spirituality. The following reports the results from the questionnaire and focus group interviews. This section explored what aspects of life students found meaningful and what they felt contributes to their personal spirituality. The first part provided eight statements relating to a *basis* for spirituality (CS01-CS05). The results reported are combined percentages of those who agree with the statements.

Table 4.12 *Basis for a personal spirituality*

Statement	School A	School B	School C	Male	Female	Overall
1. My personal value system which often gives me meaning to life's experiences	20.2%	30.8%	40%	34.5%	24.4%	28.6%
2. I try to make sense of life which certainly has a spiritual dimension	10.6%	9.6%	8.3%	10.3%	9.2%	9.7%
3. I sense a spiritual dimension to life, but I am uncertain about it	6.4%	5.8%	10%	6.9%	7.6%	7.3%
4. I would feel insecure and frightened in a world without God	17%	1.9%	1.7%	1.1%	14.3%	8.7%%
5. The teachings of the Catholic Church	11.7%	1.9%	5%	4.6%	9.2%	7.3%
6. The interaction of my faith and the world I experience on a daily basis	7.4%	9.6%	1.7%	6.9%	5.9%	6.3%
7. Life is a journey of discovery of who I am and who God is.	19.1%	7.7%	15%	8%	20.2%	15.1%
8. I believe that I am connected to something greater than me but I find religions like Christianity are not helping me in exploring this	3.2%	5.8%	15%	9.2%	5.9%	7.3%

As shown in Table 4.12, respondents were asked to select one statement that best described the basis of their own spirituality. The highest response was the first statement on an individual value system that underpinned their sense of meaning via life's experiences (28.6%). The second highest response was to the statement on life being a journey of discovery; of self and God (15.1%). A number of students highlighted the insecurity inherent in the thought of a world without *God* (8.7%). The lowest score was Religion being unhelpful in the quest for a sense of transcendence (4.1%). For this item, students could choose only one response. More detailed research would be needed to investigate responses of students to each of the questions.

4.4.1 SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES

Students were given two short scenarios that gave examples of what might be perceived as a spiritual experience. One related to the sense of transcendence experienced in nature. The other was a grief experience that may have triggered a sense of reaching out to the transcendent or God through prayer. Respondents had 4 options to circle in relation to the stories; 1) Never, 2) Unsure, 3) Yes, 4) Definitely.

55.3% of students responded to the first scenario with a yes or definitely. 27% of respondents were *unsure* and 17% of students could not relate to that situation. A significant number of students showed that they could see the spiritual aspects of nature and relate that to the idea that there is something bigger than themselves in their life experiences.

In response to the grief experience, 45.7% of students indicated *yes* or *definitely,* along with 54% who were *unsure* or could not relate to that particular scenario. Given their age, it is unlikely the majority of respondents had encountered grief at this stage of their lives. However, those who did acknowledge with a yes or definitely (45.7%) indicated that prayer was a natural response to loss and sadness.

CS05 to CS14 dealt with aspects of life that students found meaningful in expressing their spirituality.

Table 4.13 *Expression of spirituality*

Q no	Question: How do you express your spirituality	School A Females		School B Males		School C Males & Females		Total Males		Total females		Total average	
		% impt	Av	% impt	Av	% impt	Av	% impt	Av	% impt	Av	% impt	Av
CS05	Spontaneously	81.9%	4.26	34.9%	2.57	31.7%	3.16	35.8%	2.67	49.8%	3.88	56%	3.39
CS06	Formal prayer	32.2%	3.48	17.4%	2.07	15.3%	2.64	17.5%	2.09	35%	3.15	35%	2.72
CS07	Church Services	51.7%	3.36	23.9%	2.07	15%	2.97	18.4%	2.07	44.8%	3.15	34%	2.71
CS08	Personal Reflection	82.9%	4.28	43.4%	2.91	33.3%	3.24	39.6%	2.93	76.5%	4.14	61.5%	3.65
CS09	Pentecostal Churches	15.4%	2.27	4.4%	1.54	5%	1.76	6.2%	1.56	12%	2.16	9.6%	1.91
CS10	Yoga & Meditation	19.8%	2.34	11.1%	1.53	23.4%	2.08	13.8%	1.64	22.4%	2.45	18.9%	2.12
CS11	Other Spiritual Practices	15.2%	2.18	4.3%	1.48	15%	1.98	8.6%	1.67	15.3%	2.21	12.7%	1.98
CS12	Reflecting on Bible Passages	26.4%	2.47	10.8%	1.70	8.4%	1.98	11.1%	1.68	21.6%	2.32	17.3%	2.06
CS13	Being Alone	69.4%	3.98	39.1%	2.72	46.6%	3.17	37.3%	2.84	67.2%	3.91	55.3%	3.47
CS14	Reflecting on other Books	27.8%	2.49	8.8%	1.76	25%	2.12	8.8%	1.78	32.2%	2.61	22.5%	2.27

The highest response for females was expressing their spirituality through personal reflection (76.5%). For males it was also the highest result at 39.6% and was closely followed by "being alone" at 37.3%. Significantly, 69% indicated that Church services and formal prayer are important to their spirituality. With respect to alternative spiritualities, 31% of respondents indicated they practiced yoga and meditation. From this section of the survey it appeared that spirituality for most students was a personal and reflective dimension of their lives.

4.4.2 IMPORTANT THINGS IN LIFE

Students were asked to tick any number of eleven boxes that related to aspects of life that they found meaningful (CS1901-CS1911).

Table 4.14 *Important things in life*

Q no	Question: Important things in life	School A	School B	School C	Total Males	Total females	Total average
		Females	Males	Males & Females			
		% impt	% impt	% impt	% impt	% impt	% impt
CS1901	Being part of a large community	46%	36%	53%	44%	48%	46%
CS1902	Prayer & Liturgies	27%	8%	11%	6%	27%	18%
CS1903	Friendship group	93%	68%	88%	78%	91%	85%
CS1904	Successful HSC	86%	68%	85%	76%	85%	81%
CS1905	Spiritual life	36%	8%	20%	9%	35%	24%
CS1906	Helping others	66%	30%	55%	34%	68%	54%
CS1907	Making a difference as a senior	52%	42%	38%	36%	52%	45%
CS1908	Impressing teachers I like	21%	14%	26%	18%	23%	21%
CS1909	Large support network	43%	16%	53%	26%	49%	40%
CS1910	Social Justice & Fundraising	49%	26%	27%	19%	50%	37%
CS1911	Being a role model for younger students	57%	36%	48%	39%	57%	44%

The highest responses were "A successful HSC" (81%) and "My friendship group" (85%). Significant levels of affirmation were also given to "Helping others" (54%) and "Being a role model as a senior" (45%). The lowest score was for "Prayer and

Liturgies" (18%). Students in this survey were able to articulate that their lives, at this stage, revolved largely around study, school and their friendship groups. Question CS1911 built on the previous response by focusing on the positive aspects of life outside of school (CS2001-CS2015).

Table 4.15 *Positives in life outside of school*

Q no	Question: Positives in life outside of school	School A	School B	School C	Total Males	Total females	Total average
		Females	Males	Males & Females			
		% impt	% impt	% impt	% impt	% impt	% impt
CS2001	Close friends	96%	78%	98%	86%	92%	97%
CS2002	Lots of money	35%	46%	47%	45%	38%	41%
CS203	Significant personal relationship	73%	56%	67%	59%	73%	67%
CS2004	Clothes	53%	22%	50%	31%	54%	44%
CS2005	My part-time job	39%	26%	42%	33%	39%	37%
CS2006	My faith in God	63%	20%	28%	25%	55%	42%
CS2007	My individuality	73%	50%	70%	58%	73%	42%
CS2008	My looks	22%	24%	35%	31%	23%	26%
CS2009	Family	94%	74%	92%	82%	93%	88%
CS2010	Able to control my life	72%	68%	70%	67%	73%	47%
CS2011	Helping others	57%	30%	47%	33%	34%	47%
CS2012	Going to Night clubs	33%	34%	43%	41%	33%	36%
CS2013	Having pride in self	62%	44%	54%	48%	60%	55%
CS2014	Drugs & Alcohol	16%	32%	45%	42%	18%	28%
CS2015	Activities with peers	32%	22%	30%	26%	31%	29%

Students were provided with fifteen possible responses. A large majority of 97% of students nominated "close friends" as the most important aspect of life outside of school, closely followed by "family" 88%. The third and fourth highest responses to

important aspects of life outside of school were for being able to "control my life" (70%) and a "significant personal relationship" (54%). The lowest response was to "Drugs and Alcohol" (21%). Surprisingly, "My looks" scored a low result at 26%.

4.4.3 INFLUENCE OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION

The next section addressed the influence the experience of a Catholic education had on students' worldview and identity (SC01-SC10). The question asked, "How has your Catholic education helped you understand yourself and your place in the world?"

Table 4.16 *Influence of Catholic Education*

Q no	Question: Influence of Catholic Education	School A Females		School B Males		School C Males & Females		Total Males		Total Females		Total average	
		% impt	Av	% impt	Av	% impt	Av	% impt	Av	% impt	Av	% impt	Av
SC01	Catholic Education influenced my Spirituality	50%	2.33	20.6%	2.35	35%	2.34	24.6%	2.51	47.9%	3.27	38.5%	2.96
SC 02	RE teachers contributed to my belief in God	40.9%	2.92	17.4%	2.17	28.3%	2.65	23.3%	2.42	36.3%	2.85	31.7%	2.67
SC 03	Catholic Education had a negative impact on my Spirituality	18.3%	2.11	15.2%	2.11	14.8%	2.12	29.6%	2.22	22.2%	2.22	19.2%	2.22
SC 04	Retreat experience was deeply spiritual	51%	3.41	26.1%	2.52	42.3%	3.13	29.6%	2.68	51.7%	3.42	42.7%	3.12
SC 05	School liturgies helped my belief in God	36.1%	2.88	8.7%	1.93	25.8%	2.12	15%	2.23	34.7%	2.86	26.8%	2.60
SC 06	Catholic education helped my appreciation of the Church	52.7%	3.29	19.5%	2.26	28.8%	3.09	22.2%	2.49	48.7%	3.18	37.9%	2.90
SC 07	I will take on board the moral teachings of the Church	56.4%	3.50	13%	2.35	33.9%	2.87	18.7%	2.56	53.3%	3.46	39.7%	3.09
SC 08	Rather converse with God than formal prayers	68%	3.88	30.4%	2.72	58.3%	2.98	44.6%	3.07	65.7%	3.80	56.5%	3.51
SC 09	Catholic Church is out of touch with reality	26.7%	2.61	26.2%	2.72	33.9%	2.65	27.6%	2.85	29.8%	2.77	28.7%	2.81
SC 10	Prayer is important to me	66.7%	3.99	21.7%	2.24	35%	2.87	24.7%	2.44	62%	3.81	46.8%	3.26

Table 4.16 shows the highest result (56.5%) was the response to conversing with God informally rather than in formal prayer situations. By contrast, respondents commented negatively about School liturgies helping with their faith in God 26.8%. A significant number of students also indicated that prayer is important to them (46.8%). The Retreat

experience is also important to a number of students (42.7%). A low score was given to Religious Education (RE) teachers contributing to students' belief in God (31.7%). This result is important given the contemporary situation of religious education being most students' only formal exposure to the teachings and culture of the Catholic Church.

4.4.4 THE CHURCH

Table 4.17 *The Church and young people's spirituality*

Q no	Question: The Church & Spirituality	School A Females		School B Males		School C Males & Females		Total Males		Total females		Total average	
		% True	Av	% True	Av	% True	Av	% True	Av	% True	Av	% True	Av
CH01	Church Leadership is relevant	64.1%	2.30	37.2%	3.09	39.6%	2.86	30.2%	3.21	60.7%	2.39	23.3%	2.72
CH 02	Church teachings are modern	30.4%	3.01	16.6%	3.62	13.7%	3.24	14.6%	3.64	27.4%	3.21	22.4%	3.38
CH03	The Church has gone off track	13.2%	3.63	30.3%	3.09	22.4%	3.35	26.4%	3.20	15.5%	3.52	19.8%	3.29
CH 04	The Church influences my life	55%	2.62	37.2%	3.33	27.3%	2.98	26.3%	3.45	52.4%	2.72	42.7%	3.01
CH 05	You don't have to go to Church to believe in God	71.7%	2.15	53.6%	2.56	71.2%	2.43	62.4%	2.18	73.1%	2.11	69.2%	2.14
CH 06	Sex abuse scandals have ruined reputation of priests	42.3%	2.84	47.6%	2.88	37.9%	2.80	46.6%	2.77	38.3%	2.86	40.7%	2.83
CH 07	Full-on Christians are abnormal and a bit weird	19.8%	3.68	54.7%	2.57	34.3%	3.09	47.3%	2.65	21.4%	3.60	31.4%	3.23
CH 08	The Church is concerned with me personally	16.5%	3.53	14.3%	3.74	7%	3.62	12%	3.71	13.9%	3.68	13.1%	3.69
CH 09	The Church contributes to my spirituality	49.8%	2.47	26.2%	3.48	24.6%	2.98	21.4%	3.48	55.2%	2.65	41.9%	2.97
CH 10	I can get by without much help from the Church	35.9%	2.93	47.6%	2.55	57.9%	2.64	52%	2.37	40.6%	2.85	45%	2.66
CH 11	I can develop my spirituality without the Church	43.4%	3.00	42.8%	2.64	64.3%	2.98	53.3%	2.36	38.8%	2.85	44.5%	2.66

This section dealt with attitudes and belief about the Church using the same scale as for the previous table. Significantly, 69.2% of students noted that "you don't have to go to Church to believe in God." It appeared that students believed that the Church was not

concerned with them on a personal level. More than half of female students (52.4%) believed that the Church influences their life. By contrast, only 26.3% of males responded that the statement was true for them.

The next question contained a set of statements about what God might be like (GOD02-GOD15). The scale was in the above A-E format..

Table 4.18 *Religiosity and concepts of God*

My Religion		School A		School B		School C		Total Males		Total Females		Total Average	
		% Rel	Av	% Rel	Av	% Rel	Av	% Rel	Av	% Rel	Av	% Rel	Av
GOD 02	Religiousness	46.7%	3.28	23.8%	2.48	17%	2.96	2.39	22%	2.45	39%	31.3%	2.84
My Religion		% Monthly/ Weekly	Av	% Monthly/ Weekly	Av	% Monthly/ Weekly	Av	% Monthly/ Weekly	Av	% Monthly/ Weekly	Av	% Monthly/ Weekly I	Av
GOD 03	Mass Attendance	44.8%	3.38	30.2%	2.60	15%	3.13	2.38	22%	3.13	40.4%	33%	2.90
My Religion		Av	% Reg	Av	% Reg	Av	% Reg	Av	% Reg	Av	% Reg	Av	% Reg
GOD 04	Frequency of Prayer life	4.11	81%	2.37	32%	3.56	33%	2.40	29.5%	3.24	70.4%	54.8%	3.25
My Religion		% True	Av	% True	Av	% True	Av	% True	Av	% True	Av	% True	Av
GOD 05	A Caring Being who loves me	88.9%	1.52	62.5%	2.23	49.1%	1.97	54.7%	2.43	70.4%	3.81	70.2%	1.98
GOD 06	God is real person to me in daily life	60.4%	2.15	32.5%	3.10	25.9%	3.17	28%	1.69	54.3%	2.18	43.9%	2.69
GOD 07	God always forgives me	69.2%	1.81	52.5%	2.48	56.9%	2.15	2.55	50.6%	2.37	75.5%	65.6%	2.13
GOD 08	Jesus Christ is truly God	63.4%	2.10	41.2%	2.79	29.3%	2.60	2.88	37.9%	1.86	55%	48.2%	2.49
GOD 09	Jesus' death gets me into heaven	74.4%	1.72	52.5%	2.58	46.5%	2.34	2.63	46.6%	2.23	71%	61.1%	2.15
GOD 10	Jesus Christ is truly a human being	54.4%	2.28	40%	2.75	28%	2.52	2.82	36.5%	3.13	47.8%	43.3%	2.61
GOD 11	Knowing Jesus helps me be a better person	61.4%	1.95	33.3%	2.98	35%	2.15	3.09	29.3%	1.84	65%	58%	2.50
GOD 12	Some sort of God but look at the results in the world	24.4%	3.51	45%	2.75	48.3%	3.23	2.76	42.7%	2.47	32%	36.2%	3.08
GOD 13	Hope God exists but not sure	40%	3.06	27.5%	3.08	42.3%	3.04	3.04	31.5%	2.11	48.5%	38.3%	3.00
GOD 14	Do not believe in God	11%	4.42	17%	3.85	20.3%	4.16	3.74	19.8%	3.29	12.3%	15.2%	4.10
GOD15	Believe in God or gods- not sure	27.7%	3.56	32.5%	3.23	47.2%		2.99	40%	2.97	32%	35.1%	3.22

Only 22% of males considered themselves to be religious, while for females the score was 39%. 22% of males said that they attended Mass weekly or monthly in comparison with 40.4% of females.

The two most popular responses to statements on God and Religion were, "God is a caring being who loves me" (70.2% overall), and "God always forgives me" (65.6%). At the other end of the scale, most students indicated a belief in God by disagreeing with the statement that "there is no such thing as God" (15.2%). Three statements were included that related to Jesus and particular dogmas. The first declaration was "Jesus Christ is truly God" 55% of females and 37.9% of males indicated that they believed that statement to be true. 46.4% of males and 71% of females agreed with the statement on Jesus' atoning death. The section on the nature and salvific purpose of Jesus indicated most students affirmed belief in the 'Creedal Jesus' as outlined in Catholic theology.

4.4.5 FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

The focus group interview for this section of the study included a discussion on images of God related to the visual stimulus material illustrated below. Students were asked to discuss and comment on who God might be to them, and how that image was informed by their Catholic education.

4.4.6 IMAGES OF GOD

The following 'images of God' caricatures were developed as visual stimuli for discussion on images of God. They were not exhaustive as regards characteristics of God, and were meant to serve as a catalyst for discussion. The exercise was shown at two schools via a multimedia projection in a PowerPoint program while students at one school viewed the images on laminated A4 size cards. Student responses are outlined below.

Figure. 4.19 *The Checking Out God*
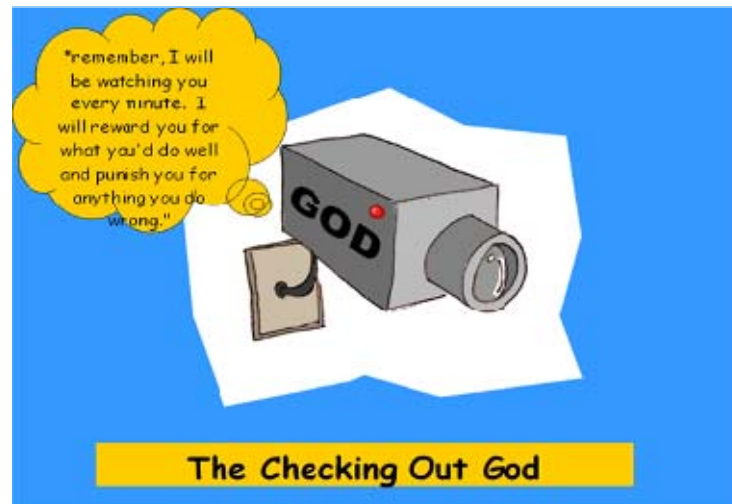
The image of the 'checking out' God did not resonate with most participants. Only 23% of respondents said they could relate to the God who watches and apportions blessings and punishments. Student 2.6 said,

> No man, no way he's like that...that's what my dad reckons he's like but that's not real love and God is love...like Jesus, he always forgave..

Student 2.4 commented, "I believe you pay for your sins when you die but not in a place that burns you up and tortures you...as if..."

Figure 4.20 *The Justice God*
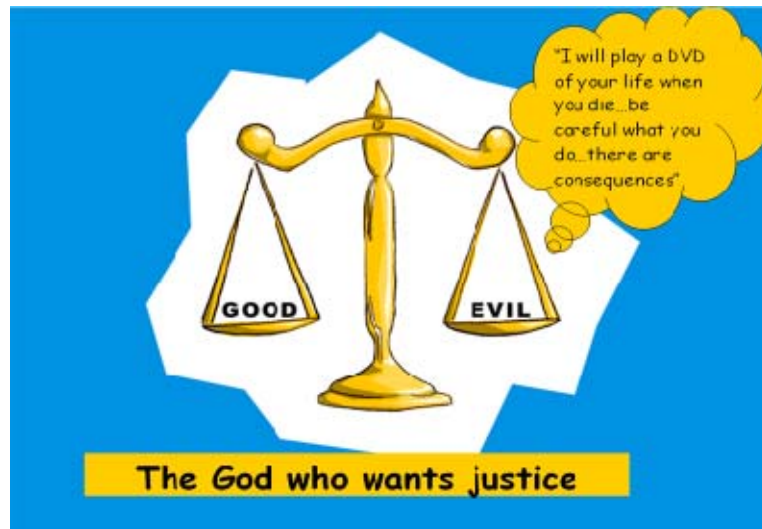
This image of God was seen as a better representation of the idea of 'a scales of Justice God.' Students were aware that life was not a 'free for all', especially if one espoused a faith in God. Students were divided in their view of punishment after death. They felt that the concept of purgatory was flawed. Student 1.1 said,

> We learnt all about Martin Luther in year 10. The Church bought and sold salvation and purgatory time. That just isn't right. Why would you have to go into lockdown for 1000 years and then be allowed in to Heaven?

Students discussed God as being a wondrous, incomprehensible Being whose true nature was love and forgiveness. Although they felt people like serial killers and rapists would suffer God's punishment, the vast majority would go to Heaven, regardless of Religion. Living a good life seemed to be regarded as the ultimate yardstick. Student 1.4 noted,

> Everyone does their best in life…even like natives in the Amazon…how can they ever go to Church or have Communion? If they are good people they will be rewarded just like us…

Figure 4.21 *The Incarnate/Atoning God*
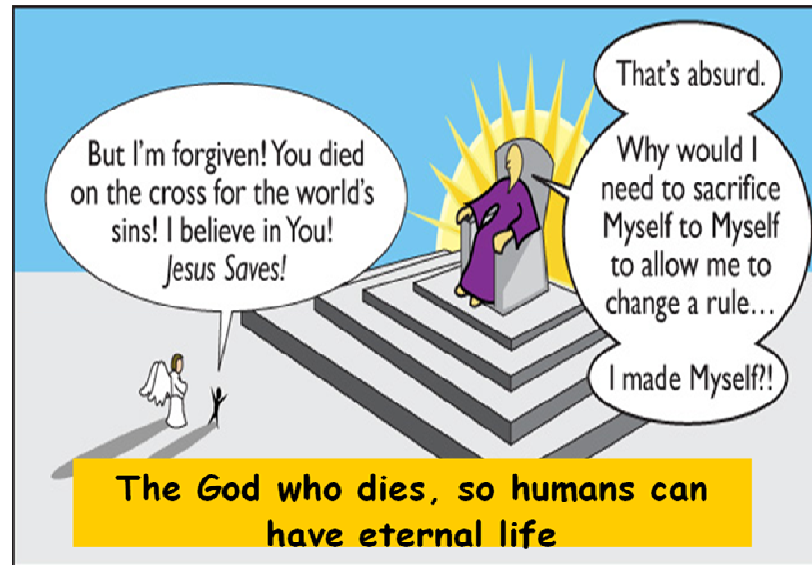
This next image was presented in a way to highlight some of confusing, layered, and complicated doctrines of Christian Soteriology. Students' initial response was to identify the humour inherent in the cartoon. Most students articulated the traditional theological words about atonement and the Incarnation and adopted them as part of their own worldview, apparently without completely understanding what the doctrines mean. The females, in particular, identified with Jesus' salvific death and "knew in (their) hearts that Jesus died for me."

Student 1.7 and 3.4 said,

> I go to the Stations of the Cross each Good Friday and cry like a baby…what he went through for us so that we can get to Heaven…now I know what God is like because I can look to Jesus as God living on earth and sharing in our experiences.

> Yeah, sometimes it's a bit hard to get your head around…but I believe he died for us…it was no accident…why would Christianity last until 2007 if the whole thing wasn't controlled by God…look how human he was in the Garden of Gethsemane…he was freaking out…just like any of us would…

Figure 4.22 *The Santa God*
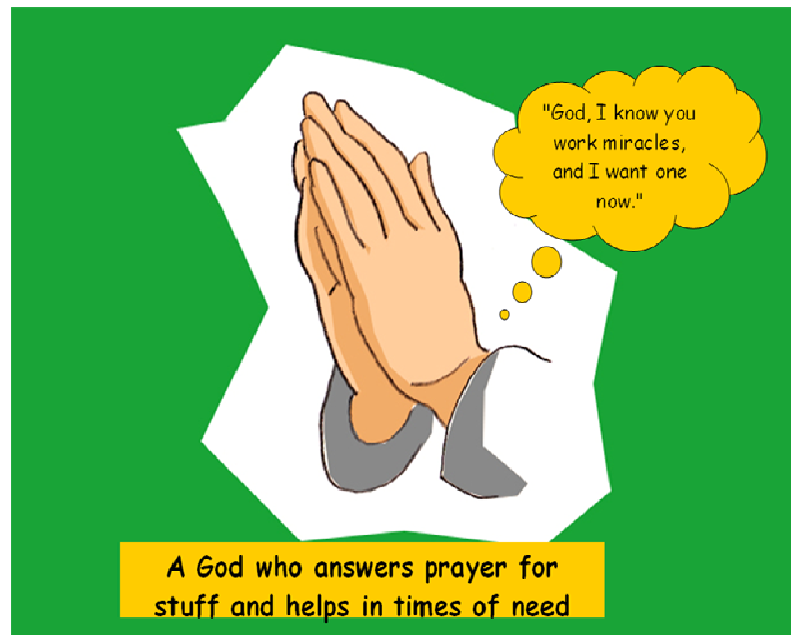
The notion of a God who answers prayer for material and spiritual things was generally agreed upon. All students had prayed and asked God for something at least once in their lives. The prayers ranged from asking to heal sick relatives to finding enough money to buy an Ipod.

Students 3.2 and 2.5 said,

> The last time I prayed was a couple of months ago…I needed a new job and asked God to help the person who was interviewing me to see that I was the right person for the job…it worked!!

> I prayed for my Grandmother..she's been sick for yonks and I didn't feel the doctors were making her any better so I prayed to God…not so much that she would get well but that she didn't suffer anymore…it's hard…what do you do?

Figure 4.23 *The Speculative Prayer*
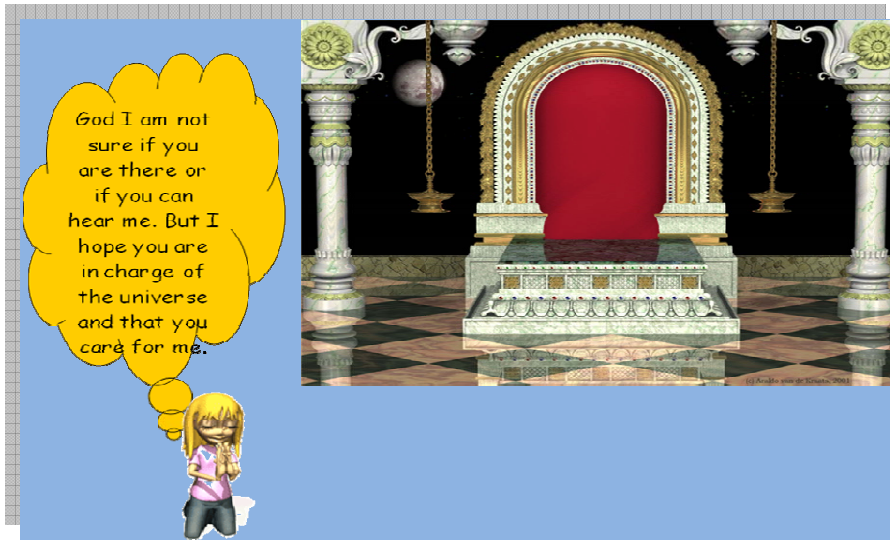
This image built on the previous one and was directed at prayer to a God who you are unsure even exists, hence the empty throne. Around half of interviewees were "kind of sure" God existed but weren't 100% certain. Those students also said they caught themselves thinking that the prayer might be just them talking to themselves. All students said they "hoped God existed" and said they would be depressed if irrefutable evidence was released God didn't exist.

Student 2.1 said,

> It gets you through life…you need to know there is a God up there that loves you no matter what...someone who can be there for you always and love…I pray because it makes me feel better...whether God hears me or not…

Figure 4.24 *The Exclusive God*
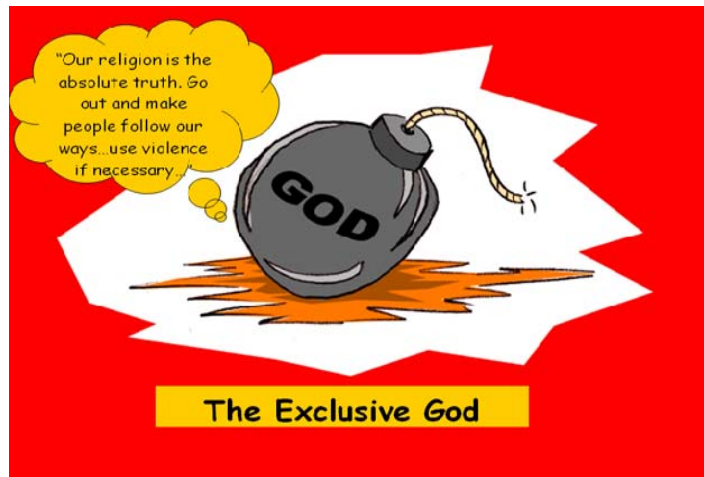
The image of the exclusive God sparked heated debate amongst respondents but comments were more in line with the problems of religious fundamentalism in the world. All students rejected this image of God as being likely. They were very concerned with the followers of this God and the effects those adherents are having on the world.

Student 2.6 said,

> I know people who think that is their God...they hate anyone else who is not a believer. Why would God love one group of people more than another and want that culture to kill everyone else...I don't think so...

Fig. 4.25 *No God*

Only 11% of students responded by agreeing with this image declaring "No God." Of those participants, 2% stated that they were fairly sure there was no God and that Religion was a bit of a hoax. Student 3.3 commented,

> I dunno...look at the world...everyone fights because of God...that just sucks...get rid of religion and gods and everyone would get on ok...

89% of students believed God exists in one form or another. Student 1.2 said,

> Something can't come from nothing...science confuses me...I have felt God's presence in my life...I just know he is there...

Figure 4.26 *The Knowing and Caring God*

Students reacted to this image positively with 90% of students saying this is probably what God is like. This corresponded with the survey results on the perception of God being a forgiving and loving deity. The God of the 50s and 60s who 'wielded a big stick' and left 'residual guilt' does not seem to be evident in the consciousness of today's Year 12 students.

Student 1.4 and 1.1 remarked that,

> I think when Jesus died he went to Hell then back up again so we all have to go through bad times to get to the good…

> I ask Jesus' forgiveness and claim my sins on the Cross, guilt doesn't come into it once there is repentance…when you know you are truly sorry it is no big deal anymore…

SPIRITUALITY

The second section of the focus group interview dealt with the theme of spirituality in the lives of students. The general question was asked, "What does spirituality mean to you?" Student 1.2 said spirituality is,

> Something inside…the way you express your faith…you can be religious and spiritual or non-religious but spiritual… heaps of people don't go to Mass but are very spiritual people…can be other stuff that helps you with your life…

Student 2.7 was less able to articulate spirituality. "I don't know…stuff that affects your life…God stuff…going to Mass and Church…"

Student 1.3 understood that spirituality had religious connections; "…things…how you feed your soul…praying to God and helping each other…love."

The next question enquired into the label *religious* and whether respondents would apply that to themselves. Student 2.2 and 3.5 said,

> I have no hassles calling myself religious…I am proud to say that about myself...you have to be spiritual to be religious in the true meaning…people go to Church but don't think about God between Sunday and Saturday…

> I am a bit religious…I go to Mass once a month with the folks…I am not full-on but I pray every day….I think you have to walk around with a pair of rosary beads to be religious…mum's like that…

Other students viewed the terms "religious" and "spiritual" as interchangeable. Commenting that,

> Your spirituality comes out in your Religion…You have to have some spiritual side to be religious even if you only think about God on Sundays…

Students were asked what aspects of their lives made them hopeful and happy. The rationale was to explore what parts of their lives sustained them and gave them a sense of purpose. Students (general comments from a number of students) from one school identified a range of pursuits.

> **HOPEFUL** aspirations, goals, getting ahead, working, completing a major assignment at school…when you mentioned 13 years at school I couldn't believe how long we have been here… **HAPPY**…Some people get happy by eating chocolate…I am happy when I am shopping…I find I am happy when I am helping other people to be happy…I visited my friend in hospital and that made me happy…

Respondents (general comments from a range of students) commented that relationships and leisure pursuits were the keys to hope and happiness.

> **HOPEFUL** friends, boyfriend…the footy…the holidays, weekends….going away n…holidays…**HAPPY**…girlfriend…parents….being at home in my room…listening to my Ipod…concerts…parties…knowing I have done a good job on an assignment…

A group of students from one school were more direct and concise. They, as males, related to the rollercoaster ride of sporting affiliations as reflecting life and community. They also linked hope and happiness with a successful HSC. Student 2.2 said,

> **HOPEFUL** schoolies…the end of a… successful HSC…
> **HAPPY**…friends…people who you like to be around…helping out the year 7s…art…music…sport…love…Easter….some of the stuff at Mass….retreats….movies like *Lord of the Rings*…being a valued member of the community…

The next question enquired whether respondents would 'try out' other churches or religions later on in life as part of their faith journey.

Students from the female school were very open-minded in their response.

> Yes…I like the Pentecostal stuff…their Music is phat…I would like to see a Muslim prayer session to see what they say about us…Buddhism is cool but I don't know about reincarnation…I like our Church…it feels like a family…

There was a mixed reaction from one school. Some said they would and others felt the Catholic Church was nurturing enough. Student 1.1 said,

> Yes…definitely…I would like to try an Orthodox Church…I love my Church…I like the Hillsong vibe…the young people and music is great…I love being a Maronite…It's the same God in other Churches….It may bring you closer to God…

Similar feedback was gained from another school. To them it was all personal and relative and about a personal relationship with God. Student 2.3 said,

> The television pastors look more relatable than our Priests…it comes down to your personal self…you need a personal relationship with God to start with…

The final question in the section on contemporary spirituality looked at the role prayer played in the lives of students. The question asked was, "Do you pray? If so, how, when, and what do you say?" One student was adamant in how important the role of prayer played in her life and the effect it had on her well-being. She said,

> If I've done something bad and I pray I feel happy after that…I have been brought up to pray morning and night and that makes me happy when I face each new day…I feel like I can't repay him for all that he does for me but I pray in thanksgiving, although I am usually asking for something…

Another response remarked that it was a bit like Santa Claus in that she asked for 'stuff.' God was also not a 'Him' for these girls and was seen of as a 'parent' figure rather than Father figure. She (student 1.1) also said that prayer was more of a chat than a formal recital, commenting,

Yeah, you are never satisfied, I always ask for more…If I don't pray I feel like I have distanced myself from him…I just chat, no full-on Our father's or anything…it is more like asking for stuff…sometimes I thank him if I get a good mark or a party was good…I just lie down in bed and pray before I fall asleep.

Most students were very forthcoming in this discussion with a range of ideas and attitudes to prayer. Student 1.3 said,

If I've done something bad I pray …no…yes…when I need something or I am sad…he is kind of a friend…I pray at school most days with our Pastoral class…that's pretty cool and a good way to start school each day…I like the Our father…knowing people have been praying that prayer since Jesus taught the disciples is pretty cool …I have prayed out in the surf before…I had a great feeling in the water…I pray at Mass when I have communion…I like that time just after we have the Host….I pray with my family at meal times…

4.5 CULTURAL INFLUENCES AND YOUTH CULTURE

The final section in this research project deals with aspects of youth culture. The general question posed to the respondents was, 'How has living in today's world affected your outlook on life?'

Table 4.27 *Today's world affecting outlook on life*

Q no	Question: How has living in today's affected your outlook on life?	School A Females		School B Males		School C Males & Females		Total Males		Total Females		Total average	
		% impt	Av	% impt	Av	% impt	Av	% impt	Av	% impt	Av	% impt	Av
YC01	I am proud of my ethnic identity	85.7%	4.36	56.4%	3.49	49.1%	3.33	49.3%	3.23	82.3%	3.96	74.1%	3.68
YC 02	No problem with other cultures in Australia	% Agree	Av	% Agree	Av	% Agree	Av	% Agree	Av	% Agree	Av	% Agree	Av
		76.7%	4.17	46.1%	3.10	40.4%	3.86	45.4%	3.15	68.2%	3.81	59.2%	3.55
YC 03	Comfortable with Oz-freedoms for the young	90.2%	4.39	67.1%	3.63	25.4%	3.12	45.9%	3.25	80.2%	3.97	63.7%	3.69
YC 04	TV contributes to my values & sense of justice	37.4%	3.00	47.4%	3.42	30%	3.23	39.3%	3.24	36%	2.99	37.1%	3.09
YC 05	Multiculturalism is working well in Oz	44.4%	3.30	29.7%	2.92	44.7%	3.12	38.6%	3.17	43.4%	3.28	41.6%	3.24
YC 06	Freedom of Religious practice as long as no-one gets hurt	75.6%	4.19	45.9%	3.27	26.3%	3.87	38.1%	3.00	62.6%	3.76	54.3%	3.47
YC 07	Learn English before migrating	47%	3.29	56.7%	3.57	30%	3.32	41%	3.04	45.6%	3.19	43.4%	3.14
YC 08	Indigenous Australians are being treated fairly	39%	3.10	29.7%	2.84	45.6%	2.92	35.2%	3.03	39.2%	3.18	37.7%	3.12

The scale utilised for this part of the survey was 1-*strongly disagree* and 5- *strongly agree*. Students were asked to comment on the importance of their ethnic identity. This response was a more general indication of cultural pride, in the context of multiculturalism, than the cultural identity measure contained in table 4.6. A result of 82.3% of females displayed pride in their ethnic identity in contrast to a lower score of 49.3% for males. A significant number of of males 45.4% and 68.2% of females said that they had no problem with other cultures living in Australia. Overall, 41.6% of respondents believed that multiculturalism is working well in this country. In terms of Australia's indigenous population, only 37.2% of students believed that they are being treated fairly. Interestingly, 43.4% of students agreed that it was important for newly arrived Australians to learn English before they arrived here. A number of young people also felt comfortable with the freedoms that are afforded them in Australian society (54.3%). With regard to television, 37.1% of students considered that it was important in relation to an education in values and a sense of social justice.

The results from this section indicated that there are a range of cultural influences impacting on young people. No response was overwhelmingly strong, except the female response to pride in ethnic identity. This medium to average result may indicate that, for young people, societal experiences are still new, and taking a personal stance on issues such as the plight of Indigenous Australians, are still being formed.

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4.5.1 FOCUS GROUP

CULTURAL INFLUENCES AND YOUTH CULTURE

The focus group interview for the section of youth culture dealt with issues of society and experience. The rationale was to build on the responses obtained from the survey and explore those indicators of youth spirituality. The questions covered the major sections contained in the questionnaire and students were encouraged to be open in their responses. The quotes below are selected from the three schools and encapsulate the main features of each school's discussions. Student codes are used to introduce each quote.

The first question asked; 1) "Is Australia a religious country?"

Student 3.6 and 3.4 said, "pretty much…not everyone is like us…heaps of people pray though…"

> No…most of the people I know aren't religious…yes, but the Muslims are taking over…fifty fifty I reckon…Not as religious as America they are full-on…

The second question looked at multiculturalism and asked if students felt it had any meaning to them and, if they thought it was working,

2) "What does multiculturalism mean to you? Is it working?"

Student 2.1 said,

> Yes, heritage is massive to me…most of the time…in our area every ethnic group gets on ok…there will always be exceptions…it's what you're brought up around…

A contrasting response was obtained from another school. Student 2.7 thought that multiculturalism,

> sucks…live and let live…not in Australia….they don't speak English and hate us skippies…we have some pretty good people at our school…they fit in alright…we should stop immigration…there are enough people here now…

A second generation Australian student (2.3) had the benefit of understanding some of the places in the world that are less safe. He commented,

> We don't go around killing each other…we have the benefit of knowing what happens in our parents' countries with war and stuff…Australia is ok.

Question 3 looked at the medium of television and what role it played in students' lives. The basis of this section of the study was to address whether television played a role in shaping the values, and contributing to the spirituality, of senior school students. The second part of the question asked whether student's found television was an important source of education in global matters and culture.

3a) "Do you watch much television? Why?"

Student 3.5 said, 'Yes…entertainment…fun…education…'

3b) "Is television an important source of education and understanding what is *cool* in the world?"

Students 3.1 and 2.4 said,

> It teaches us about the world and what is cool in music and fashion…definitely.' 'Yes…I love *Big Brother* and *The Biggest Loser*…it's entertaining…some of the docos are fab for assignments and stuff…

> "Absolutely…TV is great for fashion and what's the new *in* thing…"

Students from one school centred their television viewing on tracking the successes and defeats of their favourite sporting teams.

Student 2.3 declared, "I love it…I have Foxtel and watch sport whenever I can…I love the English Premier League….go Man U!"

One respondent (student 3.5) thought that Big Brother was lots of fun and enjoyed people *being themselves*.

He said,

> Can't miss an episode of *Big Brother* and especially *Friday Night Games*….the girls are hot and it's all about real life…I don't mind docos either…they help you with assignments and that…

The next question enquired into the role celebrities play in students' lives. Young people today are inundated with media images of celebrities and the intricacies of their personal lives. The questionnaire results indicated that the majority respondents did not view celebrities with any degree of respect as role models. The focus group interviews

at each school had the same result. All students responded by saying that they were curious and interested in celebrities but were certainly did not view them as role models on any level.

The next question built on the theme of celebrity and materialism. Students were asked whether it was important to be "rich, good looking, or respected." All three schools said that 'respect' was the most important value to aspire to as a young adult; relegating the quest for good looks and wealth to second and third.

Question 4 in the Youth Culture section looked at the role and understanding of community amongst young people in catholic schools.

4) "Do you feel a sense of community in your world (e.g., School, family, sport, local area)?"

Student 1.6 said,

"Yes…community is really important to feel you belong."

One student (student 2.2) had an understanding of his time at school being unique and special. He said, "I am going to miss school and stuff….being known is really important to us…sometimes you feel isolated because of the Web…"

Another respondent (student 2.3) looked at it from a different angle commenting, "You need to be patriotic like the ANZACS. They died so we could have a good life. We all need to band together and look after one another."

Racial heritage was the last topic covered in the focus group interview. The survey gave a strong response from females who felt it was important in terms of meaning in life.

5)"Do you identify with your racial heritage? Does that mean anything to you?"

Student 1.2 declared, "Yes…extremely important to who I am and where my family came from…"

Another respondent (student 3.3) had seen some of the racial violence that occurred in 2005 and mentioned that as an influence on his attitude. He said,

> Yes…even more so after the riots in 2005…you realise it's us against them…they have to fit in it's our country…

One participant (student 2.5) lives with many cultures in his suburb and is positive in his approach. He said,

> For sure…I live with Vietnamese, Lebanese….and I am Italian…they all come over for Sunday lunch and make sauce with my grandma….we laugh and share stories about how funny some of our customs are…I love being Italian/Australian…

Question 13 of the questionnaire enquired into whether the stories in TV are useful in helping make sense of life. The scale employed was 1-little influence to 5-very important. The following graphs highlight the results from students who indicated that stories on television were important or very important in helping make sense of life. The results indicated a stronger response for males than females. The male school (35%) and the overall male result (32%) indicated that males appeared to take on board values inherent in TV shows that portrayed life situations.

Figure 4.28 *Stories in TV are useful in helping make sense of life*
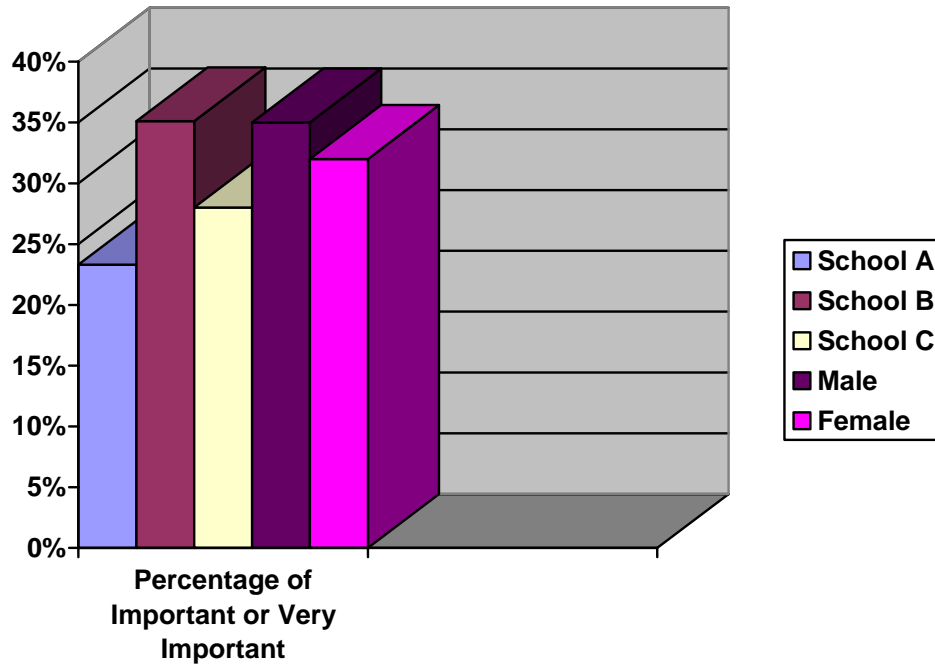
Question 14 of the questionnaire looked into the behaviour of characters in television and whether that was a learning experience. The rationale was to explore whether students related to the situations shown on television and whether they apply that to their own lives. The scale was in the same 1-5 format as the previous question.

Figure 4.29 *Behaviour of characters in TV is a learning experience*
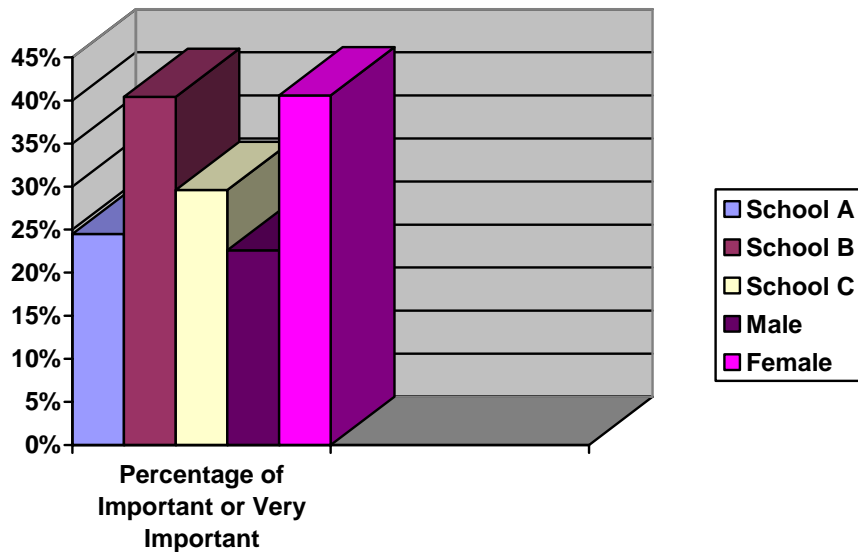
The male results were consistent with those in the previous question. Over 40% of males indicated that the behaviour of characters on television was important or very important in learning about life and how to relate. Females were less affirming with 23% indicating that television was important as a learning tool. The next question asked students to respond to the statement "War and conflict make me feel unsafe in the world." The scale was 1-little influence to 5-very important.

Figure 4.30 *War and conflict make me feel unsafe in the world*
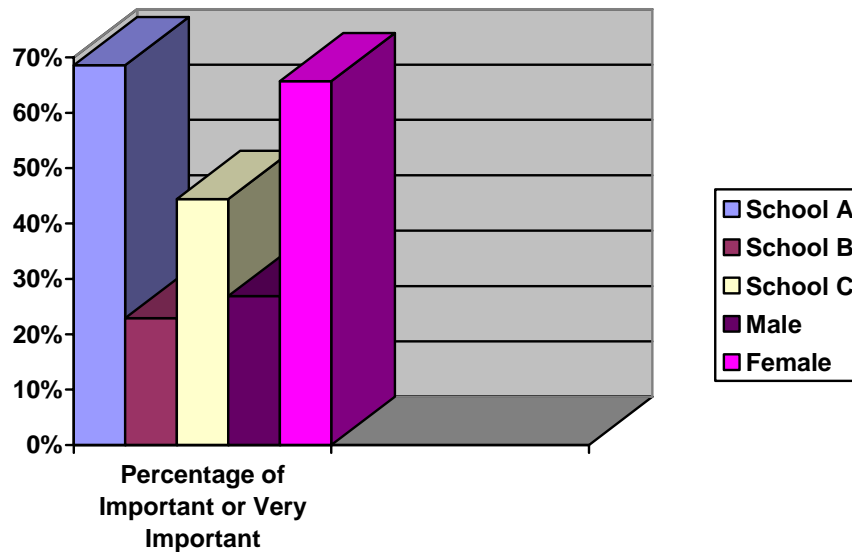
The results showed a clear demarcation between the genders. Females felt that the current state of the world, in terms of war and conflict, made them feel unsafe. Male respondents were less inclined to feel troubled by news of war and conflict (26.9%).

The final question in the focus group interview asked students to look at a visual representation of a contemporary youth spirituality. The cartoon was designed to encapsulate the major themes of this study and to allow students an opportunity to see how the various aspects of spirituality could provide a foundation, and a source of meaning in their lives.

In the cartoon, the Students represented the participants, The Boat and the Anchor stood for the project's working definition of spirituality as those aspects of life that provided a worldview, a sense of meaning and purpose, a sense of self, and that which is greater than self. The Television Set signified the influence that film and TV have on young people and their spirituality. The E symbol, Money & Fast Food symbolised consumerism and the commodification of all things, including spirituality and transcendental thought and practice.

The Heart denoted the rising tide of individualism, the search for meaning, and the importance of relationships in the lives of senior students. The Map signified multiculturalism and pluralism and its impact on contemporary Australian society and culture. The Church/Buildings represented Catholic education & spirituality, as well as some contemporary theological developments such as the popularity of the Gospel Jesus as opposed to the Magisterial Church. The Institutions also symbolised the developmental theory that is a key theme in the literature review.

Fig. 4.31 *Cartoon of Contemporary Youth Spirituality*

The responses amongst the students were varied. Female respondents tended to view the symbols as something they could relate to and understood how multiculturalism, community and secularization featured in their lives. Student 2.1 said,

> Yeah….the heart is what it is about…we are Australian and a community living in a big world…sometimes you get down on how we need money and stuff…I am glad I live in a great community that looks after each other…

Some wondered why we have to be so technological to communicate. Student 3.6 said,

> when I am in class all I think about is who has texted me and if I have any emails…as soon as I get out of class I put my Ipod on and check my phone….I wish I didn't have to think about it so much but it's the way young people stay in touch in the modern times…

Another Student (2.3) thought school and fast food were interesting themes in the cartoon. He said,

> …I love going out and buying stuff….I don't think I have ever stayed at home and made a meal…when mum does it we sit down as a family and talk…it's great…we laugh and tell old stories…school's like that as well…at lunch time we sit around and chat…if someone isn't feeling too good we can sort it out over a sandwich and a coke…

4.6   ISSUES AFFECTING THE VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF SUBJECTIVE MEASURES OF SPIRITUALITY AND VALUES

Data showed that students considered they were not influenced by 'peer group pressure'. But elsewhere in the survey they indicated that friends and friendship groups were particularly important for them and therefore potentially very influential. In addition, there was other data that seemed to run contrary to other research findings and anecdotal evidence – such as that 'how they looked' was not very important and therefore not an influential factor as regards values and behaviour.

These findings suggested that while young people may not set out to be deliberately deceiving when reporting their subjective views and talking about their beliefs and values, they may not always be highly giving accurate information. They may tend to say what they would like to feel about themselves. And at times their estimates about what has affected their beliefs and values may be biased or somewhat naive.

However, a more important issue is the need to acknowledge that questionnaires – and even interviews and focus group discussions – will have natural problems in reporting valid and reliable measures of respondents' subjective states.   When people, both adults and the young, are asked to talk about their beliefs and values, and about their

assessment of the personal and cultural influences on this development, it needs to be recognised that this is a very personal and subjective process that they are commenting on. It may be difficult for individuals to make accurate subjective judgments about themselves. Parents and educators will at times make judgments about the behaviour and motivations of children and students that are 'more accurate' than the young people's own self-assessment, or more accurate than the young would be prepared to admit about themselves; occasionally, as regards some aspects of behaviour, one may be 'better' known and understood by close outside observers; in such cases, their knowledge is in a sense more accurate and 'true' than the individual's self-knowledge. But more often than not, the observer or interviewer will have only limited and partial insights into young people's valuing and behaviour which are complex and influenced by complicated networks of factors and personal experience. At times, even behaviour will not always be a good account of their value position.

The other issue to acknowledge is that even for mature people it is not easy to make accurate judgments about the effects of outside influences on one's own beliefs, values and behavior; and similarly about the enduring influence of particular personal experiences. For example, judgments about the spiritual/moral influence of parents on the self may be based more on feelings of love, respect, admiration, gratitude etc. rather than on a systematic analysis of what one thinks are their own values and beliefs followed by a similar analysis and comparison with what one thinks are parental beliefs and values.

It has already been noted that more sophisticated research strategies and data collection techniques would be necessary to probe some of the issues in greater depth – for example, the spiritual and moral influence of friends. But even with complex strategies, there are natural limits to the accuracy of information given by individuals about their inner lives.

This study has endeavoured to take all of these issues into account when interpreting the meaning and significance of the reported subjective data from this sample of young people. That means treating the data respectfully as subjective accounts of inner

dispositions, a reportage that has natural limitations in validity and reliability that are of the very nature of the subjective data about young people's personal and spiritual development. This approach is in accord with the constructionist and interpretivist paradigms within which the study was conceived.

The interpretation of the meaning and significance of the results in the next chapters will then not be dogmatic or positivistic in ascribing causal influences, but will try to appraise what the respondents themselves understand as causal influences on their thinking and values, even if this difficult for them to estimate. While there may be significant variability in measures of the subjective data, it can still be insightful in pointing towards trends in thinking and influences on values. Also, an important part of this study has been honouring the commitment of the project to give the students a 'voice' in expressing their views in both questionnaire and focus group interview.

4.7 SUMMARY

This chapter analysed the research data from questionnaires and focus groups. With regard to moral and faith development, the data pointed toward a number of influences that included family, friends, conscience, and social norms. The results suggested that none of these are mutually exclusive and they all play a contributing part in forming morality in young people. According to the results of this study, faith development is based on the primary influence of parents, while Religious Education plays a minor role. Significantly, priests and teachers were regarded as the least influential of the factors/agents that affected understanding of God.

As regards their response to the sources of meaning in life's experiences, a personal value system was considered to be most important in interpreting meaning in life and forging a worldview. A considerable number of students indicated that they understood and experienced the transcendent dimensions of life in nature. They understood that there was something in life much bigger than themselves and their own perceptions. The research suggests that spirituality for young people is an eclectic synthesis of the sacred and profane.

This result reinforces the current view that the secular and sacred are not mutually exclusive but coexist in modern spiritualities. A negative response was found about the influence of Catholic education on a personal spirituality and meaning in life. Students said that they found Catholic education did not facilitate a clear view of the world, and did not provide clear answers to the big questions.

Images of God for young people were varied but most of the participants in this study believed in a God who loves and forgives unconditionally. They found the idea of an exclusivist/fundamentalist God difficult to reconcile. Very few students were committed atheists. Those who rejected God seemed to be rejecting on the basis of negative experiences of life and religion E.g. the effects of religious wars and terrorism. Interestingly, the 'Creedal Jesus' is important, relevant and identifiable to most students participating in this research.

Student responses to aspects of youth culture indicated a general agreement about statements pertaining to the influence of television on values, and the need for migrants to learn English. According to students, tolerance was important in allowing different cultures the freedom to express themselves within Australian society. Students also agreed that multiculturalism in Australia is working. There is not an exclusivist attitude amongst Catholic young people toward other faith traditions. Students feel 'God' can be worshipped and defined in any way that people see fit.

A contemporary spirituality amongst senior school students in this sample from Catholic schools appears to be diverse. It involved the interplay of the secular and religious. For young people, drawing meaning from life can involve beliefs, rituals, practices, and affiliations that provide identity and purpose. The data presented in this chapter suggests that the role of the Catholic school is helpful in introducing students to Religion, and the concept of spirituality. However, the majority of respondents indicated that their Catholic education did not facilitate a life-long adherence to the Catholic faith and an unquestioning allegiance to the Christian narrative.

The following chapter will discuss the meaning and significance of the research findings.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF THE MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE
RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Complementing the previous chapter which reported the data collected in the project, this chapter will look into the meaning and significance of the data, in the context of current understandings of youth spirituality. Findings will be discussed under the following headings;

- Perspective from developmental theories
- Components and characteristics of young people's spirituality
- Images of God
- Cultural influences and youth culture

In a general way, the research findings endorse current views about a wide variety of influences in young people's spirituality (Hill, 2004; Bridger, 2001). In addition, this study has demonstrated a number of new trends about what aspects of life students find meaningful.

Figure 5.1 outlines the key findings that emerged from the data analysis chapter. The diagram represents a visual overview of some of the important themes that the research has uncovered. Some key quotations by participants are included to highlight the perspectives young people in this study took as regards spirituality.

Figure 5.1 *Outline of key responses to research themes by participants*

- *Individualism*

- "I rely on my heart and what it tells me...who else can you really trust..."

Church is non-personal & irrelevant

"..why would I listen to the teachings of a bunch of 80 year old blokes in Rome... they don't know what it's like for us with pressure and stuff..."

- *Ambiguity about the spiritual influence of the school*

- "I have never really understood what the point of teaching us all this stuff is...Some teachers don't believe and have lost the plot when it comes to God....I know they don't go to Church all the time so why tell us to go...that's a bit hypocritical..."

- *Eclectic and Experiential*

- " I pray when I need something...I look at my horoscope...I follow Jesus' example of love...my room is set up feng shui style..."

Multiculturalism & Secularization

"live and let live...who cares where they come from......We have a trip planned to go to Turkey...the ANZACS made Australia what it is today..."

- *Diverse, Loving, Forgiving*

- "I don't reckon anyone really knows what God is like...I don't think he killed all the Moabites or Edomites or whatever because they were Jewish...why would God do that?....he is there for you no matter what...he doesn't really care if we do small sins..."

Personal & Spiritual Development

Spirituality & Culture

Catholic Education & Church

Images of God

5.2 PERSONAL AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

Students are exposed to a wide spectrum of moral influences that include family, media, teachers, and peers.   In general, the data shown in tables 4.7 and 4.8 of the previous chapter confirm previous findings about young people's perceptions of the diversity of influences on their personal/moral reasoning (Jackson, 2004).   A large majority of the students signified that their parents directly influenced their ability to engage in ethical reflection as to what constituted appropriate behavior.   In addition,

students from all three schools cited parents as the most influential factor in the way they establish their ideas about spirituality (Table 4.7).   Parents were considered to be the people to whom young people turn when it comes to understanding appropriate social behavior and a sense of right and wrong (Hughes,2007; Mason et al., 2006). The majority of students understood that moral reasoning underpins a personal spirituality and the two are not mutually exclusive.   However, there was no uniform set of beliefs and attitudes which indicated that there moral reasoning can be relativistic (Rossiter, 2004; Fowler, 1981; Turiel, 2002).   Student 1.2 commented,

> try and do the right thing and that...I know my mum has been through hard times and she understands what's good for me…it's funny….I pray to God for help… and I think of my mum and what she thinks when I have to decide what to do…doesn't mean I listen though (laughs)…

The high result for the reliance on conscience is significant.   Students responded confidently in stating that their own sense of right and wrong was good enough for them, even at a young age (Table 4.7).   Interestingly, when students were asked to indicate what they would do when confronted with a moral or ethical dilemma, most responded that they would "think by myself," a clear indication of conscientious self-reliance.   If a student's decision to act in a moral situation is individualistic, then it may be a symptom of institutional disillusionment and distrust (Bridger, 2001).   The non-conformity could be a coping mechanism based on a perception that cultural inconsistencies exist which they cannot resolve or identify (Berk, 2001; Rossiter, 2004; Alexander, 2000).   Therefore, students turn within and listen to their own voice of reason, and to their own feelings.   Student 2.3 summed up this formative influence from parents, and the reliance on conscience,

> You just know sometimes….what is right and wrong…listen to your heart…I think of my Dad and what he would think when I have to decide between right and wrong…It doesn't mean I always do the right thing but he looks out for me and I trust him so he is normally right about stuff… but yeah, your conscience is the thing…

Peer influence was also a major factor in personal development.   Social friendship groups assisted in providing social norms, fashion, language, affiliations, and to a significant extent, moral standards, even though the sample did not consider that they

were affected by 'peer group pressure.' The significance of this finding is that it would appear that young people are more concerned with their immediate world that includes relationships and social circles than the wider community (Table 4.14; Martin, White, & Perlman, 2003). However, young people needed to feel part of a culture and society in which they can connect and feel intimate (and loved) by the people they value and consider role models (Berk 2001; Fischer, & Lazerson, 1984). A focus group comment explained this attitude.

> I need my mum and dad, as well as my mates to run things by and stuff…my best mate will pull me up straight away if I am out of line...that is really cool for me (Student 2.2).

According to the results of this study, adult role models outside of parents seemed to have less of a role to play in the development of young people (Tables 4.9 & 4.11). For females, teachers played a role in the formation of moral reasoning but males seemed to be less trusting. However, it is not just the adult role models in their lives that they are wary of, but adults they are exposed to through the media. In this study students reported that celebrities and sports people were not perceived as a major influence on their moral thinking (Table. 4.7). Interest in the lives of famous people may be apparent for young people but this sample did not view them as role models. Trust and authenticity in adults seemed to be the biggest concern for young people when identifying an adult as somebody who could teach and provide advice.

Young people participating in this study commented that they need to identify a certain trustworthiness and integrity before they view adults with any esteem. If those two traits are present in an adult, there appears to be more of an influence on their personal development and moral reasoning. Significantly, students displayed a strong belief in God and confirmed the previously mentioned congruence emerging between spirituality and moral reasoning. Students spoke about morals and belief in God interchangeably (Table 4.7). There was a strong sense amongst students that moral reasoning was important and was linked to the expectations of those people in their lives who had authority and respect, such as family and friends. The diagram below (Figure 5.2) outlines the way the findings of this study indicated young people are relating to adults, as developmental role models, in contrast with a more traditional view.

Figure 5.2 *Trends in attitude toward personal development and moral development reasoning*
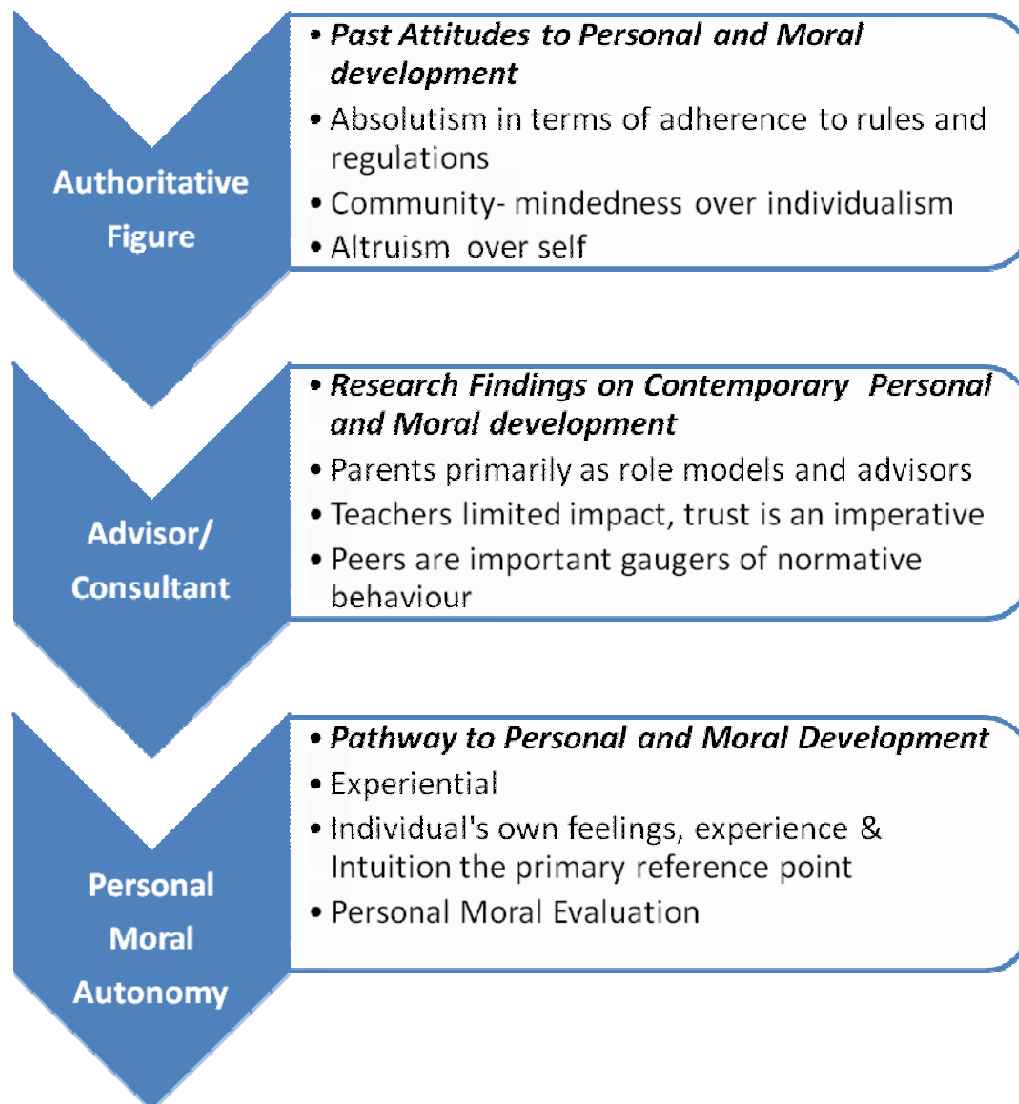
Students viewed the authority of teachers and parents as a type of non-absolute influence.   The dictates of parents and teachers, for young people, were more in an advisory capacity than in requiring a relatively 'blind adherence' to directions.   Most respondents were negative about accepting the advice and education of teachers and parents as central in their pathway to maturity.   The opposite seemed to be the general rule.   Students found that the way to gain maturity was by *not* complying with the expectations of teachers and parents.   This built on the consistent theme that emerged from the data of allowing all the major influences in young people's lives to play an

eclectic, formative role (this insight will be discussed further in the next chapter). Even the Church's (perceived by many students as archaic) attitudes had a role to play in moral reasoning. One student (1.4) said;

> The Church guides me when I have to try and understand why something is wrong, like sex…the Church's teachings are a good guide but it can be out of touch…A bit of everything…

It would seem that moral attitudes to particular circumstances are largely individual. Senior students valued their individual sense of justice rather than a corporate adherence to what everyone else was doing. This cumulative pathway to moral reasoning suggests that the development of moral reasoning for senior students is primarily individualistic and practical (Kohlberg, 1984). In this way a young person organises their understanding of virtues, rules, and norms, and integrates these into a moral choice (Power et al., 1989).

The meaning and significance of this finding for the study is that, according to Kohlberg's developmental model, young people are thought to remain in a stage of moral reasoning which focuses on the instrumental, pragmatic value of an action (Kohlberg, 1984). But the more mature levels of community-minded morality (according to Kohlberg), and altruistic levels of moral reasoning, are not congruent with their individualistic sense of the way the world works. One perspective on this result suggests that the rise of individualism in the broader community means that young people are not moving into a sense of community norms and standards as part of their moral maturation in the same way that Kohlberg's theory predicts. Instead, there is a move to a more 'intensified focus' on the self as the ultimate judge.

Thus, in Kohlberg's terms there might be a 'prolonging' of the earlier, juvenile stages or moral reasoning, rather than a progression onto more mature stages of moral thinking. Or another interpretation is possible: the increased individualism and self focus in moral reasoning may prompt a more rapid path to an autonomous maturity earlier than Kohlberg's scheme would predict.

Another area of significance that emerged from the results was the attitude young people take to intellectual property and Internet material (Table 4.8). Respondents in

this study did not see anything wrong with illegally burning music off the Internet, or copying academic material and claiming it as their own. A number of young people took the view that the Internet is a free resource and they had little understanding of the idea of intellectual ownership. This attitude aligns itself with definitions of the contemporary worldview of young people being individualistic, with a primary focus on themselves, their own wellbeing, and their self -fulfilment (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006).

A number of steps have been taken in secondary schools to try to counter this attitude. Some preliminary modules are being developed that educate senior students about what constitutes cheating, plagiarism, and Internet theft (author's school experience). Hopefully, this process will enable a change in attitude toward the availability of information, and its ownership. One student (3.3) commented;

> yeah...I burn stuff....who doesn't...I can get DVDs online and tracks from artists before the albums are released...you just have to know where to look and get the right freeware...No...I don't feel bad about it...sometimes when I cut and paste from Wikipedia for assignments I get the feeling it's wrong...teachers warn us but most of them won't Google our work and check...you just cite your sentences...everyone does it...

The majority of students in this study said that they "based their lives on 'Christian values (Table 4.8)." A component part of the Mission of the Catholic school is to develop the whole person as a contributor to society and a person who bases their lives on Christian values **(**Pope John Paul II, 1997). This result reflects positively for the Church and school in meeting this goal.

5.2.1 VALUES

The notion of Catholic school students behaving in a way that is *different* from other students was a theme that came through consistently in the data. Respondents appeared to believe that values taught to them in Catholic schools gave them a better moral 'code' and that their general social/moral behaviour was of a higher order than that of their Government School counterparts. One student (2.4) noted the difference between the ways people from his school behaved in contrast to the behaviour of students from other schools. He said, " …at parties you can tell…lots of kids take

drugs and stuff…people from our school are generally good like that…" This is a difficult finding to interpret. How extensive and how significant these perceived differences would be hard to determine. While this group were unequivocal about this perception, the perceived differences in behaviour may have been dependent to some extent on a number of factors:

- The idiosyncratic views of this particular sample.
- A natural tendency to perceive differences between one's own and groups from other schools.
- The possible influence of feelings of 'elitism' or 'moral superiority'.
- A belief that Church schools help students develop a moral code.
- In some instances, it may be difficult to infer values accurately from isolated examples of behaviour.

Some may like to see the data in this study as confirming the success of the school in promoting values in students. While this may be true to a certain extent, the researcher acknowledges that the acquisition of values is a very complex process that is hardly likely to be determined exclusively by the values pupils experience in the social life of their school and by what is taught about values in their school curriculum. However, the fact remains that this sample of students considered that their schooling seemed to make some 'difference' as far as their values were concerned. They seemed to be considering that the values they were exposed to over 13 years in Catholic education had affected them; that the Christian values taught and modeled over a significant period of time had a formative effect on their moral reasoning. This interpretation confirms the traditional commitment to values in Catholic schools. The Federal Government's National Values Education Study (2005) also confirms that a commitment to values education is not just applicable to religious schools but to all Australian schools.

5.2.3 FAITH DEVELOPMENT AND SPIRITUALITY

The data reported on the attitudes students displayed towards the Christian faith, and whether they felt that Catholic education had contributed to this aspect of their lives.

Promoting people's faith development is one of the key goals of the Catholic Church's evangelistic mission, and the Catholic school is considered to contribute to this mission. It provides students with access to religious traditions, doctrines, and Catholic worship practice (Pope John Paul II, 1997**)**. The wide spectrum of what spirituality or spiritualities might mean to each individual can create inherent problems of generic definitions and constructing rigid schemas (Zohar & Marshall, 2000).

At the personal level, this study considered that young people's belief in God was a key aspect of their personal faith, and that this was often shown to be an integral part of their spirituality.

The data suggested that the young people in this study were synthesising the secular and the sacred (Tables 4.8, 4.12, 4.13, 4.19). These two dimensions were not perceived as mutually exclusive. Students' worldview often acknowledged both the existence of God and complete immersion in popular culture. Student 2.4 commented,

> Jesus is the man…I dig his work and I try to be as forgiving as him…I also love music, TV, the Internet, Souths, and my girlfriend…God just brings a balance to it all…I don't know…can't explain it…

The results indicated that students also placed their faith in horoscopes or other alternative spiritualities. Pentecostalism was seen as a form of Christian expression that was 'interesting' but few students indicated that they would consider leaving the Catholic tradition to become a Pentecostal. Student 1.3 commented,

> Yes…I like the Pentecostal stuff…their Music is phat…I would like to see a Muslim prayer session to see what they say about us…Buddhism is cool but I don't know about reincarnation…I like our Church…it feels like a family…

Another respondent (1.4) stated,

> Yes…definitely…I would like to try an Orthodox Church…I love my Church…I like the Hillsong stuff…the young people and music is great…I love being a Maronite….Its the same God in other Churches….It may bring you closer to God…

Pentecostalism is becoming increasingly understood by Catholic students and is no longer viewed as cultist or bizarre. With nearly 15% of Pentecostal newcomers being

from a Catholic background, it is of some concern to Catholic School and Church administrators (Chant, 2004). Respondents in this study acknowledged the attraction of Pentecostal worship services and said they would attend, but only a small percentage stated that they would consider joining that tradition on a full-time basis.

In a general way, participants in this study indicated that faith in God was often hard to maintain when there is so much war, racism, and violence in the world (Hughes, 2007; Mason et al., 2006). An inherent disappointment in the lack of harmony between races and religions was evident in the interview data. Students mentioned the Cronulla riots of December 2005 as a point of reference, and the way tensions between cultures impacted on their day to day routines.

In the results of section three of the questionnaire, students agreed that multiculturalism was seen to be working well in society generally. However, the focus group data showed that many friendship groups in two of the schools were formed specifically along ethnic lines. Students at one school also mentioned the difficulties they faced, as Catholics, when living and interacting in the wider community that had a predominately Muslim presence. Student 2.1 noted,

> ...we are always told in school to be fair and tolerate all people...sometimes gangs have a go at us and call us names...they get really dirty on our girls too and can be rude and stuff...I know they want a fight but we just let them go...it's funny...you get them one on one and they are good people....

Young people are immersed in culture and that aspect of their lives informs their faith development. However, the most significant acknowledged influence was parents (Table 4.11). Many households maintained a strong, 'built-in' faith in God that is not necessarily expressed in Mass attendance and formal worship. Students were aware of this inconspicuous expression of faith in God that their parents had and they considered that this was reflected in their own attitudes and faith in God.

Teachers and Priests were given lower ratings as regards their influence on young people's faith development. Although priests made themselves available to senior students, the lack of a regular parish life, and the age of most priests, seemed to inhibit any building of relationships and trust. Another factor may be the attitude some priests have toward their role in the Catholic school and their interpretation of the

perceived success of the Catholic school. An increasing number of priests seemed to be taking a negative view of the success of the Catholic school as a 'cradle' for students' faith development (Tinsey, 1998).

The small number of students attending Eucharist on a Sunday, and having no regular and sustaining involvement with the local Church, seemed consistent with the view that a significant number of young Catholics in Catholic schools had a negative view of the Church (Tables 4.17 & 4.18).

The data in this study confirmed Mc Laughlin's (2005) claim that priests, perceived as representatives of the Church, were, in the main, regarded as distant and unapproachable. Also, the data suggested that young people needed to be able to relate to leaders and authority figures before they could have any significant, formative effect on their attitudes and beliefs. Priests, due to age and lifestyle differences, seemed unable to 'connect' and build relationships that might enhance young people's faith development as envisaged in Leavey's notion of a 'faith mentoring' role (Leavey et al. 1992).

While the overall importance of friends was understandably very high (Table 4.14), somewhat surprisingly, friends rated at a very low level as regards influences on personal faith development (Table 4.11). It appeared that for this sample of young people, discussions about religious faith did not occur frequently in peer and friendship groups. However, when the peer group is supportive of religious affiliation and religious activities, researchers have considered that this will help establish a pattern of long-term belief (Flynn & Mok, 2002; Smith & Denton, 2005; Dixon, 2004).

5.2.3 CURRICULUM

The data showed that students were generally affirming of the role that Religious education played in their faith development (Table 4.11). This finding affirms the purposes of Catholic school religious education which sets out to be a positive facilitator of faith development. The data also suggested that the teachings of the Church were generally understood and perceived as having some relevance for

students.   Student comments about the role of religion teachers suggested that they saw the teachers' role as one of 'facilitating' the message and the religious traditions. Hence, the students saw a dual role for their teachers: one as regards informing them about the tradition and secondly as credible and approachable role models.   One issue for the religious education curriculum that emerged particularly in the focus group interviews had to do with the interpretation of Biblical stories.   Some students complained about the conflict they saw existing between the ways in which the biblical stories in the *Book of Genesis* were interpreted by their teachers at primary and secondary levels.

These students saw the more theological/symbolic interpretation – consequently not a literal interpretation – as confusing because it was different from the simpler interpretation they assumed when they were children.   Some felt that they were being misled.   Some students showed anger when commenting on the way the Biblical narratives such as Adam and Eve and Noah's Ark were interpreted by the teachers who taught secondary classes.   They seemed to feel that the secondary curriculum 'stripped away' the 'layers of truth' by referring to 'literary genres'.   This also seemed to move the biblical characters into the realm of fairy tale and fantasy.   These students then connected such experiences with further 'disillusionment' about other related Church teachings, resulting in a list of 'inconsistencies' in doctrines that they felt the Church was 'requiring' them to believe.

Student 3.2 said,

> If I am no longer allowed to believe in Adam and Eve, then why should I believe Mary went up into Heaven body and soul? Or that Jesus rose from the dead and ascended in front of the Apostles.

The stories of Adam and Eve, Noah, Joseph, and Moses are apparently taught to children in Primary school in a way, and at an age, when the stories become a part of their religious/cultural identity.   They tend to believe the details of the stories as if they were historical facts, and this inevitably seems to lay seeds for conflict when they learn of different less literal, more theological interpretations.   In Year 9, the students in question studied a unit of work entitled 'Literary Forms of the Scriptures' and they felt that their earlier sense of 'truth' and 'connectedness' was largely 'taken away from

them'.   It could be that for the students who experience this problem of conflicting interpretations in primary and secondary curricula it contributes to a sense of mistrust. Student 2.3 said,

> How did Noah get two of every creature onto a boat? Now we know it was all B.S.   It's a bit like finding out Santa isn't true…Then you felt betrayed a bit and resentful…

The problem here, while being more difficult for some than others, has to do with the development of a more mature theological grasp of Christian teachings.   And it has to do with how these latter theological insights are taught and explored in the classroom. These students felt that the religious education they received in primary and secondary classes was inconsistent and contradictory because it changed.   They learned in secondary school that Adam and Eve and Noah's Ark were regarded as being part of a wider theological mythology steeped in symbol and metaphor and that the Book of Genesis was not to be interpreted as a 'science' or 'history' book (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006).   For some of these students it appeared as if this was a 'religious domino' being 'knocked over' and this raised questions about what other religious truths might also fall away as well.   The purpose of the curriculum was to promote a more mature theological grasp of the Genesis stories where their theological truth was not tied to details of the stories as if they were principally scientific historical accounts.

The data on this topic suggest that religious education should not underestimate the complexity of students' reactions to what they are learning about the interpretation of scripture.   Students need help in learning how to negotiate apparent conflict in interpretations.   That is, they may need guidance in negotiating the natural difficulty in progressing from a more literal to a more symbolic interpretation of biblical narratives. Attempting to articulate for students that there is a 'natural' progression in understanding the stories from simple to complex-theological is problematic, because the Biblical stories appear to be taught in Primary school as if they were historical and verifiable truth while a more 'exegetical' approach is followed in Secondary school.   For some students, their feelings of being misled or disenchanted need to be addressed.

McLaughlin (2005) considered that another issue compounding the problem is that those teaching this material are largely unqualified to present this material in an articulate and sensitive fashion. The related curriculum issues that are pertinent here are:

1. The apparent clash between science and religion
2. Fundamentalist interpretation of scripture and fundamentalism in Christianity
3. Uncertainty about religious truth a feature of the mood of cultural postmodernity
4. Teaching strategies for handling the biblical stories in primary school
5. Teaching strategies for handling the biblical stories in secondary school

The study has identified these important curriculum issues for religious education that have a bearing on how young people understand their faith tradition. While the problem surfaced in the focus group discussions, it remains to be determined how extensive a problem this is with secondary school students in Catholic schools. It needs to be understood and addressed because it appears to be an area that affects young people's confidence in the Church and its teachings. The indication of levels of belief in doctrines like 'Jesus as God' (Table 4.17) would suggest that for a number of young Catholics they have already entered significantly into a spirituality that includes a lot of uncertainty about the truth of traditional Christian doctrines.

5.2.4 SUMMARY

Influences on the faith development of senior students involve interplay between personal experience, role models, educational experience, and culture. Parents, school religious education, and Church teaching all play a role in resourcing and enhancing students' faith development. Students have estimates of the roles and apparent influences of parents, teachers and priests. Young people saw how the content of Church teaching and religious education assist in helping them articulate their faith in God. The more theological approach to the teaching of scripture can be problematic for some students, because it raises questions for them about religious truth and confidence in the Church. A more theological interpretation of scripture raises issues for religious education at both primary and secondary school levels. Working

towards such an interpretation of biblical stories for students is difficult, but necessary if it is to give students access to what is regarded as the more realistic complex understanding of scripture.

Importantly, the role parents play in young people's faith development at home cannot be underestimated.   Young people are looking to the example of their parents as the principal model of how faith can play a part in their lives.   Use of the term 'faith development' usually refers to the personal spiritual development of people; however, there is also the additional matter of faith in the Catholic tradition and its connections with personal spirituality.   While the line of thinking noted above about the role of school religious education may be appropriate for families who are consciously interested in the overall role of a specifically Catholic religious education, it may need modification to address both the situation and the needs of families that are not Catholic but still religious – and it may allow further modification to be relevant to those who are nominally Catholic or nominally religious.   Ideally, for Catholic families involved in the local church, the Catholic religious education experience is most valuable and effective when complementing a life of Catholic faith at home.

Nevertheless, even without this complementarity, for students whose families are not regular church goers as well as for those who are not Catholic, the religious education curriculum may still offer something that is very important and relevant for their everyday spirituality.

5.3 COMPONENTS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S SPIRITUALITY

In this study, contemporary spirituality was interpreted as a collection of various aspects of life that are somehow related to the spiritual dimension.   This includes personal intuitions, relationships, interactions with nature and God, and a sense of meaning, purpose and identity.   While special attention was given to Catholic Christian aspects of spirituality in light of the Mission of the Catholic school, it is important to note that ways of being Catholic in the 21st century are diverse and eclectic (Hill, 2004).

Spirituality for young people is a very personal and transcendent concept that has multiple aspects and means of expression as well as beliefs (Fig. 4.13). However, for this sample, the prime foundation for s personal spirituality that emerged from this study appeared to be a personal value system (Table 4.12). One student (1.6) said that spirituality was,

> Something inside…the way you express your faith…you can be religious and spiritual or non-religious but spiritual… heaps of people don't go to Mass but are very spiritual people…can be other stuff that helps you with your life…

The other significant foundation of youth spirituality emerging from this study is that spirituality is a journey of discovery, self, and God (Table 4.12). It is always changing, morphing, and revealing new insights and levels of maturation (Fowler, 1981). The students showed that they accepted a spiritual dimension to life quite readily. They did not see themselves as being 'shackled' in one dimension or pathway to a personal spirituality. They appeared to accept that spirituality is a human need and that it is nurtured and satisfied like any other human system or function. The generational difference that appeared evident was that they were not aligning themselves as exclusively to the Church and its doctrines as perhaps was the case for earlier generations (Tables 4.12, 4.17).

5.3.1 SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES

This section discusses spiritual experiences that participants nominated as providing a sense of transcendence and that enabled an identification with a higher purpose or power.
The significance of the response to these scenarios (Appendix E) is that it showed students sensing that there was something much bigger and more profound than themselves and their every day existence. A significant number said that they understood that human beings were only a small piece of the Universe and some students mentioned that it helped them with their humility. Student 3.1 commented,

> I was down the coast on my board and saw this mad sunrise….all yellows and oranges…a pod of dolphins swam past at the same time…my mate was with me

and we didn't speak…we just knew…stuff like that makes me believe in God…you just see it…

It would seem from the study that the notion of transcendence for young people is makes frequent contributions to their personal spirituality (Rossiter, 2004). Many students viewed nature and the world as larger than themselves and that there is more to it than their own immediate experiences.

One of the most prominent ideas to emerge from the grief scenario was that students turned to prayer at difficult times in their lives and they felt it was a natural and comforting response to a tragedy. Students prayed to God in times of trouble, and times of joy. Those students who had experienced grief or profound sadness said reaching out through prayer was a 'natural' reaction.

5.3.2 IMPORTANT THINGS IN LIFE

This section discusses the things regarded by students as important in their lives and the way meaning and significance is attached to them.

The data highlighted the multiplicity of spiritual expressions in young people. Spirituality is a concept that the majority of students in this study related to. The important things in students' lives appeared easily identifiable to them and played a major part in their overall sense of identity and well-being. Students acknowledged that the important things in life will ebb and flow, at various points in their lives (Table 4.14). This understanding of change meant that spirituality, in this sense, was a perspective for them, rather than a way of life. It provided a sustaining framework within which to reside and view the world (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Hughes, 2007).

Female students were more inclined to place great importance on a spiritual life than males. One explanation may be the interpretation of what a spiritual life is. There are many definitions and understandings of what constitutes a spiritual life, and spirituality (Tacey, 2003; Hanvey, 2005). Another contributing factor could be that females were more comfortable with spiritual concepts while males naturally showed more reserve in

aligning themselves overtly with concepts of spirituality and religiosity (Haug & Warner, 2000; Smith & Denton, 2005).

The two most important things in life reported by young people in this survey wee the Higher School Certificate and their friends (the New South Wales Higher School Certificate [HSC] is the final public examination for Year 12 students in that state. Other Australian states and territories have different versions and names of the 'leaving certificate.' Generally, most Australian students sitting this final exam would face similar fears and stresses.

Students realised the significance of a high mark in the HSC and correspondingly gave their final year of study in post-compulsory education serious attention. Students were experiencing implicit and explicit pressure to perform well in their Higher School Certificate and saw it as a gateway to higher education which would, in turn, give them a satisfying career. However, there are implications for teachers and parents in that anxiety permeated their senior school years at the expense of full enjoyment of Years 11 and 12. The other point is that their faith and personal development may be hindered by the intense focus on academic achievement and excellence. The fallout from a poor result or unfulfilled goals, with consequent serious psychological implications, may be an area that requires more research given the seriousness with which young people take the Higher School Certificate.

Interestingly, just below a successful Higher School Certificate, the data showed the important concern of students to maintain and nurture their friendship group. It is apparent that in the two years of senior school, the consciousness of senior students revolves around study and friends. Friends appeared to be the 'fortress' in which they could reside without fear of judgment. While there may be some insecurity in working out their identity, they are protected within the stronghold of a friendship group. Friends become helpful at a time when students are forming identity. In addition, friends provide a source for sharing fears and trepidations (Hanvey, 2005; Smith & Denton, 2005). Most of their friends were also experiencing the same life stage and were vital for support during the senior school years. A significant personal relationship (boyfriend/girlfriend) was also important for the majority of respondents.

Family was also regarded as very important for students and appeared to be the foundation for their sense of self and belonging (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Smith & Denton, 2005). This confirmed the Catholic Church's approach to education and the role ascribed to family in the personal and spiritual development of young people (Pope John Paul II, 1997).

Students also commented that control of one's life was important and gave them a sense of autonomy. This result may mean that they do not feel 'in control' during this phase in their lives. Regaining control may include areas of belief and spiritual practice. Spirituality is one of few areas that students have personal control over and it may help explain how they understand it.

Young people nominated helping others as an import thing in life and identified with social justice. Catholic schools, by and large, have comprehensive social justice programs that young people can participate in and practice their faith in a tangible way (Flynn & Mok, 2002). In addition, girls found a spiritual component in art, literature, long walks with friends, and writing blogs and diaries (Table 4.13). Any activity that included social interaction and contributed to a sense of friendship or connection with the wider community was deemed to contain a spiritual component. A smaller number of female respondents nominated religious practice such as going to Mass, Bible reading, and liturgies as having an impact on their spirituality (Smith & Denton, 2005). Boys, however, commented that sport was an integral part of their lives and following a particular sporting team was 'spiritual.' These aspects of life that they found important were also the catalysts for 'happiness' and 'hopefulness' in their lives.

Family and friendships were the anchors that sustained them. Student 1.4 explained,

> The things that make me hopeful in life are aspirations, goals, getting ahead, working, completing a major assignment at school…when you mentioned 13 years at school I couldn't believe how long we have been here…Things that make me happy are… eating chocolate…I am happy when I am shopping…I find I am happy when I am helping other people to be happy…I visited my friend in hospital and that made me happy…

Allegiance to a sporting code or franchise was considered to be sustaining, religious, and involved participating in the colours, games, events, and rituals associated with that team. Some teams mentioned by the participants had established religious affiliations such as Catholic or Protestant. Boys also included 'mateship' as important to their sense of self and identity. The male participants were aware of the ANZAC story and the forging of a sense of mateship and egalitarian values amongst Australian males. Students viewed this as very important to their sense of identity and included it in their overall concept of spirituality.

Drugs and alcohol were not considered important by the majority of students. This result could be interpreted as supportive of the educational programs at home and school are having a positive impact generally, the students did not appear to be relying on artificial means to gain a sense of well-being. The least important things in their lives at this stage were their 'looks,' and 'prayer and liturgies.' Senior students appeared to be less obsessed with looking like 'super models' than anecdotal evidence would suggest. Students in this study regarded the value of the inner person more important than above outward appearance. This is a complicated issue because research and educators' own experience suggests that looks are very important for young people for both males and females, but especially for the latter (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006). It may well be that in answering this question young people were inclined that they would 'like that to be the case'- that looks were unimportant to them.

Similarly, they said that they were not influenced by 'peer group pressure', even though elsewhere they rated friends as very important to them- and influential. For such sensitive and complex issues as the importance ascribed to looks, other research strategies would be needed to explore the issues in more detail. For example, it might probe young people's views of how others, rather than they themselves, may or may not be influenced by concern about looks.

These students did not identify very much with the Church during their senior school years. They did not go to priests for advice regarding personal issues (Tables 4.9, 4.17). They found some solace in their own spiritualities, and private dialogue with God. These young people were not utilizing or participating in formal church prayers and

practices and they rate this the lowest rank in this survey of things importance in their lives.

5.3.3 INFLUENCE OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION

This section considers a range of experiences that students are exposed to in the Catholic school setting.   This included not only the formal religious education component, but the implicit Catholic curriculum found in the liturgical and prayer life of the school.   This part of the survey was concerned with the aspects of this school experience students found meaningful and engaging.   This study found that the moral teachings of the Church, taught in the classroom, were considered to have a significant impact on students' personal development.   The students seemed to 'connect' with what the Church was saying in relation to moral standards, via Religious education, liturgies, prayer, the various charisms, and moral teachings.

However, their response to Church teachings appeared still relative and individualistic. For young people to comply, any particular teaching needed to be personally relevant (Rossiter, 2004; Hill, 2004).   This result has implications for the perceived success of the school's mission.   The official purpose of a Catholic school is one of servicing the Church and community in the education of Catholic children for a faithful life within the Church, and a productive life within society (Pope John Paul II, 1997a; Pope John Paul II, 1997b; Pope John Paul II, 2001).   While some of those magisterial goals may not be met, the results of this study suggest that some of the moral teachings are being taken on board by students.   A negative response by students in relation to religious education teachers confirms the trend shown in other studies (McLaughlin, 2005; Hill, 2004). Students pointed to religious education teachers being unhelpful and ineffectual when it came to assisting in an understanding of God and the traditions of the Church (Table 4.16).   Significantly, a low response to the influence of religious education teachers on students' belief in God may relate to the earlier result on confusion in what constitutes 'our' story and the concept of scriptural 'truth.' It is important to note that the students' perplexity at the change from simple literal truth to abstract theological may be where the disenchantment is directed, rather than directed at the teachers themselves.   It is also likely that the regard for Religion teachers is strongly influenced by their low regard for

the official Church as institution.   Similarly, they may not be likely to turn to religion teachers for personal advice for the same reasons.

There has been significant change in the composition of the Catholic school staffroom since the days when most teachers were members of religious orders.   In the 21st century the typical religious education teacher will now be a lay person, and not a religious. Religion teachers are required to have basic qualifications in the subject area.   While once a major problem, the majority of Religion teachers in Catholic schools are now there in a qualified capacity.   If the principal role of the Catholic school is to evangelise in the faith then religious education teachers are key personnel in that process.   If they were not presenting the traditions and beliefs of the Church effectively then this could contribute to the problem where some students felt confused and disillusioned.

No doubt, the recruitment and professional development of competent Religion teachers remains an important factor here.   But the problem in young people's theological development is a complex one where their experience of religious education is but one contributing factor.   Also relevant are the effects of cultural postmodernity on theology and religious language, to name one factor.

Students felt that their experiences at school helped them to be able to pray to God informally and intimately.   This contrasted with their view of formal prayers and liturgies.   The majority of students considered that the formal prayer and devotions that they had experienced at school were not as meaningful and significant (Engebretson, 2003).   However, one of the spiritual and experiential highlights of their Catholic education was the annual retreat in their senior years.   This experience was regarded as very important and it rated the highest of all the Catholic facets of school life (Flynn, 2002).   A number of students felt that the retreat was a very significant part of their school life which warranted the time away from the normal school routine to provide the opportunity for personal spiritual growth.

5.3.3 GOD AND THE CHURCH

While the school is a legitimate evangelistic arm of the Church, when trying to assess the effectiveness of its evangelizing role, it is important to gauge young people's perceptions of the Church as an agency that might enhance their spirituality.   Also relevant will be their image of God.   However, young people's perceptions of the Church and God are complex and are influenced by many factors, only one of which is the experience of Catholic education.   This section discusses the significance of student's responses to perceptions of God and the Church at this point in their lives.

Their perceived relevance of the Church is more likely to be affected by their direct experience of the Church as such, and to a lesser extent by their perceptions of the relevance of their Catholic schooling.   They could feel that their schooling and religious education are personally relevant, while not feeling this way about the institutional Church.

The majority of students believed that 'you don't have to go to Church to believe in God (Table 4.17).' This response indicated that regular Sunday Mass attendance was not meaningful to the majority of senior students.   In addition, just over one third of students indicated that they attended Mass in the last month.   This may have been at school or at their Parish on a Sunday.   If regular Mass attendance is taken as the principal measure of the success of Catholic inculturation, then the results indicated a declining participation.   Such a decline was also reported by McLaughlin, (2005); Flynn & Mok, (2002); & Hughes, (2007).

However, because the overall population decline in Catholic Mass attendance is complex, it is not realistic or appropriate to hold Catholic schools responsible for the decline.   A number of students said that the Church itself contributes to their spirituality.   Around the same number of responses commented that they could develop their own spirituality without the Church.   The richness of the Catholic tradition provided any number of spiritual and religious beliefs and practices that young people could pick and choose from.   Their spirituality is very eclectic.   It would seem that students were accepting aspects of their Catholic tradition while rejecting aspects that they felt were not relevant to their lives (Rossiter, 2004).

Other influences affecting attitudes towards the Church were knowledge of the abuse of children by Priests and how this made young people feel discouraged and wary of the clergy (Tables 4.9, 4.16; McGillion, 2003). This result is consistent with earlier findings that priests were regarded as representing the Church, but they were difficult to relate to. This 'watchful' attitude to the institutional Church and its representatives has left young people in this survey feeling relatively spiritually isolated.

A high score was recorded for the view of the Church as distant and not providing a sense of pastoral care on a personal level. Students also felt that the Church had 'gone off track' in terms of being relevant. Similar views were found in Flynn and Mok's study (2002).

Confidence and regular participation in the Church and belief in God did not appear to go hand in hand for the young people in this study. They considered that a person could believe in God without having to go to Church or participate in its rituals and liturgies (Flynn & Mok, 2002). Statements such as the Church being 'more of a guide toward religion and God' were used to describe its perceived role. The participants also view the Church as a culture like any other that could be embraced wholly or in part without diminishing the sense of identity as a Catholic young person.

Significantly, students in this survey did not feel that the Church was interested in them at a personal level. This was the case even though students felt that a sense of belonging and community has always permeated the Catholic school experience. Flynn's (1979, 1998, & 2002) research has repeatedly confirmed that a good sense of community has long been a very positive characteristic of Catholic secondary schools. Community is an integral aspect of what it means to be a student in a Catholic school. But, after 13 years of Catholic education and all that entails, students in this study were not actively embracing a sense of belonging and community within the Catholic Church. While there is no doubt about their valuing of the sense of community in the Catholic school, this was not being transferred or applied to the institutional Catholic Church.

5.4   IMAGES OF GOD

While participants did not believe that the Church was concerned with them personally, the majority of students believed that God was a caring Being who loved them and is concerned for them personally.   They also feel that God always forgave them regardless of what they have done.   These two results are significant and imply a God concept that is personal, loving, and forgiving.   Interestingly, the God conceptualised by most of the students was other-worldly and only needed to be accessed when needed (Rossiter, 2004; Hughes, 2007).   Very few of the students surveyed were confident that God did not exist at all (Table 4.18).

For most Christians, Jesus is the most identifiable person in the Christian Trinity. However, the way he is portrayed in the Gospels as the loving, tolerant, social justice motivated, seeker of truth is what students appear to be identifying with.   When it comes to articulating which Christology they accept or reject, less than half felt that Jesus was truly God, or truly human (Table 4.18; see also Mason, et al., 2006).   His divinity and humanity may be something that students are confused about and did not see as overly relevant to their lives.   A significant finding in this study is that many students believed that Jesus died for their sins and is the way for them to enter Heaven.

In addition, more than half of those surveyed in this study felt that they were better human beings with Jesus in their lives.   This result is interesting given their rejection of a lot of the more 'miraculous' aspects of Catholic belief and practice.   One explanation may be that one of the schools surveyed came from a strong Catholic tradition and the participants were more inclined to be doctrinally aligned than were students from the other Catholic schools surveyed.

The concept of God for participants is separate from the discussion on Jesus.   God was the incomprehensible transcendent creator while Jesus was the person from the Gospels and the Crucifix.   The next part of the discussion deals with responses to the specific concepts that young people in this survey hold in regard to 'God.'

5.4.1 GOD THE JUDGE

The first image (Figure 4.5, 4.6) looked at a 'justice' God who apportioned blessings and punishments to people once they died.   This courtroom-like image of life after death had God playing a DVD of your life and the Almighty Judge pointing out your virtuous behavior, weighed up against failings.   The end result would be the reward of eternal life in Heaven, or eternal damnation in the fires of Hell.   The majority of the students did not imagine this as being a realistic image of what occurs in the afterlife, and were dismissive of the model (Rossiter, 2004).   A number of students understood that life was not a 'free for all' without accountability, but God understood the fallibility of human beings.   Student 3.5 commented.

> I believe you pay for your sins when you die but not in a place that burns you up and tortures you...as if...

This attitude to their behavior and the lack of 'Catholic guilt' may go some way in explaining why young people are not participating in the sacrament of reconciliation and are dismissive of doctrines such as Purgatory, Indulgences, and Hell (Flynn and Mok, 2002; Hill, 2004).   One respondent (1.2) said,

> Why would you have to go into lockdown for 1000 years and then be allowed in to Heaven?

The 'scales of Justice' image of God prompted further conversation among students along these same lines.   Students felt that behavior, whether good or bad, was all part of the 'learning curve' of life.   Incidental misdemeanors like swearing and gossip were considered 'bad' but not endangering their souls.   Many found the concept of a God who turns His back on them for doing the wrong thing as absurd.

Respondents also felt that if they did the wrong thing to someone else then it was up to them to reconcile, and that the forgiveness would be up to the wronged individual to dispense.   Perceived 'Big ticket' sins like sex and drinking were relayed to God via private prayer but all students said they had no lingering, residual guilt after that process of repentance was undertaken.   The lack of participation in the sacrament of reconciliation by senior school students in Catholic schools may be attributed to the

lack of meaning or relevance that the sacrament has for them. Also, they may tend to associate the sacrament with a judgmental image of God.

5.4.2 THE INCARNATE/ATONING GOD

The image of God presented in the mainstream, popular Christian belief model was deliberately used as a satirical way of presenting some of the mysterious soteriology surrounding the Christian doctrine of Salvation (Figure 4.7). The God, who sends himself down to earth to live among humans and then die to enable humans to access Heaven, was the basis for this discussion. The female participants were more supportive of the idea of Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross. The majority of them were defensive of the need for Jesus' death for the salvation of the world. Student 1.4 commented,

> I go to the Stations of the Cross each Good Friday and cry like a baby…what he went through for us so that we can get to Heaven…now I know what God is like because I can look to Jesus as God living on earth and sharing in our experiences.

Male respondents were less affirming of this particular interpretation of Catholic salvation theology. Jesus was readily identifiable as a great role model and a figure who loved the marginalised and the poor. The whole idea of what constituted 'salvation' is an area that requires more research. Young people showed a range of concepts regarding what it means to be 'saved' or what is required to earn eternal life and a place in Heaven (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006). Several students pointed out the disparity between the genres of the various biblical texts. They argued that if Adam and Eve did not exist then neither did Original sin. The logical progression being that Jesus did not then have to die in order for humans to access Heaven. One respondent (3.3) said,

> No Adam, no Eve, no apple, no snake, no Original Sin (laughing), no need for Jesus to die...hey?...I think…like he died and stuff but because he was a threat to the Romans….other people made his death into this massive thing…

There is an understandable logic to this sort of thinking.   More than for previous generations, these students seemed ready to evaluate religious interpretations in the light of common sense.   If the interpretations seemed unrealistic or inappropriate, then they were reluctant to believe them.   The discussion about the atoning God reinforced the earlier comments by students regarding the inherent mistrust in Church teaching that many young people are feeling.   Some of the contradictions emerging through their experience of theology in the primary and secondary school seemed to be resulting in some confusion and a puzzlement about what Catholic/Christian doctrines mean.   This might also affect their overall 'resonance' with the Catholic religious tradition.   For some it might lead to a 'theological maturity'.   For others it might be a starting point for disregarding the Church.

5.4.3 THE SANTA GOD AND PRAYER

The 'Santa God' (Figure 4.8) referred to the deity that is only accessed in petition, and times of need.   This sparked a vigorous discussion about prayer and what students did when they prayed.   The majority of respondents said that praying to God as a senior school student was very different from the way they prayed as children.   Many still prayed to God for material possessions such as Ipods and clothes, or money, but most pray in petition for happiness and contentment (Kay & Francis, 1996).   Students prayed regularly during exam time and hoped God would help them remember what they had studied, or they prayed for inspiration.   Students did not feel the need to pray every day and only 'accessed' God when they felt they needed to chat or to ask for something. Student 3.4 commented,

> The last time I prayed was a couple of months ago…I needed a new job and asked God to help the person who was interviewing me to see that I was the right person for the job…it worked!!

Prayer took a number of forms; however, most students indicated that prayer was important to them in their lives.   Corporate prayer was not considered a positive in life at school as noted by Engebretson (2003).   Formal prayers held little interest, and for those who prayed, a more informal conversation with God was the norm.   Some female students took solace in traditional prayers such as the Rosary.   However, prayer was a

very personal feature of their spirituality.   Prayer was personal, deeply reflective, informal, important, and is regular, similar to the results of Smith & Denton (2005). Prayer did not involve repetitive mantras or established formalities (C/F Rossiter, 2004). Prayer for respondents in this study was generally conversational and was done in private and in a quiet place such as a park, the beach, or a bedroom, as reported in Tacey (2003).

Some students were not entirely sure what and to whom they were praying.   It appeared that some students were firm believers in prayer but not so firm when it came to knowing the deity they were praying to.   However, this lack of clarity did not equate to an atheistic approach.   The majority of students were confident that God existed in one form or another.   Therefore, praying was about 'getting the message' to a higher being that most felt existed.   Students felt that prayer was helpful just to 'talk out' what fears were going on inside their heads in regard to growing up and encountering the 'ups and downs' of life.   Student 2.2 said,

> (Prayer) It gets you through life…you need to know there is a God up there that loves you no matter what...someone who can be there for you always and love…I pray because it makes me feel better...whether God hears me or not…

5.4.3   THE KNOWING AND CARING GOD

Students were shown a caricature of a God who knew them personally, was involved in their lives, and loved them unconditionally (Figure 4.12).   This image attracted the most affirming response in terms of a God that most imagined actually existed.   This concept seemed to be intrinsically understood as real and most likely.   In accord with this image, students felt that this God did not watch and analyse every action and thought that they had.   Students still perceived God as a wise King in their minds (C/F Mason, et al., 2006).   However, respondents felt that the nature of God was one of love, truth and forgiveness.

The students in this survey appeared to have stripped away much of the dogmatic Church layers that have been attributed to the God presented in their experience of traditional Catholic theology.   However, they seemed to understand the concept of

unconditional love and sense that God is tolerant, accepting, and forgiving.   Student 2.4 commented,

> I love God and God loves me…he knows that I live with my mum and 2 brothers….he knows we don't have a lot of money and dad left us…he knows we struggle to do our best and loves us anyway…

Students' understanding of God was personal and relativistic.   Their God had a personal relationship with them and was always available.   Their God was not the 'corporate' God that resides in Heaven and is only accessed via sacraments or the mediation of a Catholic priest.   Respondents in this study strongly believed in Jesus who helped the poor and loved everyone unconditionally.   They were able to differentiate between Jesus and the various images of God presented through tradition and doctrine (C/F Mason, et al., 2006).

5.5 CULTURAL INFLUENCES AND YOUTH CULTURE

This section will discuss the meaning and significance of the influence of some aspects of culture on youth spirituality.   The results are significant because the mission of the Catholic school is intended to achieve a synthesis of faith and culture (Pope John Paul II, 1997b).   This faith and culture is expressed through the experience of Gospel values, and the traditions of the Catholic Church (Pope John Paul II, 1997b).   Significantly, the results for this section of the survey indicated that the culture that young people were immersing themselves in is popular culture, not so much the culture of the Church.

5.5.1 MULTICULTURALISM AND PLURALISM

Most of the students surveyed in this study believed that Australia is a 'religious' country.   In addition, most students went so far as to say Australia was a Christian country.   The perceived encroachment of Islam into Australia's religious landscape entered into the focus group discussions.   Stereotypical comments of "intolerance" and "terrorism" were mentioned but most students said that they judged people individually.   Student 3.7 disagreed he said,

> I am over it...they take over our beaches and are rude..they think they own the place...every time there is a terrorist attack it is one of them..

One of the background questions included in the survey was the idea about cultural identity. Students were asked to indicate whether they identified themselves strongly as Australian or as one of a number of other ethnic identities. The majority of students identified themselves as Australian while a smaller number of students felt that they identified more strongly as European, Middle Eastern, Asian, or Pacific Islander (Table 4.6). Students stated that heritage was very important to them even if they still viewed themselves as primarily Australian. Similar results were found by Kaldor (2004). Some students said that they had the benefit of their parents recounting stories to them of war, hardship, and deprivation in their former countries. This developed a positive and privileged attitude about living in Australia (McGillion, 2003). However, not all students viewed multiculturalism as a source of richness in diversity and harmony of lifestyles. Student 3.7 said that multiculturalism,

> Doesn't work...what about learning English first before you get here so we don't have shop signs in other languages...this is Australia!

In contrast, one student said that he loved attending the ANZAC marches on the one hand, and on the other looked forward to making pasta sauce with his large Italian family every Sunday. The closeness, the bonding and interaction made him feel part of a loving family and a wider, privileged community. This result stands appeared to contrast a lack of community-mindedness and belonging that a number of students in this study felt about their Catholic tradition.

5.5.2 THE POTENTIAL INFLUENCE OF TELEVISION ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S SPIRITUALITY

The issue explored in this study was whether television contributed to the lives of young people in any meaningful way, and if that can be interpreted as spiritual. The results showed that television for young people was regarded as a mixture of entertainment and education (Figure 4.13 & 4.14). Students were articulate in their responses to the question about "what role television plays in their lives." One of the significant issues to arise out of the role television plays in the lives of senior students was the exorbitant amount of time they spent watching programs (Anderson, 2001). Students in this study thought that television was an important part of their lives. They cited its entertainment

and educational value. Student 3.1 declared, "It teaches us about the world and what is cool in music and fashion…definitely."

News, current affairs, and documentaries were all part of the young person's program diet (Bridger, 2001). They also stated that they obtained some values from a variety of genres, including situation comedies and dramas. Reality programs were a popular genre and it appeared that young people still enjoyed this type of programming. Shows such as *Big Brother* still influenced the fashion, values, language, and behavior of senior school students. Television was also able to provide them with news about the state of world affairs and a sense of safety and privilege living in Australia. Only a few students were aware of any religious programs and even fewer had watched them. Most had watched documentaries at school and students commented that they were mainly based on the historical Jesus debate.

The significance of television for the spirituality of senior students is that television was a prime purveyor of culture. In addition, it was a popular choice amongst young people as a means of education and entertainment. Television would contribute to the spirituality of young people by providing versions of popular culture and values to be assimilated and applied to their own process of deriving meaning and constructing identity (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006). One point of significance for this project lay in the censorship of viewing habits. While programs such as documentaries and educational programs have their explicit teaching purposes, producers of reality TV shows and sitcoms were allowing implicit values, standards, language, and behavior to be accessed by young people, and this could affect their perceptions of life and the world. This situation could conflict with the mission of the School and the teachings and of the Church (Pope John Paul II, 2005).

5.6 SUMMARY

This chapter has explored the meaning and significance of the research findings. The results have highlighted the role parents played in the formation of morals, and the foundations for a personal spirituality. Significant trends in attitudes toward Catholic education, life experiences, and images of God also emerged from the data. In addition, this study provided responses by senior students on how they saw their Catholic faith and

Catholic education contributing to their spirituality. Students in this survey were fairly positive toward the concept of multiculturalism, but remained wary of other, seemingly intolerant faith traditions. Students were proud to call themselves Australian while retaining and celebrating the culture of their parents or grandparents. Students viewed reality television as 'real' and accepted cultural trends in fashion and technology from this medium. Responses showed that whilst television may develop a level of sophistication, there is little in the way of effective discrimination of program substance.

Chapter 6 will review and conclude the project. It will consider further some of the major insights that have emerged.

CHAPTER 6

REVIEW AND CONCLUSIONS

The final chapter will consider how this study contributes to contemporary thinking about youth spirituality.   It will reflect in more detail on some of the key issues raised in the previous chapter such as the way young people conceptualise God, and the influence of excessive individualism on their personal and spiritual development.   It will set out to put these findings into a larger perspective.   It will also consider implications for educating young people in spirituality with special reference to Catholic schools, while also relevant, to a degree, to public and other independent schools.   A better understanding of the complexity of these issues is important for educators because they have significant implications for theory and practice, both in education generally and religious education in particular.   The chapter will also note limitations to the study and will propose areas for further research.

6.1 COMPARISONS WITH OTHER RECENT MAJOR STUDIES OF YOUTH SPIRITUALITY

To provide an overview, Table 6.1 summarises the key findings of this study compared with those of 5 major studies on youth spirituality that have been completed within the last 6 years.   These five studies were:

1. Flynn, M., & Mok, M. (2002). *Catholic schools 2000: A longitudinal study of year 12 students in Catholic schools 1972-1982-1990-1998*

2. Mason, M., Webber, R., Singleton, A. (2006). *'The spirit of generation Y'*

3. Crawford, M., & Rossiter, G. (2006). *Reasons for living, education and young people's search for meaning, identity and spirituality*

4. Smith, C., & Denton, M. (2005). *Soul searching: the religious and spiritual lives of American teenagers*.

5. Hughes, P. (2007). *Putting life together: findings from youth spirituality research*.

Table 6.1 *Major studies on youth spirituality*

Research studies on Youth Spirituality	Putting Life Together (PLT)	Reasons for Living (RFL)	Spirit Of Gen Y (GY)	Catholic Schools 2000 (CS)	Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers (SD)	This Research Project (RP)	Notes
Acknowledged primary influence on young people's spiritual/religious and personal development							
Parents	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	All studies report parents as a most important influence
Primacy of Conscience	—	✓	—	—	✓	✓	RP reported a prominence of self-reliance in moral decision-making
Acknowledged significant influences on young people's spiritual/religious and personal development							
Parents	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	All studies reported a significant result
Teachers	✓	✓	✓	—	—	✓	Generally a low perceived influence. Aust. Studies reported a lesser influence
Religious education	✓	✓	✓	—	—	✓	Generally a low perceived influence. *PLT* reported ethics as the most positive influence in RE
Priests	✓	—	✓	—	—	✓	Generally a low perceived influence. RP reported the lowest level of influence
Friends	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	RP reported higher return for males
Basis of a personal spirituality							
Personal Value System	—	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	RP reported high self-reliance in constructing their own spirituality
The possibility of spirituality that is not so formally religious	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	✓	SD report strong identification with formal religion
Not strongly based on teachings of the Church	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Low levels reported in all studies
Some interest in contemporary non-religious movements	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	✓	All studies indicated some interest, SD lowest; GY showed more interest by older participants
Contemporary characteristics of a youth spirituality							
Eclecticism of sources	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	Similar results
Individualistic	✓	✓	✓	—	—	✓	SD reports a strong connection with community
Communitarian	✓	✓	✓	—	—	✓	RP reports emphasis on individualism
Ways of expressing spirituality							
Talking Privately with God	✓		✓	✓	—	✓	CS does not report private prayer as significant

Personal Reflection	✔	✔	✔	—	—	✔	RP most significant means of expression
Study	**(PLT)**	**(RFL)**	**(GY)**	**(CS)**	**(SD)**	**(RP)**	**Notes**
Formal Prayer (e.g. Our Father)	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	SD & CS highest returns
Church Service	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	Lower attendance for all studies
Most important things in life							
Friends	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	Friends and education were most significant for RP. Prayer & Liturgies were lower for all studies
HSC/Education	✔	✔	✔	—	—	✔	
Spiritual Life	✔		✔	—	—	✔	
Prayer and Liturgies	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	
Images of God							
Caring being who loves me personally	38%	✔	✔	**73%**	✔	Most believable image of God	SD & RD report the loving God as leading concept
Forgives unconditionally	—	—	✔	**69%**	80% believe in reward & Punishment	82%	RP returned a significant result
Atoning God/Jesus	39% (yes or maybe)		✔	70% believe Jesus is truly God	37%	61%	Mixed results
Belief in God	84%		50% (UK study)	86%	80%	84%	SD significant for reward & punishment. RFL's study was largely interpretative. PLT, & GY report 16% believe in No God
Traditional views of God as a judge	—	—	✔	—	Moral Therapeutic Deism	✔	
Other religion's images of God are valid and equal	—	—	✔	—	58%	86%	
Catholic education and spirituality							
Influenced my Spirituality	✔		✔	✔	—	✔	Low level results for CS compared with RP & RFL
RE teachers contributed to spirituality	✔	✔	✔	✔	—	✔	Low levels of influence reported in Aust. studies
Retreat experience was important	✔	✔	✔	✔	—	✔	RP levels was lower than CS.
Learning how to pray was important	—	—	✔	✔	—	✔	RP returned a positive result
Youth culture							
Pride in Ethnic Identity	—	—	✔	—	—	✔	RP found ethnicity was important.. SD supported Christian aligned cultures mainly
Positive toward multiculturalism	—	—	✔	—	—	✔	RP returned an affirming level of perceived influence
Television is an important as an educational influence on young people	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	SD returned a negative view of television compared to RP

Film/television a significant influence on spirituality	–	✓	–	–	–	✓	SD reported TV as a negative influence. PLT & GY interpreted TV as a means for education on social issues only

Table 6.1 shows that this study has provided further data on the spirituality of young people that confirms a number of the findings of the 5 listed major studies – as well as confirming various interpretations in other studies of spirituality listed in the references.   In particular, this study has added new data on the spirituality of a sample of senior students in metropolitan Catholic schools – their average age was 17. Table 6.2 summarises the distinctive findings of this research study while table 6.3 notes the key conclusions regarding students' experience of Catholic schooling as it relates to their spirituality.

Table 6.2 *Key conclusions of this study*

1. Parents are the primary influences on the spiritual development of young people.

2. Youth spirituality is individualistic and based on a personal value system.

3. Youth spirituality is diverse and draws on a range of resources in an eclectic fashion.

4. The majority of students understood a sense of the transcendent as a key to their spirituality.

5. Spirituality was commonly expressed spontaneously and in personal reflection.

Table 6.3 *Key conclusions concerning a youth spirituality*

1. Parents are the primary influences of spiritual development

2. Spirituality is individualistic and based on a personal value system

3. Youth spirituality is diverse and not uniform

4. The majority of students understand a sense of the transcendent as a key to their spirituality

5. Spirituality is predominately expressed spontaneously and in personal reflection

6. Formal prayer and Church services are not a significant aspect of youth spirituality

7. Youth spirituality is not exclusively underpinned by a sense of connectedness with community

8. Friends and the Higher School Certificate are the most important things in their lives

Table 6.4 *Key conclusions concerning Catholic schooling and religious education*

1. This group of senior students would rather pray to God informally than in formal prayers and liturgies.

2. School liturgies were not regarded by students as helpful in their belief in God.

3. The students considered that their overall experience of Catholic education did not contribute significantly to their spirituality.

4. Students considered that their experience of Catholic schooling did not assist in giving them an appreciation of the Church.

5. Students considered that religion teachers did not have much influence on their belief in God.

6. Most students felt that they not adhere to all of the moral teachings of the Church.

7. Students' having knowledge of religion did not automatically lead to a personal faith.

8. The most significant and formative relationships for senior students at school were with friends.

6.2 KEY ISSUES/QUESTIONS FOR YOUTH SPIRITUALITY RAISED BY THIS STUDY, TOGETHER WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL THEORY AND PRACTICE

6.2.1 YOUTH SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Figure 6.5 proposes an interpetation of youth spirituality that highlights key characteristics identified in this study as well as in the major studies noted above and in the litertature review in chapter 2.

Figure 6.5 S*ummary of the key aspects of youth spirituality that emerged in this study*
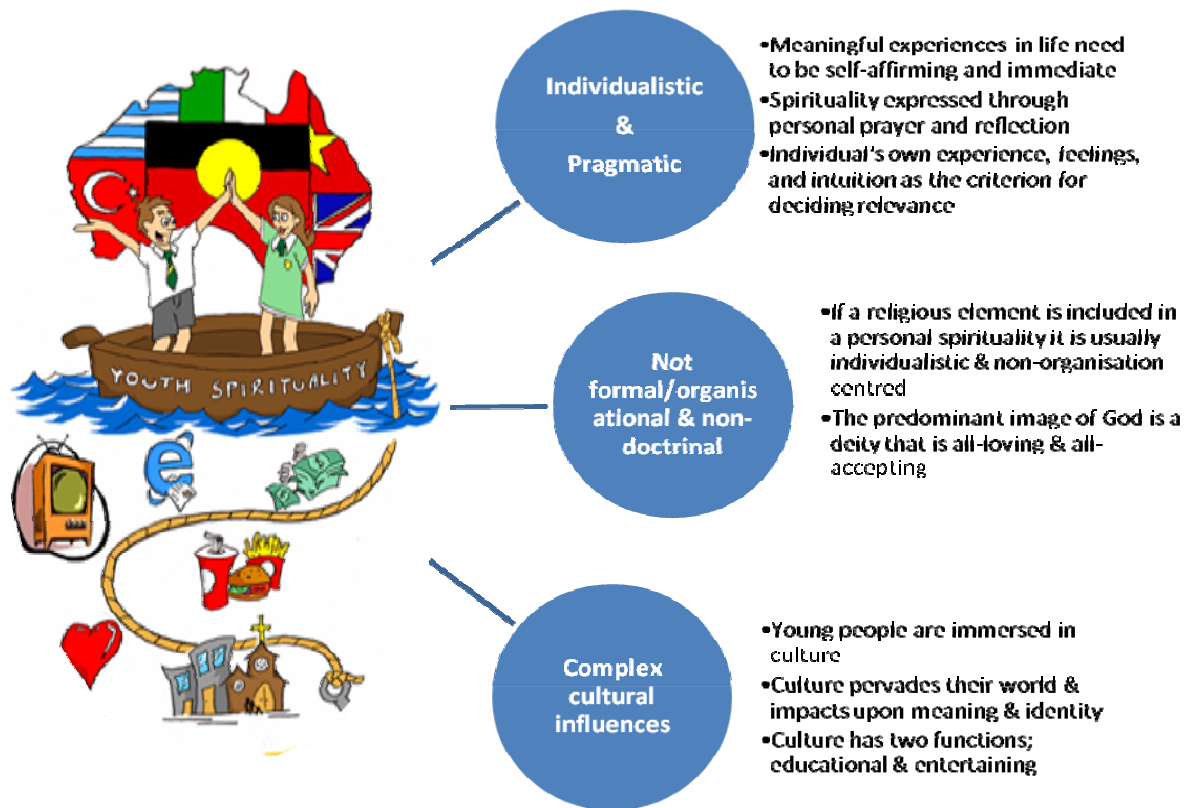
A greater number of young people are more cynical and selective as regards the teachings of their religious tradition. They tend to see religions and denominations as relative. They are more ready to think of religions as being similar in nature, as if they had a common psychic origin. They are more aware of the psychological functions of giving meaning and purpose that religions serve (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, p. 34).

Traditionally, spirituality was referred to mainly in religious terms. For a number of reasons there now appears to be more of a differentiation between spirituality and religion. For some young people spirituality remains very religious, but for a number it has shifted in that it is no longer so dependent on formal religion and theology. This tends to make it more experience, and lifestyle centred. Young people are interested in what affects them in the 'here and now'; their spirituality is very existential.

It could be argued then, that any treatment of spirituality in schools needs to be broader than just a religious-based spirituality. Otherwise it can be readily dismissed by young people as being too narrow and too parochial. Religious education in the church-related school needs to have a wider focus than just handing on the faith tradition via a curriculum that concentrates on the development via knowledge, values, and skills. An education in spirituality needs to address and take into account the contemporary emphasis on experience as a focus for spirituality and as a criterion for determining relevance. This means helping students learn how to be more reflective and critically evaluative of their own personal experience. They also need to learn to see the importance of examining the experience of others that can affect their beliefs and values.

In addition, it could help students examine both the strengths and weaknesses of being too dependent on their own mental/emotional states when deciding whether some aspect of spirituality or religion is going to be 'useful' or 'helpful'. The problems arising from excessive individualism and existentialism could be considered alongside problems with excessive dependence on authorities or cultural systems. In other words, religious education could attempt to help students put the personal/social context to contemporary spirituality into better perspective.

An education that assists students in discerning the meaning and personal/spiritual significance of both personal experience and traditions would be more effective than relying on the presentation of a more traditional set of religious beliefs as a total worldview which is not perceived as immediately legitimate and important to them. Such an approach should be more helpful to young people because if they have any

interest in spirituality, it will be likely to be a DIY (Do It Yourself) spirituality as noted by Crawford and Rossiter (2006, pp. 196, 215). A church school has a commitment to giving students substantial access to its traditions of spirituality; but this needs to be done in a way that is in tune with young people's spiritual starting points and lifestyle focused spiritual needs.

Crawford and Rossiter (2006) have proposed what an education in spirituality along these lines would involve. Taking into account the distinctive flavours of contemporary youth spirituality may add more complexity and a relative diffuseness to the educational content and process by contrast with what an education in spirituality looked like 50 years ago. Not attempting to address the issues could be the consigning of a school's capacity to contribute to young people's spirituality to irrelevance.

This proposal for an education in spirituality is consistent with the findings in this study. To take a particular example: If young people can understand that celebrities are people struggling through life just like themselves, then they have a better capacity to distinguish between what is meaningful and relevant, and what is not. Critical interpretation and evaluation of cultural influences should be an integral part of an education in spirituality. Students are immersed in culture and educating them to identify and consider traditional community values in terms of their personal applicability would be a more relevant way of giving them access to value/belief traditions.

In addition, religious education should not be solely concerned with formal and traditional religious matters. The conserving elements of handing on a tradition are important but they need to be complemented with attention to the human dimension of experience and to the conditioning influences of culture as these are so important for a personal spirituality. If these dimensions are not included, much of what is traditionally taught about spirituality could be lost on Catholic school students. Religious education that *resources young people's spirituality* needs to look at lifestyle questions in a critical, probing, evaluative way.

This will help lead young people to more awareness of the shaping influences on their values and the way they live. Good and effective teaching may contribute in this direction, but current Catholic diocesan religious education curriculum needs to give more explicit attention to these dimensions; at present it does not address adequately the social and psychological pathways in which young people grow and mature spiritually. Moreover, students are interested in what is happening today – an existential focus is paramount.

Even though for some educators in Catholic schools it may be distressing, it is important to acknowledge that many students will see Christian doctrines and ideas about Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory as vague and mainly meaningless, because these doctrines appear to have little in the way of understandable or experiential reference points for them. These teachings are regarded as being part of the relatively unknowable and uncertain 'spiritual realm'; and in such a realm they feel that they have the 'option' of choosing beliefs that seem most relevant for them (Hughes, 2007). A DIY spirituality will usually include an idiosyncratic DIY choice of doctrines about the transcendent. Young people understand there is a natural complexity and uncertainty inherent in articulating life after death, if it exists at all. Therefore, behaving in a way now that will facilitate what realm they end up in after death; often seems ludicrous to them.

Acknowledging this situation poses a significant challenge both for Christian theology and for the teaching of theology. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to address this challenge, but it does highlight the issue as a very important one.

Part of the theological problem for Catholic religious education is the question of perceived relevance to young people's lives. While there is no simple answer to this problem, and while it is unrealistic to think that perceived relevance is the only criterion for determining content and method, something can be done to try to enhance this aspect. For example, if religious education included modules on topics such as the formation of identity, the drawbacks of consumerism, the cult of celebrity, and the meaningfulness of community, then a more compelling synthesis between traditional

religious teachings and the contemporary may be possible; this could be both more 'palatable' and 'useable' for students in their own lives. In addition, if constructing a framework of meaning and an image of God has a 'natural' complexity and uncertainty, then less absolutism in the teaching of values and theology may assist in engendering understanding. A general acceptance of complexity in dealing with abstract religious concepts may help parents and teachers play more of a role in facilitating discernment of values and a sense of the transcendent.

A number of young people are saying that pragmatism is the common denominator for personal relevance. If religious education does not provide sufficient personal relevance, then it could incline students to feel that a specifically religious identity is not something they can use in their lives; they can feel comfortable in getting by without it. The impact of 13 years of formal religious education in Catholic schools could be compromised; it might be considered by many students to be largely irrelevant. If this is the contemporary situation of youth spirituality, then revising the aims of religious education and the content of curricula to address young people's distinctive spiritual needs are critical in terms of responding, adapting, and being faithful to the tradition that the school and the Church are representing and passing on.

Youth spirituality is diverse and experiential, it cannot be articulated precisely. Educators need better awareness and understanding of the psychological dynamics of young people's construction of meaning and identity – as parts of spirituality – as core processes in their personal development.   Religious education needs content that helps young people in their search for meaning, identity, and the transcendent. If students are disregarding the current content of religious education lessons, and are somewhat contemptuous of the teaching, then it will be more effective psychologically to provide content and methods of inquiry that deal with the perceived 'real' spiritual/moral issues students are facing.

Changing the emphasis in religious education in this way could help lead students towards a more personally autonomous learning experience that is not overtly focused on personal change but on becoming well informed about the issues. This could help

them see that their personal development might be facilitated more through their own efforts. Consistent with this approach, is acceptance of the individualistic style to experience and learning that is so prominent in the consciousness of young people. Therefore, self-driven learning that allows for personal inquiry and discernment to facilitate change is integral for a contemporary, holistic approach to spiritual and personal development to take place.

6.3 FORMATION OF A GOD CONCEPT

The following table outlines the way students' in this study conceptualise God.

Table 6.6 *Key conclusions regarding students' images of God*

1. God is generally perceived a loving, caring, forgiving being.

2. God's love is unconditional.

3. The concept of eternal reward and punishment (i.e., a 'judgment' God), is not readily believable or palatable for most senior students.

4. God is forgiving and is not a recorder of wrongs.

5. The Christian doctrines of the Incarnation and atonement resonate more with females than males.

6. Students believed that God answers prayer in tangible ways like providing success and material possessions.

7. God is interested in young people personally and this is expressed in a personal relationship.

8. God can be worshipped and conceptualised legitimately via any mainstream faith tradition.

9. Less than half of respondents believed that Jesus is God

The respondents in this study tended to articulate a spirituality that contained a diversity of elements. God may or may not be included in the mix, but most of the sample believed in God or a 'higher power'. The diagram in Figure 6.6 explains the development of an image of God in the form of a 'funnel.' Various God concepts filter through the minds of young people in their quest to seek out a meaningful, realistic and personal image of God.

Figure 6.7 *Images of God funnel*
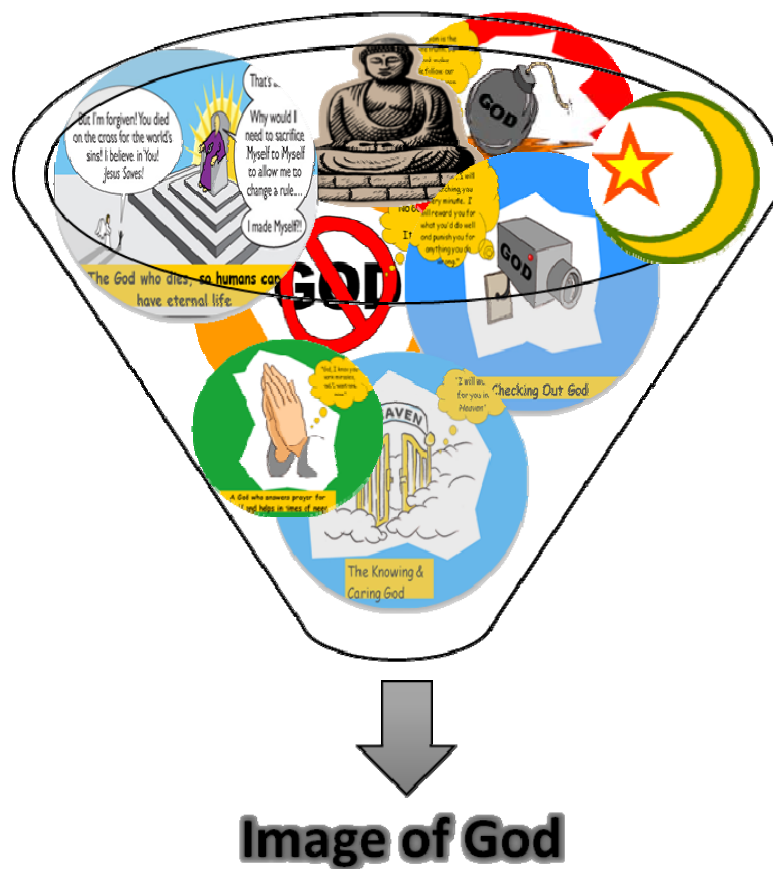
The image of God that was most commonly acknowledged as part of the students' worldview was a deity that is not judicial and menacing. Neither is their God a recorder of wrong doing and a punisher of trivial misdemeanours. God for a number of Catholic school students has a nature that is unconditionally loving and forgiving. Young people approach God via prayer that is neither formal nor submissive. Communication is informal and intimate and largely in a mode of petition. A significant number of young people felt that knowing *who God is* cannot be fully understood. This natural uncertainty is consistent with the prevailing mood of "cultural postmodernity" (Crawford and Rossiter, 2006, p. 52). Therefore, images of God from other faith traditions and their expressions of God will also be considered and incorporated into spirituality with an eclectic mix – along with the images from young people's own religious tradition.

The image of God can be like a personal opinion – everyone has their own idiosyncratic version and all opinions are accepted and respected, unless they appear to be harsh or unrealistic. Ecclesial language that asserts Catholic traditions and doctrine as containing more 'truth' than other religions tends to be questioned by a number of young people.

If senior school students are stating that this is their image of God then there appears to be little congruence with the Trinitarian doctrinal aspects proposed by traditional Christian faith. This appears to be the case even though other research shows that young people will endorse Trinitarian theological statements (Flynn & Mok, 2002; Hughes, 2007; Smith & Denton, 2005). They may have knowledge of the Christian Trinity, but this is not necessarily inconsistent with having a non-Trinitarian, personal image of God.

Young people's image of God, while naturally vague and not precisely defined, is a core element in their spirituality which determines their stance on various theological questions. The mechanism may often operate in a negative fashion, where young people question particular theological views simply because they cannot see how such views could be compatible with their notion of God. For example, they do not see that

their lives are so full of wrongdoing that residual guilt, the sacrament of reconciliation, and purgatory are relevant, or realities.

That would be inconsistent with their sense of a loving, caring, forgiving God;   and they do not need to go through the Church to get access to this God.   Young people do not want to attend or participate in formal religious services as an expression of their belief in God. They would rather spend time on their own and pray, or be involved in social justice activities that try and model what the Jesus of the Gospels did. Again, for young people, belief in God is individualistic and experiential. If it is relevant and worthwhile then it becomes a part of their spirituality. If not, then it tends to be discarded or ignored. And they do this with no sense of guilt or notion that they may be setting themselves up for an eternity in the fires of Hell.

Hence, attention to the question of 'images of God' should be central to a school's study of spirituality. The type of image of God that young people have can be considered as highly likely to have a predetermining influence on the style and direction of their personal spirituality. The scope of their spirituality will be within the limits set by their notion of God. They feel comfortable doing what their image of God will 'permit' them to do;   this may well be the same principle that has affected people with more traditional Christian images of God;   it is just that the image of God for many young people is 'more relaxed' – a more 'permissive' spirituality is consistent with an image of a more 'permissive God'. An image of God as loving, caring, forgiving, not just identified with one religion, and, above all, personally available to young people, tends to enable a more individualistic, free style of spirituality than an image of a God who is 'checking and recording' their behaviour.

It would be important for an education in spirituality to help young people understand these issues. Their image of God is not just dependent on their traditional religion, but it takes into account other sources. Their image of God can be culturally influenced by many different ideas and experiences.   In this sense, their image of God is 'educatable'.

Yet another important question to include in religious education about God is to acknowledge that personality and personal needs can also have a type of predetermining influence on one's image of God. Even to acknowledge this possibility through education could be regarded as a significant element in spiritual maturity.

This discussion suggests that Catholic religious education needs to address the way in which young people conceptualise, and believe in God. There is evidence to suggest that just telling them about the Christian notion of God is not sufficient; a good number are already not accepting fully the models of God that are embedded in the curriculum which reflects traditional Catholic theology. As noted in the previous chapter, for some young people, a degree of confusion about the meaning of biblical stories can also lessen their confidence in the Church as a source of ideas about God. If students believe in God and they have a sense of God's existence, even if somewhat vague, then this still provides a common ground or framework where further study of questions about God can be considered. A more open-ended exploration, rather than a relatively exclusive, didactic, exposition of traditional doctrines, may actually be a more appropriate pedagogy for helping students to better appreciate the God of Catholic traditions in any case.

For young Catholics, the image of Jesus is often central to their notion of God. Hence, studies of the historical Jesus and the Christ of Christian faith are integrally connected with education about God. The Gospel/social justice Jesus is popular amongst young people and this is also reflected in their significant level of community engagement. Involvement in social service and social action is not 'distant' from their understanding of God, but can be a potent statement of whom and what they think God is. This too has significant implications for the social justice orientation in the school curriculum and organisational life.

In addition, this interpretation of young people's spirituality links in with attempts to help address the problems associated with excessive individualism (considered earlier). If students can believe in a God who is reflected in the person and ministry of Jesus,

then this may also provide them with a better sense of community, whilst at the same time transcending the superfluous needs and wants of the self.

Also consistent with this approach is the need to look critically at culture and how that is related to spirituality.

> Faith will ask culture what values it promotes, what destiny it offers to life, what place it makes for the poor and the disinherited with whom the Son of Man is identified, how it conceives of sharing, forgiveness and love (Pope John Paul II, 1981, cited in Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, p. 406).

Therefore, it may be a matter of closing the gap between theory and practice. Religious education can become more valuable for adolescents if a sense of hope and action is engendered in the quest for faith development in adolescents, rather than an exclusive emphasis on theology. Students could be encouraged to reflect on and articulate their image of God without fear of challenging Catholic dogmatic concepts.

In this way the relationship they develop with God is also not so exclusive and individualistic. In addition, the cartoons used in this study that portrayed some images of God (Figures 4.5 - 4.12 & 6.3) may be used and developed as a means to identify and evaluate some of the stereotypes associated with a God concept. If other students share a similar idea of God then that concept and personal relationship can be further enhanced by making it communicative and communitarian. Students may then make more links between Jesus, social action, and the faith community. This approach seems appropriate for disposing young people to consider some commitment to a faith dimension, as part of their spirituality that is fulfilling, self-affirming, and grounded in community.

6.4   THE PRIMACY OF INDIVIDUALISM AS THE CONTEXT AND ORIENTATION OF   YOUTH SPIRITUALITY

Confirming the findings of earlier research on youth spirituality, this study has shown that the pathway to young people's meaning, identity, spirituality, belief and God is a personal one.   They are no longer so reliant on faith communities and traditions to guide their intellectual and behavioural maturation as well as their spiritual and moral development.   The trend towards an individualistic worldview has implications, not just for the personal development of young people, but society as a whole. Richard Eckersley contends that,

> Our power as a people comes from a sense of collective, not individual, agency; from pursuing a common vision based on shared values, not maximising, individual choice in order to maximise personal satisfaction (Eckersley, 2005, p. 42).

Hence, on this question, it is proposed that an education in spirituality needs to help young people think about three issues.

1. How to develop and express individuality/personal spirituality in a healthy way.
2. How to identify and address problems that arise from excessive individualism.
3. How to acknowledge the importance of a community dimension that needs to complement healthy individualism.

If an excessively individual approach to life is apparent, and can be shown to be a source of problems and unhappiness, then looking at ways to address such a development and to compensate by more attention to the value of community-mindedness would be an important educational strategy.

**6.4.1 INDIVIDUALISM AND THE INFLUENCES OF PARENTS AND
FRIENDS**

Figure 6.8 describes a context or framework that can be used for exploring these
questions with young people.   With some context or 'perspective' from which
individualism can be evaluated along with other influences, there is likely to be more
chance of helping youth understand the 'place' for individualism in their personal
development – rather than take it for granted as a cultural given or 'social dogma'.

Figure 6.8 *Context for understanding personal development in youth*

Self: Innate and
primary point of
reference for personal
& spiritual
development

Parents: Integral to
development as
advisors and exemplars

Life Experiences:
culture, education,
relationships,
lifestyle are
important for
development but
peripheral to self
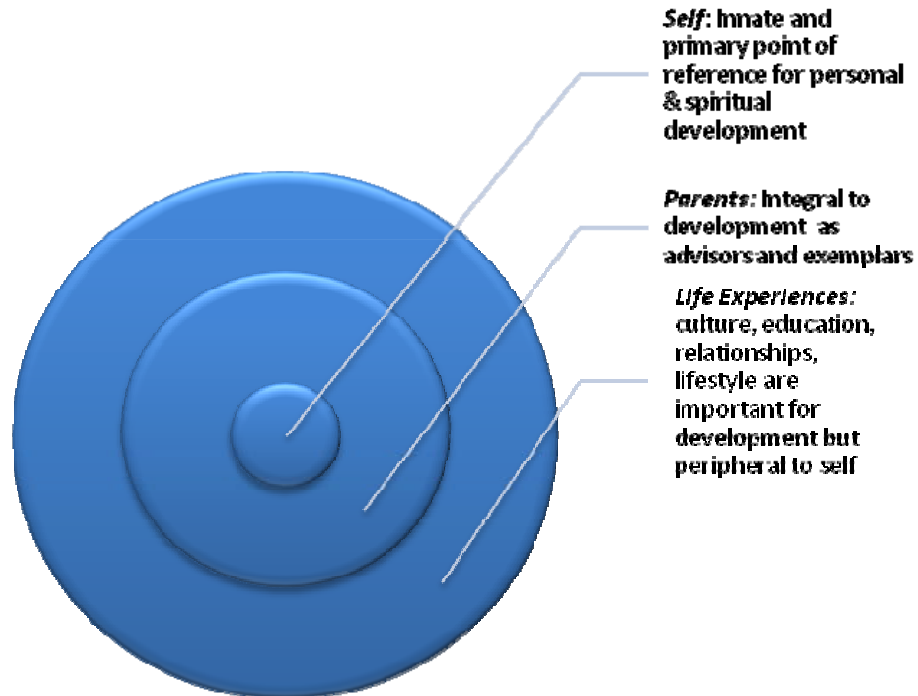
The family is the first community young people experience and it is the source their
foundational understanding of what community means – whatever the health and flaws
in their own family. However, the attitude of the young to parents, and the consequent
role of parents in influencing their notions of community and spirituality are shifting in
emphasis from what obtained in the past. A general, relatively unquestioning
adherence to advice on values and behaviour was more apparent in the past. Young

people at the age of those represented in this study are now looking to parents in more of an *advisory* role than as the taken-for-granted source of traditional values to be adhered to in a respectful and unquestioning way.

This study shows that parents remain acknowledged as the most significant influences in young people's lives, but it is now their own experiences, feelings and intuitions that have become the touchstones of authenticity.   And friends may be intimately linked with, and supportive of, this focus on the self.   The self, rather than traditional authorities, has become the most important source of criteria for what is true, useful and valuable.   The prime measure of moral decision comes from within.   Parents may model religious adherence and acceptable moral behaviour but young people will only comply if it has immediate added value in their lives, and within their current lifestyle. It could be argued then that parents are important influences on young people, but are only one of many examples of how to navigate through life.

Parents, like educators in Catholic schools, may need to inform adolescents of the importance in critically evaluating attitudes to morals, and of forming a set of personal values. Developing an ability to evaluate what is relevant and socially acceptable, within their own search for meaning and identity, may be more important and relevant than believing that young people will accept and behave according to the traditions and lifestyle that previous generations inhabited.

If the home and the school are the dominant 'cradles' of personal development for children and adolescents, then there needs to be congruence between the models of education and behaviour in both locations. If parents and teachers can educate, promote and exhibit similar models of behaviour and values, a clearer sense of communitarian morality may be 'imbibed' by young people during the senior school years. However, a personal reliance on their own conscience seems to have become the primary factor when students are seeking answers to moral situations. Depending on an innate sense of values now seems to override the views of parents, the wider community, the teachings of the Church, and the attitudes of friends. Young people are disengaging with a sense of community-mindedness and journeying through the maze

of constructing a worldview largely on their own. Therefore, the importance of an education in discernment is vital for young people to help provide them with some framework in which to understand and evaluate their life experiences. Applying what they have done and learned as young people to what they will eventually believe in as adults, is the foundation for personal development.

The approach described above is what an effective school, and home education aim to achieve. Furthermore, the social context that young people find themselves in today is very volatile and diversified spiritually, even to the point of being so existential and lifestyle-focused that there is little or no space for the specifically 'spiritual'. And this mitigates against clarity of thinking about identity and meaning-making. Crawford & Rossiter (2006) recognised this contemporary phenomenon as 'cultural postmodernity'. In this research project, a number of findings emerged that are consistent with this understanding. It is suggested here that a number of the problems implicit in cultural postmodernity can be addressed to some extent within an education in spirituality.

6.4.2 EVIDENCE OF THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURAL POSTMODERNITY ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S SPIRITUALITY

Some of the characteristics of what has been described as 'cultural postmodernity' that are pertinent to spirituality are listed below (Crawford and Rossiter, 2006)

1. Uncertainty about the existence of God or at least uncertainty about definitive knowledge of God.

2. An unwillingness to take grand metanarratives (like religions) as absolute truth.

3. An emphasis on individualism.

4. Meanings are existential, limited, not absolute and are strongly tied to particular contexts.

5. Individuals construct their own personal meaning on an 'according to needs' basis and on an existential basis that is just for the present. Construction of personal meaning may include choices from available options rather than accepting a traditional religious package of spirituality.

Young people may well experience these cultural 'moods' and influences on their thinking, even if they are not aware of, and do not use the label of 'cultural postmodernity'. It also needs to be noted that there are many adults, including the teachers in Catholic schools who are similarly affected by these cultural influences.

With this emphasis on uncertainty, it is understandable that individuals will place more store on judging in the light of *their own experience and feelings*. It also makes it understandable why young people are particularly interested in their own sense of friendship and in the support provided by friendship groups. It is not that this individualism is the sole reason for the importance ascribed to friends, but it probably makes some contribution to the prominence that friends and personal experience have in validating the sense of self, and then in providing some support for a particular lifestyle and even a spirituality.

6.4.3 FRIENDSHIP AND FRIENDSHIP GROUPS AS SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCES ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S SPIRITUALITY

An influential and almost omnipresent factor influencing young people's spirituality is their friends. Individualism is not at odds with friendship in terms of its importance for young people. For some adolescents at particular periods, it is likely that maintaining the affirmation and acceptance from friends can become the most powerful influence on their thinking, attitudes and behaviour. They may bend their thinking to be in tune with the group they most want to be liked and accepted by. More research is needed to see the extent to which friends and groups influence spirituality specifically – rather than more lifestyle related questions.

However, because friends are so intimately related to individuals' lifestyle, a key dimension to their spirituality, a 'relevant' education in spirituality needs to help young people explore the values embedded in lifestyle questions. To include this sort of content in religious education is not an abandonment or replacement of a more traditional religious spirituality with a non-religious human focus, but recognition that for contemporary youth, the spiritual dimension may be more evident in the values implicit in lifestyle than in formal religious practice.

Friendship, concretely identified with individuals and supported by conversation, SMS texting, mobile phoning, emails, Internet chatting and web blogging, is a fundamental support and affirmation structure for young people's sense of personal identity. The friendship structure affirms their acceptance as individual and distinctive; but this is in close connection with being part of a communicating friendship group. Being liked, as evident in the tangible ways of communicating noted above, is part of the identity creating and supporting network. The amount of time going into this sort of friend-communication would usually be far greater than the time spent specifically talking with parents.

Cultural postmodernity will incline young people to have their friends and their own experiences as more prominent reference points for both their enjoyment of life and their personal meaning. Friendship and groups of friends are likely to exert their influence more on matters of lifestyle, entertainment, fashion tastes and time spent in self-enjoyment with friends than on the area of the transcendent or belief in God, image of God, sense of the transcendent.

Also, the influence of friends will often eclipse the prominence of parents as influences on their spiritual and moral development. This may be in sporadic or periodic bursts, or for a sustained period of time. Parents may have been responsible for the embedding of primary values and belief when the individuals were children. But as they enter adolescence, even while retaining the basic value orientations inherited from their parents, they may become much more sensitive to the influence of friends, and to the way friends orientate themselves towards aspects of popular culture.

If the time spent communicating with friends, with time spent in face-to-face talking, SMS texting, mobile phone calls, email, Internet chat, web friendship networks (like My space, Face book, You tube, etc.) and web blogging are the measure, then this would indicate that they are paying much more attention to their friends than to parents. This suggests that friends may well be the principal spiritual/moral influence on thinking attitudes and behaviour for some periods during adolescence.

While the media and popular culture are also potentially very influential, their influence may well be mediated by the interests and preferences of the friendship group. More sophisticated research would be needed to determine whether friends can have the same sort of influence on core values and beliefs about God and spirituality as the home and dependence on an internal forum such as conscience. It may be more influential where they are very dependent on the need for self-affirmation from friends and participation in friendship groups; being liked by others, at least by some others, is a crucial matter for adolescent well- being. For example, if going to church might jeopardise affirmation from particular friends and if it might threaten their acceptance within a particular friendship group, then they may well change their religious practice accordingly. On the other hand, social contacts through the church may motivate some religious practice; for example participation in Antioch groups as a major source of friendship, fun and affirmation.

This discussion suggests that influences on the development of young people are wide-ranging and complex. It is important for educators to take into account the role parents, friends, and culture play in the personal and spiritual maturation process, and the implications for the theories of moral and faith development.

6.4.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR AN INTERPRETATION OF HOW DEVELOPMENTAL THEORIES LINK WITH YOUTH SPIRITUALITY

This section will consider ways which the conclusions from this research project might affect the way developmental theories are used for interpreting young people's spiritual and moral development. As noted in the review of literature, a number of theories related to young people's personal development (Piaget, 1955; Erikson, 1994; & Kegan, 1982). This study focused on the theories of Fowler and Kohlberg. The following diagrams (Figures 6.8 & 6.9) compare the relevant adolescent stage theories with the findings of this study.

Figure 6.9 *A diagram that looks at Moral Reasoning as implied in Kohlberg's theory (1984) and questions about the development of moral reasoning raised by this Research Project*
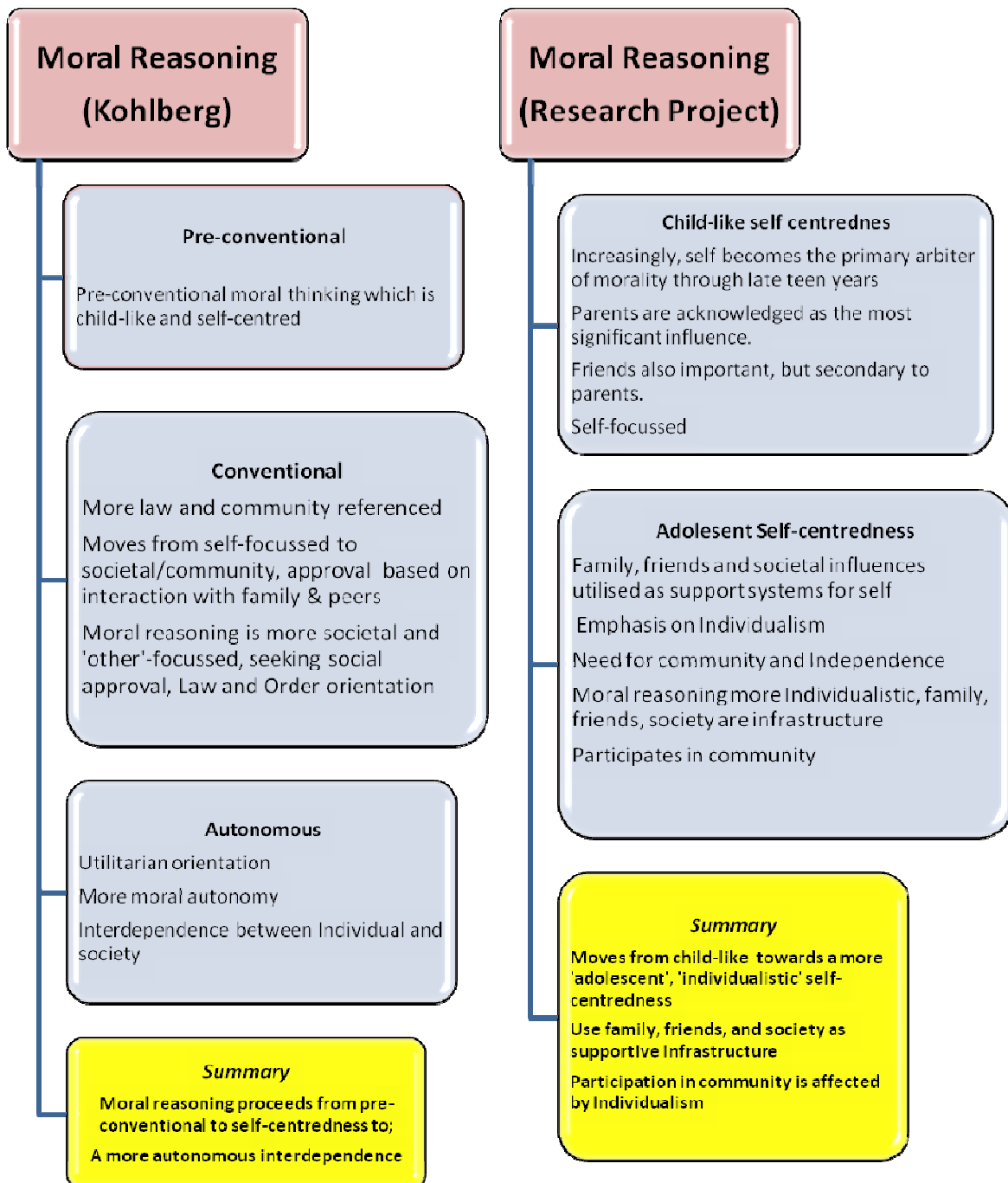
Figure 6.10 *A diagram that looks at Faith development according to Fowler's linear stages (1981) that apply to adolescents contrasted with the findings of the research project*
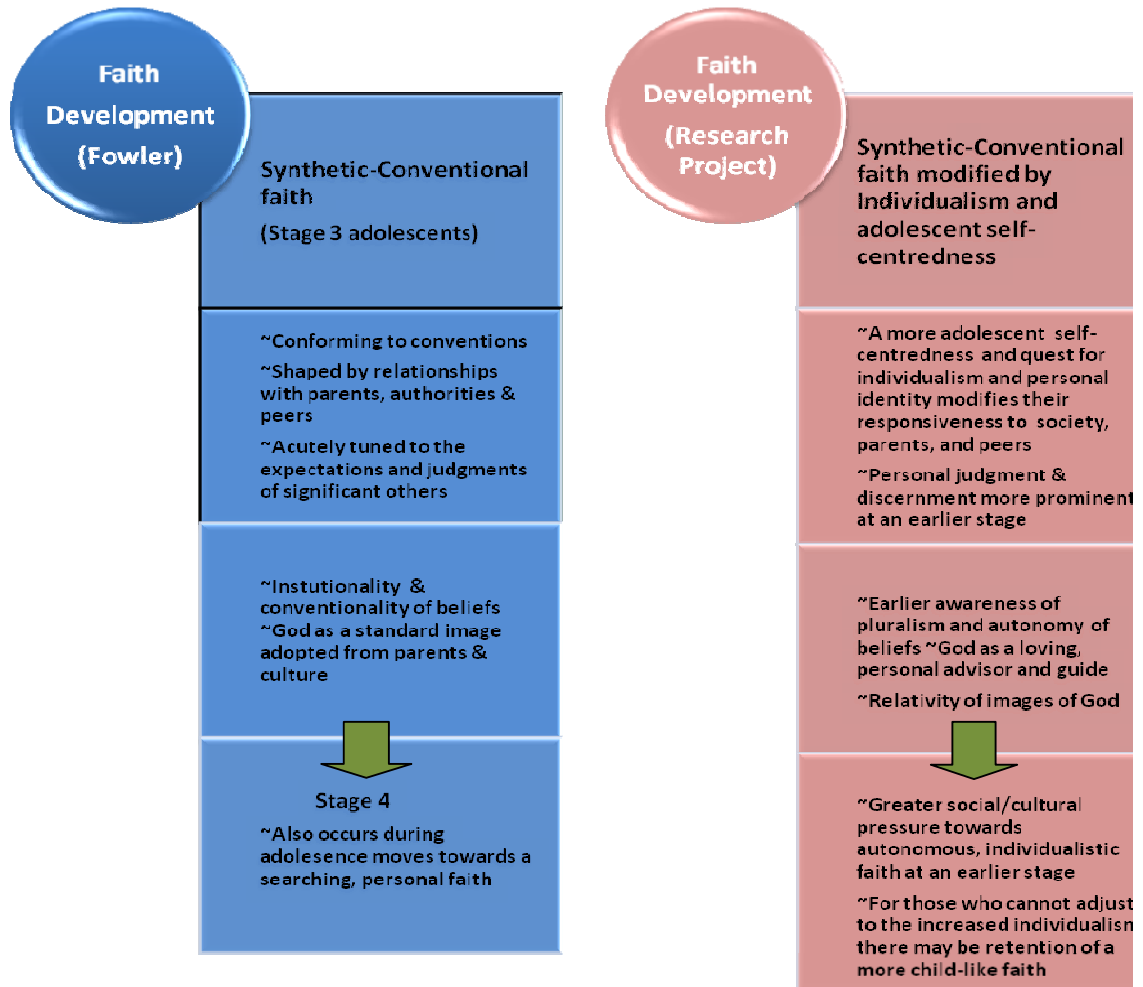
Each of the developmental theories focuses on a set of operations (or psychological competencies) that are said to enable change in a sequential, stage-like fashion. The change tends to be from a more child-like, self-centred, dependent, imitative style of functioning; through stages where they take more note of community, rules, and authorities. Young people are then considered to move toward a stage that is less imitative, and more autonomous and independent in these functions – even moving towards an interdependence. This study suggests that a new type of self-centredness (called 'adolesent self-centredness') is idealising the value of individualism and young

people take this 'on board' strongly. They are affected by a strong sense that as 'individuals' they should have their own opinions, choices, and their own concepts of the spiritual and standards for moral behaviour. This particular emphasis on individualism may be impacting, in different ways, on the processes that Kohlberg and Fowler regarded as more community/authority based. This could affect the way young people progress through these stages characterised by *community* and *conformity* becuause their progress is strongly imbued with a sense of *individualism* and *autonomy* that may not have been the case for people when Kohlberg and Fowler were formulating their theories in the 1960s and 1970s.

For contemporary young people, autonomy may be 'engaged' at an earlier stage in the developmental process with less reference to community and public standards. This study suggests that further consideration needs to be given to this question. For the application of Erikson's theory (1958, 1965) the focus on identity may now be even stronger for contemporary adolescents than was percieved to be the case by Erikson when his theory was first formulated. Erikson saw a type of dialectic between role diffusion and identity (Erikson, 1994). The emphasis was placed on finding a distinctive role in society. Whereas now there may be more emphasis on young people having a unique, personal identity, rather than one that is role-defined.

One of the other developmental tasks proposed by Erikson is the development of personal intimacy. The evidence in this study suggests that it remains very important for young people, not only in terms of one-to-one relationships but as regards the role of friends generally as being a significant end in itself and not a means of personal development.

Kohlberg focused on moral reasoning and the sorts of moral principles that are involved in moral decision-making. Fowler was concerned with the competencies that he believed went with the processes of believing. He also pointed towards a 'searching faith' where the individual moved beyond the beliefs in which they where socialised to decide what wa relevant or irrelevant according to their own judgment . Crawford & Rossiter (2006) contend that the searching faith of Fowler also includes a process of

sifting through the large amount of readily available cultural meanings about how one ought to live life. Therefore, the capacity to identify and critically evaluate meaning becomes an important developmental task for young peple, one to which education should be able to make a useful contribution. With an exagerated sense of individualism reinforced by cultural expectations, there is increasing pressure on young people to be morally self-reliant and independent in their decision-making. In a sense, the Kohlberg 'middle stage' of identifying with, and conforming to, cultural laws and principles may tend to be eclipsed or at least strongly modified by the surge of individualism. These 'incremental' or 'linear' developmental theories of maturation may need to be reviewed in the light of contemporary societal trends and significant changes in spirituality.

A number of generalisations can be made in relation to the findings of this study and the incremental stages posited by Kohlberg and Fowler. A linear progression from heteronomous self-centredness through conformity to norms and standards may need to be re-examined and reinterpreted. In the light of findings about youth spirituality that show how they operate in their meaning-making competencies, there may well be useful adjustments or qualifications that can be to the Fowler (1981) and Kohlberg(1984) theories. In turn, such adjustments may make these theories that originated in the 1960s and 1970s more relevant and useful today.

This argument is suggesting that the theories of Kohlberg and Fowler need to be revised and reinterpreted to some extent in the light of research on contemporary socio-cultural and spiritual dynamics. Their original schemes highlighted 'progression' or 'development' from self-centredness through dependence on cultural norms towards a developing sense of community, and then towards a more autonomous/independent and inter-dependent stage. This research project has highlighted a more 'accelerated' influence of individualism and adolescent self-centredness. This appears to accentuate an individualistic progression away from the 'child-like' self-centredness towards adolescent individualism, with less substantial relationships with traditional communities, while relationships with friends may have become much more important for affirming the newfound individualism. Kohlberg's stages of progression in moral reasoning may be inhibited or stalled to some extent by a new emphasis on

individualim and moral self-reliance during adolesence.   On the other hand, Fowler's scheme does acknowledge the 'searching', 'questioning' quality of faith development during adolescence.   This can accommodate an increased sense of individualism and moral self-reliance better than Kohlberg's stages.   However, the 'postmodern' characteristics of contemporary youth spirituailty (and also for that of adults) suggests that the Fowler 'searching' faith stage may be extended, and last well into adulthood – it may even become a lasting and distinctive characteristic of a contemporary 'mature' faith.

The findings of this project point towards young people as being 'fed a constant diet of individualism'.   In terms of developmental theories, for some young people, this emphasis may contribute to a prolongation of the immaturity that is supposed to go with the earlier self-centred stages.   On the other hand, for some it may accelerate their personal development towards a more 'mature' stage with an internalised, autonomous value system.   For others, this new 'developmental pressure' may result in the situation where they are very conscious of the cultural expectation that they be more individualistic and morally self-reliant, but psychologically they are not yet mature enough to handle the responsibility that goes with such autonomy.   Hence, they may feel caught in an uncomfortable situtation of not being able to cope well with the pressures of life.   In turn this could be a root cause of a number of psychological and social problems.

6.4.5 SCHOOL EDUCATION AND A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE PLACE OF INDIVIDUALISM IN YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

As noted above, individualism, or more appropriately 'excessive individualism', can be a problematic area for young people's personal and spiritual development. But if it remains a key reality in their life-world, then change is needed in education in the way this question is addressed. Students need help in developing the conceptual and reflective tools to understand and evaluate their experiences – and this includes focusing on key dimensions such as the prominence of the individual's needs and interests, exploring both the strengths and weaknesses in this orientation. The question

of individualism needs to be taken into account both in content and pedagogy when educating in spirituality.

Taking a more open-ended approach to the interpretation and evaluation of community experience at school may be the catalyst for helping young people develop a broader and more thoughtful perspective on various spiritual/moral issues. This could be fostered through participation in World Youth Day events, Duke of Edinburgh education activities, class reflection days, and retreats where these activities can be used to highlight the importance of community for personal development and well-being. This can be done in a two-phase approach. Firstly, via the experience itself, and secondly, through a follow-up discussion that 'unpacks' and interprets the activity appropriately so that students can see it as an enriching community experience with value and significance.

It could be argued then that if experience appears to be the key criterion for judgment about life, then experience needs to be analysed carefully. The key is to teach young people how to analyse and evaluate their own experiences. A judgment system that discerns what is likely to help them in life and what is likely to harm them is where the goal of an effective education may lie in relation to a holistic personal and spiritual development.

6.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This project has built upon previous research and reached a number of conclusions about the nature and orientation of contemporary youth spirituality – in the light of both the literature review and the empirical data. The generalisability of the findings is limited because the study covered only three high schools. Nevertheless, it did replicate findings from other recent studies as well as make new contributions both by adding further research data on youth spirituality and by its probing analysis of relationships between young people's spirituality and image of God. This research, despite its limited scope has pushed in the direction of interpreting the psychological dynamics of youth spirituality and the way it relates to questions of lifestyle and well-

being.   It has signposted a number of questions about youth spirituality that can be analysed further.   It also looked at perceptions of the contributions of religion and school as influences on spiritual development. This small scale study has brought to light a number of issues that might be taken up in further research.

The study has identified a number of questions for youth spirituality that need further research.   These include:

1. Relationship between spirituality and image of God.
2. The relative influence of friendship and friendship groups on life expectations and on spirituality.
3. The advisory and spiritual resource roles of both parents and school in the spiritual and moral development of adolescents.
4. The psychological dynamics of identity development in a Westernised consumer oriented society and its impact on youth spirituality.
5. Content and pedagogical implications for religious education and across-the-curriculum studies.

6.6 CONCLUSION

Through exploring the spirituality of senior students in three Catholic schools, this study provided new data confirming a number of conclusions of recent research on youth spirituality. In addition, it identified a number of significant issues relating to the transcendent dimension in the life-world of the students. Parents were identified as important in their personal and spiritual development, even though the parental role changes significantly for adolescents. The current social trends towards individualism and moral self-reliance were strongly evident. The traditional 'Catholic God', as enshrined in theology and in the forefront of Catholic school religious education is not well accepted in its traditional form as *real* for many students in this study.

The study raises many questions and issues that have important implications for planning a relevant religious education. It prompts speculation about how best to address what might be judged to be the strengths and the potential problems with youth spirituality. In turn, this highlights the need for much greater scrutiny of the complex relationships between the prevailing culture and young people's spiritual and moral development. A searching understanding of the life-world of young people and how this can have a shaping influence on their spirituality is essential for educators, especially those engaged in religious education. This should apply both to independent religious schools as well as to public education (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006).

In Catholic school systems, where the study was conducted, there are significant implications for what it means to educate young people in spirituality. The more traditional role for Catholic school religious education needs to address the significant new focus of youth spirituality on individualism and moral self-reliance. The religious heritage is not so much a body of truth to be proclaimed authoritatively – and to be accepted relatively unquestioningly.

Rather, this valuable dimension to religious education can help provide young people with meaning and purpose by discovering the bridges between their needs and the religious tradition; this can help them make sense of their lives, and by putting their lives into more historical perspective, it can give them valuable identity reference points in times that are confusing and overwhelming. In this sense, the access to heritage dimension of religious education is best perceived as *resourcing young people's spirituality*.

In addition, because the spiritual dimension to life for many young people emerges principally in relationship with existential, self-affirmation, friendship and lifestyle questions, there is a vital need for a second, complementary approach to religious education that addresses these questions directly and openly; this approach can be labelled as *critical interpretation and evaluation of culture* (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006), because it helps young people learn how to identify, interpret and evaluate the

social/cultural influences on people's thinking, values and behaviour – as well as on themselves.

This can help them discern what is happening in the world and assist them in self-reflection which may bring about better self-understanding and a more hopeful attitude towards finding a meaningful way through an increasingly complex life-world.   With both of these complementary elements in a school's religious education and across-the-curriculum studies, the school is in a better position to make a contribution that becomes an integral and sustaining part of a contemporary youth spirituality.

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⊕ ACU National

Participant Information to Staff Members

TITLE OF PROJECT: Exploration of a contemporary youth spirituality amongst senior school students in Catholic schools

NAME OF SUPERVISOR: Professor Graham Rossiter

NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: Michael Maroney

NAME OF PROGRAMME ENROLLED: Doctor of Education

Dear Staff Member,

The purpose of my research project is to investigate how senior school students in three Catholic schools construct a personal spirituality. Moreover, aspects of Catholic education, secularization and culture will be explored. The goal is to attempt to articulate what it is that young people in our schools find meaningful. Your involvement in this research would entail supervising a survey conducted by the principal researcher. There are no possible risks or discomforts.

This study aims to highlight areas of significance for the students. You should know that there is a strong likelihood that the research results will be published. You need to be aware that you are free to refuse consent altogether without having to justify that decision, without giving a reason.

Confidentiality will be ensured throughout the conduct of the study and in any report or publication. Staff and schools will not be identified. Anonymity of staff will be safeguarded in that they will not be named. Anonymity of the schools will be protected through the creation of aliases.

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the Supervisor or the Student Researcher.

Michael Maroney
(h) Telephone: 95208284 (w) Telephone: 95484000
University: 97014000

In the School of Religious Education

Mount St Mary Campus Australian Catholic University

Appropriate feedback on the results of the study will be made available to the

participant on request. You are advised that the Human Research Ethics Committee of Australian Catholic University has approved this study.

In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been

treated during the study, or if you have any query that the Supervisor or Student

Researcher have not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human

Research Ethics Committee care of the nearest branch of the Research Services Unit.

Chair, HREC,
c/o Ms Kylie Pashley
PO Box 456
Virginia QLD 4014
Tel: (07) 3623 7429

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will

be informed of the outcome. If you agree to participate in this project, you should sign both copies of the Consent Form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to the Student Researcher.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Graham Rossiter SUPERVISOR

Michael Maroney STUDENT RESEARCHER

⊕ ACU National

Participant Information to Students

TITLE OF PROJECT: Exploration of a contemporary youth spirituality amongst senior school students in Catholic schools

NAME OF SUPERVISOR: Professor Graham Rossiter

NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: Michael Maroney

NAME OF PROGRAMME IN WHICH ENROLLED: Doctor of Education

Dear Student,

The purpose of my research project is to investigate how senior school students in three Catholic schools construct a personal spirituality. The goal is to attempt to articulate what it is that young people in our schools find meaningful. Your involvement in this research would entail participating in a questionnaire and, possibly, an interview with the researcher. There are no possible risks or discomforts. In addition, it is hoped that the interview should not cause any inconvenience.

The potential benefit to you is that you will have the opportunity to reflect on and discuss the significance of spirituality in a modern sense and how much is acquired through Catholic education. This study aims to highlight areas of significance for the students. You should know that there is a strong likelihood that the research results will be published.

You need to be aware that you are free to refuse consent altogether without having to justify that decision, or to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in the study at any time without giving a reason. Confidentiality will be ensured throughout the conduct of the study and in any report or publication. Staff and schools will not be identified. Anonymity of staff will be safeguarded in that they will not be named. Anonymity of the schools will be protected through the creation of aliases.

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the Supervisor or the Student Researcher.

Michael Maroney
(h) Telephone: 95208284 (w) Telephone: 95484000
University: 97014000
In the School of Religious Education
Mount St Mary Campus Australian Catholic University

Appropriate feedback on the results of the study will be made available to the participant on request. You are advised that the Human Research Ethics Committee of Australian Catholic University has approved this study.

In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have any query that the Supervisor or Student Researcher have not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the nearest branch of the Research Services Unit.

Chair, HREC,
c/o Ms Kylie Pashley
PO Box 456
Virginia QLD 4014
Tel: (07) 3623 7429

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome. If you agree to participate in this project, you should sign both copies of the Consent Form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to the Student Researcher.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Graham Rossiter SUPERVISOR

Michael Maroney STUDENT RESEARCHER

Australian Catholic University
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne

⊕ ACU National

Participant Consent Forms

TITLE OF PROJECT: Exploration of a contemporary youth spirituality amongst senior school students in Catholic schools

NAME OF SUPERVISOR: Professor Graham Rossiter

NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: Michael Maroney

NAME OF PROGRAMME ENROLLED: Doctor of Education

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 (*or stipulate the deadline by when the participant may withdraw*). 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:
....
(block letters)

SIGNATURE .... DATE ....

SIGNATURE OF
SUPERVISOR:..

DATE:…………………………………..

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT
RESEARCHER:..

DATE:..………….

ASSENT OF PARTICIPANTS AGED UNDER 18 YEARS

I ……………………… understand what this research project is designed to explore. What I will be asked to do has been explained to me. I agree to take part in the project, realising that I can withdraw at any time without having to give a reason for my decision.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:

....

SIGNATURE: ....

DATE: ....………....

SIGNATURE OF

SUPERVISOR:...

DATE: ....………....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT

RESEARCHER:..

DATE: ....………....

Written Parental Permission

TITLE OF PROJECT: Exploration of a contemporary youth spirituality amongst senior school students in Catholic schools

NAME OF SUPERVISOR: Professor Graham Rossiter

NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: Michael Maroney

NAME OF PROGRAMME ENROLLED: Doctor of Education

I .... (*the parent/guardian*) have read (*or, where*

appropriate, have had read to me) and understood the information provided in the Letter to the Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree that my child, nominated below, may participate in this activity, realising that I can withdraw my consent 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 my child in any way.

NAME OF PARENT/GUARDIAN:

....

(block letters)

SIGNATURE ....……

DATE......................................

NAME OF CHILD

....

(block letters)

SIGNATURE OF SUPERVISOR:

…………………………………………………

DATE:………………………………..

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER

…………………………………………………

DATE: …………………………………

Year 12 Student Questionnaire
(SCHOOL)

Young people's concerns about a spiritual dimension to life

The Purpose of the Questionnaire

To explore youth spirituality amongst senior school students in Catholic schools

INFORMATION CONTAINED ON INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONNAIRES REMAINS CONFIDENTIAL

Personal Details:
(Tick the appropriate box)

Gender   **Male**   ❑   **Female**   ❑

Family Situation

Parents

Mum and Dad at home   **Mum only** ❑ **Dad only** ❑ **Guardian or carer** ❑

Both parents born in Australia ❑

One parent born overseas   ❑

Both parents born overseas   ❑

Where do you come in the order of children in your family? (Oldest to Youngest-Circle the appropriate response)

1   2   3   4   5   6

How do you identify your cultural background?
(Circle the appropriate response)

Australian	**Low**	**Medium**	**High**

English Speaking			
(England, USA, NZ etc)	**Low**	**Medium**	**High**

European	**Low**	**Medium**	**High**

Asian	**Low**	**Medium**	**High**

Pacific Islander	**Low**	**Medium**	**High**

Latin American	**Low**	**Medium**	**High**

Middle Eastern	**Low**	**Medium**	**High**

Instructions

1. Please read the questions carefully.
2. Take your time in answering the questions.
3. Do NOT put your name on this survey.
4. There are no right or wrong answers.
5. Thank you for your involvement.

☞ Please read the scale before answering the question

Section 1: Moral and Faith Development

1) How influential are each of the following on your sense of what is right and wrong?

Teachers	1 2 3 4 5
Parents	1 2 3 4 5
Friends	1 2 3 4 5
Boy or girl friend	1 2 3 4 5
Belonging to a school community	1 2 3 4 5
Being in a peer support group (or equivalent) with younger students	1 2 3 4 5
Being a member of a sporting team or other community affiliation	1 2 3 4 5
Your conscience	1 2 3 4 5
Pop star or musician you like	1 2 3 4 5
Sportsperson you like	1 2 3 4 5
Being a member of a student group (eg social justice)	1 2 3 4 5
Being a role model for younger students	1 2 3 4 5
Your belief in God	1 2 3 4 5
The behaviour and example of celebrities	1 2 3 4 5

• Other (please specify)

_____ 1 2 3 4 5

_____ 1 2 3 4 5

Morals & Attitudes	Certainly False	Probably False	Uncertain	Probably True	Certainly True
If something feels good, and no one gets hurt, it is ok to do it					
It is alright to do something if everyone else is doing it					
I stick to the law no matter what					
I burn music and copy stuff off the Internet					
As far as I can, I base my life on Christian values					
Being a good person is more important than believing in God					
I try to be helpful and friendly to people who are lonely or rejected					

Place a tick in the most appropriate response to the statement

2) "Conforming to the expectations of parents and teachers is the best way to develop maturity." Please comment

_____
_____
_____
_____

3) If a problem in your life happens, or you have to make a decision, what would you normally do?

(Scale)

1 – little importance

2 – some importance

3 – fairly important

4 – important

5 – very important

Talk with friends	1 2 3 4 5
Talk with best friend only	1 2 3 4 5
Talk with your parents	1 2 3 4 5
Think by yourself	1 2 3 4 5
Talk to a teacher	1 2 3 4 5
Talk with a priest	1 2 3 4 5
Pray	1 2 3 4 5
Talk with an adult friend	1 2 3 4 5

4) "I behave in a socially acceptable way because…" (Circle 1 or more options)

> 1. It's the right thing to do
>
> 2. I don't want to get into trouble
>
> 3. Peer pressure
>
> 4. Conscience, or,
>
> 5. It's what the Church says is the right thing

5) My faith in God is influenced by the following: (Scale)

1 – little influence

2 – some influence

3 – significant influence

4 – important

5 – very important

Teachers	1 2 3 4 5
Parents	1 2 3 4 5
Friends	1 2 3 4 5
Church Teaching	1 2 3 4 5
Religious Education	1 2 3 4 5
Priests	1 2 3 4 5
Other	1 2 3 4 5

Section 2: Contemporary Spirituality

6) The statement that comes closest to describing the basis of my own spirituality is : (select and tick one only)

☐ My personal value system which often gives me meaning to life's experiences

☐ I try to make sense of life which certainly has a spiritual dimension

☐ I sense a spiritual dimension to life, but I am uncertain about it

☐ I would feel insecure and frightened in a world without God

☐ The teachings of the Catholic Church

☐ The interaction of my faith and the world I experience on a daily basis

☐ Life is a journey of discovery of who I am and who God is.

☐ I believe that I am connected to something greater than me but I find religions like Christianity are not helping me in exploring this

☐ Something else (please explain)

_____

_____

7) Read these two stories and circle the most appropriate answer

"One time, while were on holidays, I was sitting on a rock shelf overlooking a beautiful valley. It was about dinner time and the sun was setting. It was very quiet and the colours were amazing. I felt an overwhelming sense of joy and peace. It was as if something was there with me telling me everything was ok."

Have you had a similar experience?	Never	Unsure	Yes	Definitely

"a few months ago I came home from school one afternoon and mum and dad were sitting at the kitchen table crying. I felt like something had hit me and I started shaking. I just knew it was bad. Mum told me Nan had died. I can't explain it but I ran straight to my room and locked the door. I lay down on my bed and started crying like I have never cried before. What was really strange was that my first thought was to pray. I just started saying a few things to God and asking him to look after Nan. I don't know why I did that. I don't really know if I believe in God or not…that day it seemed natural and very important.

Have you had a similar experience?	Never	Unsure	Yes	Definitely

Some people consider these to be "spiritual experiences" if you have had something similar and would like to share please feel free to write in the space below. These responses are completely confidential

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

8) The ways I find meaningful in expressing my spirituality are: (Circle the appropriate number)

	Not meaningful	Extremely meaningful

Spontaneously (talking privately with God)	1 2 3 4 5
Using a formula (such as the Lord's Prayer)	1 2 3 4 5
Church services	1 2 3 4 5
Personal reflection time	1 2 3 4 5
Pentecostal Churches	1 2 3 4 5
Yoga and Meditation	1 2 3 4 5
Other spiritual practices	1 2 3 4 5
Reflecting on bible passages	1 2 3 4 5
Being alone (e.g. in nature)	1 2 3 4 5
Reflecting on a book not a bible	1 2 3 4 5
List any other –………………………………………..	1 2 3 4 5

9) Has your Catholic education (Primary & Secondary) helped you be comfortable and accepted in your own group? (Circle the appropriate response)

(Scale)

1 – little influence   1   2   3   4   5

2 – some influence

3 – significant influence

4 – important

5 – very important

Comments:_____

_____

10) **What are the most important things in your school life?**

(Please give a general response and then tick the relevant boxes)

_____

_____

Being a part of a large community	❑
Prayer & Liturgies	❑
Friendship group	❑
Successful HSC	❑
Spiritual life	❑
Helping others	❑
Making a difference in the school as a senior student	❑
Impressing teachers I like	❑
Having a large support network	❑
Participating in fundraising activities & social justice causes	❑
Being a role model for younger students	❑
Other (please specify)	❑

_____

_____

11) What are the enjoyable / positive aspects of my life outside school?

(You may **tick** more than one category)

Close friends	❑
Having a lot of money	❑
Important personal relationship	❑
Clothes	❑
My part-time job	❑
My Faith in God	❑

My individuality ❑

My looks ❑

Family ❑

Being able to control my life ❑

Helping other people ❑

Going out to night clubs ❑

Having a sense of pride in myself ❑

Drugs & Alcohol ❑

Working with peers on projects and activities ❑

Other (please specify) ❑

_____

_____

School

> **"I have attended a Catholic school for all of my Primary and Secondary education."**
>
> **Primary and Secondary ❑   Secondary only ❑**

Please circle the most relevant response

(Scale)

1 – certainly true

2 – probably true

3 – unsure

4 – probably untrue

5 – certainly true

My Catholic education has influenced my personal spirituality	1 2 3 4 5
My RE teachers contributed to my belief in God	1 2 3 4 5
Catholic education had a negative impact on my idea of spirituality	1 2 3 4 5
The retreat experience was deeply spiritual	1 2 3 4 5
School liturgies helped my belief in God	1 2 3 4 5

My experience in a Catholic school has given me a better appreciation of the Church	1 2 3 4 5
I will take on board the moral teachings of the Church	1 2 3 4 5
I would rather talk to God in a conversation than say formal prayers like the "Our Father"	1 2 3 4 5
The Catholic Church is out of touch with reality	1 2 3 4 5
Prayer is important to me	1 2 3 4 5

The Church

Consider each of the following statements and respond by circling A, B, C, D, or E

A = certainly true; B = probably true;   C = uncertain; D = probably untrue; E = certainly untrue

Church leadership is relevant	A B C D E
Church teachings are modern	A B C D E
The Church has gone off track	A B C D E
The Church influences my life	A B C D E
You don't have to go to Church to believe in God	A B C D E
Sex abuse scandals have ruined the reputation of priests	A B C D E
Full-on Christians are abnormal and a bit weird	A B C D E
The Church is concerned with me personally	A B C D E
The Church contributes to my spirituality	A B C D E
I can get by without much help from the Church	A B C D E
I can develop my spirituality without the Church	A B C D E

God

My Religion is…

Catholic	❑	**Anglican**	❑
Uniting	❑	**Orthodox**	❑
Pentecostal	❑	**Other Christian** ❑	
Non-Christian	❑		
Don't believe in God	❑		

Are you Religious?

Scale)

1 – Not very Religious

2 – A little bit Religious

3 – Reasonably Religious

4 – Significantly Religious

5 – Very Religious

1	2	3	4	5

Do you go to Mass?

Scale)

1 – Not at all

2 – Sometimes at Christmas

3 – Only with School

4 – Once a month

5 – Nearly every week

1	2	3	4	5

Do you pray?

Scale)

1 – Not at all

1	2	3	4	5

2 – Sometimes when I need something

3 – Only when I feel sad and alone

4 – Every now and then

5 – Each day

Consider each of the following statements and respond by circling A, B, C, D, or E

A = certainly true; B = probably true; C = uncertain; D = probably untrue; E = certainly untrue

God is a caring Being who loves me very much	A B C D E
God is a real person to me in daily life	A B C D E
God always forgives me	A B C D E
Jesus Christ is truly God	A B C D E
Jesus Christ redeemed us from original sin by his death	A B C D E
Jesus Christ is truly a human being	A B C D E
Knowing Jesus helps me to be a better person	A B C D E
I believe in some sort of God, but I don't know how this fits in with the world.	A B C D E
I hope God exists but I'm not sure.	A B C D E
I don't believe in God or gods	A B C D E
I believe in some supreme being or some spiritual force in the universe, but I am unsure	A B C D E

Section 3: Youth Culture

Consider each of the following statements and respond by circling 1, 2, 3, 4, 5,

1 = certainly true; 2 = probably true;   3 = uncertain; 4 = probably untrue; 5 = certainly untrue

12) How has living in today's world affected your outlook on life?

I am proud of my ethnic identity	1 2 3 4 5
I don't have a problem with other cultures in Australian society	1 2 3 4 5
I am comfortable with the freedom Australian society offers young people	1 2 3 4 5
Television contributes to my values and sense of justice	1 2 3 4 5
Multiculturalism is working well in Australian society	1 2 3 4 5
People should be allowed to practice their own religious beliefs, as long as they don't hurt anyone else	1 2 3 4 5
You should have to learn English before you migrate to Australia	1 2 3 4 5
Indigenous Australians are being treated fairly	1 2 3 4 5

**13) "The stories in TV and movies are useful in helping me make sense of life"**

Scale)

1 – little influence   1   2   3   4   5

2 – some influence

3 – significant influence

4 – important

5 – very important

Comment

_____

_____

14) "I learn something from the behaviour of characters in film and television programs"

Scale)

1 – little influence | 1   2   3   4   5 |

2 – some influence

3 – significant influence

4 – important

5 – very important

Comment

_____

_____

15) "War and conflict make me feel unsafe in the world"

Scale)

1 – little influence | 1   2   3   4   5 |

2 – some influence

3 – significant influence

4 – important

5 – very important

THANK YOU FOR FILLING OUT THIS SURVEY

Would you be interested in participating in a group discussion with other Year 12 students to talk about issues raised in this questionnaire? (Please tick a box)

Yes, I would like to be part of a small group discussion ❑

No, thankyou ❑

Student Number: ---

Focus Group Interview Questions

Theme 1: Moral and faith Development

1. What has been the biggest influence on your life so far?

2. Has your image of God changed from Primary to Secondary?

3. Has Religion contributed to, or put you off, a faith in God?

4. What aspects of life, including school and home, give you a sense of right   and wrong?

5. How has your Catholic education helped you understand yourself and your place in the world?

6. Do you think you have "high moral values"?

7. Are you still undecided about God and faith? Will you keep an open mind as a young adult?

8. What makes you behave in a socially acceptable way?

9. Do you feel guilt or any sense of shame?

Theme 2: Spirituality

1. What does "spirituality" mean to you?
2. Are you religious?
3. What things in your life make you hopeful and happy?
4. Have your found your Catholic education has helped your belief in God?
5. What parts of life are spiritual to you?
6. Do you get the sense that you are destined for something?
7. Will you try out other churches or religions later on in life?
8. If you do believe in God, what do you think he/she is like?
9. How can a personal spirituality make your life better?

10. Do you pray? If so, how, when, and what do you say?

Theme 3: Culture

1. Is Australia a religious country?
2. What does multiculturalism mean to you? Is it working?
3. Do people's religious beliefs matter in a society such as Australia?
4. Do you watch much television? Why?
5. Is television an important source of education and understanding what is "cool" in the world?
6. Are TV stars role models?
7. Is it more important in life to be rich, good looking, or respected? Why?
8. Do you feel a sense of community in your world (eg. School, family, sport, local area)?
9. Do you identify with your racial heritage? Does that mean anything to you?